

ARTICULATIONS OF DESIRE AND THE POLITICS OF CONTRADICTION:  
MAGAZINE ADVERTISING, TELEVISION FANDOM, AND FEMALE GENDER  
IDENTITY DISSONANCE

by

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*To Phillip – to care is to salvage a soul such as mine*

## Acknowledgements

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## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Figures.....	ix
Abstract.....	xi
Chapter:	
1. Introduction.....	1
2. The Theory of Gender Identity Dissonance: A Psychological..... Perspective on Mediated Contradiction	10
3. “She is Always and Never the Same”: Gender Identity..... Dissonance and Polarized Ways of Seeing in Magazine Advertising from 1970-2006	43
4. Contradiction Sells: Analysis of Hennessy’s “Appropriately..... Complex/Mix Accordingly,” Bacardi’s “Bacardi by Night,” and De Beers’ “Right-Hand Ring” Magazine Advertising Campaigns	94
5. “Messy Like Life – Not Like TV”: Quality Television, Audience..... Pleasure, and Ambiguity in <i>Sex and the City</i>	157
6. Conclusion.....	193
Bibliography.....	204

## List of Figures

Figure 3.1.....	56
Figure 3.2.....	59
Figure 3.3.....	62
Figure 3.4.....	64
Figure 3.5.....	68
Figure 3.6.....	69
Figure 3.7.....	72
Figure 3.8.....	77
Figure 3.9.....	82
Figure 3.10.....	83
Figure 3.11.....	85
Figure 3.12.....	86
Figure 3.13.....	88
Figure 3.14.....	91
Figure 4.1.....	101
Figure 4.2.....	102
Figure 4.3.....	106
Figure 4.4.....	108
Figure 4.5.....	110

Figure 4.6.....	116
Figure 4.7.....	118
Figure 4.8.....	120
Figure 4.9.....	122
Figure 4.10.....	127
Figure 4.11.....	130
Figure 4.12.....	131
Figure 4.13.....	133
Figure 4.14.....	138
Figure 4.15.....	143
Figure 4.16.....	146
Figure 5.1.....	166
Figure 5.2.....	167

## Abstract

*Articulations of Desire and the Politics of Contradiction* recognizes that there is an intrinsic link between mediated representations of feminine contradiction and the manner in which women develop, organize, and manage personal identity. In order to explore media's role in producing, reproducing, and policing identities – their boundaries, intersections, and ruptures – the theory of gender identity dissonance is proposed. Utilizing cognitive and social psychological literature pertaining to motivation, identity, and the self-concept, this theory expands upon Leon Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, by suggesting that anxiety occurs when individuals become consciously or unconsciously compelled to embrace contradictory gender identities. Turning to critical and cultural theory in order to examine the manner in which gender identity dissonance permeates media, an historical archive of advertisements drawn from *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Seventeen* magazines beginning in 1970 was constructed. Three major dichotomies emerged: Madonna-Whore, Masculine-Feminine, and Singlehood-Couplehood. It is argued that the presence of identity-based tensions were associated with the sexual revolution and the emergence of feminism in the 1970s, and the rise of niche marketing and advent of poststructuralist/postmodern conceptions of self and society within popular discourse by the late 1990s. Industrial analysis of the advertising industry, in

particular Hennessy Cognac's "Appropriately Complex/Mix Accordingly," Bacardi Rum's "Bacardi by Night," and De Beers' "Right-Hand Ring" campaigns, found that corporations featuring gender identity dissonance-themed print magazine advertisements benefited economically. Results from focus groups conducted with female fans of the HBO series *Sex and the City* illuminate how identity dissonance associated with relationship status functions to support female fans' belief in the text's realism, enhancing their pleasure in the show. Gender identity dissonance theory rests on two assumptions. Firstly, that social discourses reinforce hegemonic power relations through implementation, reinforcement, and perpetuation of binary relationships (specifically, between identities). And, secondly, that there are corresponding psychological processes such as gender identity dissonance which create, reflect, emulate, and reinforce binary processing of information. While not all social relations and psychological experiences are rooted in binaries, certain binary-based processing and discourses exist, and how they work to both emphasize and elide the complexity that characterize women's lives is important to explore.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

American media's role in articulating – constructing and disseminating – discourses of identity, those that preoccupy and characterize individuals and society, make it a critically important arena for investigating the relationship between subjectivity and culture. The narratives that frame media texts, in particular, the affective components (values, emotions, and desires) that reside within mass forms of communication, are actively implicated in meaning-making at both the individual and societal level.

Media forms and representations constitute major sites for conflict and negotiation, a central goal of which is the definition of what is to be taken as 'real', and the struggle to name and win support for certain kinds of cultural value and identity over others. (Gledhill, 1997, p. 348)

Consequently, the mass media are an essential locality for exploring the embodiment and management of identities, and how the process of identification is marked by conflicting desires and representations.

Contradictions matter – understanding why certain contradictions prevail, and are desired and desirable matters. Identity is a non-stable entity, one that is constructed from, and characterized by, ambivalence (Hall, 1990). *Articulations of Desire and the Politics of Contradiction: Magazine Advertising, Television Fandom, and Female Gender Identity Dissonance* explores the repercussions of

contradictions that exist *between* the identities that we all embody; as this ambivalence is intimately linked to our humanity and our sense of self. Contradictions provide a space for resistance, and a rationale for repression. The self-concept, while relatively stable, is a shifting entity, and is formed through and characterized by variability and ambivalence (Hall, 1990; Higgins, 1999; Kernis & Goldman, 2003), and, the presence of conflicting identities (Stets & Burke, 2003). It is media's role in producing, reproducing, and policing identities – their boundaries, intersections, and ruptures – that make mass forms of communication such a vital field of inquiry for researchers interested in gender identity and ambivalence.

This project argues that advertising both conceals and foregrounds cultural contradictions (Goldman & Papson, 1996), especially when it comes to gender identity. Advertising is an essential space in which to explore how identity and consumption are inextricably linked in highly ambivalent ways. I investigate how contradictory representations of female gender identity within magazine advertisements mimic, distort, and exploit how females and/in American society approach gender identity construction and management. The ways in which identity develops (i.e. through self vs. other comparisons) and the manner in which identities are psychically organized (i.e. hierarchically) and socially expressed (i.e. ambivalently) all contribute to the presence of what I call 'identity dissonance'. My theory of identity dissonance can assist cultural studies theorists' understanding of the inherent relationship between self (psyche) and society (culture).



Identity dissonance presumes that during different historical periods, diverse groups of people will experience unique identity conflicts, and will have differing opinions about consistency of self. This analysis hopes to illuminate the present social reality and assist with identification, examination, and evaluation of a possible paradigm shift in self-conception, identity-management, and information-processing. The theory of identity dissonance illustrates how contemporary North American society experiences discomfort arising from dichotomous processing of information and identities, and can assist in the detection of how this tension is presently managed.

Either-or dichotomies or binary-processing is a fundamental part of North American discursive practice. Over the past few decades, scholars have drawn our attention to the fact that dual processing and discursive dichotomization can have problematic repercussions. Binaries serve hegemonic requirements and appear natural (Butler, 1990), are used to secure/shore up power for particular groups (Hall, 1997), lead to the construction of fictions about others (Bonner, Goodman, Allen, Janes, & King, 1992), and are used to consolidate particular fields of identification (Butler, 1990). Binary processing can result in homogenized and/or stereotyped understandings of groups (Kaplan, 1999; Hall, 1997) and work to elide important differences (Bordo, 1993). Bonner et al. (1992) discuss how binaries privilege certain relations (e.g. the masculine/patriarchal) and conceal how certain issues are intrinsically related (constructing false oppositions - for example, reinforcing a mind versus body delineation, instead of illuminating a mind/body relationship). While binaries

signify differently to diverse subjects, they are used to promote the fantasy of boundarylessness, freedom, and transgression while continuing to inscribe punishing differences and restrictions (see Kaplan, 1999). However, dichotomous processing is also an important psychological feature which serves a vital role when it comes to cognitive functioning – specifically, it is inherently linked to our self-construction. It sets up the boundaries for personal understanding, and provides the basis by which society's discursive articulations and disarticulations are constructed.

There are three overarching goals for this project. The first is to provide cultural studies scholars with language that could deepen and broaden their discussion of identity. Too often a reliance on psychoanalysis (an approach that is essentialist and heterosexist), inaccurate terminology (i.e. the use of the term schizophrenia), and slipperiness in language use (i.e. 'self' and 'identity' being used interchangeably) has limited the effectiveness of investigations into media's relationship to personal and social identity. Secondly, to expand the boundaries of media analysis beyond *acknowledgment* of contradiction within popular culture texts and audiences (too often the final word for media researchers), in order to focus this project on the exploration of the phenomenon – thus, utilizing critical, cultural, textual, and industrial analysis along with an audience study this research aims to catalog and describe types of female gender identity contradictions, how and when they exist, and possibly to what effect. Finally, I regard identity dissonance as a discourse that not only perpetuates ideological hegemony, but also reflects and proffers resistant approaches to self-

construction and the socially dominant identity paradigms which function in aid of 'ruling class' requirements. Identity dissonance, by recognizing that identities are not discreet, but instead contingent, historical, and contextual, takes an intersectional approach to its analysis. Intersectionality is both a theory and methodological approach that wishes to foreground the ways that identities intersect, acknowledging multiplicity and the contradictions that individuals and society must negotiate (Crenshaw, 1991; Smith, 1998). Thus, the third goal of this project centers on a desire to contribute to intersectional inquiry. By suggesting specific reasons for, and ramifications of, identity intersection and conflict, I wish to add to our understanding of the ways in which individuals and society make sense of the experience of contradiction and multiple identities.

This research seeks to examine why there are so many contradictory images of women in the mass media, and, why so many representations of femininity depend upon and promote contradiction. The figure of the female body as depicted in magazine advertising aimed at young, white, middle-class, heterosexual women is the central plane by which the play of contradiction is explored – in particular, as it relates to beauty, sexuality, and relationship status. Desirable figurations or representations of beauty, and the requirements for meeting the aesthetic category of beautiful, the 'appropriate' embodiment or expression of sexuality and sexual desire, and, coupled versus single status are examined in order to investigate the impact of relations of power on the body, and consequently, female agency.

With three broad overlapping categories of investigation in mind – text, history, and reception – this project asks a series of more specific questions: Since 1970, has there been a discernable historical ‘rise’ of imagery which reflects or evokes identity dissonance in magazine advertising? Have the representations of identity dissonance within magazine advertising ‘evolved’ over time? If so, what are some of the possible reasons for this transition? What kinds of identity contradictions are depicted in magazine ads? When are they present? How do ads featuring/utilizing identity dissonance hail women? What emotional appeals are found within identity dissonance-themed magazine ads, and what are their possible ramifications? Are advertisers attempting to utilize identity dissonance in order to better manage young women’s emotions and identities? And finally, is gender identity dissonance a characteristic of television programming, specifically the HBO series *Sex and the City*? Are fans of *Sex and the City* aware of the presence of dissonance within the text, and if so, what influence does it have on their viewing pleasure? Social discourse surrounding what constitutes consonant and dissonant – or appropriate and inappropriate – identity combinations is likely to be found within mass forms of communication, and it is the specific aim of this project to examine the benefits and disadvantages associated with the experience of identity dissonance and women’s reading of ambivalent media texts.

Chapter Two of *Articulations of Desire and the Politics of Contradiction* presents an overview of the theory of gender identity dissonance. Borrowing primarily from the cognitive and social psychological literature pertaining to

motivation, identity, and the self-concept this chapter positions identity dissonance within the historical trajectory of cognitive dissonance theory. Chapter Two lays the groundwork for understanding how, when, and why gender identity dissonance occurs and its possible consequences for women. The following chapters will then use the theory of gender identity dissonance to illuminate the relationship between identity development, the circumstances behind women's representations in media, and their media consumption predilections.

In Chapter Three the findings from an historical archive comprised of magazine advertising is discussed. From 1970-2006 advertisements from three women's magazines – *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, and *Seventeen* – are examined for the presence of gender identity dissonance. Analysis reveals important variations in subject matter, frequency of occurrence, and degree of overt reference to dissonance between gender identities in the advertisements collected; the results highlight historical changes in approaches to marketing and advertising, conceptions of self and identity, and women's roles and agency.

Chapter Four provides an industrial and textual analysis of current magazine advertising, specifically focusing on three case studies. Hennessy's "Appropriately Complex/Mix Accordingly," Bacardi's "Bacardi by Night," and De Beers' "Right-Hand Ring" campaigns were chosen in order to explore the manner in which companies target female consumers using gender identity dissonance-based appeals. Findings indicate that gender identity dissonance is indeed

regarded as an effective marketing approach and utilized to good effect by companies.

Finally, Chapter Five features an audience study, along with textual, discursive, and industrial analysis of the award winning HBO series *Sex and the City*. Scholars such as Jane Arthurs (2003) have written about how *Sex and the City* 'remediates' or reworks the familiar form of women's magazines, providing a distinctly women-centered forum by which multiple feminine perspectives are given voice, specifically in regards to sexuality. Consequently, *Sex and the City* provides an excellent instance by which to broaden this project's media analysis from its focus on magazine advertising aimed at women to an exploration of a female-centric televisual experience. By exploring the issue of relationship status (singlehood versus couplehood), and how producers cultivated narrative ambiguity, its presence within the text, and fans distinct pleasure in the contradictions present, the connection between quality television, realism, audience pleasure, and gender identity dissonance is illuminated.

Gender identity dissonance theory rests on two very important assumptions. First that social discourses reinforce hegemonic power relations through the implementation, reinforcement, and perpetuation of binary relationships, specifically, between identities. Secondly, that there are corresponding psychological processes such as gender identity dissonance that create, reflect, emulate, and reinforce binary processing of social information. However, it must be emphasized that I do not presume that all social relations and psychological experiences are rooted in binaries. Rather, it is the goal of

*Articulations of Desire and the Politics of Contradiction: Magazine Advertising, Television Fandom, and Female Gender Identity Dissonance* to explore why certain binary-based processing and discourses exist, thus examining the ways in which certain knowledges and power work to elide nuance and complexity. For example, patriarchy benefits from gendered dichotomies; femininity is not the opposite of masculinity, however, discursive reinforcement of gender based contradictions ensures that masculinity can define itself as the positive end of a binary equation that helps to ensure that sexism prevails. Thus, it is critically important to uncover and understand which binaries are valued and valorized, as, this is a key way in which to ensure that the hegemonic ideologies that shape our selves and our society are interrogated.

## Chapter 2

### The Theory of Gender Identity Dissonance: A Psychological Perspective on Mediated Contradiction

I put forth a theoretical framework that illuminates the ‘drama of the multiple’ – assisting in the identification of psychological and social discourses associated with the development, organization, and management of oppositional identities. To better examine how gendered contradiction is experienced at both the individual and societal level, I propose the theory of identity dissonance. This theory is predicated on the presumption that for North American women consistency-seeking is an important psychological prerequisite for healthy and positive self-regard, while at the same time acknowledging and exploring the impact of antithetical identity-based desires and requirements that are often inherent to women’s sense of self, and the social discourses that shape their lives.

I make a clear distinction between the terms ‘self’ and ‘identity’. Delineation between these two concepts is not always done, but I align myself with recognized identity theorists such as Graafsma (1994) and Stets & Burke (2003) when I conclude that it is both important and necessary. When utilizing the term ‘self’ or ‘self-concept’ I am referring to an individual’s overall conceptualization or understanding of his or her characteristics or qualities as a human being. I also regard the self as both stable over time *and* malleable or



context-sensitive – the self is not a fixed entity – thus agreeing with theorizing put forth by Markus & Kunda (1986). Individuals utilize schemas and identities in order to organize and implement self-knowledge. Consequently, an identity can be regarded as the self-in-context (Fitzgerald, 1993), an understanding of roles and/or abilities embedded in social interaction. However, I do not believe that people have many different self-concepts or selves, instead each individual has only one self comprised of many different understandings of one’s self-in-context, or identities. The concept of identity specifically refers to a set of behaviors and/or personal characteristics by which an individual is socially recognizable (for example, an occupation such as ‘police-officer’ or developmental period such as ‘teenage-hood’). Thus, these concepts correspond to differing experiences – the ‘self’ refers to a holistic conception of our personhood, our experiences as knower and known, the subject and object of our knowledge (James, 1999), and identity, as a reference to the socially-grounded experiential understanding of how we act and are acted upon in the world.

Identity dissonance theory desires to make a number of important additions to media scholarship<sup>1</sup>. By helping to explicate personal and social anxiety associated with the presence and/or management of multiplicity, this theory can facilitate our understanding of self-construction and its relationship to dichotomizing social discourses – serving to uncover and explore certain regimes

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<sup>1</sup> I developed the theory of ‘identity dissonance’, an elaboration of Festinger’s ‘cognitive dissonance’, in 1996 as part of my Master’s thesis in Interdisciplinary Studies at York University, Toronto, Canada. I had no prior knowledge of the term’s usage by any other theorist.

of truth/power. By illuminating how cultural products influence us as individuals, and how we as individuals influence our cultural products, identity dissonance can assist our exploration of media's impact on our everyday lives. In particular, by focusing on advertising's reflection and use of identity dissonance in a 'circuit of culture' (Hall, 1997), we gain a better appreciation of the processes by which we as individuals construct our understandings of self and the ways that mediated representations influence individual development and management of personal identities. Ultimately, it is this project's hope that identity dissonance theorizing can assist scholars' understanding of why certain ambivalent discourses pertaining to female gender identity prevail, deepening our awareness of how advertising utilizes women's gender identity contradictions in aid of a capitalist agenda, and how gender dichotomies function within televisual texts and their association with fandom.

### **An Overview of Cognitive Dissonance Theory**

Dissonance, specifically as it pertains to gender identity, is a by-product of self-development for women in North American society. In order to examine the consequence of identity development which includes aspects that are discordant or dissonant, Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance is expanded to specifically include the scenario of identities in conflict and, in so doing, his theory is both deepened and broadened (see Table 2.1 for a summary of key differences between cognitive and identity dissonance). As people cultivate ever more complex relationships, and the diversity within the self-concept is

Table 2.1: Key Differences Between Cognitive and Identity Dissonance\*:

<b>Cognitive Dissonance</b>	<b>Identity Dissonance</b>
<p>The focus is on conflict between single elements or small clusters of <b>elements</b></p> <p>Dissonance is caused by elements that are generally regarded as <b>impermanent and/or unstable</b></p> <p>Involves at least one element of the <b>self-concept</b> (Aronson)*</p> <p>Conceptualizes the <b>self as stable, cohesive, and consistent</b> (Aronson)</p> <p>Focuses on <b>dissonance caused by behavior/decision making</b> which results in opinion changes</p> <p>Behavior that specifically causes <b>an aversive or unwanted situation causes dissonance</b> (Cooper &amp; Fazio)</p> <p>Cognitive Dissonance is a <b>psychological process</b> pertaining to cognition and motivation</p>	<p>The focus is on conflict between highly developed <b>identities</b></p> <p>Dissonance occurs between highly <b>permanent/stable</b> identity schema, reflecting serious personal commitment</p> <p>Dissonance is <b>indirectly connected with the self-concept</b></p> <p>Conceptualizes a stable and cohesive <b>self as incorporating inconsistent</b> or dissonant aspects</p> <p><b>Exposure is also a primary dissonance causing agent</b> if it results in personal recognition and/or acknowledgment of an internal identity conflict (e.g. media primes conflicting identity schema causing identity dissonance, which could then prompt behavior or opinion changes)</p> <p>Dissonance is <b>not necessarily the result of an aversive or unwanted event</b></p> <p>Identity Dissonance is <b>not just a psychological/personal process, but also a sociological/social phenomena</b>. Identity dissonance occurs discursively within the media, and an individual can experience dissonance after exposure.</p>

\* if a characteristic of cognitive dissonance theory is not specifically linked with Leon Festinger, the name of the primary theorist affiliated with this standpoint follows

represented by a greater prevalence of identities, individuals may encounter situations where certain identities become positioned oppositionally, thus causing both the process and outcome identified as 'identity dissonance'.

In 1957 Leon Festinger introduced his theory of cognitive dissonance which merged the fields of cognition and motivation (Aronson, 1992). A cognitive element is a piece of information, what is known about self or surroundings, and, dissonance can be defined as "the existence of nonfitting relations among cognitions" (Festinger, 1957, p. 3) – an uncomfortable experience which individuals are motivated to remove from their lives. Early experiments exploring the effects of cognitive dissonance examined what happened when subjects were asked to do something they didn't like. A typical 'forced compliance' experiment such as the classic 1959 study by Leon Festinger and James Carlsmith asked male participants to tell another individual that an extremely boring activity that they had just completed was in fact very pleasurable. Researchers found that subjects had a tendency to change their opinion of the task in order to bring their beliefs in line with their actions, consequently reducing their cognitive dissonance. Dissonance can arise under a number of circumstances: logical inconsistency, cultural rules of conduct, the ramifications of cognitive groupings, or the influence of past experiences (Festinger). Cognitive dissonance theory proposes that dissonance is often the result of daily interactions with people and encounters with information that are not reflective of opinions currently held, therefore arguing that every personal interaction and every cognition is a possible source of dissonance. Ultimately, any situation or

instance that can induce the organization of cognitions into oppositional positions has the potential to cause dissonance.

Festinger's theory assumes that individuals have a fundamental desire to try to relieve the uneasiness produced by disharmony between cognitions – an essential drive toward maintaining or re-establishing consistency in thoughts and behaviors. As Jean-Léon Beauvois and Robert-Vincent Joule (1996) point out, numerous theorists have proposed that individuals have an idealized state of cognitive organization motivated by consistency: Newcomb (1953) talked about the individual's wish for 'symmetry', Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) explain the desire for 'congruence', and Heider (1958) proffered his 'balance' theory.

Festinger's conceptualization of 'consonance' states that

people strive for consistency among their cognitions regarding their actions, beliefs, past experiences, and so forth. Accordingly, when faced with cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent, the individual experiences dissonance, an uncomfortable motivational state similar to hunger or thirst. Once dissonance is aroused, the individual becomes motivated to reduce it, either by changing one or both cognitions to make them more consonant or by adding a third cognition which will render the original cognitions less inconsistent with one another. (Aronson, 1997, p. 22)

If techniques of avoidance are not effective and the inconsistency stays, Festinger concludes that the individual then experiences 'psychological discomfort' or dissonance. Consistency can be defined as agreement between feelings or actions, for example, according to Heider's Balance theory we expect someone we like to like the same things we do. Festinger's theory is based on an understanding that individuals strive to maintain consistency in their lives, and

that there is a tendency for people to want to maintain balance amongst their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

According to Festinger, to determine the overall level of discomfort, or cognitive dissonance, the characteristics of the conflicting elements must be examined. Not all dissonant relationships are equivalent in experience. The *“maximum dissonance that can possibly exist between any two elements is equal to the total resistance to change of the less resistant element”* (Festinger, 1957, p. 28, italics in original), as once this threshold is reached the less resistant element will collapse and the dissonance will be removed. Specifically Festinger makes two hypotheses regarding the degree of dissonance that will be experienced by an individual:

*If two elements are dissonant with one another, the magnitude of the dissonance will be a function of the importance of the elements. The more these elements are important to, or valued by, the person, the greater will be the magnitude of a dissonant relation between them...[and] the total amount of dissonance between this element and the remainder of the person’s cognition will depend on the proportion of relevant elements that are dissonant with the one in question. Thus if the overwhelming majority of relevant elements are consonant with, say, a behavioral element, then the dissonance with this behavioral element is slight. If in relation to the number of elements consonant with the behavioral element the number of dissonant elements is large, the total dissonance will be of appreciable magnitude. (1957, p. 16-17, italics in original)*

Consequently, the degree of dissonance experienced is dependent upon the significance that the elements are accorded by the self, and their relation to other inter-connected cognitive elements. Ultimately, the magnitude of the disturbance is an important determinant of whether a person will be pressured to resolve or

reduce their dissonance. The greater the dissonance the larger the drive for reduction.

Individuals are motivated to manage their dissonance. Leon Festinger suggests a number of ways to reduce dissonance: change the originating action or feeling that induced the conflict, add new cognitions to reduce the dissonance, or remove oneself from the physical or social environment that reinforces the dissonance. He also hypothesizes that some people might be more accepting of dissonance than others:

One would expect a person with low tolerance for dissonance to see issues more in terms of “black and white” than would a person with high tolerance for dissonance who might be expected to be able to maintain “grays” in his [or her] cognition. (Festinger, 1957, p. 267)

In addition, Festinger recognizes that the effectiveness of dissonance reducing techniques will vary from person to person, as will the preference for a particular method. To completely eliminate dissonance Festinger assumes that the cognitive element that is causing the disturbance must be removed, although he does recognize that often this is an impossible task to accomplish.

### **Aronson’s Expansion of Cognitive Dissonance Theory**

In 1968 Elliot Aronson provided an important modification to Leon Festinger’s theorizing by recognizing the central importance of the self-concept to the experience of dissonance. Aronson’s expansion centers around three predictions that he makes regarding how individuals govern their lives. He proposes that people are always striving to: 1) maintain an established,

permanent, and predictable sense of self 2) preserve a competent self-concept 3) preserve a positive moral sense of self (Aronson, 1992). With these goals in mind, Aronson concludes that cognitive dissonance theory “is greatest and clearest when it involves not just any two cognitions but, rather, a cognition about the self and a piece of our behavior that violates that self-concept” (Aronson, 1992, p. 305). Aronson (1969) states that the major weakness with Festinger’s theory is its conceptual ambiguity regarding the limits and boundaries of cognitive dissonance’s theoretical application. According to Aronson, dissonance is not only the result of logical inconsistencies but also psychological incompatibilities because “if dissonance exists it is because the individual’s behavior is inconsistent with his [or her] self-concept” (1969, p. 27). Aronson’s expansion of Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance to include the predominant influence of the individual’s self-concept is both a vital and valuable extension of dissonance theory.

Aronson presumes that cognitive dissonance arises due to people’s need to rationalize their actions to themselves and others. Aronson, along with Carlsmith, argues that “dissonance would occur when negative [or positive] self-expectancies were violated” (Aronson, 1997, p. 24). For example, when a person with low self-esteem does something that results in positive self-reflection the person will experience dissonance due to the breaking of self-expectancies. Aronson (1997) concludes that “the greater the personal commitment or self-involvement implied by the action and the smaller the *external* justification for the action, the greater the dissonance and, therefore, the more powerful the attitude



change” (p. 24-25, italics in original). Consequently, like Festinger, Aronson (1969) recognizes that each person will have a unique and individual reaction to dissonance.

Dissonance reduction, as Aronson (1997) envisions it, always involves some level of self-justification. According to Aronson “what leads me to perform dissonance-reducing behavior is my having done something that (a) astonishes me, (b) makes me feel stupid, or (c) makes me feel guilty” (1992, p. 305). As dissonance arousal is caused by a disturbance in self-concept, dissonance removal is based upon reparations being made to the self in order to ease the distress. “Specifically, dissonance reduction will typically involve an effort to maintain two important elements of the self-concept: the sense of self as both (a) morally good and (b) competent” (Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992, p. 592). These two self-conceptions, which Thibodeau and Aronson propose are present in any healthy person, are what motivates individuals to take action to dissipate the mental discomfort brought on by dissonance (however, it should be emphasized that self-management will always be moderated by individual differences, for example, variations in self-esteem). Cognitive dissonance is rooted in disruptions to the self-concept, consequently, it can only be repaired by addressing the damage in a manner that re-establishes the previous self-schemata, or, allows for the development of new and acceptable self-definitions.

Not all cognitive dissonance researchers fully agree with Festinger and Aronson’s particular conception of cognitive dissonance, nor the presumed role that self-consistency plays in dissonance creation and reduction. For example,

Joel Cooper and Russell Fazio's (1984) 'new look' at dissonance theory focuses on dissonance caused by behavior that specifically results in an aversive or unwanted situation. Their approach drops the focus on the self and the need for self-consistency as the primary cause of dissonance and replaces it with an aversive event. Self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988, Steele & Liu, 1983) suggests that dissonance reduction has as much to do with self-esteem and activating ego functions (in particular, the need for self-affirmation) as consistency motives. Thereby the self is a resource for dissonance reduction, and dissonance effects can be reduced using activities that affirm the self. This modification to cognitive dissonance theory suggests that dissonance reduction occurs in order to re-affirm moral integrity and positive self-regard. Another perspective examines the role of self-esteem using the self-standards model of cognitive dissonance (Stone & Cooper, 2001). For proponents of this revision to cognitive dissonance research, the individual's self-standards or personal judgments about their behavior made salient at the moment of dissonance dictate the characteristics of the dissonance experience. Each of these influential approaches has its followers and empirical support<sup>2</sup>, though according to a 2008 survey of the field by Eddie and Cindy Harmon-Jones, much of the current research upholds Festinger's original conception of dissonance and the important role of consistency-seeking. While there may be no overall agreement between researchers as to the role self and self-consistency ultimately plays in

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that there are many more theoretical attempts to expand upon or clarify cognitive dissonance theory that are not listed here. However, they are less established streams of analysis, and thus, not pertinent to this discussion.

cognitive dissonance, there is little doubt regarding the value accorded the theory.

50 years later cognitive dissonance theory is still generative, with an active presence in the field of psychology. While researchers may disagree about the conditions which evoke dissonance and the particulars of dissonance resolution, with a proven experimental record and with many hundreds of studies supporting the main theoretical premise, the basic principles of the theory are almost universally well-regarded (see Brehm, 2007). Recent investigations of cognitive dissonance aim to refine the parameters of the theory and its application, focusing on variations in the experience of dissonance due to individual differences (e.g. Matz, Hofstede & Wood, 2008; Newby-Clark, McGregor & Zanna, 2002), cross cultural variation (e.g. Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004), and pro-social outcomes (e.g. Stone & Fernandez, 2008).

However, what remains largely under-theorized is the role that identities play in dissonance-related experiences. Occasionally a theorist such as Alain Clémence (1994) will examine how dissonance effects are influenced by subjects' identity; Clémence's 1994 analysis of a series of studies exploring self-threat found that dissonance is more powerful when associated with identity. Another occasion where identity conflicts come to the fore occurs when, under the auspices of cognitive dissonance, research is conducted that in fact explores the impact of identity conflicts (see Mahaffy (1996)<sup>3</sup>). Generally though, issues

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<sup>3</sup> Mahaffy's (1996) research explores conflict between sexual and religious identity. Specifically she examines the dissonance experienced by young Lesbian women who self-identify as Evangelical Christians.

of identity are largely neglected by the field<sup>4</sup>. By expanding the theory to encompass both the role of identities in the experience of gender-based dissonance and the ways in which dissonance operates within the social sphere (in particular, mediated discourses found within advertising and televisual texts) identity dissonance theory aims to continue to ensure that psychological dissonance is a meaningful way for understanding self and society.

### **The Theory of Identity Dissonance**

It is my hope to introduce a new line of inquiry, modifying cognitive dissonance theory, in order to overtly examine how dissonance pertains to identity management and engagement with mediated texts.

I define identity dissonance, an elaboration of Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (1957), as an unsettling feeling of psychological disquiet, occurring when people make a commitment to two or more conflicting identities. Identity dissonance occurs when an individual regards particular identities as essential components of his or her self-concept yet also considers, consciously or unconsciously, these identities to be antithetical. The experience of dissonance indicates that the individual has reached the conclusion that these

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<sup>4</sup> Since developing the theory of identity dissonance in 1996 I have occasionally come across writing/research which makes reference to 'identity dissonance'. Most other academics, however, seem to be using the term to refer to a general identity conflict, rather than presenting a theory regarding why and how identities are positioned antithetically, or, actively attempting to add to the research pertaining to cognitive dissonance (see, for example, Avruch (1982), Babcock (1997), Costello (1998), Juul (1995), and Watson (1972), all of whom use the term 'identity dissonance' but do not cite Leon Festinger). Other theorists, such as Carrie Yang Costello (1998) who do attempt to present a theoretical discussion of 'identity dissonance' have operationalized the process and effects in a significantly different manner, thus, at present I feel confident in my assertion that this my unique contribution to the discipline.

identities, or parts of these identities, should not simultaneously co-exist. Like cognitive dissonance theory, the resulting psychological anxiety that occurs from dissonance acts as a motivating tension, encouraging individuals to either: remove one of the offending identities from their self-concept; continue to wrestle with the tension, ideally finding alternative psychological and/or behavioral strategies (e.g. distraction) in order to mitigate the resulting anxiety; or thirdly, adjust their conception of the identities in order to conceive of them as corresponding (modification of Festinger, 1957). What this means is that self, and usually society, presume that identities are an 'either – or' proposition. For example, the simplistic Madonna-Whore dichotomy. You can be either a saint or a sinner, but not both. Consequently, within a unified sense of self there can exist competing or oppositional identities, that while recognized as integral to who we are, when embraced, can result in anxiety.

To be dissonant, identities must contain information and/or values that an individual considers contradictory. An identity is a highly developed cognitive network (a multitude of inter-related cognitive elements), thus, in comparison to cognitive dissonance, identity dissonance is a highly entrenched psychological process. Cognitive dissonance focuses on discord between two opposing beliefs, or a small grouping of personal information (for example, I am not rude, but I just swore). A cognitive element, or small grouping, is far more unstable or impermanent due to the fact that it has little or no relationship to other pieces of knowledge held by the self-concept. A small group of elements (a very simple schema) can be removed from the self-concept with far less personal distress

than a highly evolved schema (Wicks, 1992). Consequently, identities, as profoundly networked schemata, are very stable. Identity dissonance applies to antithetical relations between very large clusters of inter-related beliefs directly affiliated with personal identity (for example, I am a woman, but I am training to be a police officer, and I conceive of these roles as irreconcilable).

Consequently, the psychological impact of identity dissonance can be very substantial due to both its constancy and strength within the self-concept.

Identity dissonance theory argues that the self-concept (which is responsible for the development and organization of identities) is not *directly* involved in the process of identity dissonance. According to the theory, dissonance occurs when conflicting identities are consistent with, or representative of, the expectations and desires of the self-concept instead of when the baseline understanding of self is specifically threatened, as Aronson presumes. Identity dissonance would occur when two identities vital to the self-concept are perceived as conflictual: I am both a police officer and a woman, but police officers should not be female. The self does not directly act in the world, but rather its wishes, needs, values etc. are manifested in identities which, once recognized by an individual as contradictory, set off the process of identity dissonance. Thus as conceptualized, identity dissonance does not directly involve the self-concept.

Although the theory of identity dissonance recognizes that individuals are motivated by a drive for consistency, it nevertheless is based upon the presumption that our self-concepts are inconsistent; that individuals are

contradictory by nature. Identity dissonance suggests that selves are composed of needs and desires that are often in opposition to each other and that this reality may explain why individuals experience the drive towards internal consistency. Consistency is the most 'comfortable' state for the psyche (Heider, 1958), therefore North Americans are motivated to try and attain this state of being even though the natural process of identity development would seem to render this an unachievable goal. Societal influences promote the development of an inconsistent self-temperament. Ultimately, this theory argues that a determining factor in the degree of self-inconsistency will be the demands placed upon an individual by his or her ever-changing environment. Identity dissonance theory proposes that the range of valued identities that a modern and effective self-concept has available for integration are very often contradictory in nature; consequently, everyday life and normal self-concept development encourage the adoption of identities in opposition. For example, socially acceptable adolescent female identities stress the desirability of being both active, independent, and self-centered *in addition to being* passive, dependent, and other-centered. If an adolescent girl accepts and integrates both opposing psychological approaches is she irrational or in danger of emotional collapse? Identity dissonance theory would propose that this girl is not in psychological danger, but would predict that she should experience a degree of dissonance in her life. Different contexts will prompt individuals to enact differing identities based upon fluctuating environmental and personal demands and desires, thus, identities will vary as environments change, increasing the likelihood of dissonance. Ultimately,

according to the theory of identity dissonance, a 'stable' self-concept is also a dissonant one.

### **Consistency Striving and Dichotomous Processing: Two Key Components of Identity Dissonance**

Two key processes underlie identity dissonance theorizing: consistency-striving and dichotomous processing. There are at least three different dimensions associated with identity consistency: cross-situational, internal, and temporal (Suh, 2002). This investigation focuses on the ramifications of internal consistency – consistency, or lack thereof, between personal understandings of the self.

Self-consistency is a cornerstone of Elliot Aronson's cognitive dissonance theorizing, and a necessary requirement for identity dissonance. Self versus other evaluations, and the thrust towards internal consistency in self-regard and interpersonal understanding help to ensure that identity dissonance is likely to occur. Theorists such as Fritz Heider (1944), Leon Festinger (1957) and Roy Baumeister (1999), have argued that individuals are motivated to process self-relevant information in a manner that maintains self-consistency and verifies previously held conceptions of self. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) notion of the metaphor as the general basis for cognition, inherently presumes a consistency-striving drive to human development as "understanding something requires fitting it into a coherent scheme, relative to a conceptual system. Thus, truth will always depend partly on coherence" (p. 180). For North American society, self-



consistency acts as a cognitive anchor, a way to make sense of ourselves and others (Oyserman, 2004). It also works to motivate, as we are driven to preserve our own self-definitions and conceptualizations of the world, such that we perceive people who behave in a consistent manner more favorably (Suh, 2002). Self-construction is intimately tied to consistency-seeking, as the schemas that we use to organize knowledge and guide self-understanding are highly resistant to counter-schematic information (Markus, 1977/1999). Therefore, according to Hazel Markus, "as individuals accumulate repeated experiences of a certain type, their self schemata become increasingly resistant to inconsistent or contradictory information, although they are never totally invulnerable to it" (Markus, 1999, p. 124). And, while consistency seeking is an important characteristics of Western thought and well-being (Markus & Kitayama, 1994), this does not mean that individuals will always strive to be consistent – as lack of response to shifting contexts and the absence of psychological growth could indicate a high degree of maladaptive inflexibility. Nevertheless, self-consistency is positively associated with psychological happiness and health (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne & Ilardi, 1997) which means that individuals are more satisfied, and consequently more likely to thrive, under conditions of internal consistency.

Identity dissonance theorizing also assumes that a good deal of information is processed in a dichotomous manner. Self-other comparison are essential to the development of self-awareness (Lewis, 1990; Harter, 2003) and result in observational learning or abstract modeling (Bandura, 1994). Consequently, the information that occurs from these examinations structure

identity development. Identity formation based on social comparison has been proposed by numerous theorists, such as George Herbert Mead (1934), Henri Tajfel (1978), and Albert Bandura (1994). As, it is only from persistent questioning of self in relation to others or “positive assessment of similarities and differences” (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 116), that individuals become aware of their own personal feelings, and thus knowledgeable about their identities. Joan Miller (1994), citing M. Z. Rosaldo for support, illustrates the dualistic nature of the Western cultural view of self and how comfortable self-dichotomization appears to be. Acknowledging Peter Burke’s presumption that identities are constructed in correspondence to counteridentities (Stets & Burke, 2003), identity dissonance explores how North American identity development is so often culturally and psychologically regarded as an ‘either/or’ proposition – for instance, the reductive Madonna-Whore dichotomy when it comes to women’s sexual expression.

### **Variations in the Experience of Dissonance Due to Context**

Identity dissonance theorizing strives to consider how variations in context will impact the experience of dissonance. Acknowledging differences due to historical moment, culture, psychological temperament, and developmental growth, identity dissonance theory is sensitive to the vast array of influences that might impact the experience of dissonance and its management.

The way that individuals and society conceptualize self changes over time (Baumeister, 1998; 1987). The theory of identity dissonance presumes that during different historical periods, diverse groups of people will experience

unique identity conflicts, and will have differing opinions about consistency of self. Identifying seven historical states in Western understanding of selfhood, Baumeister (1987) recognizes a trend towards regarding the self in the modern era as increasingly important, unruly, and unstable. Thus, it follows that for contemporary times, struggle with identity conflicts, or dissonance, would be of foremost concern for both Western individuals and society.

Dissonance effects vary across culture, as do our understandings of self or 'theory of mind' (Lillard, 1998). A number of studies have examined how there are distinct differences between the way East Asian and Western cultures conceptualize self (see Markus & Kitayama, 1994). For example, Americans require self-consistency far more than Koreans (Suh, 2002) and Japanese men and women are less likely to experience dissonance in comparison to Americans (Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004). Another cross cultural study conducted by Patricia L. Murphy and Carol T. Miller found that American students experienced greater postdecisional dissonance after consuming magazines than Finish students, a result they attribute to American consumer culture and the resulting commodification of the self-concept (1997).

Even when from the same culture, people do not necessarily experience dissonance in a similar manner. According to Aronson (1969) there are basically three ways that people should differ in their relationship to dissonance: in their ability to tolerate the experience, in their preferred mode of dissonance reduction, and, in their perception of dissonance (what is dissonant for one person is very often consonant for another). Depending upon individual differences people will

emphasize different identity conflicts, and will have varying consistency requirements and management styles. Personality traits, such as extraversion (Matz, Hofstedt, & Wood, 2008), Machiavellian attitudes (Epstein, 1969), preference for consistency (Newby-Clark, McGregor, & Zanna, 2002), and differing levels of self-monitoring (Snyder & Tanke, 1976) have been demonstrated to impact people's experience and tolerance for dissonance.

The degree and influence of identity dissonance in individuals' lives can also be a function of the developmental period in which they are situated, as the act of consistency-seeking, dichotomous processing, and identity development and management will vary across an individual's lifespan. Self-understanding begins with the realization that one's body is separate from others. Michael Lewis (1990) argues that the interactive patterning of self-other comparisons (dichotomous processing) that give rise to self-awareness begins to occur in the first three months of life. Between the ages of eight to fifteen months self-other differentiation becomes established, by fifteen to twenty-four months of age the child is able to become empathic, and true self-consciousness begins to emerge, solidifying by the time the child reaches the age of five. 'Bidimensional thought,' or the ability to hold opposites in our head, does not occur until middle to late childhood, and it is not until adolescence (age fifteen to sixteen) that contradictory self-conceptions can be negotiated (Harter, 2003). It is during adolescence that self-concept clarity and identity conflicts are of great concern (Rosenberg, 1986), in particular because identities are often in a state of 'moratorium' (Marcia, 1966) – a time of crisis when identities are actively

engaged in a struggle for understanding and commitment. It follows that people's identity-based needs and role choices shift as they age (Lips, 1993; Skevington & Baker, 1989). The identities that a teenager embraces are most likely not the exact same ones accepted or utilized by a woman in her 40s. Therefore, the actual process of aging, and its corresponding physical and emotional changes, ensures that identity development and management, and, in particular dissonance, will vary across the lifespan. Ultimately, consistency-seeking and dichotomous processing, along with identity dissonance experiences, differ according to historical, cultural, and individual differences.

### **The Experience of Identity Dissonance**

Exposure to stimuli which activate either conscious or unconscious self-recognition of inconsistencies between identities triggers identity dissonance. The act of perception is what defines exposure; any physical or psychological experience that is perceived by an individual can theoretically be dissonance arousing (for example, flipping through a magazine, or, having television on in the background while doing housework are both potentially dissonance-inducing experiences). In contrast, Aronson (1969) conceptualizes dissonance as arising specifically from counterattitudinal conduct. Cooper & Fazio (1984) refine this perspective by proposing that cognitive dissonance is the product of behavior that the individual conceptualizes as aversive or unwanted. While media exposure might prompt the experience of dissonance, gender identity dissonance theory is not based on an activation model; therefore, identities that are

positioned in opposition are not necessarily the result of a particular physical action taken by the individual, nor the outcome from one competing identity being accepted and the other 'interrupted', as Burke (1991) theorizes<sup>5</sup>. Instead, dissonance takes place when identities that are important to the self are regarded as antithetical, thus personal recognition of self-inconsistencies alone can cause identity dissonance. Of course, this does not discount the fact that identity dissonance can result from specific actions or aversive situations, but instead foregrounds another type of dissonance-evoking event for investigation.

The theory of identity dissonance does not propose that individuals would necessarily refrain from pursuing information or situations which would induce dissonance. Consequently, in accordance with Beauvois and Joule (1996), I disagree with Festinger's statement that "when dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance" (1957, p. 3). Identity dissonance theorizing assumes that individuals may often seek out information that will either create or increase the magnitude of their dissonance, as commitment to defend an identity's prominence and position in the psyche, or the decision to integrate new self-conceptions, will be heavily influenced by their personal and social

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<sup>5</sup> Peter J. Burke's (1991) model of identities interrupting each other, though similar in a number of ways to identity dissonance theory (due to his recognition that oppositional identities can be connected to each other, and hamper how individuals effectively manage their relationship to their world) still strays from my conceptualization. I argue that identity dissonance can motivate individuals towards removal or re-ranking of identities (which would decrease or eliminate dissonance). And, until individuals resolve their dissonance, it is assumed that the conflicting identities will be maintained and utilized as there is value in their presence. Identity dissonance theory does not make an assumption of interruption. Instead, this theory utilizes separate conceptual tools (dissonance theory versus Burke's interference model) and predicts that different outcomes will arise from identity conflicts.

worth (Thoits, 1983). Thus, maintaining or increasing dissonance could be regarded as beneficial (see Mills, Aronson, & Robinson, 1959; Allen, 1968), based on the dissonant identities' usefulness, importance, or, social utility. As a result, just because dissonance arousal occurs does not mean that the individual will make changes. Dissonance does not necessarily remove the desirability or attractiveness from identities, as the positive gains of embodying the identity may outweigh the negative experience of dissonance.

Identity dissonance is not necessarily a negative experience. Though the feelings that result from dissonance are aversive by nature, the event need not be damaging and could even be regarded as having a positive effect (see Cooper & Fazio, 1984). When individuals are uncomfortable with the disquiet caused by dissonance they could react in a manner that reflects psychological unease and distress. Their increased stress levels may evoke noticeable feelings of discomfort and disturbed behavioral cues (see Burke, 1991). For example, frustration over identity dissonance may be displayed in behaviors such as short-temperedness, confusion, and uncertainty in interpersonal dealings. In contrast, individuals who are more accepting, or positively motivated by the presence of identity dissonance may experience emotions and behaviors that are both agreeable and socially adaptive. Identity dissonance, when regarded and managed positively (such as when the conflict is resolved, or, when it is effectively lived with and regarded as an acceptable experience), may lead to dynamic and diverse coping strategies, deliberations, and conduct that could assist individuals to adjust effectively to varying social environments. Overall,

identity dissonance can be regarded as a potentially productive component of identity development and management and thus, part of the healthy expression of an individual's self-concept.

### **Gender and Identity Dissonance**

Binary processing, as both psychological and sociological phenomenon, has both progressive and regressive consequences for women's lives. While the structuring of knowledge into either/or categories can be beneficial, allowing people to quickly sort through incoming information in order to ensure decisive and low-impact decision-making, it can also result in problematic consequences. Malevolent stereotyping of people and events such that they are deemed 'less than' or threatening to our own self-concept and group memberships is one key consequence. While dichotomous either/or processing necessarily functions to construct and strengthen personal and group identities, it can also result in the reinscription of problematic social hierarchies. Binary processing is at the root of prejudice – shoring up hegemonic ideologies and assisting in the formulation and nourishment of fears and intolerance (Bonner, Goodman, Allen, Janes, & King, 1992). Thus, if under patriarchy, masculinity signifies strength, wisdom, and control, femininity, as its presumed opposite, will come to imply vulnerability, foolishness, and frivolity. Consequently, the perception of difference constructed through binary processing can effectively aid in the rationalization necessary for exclusion and oppression. It is the prominence of gender-based binaries within mediated texts, especially advertising (and its use of simplistic either/or appeals



capitalizing on our most basic needs and fears), which make them such a critically important space for investigation.

There are an abundance of discussions and studies aimed at exploring the unique characteristics of female identities and female identity development and management. “*Gender identity* is defined as the individual’s private experience of the self as female or male - a powerful aspect of the self-concept that is formed early in childhood and, in most adults, extremely resistant to change” (Lips, 1993, p. 49, italics in original). Research that reports gender differences often attributes these findings to the distinct social expectations and role assignments that are forced upon men and women (Abrams, 1989; Alcock, Carment, & Sadava, 1991; Lips, 1993; Skevington & Baker, 1989). Recognizing the importance of social influence, Abrams (1989) proposes that both male and female children have similar gender development until they reach the age of 11; at this time it seems that children attach significance to their own gender, attributable to society’s expectations or evaluations of their sex.

The categories of masculinity and femininity are nothing more than “cultural constructions” (Bem, 1993, p. 123). Social identity theory argues that women’s identities are assembled in a manner that reflects the current sex-typed demands and expectations of society. As so many aspects of identity are derived through membership in social groups (Skevington & Baker, 1989), it is postulated that gender identity is simply a social contrivance. The social learning view of gender emphasizes that rewards and punishments are handed out by others, who act to reinforce or remove behaviors that are not socially acceptable

(Santrock & Yussen, 1992). Consequently, the individual 'learns' how to behave in a gender appropriate manner.

What constitutes socially acceptable female identities, fluctuates. In today's modern society, with so many roles available for partial or outright adoption, the process of identity construction seems overwhelmingly complicated. Cultural expectations provide guidelines and standards which women internalize and use to govern their behavior and self-conceptions. As females age what society expects regarding designated roles and behaviors, changes (Skevington & Baker). In addition, there are developmental periods when female identities will be more likely to fluctuate (Rosenberg, 1986). According to Rosenberg, young adolescent girls have a highly 'volatile barometric' self-concept in comparison to boys of the same age for two specific reasons. His first explanation for female identity fluctuation is based upon his presumption that adolescent "girls may be more fully immersed in the role-taking stage, more sensitive to the internal thoughts and feelings of other people, more concerned with others' attitudes toward them" (p. 130). This perspective fits well with Carol Gilligan's (1993) conclusions regarding women's preoccupation with developing and maintaining relationships and Fredrickson & Roberts' (1997) Self-Objectification theory which explores how women internalize the other's perspectives towards their selves. Rosenberg's second explanation addresses the physical ramifications of being an adolescent in a society that polices women's bodies, and places such a high value on physical attractiveness, as his "data analyses indicate that the single strongest reason for the higher self-

concept volatility among girls is their sense of change in physical characteristics” (p. 130). For a young adolescent girl, ensuring that her body measures up to society’s ideals is both time-consuming and psychologically arduous work.

The mass media present a wide array of socially desirable and useful gender identities to any female within range of reception. Thus, age appropriateness or logical consistency to identity adoption and performance may be undermined by the mass media’s popular appeal and general accessibility (Meyrowitz, 1985). The fact that many diverse and contradictory identities are available for internalization may assist in the instability or inconsistency of self-concepts in women, in particular those in their adolescence, resulting in a greater likelihood that gender identity dissonance will be experienced.

Ultimately, the majority of an individual’s self-concept is never fully established or static, and therefore, is continually changing and evolving. Gender identity, as a social construction, is highly related to age, and as social expectations regarding females at certain developmental periods changes, so do the associated gender identities. Therefore, as women age they are consistently encountering and acquiring new gendered identities that are most likely socially sanctioned, personally desirable, and at times, antithetical. Identity dissonance, dissonance pertaining to identities in opposition, is conceptualized as a natural (and presumably unavoidable) by-product of Western women’s gender identity development.

## **The Social Ramifications of Identity Dissonance: Identity Dissonance and Women's Media Consumption**

There is an important connection between mass communication and identity. "Society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories" (Goffman, 1963, p. 2); consequently, mass media, as a social institution, will demonstrate and display those culturally accepted categories and characteristics. And, since "the media operate largely in the public sphere but influence the private – ultimately how we view ourselves" (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 126), media content covers the realm of identity and its development. Cultural theorists such as Erving Goffman (1979), Stuart Ewen (1988), and Angela McRobbie (1994) have explored the impact of mass media on self-concept and identity development. The growing attention paid to the intersection of these areas seems to indicate "the increased salience of identity as a problem played out in everyday life, and to identity as it is managed and administered in the cultural industries of mass communication" (Gilroy, 1996, p. 36). Though media can not directly force an individual to embark upon a particular action or specific piece of decision-making regarding identity development, its ability to both elevate and marginalize particular identities attests to its strength as a method of socialization and its ability to affect the process of identity development. In other words, mass media's greatest influence may be its ability to present and promote a limited amount of socially prescribed identities which it subsequently 'sells' to audiences for consumption.

Mass media should be a significant source of dissonance arousing material due to the disparate variety of identity-related content that it provides. North American females are often confronted with socially prescribed but oppositionally situated identities and/or values between which they can hardly be expected to attain congruence (see Douglas, 1994). Understandably, females functioning in a society sustaining no singular definition of womanhood, or unified ideal of female identity, may inevitably experience conflict. If the self is regarded as a homeostatic system that strives to maintain/regain consonance between its diverse and unruly parts, it seems obvious that the paradox in socially prescribed gender identities would cause identity dissonance. Research has uncovered a possible relationship between exposure to certain types of media products and the presence of post-decisional cognitive dissonance (Murphy & Miller, 1997). Therefore, it seems that not only is the mass media an environment marked by contradictions and conflicting identity messages, but also very likely able to induce identity dissonance in its audiences.

Ultimately, media representations function in five ways when it comes to the experience of gender identity dissonance. First, they participate in the development and perpetuation of oppositional information-processing and identity construction for both individuals and society (at the psychological and discursive level). Media representations overtly and/or covertly display identity dissonance. Media reinforce and influence the social requirements associated with the process, and, evoke feelings of dissonance. And finally, mediated representations seek to resolve dissonance to the benefit of their producers and

in accordance with hegemonic notions of gender (and) identity. Ultimately, the goal of gender identity dissonance theory is to assist in the exploration of the social and psychological ramifications of contradiction and further facilitate the dialogue pertaining to gender identity development and management.

Identity dissonance is both a psychological and sociological phenomena. As a psychological process it is perpetuated and influenced by imagery found within the social environment. I argue that media texts in fact, not only prompt identity dissonance, but in representing imagery of gender identity dissonance (be it in advertisements featuring multiple images of the same, conflict-riddled female model, or, in the characterization of Carrie from the HBO series *Sex and the City*) reflect, perpetuate, and transform the psychological experience of gender identity dissonance. Therefore, mass forms of communication and their dissonant representations and discourses, inspire, perpetuate, and modify, the way that gender identity dissonance is experienced by audiences.

Ultimately, while gender identity dissonance can have a destructive effect on women's lives – producing psychological distress and undermining self-understanding – it could also play a positive and socially adaptive role. Females who knowingly choose to embrace information or actions which result in dissonance are recognizing not only that the benefits might outweigh the discomfort experienced by integrating new contradictory information/identities but that identity dissonance is not generally a self-fracturing process or experience. Elliot Aronson, by way of work he did with Mills and Robinson (1959), came to acknowledge that dissonance may be an acceptable by-product of beneficial

decision-making, observing that “dissonance and utility are in constant tension by virtue of the fact that under certain conditions dissonant information may be extremely useful and, conversely, useful information can arouse dissonance” (Aronson, 1969, p. 31). Aronson recognized that dissonance may be an unavoidable consequence of the struggle towards a comfortable, sustainable, adaptive, and healthy sense of self. Psychological malleability or an ability to adapt to contextual changes, thus maintaining a diversity of identities and understandings may be an important predictor of mental health (Thoits, 1983). Dissonance is both a motivator, driving individuals towards its removal through reshuffling of identities and consequently reconceptualization of selfhood, and, it is also a consequence, the unavoidable result of an ongoing process of self-definition and identity development. In both its incarnations identity dissonance plays an important and beneficial role in healthy gender identity development and management.

While a key aim of this project is to illuminate some of the positive ramifications of binary processing and dissonance, it is also argued that gendered dichotomization and identity dissonance leads to the narrowing of feminine potential, resulting in psychological discomfort (as a result of female gender identity dissonance) and punishing social discourses (such as those found in patriarchal representations within the media). It is my hope that through illuminating the presence of identity dissonance, characteristics that have led to females’ being stereotyped as unstable and capricious (for example the conventionalized depiction of the ‘flighty’ or ‘ditzzy’ female) can be redefined both

by individual women and by society as a whole in order to acknowledge female dynamism and adaptability. As long as the media continue to reinforce the distinctions/differences between female gender identities, portraying them as exclusive, while praising them and holding up these antithetical depictions as the social/cultural ideal, females will continue to be encouraged to feel shame and self-doubt regarding their ability to be accepted, and acceptable, to both self and society. It is the belief of this project that a coherent sense of self does not preclude a multiplicity of identities, nor the presence of feelings of dissonance, and, that diversity of self-understanding and identification is both an adaptive and productive feature of being human.



### Chapter 3

#### “She is Always and Never the Same”: Gender Identity Dissonance and Polarized Ways of Seeing in Magazine Advertising from 1970-2006

With the rise of poststructuralist, postcolonial, and feminist theory in the later half of the twentieth century came an accompanying unease with cognitive and discursive approaches to identity construction, management and representation which relied upon dichotomies. As scholars interrogated the relationship between subjectivity, context, knowledge, and power, conventional binary-based conceptualizations were brought into question. Within academia, simple either-or approaches to the examination of gender, race, class and sex were re-evaluated, replaced by a more nuanced or ‘intersectional’ (e.g. Smith, 1998) understanding of identity politics, media reception, and cultural analysis. While there is little doubt that at both the cognitive and discursive level binary-based conceptions of identity continue to be perpetuated, North American popular culture does in fact reflect this growing trend towards a more multifaceted approach to identity development, management, and representation. Specifically, an historical analysis of advertising in popular women’s magazines over an almost 40 year span uncovers how advertising displays, distorts, and possibly contests the normative binary-based paradigms that frame female gender identity at particular moments in history – illuminating how advertising

works to provide both a space for the reinscription of problematic gender norms and resistance to the restrictive gender dichotomies that frame women's lives.

Within North America, binary-based cognitive processing and discourses which utilize and reinforce either-or dichotomies are fundamental to the way in which individuals and groups understand self. Historical scholars such as George H. Roeder, Jr. (1993) have documented how polarized ways of seeing (i.e. us vs. them; Americans vs. Germans etc.), were promoted through institutional policy and social convention during the first half of the twentieth century, specifically in the approach taken to 'marketing' World War II to American citizens. Arlene Dávila (2001) provides contemporary support for the perpetuation of binary processing as a cognitive and discursive practice in her analysis of the Latin advertising industry, identifying the function of self-other dichotomies in the establishment and maintenance of nationhood. Stuart Hall's (1996) seminal investigation into the manner in which polarizing representations impact the lived experiences of individuals and social groups deemed 'other' provides an important avenue for exploring the social repercussion of individuals' cognitive behavior and discursive practices. One of the most significant contributions to cultural studies that Hall makes centers around his exploration of how meaning is contested and continually struggled over and for. His examination of the production of meaning is entrenched in the study of difference and power, and emphasizes how discourses and representations rely upon binary-based comparisons (e.g. good/us vs. bad/them). Hall's discussion of meaning production and, specifically, how identity is fixed through the repetition

of binaries is vital to identity dissonance theorizing. In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Hall (1997) illustrates how relying on simple binary oppositions when it comes to identity elides complexity, and reinforces and rationalizes problematic power relations and social hierarchies. However, what seems to be currently absent from Hall's theorizing is a fully articulated investigation into the psychological (and to a more limited degree, sociological) ramifications of contradiction, specifically, an analysis of what occurs when both sides of an identity-based dichotomy are hailed. This absence is what identity dissonance theory tries to address.

While it has become almost a customary requirement of cultural studies research to acknowledge the contradictory nature of the text, audience, or discourse under investigation, the usefulness of this is significantly reduced if the examination stops short at simple recognition. And although there have been a number of valuable investigations which have made the examination of feminine contradictions their central aim (e.g. Douglas, 1994; Gonick, 2006; Hayes, 1996; Inness, 2004; Stillion Southard, 2008), there is still much work to be done in order to fully comprehend the ramifications of this recently identified social phenomenon. By examining the rise of identity dissonance within magazine advertising aimed at young, primarily white, middle-class, women, I will illuminate how feminism, poststructuralist notions of subjectivity, and the ramifications of niche marketing assist in the development of a collective dialogue dedicated to exploring the complex nature of female gender identity.

Advertising is actively implicated in social change (see, for example, Frank, 1987; Lears, 1983; Marchand, 1985). In order to explore the ways gender identity, magazine advertising, and historical shifts in cultural attitudes and values intersect, I composed an archive to investigate the following question: since 1970, has there been a steady increase in magazine advertisements depicting, discussing, or potentially evoking gender identity dissonance? By examining the rise of identity dissonance within advertising campaigns featured in *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour* and *Seventeen* magazines between 1970 and 2006, a greater understanding of the relationship between advertising and women's lived experiences can be gained.

Contrary to predictions, there was no exact historical time-period that emerged as the moment in which identity dissonance surfaced as an important element of advertising discourse. However, analysis of identity dissonance-themed advertisements in the target magazines reveal three general findings: first, the strength of the identity-based tension present within advertisements featuring identity dissonance becomes more explicitly salient over time, secondly, the themes associated with gender identity evolved to become more complex and thematically diverse, and thirdly, two historical moments, the late 1970s and 2000 onward emerge as important moments when gender identity dissonant imagery appears with greater frequency<sup>1</sup>. While it could be argued that this shift

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<sup>1</sup> Due to time constraints, the research design did not reach far back enough in time to effectively answer whether there has been a discernable historical moment in which identity dissonance in magazine advertising first emerged. In addition, all research findings could be strengthened by an investigation that included even more magazine issues for each year between 1970-2006.

in representation is due to the increasingly sophisticated nature of recent advertising appeals and marketing strategies, analysis indicates that the increased saliency of identity dissonance in advertising campaigns over time speaks to more than technique; instead, historical shifts in representation highlight identity dissonance's underlying usefulness/effectiveness in marketing to audiences, and/or a perceived pleasure in audiences' encounter with this theme on the part of producers. The historical intensification in identity dissonance tensions in advertising likely reflects changes in perceptions regarding appropriate or inappropriate (or dissonant and consonant) gender identity combinations. Consequently, it seems apparent that there is a strong link between cultural attitudes toward gender identity and the prevalence of gender identity dissonance within magazine advertising.

### **The Development of an Archive**

In order to explore the relationship between contradiction, identity construction, and advertising, an historical archive of magazine ads was constructed. Systematic sampling of women's beauty magazines' *Cosmopolitan* (founded in 1886, but re-launched in its now famous format in 1965) and *Glamour* (established 1941), with 2007 circulation rates of 2,909,332 and 2,308,048 respectively (Magazine Publishers of America, 2009), were examined to ascertain both the frequency and characteristics of advertisements featuring identity dissonance that are aimed at young women. These two periodicals were chosen for a number of reasons. First, they both have long histories which

allowed for the necessary time-span required in order to build the archive. They are both stable, well-recognized, high-profile magazines. They have two of the highest circulation rates for the generic 'women's magazine' category for 2007, thus are not only successful, but also popular. And finally, their target audience is primarily young, middle-class females.

*Seventeen*, established in 1944, is a magazine oriented towards teenage girls. This publication is included because it is a strong lead-in/'gateway' magazine, establishing young female consumers' taste and shifting their attention toward the adult fashion-oriented target market of *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*. Ultimately, *Seventeen* with a 2007 circulation rate of 2, 066,825 (Magazine Publishers of America, 2009) was included in this archive in order to explore characteristics of preteen/young females' socialization<sup>2</sup>.

I began examining magazines beginning in 1970, continuing right up to 2006. Within each decade, four years were examined (1970, 1973, 1976, 1979; 1980, 1983, 1986, 1989 etc.), and within each year three magazine issues were randomly chosen and their advertisements evaluated for the presence of identity dissonance<sup>3</sup>. 45 issues were evaluated for each magazine, with a grand total of 135 magazines making up the scope of the archive. Particular attention was

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<sup>2</sup> In the future, so that I may strengthen my understanding of the ways in which women are hailed by identity dissonance related advertising, I wish to examine the manner in which identity dissonant magazine advertisements directed at male readers are both similar and different to those directed toward a female audience.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that poor contrast found in microfiche/microfilm, often the only accessible format for old issues of *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*, prevented the occasional advertisement from being evaluated. In addition, for 3 issues there were a few pages that the company in charge of reproduction failed to duplicate.

given to catching any discernable changes over time that occurred in the manner in which gender identity dissonance was depicted. Only full page ads were examined, which ruled out the inclusion of classified ads that often appear at the end of periodicals<sup>4</sup>.

Advertisements were identified as relevant if they contained contradictory imagery pertaining to gender identity, visually referenced the emotional repercussions of dissonance, or, provided visual representations that could be presumed to evoke identity dissonance in consumers<sup>5</sup>. Advertisements that imply opposites using body posture, color, clothing, props etc. were included in the archive, with special attention paid to identifying those ads which presented different physical and/or psychological depictions of the same model, and/or which visually suggest that multiple aspects/versions of the self can be brought together or merged through consumption (e.g. a 2000 Virginia Slims advertisement which features three varying images of the same model who is

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<sup>4</sup> The total number of advertisements appearing in magazines was also assessed in order to evaluate whether there had been a rise in the number of advertisements included in magazines historically. Overall, there was no noticeable difference in the magazines examined. In addition, evaluating the material found on the page prior to, and just proceeding, each dissonant ads did not reveal any relationship between the ad and its surrounding text. It does not seem that the meaning located within these ads is being anchored in any particular way by the content in which they are situated. This points to the possibility that those in charge of the magazine (editorial staff, layout and production designers etc.) are not yet aware, or trying to take advantage of, the way that their readers are hailed by dissonant ads.

<sup>5</sup> While multiplicity within the self-concept is necessary for identity dissonance to occur, the focus for the archive was on identifying images which presented distinct antithetical pairings. For example, an ad for *Piz Buin* tanning lotion (1979) contains the slogan: “for all your lives under the sun.” This ad points to multiplicity in the self-concept (the ability to have many lives), however, it does not position those lives as antithetical, thus was not counted as part of the archive. It is contradiction between identity positions, not just the presence of diverse identities, that is characteristic of identity dissonance. Thus, images that present a multi-faceted representation of womanhood were not included in this archive – though, the presence of this type of advertisement does point to a dialogue conducive to the development of identity-based contradictions.

dressed, styled, and posed in a variety of ways that suggest opposition, and an accompanying fourth picture which can be interpreted as an amalgamation of the other three). Advertisements which visually highlight opposition were identified as pertinent to the archive, thus, consideration was given to ads which utilized graphics, lighting, color, and models' body posture to create divisions and opposing signs (for example, the use of light and shadow to divide a woman's naked back, paired antonyms in the advertising copy, and differing font styles in the product name of a 1996 advertisement for Vanilla Musk perfume). Finally, ads which featured incongruity between imagery and advertisement copy were included (such as Citibank's 2003 anti-identity theft ad which presents an elderly Asian woman, wearing a conservative blouse and pearls smiling broadly. Underneath her portrait is the statement: "I spent \$2,342 on violent and suggestive video games").

Attention was also paid to the way that advertising copy or the written text within the ads worked to evoke dissonance. Specifically, advertisements which referenced opposition in the name of the company or product line (e.g. Contradiction perfume), tagline (e.g. "she is always and never the same), or general textual opposition in the form of antithetical pairs, 'either-or' phrasing, or, other textual forms of division were included (for example, the copy for another 1996 Vanilla Musk perfume ad reads: "What sunlight does for shade What lace does for leather What a whisper does for words Vanilla does for musk"). In addition, when there was a conflict set up between the image and the text, or when textual reference was made to division in the self/self-concept or variation



between identities the ad was included in the archive (e.g. De Beers' Right Hand Ring campaign: "Your left hand likes evenings at home. Your right hand loves a night out..."). Finally, textual reference to how a product will produce unification of self or resolve a tension between opposing identities ensured that the advertisement was identified as pertinent to this research project (e.g. the use of the word "bridge" situated beneath a bottle of Pinot Grigio and between a pair of comfy pastel pink pyjamas and a slinky hot pink negligee in Woodbridge's 2002 ad for wine).

Out of 135 magazine issues examined, 37 advertisements were identified as featuring female gender identity dissonance<sup>6</sup>. Within the 12 issues that were chosen between 1970-1979, 9 advertisements were identified as fulfilling the criteria for gender identity dissonance, 12 from the 1980s, 5 from the 1990s, and, between 2000-2006, 11 ads were found. Ultimately, this outcome confirms the necessity for further research, as the incorporation of more magazines and a longer historical timeline would further illuminate patterns and shifts in representation. Nevertheless, this archive is able to determine that gender identity dissonance was a marketing technique that has a well established presence in women's fashion magazines from at least the 1970s. While results indicate that there was no strict historical time-period that emerged as the cultural

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<sup>6</sup> If the exact same ad appeared in more than one magazine, or a similar ad utilizing identity dissonance from the same company's campaign was found, it was only counted once. This action was chosen because this research project was more interested in assessing the advertisers' choice (consciously or unconsciously) to incorporate identity dissonance as a selling technique within advertisements, rather than trying to meticulously calculate the degree of direct exposure experienced by readers.

moment in which identity dissonance surfaced, there are important changes that have occurred in the way that female gender identity dissonance has been represented over time.

When examining the range of 37 advertisements that make up the archive, spread over 4 decades, a number of important features surface. First, two historical moments emerge where there is a marked increase in the presence of gender identity dissonant advertisements: 1976-1980 and 2000-2006. Together these intervals comprise almost 70% of the archive, making both the late 1970s and our current time vitally important periods to consider when exploring both the impact and function of gender identity dissonance in advertising. Second, over time, the visual and textual representations of feminine multiplicity and contradiction evolved to become far more explicit in their appeal to consumers to both identify with, and desire, gender dissonant self-expression.

While binaries, or polarized female images, have been identified by other theorists studying women's representations in advertising (e.g. Boyd & Robitaille, 1994; MacCurdy, 1994), what makes this particular examination unique is the recognition of polarized female images existing within the same advertisement, rather than between/across advertisements. This archive identified the presence of three different types of antithetical pairings when it came to representation of women's gender identity – Madonna versus Whore, Masculine versus Feminine, and Single versus Coupled. And, while it should not be assumed that each ad contains only one tension, as occasionally there is more than one type of gender

identity dissonance resonant within an ad, and, pairings often work in conjunction with each other, each advertisement included within the archive is notable for featuring one dominant dissonance pairing.

Although the three dichotomous pairs that recur throughout the archive can be seen to provide an avenue for diversity in feminine expression, they also function to reinscribe patriarchal values. Identity pairings are generally made up of opposites: a conventional identity and its reverse, a less accepted, atypical identity. Most often, the 'job' of the counter-stereotypical identity within a binary-based pairing is to validate the normative identity/meanings associated with the duo, and, frequently, this was the case for the gender dissonant pairs in this archive. The expression of an overt sexuality or 'whorishness', or traits deemed to be typically masculine when found within gender identity dissonant advertisements often served to reinforce the idealization and normative expectation associated with femininity, with its presumption of a controlled or absent sexuality. These findings support Inness's 2004 examination of how the presentation of 'toughness' in women's magazines validated femininity and heterosexuality, rather than providing an alternative more masculine or homonormative version of womanhood. It must be noted, however, that the coupled vs. single identity pairing works slightly differently, as each of these identities can be regarded as transgressive or problematic, depending upon the age of the woman involved (for example, women who are unmarried/uncoupled after a certain age – generally mid 30s – are to be pitied as they are deemed not good enough for a man, passed over, or aberrant for not wishing to be

partnered), thus, while each identity state is characterized by what it lacks, it is even more pronounced for the coupled vs. single pairing.

While there is power for women in adopting non-normative identities or characteristics – for example, agency to be found by wearing masculine clothing, being sexually aggressive, or loosening the expectations around what it means to be coupled or single – much of this pleasure is due to the increased attractiveness, freedom, respect, or fear that is garnered *from* men. And, it is the requirement to meet patriarchal expectations in order to have access to that power that reinforces traditional notions of femininity and shores up the power associated with the normative side of female gender identity-based binaries. Antithetical representations of female gender identity have a long history of use in advertising aimed at women, but it is their role in both empowering and narrowing women's potential, and their relationship to the historical moment, that makes their presence particularly significant for scholars interested in exploring ambivalent representations of female gender identity in the mass media.

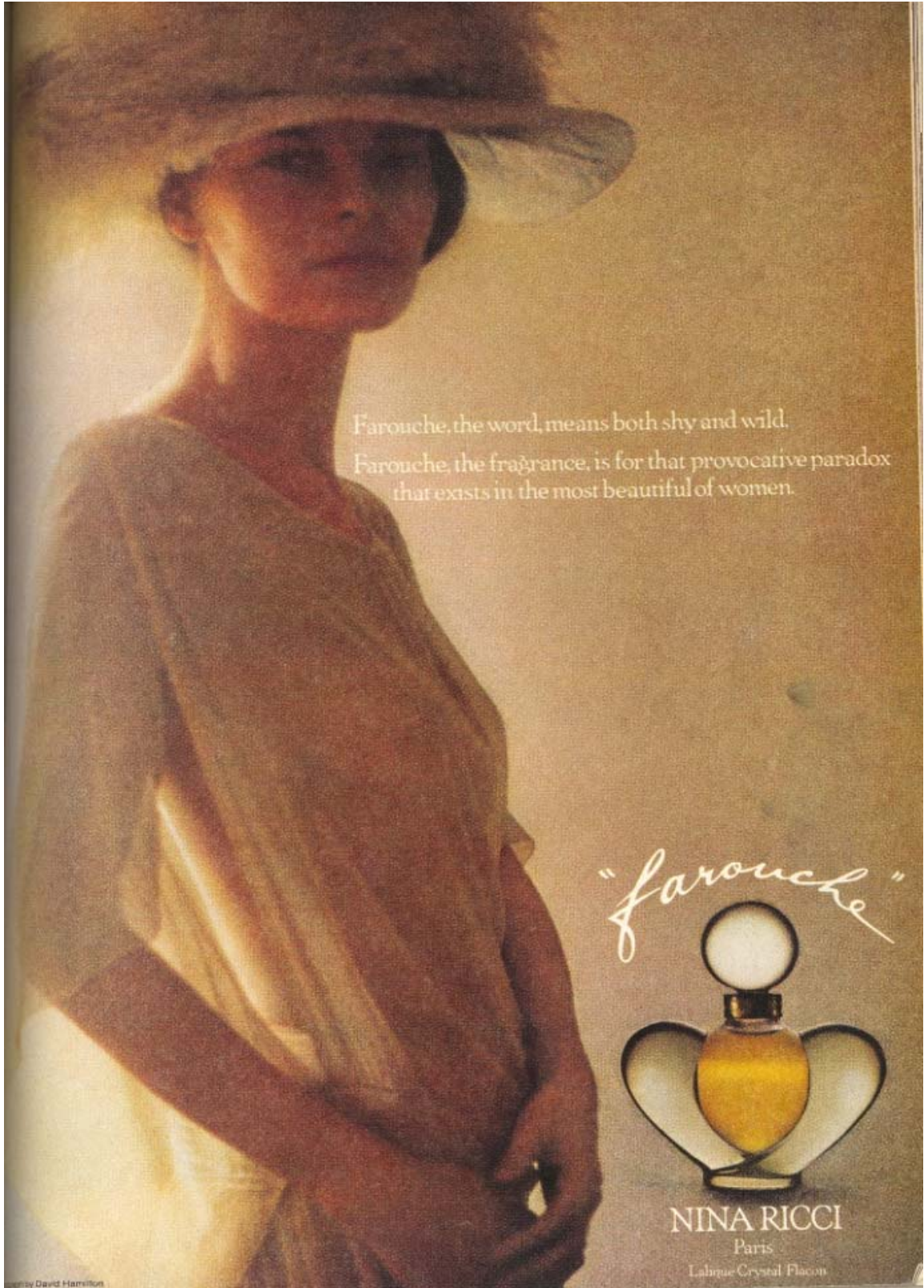
### **The Rise of Feminism and Female Gender Identity Dissonance: 1976-1980**

The sexual revolution of the 60s and 70s, and the ambiguities that it brought to the fore, are reflected in the increased presence of representations of female gender identity dissonance-themed ads during this historical moment. The women's movement exposed social hypocrisy regarding mediated representations of female sexuality and pushed to bring recognition and value to women's pleasure. What social historian Ruth Rosen (2000) astutely suggests is

that by emulating the language of empowerment and visual signs of liberation that were associated with the women's movement, consumer culture was able to utilize, and undermine, the movement. She labelled this outcome 'consumer feminism,' where advertising removes political meanings and goals and reduces feminism to nothing more than a style for consumption. This new feminist styling was characterized by the promotion of individual and sexual liberation and self-expression as achievable through particular purchasing habits that were meant to signify feminine choice.

The most prevalent dyad within the archive, the Madonna-Whore dichotomy, was the only type of dissonance pairing to be found during the 1970s; the advertisements collected during the 70s were forceful in their promotion of diverse feminine expression as achievable through consumption – characterized by a generally ambivalent approach to feminine sexual expression. An advertisement for a perfume by *Nina Ricci* has the following caption: "Farouche, the word, means both shy and wild. Farouche, the fragrance, is for that provocative paradox that exists in the most beautiful of women" (1976). This ad (see Figure 3.1) portrays identity dissonance as the characteristic of "the most beautiful women"; thus, implying that this identity combination (shy vs. wild/Madonna vs. Whore) is very much desirable, and ultimately achievable, by means of this particular brand of perfume. The advertising image which depicts the torso of a very lean model also helps to reinforce this dichotomy/tension. She is wearing a gauzy, cream-colored dress and a large hat; her presence

Figure 3.1:



evokes the Victorian/Edwardian era and its associations with a demure and traditional femininity. The visual tension is suggested through the lighting. The light source comes from behind the model, there is a warm glow which streams through the material of her dress, accentuating the slight curves of her body and producing a heightened sexuality typically not associated with the modesty and purity connected to notions of a refined or proper female. Thus, the image reinforces the textual paradox that this ad both evokes and idealizes.

Identity dissonance-based images in magazine advertising reflect larger cultural dynamics associated with social anxieties over the changing roles of women in general, and, more specifically, feminism. The women's movement, and specifically the National Organization for Women during the early 60s and 70s, was acutely aware of the power associated with negative media images and their role in perpetuating patriarchy, sexism, and gender inequality. Betty Friedan (1963) in her ground-breaking book *The Feminine Mystique* identified the disjuncture between images seen in magazines and the identity requirements that women experience every day. Her concern was reflected in the notion of the 'feminine mystique' which she used to refer to the disjuncture between the media's 'happy housewife heroine' and the realities of women's lived experiences. Magazines reflect the sociological and psychological preoccupations of their general readership. Thus, "in short, the traditional women's magazines – filled with stories, editorials, ads, and columns that frequently contradicted one another – accurately captured the kaleidoscopic chaos of women's lives during the seventies." (Rosen, 2000, p. 310) The sexual

revolution of the 60s and 70s, and the ambiguities that it brought to the fore, are reflected in the sexual representations of women in the identity dissonance-themed ads during this historical moment. The women's movement exposed social hypocrisy regarding mediated representations of female sexuality and pushed to bring recognition and value to women's pleasure. And, it is this social ambiguity over appropriate and inappropriate female sexual identifications and representations (the Madonna-Whore dichotomy) which seems particularly characteristic of the archived advertisements of this time.

In this vein, Avon's Sweet Honesty perfume (see Figure 3.2) is touted as "down- to-earth but heavenly. Innocent but sexy" (1976). Again, a simple but powerfully resonant juxtaposition of imagery and visuals in this advertisement. The model is wearing a modest yellow floral print top, blond hair curling around her face, but her lips are berry-red, full, and expectant. She looks into the camera with a penetrating gaze, a little more flushed in the cheek and sensual than her purported purity, or 'sweet honesty' should exhibit. A very subtle but evocative tension between stereotyped expectations is being expressed here, suggesting that the production team took great pains to ensure that the model appear both 'innocent' *and* 'sexy'.

There is a general coyness to the expression of female sexuality found in the dissonant advertisements collected between 1976 and 1980. The Sexual Revolution has just occurred, marking a new era of awareness and expression for women, characterized by the introduction to the mainstream of the birth control pill. The 60s and 70s were a time of real change, especially when it came



Figure 3.2:



**Just you  
and your  
Sweet  
Honesty**

It's down-to-earth but heavenly. Innocent but sexy. Goes where you go but lingers where you've been. And makes you feel beautiful even though nobody can see it. Sweet Honesty Cologne Mist. Only from

**AVON**

to women's ability to claim agency over their own bodies. However, within these mainstream magazines, feminine sexual expression was still very much subdued, most likely reflecting the negotiation occurring within the public sphere at that time between traditional/passive and modern/active notions of acceptable feminine sexual expression. Thus, this pronounced negotiation between the requirement to be innocent yet daring, earthy but sensual is repeated over and over again within the ads during this historical moment – asking women “What are you in the mood for?” (Sharing, Caring, and Embracing Cologne, 1976). Feminine sexuality is discussed within these ads, standing as an important improvement over representations from previous decades, though the public display of sexual agency and self-expression is covert or subtly implied, ensuring that women can still maintain their ‘femininity’. However, within these ads, sexual agency – the ability to express or own feminine sexuality – is positioned as being as essential a requirement for idealized womanhood as traditional virginal modesty. Consequently, these antithetical expressions of feminine sexuality are able to encourage consumers to embark upon a highly sophisticated negotiation in order to embrace and convey multiple identities.

During the 1970s there was a significant amount of anxiety expressed within the media concerning the possible erosion of the tradition of marriage and shifts in the presumably static boundaries between males and females. It is very probable that this anxiety translated into an increased presence in gender identity-based advertisements, and more specifically the surge found during the late 1970s to early 1980s. Ruth Rosen notes that it was “the year 1979, when

media pundits declared – with a collective sigh of relief – that the women’s movement was dead” (p. xii). The public debate around women’s rights and roles was quickly stripped of its position as a civil rights issue, and contained to a more de-politicized discussion around personal responsibility and purchasing choice.

Women’s sexuality and sexual agency in advertisements featuring gender identity dissonance from this historical moment appear distinctly to be in service to male fantasy. For example, the advertisement for Maybelline’s Kissing Slicks (1980) where the Madonna-Whore dichotomy is front and center, reflected in the evocation of Eve situated in the Garden of Eden (see Figure 3.3). The model, wearing a tight pink shirt reading “I’m not as innocent as I seem” is surrounded by lush fruits and vegetation, with a cluster of grapes standing in for the tempting apple. The “forbidden fruits” that the advertising copy refers to are not just the grapes and other produce featured in the image, nor the Kissing Slicks, but also includes the alluring blond model promoting the possibility of oral sex (the lip gloss’s application wand is brushed up against her parted, rosy, shimmering lips – a classic erotic pose repeatedly found in magazine imagery of this era). The pastel lip glosses look innocent, but they are also able to signify the possibility of the consumer’s willingness to take sexual risks and defy conventional codes of feminine propriety. The flavors Wicked Watermelon and Peppermint Pleasure are “the most delicious shine he’s ever tasted,” and allow the female consumer to be “ready for anything”.

By 1980 the next thematic tension to be discovered in the archive



Figure 3.3:

# Forbidden Fruits



**I'm not as innocent as I seem**

Introducing five new mouthwatering flavors of Kissing Slicks. The Flavored Automatic Lip Gloss from Maybelline. Clearly not-so-innocent. Not when it comes in such tempting flavors as Wicked Watermelon and Peppermint Pleasure.

To give your lips the most delicious shine he's ever tasted. Kissing Slicks. Just add our not-so-innocent T-shirt. And you're ready for anything.



**Get the T-shirt that says it all! The Kissing Slicks T-shirt.**

Stylish "French Cut" design 50% Polyester, 50% Cotton woven knit. Non-fading permanent message. \$7.00 retail value\* only \$2.50 plus 50¢ postage and handling from Maybelline. Mail coupon and proof of purchase (product card) for Kissing Slicks plus \$3.00 for each shirt, to: KISSING SLICKS T-SHIRT OFFER, P.O. Box 3357, Maple Plain, Minn. 55359

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ T-shirt(s). Available in pink only.  
Indicate size(s) desired: S \_\_\_ M \_\_\_ L \_\_\_

Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Offer expires 12/31/80. Void where prohibited, taxed or restricted by law. Good only in U.S.A. \*Manufacturers suggested retail price.

**Kissing Slicks**  
**Maybelline**  
© 1980 Maybelline Co.

090

emerges, that being the tension between Coupled vs. Single gender identity. A key example of this conflict is present within the advertisement for *Me!* perfume (1980; see Figure 3.4) the copy reads:

I know what is me and what isn't.

Enjoying being single and on-my-own is me. But so is getting married and raising a family.

Being active in my community is me. But so is being interested in my home.

Feeling free and independent is me. But so is depending on someone else.

I wear the fragrance *Me!* because I've discovered it is me.

Long-lasting and distinctive, but not heavy. Beautiful and soft, but not over-bearing.

It's simply, honestly and completely me.

The advertising text clearly creates a distinction between the single (on-my-own, active, community-based, free, independent) versus coupled (married, family, home, dependent) aspects of self. The spokeswoman for this perfume is Anita Burkhart and her accompanying biography lists her interests as "community leader, gourmet cook, sports enthusiast". These characteristics have been chosen very carefully, positioning Ms. Burkhart as interested in both engaging in and most likely retaining aspects of identity that are associated with women who are both single and in relationships. The advertisement's narrative is clearly invested in locating her interests both inside and outside of the domestic sphere. Ms. Burkhart (who is wearing a high-necked blouse, full length skirt, and hair



Figure 3.4:



I know what is me and what isn't.  
Enjoying being single and on-my-own is me. But so is getting married and raising a family.  
Being active in my community is me. But so is being interested in my home.  
Feeling free and independent is me. But so is depending on someone else.  
I wear the fragrance Me! because I've discovered it is me.  
Long-lasting and distinctive, but not heavy. Beautiful and soft, but not over-bearing.  
It's simply, honestly and completely me.

*Anita Burkhart, community leader, gourmet cook, sports enthusiast.*

Me!  
For the woman  
who knows  
exactly who she is.



COPAREL PARIS NEW YORK

© Coparel, Inc. 1979. Available in Canada.

swept up into a modest bun) is posed in front of a large mirror. The double-image works to purposefully reinforce the conflicted nature of the ad copy that accompanies the picture, and to slightly offset the concreteness of her self-presentation. The slogan for Me! perfume reads: “For the woman who knows exactly who she is,” however, this advertisement appears to purposefully reinforce her conflicted division when it comes to goals, desires and interests – Ms. Burkhart in sitting in front of a mirror that allows the reader to see two distinct images of her smiling face. Thus, at both the connotative and denotative level this advertisement has gone out its way to invoke not only a division in self, or duality, but the desires driving the embodiment of antithetical identity positions. The makers of *Me!* seem to hope that readers identify with Ms. Burkhart’s predicament and will be led to feel that they can only achieve balance, or, possibly resolve identity dissonance, through the addition of the appropriate perfume. While this 1980 ad featuring a tension between Single versus Coupled identity is the first of its kind within the archive, it is important to note that this dichotomy or dissonance does not reappear for almost 20 years, until 1999 in high profile campaigns for Calvin Klein and De Beers.

### **Gender Ambivalence as Backdrop: 1983-1999**

While the period between 1983 and 1999 represents a far more quiet time when it comes to magazine advertising’s portrayal of female gender identity dissonance, there are still notable moments which reflect important shifts in the ambivalent representations of women within popular discourse. Beginning in the

1980s this archive found a slow but steady expansion in the antithetical depictions of women beyond the Madonna-Whore dichotomy to include images that pushed the boundaries on strict gender roles (femininity versus masculinity) and relationship status (coupled/married versus single). While there were fewer instances of gender identity dissonance's presence within advertising, the dissonant ads were more explicit, and, in a sense, more urgent in their expression of identity conflict than those from prior years. Unsurprisingly, this urgency coincides culturally with major strides towards equality for women, the public backlash against feminism, the rise of corporate culture and professional women within the workplace, neo-conservatism, widespread affluence, and increased consumerism.

The Madonna versus Whore dichotomy is utilized far more often than any other gender identity dissonance pairing, occurring 73% of the time within the archive. Marian MacCurdy (1994) found that this infamous identity-pairing dates as far back as medieval times, and concludes that polarized sexual images of women reflect very real masculine anxieties. She suggests that female visual representations, and in particular the Madonna-Whore dichotomy, is shaped in response to male fears and desires – specifically, a prevailing masculine concern over female power. Thus, female gender identity dissonance that utilizes the Madonna versus Whore dichotomy exposes our culture's ambivalence over what would happen if women chose to utilize their sexuality for personal and political gain, and a conflicted recognition of the desire to both sexually subdue, and be subdued, by women.



The 80s and 90s were a time characterized by great strides towards women's equality: the passing of the Family and Medical Leave and Violence against Women acts, Title IX was restored, and there were record numbers of women holding top positions in corporations and government; there were also serious setbacks, such as the Equal Rights Amendment failing to be ratified. Popular culture's ambivalence regarding the cultural shifts that were occurring in gender roles and behavior at this time is epitomized by the rise of the pop star Madonna. Madonna, who released her first self-titled album in 1983 was famous for defying gender and sexual norms – presenting herself as sexually empowered and independent while sporting a belt that read “boy toy”, or wearing lingerie as outerwear while singing the lyrics to “like a virgin”, she provoked ambivalent responses from fans and critics alike. It is during this turbulent time, 1983 to 1999, where gender identity dissonance, specifically as it pertained to female sexuality, was present in the archived magazine advertisements in a far more overt form than ever seen before.

The phenomenon where a product is given a title that directly refers to ambivalence is something that first appears in the advertising campaigns of the 1990s (see, for example, Calvin Klein's perfume, 'Contradiction'). This trend is illustrative of the continued development of a more overt utilization and reference to ambivalence and gender identity dissonance within advertising campaigns. In a two page advertisement, which is part of a larger campaign for Vanilla Musk (1996; see Figure 3.5 and 3.6), a very important tension is produced between an

Figure 3.5:

FOR A STORE NEAREST YOU PLEASE CALL 1-800-528-7228

WHAT SUNLIGHT DOES FOR SHADE  
WHAT LACE DOES FOR LEATHER  
WHAT A WHISPER DOES FOR WORDS  
VANILLA DOES FOR MUSK

© 1998 COTY US INC. AVAILABLE IN CANADA

**VANILLA**  
*Musk*

WHAT INNOCENCE DOES FOR SENSUALITY

The advertisement features a woman's back and shoulder in profile, illuminated from the left. A small, clear glass bottle of Vanilla Musk perfume is positioned at the bottom center, resting on the woman's lower back. The text is arranged in a vertical column on the left side of the back, with the brand name and tagline at the bottom.

Figure 3.6:

WHAT CANDLES DO FOR THE HOLIDAYS,  
VANILLA MUSK DOES FOR YOU...

The advertisement features a warm, intimate setting with several lit candles in the background. In the foreground, two gift sets for 'Vanilla Musk by Coty' are displayed. The larger set on the left includes a perfume spray, a body powder, and a body lotion. The smaller set on the right includes a perfume spray and a cologne spray. Individual bottles of the perfume spray and body powder are also shown, some wrapped in decorative ribbons. The overall aesthetic is cozy and festive, with a focus on the brand's signature scent.

PERFUME SPRAY .35 FLOZ 10.3 mL COLOGNE SPRAY 1 FLOZ 29.5 mL

INNOCENT, YET SENSUAL...  
and now in holiday gift selections.

VANILLA  
Musk  
by COTY

embraceable or non-threatening femininity and a dangerous, more agentic version. The advertising copy reads:

WHAT SUNLIGHT DOES FOR SHADE  
WHAT LACE DOES FOR LEATHER  
WHAT A WHISPER DOES FOR WORDS  
VANILLA DOES FOR MUSK

A contrast is set up between 'sunlight', 'lace', 'whisper', and 'vanilla' in comparison to 'shade', 'leather', 'words', and 'musk': the language evokes a light, virginal, passive facade to be contrasted against a dark, sexual, assertive side, literally, as this provocative copy is laid across a naked female model's back. Her body, divided by light, accentuates the division in self that is being evoked. The bottom of the page states: "WHAT INNOCENCE DOES FOR SENSUALITY". Thus, this advertisement clearly seems to be acknowledging the function of the dichotomization (Madonna-Whore) in making the product appealing, and in its appeal to customers. The antithetical requirements (you cannot understand sunlight without the presence of shade; you cannot embody virginity without there being sexuality to contrast it against etc.) are exploited. This advertisement seems to purposefully (though not necessarily consciously) evoke identity dissonance. By positioning 'Vanilla' as the opposite of 'Musk' (note the use of contrasting fonts to emphasize the difference between the two smells) and calling their perfume Vanilla Musk, Coty is clearly defining its product through the use of contradiction.

The division in self in the Vanilla Musk campaign is both visually and textually resonant, and the presentation of tension between gendered identities is

explicit and implicit. The female reader/consumer is being asked to identify and/or recognize her innocent and sensual sides; a blatant request that has the possibility of evoking feelings of identity dissonance. On the second page of the ad the following conclusion is reached: “WHAT CANDLES DO FOR THE HOLIDAYS, VANILLA MUSK DOES FOR YOU...” thereby suggesting to the reader that Vanilla Musk perfume will both illuminate and represent your self in the same way that candles capture the holiday season. This is a very powerful statement, highlighting the functional utility of consumption and the productive pleasures associated with using a perfume that assists in the management of female gender identity dissonance.

Gender politics within the 80s and 90s continued to be framed within popular discourse as a personal problem – one which capitalism (and thus, advertisers) suggested could be managed/mitigated through expenditures. And, while the needs and desires that fueled the women’s movement did not go away, “women’s magazines helped translate and transform American feminism into a universe of goods and services that promised liberation” (Rosen, 2000, p. 308). In accordance, this archive provides support for the supposition that this new consumer feminism came with an increased emphasis on consumption as the key to the management of gender, and its troubles.

While there are ever-so-subtle allusions made to masculine and feminine gender identities within some of the earlier advertisements, the first definitive instance of this dichotomy being overtly used within an ad occurs roughly 20 years into the analysis, in 1989. Proxy shoes (1989) (see Figure 3.7) showcases



Figure 3.7:



Florence Griffith Joyner, a three time gold-medal-winning Olympian in track and field<sup>7</sup>. She is featured mid-stride smiling at the camera, dressed in full-body spandex running-gear. Griffith Joyner's incredibly powerful physique dominates the advertisement, a perfect vision of stereotypically masculine power and athleticism – her sculpted arm-muscles are fully flexed, and thigh and calf muscles prominently protrude. However, she also sports long painted finger nails, flowing hair, and, jarringly, red high-heel shoes. According to the company this image depicts "...a winning combination!"; she presents as the epitome of the Jane Fonda inspired work out craze of the 1980s, and the can-do-all attitude expected of the power-suited women who were entering the (male-dominated) business sector in droves. The advertising copy alludes to the presentation of opposing representations of masculinity (physical strength, muscles, athletic prowess) and femininity (flowing hair, heavy cosmetics, long nails, and high-heels). By displaying these two most disparate identities (as presented within

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<sup>7</sup> Acknowledging how the U.S.'s history of slavery and racism has perpetuated stereotypes of African American women as either asexual or hyper-sexual, it is important to note that the first archived ad to evoke the Masculine-Feminine dissonance pairing features an African American female. The archive consists primarily of Caucasian models. In a total of 45 advertisements (this number includes multiple ads from the same campaign), 3 featured African American females and 2 ads featured Asian female models. Race of the model is most likely to vary when a large campaign is undertaken, rather than when there are a limited number of ads (thus, images of women) to be affiliated with a particular product's campaign. While this finding of white-washing when it comes to the racial imagery present within magazine advertising is unsurprising, due to the racial biases within North American culture, it also fulfills the expectation that, due to problematic racial stereotyping, minorities should be unlikely to be presented in a manner that reflects gender identity dissonance. In accordance with Herman Gray's (1995) assessment of how mainstream American media refuses to recognize the plurality of racial subjectivities, it is expected that this archive would find support for the concrete suppression of the diverse identities of marginalized racial communities. By confining or limiting discourses pertaining to identity, society can effectively manage or control social groups. Thus, I believe that this is why there are very few representations of identity dissonance when it comes to media depictions of minorities; their diversity is not valued, it is the stereotypes that generally prevail, and these stereotypes are simplistic and limiting.

Florence Griffith Joyner) this ad hopes to both catch the attention of the magazine reader and evoke a pleasant response to, or identification with, gendered dissonance.

Advertisements from the time period 1983-1999, are more likely than ever before to speak directly to the consumer regarding the functionality of their product in bringing about, managing, or even finding pleasurable repercussions from gender identity dissonance. Campaigns with taglines such as Bacardi Rum's "Just Add Bacardi" (1996) and American Eagle's "She Used to be Conservative and Then She Got Those Shoes" (1993), reflect the growing trend towards an overt discussion of the complete transformation that can overcome any woman who chooses to consume 'appropriately,' and who might wish to represent the diversity of her experiences through her habits of consumption.

### **"I Know that I'm Very Complicated...I Like it That Way": New Millennial Advertising, 2000-2006**

The years 2000 to 2006 comprise the second surge in gender identity dissonant advertisements to be found within the archive, and, the magazine advertisements from 2000 onwards are not only plentiful, but unique in a number of important ways. In comparison to advertisements gathered from earlier time periods, current ads are far more explicit in their use of gender identity dissonance, present more variety in the types of dichotomous identities on display, and are more diverse when it comes to the type of products utilizing gender dissonant appeals (prior to 2000 the majority of the ads featured perfume



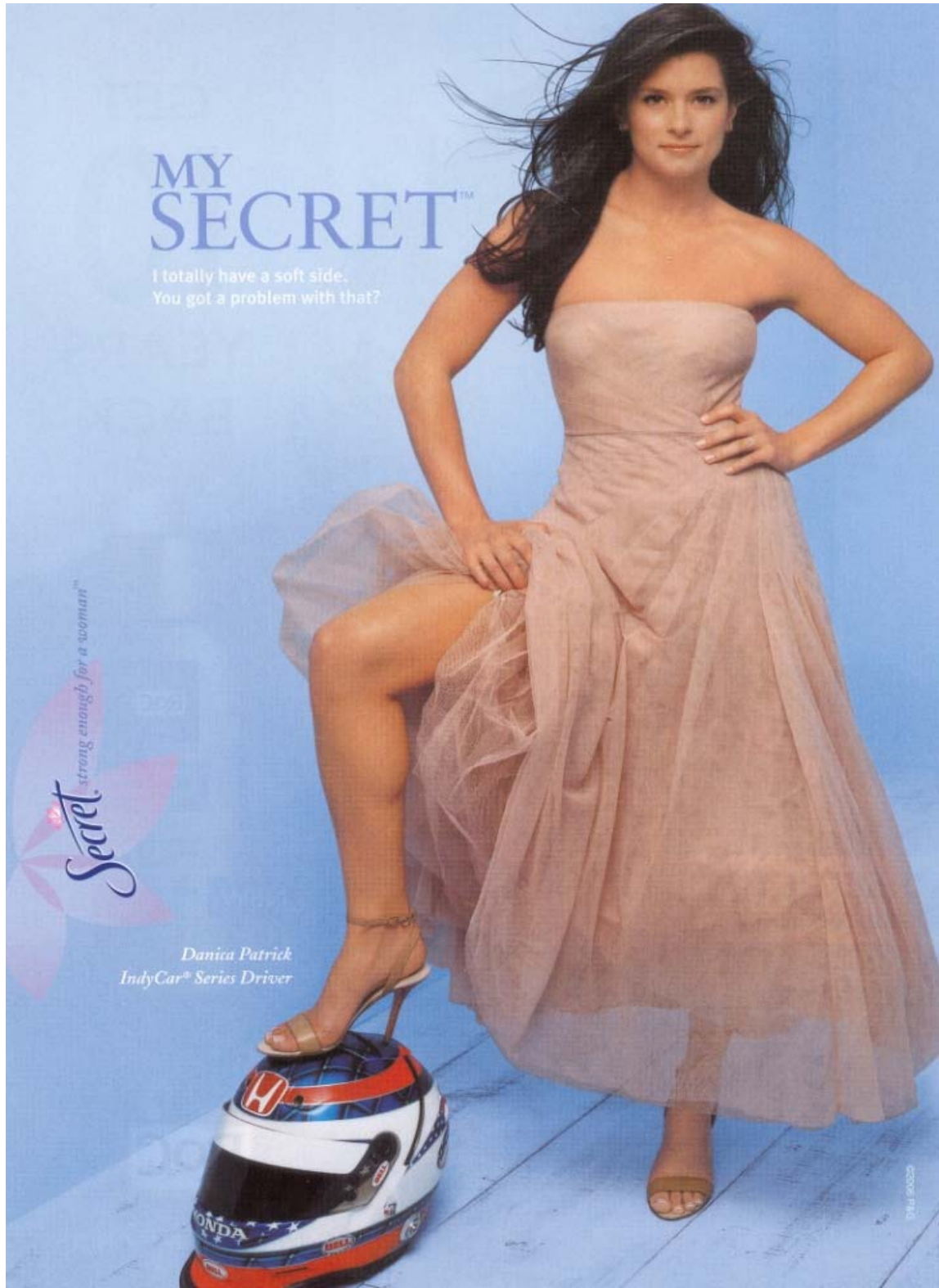
and women's clothing). The 21<sup>st</sup> century advertisements are notably overt in their reference to the variety of antithetical identities that are available to women, and the pleasures to be derived by attaining them. Advertising campaigns which feature before and after pictures of the same model (e.g. Garnier Fructis hair products, 2006), models divided in half (Venus razors, 2006), and ads with boxes containing antithetical personality descriptors asking consumers to mark off *all* that apply (Rampage lingerie, 2006), stand as key examples of how gender identity dissonance operates both visually and symbolically within current advertising in a manner that is ever more complex and concrete than found in previous eras. New millennial advertising reflects the historical moment – third wave feminism, niche marketing along with market segmentation, and the seeping of postmodern and/or poststructuralist understandings of self and society into popular culture – these events have had an important impact on advertising, and can help to explain the heightened presence of gender identity dissonance.

Recognition of women's dissonant existence lies at the heart of current feminist theorizing, often regarded as third wave feminism, which takes as a given the inherent instability of identity, and embraces contradiction (Rosen, 2000). While the political agenda associated with the women's movement may have become less culturally visible (and has certainly faded in prominence within the pages of women's magazines), feminists continue to express concern regarding divergent gendered expectations, identity requirements, and desires. These concerns are also present within media discourse, and in particular, within magazine advertisements. The tensions expressed in the ads are the same

tensions that evoked the rise of the women's movement, and those which the movement was concerned with acknowledging and resolving.

By hiring Danica Patrick, a woman famous for being a successful IndyCar driver, to represent Secret Platinum deodorant (2006; see Figure 3.8) and stand as the personification of gender identity dissonance, the marketing campaign purposely exploits feminist desires for gender equality. The Secret deodorant campaign emphasizes gender stereotyping, and makes use of the tension between masculinity and femininity by drawing upon expectations associated with the profession of race car driving and its strong connection to masculinity. Playing with their previously well-known tag line "strong enough for a man, but made for a woman" the figure of Ms. Patrick is contrasted against newly revised copy which simply states: "strong enough for a woman". While in many ways this advertisement could be regarded as presenting a very powerful representation of a woman who is not confined to either feminine nor masculine stereotypes, another equally relevant interpretation would find that this campaign works very hard to promote traditional notions associated with *both* masculine and feminine gender identities. Standing beside the heading "My Secret," Danica is styled in a manner that promotes a range of contradictions. Wearing a nude colored strapless dress featuring copious layers of light tulle, high-heeled strappy sandals, and long flowing windswept hair, her exposed leg is perched atop a racing helmet – a stark contrast in bold primary colors that distinguishes itself against the pastels that dominate the rest of the image. "I totally have a soft side. You got a problem with that?" What begins at first to be a statement about the

Figure 3.8:



presence of her gentle femininity is contrasted against a decidedly aggressive and masculinized accusation, highlighting once again the gendered contradictions that are being promoted throughout this ad. Secret Platinum deodorant most likely chose Danica Patrick to represent their product because they wish to tie the gender identity dissonance inherent to her public persona with their product's functionality for consumers, and, in so doing, are clearly recognizing the benefits of exploiting women's gender-based identity struggles in their pursuit of consumers.

It is important to note that with the presumed completion of the feminist agenda (which really resulted in the relegation of vitally important issues to the realm of unfinished business) there is an associated strengthening and intensification of the discourse of identity dissonance by way of magazine advertising. This condition alludes to a very depressing situation; women are encouraged to identify with advertisements whose primary goal is to exploit that identification for financial gain. And, because advertising is willing to acknowledge women's difficult, and despite it all, gratifying, multi-faceted existences, it is able to capitalize upon this experience by providing one of the few places where women can go to find images that feel representational. The fact that our current postfeminist era, characterized by often malicious exploitation of contradiction in aid of hegemonic patriarchal discourse, practically guarantees the presence of identity dissonance within magazine advertisements, points to the existence of a very dangerous double-edged sword in women's lives.

The rise of niche marketing, or market-segmentation, in the 1980s (Turow, 1997) may have also contributed to a heightened presence of gender identity dissonance in current advertising. Niche marketing “involves the intentional pursuit of specific segments of society – groups, and even individuals” (p. 4). While it is interesting to note that “the word in the ad industry was that the increase in media fragmentation was a direct response to...social fractionalization” (p. 41), this does not discount the fact that market-segmentation does function in a manner that splinters society. Thus, industrial imperatives within the advertising industry may have also contributed to the increasingly overt presence of gender identity dissonance in the pages of women’s magazines. The desire to capture more niches, to hail multiple subjects from multiple subject-positions (as long as they are still part of the target market) is inherent to the niche marketing approach. As a result, this marketing style can help to explain the heightened presence of advertisements containing reference to, or attempting to evoke, identity dissonance.

Women who experience conflict when it comes to enacting identities pertaining to their sexuality, relationship status, or gender roles will come face to face with advertising which wishes to capitalize upon this discomfort – and, by pushing women into smaller and smaller niche markets, advertising may in fact exacerbate identity-based tensions. The more markets you belong to, the more useful you are as a consumer. Consequently, by continually encouraging women to incorporate more and more divergent identities, companies are both increasing the likelihood that gender identity dissonance will be experienced and growing

their marketplace at the same time. Niche marketing facilitates identity dissonance and encourages the continual fragmentation of the general marketplace, and, according to media scholars such as Turow (1997) and Putnam (2000) does not bode well for American society as a whole. The pressure to continually fragment into divergent identities (Masculine versus Feminine, Madonna versus Whore, Single versus Coupled), especially when this fragmentation is not in aid of individual self-expression but rather exploited by a homogenizing capitalist agenda, is particularly problematic for both individuals and society.

The development of a more nuanced, and thus more accurate, understanding of selfhood/subjectivity associated with the ascendancy of postmodern/poststructuralist theory can also be regarded as facilitating the rise in identity dissonance-themed ads. Beginning in the 1980s, cultural theorists such as Lawrence Grossberg (1987) and Angela McRobbie (1986) raised important questions regarding the 'fragmented,' 'hybrid,' or 'nomadic' nature of subjectivity. In particular, Stuart Hall has focused academic attention toward a fundamental shift in understanding identity. Post-structuralism reminds us that "meaning is always in process" (Storey, 1993, p.89), and thus, the subject is always in flux. Hall applies this approach to identity, suggesting that it is "far from the simple thing that we think it is (ourselves always in the same place) understood properly is always a structure that is split; it always has ambivalence within it" (1990, p. 15). It is this tension, specifically as it relates to gender identity, that is captured in the archived ads.

For advertisements gathered between 2000 and 2006 a noticeable trend emerges which could help female consumers embrace consumption as an effective tool for managing gender identity. Specifically, through the presence of multiple images and before-and-after pictures of the featured model, products are positioned to illustrate how multiple identities are not only present, but managed, within the same feminine subject. For example, the campaign for Garnier Fructis hair products (2006) features a young woman with a 'before' portrait of herself pinned to her top (see Figure 3.9). She stands there newly "unleashed," reborn as an alternative version of her former self, smiling confidently into the camera as the broken chains of her previous "weighted down" existence splay out metaphorically from the bottle of hairspray that allowed her to make such a fantastic transition. In an advertisement for Jane makeup cleanser Good Skin (2000; see Figure 3.10) we see another version of this revolution. In this example, the before image is 'cleaned up' in order to restore the rebellious teenager to a status acceptable for a rendezvous with Mom. Consumers are encouraged to "see the good" that can result from use of this particular product along with the good that was hidden within the teenager, and admire how quickly the young girl was able to transition between the Madonna-Whore dichotomy implied within the punk-light vs. preppy identities on display. It is also important to note that this campaign addresses how certain feminine identities are conceived of as appropriate/acceptable only within the confines of certain contexts. Thus, these ads both remind and teach young girls how self-presentation and identities must be appropriately managed in order to be socially



Figure 3.9:

WEIGHED DOWN  
GETS WAY TOUCHABLE.



**NEW**  
GARNIER FRUCTIS STYLE  
pure fix<sup>®</sup> SPRAY

THE FIRST NATURAL-FEEL STYLING SPRAY  
WITH FRUIT MICRO-WAXES FROM GARNIER.

Get pumped about a style spritz that creates a natural look that always stays in place. And buildup? It's banished. Invisible fixing agents give you a touchable, long-lasting style that won't feel sticky.

**UNLEASH  
YOUR STYLE!**

>[www.garnierfructis.com](http://www.garnierfructis.com)

**GARNIER**

©2006 Garnier, L.L.C.



Figure 3.10:

Discover the good skin collection right next to the jane aspray or  
WWW.JANECOSMETICS.COM

**3:00 MALL. 3:15 MOM.  
QUICK.  
CLEAN UP YOUR ACT.**

**jane**  
**good skin**  
**cleansing to-go**  
with pineapple & grapefruit  
peels

**jane**  
**cleansing-to-go**  
**STICK CLEANSER**

WASHES AWAY MAKEUP & DEBRIS TO LEAVE SKIN FRESH & CLEAN. 3 FORMULAS- NORMAL, OILY & GENTLE-  
ALL WITH ZEN-BLEND BOTANICALS LIKE PINEAPPLE & GRAPEFRUIT, MANGO & ALOE. TOSS IT IN YOUR BACKPACK.  
DERMATOLOGIST TESTED.

**goodskin** SEE THE GOOD

successful – an idea that companies can excitedly endorse, as they are able to position their products as the tool to ease some of the anxiety and complexity associated with this process, and provide a conduit (the product) by which to assist with the transition between desired identities.

A Virginia Slims advertisement from 2000 provides another example of how current advertisements deliberately call attention to the antithetical aspects of self that can be displayed, implied, or managed through consumption (see Figure 3.11 and 3.12). This campaign features multiple images of the same model in differing clothing, hair styles, and body postures which are also further differentiated using color blocking which overlays the various pictures. While there are numerous campaigns that utilize multiple images of the same women in an ad to address how their product can reflect the diversity of identities that comprise womanhood, I contend that ads like those from this Virginia Slims campaign are both different and important due to their use of antithetical or contradictory representations. While this advertisement could be regarded as simply representing the multiplicity that characterizes womanhood, it can also be argued that it goes beyond, by providing a subtle array of antithetical imagery and stereotypes, specifically the Madonna-Whore and Masculine-Feminine dichotomies, through the use of color, body posture, fabric patterns, and clothing choices within the ad. The array of representations reinforce her conflicted variations in self-identification (“i know i’m very complicated”) that are able to be expressed through the use of this particular brand of cigarette. “I like it that way” – this declaration by the female smoker epitomizes the ads from this era which

Figure 3.11:

i know  
that i'm very  
complicated

for more information about PM USA and its products,  
visit [www.philipmorrisusa.com](http://www.philipmorrisusa.com) or call 1-877-PMUSAWEB.  
1 mg "tar," 0.7 mg nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.  
Virginia Slims Lights 100's

**SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, Emphysema, And May Complicate Pregnancy.**

© Philip Morris Inc. 2000



Figure 3.12:

i like it that way  
**VIRGINIA SLIMS**

For more information about PM USA and its products, visit [www.philipmorrisusa.com](http://www.philipmorrisusa.com) or call 1.877.PMUSAWEB. 8 mg "tar," 0.7 mg nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method. © Philip Morris Inc., 2008.

**SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, Emphysema, And May Complicate Pregnancy.**

work to support the notion that through consumption a better, more complex, and well-integrated self will be achieved.

According to Stuart Hall, “there is no identity that is without the dialogic relationship to the Other. The Other is not outside, but also inside the Self, the identity” (1990, p. 16). It is a nascent version of this poststructuralist understanding of identity and selfhood that seems to be slowly gaining momentum within magazine advertisements. Identity dissonance-themed magazine advertising addresses ambivalence, revealing the limitations of older notions of identity construction and maintenance, while reinforcing the burgeoning prominence of poststructuralist views of self and the “postmodern intoxication with possibilities” (Bordo, 1993, p. 39) that mark the current media landscape. The ads that appear in this archive, in particular those that appear from 2000 onwards, illustrate the limitations of older notions of identity construction and maintenance and point to the burgeoning prominence of poststructuralist views of self within general discursive practices – thus, indicating the ascendancy of a more complicated and contradictory understanding of sexuality, relationship-status, and gender roles, as depicted in gender identity dissonant magazine advertisements.

And, while ads represent identity conflicts, recognition must also be given to how they may produce identity dissonance in their audience. A Hennessy cognac ad (2000; see Figure 3.13) featuring two young, 20-something females is an example of this potential in advertising. Both models study themselves in a bathroom mirror, the exoticized Asian woman applies dark red lipstick, while

Figure 3.13:



below her hand is the text “man-eater.” Sitting on the counter beside her is a willowy blond Caucasian with the word “vegetarian” adjacent to her head.

Beneath this visual scene lies the textual encouragement to “mix accordingly”. This advertisement does not depict one lone female experiencing or representing identity dissonance, instead, this ad could be interpreted as encouraging identification with both of these models and their contrasting identities. If identity dissonance is experienced by the consumer of the ad, the resulting anxiety will be encouraged to be managed or erased through the purchase and consumption of the product.

There are various advertisements and ad campaigns dedicated to presenting a more metaphorical or implied division in self, that, while not as literal in their representation of identity dissonance, are just as powerfully resonant as those ads featuring multiple images of the same model. An advertisement for Rampage lingerie (2006) encourages consumers to check both boxes that apply, self-identifying as humanitarian *and* sex-kitten, while an ad for the Diamond Trading company’s Right Hand Ring campaign (2006) divides women by desires and pleasures associated with their right/single versus left/married hands – both campaigns notable for how they encourage consumers to embrace contradiction. These companies, along with those found throughout the archive, work hard to situate their product as the means by which women can achieve a more fully satisfying existence, and the most appropriate conduit for the expression of dissonant identities.

## **The Pleasures and Productivity of Female Gender Identity Dissonance**

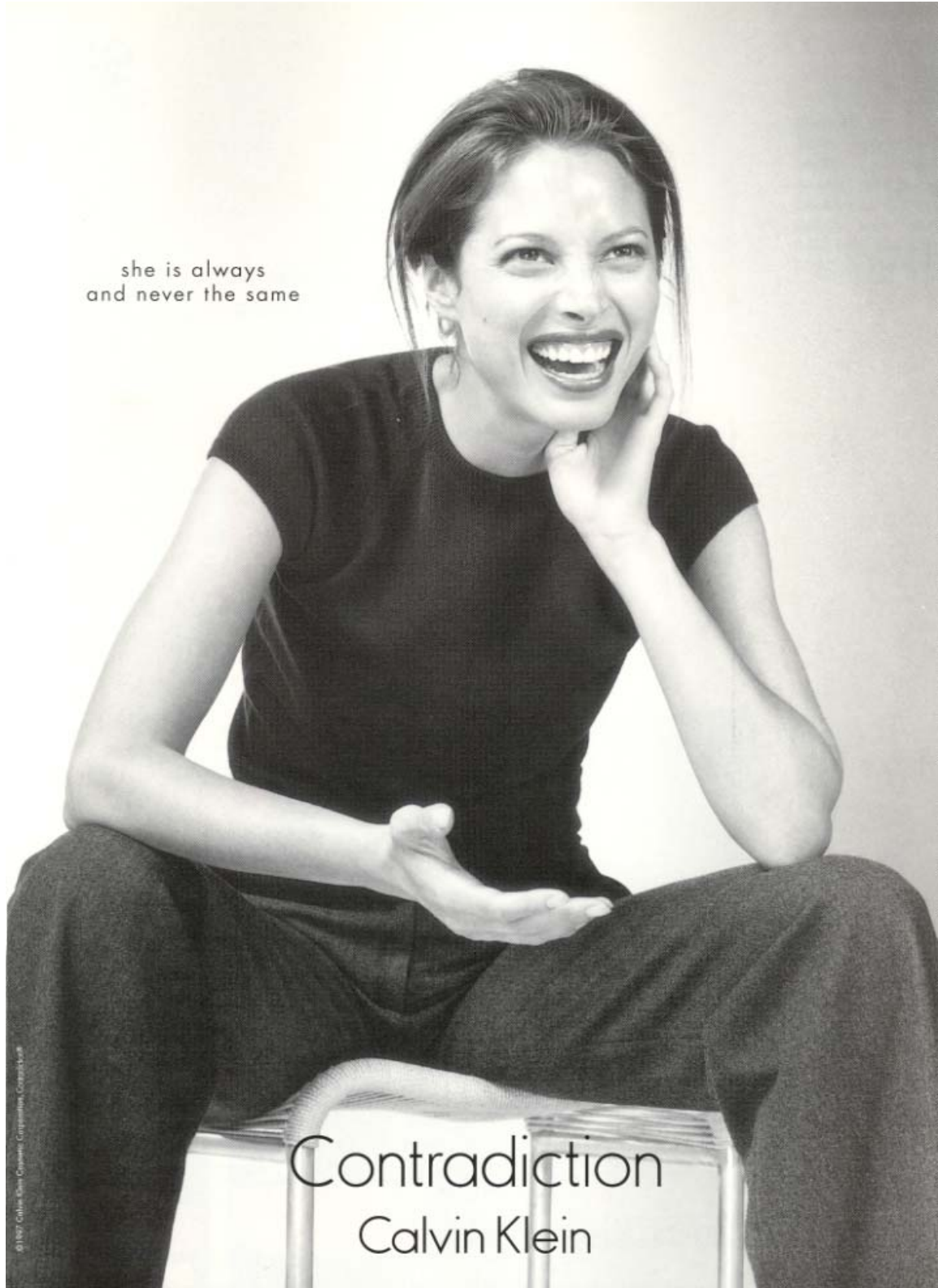
Individuals can be no less crisscrossed and scarred with contradictory meanings than is the society at large that shapes and sustains them. (Lubin, 1994, p. 48)

Analysis of magazine advertisements found in *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour* and *Seventeen* magazines since the 1970s reveal that the quantity of advertisements, the quality of the references made to identity-based tensions present within advertisements, and, the variation in themes associated with gender identities in gender identity dissonant ads, have transformed over time. And, these changes reflect a shift in public understanding regarding the gendered self and what are perceived as appropriate or inappropriate (or dissonant and consonant) female gender identity combinations. The sexual revolution and the emergence of feminism as a popular discourse in the 1970s contributed to the increase in advertising dedicated to gender identity dissonance between 1976 and 1980, just as third wave feminism, the rise of niche marketing and poststructuralist/postmodern conceptions of self and society, help to explain the surge in presence and the changes in gender identity dissonance's representation and utilization in advertising since 2000.

"She is always and never the same" reads the ad copy for the perfume *Contradiction* by Calvin Klein (1999; see Figure 3.14). The advertisement features the 'supermodel' Christy Turlington. She sits with her legs wide open in a very masculine pose, with a quizzical, happy, relaxed, and amused expression on her face. Wearing a basic black T-shirt and grey wool trouser disguising her curves, no visible jewelry, and little makeup, Turlington's working persona is that



Figure 3.14:



of a 'man's woman', an uncomplicated, low-maintenance model whose image is in high contrast to her other more famously petulant supermodel peers. Her presence in this campaign has to be regarded as a very calculated choice by Calvin Klein, as her image works to reinforce the normalcy and harmlessness of the conflict embodied in the meanings associated with the word 'contradiction'. In accordance with Todd Gitlin, this investigation proposes "that the deeper currents of media operate not on patterned ideas but on feelings" (2003, p. xvii), and suggests that the emotional appeals made by advertising are both their strongest, and primary, function. Advertising research conducted by Roland Marchand (1985) and T. J. Jackson Lears (1983) supports the perception that much of the media's crucial work remains affective. There are many pleasures that can be presumed to be associated with identity dissonance, such as the opportunity to display all aspects of self, fulfilling antithetical desires associated with the ideal male gaze, and being able to easily adjust to meet changing social demands. Using an explanation reminiscent of Frank's (1997) examination of the cooptation of hipster coolness by the advertising industry of the 1960s, it is the transgressive nature of the pleasures derived from identity dissonance that seems to be so very attractive to advertisers, and very possibly, their female audience.

The ads collected in this archive reflect the presence of a political discourse pertaining to gender, one being worked through under the auspices of a capitalist agenda, but still one that is expressing the requirements and the experiences of the audience. It is presumed that what these female consumers

are attracted to is a presentation of self that seems realistic, one that considers new gendered possibilities that allow for more breadth and depth in identity development and embodiment. There are certainly many advertising appeals that make reference to the multiplicity of options that are open to women when it comes to gender identity, however, it is the continued reference to, and reinscription of, the *antithetical* nature of many of the female gender identities that are on offer for women that both reinforces and perpetuates gender identity dissonance. A less cynical interpretation than the presumption of capitalist exploitation would suggest that the limitations inherent to a binary understanding of self and society are being investigated within the gendered discourse of magazine advertisements, and those advertisements featuring gender identity dissonance. And, it is possible that these ads portend the ascendancy of a more reflective approach to depicting and constructing women's lives, and the process by which identity is managed; a subtle but significant paradigm shift in discursive formations pertaining to issues of identity, gender, and advertising. The hope is that identity dissonance-themed magazine advertisements not only reinforce, but challenge, dominant ideological presumptions and point to the real possibility of concrete changes in women's self-understanding, gender-identity constructions, and ultimately, lived-experiences.

## Chapter 4

### Contradiction Sells: Analysis of Hennessy's "Appropriately Complex/Mix Accordingly," Bacardi's "Bacardi by Night," and De Beers' "Right-Hand Ring" Magazine Advertising Campaigns

The magazine industry is a powerful part of the North American media landscape. From the introduction of the first magazine in 1741, the market has grown to a conservative estimate in 2006 of over 19,000 magazines titles in circulation (Magazine Publishers of America, 2007). Magazines today cater to niche audiences, appealing "directly to an audience of readers who are targeted as potential readers by virtue of where they live, their interest in a specific topic, or their demographics – age, sex, profession, income level, race, religion, or nationality" (Daly, Henry, & Ryder, 2000, p. 31). With approximately 225 general 'market classifications' or niches, which define magazine audiences by their interests and personal characteristics (Daly et al.), magazines are able to offer advertisers very important access to specialized audiences. And while most magazines have an associated cover/purchase price, their most lucrative and stable source of revenue is advertising, which contributes over half of their overall revenue (Turow, 1997); in 2006 this amounted to almost \$24 billion in sales, 18% of all advertising dollars spent (Magazine Publishers of America).

Even in the face of new media options for the delivery of entertainment and information such as websites, ipods, videophones and the like, magazines

hold great appeal. Between 1996 and 2006 magazine subscriptions rose 7.4%, resulting in a total of 84% of adults 18 years of age or older being identified as magazine users (Magazine Publishers of America, 2007). According to the Magazine Publishers of America, consumers pay more attention to advertising found in magazines than to other forms of advertising (especially for young millennial consumers - those born between 1977 and 1996). Thus, it appears very possible that print magazine appeals can have an even stronger impact on readers than other forms of advertising.

According to the industry, magazine advertising is regarded by consumers as the most enjoyable format for experiencing advertising. Magazine ads are less likely to be regarded as intrusive or lacking in credibility, and, in comparison to other media outlets (e.g. television, radio, internet), magazine advertising elicits the most positive consumer attitudes – generally regarded as more useful, trustworthy, and valuable than advertisements encountered in other media (Magazine Publishers of America, 2007). Thus, overall exposure to magazine advertising could result in consumers adopting strongly positive opinions of the products on display. In addition, dedicated readers are a very desirable target audience, as they are significantly younger, wealthier, and better educated in comparison to heavy television viewers (Magazine Publishers of America).

Magazines, and the advertisements they contain, are incredibly influential – especially with young women. Studies report that over 72% of teenagers read magazines regularly (Klein et al., 1993; Magazine Publishers of America, 2007), with more than 60% of college-age women reading beauty magazines on a

monthly basis (Thomsen, McCoy, Gustafson, & Williams, 2002). Angela McRobbie's (1996) investigation of women's magazines, along with her assessment of prior media research, has led her to conclude that magazines function as powerful and highly ambivalent "media-scapes for the construction of normative femininity" (p. 172). She observes that unlike other mass media, the specificity of women's magazine's gendered address plays an important role in the construction of the feminine subject. Support can be found in research which has concluded that, in comparison to television viewing, magazine reading is more consistently predictive of body dissatisfaction (Harrison & Cantor, 1997), and correlated with the internalization of thin ideals (Tiggemann, 2003); thus, under certain circumstances magazines, in comparison to other media, are likely to have a very powerful influence, one that is specifically detrimental to women's well-being.

Identity, consumption, and advertising are inextricably linked. Not only do advertisements reflect their historical/cultural moment, their role in the development of public discourse and dissemination of community values and attitudes ensures that they assist individuals and society with adapting to changing circumstances (see Marchand, 1985). T.J. Jackson Lears (1983) in his seminal article on the therapeutic roots of consumer culture discusses how changes in social circumstances and the psychological makeup of Americans at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century led to a revolution in the conception and utilization of advertising. By fusing desire and consumption, advertisers promoted fears associated with an incomplete or less-than desirable self in order to fuel a

capitalist-based agenda. “When advertising shifted from merely announcing the availability of goods and merchandise to attempting to define wants and needs, it went from being part of business enterprise to becoming a social institution” (Budgeon, 1994, p. 55). Advertising has a significant impact on people’s psyche (i.e. Berger, 1972), and, as a social institution, cannot help but construct, reflect, and distort the psychological experiences and lives of those who consume it. As a result, advertising provides an important arena for investigating the psychological ramifications for women of living in our current highly-commodified society.

“Advertising in women’s magazines plays an influential role in formulating, maintaining, and altering how readers understand the construction of socially acceptable gender norms” (Inness, 2004, p. 125). Scholarly investigation into the impact of magazines on young women demonstrates a growing awareness of the incredibly mixed messages contained within these texts (e.g. Bordo, 2003; Inness, 2004; McRobbie, 1996). Noting that magazines not only present contradictory representations of female gender identity, but actually benefit from the “complexity of what womanhood entails” (Inness, p. 128), this project will explore the relationship between advertisings’ inducement to consume and the binary-based ‘legitimizing myths’ surrounding feminine identity found in magazine advertisements.

By editorializing about new goods and services, providing a satisfying atmosphere by which to encounter advertising, and promoting lifestyles dedicated to the pursuit of the perfect product, magazines both reinforce and

hasten the rise of consumer culture. The editorial and advertising content they contain instructs readers about the 'pleasures' of consumption and connects the product's qualities with psychological attributes (i.e. self-confidence) or states of being (i.e. happiness) to which readers aspire.

Key to establishing and developing the relationship between consumption, identity, and pleasure is the dissemination of gender based dichotomies that work both to establish and reinforce stereotypical notions of appropriate female gender identities, and link self-actualization with the embodiment of contradictory identity positions – a development that is presented as an ideal best achieved through consumption of the appropriate product. An in-depth analysis of three print advertising campaigns featured in magazines dating from 1998 to 2006, where feminine multiplicity and gender identity dissonance are key characteristics of the appeal made to consumers, allows for a revealing exploration of the relationship between advertising and identity. Hennessy's Appropriately Complex/Mix Accordingly, Bacardi's Bacardi by Night, and De Beers' Right-Hand Ring dissonance-themed campaigns illuminate the ways in which the advertising industry have worked consciously and unconsciously to capitalize upon women's ambivalent feelings and gender identity construction. These three ad campaigns were chosen because of their clear use of feminine multiplicity and gender identity dissonance in their appeals, wide circulation in high-profile magazines, and cohesive vision, aimed at reaching a national audience with broad-based appeal to young female magazine consumers. Advertisements from the featured campaigns, and information gathered from



industry sources indicate that there is a conscious focus within the industry, especially within recent years, towards the representation and utilization of feminine complexity and female gender identity dissonance in product marketing.

### **Feminine Complexity and Gender Identity Dissonance in Marketing to Women**

While there is no doubt that advertising presents a distorted representation of people and culture, advertising still reflects the cultural moment in which it is embedded. As a consequence, marketing appeals will surely draw upon and exploit the experience of gender identity dissonance.

Roland Marchand astutely observed that as early as the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century advertising was meticulous at replicating the cultural standards of its day, as “advertising leaders recognized the necessity of associating their selling messages with the values and attitudes already held by their audience” (p. xix, 1985). When society’s opinions shift regarding certain tastes or practices, producers must scramble to change their appeals in order to refrain from alienating or offending consumers. While few industries have tried to be as sensitive to this reality as the tobacco industry, in early 2000 Philip Morris, producer of Virginia Slims cigarettes, was once again reminded of this marketing imperative. Their ‘Find Your Voice’ advertising slogan and campaign was regarded as offensive by millions of people who argued that it was insensitive to those suffering from smoking-related diseases, especially throat cancer. While testifying under oath during a class action suit initiated by Florida residents with

smoking-related illnesses, head of tobacco operations Michael E. Szymanczyk responded to angry Florida residents by assuring them that there would not be a “hint of rebelliousness’ in future advertising. ‘We don’t want controversial advertising...I don’t want people to look at our advertising and say that we’re trying to do something wrong’” (Fairclough, 2000, June 13, ¶ 10). Not surprisingly, Philip Morris quickly launched a new campaign, one which they felt would in no way offend the sensibilities of their consumers.

Thus, Philip Morris’s ‘i like it that way’ campaign was born later in 2000. It represented both a fresh and benign approach to advertising cigarettes for Virginia Slims, and, it relied heavily on an identity dissonance-based appeal. The tag line for these new print magazine advertisements read: “i know that i’m very complicated. i like it that way” (see Figure 4.1 and 4.2). Virginia Slims cigarettes were positioned as able to represent the multiple sides of their target female consumer, an attractive and enticing address that was positioned as being innovative without being too edgy or extraordinary. By promoting the ‘i like it that way’ campaign at a time when Philip Morris was so clearly searching for an advertising appeal that would cause no undo public controversy it is clear that this company did not regard feminine multiplicity, or female gender identity dissonance as out of the ordinary or challenging for customers. Instead, Philip Morris must have believed that ads that directly referenced feminine diversity and women’s gender-based ambivalence were far from ‘rebellious’ and in no way disruptive to cultural norms. Through the use of contrasts, illustrated through the color blocking within the advertisement and the model’s body postures and

Figure 4.1:

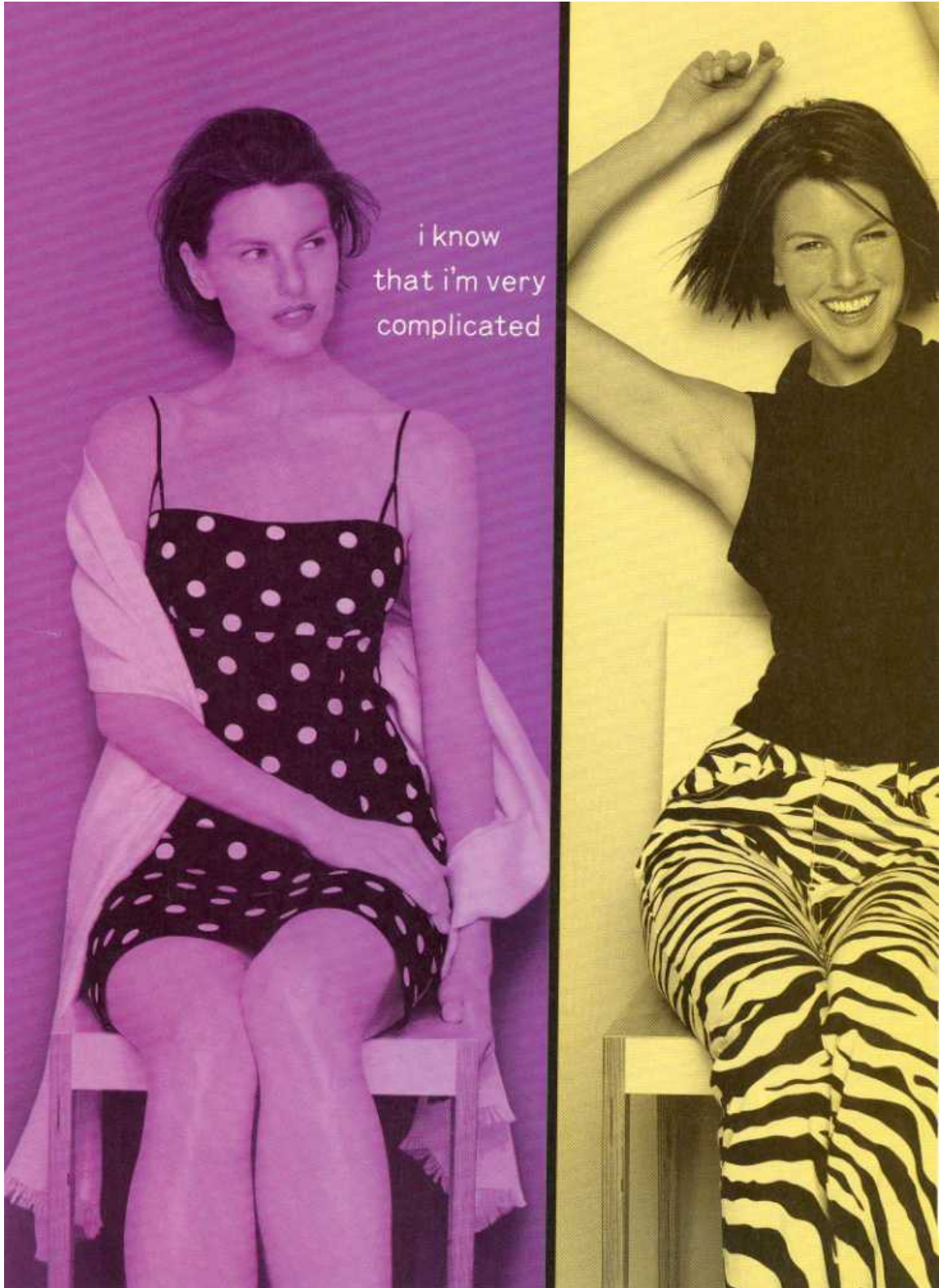


Figure 4.2:

i like it that way

VIRGINIA SLIMS

For more information about PM USA and its products, visit [www.philipmorrisusa.com](http://www.philipmorrisusa.com) or call 1-877-PMUSAWEB. 8 mg "tar," 0.7 mg nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.

**SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Quitting Smoking Now Greatly Reduces Serious Risks to Your Health.**

© Philip Morris Inc. 2006

clothing, Virginia Slims is able to convey the variety of gendered positions, and antithetical identities, that one woman may ideally wish to convey – alluding that it is the cigarette that is able to both illustrate and facilitate those desirable and diverse aspects of self. Here gender identity dissonance is presented as nothing to be concerned with and, in fact, very manageable through consumption. Therefore by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century gender identity dissonance seems for this company, its advertising executives, and presumably the consumers of Virginia Slims' advertising campaign and cigarettes, to be a natural state of affairs.

“Brands need to reinvent themselves” observes Richard Kirshenbaum, co-chairman and chief creative officer at Kirshenbaum Bond the advertising agency behind Hennessy's Appropriately Complex advertising campaign (Elliot, 1998, September 29, ¶ 9); and, it seems that one of key ways that products are able to redefine their image is by using dissonance-themed advertising campaigns. Kirshenbaum goes on to explain that marketing appeals are “competing in a complex world where consumers face an enormous amount of choices and options.” Effective advertising is advertising that anticipates and features the most current needs, wants, and desires – the overall zeitgeist – of society. Thus, by presenting a psychologically complex *and* contradictory representation of female gender identity, advertising is both capitalizing upon and exploiting the multifaceted and contradictory nature of the current cultural moment.

A company's desire to associate complexity with their product is reflected in the marketing choices they make, such as the name of their product and the

model-spokesperson for their brand. According to a leading trend-watcher J. Walker Smith, “when Calvin Klein does something I listen...He has the best ear around for American pop culture” (Shapiro, 1998, September 2, ¶ 5). Thus, in 1997 when fashion and accessories designer Calvin Klein launched a new women’s perfume, the fact that he chose to call his fragrance ‘Contradiction’ spoke volumes about the historical moment. Klein already had a history of marketing a perfume that was symbolic of an era, as during the 1980s his fragrance *Obsession for Women* and its advertising campaign featuring a young Kate Moss, were heralded as an iconic expression of the excessive, sexual, and superficial-nature of 1980s. In the late 1990s Calvin Klein once again had his hand on the pulse of America, building a product brand which attempted to reflect the true paradoxes and uncertainties of the cultural moment, a moment in which, as Walter Shapiro of *USA Today* observes, “contradiction sells” (1998, September 2, ¶ 17).

Calvin Klein picked Christy Turlington to be the face of his fragrance campaign for *Contradiction* because he felt she had “many different sides” (Aktar, 1997, September 26, ¶ 2).<sup>1</sup> Not only a famous model, but a student studying comparative religion and eastern philosophy at New York University, and an established businesswoman, it was the diversity of the representations associated with her public persona that signaled “a depth to her that [Calvin Klein] really wanted to capture” (Aktar, ¶ 3). The initial print advertisements

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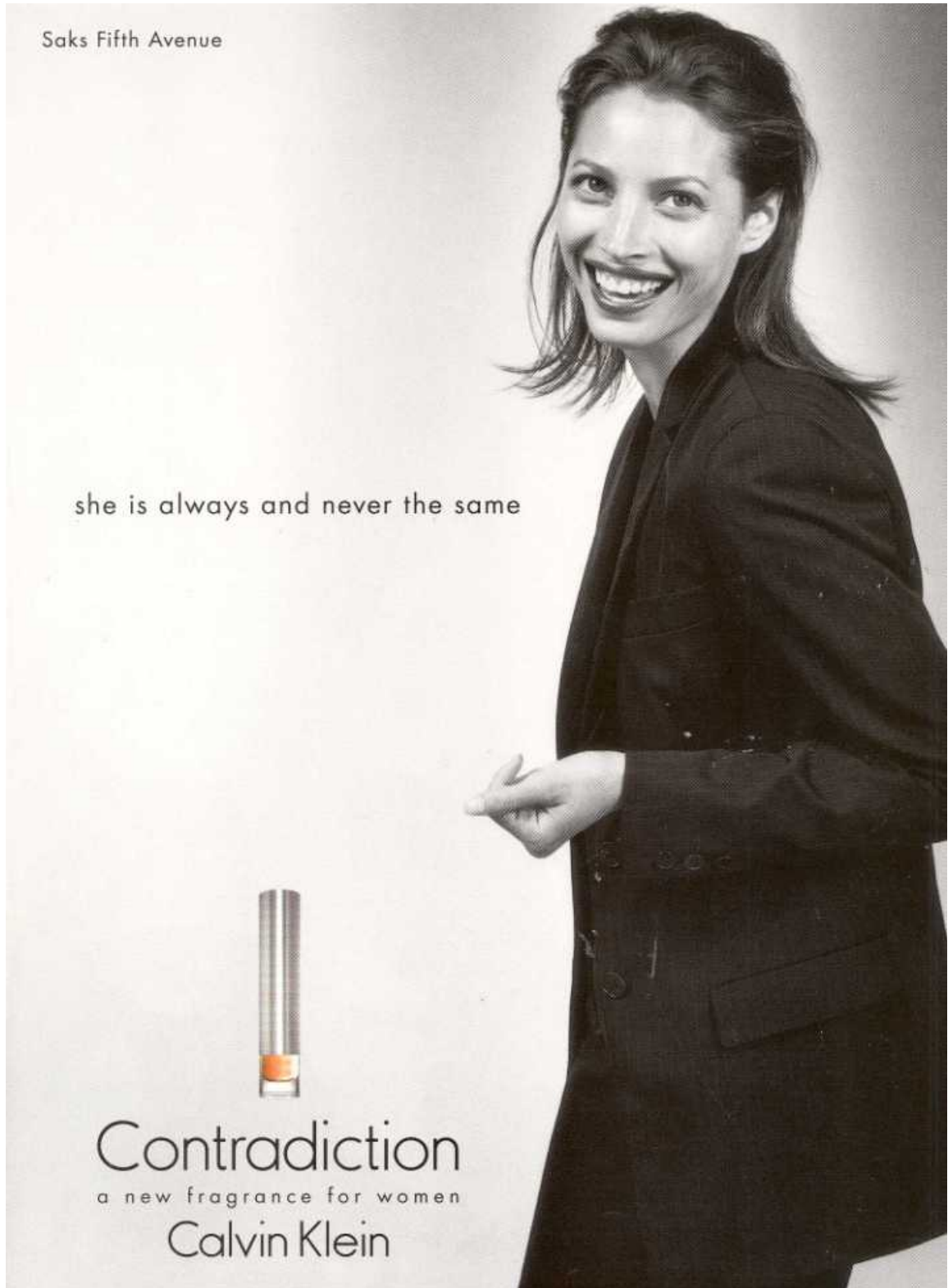
<sup>1</sup> In 2000 Calvin Klein introduced Carolyn Murphy as the new female face for his perfume *Contradiction*.

associated with this campaign are extremely minimalist in their aesthetic. Primarily black and white, the ads feature the model casually posing against a shadowy white backdrop (see Figure 4.3). Many of the ads depict Turlington in loose tweed pants and black t-shirt, or, wearing a boxy black suit without a shirt – her modest cleavage suggesting the shape of a man’s chest more than a woman’s breasts – a subtle play between masculine and feminine gender. The advertising slogan associated with this campaign is: “she is always and never the same.” This tag line helps to reinforce both the traditional/classic and progressive/avant-garde tone that Klein wished to personify in his advertising for Contradiction. Ultimately the general approach of the campaign was to demonstrate the pleasure to be gained from both embodying and demonstrating complexity. “We wanted her to be having some fun” in the ads observed Sheila Hewett, vice president of global marketing, advertising, and communications at Klein Cosmetics, and this happiness is seen clearly in the big joyous grin that Turlington exhibits in so many of the print advertisements (Aktar, ¶ 5). While Contradiction never evolved into a classic scent like Obsession, for women between the ages of 25 and 49 Contradiction for Women did extremely well; within its first year the perfume ranked 7<sup>th</sup> among women’s ‘prestige’ fragrances (Born, 1998, June 12) and became one of the best-selling scents in the U.S. in 1998 (Aktar, 1998, May 1).

Many companies who wish to ensure that their advertising campaigns seem realistic will turn to identity dissonance themed appeals to accomplish this goal. For the Richards Group, the distinguished advertising and marketing



Figure 4.3:





agency responsible for an identity dissonance themed campaign for Woodbridge wine, there was an imperative to avoid sounding “phony or set up”, while attempting to “inject some humanity” into their approach (Charski, 2002, October 28, ¶ 7). In 2002 Robert Mondavi’s Woodbridge wine label set out to shift its previous marketing goals; in particular they chose to target women (Coppola, 2002, May, 20). Diane Fannon, a principal at the Richards Group, argued that “women want to see the way they use wine reflected realistically in their lives” (Coppola, ¶ 2). With an agenda to break the normal conventions associated with wine advertising, print ads featured numerous situations in which wine could act as a conduit between varying feminine experiences, with the tag line “Many moods, many occasions, One wine always connects” (see Figure 4.4). Print advertisements featured contrasting objects such as sleepwear (pajamas vs. negligee) and shoes (flip flop vs. strappy stiletto) with Mondavi’s wine acting as both physical and psychological “bridge” between the two disparate objects and implied circumstances. Focusing on the product’s “versatility” (Hein, 2002, October 21, ¶ 1), the consumer’s ability and/or desire to vary her identities/experiences is associated with her consumption practices. Thus, the product’s versatility is linked to the consumer’s need for radical shifts in self-presentation. The promise was that gender identity dissonance can be managed by using their wine as a ‘bridge’.

Ads which reflect and exploit the psychological complexity of consumers are regarded as effective marketing tools. Barbara Lippert, a celebrated advertising critic and columnist for *Adweek*, a weekly trade publication, praised




the use of “cognitive dissonance” in a series of 2003 identity theft ads by Citibank (2003, November 24, ¶ 3). Finding the use of dissonance “inspired,” (¶ 3) she raves about the disjunctures depicted, suggesting that “the dissonance becomes like an interactive game” (¶ 9), providing an important element for the promotion of viewer engagement. Both print and television ads in Citibank’s identity theft campaign rely upon identity-based juxtapositions that are meant to be humorously jarring – a ridiculous situation is depicted where a purchase seems improbable based upon the identity of the card-holder, thus becoming evidence for identity theft. For example, one print ad (see Figure 4.5) depicts a demure Asian woman in a tailored pink suit standing in front of a Monster truck with the tag line “It didn’t seem right to us, either”. It is the humorous discord between identities represented in these ads, the actual dissonance or antithetical nature of the identities depicted, that appeals.

Creating “wickedly funny juxtapositions” (Parpis, 2004, February 9, ¶ 3), the Citibank identity theft solutions’ ads were within the top 5 advertising campaigns when it came to retention and recall by television viewers for October of 2003 (Advertising Age, 2003, November 3). The identity dissonance-themed ads could be considered extremely effective, as according to the Magazine Publishers of America [MPA website, 2008] the advertisements led to an increase of over 10,000 new applications and 2,100 new accounts for Citibank. In addition, the campaign was a 2004 MPA Kelly Finalist and won *Adweek’s* Campaign of the Year honors for 2003. It is important to note that the dissonance between identities depicted in both Citibank’s print and television ads

Figure 4.5:



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 It didn't seem right to us, either.

With Fraud Early Warning, when we see uncharacteristic or suspicious spending, we'll alert you and stop it. It's part of Citi® Identity Theft Solutions. That's using your card wisely. Call 1-888-CITICARD or visit [citicards.com](http://citicards.com).



  
Live richly.®

is vital to their success. In contrast, for example, to the ads for Calvin Klein's Contradiction which present feminine multiplicity as a natural and ideal experience, the gender based identity dissonance depicted within the Citibank ads is used to mock contradiction rather than promote it. As a consequence, Citibank's award-winning advertising works to reinforce the importance, expectation, and value of consistency in people.

Cultural and marketing/advertising critics have drawn attention to how various companies have consciously cultivated and/or pursued advertising campaigns that clearly use dissonance as a means to attract customers (e.g. Lippert, 2003; Walker, 2005). Thus, there is a general awareness by those who monitor the industry of how companies capitalize on dissonance and the pleasure and/or attraction that it has for their consumers. For example, in 2005 Rob Walker of *The New York Times* observed how cognitive dissonance was utilized as a marketing strategy for the crème Stri Vectin-SD. Klein-Becker, the manufacturer of the crème, cultivated a contradictory tone between their marketing message and packaging, encouraging consumers to find pleasure in the discord by using their product in a manner in which it was not originally intended. Walker points out that by promoting their anti-stretch mark crème as a wrinkle-fighter ("better than Botox"), while still retaining a packing style which remained centered around a clinical discussion of how the product effectively removed stretch marks, they consciously encouraged a mythology for their product which relied upon the consumer embracing dissonance as a sign of product prestige and effectiveness. Therefore, Stri Vectin-SD benefited from

consumers' desire for a skin-care product which could be classified as both a cosmetic *and* a pharmaceutical. In another instance, Edward Jay Epstein (1982) notes how research conducted in the 1970s for N. W. Ayer on behalf of De Beers, revealed how diamonds were purposefully marketed in a manner which sought to mitigate the dissonance many women experienced when receiving a diamond from a partner. The investigation by the advertising agency revealed that women experienced a strong sense of guilt when their requirement for practicality clashed with their desire for expensive jewelry. Consequently, N. W. Ayer set out to design a campaign promoting diamonds as a gift to surprise women with, as

the element of surprise, even if it is feigned, plays the same role of accommodating dissonance in accepting a diamond gift as it does in prim sexual seductions; it permits the woman to pretend that she has not actively participated in the decision. She thus retains both her innocence – and the diamond. (Epstein, 1982, p. 27)

Like most (successful) advertising appeals, De Beers connects the purchase of its products with a desired emotional outcome – in this instance, the outcome was not only the presumed feelings of love and desirability that the gift of a diamond can help a woman feel, but also the alleviation of any possible dissonance that might be affiliated with the acceptance and/or desire for this gift of diamonds.

Few campaigns have been as explicit in their appeal to, and endorsement of, women's experience of dissonance as Calvin Klein's advertising and marketing campaign for Contradiction perfume. The October 1997 issue of *Glamour* magazine featured a promotional partnership with Calvin Klein in which

the magazine asked readers to submit personal accounts of how contradiction in their lives helped them to be successful and accomplish their goals. Readers whose stories were chosen were honored at receptions where they were lauded and presented with a personal letter from Calvin Klein and a gift of a silver frame (Aktar, 1997, September 26). The distinguished historian Roland Marchand observed that advertisers discover “vacuums of advice and psychological deprivations in modern society” in order to play “a therapeutic role in helping Americans adapt to new social and technological complexities” (1985, p. xxii). I would suggest that this in fact explains the recent increase in advertising expressing and utilizing identity dissonance-based themes. In the case of Calvin Klein’s Contradiction, the fragrance ads tried to position themselves as an expression of women’s essential complexity – the perfume tries to capture an abstracted desire, an experience that is almost beyond words or too difficult to articulate, and/or a desired or aspired-for self. Ultimately, the industry not only wants to attempt to exploit these wished for selves/experiences, but also cultivate consumers by acknowledging the difficulty of experiencing and managing certain psychological and cultural experiences, in particular, that of identity-based complexity, and its repercussion, dissonance.

In order to better explore the way that producers, and the advertising and marketing industry consciously utilize gender identity dissonance as a means to encourage consumption, three key campaigns will be examined in more detail.

## **From Multiplicity to Dissonance: Hennessy's Appropriately Complex and Mix Accordingly Campaigns**

Complexity, or multiplicity, is regarded as a positive characteristic for many consumers, a fact supported by marketing research conducted by the makers of Hennessy, the world's best-selling cognac during the late 1990s.

"We did about four months' worth of research," said Elizabeth Sorota, senior brand manager for Hennessy at Schieffelin & Somerset, "and found that consumers saw complexity as depth of character and having diversity in one's life. Those attributes were very appealing and relevant to our target audience." (Elliot, 1998, September 29, ¶ 13)

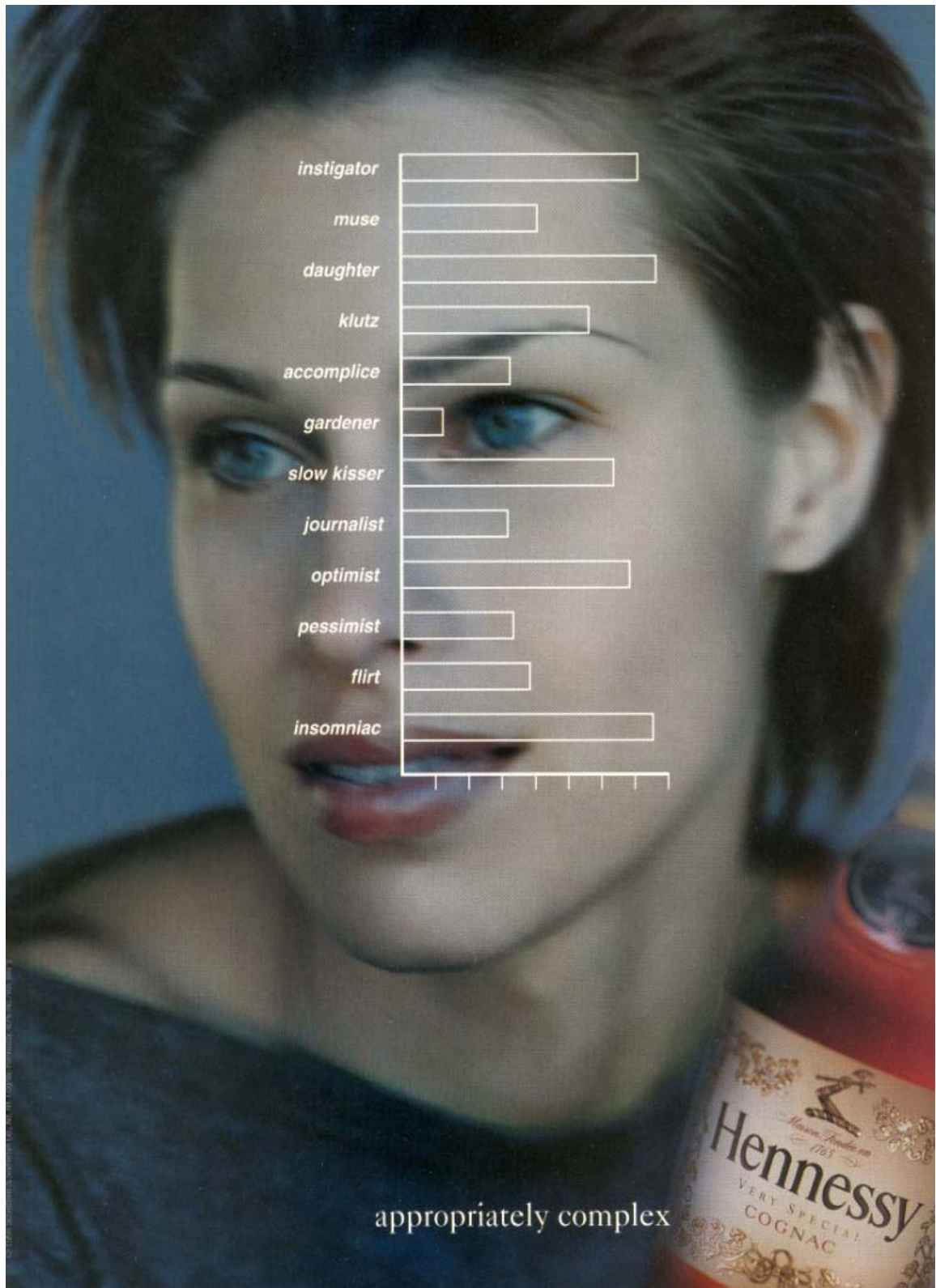
Accordingly, Hennessy's previous marketing campaign which centered on capturing and promoting the feelings associated with consuming cognac was duly replaced with one which investigated the multifaceted nature of both their product and consumers. From 1997 till at least 2001 Schieffelin & Somerset worked to "humanize" their advertising appeals by making them more "accessible and relevant" (Elliot, ¶ 6). In their Appropriately Complex and Mix Accordingly print campaigns, which were featured in such magazines as *Nylon*, *InStyle*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Vanity Fair*, Hennessy strived to develop the association between complexity and cognac. The budget for the campaigns (estimated at \$5 million for 1997, \$7.7 million in 1998, \$16 million in 1999, and \$21 million by 2000 (Elliot)) represented a significant investment by the company as it attempted to reconfigure its product's appeal, making it more young, hip, and attractive to youth in their 20s and 30s – a market segment approximately 20 years younger than traditional cognac drinkers. Hennessy was very careful when devising their



complexity-based branding to ensure that that this new approach would in no way alienate their older more traditional consumer base.

Richard Kirshenbaum, co-chairman and chief creative officer at Kirshenbaum Bond & Partners, the advertising agency behind Hennessy's Appropriately Complex print advertising campaign, observes that "we're competing in a complex world where consumers face an enormous amount of choices and options" (Elliot). Beginning in 1997 advertisements which featured graphs and charts worked to reinforce the notion of diversity, while, at the same time, presumably heightening consumer desire for integration. Some of the ads featured histogram-like lists of attributes, such as journalist, daughter, muse, and instigator, and dichotomous pairing such as optimist and pessimist superimposed over models' faces (see Figure 4.6). The characteristics are laid out in a rather cold and reductive manner evocative of a personality test, market research findings, or statistical experiment. Working under the heading of "appropriately complex" the tonally muted ads work to focus the consumers' attention on the variety of appealing traits associated with those who imbibe. The ads encourage those who self-identify as multifaceted or who wish to embrace more complexity in their lives, to align themselves with this particular commodity. As Mark Dolliver, a regular *Adweek* commentator on new trends in advertising points out, "the enumeration of Hennessey drinkers' diverse traits gives a prudent dose of flattery to the target audience" (1998, p. 56). It also ensures, through the presentation of a vast array of personality characteristics, that practically no one escapes being targeted as a possible consumer.

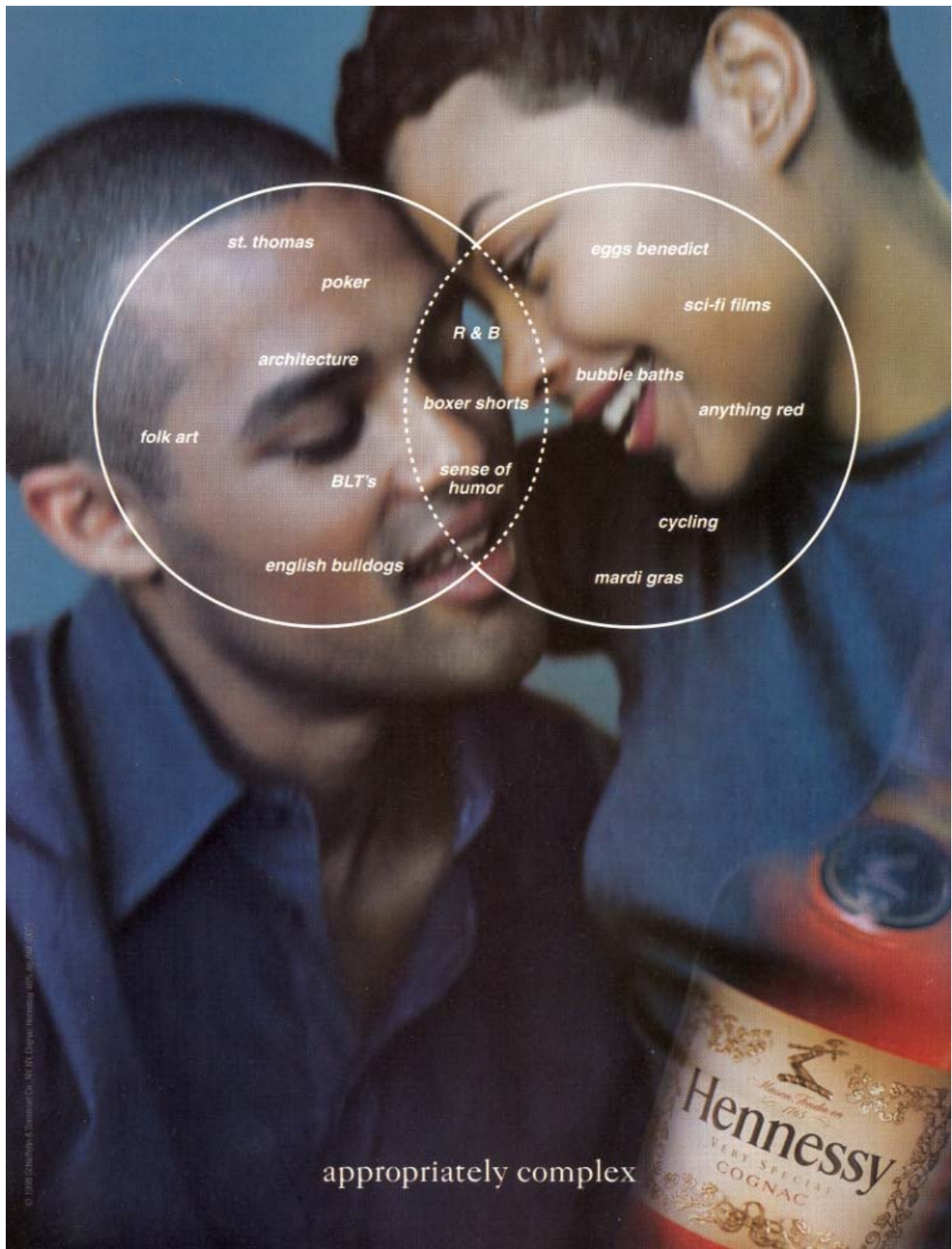
Figure 4.6:



Another type of graphic representation of product and consumer complexity is found in advertisements that feature Venn diagrams. In one particular example of this approach (see Figure 4.7) a couple is represented as having very divergent personalities. The man loves poker, folk art, and BLTs while the woman finds pleasure in cycling, sci-fi films, and eggs benedict. The contrariness of these traits is reflected in the exclusionary relationship of the circles which represent their two worlds of interest. The overlapping portion of the diagram signifies their shared sense of humor, love of R & B, and boxer shorts. The ad's implication is that the 'appropriately complex' cognac not only represent their diversity, but is a common pleasure that brings them closer together.

By 2000, the "Mix Accordingly" phase of Hennessy's complexity-focused marketing campaign appears in magazines – and now, the advertising shifts from a simple acknowledgement of human complexity, to both a recognition and utilization of the gender identity dissonance that frames people's lives. This period is characterized by the presentation of dichotomous pairings of attractive and enticing text and visuals; the antithetical nature of the identities represented in this series of ads is alluded to in a number of ways. This approach features advertising with contrary textual headings which work to illustrate and illuminate a non-visual/hidden identity. For example, one ad features a beautiful, well-dressed, African American couple, with the tag 'Gemini' hovering over the shoulder of the man and 'Scorpio' above the head of the woman. The 'appropriately complex' tagline trades upon viewers' general knowledge that

Figure 4.7:



these astrological star-signs are diametrically opposed to each other: Gemini is a masculine air sign – Gemini's are presumed to be upbeat, whimsical, enthusiastic, and charming. On the other hand, Scorpio is a feminine water sign, and those born to this sign are considered to be intense, secretive, willful, and brooding in personality. As individuals, the two models are being presented as diametrically opposed in temperament, but as a couple, they are promoted as an “appropriately complex” amalgam.

A 2001 ad for Hennessy cultivates complexity by producing a tension *between* text and image. Dissonance is evoked by presenting a very sexy and feminine image of a woman from the waist down, wearing a short skirt and high heels, with the label ‘tomboy’ superimposed over her outstretched leg (see Figure 4.8). This Hennessy advertisement for cognac effectively illustrates the productive tension of identity dissonance. Kirshenbaum Bond & Partners is exploiting the fact that men generally regard females who are tomboys – women who embody characteristics often reserved for men, such as being physically and emotionally outgoing, watching sports, having hearty appetites etc. – as sexy. However, men also desire to be with women who display hyper-feminine or more traditional and idealized feminine traits, such as being elaborately coiffed and strikingly thin. What Hennessy is promoting is the belief that if a female is really interested in catching a man she should capitalize on both these identities by dressing up in a hyper-sexual, ultra-feminine way, like the model in the print advertisement, and ordering a Hennessy cognac. By doing so, said female can alert the men in the room to the fact that not only is she an envy-inspiring hyper-



Figure 4.8:



sexualized supermodel but also a laid-back low-maintenance tomboy. It is the advertiser's hope that female consumers will believe it is the glass of Hennessy cognac that allows them to so easily "mix accordingly" from each of these attractive and useful identities – and, by doing so, increase their attractiveness to the men they wish to catch the attention of. The tension set up between these identities, the fact that the 'tomboy' and the 'model' are generally regarded as antithetical, is what advertisers want to exploit (this image is even slightly subversive, as the masculine, open-legged stance of the female model works to subtly allude to her tomboy status – the customary expectation is that her legs should be crossed in order to comply with social expectations regarding demure femininity). Companies are trying to take advantage of women who are aware of the positive results to be had from breaking from convention and demonstrating the presence of conflicting gender identities (in this case, masculine and feminine aspects), specifically, by trying to sell products that will help ease this discord. This ad points to an important presumption associated with the theory of identity dissonance which is that many women understand that the discomfort caused from managing multiple and conflicting identities can sometimes be outweighed by the positive and rewarding results that accompany that dissonance.

One final advertisement from this series is important to discuss; Figure 4.9 uses both dichotomous imagery and textual references to evoke its dissonance, and while a strong example of how advertisers utilize identity dissonance to encourage people to consume, it is also highly problematic – specifically in the way that it trades upon race and sexual stereotypes to suggest its conflict. There

Figure 4.9:





is an undeniable, but subtle, subtext to this image, one which traffics in heterosexual male fantasies – the idealized experience of sex with two females who are together sexually only in order to provoke and service male desire, an imagined pseudo-lesbianism that is really in service of heterosexuality<sup>2</sup>. The ad presents two young women looking into a mirror in the bathroom of what appears to be an upscale dance club or restaurant. The ‘vegetarian’ on the left has long blond hair, is wearing a white lace dress, and has classically attractive Caucasian features. A beautiful Asian woman stands on the right side of the frame, wearing a sophisticated black dress, with her hair in a sleek up-do, she is suggestively applying blood red lipstick. Ultimately she represents the quintessential hyper-sexualized Asian female dragon-lady stereotype – an interpretation that is reinforced by the title of ‘man-eater’ which hovers across her chest. Again, the archetypal Madonna-Whore dichotomy is evoked in this ad, this time reinforcing race-based stereotypes about women. The tension set up between these identities, as reflected in differing representations of ideal female beauty, sexuality and, racial stereotyping, provides a compelling visual metaphor. The fact that the virginal ‘vegetarian’ and the sexually forward ‘man-eater’ are generally regarded as antithetical, presumed not to be found in the same person, is the expectation that Hennessy is trying to exploit. While certainly targeting the male fantasy of being with two women, this ad also addresses female consumers - women who are aware of the dichotomies that frame their lives – encouraging

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Susan Douglas for bringing this interpretation to my attention.

them to find pleasure from breaking conventions and demonstrating the presence of conflicting identities.

Regardless of intent, the cultural insensitivity and obvious racial stereotyping that is present within this Hennessy advertisement is offensive, especially for Asians. Reporting on the impact of this ad for AsianLife.com Ji Hyun Lee observes that “the dichotomy of these ideas sends an undeniable message regarding the predatory nature of Asian women” (2003, ¶ 15).

Yoosoon Kim, creative director for Kang and Lee Advertising, a New York advertising agency specializing in Asian consumers, explains that “the man-eater caption has a very, very negative meaning...Translated in Korean, it literally means ‘one who eats and swallows up man.’ It’s like referring to someone as a prostitute” (Lee, 2003, ¶ 21)<sup>3</sup>. This Hennessy ad highlights how advertisements which feature gender identity dissonance, while at times able to present incredibly progressive representation of women in the form of multiplicity and gender identity dissonance, are just as prone to the reinscription of problematic gender norms that rely upon unacceptable racial, sexual, and cultural stereotypes as any other form of advertising.

Beautiful, smart, and amusing, heteronormative, sexist, stereotypical, and occasionally overtly offensive, the Appropriately Complex and Mix Accordingly

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<sup>3</sup> Part of the problem of supposed colorblind casting of models in advertising is that it often reinforces racial stereotypes, rather than removing them. This is because it takes more than just the presence of diversity within advertising to create a progressive ad, instead it takes actual cultural awareness and sensitivity to create a marketing strategy that effectively considers and represents the breadth and multiplicity of U.S. citizenry. As Ji Hyun Lee astutely points out in her article *Sexploitation of the Asian Kind in Advertisement*, “advertisers need to be able to ‘see’ from the ethnic perspective,” (2003, ¶ 32) otherwise they will continue to be unaware of the variety of culture-based interpretations for their words and images.

print magazine campaigns are fine examples of how identity dissonance can be effectively utilized to prompt consumer attention, reconfigure a product to appeal to a wider age range of men and women, and modernize and update an alcoholic beverage for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2003 Hennessy's overt, complexity-focused marketing was replaced by their 'Never Blend In' and 'Are You Privileged' campaigns, with a primary focus on appealing to male consumers. Never Blend In continued Hennessy's agenda to tap into urban culture – targeting a young, hip, music-conscious audience in ads featuring up-and-coming talent, for example, reggaeton singer Tego Calderon and Saul Hernandez lead singer of the Mexican rock band Jaguares, and established legends such as Marvin Gaye, Miles Davis, and Isaac Hayes. The Are you Privileged campaign perpetuates the young, moody, and upscale aesthetic of the Mix Accordingly campaign, featuring successful, often ethnic, men with a list of impressive, eclectic, and mysterious achievements superimposed over and around their bodies. Evoking an idealized 'renaissance man', the Are You Privileged advertisements, though more subtle, further the link between Hennessy cognac and complexity, presenting contradiction as a characteristic of only the most desirable, fortunate, and successful men<sup>4</sup>.

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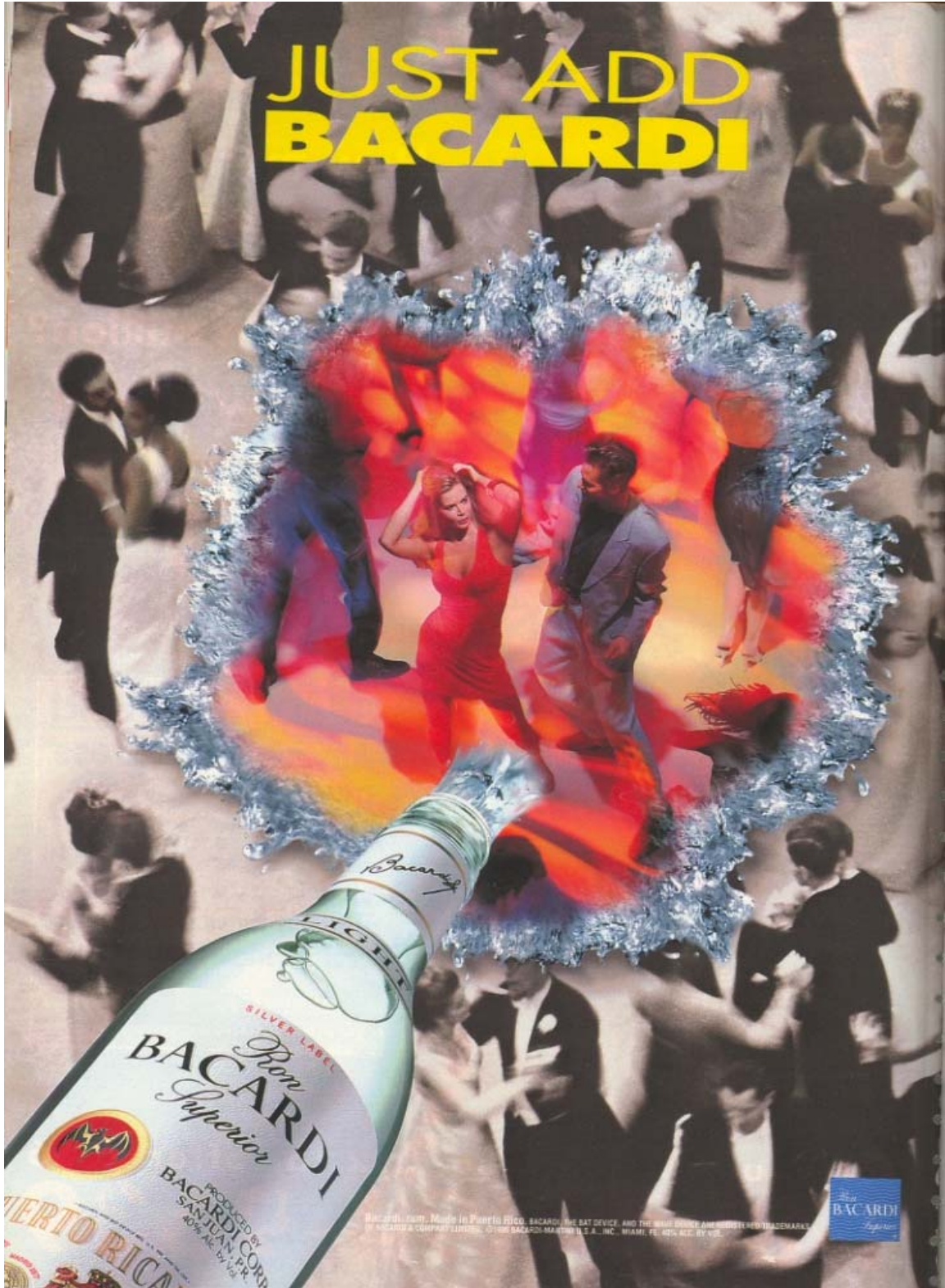
<sup>4</sup> Both of these campaigns reflect the growing attention paid by Hennessy towards attracting upscale African American male consumers. In 2001 Sumindi Peiris, Hennessy's brand manager acknowledged that marketing to affluent African Americans must be "nuanced" in order to tap into the dynamic manner in which ethnic identity can be impacted by upward shifts in income (Whelan, 2001, p. 3). To that end, it seems that the understated ambivalence of Hennessy's Never Blend In and Are You Privileged campaigns would be particularly adept at targeting wealthy African Americans.

## **The Promise of Transformation: The Bacardi By Night Campaign**

In the 1990s Bacardi-Martini USA spent a considerable amount of energy and resources marketing Bacardi rum in a manner that asserted its ability to promote a shift between identities. Their first campaign, “Just add Bacardi,” ran from 1993-1998 and featured a subtle and generally abstract discussion of how their product could transform situations and people in both useful and pleasurable ways. For instance, one advertisement featured a pack of walruses on an ice flow. After adding Bacardi, one walrus is transported in both temperament and place to a tropical island where he/she lounges on a towel wearing sunglasses and a sunhat. The suggestion that Bacardi rum can provide a relaxing get-away for its consumer is front and center, but the transmuting nature of the drink and the discord between place and attitude is understated.

Another advertisement from this same campaign features a more explicit discussion of Bacardi’s usefulness. In this ad (see Figure 4.10) a splash of Bacardi brings ‘color’ and excitement to a formal event, turning the black and white experience of a old-fashioned traditional ball into an evening of dancing at a wild and exuberant nightclub. The female model is presented as being freed from a binding and colorless formality (her male partner is included in this shift to a lesser extent). The tag line reads “Just add Bacardi,” and there is an unmistakable division made between the virginal and formal ballroom dancers and the sexualized woman gyrating at the nightclub. Unlike her colorless counterparts, her hair is down, her hands are up caressing her flowing blond hair, and her breasts, hips, and legs are on display. It is the Bacardi rum which has

Figure 4.10:



brought about this drastic and presumably desirable conversion in sexual expression and identity.

It is likely that Bacardi-Martini was so impressed with consumer response to their overt discussion of identity transformation that they decided to develop an advertising campaign which featured an even more blatant display of identity dissonance-based imagery. And, in 1998, in an attempt to attract a more youthful and urban/hip customer to their rum, the 'Bacardi by Night' campaign was launched. New York firm Ammirati Puris Lintas was hired to develop the advertising and promotion, and Bacardi-Martini invested \$27 million in the first 6 months (Volz, 1998, August 14). According to Marcos Perez, a marketing manager for Bacardi, the campaign sought to demonstrate how "Bacardi is the real you, the person who comes out after doing the things you've got to do" (Arndorfer, 1998, June 1, ¶ 4). Appearing in 35 magazines, the campaign attempted to attract the young savvy demographic which read such publications as *Cosmopolitan*, *Details*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Spin*. In addition to the print campaign, they established the Bacardi by Night comedy tour to encourage the belief in 21-35 year olds that "the brand is fun and that it stands for good times" (Howard, 1999, April 5, ¶ 5).

Bacardi by Night ads feature beautiful men and women in their early 20s, celebrating, most often while holding a (Bacardi laced) cocktail<sup>5</sup>. Like all

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<sup>5</sup> As with the Hennessy Cognac campaign, the 'Bacardi by Night' magazine advertisements target both male and female consumers, however, for the purposes of this examination, the focus will be on the Bacardi ads which prominently feature women, and the responses that might occur in a female audience.

advertising, these images present the viewer with aspired-to situations, identities, and products. The models are presented as extremely happy, with big smiles on their faces, their wealth demonstrated through their expensive clothing and accessories, white collar careers, and accessibility to such celebrated New York hot spots as Spy Bar, the Knitting Factory, and Chaos (Arndorfer, 1998, June 1 ; see for example, Figure 4.11). Not surprising, given the predilections of mainstream advertising, the models who are meant to reflect the young hip target demographic are overwhelmingly Caucasian – consciously so, as Bacardi-Martini chose to develop alternative campaigns by turning to the Burrell Communications Group of Chicago who specialize in capturing the African American demographic and the Castor Group of New York for their expertise in appealing to Latin audiences (Arndorfer).

Advertisements by Bacardi promote escape from identity-based constraints through consumption. They address and promote the tension that may occur when individuals wish to flee some of the pejorative connotations associated with both traditional norms of female propriety and their day-jobs, adopting a new, more party-oriented, sexy self. The ability to express/enact antithetical identities is depicted as an opportunity provided by Bacardi rum. For example, one of their ads features a very sexy woman wearing little clothing, with a Bacardi rum insignia tattooed on the base of her back (see Figure 4.12). Underneath her image, the copy reads: “Librarian by day. Bacardi by night”. Advertisements such as these work to construct a tension between image and text, and to imply and evoke the presumption of dissonance. This ad highlights



Figure 4.11:



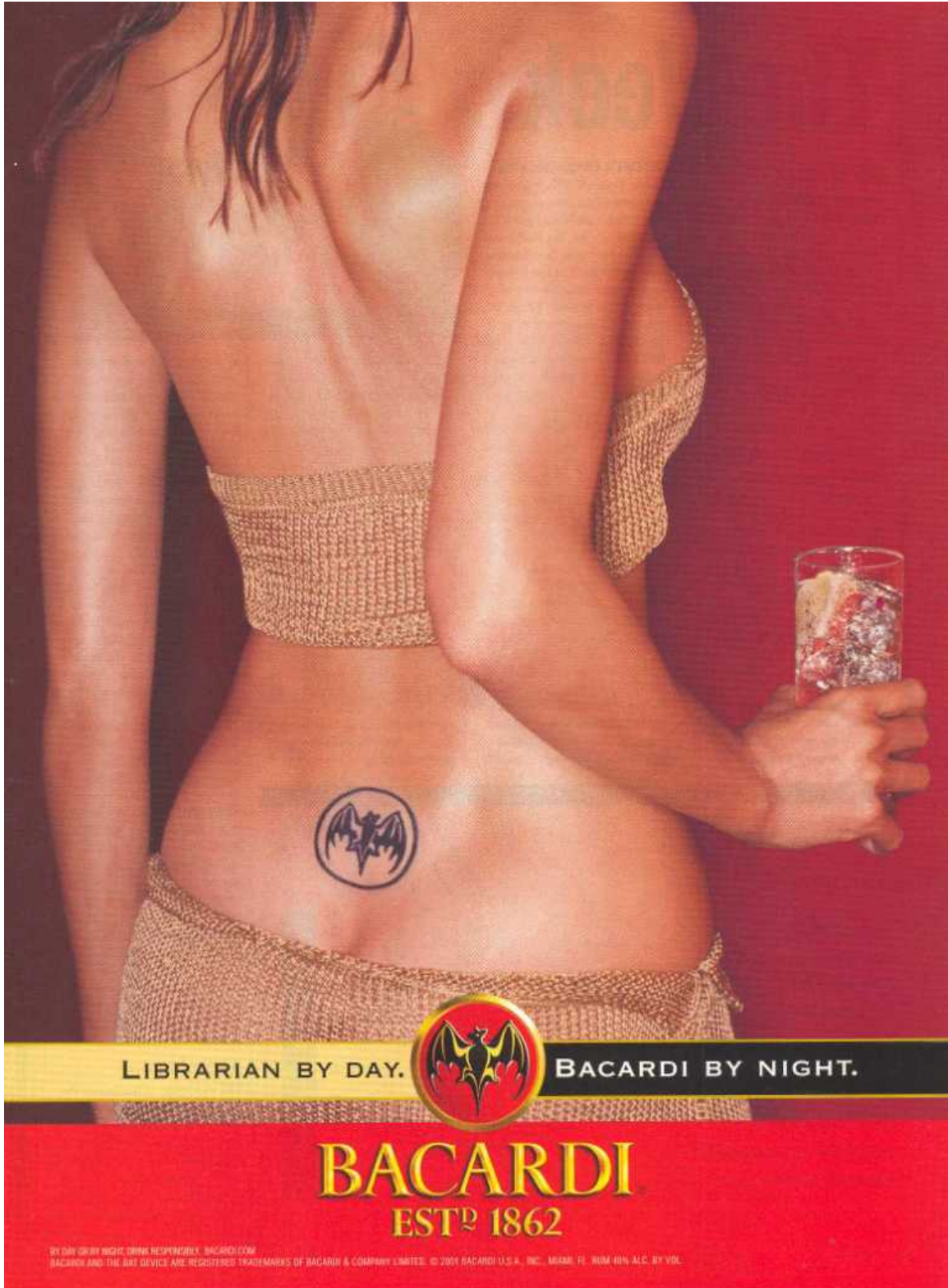
**BUTTONED UP BY DAY. BACARDI BY NIGHT.**

**BACARDI**  
ESTD 1862


BY DAY OR BY NIGHT, DRINK RESPONSIBLY. BACARDI.COM  
BACARDI AND THE BAT DEVICE ARE REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF BACARDI & COMPANY LIMITED. © 2001 BACARDI U.S.A., INC. MIAMI, FL. RUM 40% ALC. BY VOL.



Figure 4.12:



A photograph of a woman's back, showing a tattoo of the Bacardi bat logo on her lower back. She is wearing a gold-colored, textured, strapless top and matching skirt. She is holding a glass of Bacardi rum and orange juice with ice and a lime wedge. The background is a solid red color.

LIBRARIAN BY DAY.  BACARDI BY NIGHT.

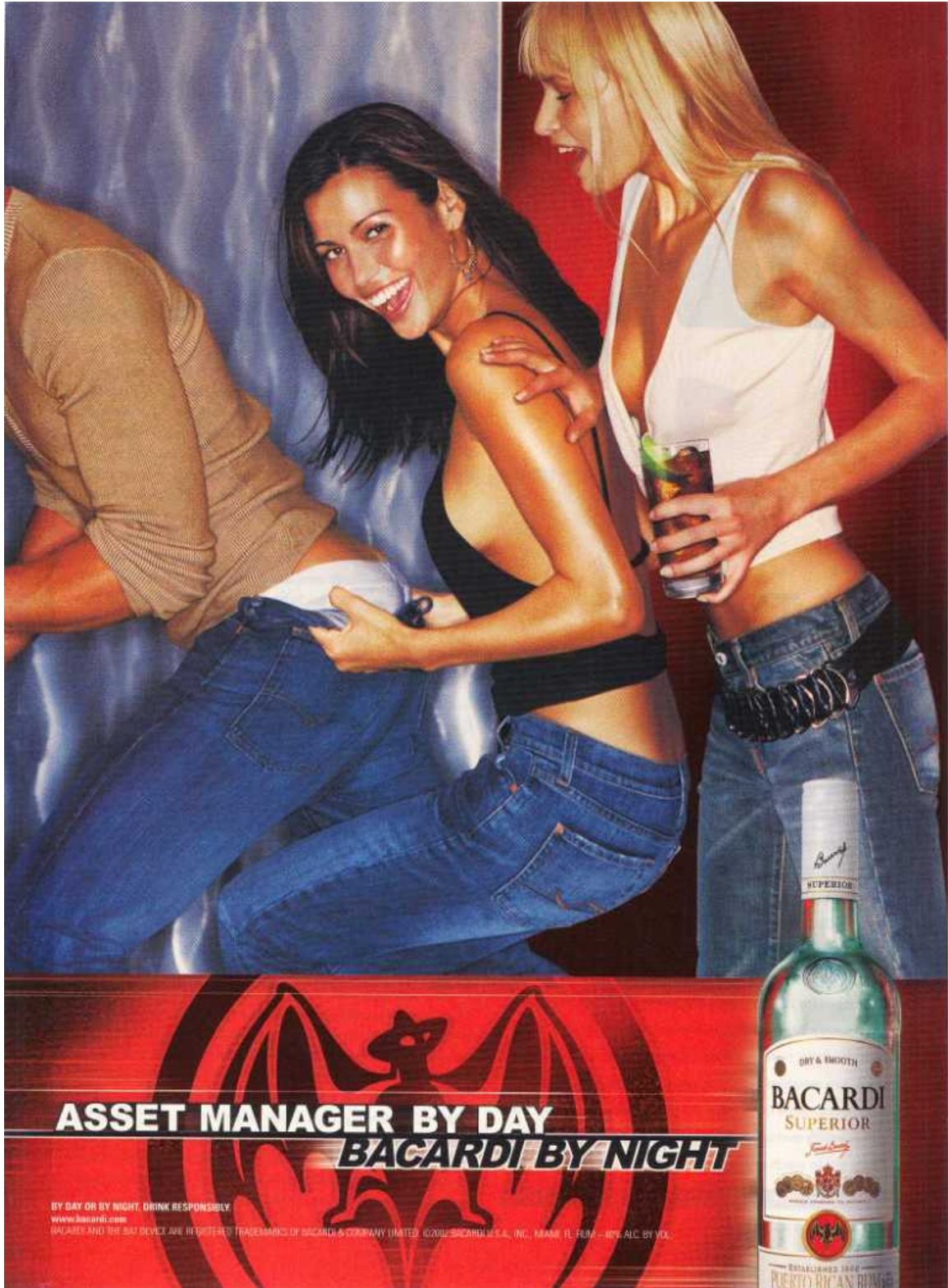
**BACARDI**  
ESTD 1862

BY DAY OR BY NIGHT, DRINK RESPONSIBLY. BACARDI.COM  
BACARDI AND THE BAT DEVICE ARE REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF BACARDI & COMPANY LIMITED. © 2001 BACARDI U.S.A., INC., MIAMI, FL. 40% ALC. BY VOL.

the tension associated with the stereotyped librarian, and the identity-confinement associated with that day-job. Female librarians are typically depicted in the mass media as older dowdy asexual females, with long hair pulled back severely from their faces, wearing glasses and tweed suits. However, this female model is demonstrating a persona far more reminiscent of a pop singer or super-model. It is her choice of alcohol, Bacardi, which literally brands her as a woman who not only fulfills the requirements associated with her traditional job, functioning with her sexuality demurely in check, but also when given the right circumstances, equally capable of overt sexual expression and alcohol-fueled revelry. Ultimately, this ad promises that for women (and men who desire women) who wish to express both ends of the Madonna-Whore spectrum, negotiating and conveying the contradictions that surround female sexuality, Bacardi is your drink.

Most of the advertisements in this campaign juxtapose a printed description of a conservative career choice (e.g. banker, auditor, chiropractor etc.) that occurs 'by day' alongside a stereotype-busting image of the individual having a wonderfully wild time 'by night'. In Figure 4.13 we see a female who is presumed to spend her day as an asset manager, evaluating the buttocks of an anonymous male while out for an evening. Once again, there is a strong contrast between the audience's expectations/the conservative nature of the model's daytime career and the behavior depicted in the advertisement. Not surprisingly, the ads which focus on female Bacardi users, in comparison to ads featuring men, contain far more sexual innuendo. Advertisements with taglines like

Figure 4.13:



**ASSET MANAGER BY DAY**  
**BACARDI BY NIGHT**

BY DAY OR BY NIGHT, DRINK RESPONSIBLY.

[www.bacardi.com](http://www.bacardi.com)

BACARDI AND THE BAT DEVICE ARE REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF BACARDI & COMPANY LIMITED. ©2010 BACARDI U.S.A., INC., MIAMI, FL, FLORIDA - 100% ALC. BY VOL.



Buttoned up by Day, Vegetarian by Day, and Pussy Cat by Day present women as both sexual predators and as suitable prey. These advertisements speak to how problematic it is for women in today's society to express their sexuality and desire.

Addressing male fantasy, Bacardi's ads function to mitigate the perceived threat associated with women who have high-paying and powerful careers. While being identified as both virginal and whorish is advantageous, in order for sexual desire to be acceptably expressed there must be an abdication of self (a woman can't be seen to be too in command of her sexual expression) as she must still be able to still claim 'innocence'. Consequently, alcohol consumption is promoted as an ideal conduit, as then a woman's sexual assertiveness can emerge without her suffering the label of 'unseemly' or 'forward'. Bacardi seems very aware of the tensions that are associated with the expression of identities, especially women's expression of sexual identity, and purposefully sets out to present a campaign that revolves around the acknowledgment and management of this psychological and sociological dilemma

"No single ad can express the messy complexity of the zeitgeist, but [the 'Bacardi by Night' advertisements manage] to capture the contradictory moment" (Lippert, 1998, ¶ 3). Appearing at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Bacardi by Night campaign emerges at a moment that is characterized in the U.S. by an increasingly liberal approach to identity politics, prosperous markets, and economic growth, and, as Lippert astutely points out, the Monica Lewinsky/President Bill Clinton sex scandal. One ad in this series is particularly



resonant of the cultural moment as it features an anonymous dark haired woman, with deep red lips, smoking a cigar, with the tag “Politically Correct by Day – Bacardi by Night” just beneath her hand – all details which resonate with added meaning during the days following the Lewinsky/Clinton sex scandal and the Starr Report (Lippert). Bacardi, thus, not only effectively captures the conflicted feelings women are experiencing regarding self-presentation, but also the general confusion and ambivalence towards gender roles, power, and sexual expression in the United States at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The aesthetic qualities of the images and the psychological promises proffered ensure that the Bacardi by Night’s advertisements are extremely appealing to both men and women. In Koren Zailckas’s book *Smashed: Story of a Drunken Girlhood* she discusses how as a teenager she and her friends papered their school lockers and bedrooms with alcohol advertising. Zailckas preferred Bacardi’s “sly message about being ‘buttoned up’ by day but getting wild at night” and “admired the women in those ads” (Ogle, 2006, ¶ 1, 2). Extremely shy, she recognized Bacardi’s promise to help her transition from insecure and fearful to confident and self-possessed. Later on in life she came to understand the deceptive nature of the advertising, realizing that her alcohol consumption was because of, and worked to reinforce, her lack of confidence rather than providing her with the self-assurance that she wished for. In 2003, while visiting the home of a male colleague, I came upon a framed copy of the “Librarian by Day – Bacardi by Night” advertisement hanging in his upstairs hallway. He was not aware of the particulars of my research, and when asked

why this specific advertisement hung as if art, the man's response was that it was a very beautiful image, and, that it was the combination of librarian and sex-kitten that he found enticing; the expression of gender-based identity dissonance between career and sexual expression was particularly appealing. It is likely that women's awareness of men's attraction to the Madonna-Whore dichotomy provides one more reason to seek out and adopt divergent identity positions such as those featured within the Bacardi by Night campaign.

### **Contradiction and Consumption: De Beers' Right Hand Ring Campaign**


The Right Hand Ring Promotion, by The Diamond Trading Company, a sales and marketing arm of De Beers, looked to increase diamond sales by utilizing the conflict associated with a woman's relationship status. Acknowledging the advantageous identifications associated with being both single and in a relationship, De Beers recognized that women may feel anxiety due to the fact that one of these desirable identities must always be forsaken for the other. Thus, they built an advertising campaign around the suggestion that women could assume/display both identities (which express valued characteristics of the self) only by the overt wearing of a 'right hand ring'. This campaign built a new purchasing imperative – the right hand ring phenomenon – utilizing dissonance-themed advertising. Capitalizing on women's feelings of division and anxiety, and utilizing women's aspirations towards self-actualization and the associated hurdle of negotiating antithetical identity constructions that are part of being single or coupled, the print magazine campaign "establishes a

new dialectic of diamonds: the split between romance and independence” (Lippert, 2003, ¶ 2).

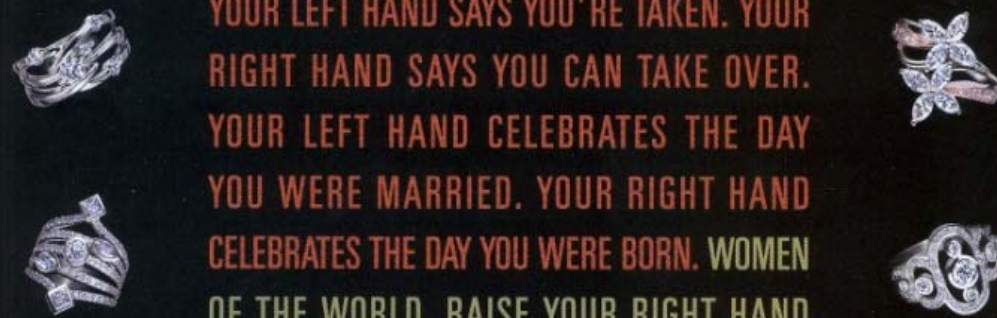
The tag line reads: “Your left hand says you’re taken. Your right hand says you can take over. Your left hand celebrates the day you were married. Your right hand celebrates the day you were born. Women of the world raise your right hand” (see Figure 4.14). Womanhood, both physically and psychologically, is being divided down the middle – and this division is an important reflection of a larger discursive trend. Relationship statuses are socially constructed in such a way that very different requirements and pleasures are linked with either identity. For example, having a partner is often characterized as a ‘trade-off’ with a significant sacrifice of freedom and self-indulgence made in order to attain economic and emotional stability (Kimmel, 2000). And, while a strong argument against whether these identity claims are truthful or acceptable can be made, the fact remains that society is replete with images and representations of single and coupled women that reinforce these divisions. The Right Hand Ring campaign, and its accompanying print magazine ads are part of the 200 million dollars a year that De Beers spends on marketing (The Economist, 2007).

Launched in the Fall of 2003 by the immensely powerful J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, the campaign set out to establish diamonds as a potent expression of a woman’s own style and individuality (O’Laughlin, 2004). While men have been the traditional purchasers of diamond jewelry, the right hand ring campaign shifted its sights to inspiring women to buy for themselves.

Figure 4.14:



**YOUR LEFT HAND SAYS YOU'RE TAKEN. YOUR  
RIGHT HAND SAYS YOU CAN TAKE OVER.  
YOUR LEFT HAND CELEBRATES THE DAY  
YOU WERE MARRIED. YOUR RIGHT HAND  
CELEBRATES THE DAY YOU WERE BORN. WOMEN  
OF THE WORLD, RAISE YOUR RIGHT HAND.**



**THE DIAMOND RIGHT HAND RING. VIEW MORE AT [ADIAMONDISFOREVER.COM](http://ADIAMONDISFOREVER.COM)**

**A DIAMOND IS FOREVER**  
DIAMOND TRADING COMPANY

Top right: ©2005 Felicitant. Bottom right: ©2005 The Stuckey Co. Top left: ©2005 The Stuckey Co. Bottom left: ©2005 Corissa. © The Provenance is used under license.



And, though much of the campaign is aimed at married women, it should be no surprise that at a time when marriage rates are falling, and thus, the number of engagement rings purchased declining, a campaign that also targets single, middle-class women should be launched. Hoping to develop a product that would utilize smaller, less desirable stones (Lippert, 2003), a key goal of the Diamond Trading Company was to link female empowerment with the purchase of jewelry. With a diamond right hand ring costing an average of \$1,153 in 2006 (Yadegaran, 2007, November 8) these expressions of 'self care' are generally directed at upperly mobile professional women who can afford to make a significant financial investment.

Comprised of at least 21 ads, all but one featuring a variation of the same gender identity dissonant theme, the Right Hand Ring print campaign appeared in magazines as diverse as *Vogue*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *House & Garden*, *Glamour*, *Redbook*, and *Architectural Digest*. What unites these magazines is that they all target an established or aspiring upscale, or presumably empowered female audience (Braverman, 2005). Right hand rings are what the industry refers to as 'fashion' jewelry, designed to capitalize on women's desire to buy accessories reflective of their personal style and individuality. Sally Morrison, a spokesperson for De Beers, suggested that the ultimate goal for the Right Hand Ring campaign was to create a "cultural imperative" (Zoellner, 2006, p. 246) – the development of a mythology or need where none before existed. According to research conducted by J. Walter Thompson this campaign has succeeded in convincing women to regard diamonds in new ways (O'Loughlin, 2004); since its

inception in 2003 there has been an increase in women's recognition of diamond rings as something that can be purchased for themselves, as not tied to marriage, nor particularly a reflection of a man's love, but, as a stylish accessory that is able to indicate one's authenticity, independence, and self-love.

Regardless of the many reasons that lead women to acquire a right hand ring, it is clear that the purchase of a diamond ring is no longer directly linked to a heterosexual marriage proposal, and thus the sole terrain of men.

Since the 1970s the presence of what Ruth Rosen (2000) refers to as 'consumer feminism,' has ensured that the imagery and language of liberation and emancipation associated with the women's movement has been effectively co-opted to sell goods and services. The result is that advertising appeals have sold feminine agency and achievement as easily attainable through consumption. De Beers recognized the tension that men and women were experiencing during the 1970s and constructed ads that addressed the conflict between modern feminist tendencies and traditional notions of desire and identity, suggesting that this tension could be managed by purchasing jewelry. De Beers' continued this trend, and by the 1990s, advertisements featured slogans that referred directly to this anxiety. For example, one of their first ads promoting a right hand ring states: "On my left hand you will see a symbol of my commitment. But my right hand is my independence. My uncaptured spirit that also wants to shine" (De Beers, 1999). De Beers seems to presume that women will experience dissonance due to competing desires to enact equally valued identity positions, and, it is implied in this ad that such tension will continue to live on after the


purchase of a diamond engagement ring. Fear of losing clients is what seems to be motivating this ad, as De Beers encourages women to recognize that 'independence' may be compromised after making a marriage commitment, and in order to be regained, another diamond needs to be purchased for the right hand to help facilitate the expression of the 'uncaptured spirit.'

A more recent Right Hand Ring ad, published in 2006, declares: "Your left hand sees red and thinks roses. Your right hand sees red and thinks wine. Your left hand says, 'I love you.' Your right hand says, 'I love me, too.' Women of the world, raise your right hand" (Diamond Trading Company). The Diamond Trading Company overtly petitions women to conceive of purchasing a diamond ring as a form of empowerment, employing the notion that loving a man means losing yourself. In these new millennial advertisements consumers are presented with the evocative cry at the end of every Right Hand Ring ad for "women of the world to raise their right hand", using the language of self-respect and self-actualization – seen here in the assertion "I love me too" – the ads from this campaign stand as a prime example of consumer feminism. They petition women to regard consumption as the best path to collective social action, a situation they present as being achieved by appearing in public with outstretched hands bearing flashy, beacon-like diamond rings. Personal agency and defiance of the social order is reduced to a goal best reached by simply shifting the meanings associated with the baubles we use to adorn ourselves.

A popular advertising approach is to feature the act of purchasing as a means to providing an easy fix to often untenable situations. Right Hand Ring

ads position their jewelry as assisting women to negotiate the divide between the public and the private sphere: “Your left hand likes evenings at home. Your right hand loves a night out. Your left hand reads stories before bed. Your right hand lives a story worth reading. Women of the world, raise your right hand” (see Figure 4.15). Many of the ads feature models clearly wearing a wedding band. For married female magazine readers these ads may work to encourage them to feel that by acquiring a new diamond ring they will be able to physically express to the world that there is more to them than what their married identity, and their wedding rings, would indicate. That, in fact, the right hand ring can function as a bridge, demonstrating their ability to traverse between the private marital home and the world at large with ease and grace, thereby indicating that they may have escaped the normative feminine trajectory which presumes to result in the abdication of positive, productive, and agentic characteristics of self that are often associated in our culture, and these ads, with singlehood. In contrast, for women who do not have a partner, this advertising could also inspire the belief that by purchasing a diamond ring to wear on their right hand, they are not only able to mark themselves as independent and self-possessed, but also not waiting around for marriage and a man to come along and validate their existence. The Diamond Trading Company is trying, in the case of the right hand ring, to re-write the romantic heteronormative discourse that they have effectively promoted for so very long, disentangling the diamond from its primary role as a symbol of a man’s love and fidelity. Thus, single women are being encouraged to wear a right hand ring as a sign of ‘rebellion’ against the oppressive gendered

Figure 4.15:



YOUR LEFT HAND LIKES EVENINGS AT HOME. YOUR RIGHT HAND LOVES A NIGHT OUT. YOUR LEFT HAND READS STORIES BEFORE BED. YOUR RIGHT HAND LIVES A STORY WORTH READING. **WOMEN OF THE WORLD, RAISE YOUR RIGHT HAND.**

THE DIAMOND RIGHT HAND RING. VIEW MORE AT [ADIAMONDISFOREVER.COM](http://ADIAMONDISFOREVER.COM)

A DIAMOND IS FOREVER  
DIAMOND TRADING COMPANY

Top right: ©2005 Carasso. Bottom right: ©2005 Hearts On Fire. Top left: ©2005 Galaxia Jewellery, LLC. Bottom left: ©2005 Shiller. The Forevermark is used under license.

discourses that the industry itself strenuously helps to promote.

These ads also work to reinscribe very traditional notions of mothers and wives. Married mothers are constructed, for example, as a romantic not passionate figure, and very clearly relegated to the domestic rather than the public sphere – she is left reading stories before bed. In contrast, the modern single girl's territory is 'out there,' her energies are directed inward towards pleasing herself, and outward in ways that mark the world as her's – living a story worth reading. Ultimately these ads may work to reinforce and magnify gender identity conflict by reasserting the supposed oppositional nature associated with women's relationship status. By reinforcing the antithetical nature of these identities these ads likely mobilize feelings of dissonance in their female audience, while encouraging women to resolve the anxiety through a show of resistance and solidarity that they argue is best achieved by purchasing a diamond ring.

Ultimately, being married *and* being single are states of being for women in our society that generally depreciate in value and respect over time. Newlyweds are celebrated, their lives are perceived to be characterized by bliss-filled days having fun and being adored, during which love and relationship are new and exciting. However the common perception is that most unions slowly deteriorate into a space of heavy obligation, characterized by exhausting commitment and boring familiarity. In addition, single life is constructed as exciting and fulfilling until you are single for too long, and then you can become a subject of pity and marked as unwanted or unlovable. These ads effectively

address and manage the anxiety associated with the negative constructions pertaining to these gender identities by their use of older models in this campaign. By featuring women in their 30s and 40s, with all the markers of wealth and sophistication, the ads are able to target women who may be wrestling with the derogatory connotations of being either long time single or long time married, offering them ways to reinvigorate their lives by bringing more meanings and identities into play.

However, instead of negotiating lack or loss in a woman's life, another equally relevant interpretation would be that this campaign is trying to capitalize on women's desire to display their retention of valued characteristics associated with an identity that is abdicated upon marriage. One advertisement from this campaign states, "Your left hand says 'we'. Your right hand says 'me'. Your left hand loves candlelight. Your right hand loves the spotlight. Your left hand rocks the cradle. Your right hand rules the world. Women of the world, raise your right hand" (see Figure 4.16). The diamond that this model wears is being promoted as the means to display her ability to both 'rock the cradle' and 'rule the world.' While a woman's single identity is forfeited the moment that she gets married, qualities inherent to singlehood are not necessarily excised from the self. Women who wish to incorporate those valued characteristics, while accepting the problematic belief that they are tied intrinsically to singlehood, will experience dissonance. Thus, the pleasure of having one's diversity recognized, even if it is done in a way that reinforces the antithetical nature of the desired identifications, can be both important and productive for those women struggling to express and

Figure 4.16:



YOUR LEFT HAND SAYS "WE." YOUR  
RIGHT HAND SAYS "ME." YOUR  
LEFT HAND LOVES CANDLELIGHT.  
YOUR RIGHT HAND LOVES THE  
SPOTLIGHT. YOUR LEFT HAND  
ROCKS THE CRADLE. YOUR  
RIGHT HAND RULES THE WORLD.  
WOMEN OF THE WORLD, RAISE  
YOUR RIGHT HAND.



A DIAMOND IS FOREVER



possibly reconcile the conflictual nature of their lives. While there is no doubt that some women have either worked to shift their self-understanding, or in fact, have never conceived of the feminine subject, or single and coupled identity, as divided up in such punishing and adversarial ways, it must be recognized that for many this division has a significant impact. Careful not to alienate their female demographic, the Diamond Trading Company beseeches women to buy more diamonds as a form of true self-expression – a way for a woman to communicate to her self, and the world at large, all the varied aspects of who she is and what she does. By acknowledging the Catch-22 that shapes certain women's lives, it seems the Diamond Trading Company is benefiting from women's discomfort when it comes to the choices they must make in regard to identity. Expressing an understanding of feminine struggles, they offer an easy but expensive solution to their problems.

As they state in one of their ads, it is the hope of De Beers that you will regard "A diamond as forever. Forever timeless. Forever unique. Forever a force of nature. Forever all the things that make a woman" (Diamond Trading Company, 2005, September). In a manner similar to Jackson Lears' (1983) discussion of therapeutic-oriented advertising as a means of social control, the Diamond Trading Company is arousing consumer demand by associating their product with an imaginary state of well-being – one based upon the desire to attain harmony between competing anxiety-provoking identifications. These ads promote personal feelings and experiences in order to both exploit and proffer solutions to gender identity dissonance. By presenting their product as a means

to manage competing desires, while at the same time working to reinscribe the very same problematic dichotomies, this company ensures that the consumption-invoking anxiety will continue for many years to come.

Ultimately, the Right Hand Ring print magazine campaign by the Diamond Trading Company, on behalf of De Beers was extremely successful. According to J. Walter Thompson [JWT], over half of the women they surveyed said that the ads had a direct impact on the way they now viewed diamonds; 25% of the women that JWT talked to said they were willing to consider a diamond ring for their next jewelry purchase as a direct result of viewing the print advertisements for the Right Hand Ring campaign (O'Loughlin, 2004, April 19). In just the first year of the campaign, right-hand ring sales jumped 15% (Braverman, 2006, January 1). In addition, the campaign won a "They Get It" award from Advertising Women of New York – an organization run by women in the industry whose goal it is to promote the overall professional and personal success of females in the field and advertising that reflects positive representations of women. By late 2006, De Beers finally replaced their highly successful and well-received identity dissonance-themed campaign with a new marketing approach which focused on demonstrating how right hand rings could be regarded as everyday accessories of the domestic sphere. The new ads featured groupings of right hand rings adorning such household objects as pincushions, clothes hangers, and towel hooks.

## **Advertising and Identity**

Corporations, and their marketing and advertising agencies, have found that gender identity dissonance-themed print magazine advertisements have been beneficial to their marketing strategies. Research into consumers' expectations and desires demonstrates the efficacy of using gender identity dissonance-based appeals. Studies conducted by the makers of Hennessy cognac revealed the public's appetite for media products that reflect and discuss the multiplicity of the historical moment and consumers themselves, and, sales figures demonstrate a marked increase in consumer purchasing of products by De Beers and Citibank after the introduction of advertising featuring gender identity dissonance. Winning prestigious advertising awards, and gaining positive feedback from consumers and critics alike, by all measures these campaigns can be regarded as successful.

Producers (especially of luxury or taboo-infused goods such as tobacco, alcohol and jewelry) have attempted to reposition their products in important ways utilizing feminine multiplicity and gender identity dissonance-based themes in their advertising. Identity dissonance has been used to make products appear more useful. Many campaigns have focused on the value of dissonance, by demonstrating the way that a product is able to serve many functions in a woman's life – to express her multiple identities (e.g. Virginia Slims cigarettes), or assisting in the shift between differing identities (e.g. Woodbridge wine). Companies have also utilized gender identity dissonance in order to make their product seem more realistic or modern, arguing that just as contradiction is a

natural part of women's lives, so is their merchandise (e.g. Contradiction perfume by Calvin Klein). A product's ability to reflect the ambivalence that is also part of the consumer and her culture, to display, evoke, or discuss gender identity dissonance, has been one important way to ensure that a product continues to be regarded as culturally relevant.

Since the advent of modern advertising in the nineteenth century, the industry has capitalized upon the anxiety women experience when attempting to fulfill social roles and express identity in a socially acceptable manner. While early advertising campaigns were characterized by rationalistic appeals that explained how the product would directly improve the material requirements of consumers' lives, such as creating greater health, or more leisure time (Goldman, 1984; Leiss, Kline, & Jhally 1990; Williams, 1980), the pressure was on women to enhance their beauty, and ensure that only the very best products were introduced to the family. As advertising came to rely on using non-rational or symbolic/emotional appeals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally), women were targeted in ever more effective ways – in particular, it was now their own self-understanding and psychological well-being that was at stake (Lears, 1983). Since then, women have been encouraged to turn to advertising as a source of information and validation about self, and advertising featuring gender identity dissonance is just another in a long line of appeals which the industry has used to effectively exploit women's fears in order to fuel consumption.

Gender dissonant advertising presents women with an often disconcerting array of ideal(ized) identities, enticing them to embrace the wide variety of

options, while privileging or endorsing just a few. While there may be a vast range of identity options on display, the ads often contain a subtle but significant ideological slant that promotes the adoption of traditional gender identities over those that could be deemed rebellious or non-normative. For example, while the Madonna-Whore dichotomy is ever-present within advertising appeals to both men and women, women's sexual assertiveness or agency is presented as fantastic – a fantasy for men – rather than a realistic and acceptable identity for an ideal or socially-desirable woman to express for herself. Women's sexuality is traditionally tied with reproductive function and motherhood. Accordingly, female sexual agency and desire is generally excised from hegemonic notions of womanhood, as it is considered a threat to patriarchy (Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos, & Kirkby, 2003). What is implied in dissonant ads featuring the Madonna-Whore dichotomy, is that the woman's sexually explicit display is only there in order for her to attract a future partner, after which she will curb her public predatory ways, saving them for private moments in service of her boyfriend's, or preferably husband's desires. Outside of a socially sanctioned partnership (or the excusing influence of alcohol), women, to remain socially acceptable, generally must adopt a more demure, passive sexuality. A traditionally modest feminine identity is positioned as the normative ideal in these ads, reinforced as the most common or stereotypical state of female sexual expression. In accordance with this perspective, the sexuality displayed within these gender dissonant advertisements does not seem to be a reflection of true desire on the part of the female model. Instead, it appears as a type of

packaging used to entice admiring looks from an idealized male population, appealing to a female audience looking to make themselves more attractive to the opposite sex. Consequently, only under particular circumstances are women to express overt sexuality in these advertisements, and those circumstances occur under the ever-vigilant masculine gaze, and adhere to patriarchal values.

While some advertisements are progressive in their celebration and support of feminine complexity, seeming to find satisfaction through the acknowledgement of multiplicity (with the goal being to reach a wide variety of women), other ads exploit feminine contradiction, utilizing dissonance in order to fuel consumption. Many of the ads featuring gender identity dissonance perpetuate gender stereotyping, likely reinforcing the need for compartmentalization and conformity on the part of consumers. The gender-based dichotomies present within these advertisements function in very problematic ways. These ads work to reinforce the social requirement to present one *or* another identity – parsing identities into either-or options that often lack authenticity and perpetuate the belief that identity adoption and management is a limited process that only allows for rigid choices to be made between simple pairings of opposites. Identities within these ads are presented in a manner that elides the diverse currents that exist *within* all identities (be it mother, librarian etc.), presenting identity as if it is one-dimensional and static. While a useful tool for an industry whose goal it is to encourage women to find and understand themselves through what and how they consume, gender identity dissonance

functions within advertising in a manner that ensures that false binaries are constructed between the multiple identities and roles that frame women's lives.

The limited range of identities that are depicted guarantees that women will perceive their roles, abilities, and actions narrowly, and will be encouraged to vigilantly police themselves in order to conform to those restricted, but social-sanctioned options. Perpetuating the false presumption that identities must be singular in temperament or goal – a dichotomous understanding of female gender identity that is constructed for social desirability, and not a psychological requirement – has weighty consequences. While it may be easier for society/patriarchy to manage femininity by endorsing a limited array of gender identities and positioning them in simple either-or/good-bad options, this manner of depicting gender identity narrows women's lives and undermines their agency.

Ads featuring gender identity dissonance not only propagate the standards of patriarchy, but also normalize whiteness and heteronormativity. While under certain circumstances a company may seek to attract minority consumers (i.e. Hennessy's appeal to wealthy African American men), the general advertising approach of gender identity dissonant advertising privileges whiteness. Racially diverse models are 'used'; models from many different racial backgrounds are presented sparingly in campaigns, as tokens reflecting a company's desire to present itself as sensitive to issues of racial diversity rather than pursuing an authentic agenda to incorporate diversity within its campaigns. In a similar vein, heterosexuality is reinforced and normalized over and over again (see, in particular, the advertising copy from De Beers' Right Hand Ring campaign).

Homosexuality between male models is never implied. When ads feature two men in Hennessy's Appropriately Complex campaign the models gaze away from each other, and are most often physically separated by the presence of a female model. However, that does not prevent the same campaign from utilizing a subtle lesbian subtext in order to attract male consumers – an appeal that once again reinforces heteronormative values by undermining authentic lesbian desire. Magazine advertising most often transmits a populous/popular sensibility, as a result, campaigns tend to reinforce troubling hegemonic ideologies pertaining to gender, race and sexuality, and, advertising featuring gender identity dissonance is no exception.

While dissonant media representations work to perpetuate patriarchal notions of womanhood, providing a rationale for repression and restricting feminine potential, it is also possible that these images present more liberating possibilities. Expanding upon Roland Marchand's (1985) observation that advertising provided an important space where information about 'delicate' or taboo social issues can be discussed<sup>6</sup>, it is reasonable to suggest that advertisers not only assist society by talking about issues deemed sensitive, but provide a forum for discussing issues that till represented in advertising were not prominently articulated within the mainstream. With the advertising industry's focus on being dialed in to social trends and psychological predispositions, along with their aesthetic reliance on iconography, symbolism, and metaphor as a

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<sup>6</sup> See Roland Marchand's (1985) illustration of how Kotex brand, by presenting advertising that discussed their product, provided anonymous advice to a female public that was in need of education in matters that were deemed too delicate to be discussed in any other public forum.



means for effective communication, print ads in particular may be able to circumvent some of the barriers to talking about taboo, or yet to be effectively articulated, issues in the mainstream. It takes time for language to be created so that society can effectively discuss new beliefs, ideas, and feelings, therefore, it is possible that imagery comes before language when presenting issues that have yet to find a place within mass social discourse. If this is true, then the visuals, titles, and tag lines associated with gender identity dissonance-themed advertising campaigns might function in an important way – by naturalizing, legitimizing, and shifting gender regimes these ads may assist in shifting society's feelings regarding women, and more specifically, the effective expression of female gender identity.

By the very fact that these ads so explicitly lay out the unreasonable social constructions that frame female gender identity they may possibly provide an important liberatory space for resistant readings and social critiques of the burdensome norms and untenable social expectations that frame idealized femininity. Mediated contradictions themselves function in highly ambivalent ways. It is media's role in producing, reproducing, and policing ambivalent feminine identities – their boundaries, intersections, and ruptures – that make mass forms of communication such a vital field of inquiry. The contradictions pertaining to relationship status which frame female representations of women in Hennessy's Appropriately Complex/Mix Accordingly, Bacardi's Bacardi by Night, and De Beers' Right Hand Ring advertising campaigns could result in important societal and individual consequences ranging from postfeminist backlash and

psychological anxiety to the politicization of women who are tired of being told that they must abdicate one prized identification for another, or suffer from dissonance. The hope is that identity dissonance-themed magazine advertisements not only reinforce but challenge dominant ideological presumptions and binary-based discourses and point to the real possibility of concrete changes in women's self-understanding, gender identity constructions, and ultimately, lived experiences.

## Chapter 5

### "Messy Like Life – Not Like TV": Quality Television, Audience Pleasure, and Ambiguity in *Sex and the City*

In a 2008 trailer promoting the theatrical release of *Sex and the City: The Movie*, the character of Miranda, while shopping for a Halloween costume, turns to Carrie and laments that there are “only two choices for women: witch and sexy kitten.” To which Carrie responds: “Oh, you just said a mouth-full sister!” This exchange, which acknowledges the limiting dichotomies that so often frame women’s lives, is characteristic of how the wildly popular HBO series *Sex and the City* explores the anxiety that exists around the management and enactment of contradictory representations of female gender identity. From 1998-2004 the series documented the struggles associated with achieving and managing antithetical identity constructions, and, specifically, focused on the tensions associated with a woman’s relationship status. I suggest that it is the narrative exploration of gender identity dissonance, or anxiety provoking contradictions between identities, that marks *Sex and the City* as a ‘quality’ televisual text, and, that it is this type of textual ambivalence in particular that is pleasurable and assists in the development of a sense of realism for fan.

Five years after the cast of the television series *Sex and the City* drank their last Cosmopolitan together the show’s impact upon the current pop culture landscape is robustly present. For the dedicated fan there are organized tours to

be taken of the New York City bars, coffee shops, and clothing stores featured in the series, and a copious variety of t-shirts, shot glasses, travel mugs, holiday ornaments and other random paraphernalia on which the *Sex and the City* logo and resonant snippets of dialogue are embossed. Devotees can still take quizzes to find out which character they are most like (“I’m a Carrie!”), read fan blogs, and watch an edited version of the series in continuous syndication on TBS. In anticipation of the summer 2008 movie release, the popular entertainment magazine *Entertainment Weekly* devoted a whole issue to the television series. With an opening weekend gross of just over \$57 million, and worldwide earnings of \$415 million (Box Office Mojo, April 1, 2009), *Sex and the City: The Movie*'s success stands as a testament to the continued enjoyment and value that the long running television series provides.

*Sex and the City* the series is a widely popular Emmy and Golden-Globe award-winning dramedy, which offers a worthwhile place for cultural investigation into the meanings and functions of mediated contradiction. With storylines dedicated to the examination of socially relevant situations that impact women's lives, from a multiplicity of feminine perspectives (Lotz, 2006), the television series presents a narrative that resonates for female fans, and seals its place in 20<sup>th</sup> century popular culture. In particular, by presenting varied and often ambivalent responses within its fictionalized main characters to their relationship status, *Sex and the City* is able to explicate how identity-based contradictions are not only mobilized in popular media texts in order to further prestige and general appeal but also how they can function as a key element of fans' pleasure.

*Sex and the City* is an episodic prime time soap opera which chronicles a family of friends. Four white, professional heterosexual women, in their mid-thirties to early-forties, living in New York City: Samantha Jones, the owner of a public relations firm, Miranda Hobbes an attorney, Charlotte York an art dealer, and the lead character, Carrie Bradshaw, a sex columnist for a major newspaper. For a commercial-free half-hour these four females identified and negotiated relationship-based conflicts – a central thematic preoccupation being the tension produced by the normative discourse of female self-progression from young single girl to mature married woman. Being single, a person not presently involved in a committed relationship, or coupled, implying the presence of a recurring sexual partner within or outside of a marriage contract, are relationship statuses with very different social and psychological expectations and requirements. As a result of exploring this feminine thematic *Sex and the City* is able to present an important textual space for examining the impact of antithetical identity requirements and their resulting anxieties embedded within American women and culture.

The characteristics that are assigned to being a single woman versus being in a couple are extremely different, in fact they are generally constructed as antithetical identities. For example, the single life is considered to be a time marked by freedom, experimentation, and loneliness while couplehood is presumed to be overflowing with obligations, conservative behavior, and loving relationships – thus, very different (stereotypical) expectations and pleasures are associated. This television series critically evaluates the cultural presumptions

that are associated with these statuses, at the same time re-establishing their value and prominence within society. Cindy Royal (2003), borrowing from Judith Butler, concludes that *Sex and the City* provides its audience with “a troubling of gender” (p. 18). By presenting its modern and heroic protagonists struggling to make the necessary concessions in order to embody idealized female identities, the series presents both a reinforcement and a critique of these very same identity-based social requirements.

My agenda is threefold: to explore how *Sex and the City* intentionally set out to cultivate narrative ambiguity or contradiction and its relationship to quality programming, to examine the textual presence of that ambiguity in the form of identity dissonance pertaining to relationship status, and, finally, using feedback from focus groups to investigate how contradiction, as a key feature of quality televisual texts, functions in aid of female fans’ viewing pleasure. This inquiry acknowledges the desirable identifications associated with being both single and in a relationship. However, it also recognizes that one identity must always be forsaken for the other, and that both positions express valued characteristics of the self. Consequently, I believe that it is the identification of identity dissonance pertaining to relationship status within the narrative which provides an important source of gratification for the young female viewers interviewed. Thus, *Sex and the City* fans enjoyed engagement with, and critique of, the way that identity is constructed and represented as binary.

By exploring how textual ambiguity in the form of identity dissonance is a key characteristic of quality televisual texts such as *Sex and the City*, I wish to

illuminate the relationship between contradiction and realism and their role in audience pleasure. Incorporating information gathered from industrial and textual analyses, I examine how female fans of *Sex and the City*, that I spoke to, associated one of their key pleasures in the text with a perceived realism in the feminine portrayals of Carrie, Samantha, Miranda and Charlotte; a realism centered in the ways in which female relationship statuses (being single or being coupled), and their associated struggles are narratively depicted. Specifically, I suggest that it was the presence of gender identity dissonance pertaining to relationship status within the narrative that proved to be an indicator of its authenticity, and a key source of viewing pleasure for young female fans. Thus, *Sex and the City* provides one more place where North American women's relationship to mediated forms of gender identity dissonance can be investigated.

### **Production Goals: Identity Dissonance and Quality TV Programming**

Michael Patrick King, executive producer, writer, and occasional director of *Sex and the City* suggests that he framed the lead character Carrie's relationship experiences to be "messy like life – not like TV" (Snierson, 2003, p. 41). Pointing out that Carrie's on-again off-again love affair with fiancé Aidan was manufactured in order to present a more truthful portrayal than would be found in a simple happily-ever-after romantic scenario, King acknowledges how he purposefully set out to construct a series that would stand above more traditional TV programming due to its heightened emotional tension. Michael Patrick King's statement encourages us to consider how the intentional insertion

of ambivalence into the *Sex and the City* narrative assisted in achieving his goal of constructing a show that could be deemed both realistic and a quality televisual text; a text which inspires serious fandom, aided by the presence of an ambivalence regarding relationship status that read as honest and truthful to not only the creators, but also the consumers of the show.

The presence of gender identity dissonance within a narrative is an important indicator of the text's status as quality programming. Which isn't to imply that all texts that deploy discourses featuring identity dissonance are quality, but that texts that are quality are most likely to feature narratives which actively explore identity-based contradictions<sup>1</sup>. While quality television programming as a concept is both problematic (Jaramillo, 2002) and elusive (Geraghty, 2003), it generally melds circumstance of production and industry, textual characteristics, and audience judgments. The notion of quality programming as a scholarly construct emerged in the mid 1970s and is historically connected to research on MTM programming published in 1984 by Jane Feuer and her colleagues. Given the fact that *Sex and the City* was pitched according to Carolyn Strauss, executive VP of original programming at HBO, by Darren Star to be "Mary Tyler Moore for the '90s, but with sex" (Snierson, 2003, p. 35), it would seem that from the moment of its conception the series worked very hard to establish itself within the framework of quality. The intimate and

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Bambi Haggins (May, 2006. Paper presented at the International Conference on Feminism and Television, Video, Audio and New Media: *Console-ing Passions*, Milwaukee, WI) argues that moral relativism, a different identity-based conflict, is a key narrative feature of another quality televisual experience from HBO, that being *The Sopranos*.



frank conversations about relationships and sexuality articulated by the all female ensemble, the trend setting fashions, nudity, and high production values indicated that in no way was this series to be mistaken for 'regular' television.

This investigation focuses on two important characteristics of quality programming: ambivalence and realism. Textual realism is more than just an aesthetic aim, a question of verisimilitude, or a byproduct of production. Instead, it can be regarded, using John Ellis's term, as an 'ethical category', as "the more a representation is deemed to be realistic, the greater its access to the truth of the situation" (Ellis, 2000, p. 13). I suggest that the perception of truth is directly linked to the presence of ambivalence – diversity and contradiction. While acknowledging that there is always an inherent falsity built into fictionalization, this research is interested in exploring what Jane Feuer recognizes as the "roundness" of characterization, brought about by the presence of a multiplicity of traits that ensures that a simple, stereotypical, or unrealistic depiction is avoided (Feuer, 1984, p. 36). While Bonnie Dow rightly argues that "popular texts gain appeal from exploiting and reworking cultural contradictions" (1996, p. 139), popular media content varies drastically when it comes to the degree of narrative irresolution or types of contradictions present. Thus, what is notable about *Sex and the City*, is the *purposeful* agenda to include gendered ambiguity and narrative nuance in aid of realism within the text, and the subsequent acknowledgment of that ambiguity and realism as important to fans.

In an interview for the U.S. Comedy Arts Festival Seminar in 2004, Michael Patrick King, asks star and co-executive producer Sarah Jessica Parker,

“What makes writing bad?” Her response is extremely telling, noting that it occurs “when people aren’t made complicated, when things are easy”. She then goes on to suggest that good writing, in alliance with Feuer’s assessment of quality programming, must be “nuanced.” When asked her opinion on why Carrie is the hardest character for the writers to put down on paper she responds:

With the other three women they are intentionally archetypes, and I think that [what] your stellar writing staff and yourself have worked so hard to do is make sure you keep them archetypes, but you make them more and more deep and complicated and really flesh them out and still they are really identifiable to the audience. And I think that it is not easier, but there is an understanding. I think that Carrie is, you know, the everyman which also allows for a lot of freedom – in clothing, in hair, in dress, and makeup – it is like your mother setting you free. It is daunting, you know, how to make choices. And I was always glad for that...that she was hard.

(USCAF Writers Panel Discussion, March, 2004)

Carrie’s narrative presence as ‘every woman’ ensures that she represents an amalgam of the other opposing feminine archetypes – the ultra feminine and traditional Charlotte who pines away for the perfect husband, the commitment phobic Samantha who is driven by her sexual desires *and* the career-centric Miranda who fears that no man who desires her will ever make a desirable partner. In interview after interview actors, writers, and producers of *Sex and the City* continually point to how the characters are ‘based in truth’, and are ‘truthful’, as a key explanation for the show’s credibility and popularity. Thus, a connection is repeatedly being made within the narrative and by those in charge of crafting the series, between authenticity, reality, and gender identity-based contradictions or ambivalence.

A 2003 ad campaign for the DVD and video collection for season five of *Sex and the City* reflects a clear desire to acknowledge, cultivate, and market the presence of gender identity dissonance pertaining to relationship status. The advertisement in Figure 5.1 features a bridge, American flag clearly waving, overlooking Manhattan at night. Iconic, patriotic, attractive, and moody, the black and white imagery of New York city works to remind the fan of the importance of the fifth character in *Sex and the City*, that being the city itself. The advertising copy and message are clear – there is a broad line down the middle of the pedestrian bridge, with “Singles” in bold print on one side, and “Couples” on the other; thus, when it comes to female relationship status, singlehood and couplehood are on opposite sides of the street. This association is once again affirmed in another ad from the same campaign featuring a New York subway stop (see Figure 5.2). However, the second advertisement also works to strengthen the common perception that the next logical step after securing a partner is for a woman to procreate. Thus, this ad helps to reinforce the correspondence between couplehood and parenthood – an association echoed by the directional sign pointing out that those who organize “play dates” for their children and are partnered (or, in more derogatory terms, “tied down”) are to move to the right side of the subway platform, in contrast to the singletons who are to move to the left, have “play mates,” and spend their time “hooking up.” Again we see an advertisement establishing that single women and coupled women are traveling in literally the opposite direction from each other. These images are reflective of both the *Sex and the City* narrative, and the producers’

Figure 5.1:

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**SINGLES** **COUPLES**

THE COMPLETE FIFTH SEASON  
**Sex and the City**

**HBO VIDEO** Sex and the City® The Complete 5<sup>th</sup> Season on DVD and Video 12-30-03

Don't miss the final 8 episodes of SEX AND THE CITY.® Premieres Sunday, January 4, 9pm/8c.

Available at **amazon.com**

Figure 5.2:

← 5 →  
Play Mates  
Hooking Up T Play Dates  
H Tied Down

© 2003 Home Box Office, Inc. All rights reserved. HBO® and Sex and the City® are service marks of Home Box Office, Inc.

**HBO**  
VIDEO

**Sex and the City®** The Complete 5<sup>th</sup> Season now on DVD and Video

Don't miss the final 8 episodes of **SEX AND THE CITY®** Premieres Sunday, January 4, 9pm/8c.

Available at **amazon.com**

intentions to construct a text that is both relevant and realistic to their fans – a televisual text which speaks to/incorporates the dichotomous gender identity-based contradictions that frame women's lives.

### ***Sex and the City* and Identity Dissonance: If only we could be Single and Coupled**

I was drawn to an examination of *Sex and the City* due to my own ambivalent response to watching the show. While I have always been a strong fan of the series, I was interested in investigating why it was that some scenes or episodes left me feeling wistful for my single days, while after viewing others I walked away thankful and almost relieved that I was partnered. What led me to investigate this topic were my own pleasures as a fan and conflicted feelings regarding my relationship status upon viewing the text. I wanted to learn more about other fans' reactions, specifically their feelings regarding how the narrative depicted women's relationships, and whether they identified contradiction as an important and attractive theme within the narrative.

In order to better explore this concern an in-depth textual examination of two episodes was conducted: Season one, episode three's 'Bay of Married Pigs' and 'I Love a Charade' the finale from season five. These episodes were chosen due to their very different orientations towards relationships status.

In Bay of Married Pigs Carrie writes about the "cold war" between married people and singles. The episode's narrative builds upon Carrie's experience with a couple in the Hamptons which leads her to consider why married people

perceive single women to be a threat. All four ladies find themselves subject to experiences that lead them to ponder the punitive aspects of their single existences, which prompts them to recognize their ultimate pleasure in their status as single women. In contrast, *I Love a Charade*, the finale of the fifth season, presents a particularly positive account of being coupled. This episode finds the protagonists spending the majority of their time contemplating, and struggling to find, the most appropriate mate, while attending the wedding of a friend.

While I suggest that each of these episodes ultimately valorizes a different relationship status, generally speaking all *Sex and the City* episodes are marked by a continuing narrative struggle giving voice to, and supporting, both single and coupled identities. Executive producer, writer, and director Michael Patrick King notes that “we know that we have a good show when we have very different counterpoints that play against each other” [DVD commentary, Season 5, episode 1]. And, Belinda A. Stillion Southard’s (2008) scholarly analysis of feminism and *Sex and the City* illuminates how feminine contradiction, and the internal struggle to negotiate dependence/coupledness versus independence/singlehood works as a central theme recurring throughout the popular text. Thus, even though some episodes do seem to present an agenda that supports single *or* coupled identity, it is the nuanced ambiguity and dissonance displayed within each episode that ultimately characterizes the way that relationship status is explored narratively.

In order to build an argument regarding the ambivalent nature of the series, a closer analysis of the contradictory depiction of relationship status is necessary. In the course of each episode the four female characters proceed to explore a dilemma central to American women's daily lives. Presented in the form of a question posed by Carrie in her role as a newspaper columnist committed to exploring sex in New York city, the query is used to shape the narrative, fleshing out not only the central characters' varied responses, but society's approach to understanding complex, anxiety provoking, female-centric issues.

In Bay of Married Pigs, Carrie types into her laptop: "Is there a secret cold war between marrieds and singles?" (Star & Holofcener, 1998) The episode begins with Carrie visiting a married couple's weekend home in the Hamptons, where she finds herself face-to-face with the husband who is wearing nothing but a t-shirt. When the wife, her friend, is casually informed of her husband's public nudity, Carrie is quickly rushed out the door. Carrie returns to New York where over lunch, she sits down with her friends to discuss how married people look at a single woman like she is a:

Carrie: "Looser!"

Miranda: "Leper!"

Samantha: "Whore!" (Star & Holofcener, 1998)

Singlehood is presented as a personal threat to coupled women and heterosexual union, a point illuminated later on in the episode when the previously concerned wife is warmly receptive to Carrie after finding out that she



is now dating and thus no longer to be regarded as competition for her husband or a danger to her marriage.

This episode provides a distinctly negative depiction of coupled life. Couples are most often presented as hostile towards the four female friends – regarding them, and their single status as dangerous, pitiable, or, in desperate need of being changed. However, the people with partners are the ones shown in a particularly poor light, cast as disillusioned, petty, haggard, miserable, limited in experience, and narrow-minded. For example, as a husband with glazed-over eyes looks off into the distance, his wife shrilly asserts that:

I love my single friends, but now that I'm married I don't see them as much as I used to. It's too painful. They remind me of how desperate I used to be...It's all about what you want out of life. Some people like me choose to grow up, face reality, and get married. And others choose to, what? Live an empty haunted life of stunted adolescence. (Star & Holofcener, 1998)

This pronouncement epitomizes the generally negative depiction of married or partnered people, and their poor opinion of singles within this episode. As Miranda observes: "When someone gets married all bets are off, they become married and we become the enemy" (Star & Holofcener, 1998).

Over the course of *Bay of Married Pigs* all four main characters have experiences where in they feel punished, or at a disadvantage due their position as single women. For example, Miranda's law firm struggles to come to terms with her single status, leading her to scornfully conclude that not being in a relationship has hampered her career. And Samantha, perceived as an adulterous vixen, finds herself shunned at a house-party surrounded by previous

sex partners and their overtly insecure and hostile wives. By the end of the episode all four protagonists espouse the pleasures of singlehood. Thus, Charlotte “who treated marriage like a sorority that she was desperately hoping to pledge,” (Star & Holofcener, 1998) dismisses a man who is interested in making a serious commitment because he picks the wrong china pattern, and, Carrie concludes that she may not be the “marrying kind.” (Star & Holofcener, 1998) The overall slant of this episode is towards a preference for oneself or platonic friends’ company over being with a sexual partner. Being in a relationship is equated to embracing or performing a false-self.

In contrast, during *I Love a Charade*, the four women attend the wedding of Carrie’s homosexual male friend Bobby Fine to a woman, Bitsy Von Muffling. The marriage is presented as one of fond convenience, a sensible answer to growing old alone. This episode, while containing moments where singlehood is prized, ultimately idealizes and supports the pleasures associated with having a partner in one’s life. The plot details how Miranda who swore she wanted to be a single parent, once again has sex with Steve, the father of her child, and feels conflicted about her desires for Steve in her life as father and lover. Charlotte finds that she has developed serious feelings for her new ‘just sex’ partner, Harry, whom she had previously regarded as wholly inappropriate. Samantha, still hurting from her breakup with the cheating Richard, responds poorly to young female ‘competition’ for her previous lover. And, just when Carrie begins to contemplate settling for a so-so relationship, a new enticing possibility appears in Berger who tells Carrie that he would like to go on a date with her, once again

reaffirming her commitment to the ideal of romantic love. The central subject matter of this episode is the value/pleasure associated with having a partner and the idealization of 'true,' or what Carrie calls "zsa-zsa-zsu" love.

In *I Love a Charade* Carrie contemplates whether it is appropriate to 'settle,' writing: "when it comes to saying 'I do', is a relationship a relationship without the zsa-zsa-zsu?" (Chupack, King & Engler, 2002). The central dilemma revolves around the possibility of partnering with someone who does not live up to an idealized or most desired notion of love. Samantha required fidelity from Richard, a quality that she herself has often resisted, and was hurt when he ended up betraying her. Uncharacteristically, Samantha is shown to be visibly shaken by the loss of her long-term lover. Time and again the dominant narrative thrust of this episode supports the drive towards being coupled – whether for comfort (as in the case of the gay Bobby Fine marrying Bitsy Von Muffling) or for overwhelming love (the four main character's pursuit of zsa-zsa-zsu). Conspicuously missing from a television series that is so clearly dedicated to providing diverse opinions and options, is a meaningful discussion in this episode of the validity of choosing to stay single/alone rather than enter into a relationship based upon significant compromise. The overarching message is that *any* partner, is better than *no* partner. Being single is regarded as a reason for regret in the aptly titled "I Love a Charade". The underlying message: hope and dream for a love connection, but, better a charade of a relationship, than no relationship at all. Consequently, the two episodes discussed champion very

different relationship choices and present extremely antithetical perspectives about these choices.

Contradictory positions when it comes to relationship status are once again inscribed in these episodes through the crafting of very different final scenes. Bay of Married Pigs ends on a high-note with all four single friends meeting to catch a movie. While they laugh and embrace Aretha Franklin sings “R.E.S.P.E.C.T.” in the background, and Carrie ponders how

maybe the fight between marrieds and singles is like the war in Northern Ireland. We are all basically the same, but somehow we wound up on different sides. Sure, it would be great to have that one special person to walk home with, but sometimes, there is nothing better than meeting your single girlfriends for a night at the movies. (Star & Holofcener, 1998)

While the voiceover acknowledges that marrieds and singles are basically the same, the scene as a whole works to point out how dissimilar (at ‘war’ even) these two positions can be. The display of hugs and happiness by the four women standing outside the movie theater ensures that the message is very clear, that sometimes being single is the best thing – presenting an empowering, and in many ways radical, conception of what singlehood can mean for women in their 30s and 40s. The four friends provide each other with companionship that speaks of a pleasurable and conscious choice, rather than a better-than-nothing default position. And, while Carrie does acknowledge her desire to have a partner with whom she can “walk home with”, the scene and episode as a whole ultimately idealizes and affirms singlehood.

In contrast, *I Love a Charade* ends with all the girls dancing to the far more wistful melody “Is that all there is?” as Carrie ruminates:

when it comes to relationships, maybe we are all in glass houses and shouldn't throw stones. Because you can never really know. Some people are settling down, some people are settling, and some people refuse to settle for anything less than butterflies. (Chupack, King & Engler, 2002)

The overarching message in the conclusion of this episode is that for happiness to be fully achieved, a relationship is necessary. According to Michael Patrick King (DVD commentary, Season 5, Episode 8), season Five was a season without men, thus, he purposefully set out to craft the finale with the promise of relationships to be developed in the following season. King ensured that the closing scene of *I Love a Charade* resonated by having Carrie wear her signature ‘Carrie’ nameplate necklace, a prop used to signify to audiences that “she has come back to herself” (DVD commentary, Season 5, episode 8). And, in this episode, coming back to herself coincides with the beginning of another new romantic tryst for Carrie with the butterflies-in-the-stomach inducing Berger. *I Love a Charade* ends with all the girls dancing with their male partners at the wedding – both literally and figuratively. While Carrie dances with Berger, and Charlotte with Harry, Miranda (with baby Brady in hand) and Samantha dance together after establishing that their hearts and minds are elsewhere, as they pine for their absent male companions. The late summer evening with its soft pastel lighting, gentle music, copious flowers, and dreamy dance sequence all work to elicit the feeling that this scene is the epitome of romance. The concluding image in this episode features the swirling wedding festivities

twinkling away in the background as a cartoon butterfly lands on a lilac bush – the final touch to a very modern fairytale.

While there is conflicting identification with, and valuing of, relationship statuses between these episodes of *Sex and the City*, tension does exist within these episodes. Thus, even though the narrative theme for I Love a Charade reaffirms the position of romantic partnership, the cynical reaction of the four friends towards Bobby's choice to 'settle'/marry (thus, forgo his sexuality as a gay man), is sharply critical – illustrated by his continual presence as a target of ongoing jokes regarding his presumed lack of sexual attraction toward Bitsy, his soon-to-be wife. And, despite the fact that Bay of Married Pigs centers around the likelihood that "married people are the enemy" (Star & Holofcener, 1998), Carrie goes out to lunch with her 'favorite couple' and expresses envy at their closeness, implying that what holds her back from being them is not yet meeting the right partner to sweep her off her feet and out of her single status. Therefore, what characterizes these particular *Sex and the City* episodes, and the series as a whole, is the ambiguity and contradiction woven throughout.

Although Carrie's friends are rooted in stereotyped caricatures (Samantha the promiscuous, Charlotte the idealist, and Miranda the cynic), in fact, all four female protagonists do provide well rounded and nuanced representations of women. *Sex and the City's* depiction of highly "complicated" (Kim, 2001, p. 328) feelings and behavior on the part of the four main characters may be an important pleasure associated with viewing and could lend what is perceived to be an authentic female voice to the series. *Sex and the City* exemplifies what

theorists such as bell hooks (1992) and Susan Bordo (2003) have already identified, that gender representations are complex, characterized by paradox, and that “American women have been surrounded by contradictory expectations since at least the nineteenth century” (Douglas, 1994, p. 14). Compromises must be made and pleasures relinquished in order to meet antithetical demands associated with gender identity constructions. The acknowledgement and presence of these ‘complications’, the fact that this tension between different identities/identity-demands is such a central theme, is presumed vital to the popularity of this premium cable television series.

In the episode All That Glitters from Season 4, Carrie asks: “to be in a couple, do you have to put your single self on a shelf?” later on in an attempt to find a way for “her single self and her coupled self to coexist” she puts her engagement ring on a chain around her neck. (Chupack & McDougall, 2003)

There are significantly different expectations and requirements associated with various female identities (the wife, the mother, the girlfriend, the single girl etc.) and this reality is reflected in the depiction of psychological discord within the characters of *Sex in the City*. “The paradox of ‘otherness’ is that although the Other is defined as deviant, marginal, the nonself or nonsame, it is absolutely necessary to the existence of the self or same; it is constitutive of Self” (Schweitzer, 1991, p. 11). False dichotomies are set up when society ascribes certain personality characteristics to particular identity positions, narrowing the scope of gender possibilities. What this dichotomizing process does is almost guarantee that anxiety will be experienced by individuals feeling social pressure

to abdicate valued characteristics in order to adopt other (antithetically-positioned) identities. For example, in *I Love a Charade*, Miranda is depicted as extremely fearful of losing her independence as a result of entering into a monogamous relationship with Steve – her character’s underlying assumption is that women with partners can not, under any circumstance, maintain autonomy; that the single woman forfeits her individuality at the steps of the heterosexual marriage/relationship altar. This tension is inherent to numerous identity constructions and gender requirements. And, while *Sex and the City* can be looked upon favorably because as scholar Cindy Royal notes, it “question[s] the traditional rules of society regarding relationships” (2003, p. 19), like all popular texts, it also upholds these very same contradictory and binding traditions.

It is the opportunity to explore what it means to be attracted to, and embody, oppositional identities that is provided by quality televisual texts such as *Sex and the City*.

Identification exists in a mutually exclusive binary matrix conditioned by the cultural necessity of occupying one position to the exclusion of the other. But in fantasy, a variety of positions can be entertained even though they may not constitute culturally intelligible possibilities. (Butler, 1990, p. 333)

Carrie and her friends provide an important space for fantasy, and indeed are themselves fantastic in their ability to embody American women’s struggle with gender identity. And while *Sex and the City* ultimately reinforces the relationship between capitalist consumption and personal independence, and positions power as held by those ‘fortunate’ to be the recipient of the masculine gaze (Brunnemer, 2003), the text also provides an important place for resistance. By



supplying its audience with an account of the ways women can experience and manage antithetical identity requirements, *Sex and the City* can be regarded as assisting women to progressively negotiate and possibly resist binary-based gender discourses.

A textual analysis of the entire HBO series and a close reading of two episodes reveals an important narrative friction between single and relationship-based identities. In a society that constructs singlehood as the place where women can be independent, adventurous, sexually-fulfilled and desirable and women in couples, in particular when married, as taken care of, selfless, personally-fulfilled, and loved. Or, on the flipside, singlehood as a marker of a female who is unlovable, home alone, incomplete and self-absorbed and the married woman as devoid of sexuality, a nag, boring and bored – how can women not yearn for and attempt to enact both of these antithetical positions at the same time? While it can be argued that *Sex and the City's* overarching conclusion is that the true path to female enlightenment can only be found by transitioning from single girl to married woman, it is significant to note that this television series also provides an important space where this presumed cultural right of passage is both questioned and struggled over.

### **Gender Identity Dissonance Pertaining to Relationship Status and Fan Pleasure**

In addition to discursive analysis of two episodes, the series, popular press, and DVD commentary, two focus groups were conducted. The eight women were young female fans enrolled in a large Midwestern university in their

late-teens to early twenties. The primarily Caucasian respondents were all upper middle class heterosexuals, and divided equally between being single and in established relationships at the time of the group discussion<sup>2</sup>. In addition to participating in a focus group, the women also completed an open ended questionnaire that explored their opinions regarding the series as a whole, and more specifically the lead character Carrie's approach to relationships.<sup>3</sup> At the time of their participation each group collectively viewed *Bay of Married Pigs* and *I Love a Charade*, the two *Sex and the City* episodes that received a detailed textual analysis<sup>4</sup>.

There was a general theme of choice that emerged from participants' writing and conversations. These women were excited to discuss how the *Sex and the City* narrative explored the diverse options now available for women – particularly around when/if to get married or stay single, female sexual assertiveness, the option to be content with friends instead of constantly searching for a partner, and, the desire to pursue a career rather than finding a husband and starting a family. The focus group participants were aware of the ambivalent representation of single and coupled life within the *Sex and the City* narrative, and the four female protagonists more specifically. Their discussions

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<sup>2</sup> The two focus groups, comprised of seven Caucasian and one Asian participant, were conducted in 2003, before the series finale.

<sup>3</sup> The members of the focus group were asked to fill out open-ended questionnaires because McGuire (1999) found that his subjects appeared to be more "introspectively self-focused" (p. 260) in their writing in comparison to verbal responses when interviewed.

<sup>4</sup> In addition, after the series finale one in-depth interview was conducted with a married, middle class, Caucasian, female fan in her mid 30s.

revealed an enjoyment in exploring the relationship-based identity dissonance within the text, and astute recognition of the difficulties associated with management of relationship-based identities and/or qualities, specifically as women age. Ultimately, it was the focus on feminine choice and the complicated nature of the identities on option that helped them to feel that the text was realistic in its portrayal of women's lives.

Participants identified that the narrative is very contradictory when it comes to endorsing a relationship status, and, that both singlehood and couplehood are held up for scrutiny. According to one young fan, Allison, the HBO series

really gives out conflicting views. Singles can be happy, and live exciting but fulfilling lives, but the carefree life of being unattached isn't necessarily the escape it's often depicted as. All these women are looking for someone to marry, but are expressing it through their very single behavior.

The participants recognized that while at points the narrative works to confirm and legitimate the value of being single or married, at other times it can be regarded as undermining the agency and happiness previously ascribed to each of these gender identities. Mandy observes that Carrie "does enjoy being single." However she also notes that while "on the surface she is content with the way she is at this time in her life. Deep down inside I have a feeling that she longs for a meaningful relationship." Mandy's position is corroborated by Libby who points out:

When I was watching it, it was more like 'oh its so good to see them, like, you know, with these possibilities.' Because I feel like, that as much as the show is about like, being single and all,

everything that goes on, the ultimate thing is to end up with someone. Like I think that is what, you know, they are building up to.

What these responses show is that the young female fans were aware of the ambivalent treatment of relationship status within the *Sex and the City*'s narrative.

The women's awareness of the conflicted nature of the *Sex and the City* text, corresponds with their recognition of its connection to actual real life experience. For example, Lynn when asked to describe what she liked about *Sex and the City* says that it "shows a woman's perspective on relationships and life in general." As Janice astutely observes: "being single is [both] accepted and not in our culture. [*Sex and the City*] shows the ups and downs about it". It is the ability for the series' narrative to reflect life as viewers themselves experience it, specifically the representations pertaining to relationship status, that enhances textual realism and pleasure for the fans interviewed.

Participants continually mentioned how realistic the text was – drawing examples from clothes, language, and behavior, but especially the emotional struggles that the four protagonists encountered. Despite significant differences in age and circumstance, there was still a forceful claim to identification and recognition. Allison reveals that

even if they are living in New York and it is a completely different, like, atmosphere. A lot of stuff actually does apply, regardless of what your own situation is. I really like how 'Oh my god that has happened to me.' That's kinda weird.

The women explained that watching Carrie, Miranda, Samantha, and Charlotte struggle to negotiate the pitfalls associated with single and coupled life helped them to feel better about their own relationship-based experiences, as it provided “something they could relate to.” *Sex and the City* functions in accordance with John Ellis’s (2000) notion that televisual texts allow audiences to ‘work through’ issues within a ‘safe space’ – and that part of the show’s pleasure and realism for fans resided in the narrative’s ability to recognize the presence, and attend to the consequences of gender identity dissonance around relationship status.

The fans interviewed repeatedly linked their enjoyment of *Sex and the City* to its personal relevance. Once again Allison shares how she

liked [the show] a lot just because the writing is clever. It’s a really good show. It’s a good show. But then like afterwards, you watch it and you go like – oh my God that really really applies to my situation.

This identification is critical to Allison’s enjoyment, as she recounts how after breaking up with her boyfriend she began to fervently download and watch the series.

It was interesting that it kind of paralleled, and I ended up watching that a lot, along with listening to a lot of Mariah Carey (group laughter). It applied more, I guess, and so it made me feel better, just because it made me happier like in quotation marks, but like, just because it was kind of the same situation, something I could relate to.

*Sex and the City* is able to pleurably reflect viewers experience as they negotiate feminine experiences, especially in relation to normative gender discourses pertaining to relationships. Ultimately, “an ability to see ourselves in these characters works not simply to confirm our sense of self but to question the

costs as well as the benefits of living in a postfeminist consumer culture.”  
(Arthurs, 2003, p. 95).

While the women in the focus groups continually identify how they saw themselves within the relationship struggles found in the text, they also wisely acknowledge that they were younger than the four main characters, and subject to distinctly different circumstances. Jenny reveals that *Sex and the City* shows her the possibility of growing old without a partner. She says she feels

comfortable with being single just because of how they end, and how they can just have all these things and they are single and they are happy, and you know, I mean, occasionally they are upset if they are in relationships and they are trying to get out, and, or, they are really happy in their relationships, and like Charlotte she's always trying to get married or something. But for the most part they are single and they are happy and it gives me hope that if I'm single when I'm 35 I can still be happy...It's a nice thought that I could still be happy and not like, just wish that I was married all the time.

The *Sex and the City* narrative is able to stand as an exemplar, providing young women with a new path that does not follow the traditional and normative fairytale associated with growing old as a woman. Instead, presenting an imagined life filled with love and relationship not solely provided by a romantic partner. It was their psychological experiences – in particular Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda's struggles over identity management and expression – that struck these young fans as similar. Like the emotional recognition that Len Ang spoke of in *Watching Dallas* (1982), *Sex and the City* fans' identify and find pleasure in the emotional turmoil that these characters experience and express. As a result of the presence of this ambiguity (and more specifically, gender

identity dissonance), this television series works not only to undermine the pejorative cultural presumptions associated with being single, at the same time as re-establishing the social requirement of couplehood and marriage, but, also functions in a manner that allows the anxieties associated with negotiating contradictory identities to be expressed in both humorous and powerfully resonant ways.

The presentation of a complicated, conflicted, and presumed to be authentic representation/discussion, of female gender identity was spoken of as both admirable and satisfying. This was, for them, the mark of the show's relatability. These fans recognized the ambivalence within the *Sex and the City* narrative, identifying it as a text which valorized *both* single and coupled life. When asked whether the four protagonists are happier when single or when coupled, Libby replied, "they are happier like in a different way, in both situations." Notably, an important pleasure to be derived from viewing was the exploration of an honest and realistic depiction of the identity-based ambivalences that mark fan's lives, and that watching the characters struggle to manage the anxieties associated with expressing contradictory aspects of self lent realism to the experience. Like Janice who observed that "I think [the show] sends a lot of messages – they're not black and white," almost all of the women spoken to concluded that Carrie was happy when both single *and* in a steady relationship, and, that this was one of the central problems explored in the series. Janice again suggested that for Carrie, the attraction of her main love, Mr. Big, was that while he was her partner and took care of her he "still gives her enough

space to lead life as a single woman.” A very interesting observation, and one which illustrates an important tension running through the series – specifically how women struggle to not only achieve identities, but also sometimes, to retain competing identities and their associated, and desirable characteristics. Carrie can not be Carrie without her independence, an independence that is directly related to her status as a single woman, but neither is she happy without a relationship. How women negotiate and/or resolve the resulting tension or dissonance that occurs from managing contradictory identities is a central theme of the narrative.

A viewer’s relationship to mediated texts is intimately tied to his or her sense of identity, or self-in-context, and, the discovery of aspects of one’s self in the outside universe is both important for psychological development (i.e. exploring the range of consequences to possible behaviors) and a key source of gratification.

Pierre Bourdieu has explained that popular pleasure is characterized by an immediate emotional or sensual involvement in the object of pleasure. What matters is the possibility of identifying oneself with it in some way or other, to integrate it into everyday life. In other words, popular pleasure is first and foremost a pleasure of recognition. (Ang, 1982, p. 20)

While this project identifies the presence of identity dissonance within the televisual text of *Sex and the City*, it also wishes to deepen its argument by suggesting that not only are fans acquainted with the identity-based contradictions that are located in the narrative, but also find pleasure in exploring those tensions. Female fans that were interviewed were able to recognize,



interrogate, and negotiate a central identity-conflict located within the television text, their own selves, and American culture – this being the desire to embody *simultaneously* the traits/identities associated with being both single and in a relationship. Thus, this research illuminates how the presence of gender identity dissonance within the narrative proved to be an indicator of its authenticity, and was an important contributor to the pleasure experienced by young female fans.

### **Exposing Contradictions: Interpretations of Quality Television, Realism, and Audience Pleasure**

Like Stuart Hall, I find the multiple interpretations and contradictions that mark mediated representations, the social condition, and personal identity most compelling. George Lipsitz (1990), invoking Hall, identifies how the media “lead to a disclosure of contradictions” (p. 69). This exposure performs two highly contradictory functions: to spotlight social incongruity at the same time as continuing to perpetuate and reaffirm the very same social disparities.

As Jane Feuer outlines in her analysis of the production company MTM, ‘quality’ tv is marked by the presence of multiple storylines, dramedy, empathic audience responses, social relevancy, self-reflexivity and ambiguity – the tensions constructed by moral relativism and liberalism that are both present within *Sex and the City* set the scene for a more sophisticated examination of women’s relationship to ‘relationships’. I observe that ‘quality’ televisual texts are not just marked by the presence of contradiction, but, more specifically, at points, by anxiety provoking contradictions between identities – thus suggesting that it is

very possible to regard identity dissonance as a key characteristic of quality television.

Responses to the series' finale help to illuminate fan's desires for narrative ambivalence and its relationship to notions of quality. While Michael Patrick King stated that the series finale was "not going to end with a four wedding ceremony in Central Park. I would shoot myself. And single women would find us and kill us" (Snierson, 2003, p. 41), in the end, Carrie, Samantha, Miranda, and Charlotte each experience their storybook ending. Samantha who was notoriously promiscuous overcomes cancer and embraces a relationship with her young stud Smith. Miranda embraces family, marries Steve, and moves his ailing mother and their baby Brady to a house in Brooklyn. Charlotte converts to Judaism, marries her opposite Harry and fulfills her dreams of motherhood with the adoption of a daughter. And Carrie, in the end reunites with Big, who "in the grandest of romantic gestures, jetted to Paris to get Carrie, bringing her back to him, back to New York, and, most importantly, back to herself" (Sohn, 2002, p. 169).

In a show about single women, it is notable that all four protagonists wind up partnered. Unsurprisingly, many fans were disappointed. One *Entertainment Weekly* critic "seethed" about the ending, and felt that it betrayed the characters and the theme of "men-ain't-everything" (Flynn, December 2004). A participant in this study, Cora, remarked, "it turned out to be a tv show. It had a tv show ending." This observation, demonstrates the hope, the belief, that *Sex and the City*, for some of its fans, offered more than just a 'tv show' – it provided them

with a feeling that they were encountering a space that was more realistic and personally meaningful. And, it was the contradiction, the messiness identified by Michael Patrick King, that was an important factor contributing to their enjoyment of the show. Cora's mention of the loss of pleasure that occurred as the seasons progressed suggests that with the rise of *Sex and the City* into mainstream consciousness, with its popularity, came an accompanying decrease in ambiguity. That, in particular, there occurred a reaffirmation of the hegemonic norm of coupled heterosexual womanhood.

A show that presents not only 'friends as family', but at numerous times, 'friends as partners,' would in fact present a significant threat to heterosexual norms and identity – a threat that would ultimately need to be narratively subsumed or incorporated. The continued input of Sarah Jessica Parker, her rise to executive producer, and her more traditionally modest take on feminine representation<sup>5</sup> may have resulted in a less transgressive (and thus, conflicted) narrative when it came to relationship status and sexuality<sup>6</sup>. It is also possible that the series finale represents an essential desire on the part of all individuals (even those who enjoy their single lives) to find love and forge commitment with one special sexual partner. Regardless of why the shift away from ambiguity occurred, it did have an impact on many fans' pleasure.

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<sup>5</sup> Darren Star describes Sarah Jessica Parker as far more "ladylike" than Carrie, and details how she had difficulty embracing the discrepancies between herself and her character, ultimately placing boundaries on what she would say and do under the guise of Carrie (Ginsberg, 2003, p. 158).

<sup>6</sup> Many thanks to Professor Bambi Haggins for encouraging me to consider the effect of Sarah Jessica Parker's position as producer on the text.

Indeed, the focus group fans involved in this project felt that the series changed over time, towards an overall relationship-oriented valence. That greater attention was given to Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda's pursuit of permanent partnerships, and that there was a noticeable withdrawal from the friendship circle that was so tight and intimate at the beginning of the series. Is this the marker of personal growth and adulthood that those who produced *Sex and the City* were looking for?

Dichotomous, either/or, self versus other presentations of identity are a social construct – while binaries may be rooted in the manner in which individuals personally develop and manage identity, the types of binaries that exist (e.g. Madonna-Whore, Masculine-Feminine, Single-Coupled) are the result of (gender-based) ideologies that permeate our society. These binary conceptions of identity are exceedingly powerful, and present women with limited means by which to regard self and society. Televisual representations are no exception. However, certain shows, and this project argues that *Sex and the City* is one, have been able to present and explore this tension – questioning the presumptions that underlie antithetical identity requirements and the resulting anxieties that occur for women when navigating a society that encourages identity loss and trade-offs with every life-decision. *Sex and the City* presented an important space for female fans, a space where heteronormative relationship-based tensions could be humorously engaged and anxieties explored in a complex and meaningful manner.

Fans of *Sex and the City* enjoy identifying with the identity-based struggles contained within the series' narrative. The fact that the contradictions around single versus coupled female gender identity are explored within the text is important; as the ambivalence seems to function to allow space to interrogate the hegemonic norm of coupled heterosexual womanhood for the young female fans interviewed. Thus, *Sex and the City*, by presenting a televisual text marked so overtly by contradiction, offers up an opportunity to undermine some of the legitimating binary-based presumptions surrounding relationship status. Michael Patrick King, suggests that he framed Carrie's relationship experiences to be "messy like life – not like TV." Thus, the producers purposefully set out to construct a televisual text that would stand above more traditional TV programming due to its heightened emotional tension. The tension that Michael Patrick King is so interested in exploring, the emotional relevance that he so proudly attributes *Sex and the City's* popularity to, is associated with the show's eagerness to explore how relationship-based identities are lost and found, discarded and embraced.

It seems that we are currently witnessing a historical trend towards a new awareness and acknowledgement of the ambivalences that frame both our selves and society. Over the past 25 years with the rise of feminism, advanced capitalism, niche marketing, postmodern culture and poststructuralist notions of the self, has come an associated preoccupation with exploring the contradictions that mark our lives. In the future it would be productive to more fully explore the way that television programming has responded to crises within the industry and

audience allegiances with a new dedication to complexity and textual ambivalence. By examining the corresponding trend in quality programming and ambivalence in more detail, we can illuminate how the industry is working to ensure that television is operating in newly relevant and creatively fruitful ways, securing audience loyalty and (re)invigorating a medium.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

Seek mind where it is mindful, indissociably embedded in the meanings and resources that are its product, yet also make it up. (Shweder, 1990, p. 13)

At the core of this project has been the belief that there is an intrinsic link between the representations of feminine contradiction that are present within the mass media and the manner in which individuals' personally develop and manage identity. Critical and cultural studies theorists who have observed the presence of dissonant or contradictory representations of women within the mass media have often remarked that these texts are responsible for women feeling "schizophrenic" (Douglas, 1994; Rabine, 1985; Thurston, 1987). Scholars utilizing this term are unintentionally obscuring the fact that individuals shape their media, and, that meaning making and media reception is the result of a complex multi-faceted interaction. It was a desire to interrogate this relationship and propose more accurate and productive language that led to the development of the theory of gender identity dissonance. By acknowledging the association between psychological processes and mediated social configurations, I propose that ambivalent media is also reflecting (and influencing) the psychological characteristics and outcomes that are inherent to female identity production and management.

Advertising and televisual texts featuring identity-based contradictions fuel personal complexity, and vice versa, it is the complex manner in which individuals develop and manage identity that drives our media representations. Consequently, a key goal of this project was to explore the cycle of influence associated with the perpetuation, reinforcement, amplification, and distortion of gendered identities and gender identity dissonance within media.

The theory of gender identity dissonance expands upon Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance by proposing that anxiety occurs when individuals become compelled (consciously or unconsciously) to embrace contradictory gender identities. In order to interrogate the varied manner in which gender identity dissonance manifests within the public sphere, a detailed analysis of print magazine advertising was undertaken. Historical analysis of magazine advertising in *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Seventeen* found that between 1976-1980 and 2000-2006 there was an increased presence of gender identity dissonance within advertisements aimed at young women. The archived advertisements broke down into three major pairings: Madonna-Whore (which comprised 73% of the archive), Masculine-Feminine, and Singlehood-Couplehood. The fact that it was these particular dichotomous identities that recurred throughout the 36 years speaks to the ongoing social and personal concern with the female body, sexuality, and subjectivity – highlighting the political struggles surrounding what it means to be feminine/female within a patriarchal society (particularly given the zeitgeist of the late 1970s and 2000-2006). This project revealed that there are historical fluctuations in the amount



and manner in which gender identity dissonance presents within magazine advertisements, predominantly associated with the sexual revolution and emergence of feminism as popular discourse, the rise of niche marketing, and poststructuralist/postmodern conceptions of self and society.

I am highly cognizant of the fact that context impacts the interpretation and utilization of identity. This means that both sides of an identity-based dichotomy (e.g. Madonna and Whore) can be regarded as appropriate *or* transgressive depending upon the situation. For example, as illustrated previously, the advertisements in Bacardi rum's "Bacardi by Night" campaign idealize women's sexual availability when out on the town at night. However, this campaign also implies (through career choice such as librarian etc.) that during the day women are to live very virginal and asexual existences. While all of the dichotomous identities are socially acceptable for women to enact during certain situations, generally, patriarchy privileges feminine Madonna figures who are safely married. It is only in certain situations, such as when men wish to have sex outside of the conventions of marriage, relationship bonds etc., that we see a normally transgressive identity (feminine agency in the form of 'whorishness') being promoted/encouraged. Ultimately, there is always a normative side to a gender identity-based dichotomy that ideologically supports the presumptions associated with patriarchy. For the dichotomies found within this research, this would mean a privileging of virginity, traditional feminine characteristics, and couplehood.

Mediated dissonance captures women's struggles to embrace self-pleasure and self-worth, and the desire to be sexually assertive or agentic for

one's self rather than in service to male pleasure or gaze. I would like to suggest that it is the way that identities are framed as clearly antithetical within ads, while still accompanied by a subtle but potent recognition of the equally important feminine desire and experience of embodying both identities, that makes identity dissonant ads so very evocative, and thus successful.

Embedded in the advertisements featuring gender identity dissonance are a number of promises made to women. First, is an assurance of self-expression. That women can and should convey their multiplicity, or the dissonance that they are experiencing in their lives. Hidden or difficult to express aspects of self can be displayed through product placement (see De Beers' Right Hand ring campaign). Secondly, is a promise of self-coalescence, or the unification of multiple aspects of self. This involves the management of self-complexity, or, removal of dissonance (see the Virginia Slims' cigarette campaign). Finally, there is the promise of self-transformation. Gender identity dissonant advertisements promote ease of movement from one desirable identity to another (see campaign for Woodbridge wine by Robert Mondavi). However, these promises are not meant to be discreet, as often advertisers promote more than one ideal outcome for consumers. Ultimately, the reason why advertisements featuring feminine multiplicity, and more importantly, gender identity dissonance are so effective lies in their ability to capture real feminine desires and aspirations – they hail women in a manner that appears authentic.

Some advertising campaigns take feminine complexity, or the presence of a multiplicity of identities within one self, as both normative and valuable (see

discussion of Hennessy's "Appropriately Complex " campaign). These campaigns present/promote a representation of feminine selfhood that is complex in nature, looking to receive favorable responses from female consumers due to their acknowledgment of a perceived and/or presumed feminine reality. However, other campaigns have found success by going further, explicitly referencing female gender identity dissonance within their print advertisements, and exploiting or developing tension between identities. These campaigns don't just acknowledge feminine complexity, or seek to resolve tensions that exist between identities (remedying the anxiety associated with identity dissonance), but, instead, look to employ those tensions in order to fuel consumption in women. Thus, there is often a two part process to advertisements utilizing gender identity dissonance as marketing approach. First, is the acknowledgement of feminine multiplicity, and next step is the exploitation or utilization of that identity-based complexity in order to promote the tension as resolvable or at least manageable by means of spending.

In order to further understand the manner in which gender identity dissonance reflects real feminine concerns and desires, a shift was undertaken away from an examination of print magazine advertising toward investigation of the female-centric HBO series *Sex and the City* – a televisual text which 'remediates' or reworks the women's magazine format (Arthurs, 2003). The findings from the focus groups, textual, industrial, and discursive analyses further confirms the value/pleasures to be derived from women's engagement with mediated contradiction. *Sex and the City* presents a fantastical world where

certain fans were able to explore what it means in our society to be single or coupled, and what may befall a woman who does not wish to give up the defining/pleasurable characteristics of her single self, just because she happens to fall in love. Specifically this study reveals how gender identity dissonance associated with relationship status functions to support female fans' belief in the text's realism, spurring their pleasure in the show. This reception research lends support for the central argument – that contradiction exists throughout the media landscape because of its very real connection to women's lived experiences.

The value of *Articulations of Desire and the Politics of Contradiction: Magazine Advertising, Television Fandom, and Female Gender Identity Dissonance* is that it works to broaden the explanation for gender-based contradictions from an understanding of women in peril due to media exposure to a discussion of media's reflection, adoption, and utilization, of a psychological predilection. While there are problematic repercussions to mediated gender identity dissonance – note the limiting white heterosexist imagery and discourse found throughout the magazine advertisements and the series *Sex and the City* – it also productively assists women to examine and critique the dichotomous boundaries that frame their lives. It is the aim of this research to extend our understanding of the ways in which binaries continue to exert ideological dominance when it comes to issues of gender identity, and, how psychological tensions or identity dissonance is effectively utilized by advertisers to promote consumerism. Furthermore, by illuminating the relationship between gender identity dissonance, realism, audience pleasure, and quality television this project

seeks to clarify how dissonant imagery both reifies and helps audiences to contest the oppressiveness of binary based understandings of self and society – both (re)establishing and destabilizing these dichotomies.

This research marks an important change in the discussion regarding the manner in which mediated contradictions reflect the relationship between psychological and sociological discursive practices. The next step in the process of illuminating this association would be to expand the historical archive. This development would include going back to the 1950s in order to further investigate the presence of gender identity dissonant magazine advertising, as well as including a greater range of magazine issues from each subsequent year. Doing so would ensure that a clearer picture emerges, better illuminating the ways in which historical shifts impact gender-based representations. An expanded industrial analysis should also occur by talking directly with those men and women who are responsible for the creation of gender identity dissonant print advertisements. Along with an examination of other media forms (e.g. television advertising), these steps could further elucidate the findings gathered from the historical archive and case studies. Future research could also explore in greater depth the role that gender identity dissonance plays in perfume marketing, as the high percentage of perfume advertising featuring gender identity dissonance begs additional investigation.

Finally, there is need for an expanded examination of the types of identities/identifications under investigation. Women are the focus of this project due to time and resource limitations. However, examining both the similarities

and differences in the manner in which men are portrayed in advertising (and their tastes as television fans), is incredibly important to our understanding of men and women as media consumers, and objects of representation. Society is far more harsh in its condemnation of men who display variation in their self presentation in comparison to women (females are stereotyped as flighty and whimsical, but men are ideally solid and steady) thus, there are likely important differences in the manner in which men are depicted when it comes to issues of contradiction. In addition, those from marginalized communities (due to race, class, ability, sexuality etc.), are not only often missing from the media landscape, but clearly misrepresented. In particular, minorities are generally presented in extremely limited ways that elide the diversity and multiplicity contained within a particular identity category, consequently, individual and group differences are not acknowledged within the public sphere. Herman Gray in his seminal book *Watching Race* (1995) observes how mainstream American media fails to recognize the plurality/multiplicity that comprises black racial subjectivity. This rejection leads to the suppression of real and valid identities for minorities. Therefore, by confining or limiting discourses pertaining to identity, concealing the contradictions/dissonance that exist within individuals and groups, a serious form of psychological and sociological oppression is achieved. An investigation of identity dissonance as it pertains to a greater range of identity categories, such as race, class, ability and/or sexual identity, would add to our general understanding of the process of gender identity dissonance, its consequences, and its place within discursive/cultural practices.

“Cognitive styles reflect the demands of a culture” (Maccoby & Modiano, 1966, p. 268), thus identity dissonance, being a distinctive repercussion of personal identity development is present within the broader framework of American culture. I propose that the media, specifically advertisers, innately recognize the intrinsic value of identity dissonance and identify with the process. By suggesting that their products will provide the perfect solution to the difficult dilemma of negotiating dissonance, they hope to sell psychological well-being and social adaptation specifically through consumption. While American culture values women who break the rules, who personify identities that are imbued with stolen power (such as the Whore, or the femme-fatale) society/patriarchy seeks also to punish these indiscretions. Accordingly, the discourse pertaining to identity dissonance is very much characterized by both envy and fear. These ads provide a rationale for the purchasing of products. They suggest a manner by which boundaries can be crossed, and promote the expression of certain parts of the self not always given voice to. They provide an escape from the constraints imposed by normative assumptions regarding appropriate sexuality, relationship status, and gender roles – however, they are also equally a highly elusive dream promulgated by our mediated culture, and in particular the advertising industry.

Embodying transgressive identities can be an important psychological strategy – the social enactment of identities which are both valorized and demonized by society is powerful. José Esteban Muñoz (2003) observes how the tactic of ‘disidentification’ (in relationship to transvestitism) allows individuals

to resist the socially oppressive categorization of identity. By using the parody and pastiche inherent to performance art, Muñoz suggests that some people are able to resist the binding constraints imposed by hegemonic discourses and binary conceptions of self in order to find a more authentic manner of self-expression.

Gender identity dissonance theory recognizes that while it may be true that some unique individuals are able to transcend the ideologies that oppressively fix subjects (using such strategies as disidentification) many people instead choose to embrace the multiple identifications and antithetical gender identities that permeate our media saturated culture, regardless of the anxiety-provoking results that often occur. Ultimately, I argue that North American women and the mediated gender discourses they consume, are marked by the presence of gender identity dissonance. Identity dissonance, a theory that was developed in order to discuss the anxiety provoking feelings and social dialogue associated with the presence of antithetical identity requirements, is based upon the presumption that our selves and society organize identities into 'either/or' binary-based options. And, that women's desire to enact multiple identities, despite their antithetical nature, is being reflected, reinforced, and exploited by the media that women encounter in their every day lives. My aim is to assist in the development of new language and heightened awareness necessary for a deep analysis of the manner in which mediated contradictions both reinforce and challenge hegemonic notions of gender. The hope is that women can in turn develop a greater ability to recognize, articulate, and understand the ways in



which gender identity-based binaries shape their sense of self and society, gathering the tools necessary to challenge the heterosexist norms and patriarchal ideologies that permeate their lives and the media they consume.

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