

Narrative and Persuasion in Fashion Advertising

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Narrative transportation—to be carried away by a story—has been proposed as a distinct route to persuasion. But as originally conceived, narrative transportation is unlikely to occur in response to advertisements, where persuasive intent is obvious and consumer resistance is expected. We analyze fashion ads to show how narrative transportation can nonetheless be a possible response to ads, if specific aesthetic properties are present, most notably when grotesque imagery is used. We then situate narrative transportation as one of five modes of engaging fashion advertising, each of which serves as a distinct route to persuasion. Interviews showed that consumers variously engage ads to act, identify, feel, transport, or immerse. We explain how aesthetic properties of ads call forth different modes of engagement and explore how grotesque imagery can lead to either narrative transportation or immersion. As routes to persuasion, transportation and immersion work by intensifying brand experience rather than boosting brand evaluation.

A woman returns home after a long day and finally gets to sit down. It is evening, and the sky is darkening. Feeling tired and hoping to take her mind off the day's struggles, she picks up a fashion magazine. A tall lamp casts a warm glow over the page. She opens the front cover and glances at the first ad: two beautiful young women wearing French period costume and curls. The first woman cradles the head of the second, which is thrown back, her long hair flowing over the first woman's hand as she clutches a richly embroidered handbag to her chest. The first woman gazes intently off into the distance with a hand raised, ready to plunge a sharp metal skewer into the exposed throat of the other woman. The only words on the page are "Dolce & Gabbana."

If you imagined a woman sitting down and beginning to read a magazine, as described in the paragraph above, you may have engaged in narrative transportation—the act of

being transported into a story world as a result of becoming involved in a tale (Green and Brock 2000). And if you were transported into the story, you may have been jolted out of that story world by disbelief that a skewer to the throat could be used to sell a woman's handbag costing many hundreds of dollars. Based on the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo 1981), you might even have surmised that, in the absence of a strong verbal argument, a negative peripheral cue such as a woman being stabbed should lead to a negative brand evaluation. If so, then either the Dolce & Gabbana ad is misconceived or extant consumer behavior theories mistake what this ad attempts to do.

In this article, we use aesthetic theory to identify a particular kind of advertising imagery, readily found in the fashion domain, labeled *the grotesque*. We explain how such imagery can produce narrative transportation for consumers. We answer the question of why an advertiser would bother trying to transport consumers by connecting narrative transportation to ideas about brand experience (Schmitt 1999). We further situate narrative transportation as one mode among others by which consumers engage advertisements and develop the role played by different modes of engagement in overcoming consumer resistance and fostering a more intense experience of brands. Depth interviews with consumers of fashion imagery provide an empirical foundation for the discussion. Grounding the discussion in the domain of aesthetics likewise allows us to differentiate this research from prior theoretical challenges guided more by consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Thompson and Haytko 1997).

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John Deighton served as editor and Russell Belk served as associate editor for this article.

Electronically published April 22, 2010

NARRATIVE TRANSPORTATION AND BRAND EXPERIENCE

Green and Brock (2000) develop the concept of narrative transportation as a new route to persuasion not addressed in prior theory. Their idea of an unsuspected new path to persuasion has intrigued consumer researchers (e.g., Escalas 2007; Wang and Calder 2006). However, attempts to incorporate narrative transportation into theories of advertising response have faced a serious obstacle: Green and Brock deny that rhetorical documents like advertisements can engender narrative transportation. In their view, stories are fundamentally different from ads. Consequently, narrative transportation has yet to be successfully integrated into consumer behavior theory.

Narrative Transportation as a Route to Persuasion

The concept of narrative transportation builds on the work of Gerrig (1993) and represents a synthesis; to appreciate Green and Brock's contribution, it helps to examine separately its two constituents, "narrative" and "transportation." Although narrative just means "story," Green and Brock have in mind a specific kind of story. For persuasion to be possible, they require "a story that raises unanswered questions, presents unresolved conflicts, or depicts not yet completed activity; characters may encounter and then resolve a crisis" (Green and Brock 2000, 701). The narratives used by Green and Brock are intense. In one, a babysitter takes a child shopping only to see her murdered by an escapee from an insane asylum; in the other, a child abandoned on an Arctic ice floe slowly starves, alone except for his dog who eyes him hungrily, until a plane miraculously appears. In a word, pathos—defined as strong emotions evoked by the extremities of the human condition—is the key aspect of narrative for Green and Brock.

Gerrig (1993) initially introduced the idea of a "transportation response" as a conceptual metaphor to guide exploratory research into the broad domain of the psychology of reading. Gerrig chose "transported" over its synonyms "entranced" and "immersed" but acknowledged the relevance of work by other scholars who preferred these alternatives (e.g., Nell 1988; Ryan 2003). In the Green and Brock (2000) tradition, which focuses on persuasion rather than on reading processes, the Gerrig account was streamlined. The essential elements of transportation become: (1) a story to provide the occasion, (2) the experience of entering into a story world and leaving one's own world behind, and (3) the changes that result from experiencing the story world. The central assertion made by Green and Brock is that changes that result from being transported are relevant to theories of persuasion.

In fact, Green and Brock (2000) conceived the construct of narrative transportation as a repudiation of the elaboration likelihood model and kindred theories (Chaiken 1980; Petty and Cacioppo 1981). In the elaboration likelihood model, there are only two routes to persuasion. The motivated consumer will centrally process arguments in the persuasion

attempt and elaborate on the claims made to come to a positive or negative evaluation. The uninvolved consumer will not elaborate the arguments but will use a variety of peripheral cues to form a heuristic judgment that may be positive or negative. There are no other routes to persuasion, and there is no distinction of narrative or any other impetus; in the elaboration likelihood model, there are simply persuasion attempts and the central or peripheral processing of same.

Green and Brock (2000, 717) decry "the failure of mainstream attitude-change theories to offer apposite mechanisms [for explaining] narrative-based persuasion." They argue that narrative transportation isn't a matter of central or peripheral, systematic or heuristic processing—it is another kind of persuasion process entirely. And as a distinctive route to persuasion, it is also tied to a particular kind of impetus—the sort of conflict-laden, pathos-rich narratives used in the Green and Brock studies.

As to how narrative transportation leads to persuasion, Green and Brock draw on the stream of research conducted by Gilbert (1991). The basic concept is that to comprehend an assertion is necessarily to accept its truth, however provisionally. It requires cognitive effort to disbelieve what has been read; the default option is to accept it and believe. It is not only explicit assertions by characters or a narrator that are accepted when transportation occurs; tacit and tangential aspects of the story world are also accepted. The greater the transportation into a story, the greater the belief that the assertions that make up the world within that story are true, because there will be less and less critical examination of the ideas that inform that story world. By contrast, to evaluate critically and skeptically is not to be transported.

Can Print Ads Transport Consumers?

Green and Brock (2000) specifically rule out ads as occasions for narrative transportation—print ads are rhetorical documents, not narratives, and transportation requires a narrative. In consumer research, Wang and Calder (2006) accepted this restriction, examining instead transportation in response to the narrative material in which ads are embedded, and its impact on ad outcomes. Escalas (2007) took a different gambit, arguing that narrative transportation was a possible consumer response to ads, as long as the ad specifically instructed the consumer to construct a narrative, as in her experimental manipulation.

Imagine yourself using Saloncare shampoo. As you wash your hair, you experience Saloncare's latest formula with enhanced natural ingredients. Feel the lather permeate your hair. Your hair feels clean, your scalp refreshed.

Unfortunately, Escalas's text bears little resemblance to the narratives used in the Green and Brock (2000) experiments. There, the narrative was contained in the document read by subjects, whereas in Escalas (2007), the document contains only instructions to the consumer to construct a specified narrative. Her supposition appears to be that con-

sumers transport themselves into their own narrative in the course of constructing it. But this is not the phenomenon studied by Green and Brock (2000) or Wang and Calder (2006).

Although Green and Brock (2000) refer only to narrative, the elements of narrative specified in their account bear much in common with elements thought to be fundamental to drama, such as plot, character, and climax (Stern 1994). It therefore seems likely that consumers may be transported by television ads when these take the form of dramatic narratives featuring a high degree of pathos; the Apple Macintosh 1984 ad would be a well-known example (Deighton, Romer, and McQueen 1989). However, Green and Brock's narrative specifications make the manipulation in Escalas (2007) problematic: "feel the lather" lacks the elements of drama in addition to being devoid of pathos. In fact, most print ads lack drama, tend not to tell an extended story of the kind studied by Green and Brock, and are not emotionally intense. This is why Green and Brock opine that "transportation is unlikely even in response to very good rhetoric" (719). It is because consumers have a propensity to resist advertising and other rhetorical documents that Green and Brock (2000) presume that transportation is unlikely in response to explicit attempts at persuasion (Friestad and Wright 1994; Scott 1994a). If a critical stance is the default, as we can reasonably expect when real consumers encounter real ads, then transportation won't occur, and persuasion via this route will not follow.

The dilemma for consumer behavior scholarship, then, is that Green and Brock (2000) introduce an innovative conception of how persuasion can occur, which unfortunately appears not to be widely relevant to the persuasion of consumers. Even if consumer resistance to advertising could be overcome by crafting ads in a particular way, it is not clear how "acceptance of the tacit and implicit aspects of the story world" could serve the interests of the brand sponsoring the advertisement. However, the solution to this second problem may be found in ideas about brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009).

Brand Experience

Schmitt (1999) attempts a comprehensive integration of the multiple ways in which consumers may experience brands (Holbrook 2000) and delineates five dimensions of experience: thinking, feeling, sensing, acting, and (social) relating. A single dimension can dominate an individual consumer's experience of a particular brand, or the experience of a brand may be multidimensional. Schmitt and colleagues argue that brand experience can be distinguished from brand evaluation, the historical focus of work on consumer persuasion, and also from other brand-related phenomena: "Brand experience differs from evaluative, affective, and associative constructs, such as brand attitudes, brand involvement, brand attachment, customer delight, and brand personality" (Brakus et al. 2009, 53).

A key aspect of the brand experience construct is that it can vary in strength or intensity. A consumer can have only

a weak or pallid experience of one brand, but a strong and intense experience of another, even within a given product category and while holding awareness constant. Most important, having a stronger and more intense experience of a brand is itself predictive of positive outcomes for the brand. The valence of a brand experience need not be known for brand experience to function successfully as a predictor of brand outcomes. *Ceteris paribus*, the more intense the experience, the more likely that inferences about brand personality will be generated, thus facilitating a relationship to that brand; likewise, more satisfaction and greater loyalty can be expected (Brakus et al. [2009, 63–65] provides empirical evidence). This is important because it breaks the link between valence and outcomes that has been a staple of persuasion research for decades; specifically, the brand experience literature indicates that positively valenced evaluative judgments are not required to achieve positive outcomes for the brand. Intensity of experience provides an alternative route.

These theories of brand experience, then, address the question of why brand managers might seek to transport consumers into their ads—the intense experience elicited by such transportation can provide positive outcomes for the brand. Unfortunately, to be transported does not appear among the dimensions of experience in Schmitt's work, nor is narrative distinguished in his list of triggers. On its face, the work on brand experience makes no allowance for brand-created narratives and does not call out transportation as among the responses that brands seek to arrange by crafting ads. Hence, Schmitt's account of how consumers experience brands, and the means by which this experience can be acquired, appears to be incomplete, in the same way that the elaboration likelihood model proved incomplete as an account of the possible routes to persuasion.

ADVERTISING ENGAGEMENT

In this essay, we argue that consumers engage ads in diverse ways, several of which have been neglected in consumer research. One of these neglected modes of engagement is narrative transportation; another is immersion in ad imagery. Failure to appreciate the diverse modes in which consumers may engage ads has led to narrow and theoretically naive accounts of how advertisements are constructed, which in turn has led to constricted empirical investigations of what consumers do with ads. What's been missed is that the purpose of some ads may be to foster a more intense brand experience rather than simply to create a positive brand evaluation as in conventional theories of persuasion. The concept of advertising engagement is intended to open up a space for identifying alternative routes to the persuasion of consumers. Distinguishing alternative modes of engaging ads, and connecting these to brand experience, addresses the question of how consumer response to advertising can best be theorized once we set aside brand evaluation as the focal outcome.

Engagement with Fashion Advertising

One reason the domain of women's fashion was chosen to ground this research is because extant theories of how fashion advertising is engaged appear particularly narrow and constricted. For many years, the scholarship of fashion consumption has been focused on the search for personal identity (e.g., Bannister and Hogg 2004; Elliott and Davies 2006; Murray 2002; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Thompson and Hirschman 1995) and on the social consequences of fashion ad imagery (Lindner 2004; McCracken 1993; Richins 1991). This research often appears sober to the point of grim: here fashion consumers inhabit a world in which a socially and culturally acceptable personal identity is a scarce good, inevitably contested, and always at risk. A wan desperation pervades the often fruitless search for personal identity through the consumption of clothing; insistent negative identities must be shunned or cast off. Seen through this lens, the consumption of fashion imagery found in ads can produce only "hopeless fantasies" that result in "frustration and depression" (Belk 2001, 198).

What has been overlooked is the double face of fashion consumption, as defined by Barthes (1967). He surmises that fashion fulfills two roles for women: (a) identity and (b) play, defined as transformation without risk to identity. Put another way, consuming fashion images and fashion products can each in their own right be gratifying: "The pleasure of looking at the photographic images forms one part of a continuum with the pleasure of re-creating the body and the pleasure of masquerade" (Rabine 1994, 63). One can only wear one piece of clothing at a time, whereas one can try on many articles of clothing (Chen 2009). And this trying on of clothing can be performed while holding a magazine more easily, and repeated far more often, than when performed in a dressing room. "Women take pleasure in clothes, not just in wearing clothes, but also in looking at clothes and looking at images of women in clothes, because they encourage fantasies of transport and transformation . . . magazines . . . draw us into situations and personalities that we can play at" (Young 1994, 206). The playful character of fashion ad consumption, as proposed by these scholars, suggests the need to identify diverse modes by which consumers engage fashion advertising (Kozinets et al. 2004).

When cast in the form of play, engagement with fashion ads need not be a desperate quest for a defining identity, or a spur to social comparison, but can instead take the form of a masquerade. Fashion is dress-up, as a child might say, and *Vogue* is carnival and costume party. Given this ludic potential of fashion, we may reasonably expect a wider and more diverse set of modes of advertising engagement than might be found in the case of a more humdrum and prosaic product category, such as shampoo.

Role of Text Properties in Ad Engagement

There is nothing new in the idea that different consumers may respond to one and the same ad in different ways (Mick

and Buhl 1992); this is a central tenet of consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Most accounts of multiplicity in consumer research, however, have emphasized consumers' autonomous reworking of ad meanings (e.g., O'Donohoe 1994; Ritson and Elliott 1999). These consumer reworkings are by and large unanticipated by the brand, insofar as they are a function of individual consumers' life projects and social and cultural situations. These reworkings represent what consumers do with ads, apart from what brands might have been attempting to accomplish through paying to have the ad made. What is new about the construct of engagement is that all its modes may reasonably be anticipated by the brand and made to benefit the brand. Modes of engagement are routes to persuasion, with "persuasion" defined simply as positive outcomes for the brand—including the strengthening or intensification of brand experience.

The idea that engagement has multiple modes implies both that ads can be crafted to be more or less engaging and that particular ad constructions call on consumers to engage them in a specific mode. In this conception, we follow Scott (1994a), who supports the basic contention of Green and Brock (2000): that a certain kind of text (e.g., narrative) may be required to evoke a particular kind of response (e.g., transportation). Unfortunately, with few exceptions (e.g., Schroeder 2002), her idea of bridging between text and consumer has not taken root in consumer research. Least honored has been her argument that "storytelling takes many forms in advertising . . . [and] the response of the consumer is likely to be at least as sensitive to the operation of these textual genres" as to any specific element within an ad (471).

The elaboration likelihood model does little to differentiate among types of persuasive documents. The central or peripheral processing the consumer undertakes is a function of the consumer's motivation, opportunity, and ability—not any property of the text engaged. From far on the other side of consumer research, consumer culture theory parallels the elaboration likelihood model: here consumers negotiate identities and construct their social and cultural roles primarily as a function of their own social and cultural situation and not as a function of differences among the specific types of brand material with which they work. Neither the experimental tradition, as instanced by the elaboration likelihood model, nor consumer culture theory, as instanced by women's search for identity through fashion, cares much about categories of text as a causal factor in persuasion. The literary and aesthetic tradition in consumer research, which does valorize differences among the texts to which consumers are exposed (Scott 1994a, 1994b; Stern 1989), has gone dormant as cognitive and sociological perspectives have taken hold.

Text Properties and Resistance to Ads

A key problem with theoretical accounts of persuasion that ignore text properties is that resistance to persuasion also gets ignored. The idea of resistance is a relatively recent

addition to persuasion theory (Knowles and Linn 2004). Earlier work such as the elaboration likelihood model tended to assume that any target of a persuasion attempt was *per se* persuadable. The emerging picture is that in specified circumstances, persuasion is highly unlikely or even impossible because the audience will refuse to engage the attempt, so the persuasion process is snuffed out before it can properly begin.

It is a truism that consumers don't have to engage any given ad. No matter how motivated the consumer (and motivation may be very high in categories such as fashion), there are always hundreds of other ads that may be engaged instead, as well as editorial matter. But if engagement is optional, then ads need to be crafted to promote engagement, regardless of what else they attempt. This fact has been undertheorized in consumer persuasion research. As a result, we know little about the factors that determine whether a consumer will engage a given ad or not, and almost nothing about whether there exist text properties that are generally efficacious in overcoming resistance and engaging consumers to the degree that something like transportation might result. In particular, the role played by aesthetic properties in overcoming consumer resistance to persuasion has gone unnoticed.

To return to the story with which we began, about a woman reading a fashion magazine: for the scholarly reader, the skewer to the throat may bring transportation into the story to a halt, as a critical stance is triggered. But for the fashion-loving woman in the story, the skewer to the throat may be essential if she is to be transported into the ad and not turn the page right away, in resistance. That skewer to the throat is an instance of what is meant by an aesthetic property of ads.

AESTHETIC DIFFERENTIATION OF ADS

Aesthetics in Consumer Research

The initial infusion of aesthetic concepts into consumer research drew primarily from literary theory (Stern 1989) and occurred about the same time that literary ideas made their way into the psychology of reading; thus, Deighton et al. (1989), Scott (1994a), and the cognitive psychologist Gerrig (1993) all draw on the same literary theorists (e.g., Wolfgang Iser). Subsequently, beginning with Scott (1994b), consumer researchers turned to visual aesthetics and design and began to examine the elements that make up an aesthetic form, such as unity or prototypicality (Veryzer and Hutchinson 1998), drawing on the older experimental tradition of Berlyne (1971). This tradition is now firmly focused on the elements of product design and how consumers respond to these elements (e.g., Bloch, Brunel, and Arnold 2003). A separate tradition, beginning with Holbrook (1986), is not concerned with aesthetic theory *per se* but looks at the consumption of culturally defined aesthetic objects, such as works of (fine) art (Hagtvedt and Patrick 2008; Joy and Sherry 2003; Venkatesh and Meamber 2008). A final tradition argues that marketers can themselves be understood

as artists; hence, their creations can be understood using the same aesthetic categories that are applied to works of art (e.g., Brown, Doherty, and Clarke 1998; Brown and Patterson 2000; Schroeder 2005).

In this article, we show how fashion ad imagery can be understood in terms of particular concepts drawn from visual aesthetics and focus on how consumer response varies across aesthetically differentiated ad texts. The goal, consistent with Scott (1994a) and Green and Brock (2000), is to tie particular kinds of consumer response to particular kinds of ad texts, such that aesthetic categories become causal factors.

Aesthetic Character of Fashion Ad Imagery

To understand why aesthetics matter, we begin with the shampoo ad in figure 1. It provides a foil against which the aesthetic properties that define a particular kind of fashion ad can emerge by contrast. The first point of difference is that here, the advertised product costs \$5 to \$10 while in the fashion ads to be discussed, the advertised products cost hundreds or thousands of dollars. This leads to a second point of difference: shampoo, in twenty-first-century developed nations, is a daily necessity that offers utilitarian benefits to hundreds of millions. Multi-hundred-dollar handbags and thousand-dollar outfits are discretionary items marketed to women who hold the social and cultural position to support their purchase. These do not offer any obvious utilitarian benefit over equally serviceable \$50 handbags or \$100 outfits. Moreover, although the shampoo and its packaging may exhibit good design, it is not an everyday art object, while fashion clothing often is (Angeletti and Oliva 2006). The third point of contrast is that the shampoo ad contains picture, text, and brand elements, as theorized by Pieters and Wedel (2004). By contrast, fashion ads omit the text element and contain only picture and brand. This third point distinguishes fashion ads not only from shampoo and inexpensive beauty product ads generally, but also from ads for other discretionary, hedonic, or hobbyist products that likewise cost hundreds or thousands of dollars. Ads for consumer electronics products make claims using words, ads for sports cars use words, but ads for fashion apparel and accessories do not contain verbal statements. These consist only of branded imagery.

Aesthetic theory is not necessary to explain how consumers might engage ads like the shampoo ad in figure 1. Most of what is needed to explain consumer response to the shampoo ad already exists in conventional theories of persuasion like the elaboration likelihood model or, from a very different perspective, in consumer culture theory and its descriptions of how consumers, as culturally and socially situated actors, might create personal meanings from this ad. No new theory is required to explain the Pantene ad's construction or consumers' responses.

We draw a sharp distinction between the shampoo ad in figure 1 and the fashion ads to be shown next to make one additional point: prior consumer research on "fashion consumption," for the most part, has not actually included fashion products or focused on fashion consumers in the sense

FIGURE 1

PANTENE SHAMPOO AD



NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

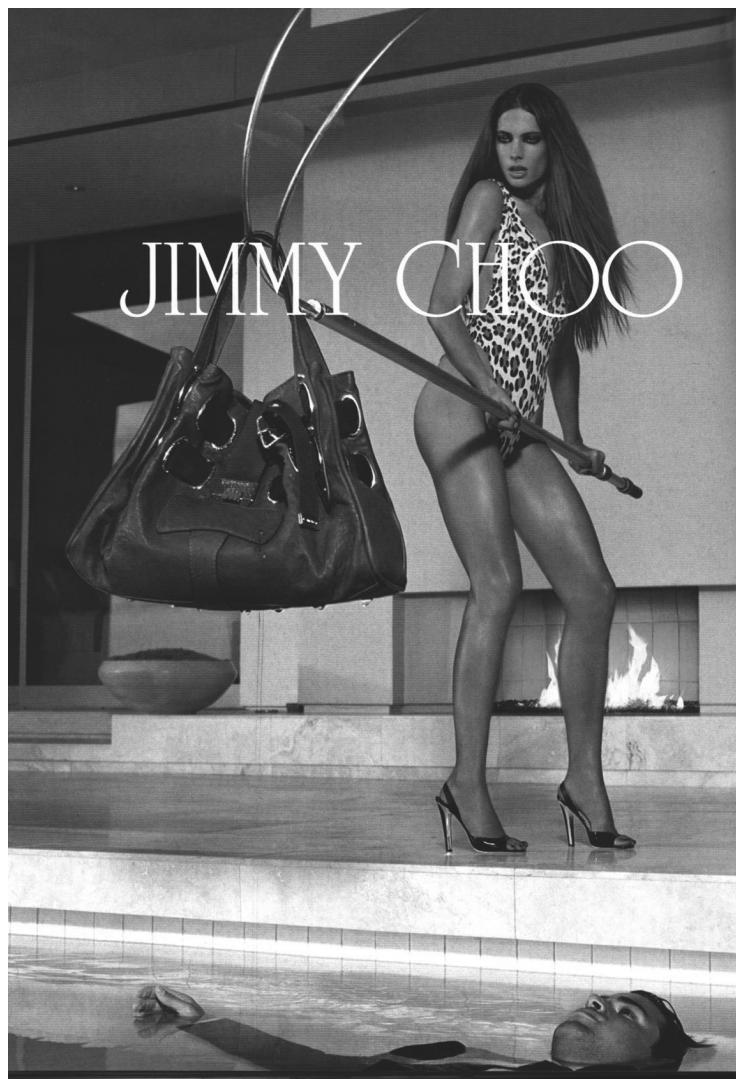
used here. In this essay, fashion advertising is defined as ads for clothing and accessories primarily appearing in fashion magazines like *Vogue*. Likewise, fashion *consumers* are defined as those women who have the financial, cultural, and social resources to spend thousands of dollars on the kind of clothing advertised mostly in fashion magazines, and who are involved enough in fashion to regularly and willingly spend time with a magazine like *Vogue*. These are the women we interviewed; none were students. This is a considerably more specific domain than has been studied before; for example, Richins (1991) labels her material “fashion” but actually investigates shampoo, cosmetics, and swimsuit ads, using college students. Thompson and Haytko

(1997) interview only college students, some of whom state explicitly that they cannot afford the fashion clothing advertised in *Vogue*. Hence, what is new in the present account may stem in part from examining ads for a different kind of product directed at a different kind of consumer.

Turning now to bona fide fashion ads, consider the Jimmy Choo ad in figure 2. This ad is constructed very differently from the Pantene shampoo ad. There is no text other than the brand, no verbal claim, not even a product identifier. There is a female protagonist but here she is situated, rather than floating free of any context, as was the model in the shampoo ad. This image, one might say, would make a lousy experimental stimulus: there is way too much going on. We

FIGURE 2

JIMMY CHOO SHOE AD



NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

see an Amazon figure in a leopard-skin bathing suit; a man wearing a tuxedo floating in the pool, seemingly dead; fire between the woman's legs; a purse fished out of the water with a pool hook; and more.

One way to think about this picture is to see it as a moment within an ongoing narrative. The image provides all the elements needed to construct a plot and develop character. Of course, quite a bit of performance is required on the part of the consumer for this narrative to actually take place (Deighton 1992), but as Wolfgang Iser, Norman Holland, Stanley Fish, and the other literary theorists cited by both Scott (1994a) and the psychologist Gerrig (1993) make clear, every narrative requires a suite of performances by its audience to come into being at all.

There is prior evidence that pictures alone can provoke transportation; thus, Gerrig (1993, 9–10) is at some pains to delink the transportation response from verbal stories, citing as an example of nonnarrative transportation the response to a painting by David called the *Oath of the Horatii* (Stewart 2001). The important point here is that this pictorial occasion for transportation depicts an old Roman legend in which five of six cousins die at one another's hands, after which the survivor returns to slay his sister, who was betrothed to one of the slain, for which he is sentenced to death for murder but then spared by public acclaim for his patriotism in slaying the foreign-born cousins. In other words, pathos is once again at extreme levels. Gerrig's pictorial example serves to emphasize the connection between

FIGURE 3
VERSACE CLOTHING AD



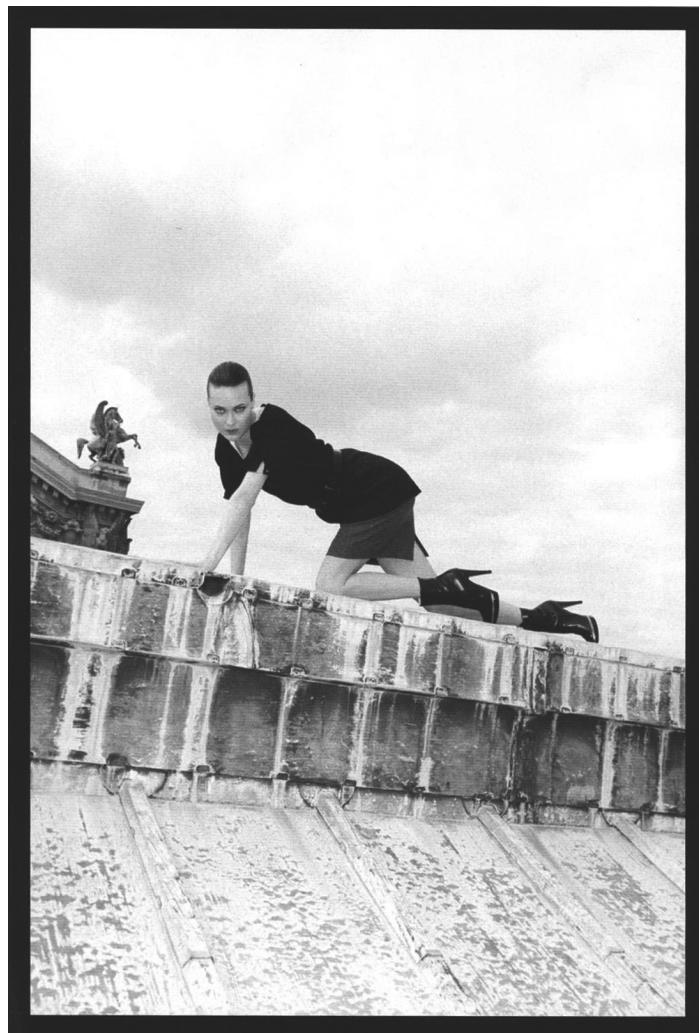
NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

intense, extreme experiences and transportation, whatever the means by which this intensity is invoked. The Jimmy Choo ad is like David's *Oath of the Horatii* painting: it provides an intense narrative, visually presented rather than spoken or written, but a narrative nonetheless. Hence, a consumer could be transported into the Jimmy Choo narrative. By contrast, the shampoo ad does not contain the elements of a narrative. It is a rhetorical document, in Green and Brock's (2000) terms, and transportation is not expected.

Mindful that the linguist George Lakoff (1990) famously titled one of his works "Women, Fire, and other Dangerous Things," it might be counterargued that the Jimmy Choo ad is better thought of as a metaphor rather than as a narrative—as a visual rhetorical figure, to use McQuarrie and

Mick's (1999) terminology. In this telling, the ad would no longer challenge existing theory; it is simply an assemblage of signs from which meanings can be read off by the semiotically cognizant. Jimmy Choo is the "handbag to kill for" or "the shoes that put fire between a woman's legs." These meanings, while easy enough to articulate if we approach the image as a metaphorical vehicle for meaning transfer, come to seem problematic if we take the perspective of the brand. Jimmy Choo paid over \$100,000 to be placed in front of women with discretion to spend thousands on its products—or instead on competitor's products appearing subsequently. Consumers (or scholars) may transfer these meanings by approaching the image as a metaphor, but it is not clear why a brand would construct an ad to evoke them.

FIGURE 4
YVES ST. LAURENT CLOTHING AD



NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

This challenge—is it narrative or is it metaphor—is worthy of careful consideration, since it goes to the heart of what is new here. A few more examples will help to constellate the issues. In figure 3, Versace shows us a young blond woman, upside down, in a lavender evening dress, again apparently dead, at the bottom of what appear to be somewhat shabby and dirty concrete steps, holding a bitten apple in her hand. One does not have to be a semiotician to make the connection to Eve and to the Fall into original sin after the eating of the apple, or to Snow White and the wicked stepmother. But how do these allusions work to the benefit of the Versace brand: is it to be the brand for disobedient females who doom themselves to perdition? Or is Versace the brand for victims of the wicked and vain? Besides being implausible, these metaphorical readings leave

elements of the image underspecified. Why is the bitten apple already brown? Why the gritty concrete steps? These are unnecessary to invoke Eve or Snow White, but they do a great deal to help the consumer perform a narrative. What has happened here? That is the response Versace wants; for then the consumer, engaged, will perform a narrative occasioned by Versace and will gain an experience of the Versace brand in so doing.

Consider next the Yves St. Laurent ad in figure 4. Here the reference to Catwoman is as obvious and as unsatisfying as the allusion to Eve in the Versace ad, and the idea of a cat on a hot tin roof takes us no further than did the allusion to Snow White. These are trifles scattered about by the advertiser who has another and larger purpose than providing semioticians with a kind of Easter egg hunt for meanings

FIGURE 5
DOLCE & GABBANA HANDBAG AD



NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

to decode. How did she get there? What is she doing? The elements of the Yves St. Laurent ad are arranged to put forth an invitation to narrative for the passing consumer to perform if she chooses to engage.

Put another way, these aesthetically differentiated ads do not employ picture writing systems (Scott and Vargas 2007), and they are a long way from the copy theory that guided Mitchell and Olson (1981), in which an image of a kitten suffices to transfer the meaning "softness" to a brand of tissue. Yves St. Laurent is not the brand for women who like to crawl about on guano-covered roofs. Dolce & Gabbana is not the brand for women who enjoy wearing period dress while threatening to stab another (fig. 5). These fashion ads are not effectively theorized if treated as signs from which meanings are to be read off by consumers.

In a moment we will categorize the Jimmy Choo, Versace, Yves St. Laurent, and Dolce & Gabbana ads as grotesque and develop the implications of this aesthetic categorization. But first we need to clarify that the genre under study is not the fashion ad genre, but the genre of grotesque representations. To do this, we will walk the reader back toward the Pantene shampoo image while remaining within the fashion category. Consider the Michael Kors fashion ad in figure 6. The materials necessary for a narrative are as present here as with Jimmy Choo, but there is nothing grotesque; everything is pretty, lovely, or luxurious, at least by the standards of twenty-first-century North American mass culture. Here the imagery is idealized rather than grotesque. It is the same with the Bottega Veneta ad in figure 7. This latter image is liminal with respect to whether it occasions a nar-

FIGURE 6

MICHAEL KORS CLOTHING AD



NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

rative; if it does, that narrative must center on the model and who she is. As a result, other ways of engaging the ad, such as interpersonal appraisal ("Do I like how she looks?"), seem at least as likely as the performance of a narrative.

These ads are just as much fashion ads as the Jimmy Choo ad, but there is little to distinguish their style of representation from that of the Pantene ad, except for the absence of words. Hence, the Jimmy Choo and Bottega Veneta ads serve to mark out the poles of a continuum, along which lies the aesthetic differentiation to be developed next.

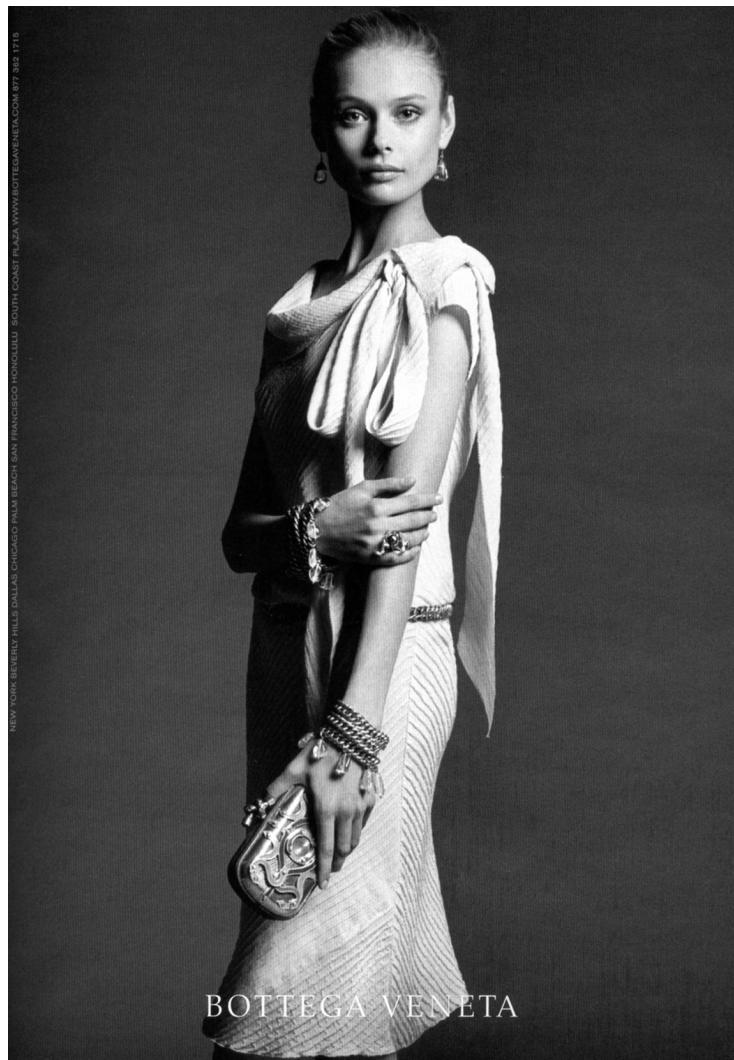
The Grotesque in Advertising

In seeking an apt categorization for ads like the Jimmy Choo ad, "grotesque" was selected from a family of cognate

terms that included bizarre, surreal, deviant, absurd, discrepant, peculiar, and odd. Each candidate term carried its own theoretical precommitments and had distinct connotations (Arias-Bolzmann, Chakraborty, and Mowen 2000; Homer and Kahle 1986; McDaniel et al. 1995). The alternates are listed roughly in accordance with decreasing strength of vituperation implied. The first reason for selecting grotesque is the intuition that it is the strongest term on that dimension, and the one most antonymic with respect to the family of positive descriptors centered on beautiful, lovely, pretty, and attractive. The second reason is that the theoretical presuppositions accompanying "grotesque" appeared more suitable than those of its closest alternatives, the bizarre or surreal.

"Surreal" originated as a description of particular style of twentieth-century painting, but the style of visual represen-

FIGURE 7
BOTTEGA VENETA CLOTHING AD



NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

tation of the Jimmy Choo ad is not surreal in this sense; it is as photo-realistic as the Pantene or Michael Kors ad. There was less to distinguish the grotesque from its closest alternative, the bizarre; in fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines each by reference to the other. We settled on grotesque because its history of usage is more closely tied to discussion of visual representations. As developed below, “grotesque” is also central to a particular aesthetic theory that proved useful, while “bizarre” has more diverse associations not centered in aesthetics. Finally, bizarre is in part negatively defined with respect to the normal, conventional, or expected, where the grotesque instead forms a duality with the pretty.

Ads like the Jimmy Choo ad are deliberately constructed

to include an element of the grotesque. The grotesque imagery is not happenstance or an artifact of the scholarly gaze. Grotesque imagery is deployed in these examples to benefit the brand and has a reasonable prospect of fulfilling this goal. To explain why, we draw on the romantic poet and dramatist Victor Hugo, who speaks of the power of “the fruitful union of the grotesque and the sublime” (Guerlac 1990). In this context, we take the sublime to mean an intense experience of some kind, to be defined further below, and not just a positive evaluation. Hugo’s idea is that the sublime—this intense aesthetic experience—requires the grotesque, or emerges more readily and completely when the grotesque is present.

This aesthetic is the polar opposite of simplistic “copy

theories" in which ad images directly convey specific product qualities (Mitchell and Olson 1981; Scott 1994b). Under a copy theory of fashion ad imagery, to obtain positive brand evaluations, one must performe show positively regarded visual elements. To be favorably evaluated, an ad would have to place clothing on pretty models surrounded by luxuries and ensconced in a lovely setting, as the Michael Kors ad does and the Versace ad does not.

The idea of the grotesque explodes this simplistic aesthetic. It exposes the copy theory as more sympathetic magic than scientific theory. In sympathetic magic, like causes like (the law of similarity), and contiguity implies transfer (the law of contagion). These primitive notions, formulated in anthropology over a century ago (Frazer 1922), have been shown by experimental psychologists to still exert a potent influence on the thinking and the behavior of contemporary citizens in developed countries (King et al. 2007; Morales and Fitzsimons 2007; Rozin and Nemerooff 1990).

The grotesque allows us to bracket the conventional idea that positively valenced ad images are required to create positive brand evaluations and that such positive evaluations exhaust the meaning of "persuasion." It raises the question of whether the requirement that images be positively valenced is really a scientific idea or simply reinscribes the heuristic that underlies pancultural notions of sympathetic magic. Once that connection is made, it is hard not to see the elaboration likelihood model's account of persuasion via peripheral processing as anything more than a reiteration of the laws of sympathetic magic. Positive cues in the ad create a positive response in the consumer (similarity), which attaches to the brand (contagion).

The Jimmy Choo, Versace, and Yves St. Laurent ads can't be understood from the standpoint of sympathetic magic or copy theory, and that is what makes them theoretically important. These ads are replete with negative elements (What kind of heuristic cue is a dead man floating in a pool? Or a girl knocked out on the stairs?). Their imagery isn't designed to transfer prettiness over into favorable brand regard. These ads can better be explained as providing an occasion for a strong experience; Brakus et al. (2009) make it clear that intensity, not valence, is primary to the definition of the brand experience construct.

The Experience of the Sublime

Thus far, we have differentiated grotesque versus idealized imagery as an aesthetic category applicable to some fashion ads. Next we develop the sublime as a label for a relatively intense kind of aesthetic experience and connect it back to the transportation response of Gerrig (1993) and Green and Brock (2000). The sublime has served as a referent in aesthetic theory for thousands of years; we will not hew to any particular definition of it, so much as re-adapt its history of usage to our particular purpose of differentiating multiple modes of engaging ads, and linking these modes back to particular kinds of ads.

In a very early account of the sublime, focused on verbal art, the poet Longinus notes: "Listeners . . . come to feel

as if they had produced the sublime utterance themselves. This is the moment of 'proud flight,' the moment of elevation and *transport*" (emphasis added; translation in Guerlac 1990, 3). In a much later account of the sublime by the philosopher Burke, the responses of interest "turn on pain or danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain or danger without actually being in such circumstances; whatever excites this delight I call sublime" (Guerlac 1990, 6). It would be painful indeed to fall down the steps like the Versace model, and dangerous to crawl about on a roof like the Yves St. Laurent model, but the idea of these things is only grotesque and provides a route to the sublime—or to transportation, to return to the vocabulary of social psychology.

The core notion from Victor Hugo's aesthetic, then, is that the grotesque and the sublime are intertwined, and necessary to one another (Guerlac 1990). Returning to the context of fashion advertising, for a consumer to experience the sublime, which means to have an intense experience that may include being transported, the ad may have to contain grotesque elements. Recall that Green and Brock (2000) were choosy about the kinds of narratives that allowed for transport: pathos was required.

The theoretical insight is that the grotesque provides to advertising imagery what pathos provided to written narrative: the impetus for transport, and perhaps also for other intense forms of engagement. The grotesque solves a problem for the print advertiser, which is the inability of any static sales document to call on pathos. Without words and without the plot and character development over time that broadcast media provide (e.g., Deighton et al. 1989), there is no way to create in print the pathos that appears to be essential to the transportation response (or to an experience of the sublime, to use the older vocabulary). And without something akin to pathos, a print ad remains vulnerable to consumer resistance; in the end, it only wants to sell something. And that's the vulnerability of fashion ads such as the Michael Kors ad that choose not to be grotesque: the only narrative that may come to mind is of a model paid to prance about for a photographer among props on a stage. And who can be transported into a story like that?

Theoretical Summary

The outline of a causal theory emerges as follows. Many fashion ads contain elements that allow consumers to perform a narrative. Some, but not all, of these narrative images are also grotesque. Narrative imagery with an element of the grotesque can provide the consumer with a more intense experience of the brand that occasioned it, as a result of being transported into the narrative. Per Brakus et al. (2009), when consumers acquire a more intense experience of a brand, it leads to more positive outcomes for that brand.

The idea is that consumers engage grotesque ads differently, in a manner that benefits the brands that construct this particular kind of imagery. Conversely, ads that are not grotesque may fall short for at least some kinds of consumers,

such that these ads are not engaged in the same way and do not strengthen brand experience to the same degree. Thus, this aesthetic differentiation is causally potent with respect to shaping consumer response to brand initiative.

Stepping back, consumer research may be viewed as slowly disentangling itself from an exclusive focus on evaluative judgments as the central theoretical construct in understanding consumer response to brand-initiated communication. Thus, Green and Brock (2000) offer narrative transportation as a new kind of audience response but deny it can occur in response to ad texts. Brakus et al. (2009) offer brand experience as an alternative to brand evaluation but fail to tie brand experience to ad texts beyond simple causal connections (e.g., that color is likely to affect consumers' sensory experiences of brands). Consumer culture theory offers a dramatically more nuanced and enriched account of how consumers experience brand material but tends to unmoor this experience from the brands that provide this material. The aim of the present work is to provide an integration of these detached theoretical streams under the heading of advertising engagement, with aesthetic categories serving as causal agents.

MODES OF ADVERTISING ENGAGEMENT

The interviews that follow will emphasize the multiplicity of ways in which adult women may engage fashion advertising. Although modes of engagement bear some resemblance to the reading strategies discussed in reader response theory (Scott 1994a), we introduce new terminology, first because there is nothing to read in fashion ads, and second because "strategy" carries undesirable connotations of volition and direction. Which mode of engagement occurs is, in part, a function of the aesthetic properties of the ad and not simply a strategic decision of the individual consumer. These modes of engagement can be thought of as a palette of responses available to consumers of fashion, itself understood as an instance of the larger category of expensive, discretionary, socially visible, and culturally laden products. As treated here, women's fashion serves as one concrete instance of that broader domain.

Interview Methodology

The interview technique used a straightforward nondirective approach, in the tradition of the focused interview of Lazarsfeld (Merton, Fiske, and Kendall 1990), the long interview of McCracken (1988), or the phenomenological interview of Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989). Because imagery was the focus, the auto-driving of Heisley and Levy (1991) and the visual ethnography of Pink (2007) also provided guidance. By nondirective, we mean that interviewer direction was limited to: (1) selecting the ads to be discussed, and (2) keeping the consumer focused on discussions of how they typically experienced these ads and others like them. In all other respects, consumers were left free to say what they wanted to say (including not to say much at all about particular ads).

Pilot work, in the form of a questionnaire completed by 130 college students, had confirmed that for many women, ads are a focus of attention when a magazine like *Vogue* is consumed. Respondents expected to spend as much or more time perusing the ads as the editorial matter. They indicated that fashion ads are themselves consumed, rather than simply serving as sources of product information, and that the consumption of fashion ads provided pleasure and many positive emotions. A separate content analysis of *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* confirmed that nonidealized ads, more similar to the Jimmy Choo than the Michael Kors ad, appeared frequently. Hence, it seemed reasonable to suppose that the interviews could be made to focus on consumers' experiences of fashion ads, including grotesque ads, and that the experiences vocalized in response to our prompts were not likely to be an artifact of the interview procedure.

At the outset, we had few ideas a priori about exactly how women might consume fashion ad images, other than a conviction that existing formulations were insufficient. The goal was to show actual fashion ads to women who consumed fashion clothing and to learn from them how they experienced these ads. All interviews were analyzed using the grounded theory method (Strauss and Corbin 1998) where key findings are allowed to emerge from the data and theoretical explanations are added as needed to understand the results.

A commercial research firm recruited 18 participants in a large urban area in North America who were screened to be between ages 30 and 55, to have read six or more fashion magazine issues in the past 12 months, and to have spent more than the national average on clothes, shoes, and handbags intended for themselves (about half spent over \$5,000 per year on these products). In addition, these women scored above the midpoint on the Gould and Stern's (1989) fashion-consciousness scale, indicating that all found fashion to be personally important and relevant. Participants are described in table 1.

To begin the interview, participants were asked to freely associate with and define fashion in their own terms. Next, the participants were shown a set of fashion ads and asked to examine them as they typically would when viewing the magazine at home. They were allowed to discuss the feelings, sensations, and impressions they got from each image, if any. The images were selected from current issues of fashion magazines for different brands. Some of the ads were selected to lie toward the grotesque pole of the fashion advertising continuum, while others lay more toward the idealized pole. (The contrasting poles were evident from the initial perusal of fashion ads, although their labels emerged much later.) The ads are described in table 2; several have been reproduced as figures in this article. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

The transcribed interviews were analyzed by the first author using line-by-line analysis to develop provisional explanatory themes (i.e., open coding). The analysis focused on uncovering similarities and differences in the modes of engagement of fashion images, including the interpretation

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Age	Marital status	Occupation	Personal fashion spending (per year)
Deborah	46	S	Health-care service	\$2,500–\$5,000
Nadia	39	S	Government service	\$2,500–\$5,000
Tracey	37	M	Accountant	\$5,000+
Sharon	45	M	Personal trainer	\$5,000+
Brenda	52	M	Early childhood educator	\$2,500–\$5,000
Tess	32	M	Nutritionist	\$2,500–\$5,000
Erica	42	M	Lawyer	\$2,500–\$5,000
Karen	43	S	Salesperson	\$5,000+
Marie	41	S	Banker	\$5,000+
Pamela	44	M	Education administrator	\$2,500–\$5,000
Tammi	30	M	Make-up artist	\$2,500–\$5,000
Maureen	32	S	Business consultant	\$5,000+
Eva	30	M	Receptionist	\$5,000+
Emma	41	M	IT consultant	\$2,500–\$5,000
Rosemary	53	M	Accountant	\$5,000+
Sara	32	S	Early childhood educator	\$2,500–\$5,000
Fay	45	S	Teacher	\$5,000+
Tasha	42	M	Health-care administrator	\$2,500–\$5,000

NOTE.—Participant names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

of ads. The constant comparison method was used, in that each interview was compared to the ones before it to ensure consistency of provisional themes and to identify negative cases that did not support the provisional themes. At this point in the analysis, the provisional themes were shared between researchers. Both researchers then engaged in axial coding to transform the provisional themes into the model in figure 8. The researchers used an iterative approach to analyze the interview transcripts, moving back and forth between examining each participant's interview in depth versus examining a cross section of several interviews at once. Decisions about whether each piece of the model was supported by the data were made together through discussion and were based on the clarity with which the themes emerged and the weight of evidence supporting each theme. The final step in the analysis process was gathering and interpreting more theory to support the model (such as the work by Joy and Sherry [2003] on the processing of art, for example) and incorporating this new theory into the model, as supported by the data (i.e., through selective coding). Analysis continued until no further ideas emerged and all of the data could be encompassed by the model.

Of the five modes of engagement uncovered by the interviews, three map quite closely onto existing theoretical accounts, to the degree that there would be no need for new terminology had only these been found. We touch briefly on known modes first, to align this essay with prior research while focusing on how aesthetic categories such as the grotesque are received in these modes. We then turn to transportation and finally immersion, the novel modes of engagement that emerged from this study. The five modes are profiled in figure 8.

Known Modes of Engaging Fashion Ads

Engage to Act. Some women treat fashion magazine ads as if they were pages from a catalog. In this mode, a woman shops the ads, scrutinizing the merchandise on offer. This woman is oriented to the product rather than its advertisement—will she consider, like, and buy the item featured in the ad? Thus, although she is an avid reader of fashion magazines, Deborah ignores all parts of an ad's image except the product shot. The dramatic Dolce & Gabbana ad (fig. 5) elicited the following terse comment:

That purse is really nice.

Similarly, regarding the Jimmy Choo ad (fig. 2):

This is a nice ad. There are a few things appealing about it for me: the shoes, and the swimsuit, and the purse, and the fact that it is Jimmy Choo.

Deborah's focus lies solely with the product and brand.

This mode of engagement represents elaboration and the central processing route as defined in the elaboration likelihood model: effortful consideration and scrutiny of the evaluative implications of information (Petty and Cacioppo 1981). What's distinctive in the present case is that the "argument" that is centrally processed is purely visual. In prior applications of the elaboration likelihood model to ads, visual elements were typically allocated to the peripheral route; the central route required words. Deborah describes her elaboration of fashion ads thus:

I will go through it very slowly because I need time to focus. If you see an outfit that you like, at the back they'll tell you

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW ADS

Brand	Description
Ads with ideal elements:	
Bottega Veneta	(Reproduced as fig. 7)
Michael Kors	(Reproduced as fig. 6)
Carolina Herrera	Model in dress is thin and attractive; setting is limousine in the rain
Ads with grotesque elements:	
A-K-R-I-S	Model in dress; no setting; model looks plastic, like a mannequin
Dolce & Gabbana	(Reproduced as fig. 5)
Chloe	Model in dress looks tousled and drugged; setting is empty table with rumpled tablecloth
Max Mara	One model is yelling at another
Prada	Model looks bruised; setting is park bench at night
Jimmy Choo	(Reproduced as fig. 2)

where you can get it or how much it is, and I can rip it out and see if I can find it.

In this mode, a woman's approach to fashion advertising resembles that of any hobbyist consumer highly involved in some hedonic product category; it appears no different than how a male audiophile might peruse ads in a stereo magazine.

In this mode, there is neither transportation into the ad narrative nor immersion in the ad imagery. In fact, participants who engaged ads solely in preparation for action found it difficult to answer the researcher's questions regarding the sensations, emotions, or allusions the images conjured. Tracey, another shopping woman, remarked about the Max Mara ad:

I honestly would never think twice about the picture. I really would just look at the clothes and that's it. There's nothing else that would catch my eye. I would not analyze it, like "Why is she looking so angry?" I just wouldn't think that.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this mode of engagement is how much of the ad these women are able to ignore while nonetheless engaging other elements of the ad quite closely. For instance, it is not the case that the Dolce & Gabbana ad fails with this type of consumer, for she does see "that purse is really nice" and makes plans to purchase it. The layers of aesthetic crafting and stylization in the image simply pass her by. She does not construct a narrative. In terms of a conceptual metaphor, for these women, an ad is simply a store window onto the product. She looks through the ad to the clothing for sale.

The important point about this mode for our purposes is that a grotesque portrayal, although it does not engage women who rely on this mode, also need not alienate them. This suggests that brands have some latitude to craft grotesque ads without fear of losing more consumers than they might gain.

Engage for Identity. This mode maps onto the traditional conception of fashion magazine readers derived from

prior consumer research (Murray 2002; Richins 1991; Thompson and Haytko 1997). In this mode of engaging fashion ads, women try on and negotiate identities. These women do pay close attention to the images in the ads, rather than look through the ad to the product. But the primary focus in this mode is the appearance and the possible personality characteristics of the model(s) portrayed in the image. For example, Sharon discusses the model in the Bottega Veneta ad:

It's like an elite . . . like a duchess or something. She exudes confidence—look at her face. She looks good wearing it.

Sharon confesses that her motivation for fashion purchases is to provide herself with confidence; therefore, she seeks out confident fashion models. Sharon commented on the red skirt in the Carolina Herrera ad:

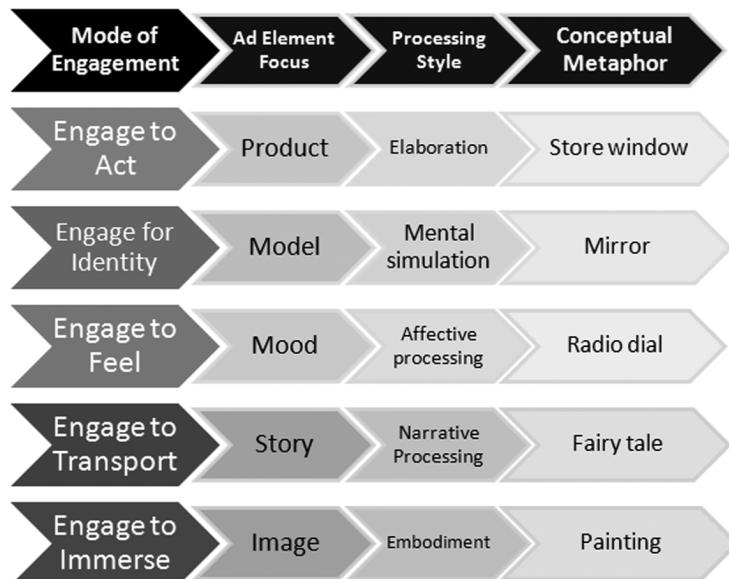
Red is very confident. If you are in red and walk into a room, everybody's eyes are on you because of the color, so it's an impression.

This hope that a product (red dress) will lead to an ideal self (confidence) is consistent with current cultural beliefs that fashion provides symbols of identity, but that these symbols are temporary, ambiguous, and can be changed at will (Davis 1992; Entwistle 2000; Young 1994). Marie, who engages ads in this mode, explains how she responds to fashion imagery:

What type of image does this portray to me? Do I want to be like her or not? Or will everybody just look at me and say "What the hell is she wearing? What is she trying to be?"

To try on these possible identities, women engage in what might be described as mental simulation (Taylor and Schneider 1989) rather than the elaboration and central processing of the elaboration likelihood model. Mental simulation is a cognitive construction of hypothetical scenarios that are usually in the form of stories starring ourselves as the main character (Escalas 2004; Sanna 2000). Mental simulation is

FIGURE 8
MODES OF ADVERTISING ENGAGEMENT IN WOMEN'S FASHION



NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

more commonly known as fantasizing, where we imagine ourselves as the glamorous model exuding confidence on our way to a fabulous party (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Here the ad is taken as an invitation to “feel the confidence,” parallel to the explicit instructions given in Escalas (2007) to “feel the lather.”

Mental simulation is one element within the portmanteau conception of narrative transportation advanced in Green and Brock (2000), and it has been suggested that mental simulation can lead to narrative transportation (Escalas 2004). Based on these interviews, it seems more accurate to say that, although mental simulation is one way of engaging a fashion ad, it does not represent transportation. In this mode of engaging fashion ads, a woman is not transported into the story or world of the ad, as much as she is transported back into her own mind—into the fantasy identity that she is negotiating for herself. Here, the conceptual metaphor is ad as mirror; this woman looks into the ad and strives to see herself reflected back. As Tess notes:

I don't tend to read too far into things when I'm looking at it [the ad]. I wouldn't necessarily stare at it and come up with a big story. Usually, I take it at face value. I might put myself in the clothing.

Coming up with a “big story” is a different mode of engagement.

It is important to note that women using this mode will not engage with every ad that contains an attractive or idealized model. Engagement will only occur when the ad's models, brands, and situations are deemed glimpses of a

way to achieve a possible as well as a desired ideal self. As Goldworthy (1988, 111) notes: “A fashion photograph does not represent reality . . . [it] is not a statement of fact; it is an ideal, not commonplace reality but a created illusion. Although we all accept it as such, the medium works as a potent selling device, because subjectively people are willing to believe in the possibility of the existence that it depicts.” In this mode, a woman will engage the ad when she can “believe in the possibilities” and embrace the identity on offer in the ad image. But such engagement does not occur when a woman perceives the ad's model negatively; these images are rejected as selling tools rather than opportunities for mental simulation. Erica rejected the model in the Chloe ad:

Maybe people fantasize about having the kind of life that image suggests. She looks like she's not troubled by anything—no concerns. She's free. It just seems feigned to me.

Consequently, Erica does not engage with the ad:

I'm a little more detached. I feel more conscious that someone is trying to sell me something. . . . [They] make you want to want to feel that way. I don't care for any of that.

A consistent theme in the relevant literatures is the idea that once the spell is broken, responses such as transportation and even mental simulation become unlikely. Transportation is less likely to occur when persuasion knowledge is activated and consumers are skeptical about the persuasive intent of an advertiser. This, again, is the reason why Green

and Brock (2000) assert that rhetorical documents, such as advertisements, are unlikely to be an occasion for transportation (Gerrig [1993, 12] and Scott [1994a, 473] both quote the literary theorist Gibson's discussion of ads that "break the spell").

Some of these women found ways to reinterpret the disliked aspects of advertising images and "rewrite" the ad to focus on the ideal aspects of the picture. For women using this mode, the rewritten aspects of the ads were the grotesque elements. In response to the Jimmy Choo ad (fig. 2), Brenda explained:

I'd like to look like that in a bathing suit. I could visualize myself with that [bag]. I think I'd like to have the guy in the pool.

Brenda rewrites the fact that the guy in the pool is dead.

This mode of engaging identity is important in two respects. First, it ratifies the perspective of consumer culture theory as to how fashion ad imagery is approached by consumers understood as socially and culturally situated actors. Interview quotes published in Thompson and Haytko (1997) could have been inserted in this section without causing notice; we heard the same things as they did when interviewing women who relied on this mode. Our contribution is to suggest that consumers' negotiation of identities is simply one mode of engaging ads, rather than making it constitutive or governing. Second, by and large, the more grotesque ads failed to appeal to women who engaged ads for identity; not everyone was willing or able to rework grotesque imagery as did Brenda. This helps explain why grotesque images, while common in fashion advertising, are far from being a majority. A brand choosing to make its ads grotesque may repel some consumers even as it engages others.

As a route to persuasion, this mode can be thought of as elaboration applied to the identity on offer, rather than to the clothes on offer. To choose the identity is to choose the brand that offers it; persuasion here means brand preference and occurs when the "argument" for a particular identity is accepted. The risk is that the identity offered is rejected by the consumer, leading to rejection of the brand as well. A second risk is that negotiating identities is not necessarily a pleasant experience, leading consumers to resist or disengage from ads whose construction encourages no other mode of engagement. This risk will become important subsequently when we discuss the role of the grotesque in fostering a different mode of engagement.

Engage to Feel. In this mode, women approach fashion images primarily to regulate mood or to obtain a desired emotional response (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). As Tasha explains:

I think because of these magazines . . . you walk away feeling refreshed and light and something to look forward to. It puts me in a good place.

Notably, this mode was associated with the most idiosyn-

cratic responses; women relying on this mode seek whatever pictures can help them to experience a desired emotion. Thus, while both Fay and Tasha made use of this mode, there was little agreement between the two women as to which pictures produced desired moods. This is important, because it is not a question of images that are happy or unhappy and that exert their impact through sympathetic magic's law of similarity. Rather, it is a matter of consumers who find a particular ad to be a helpful pretext for feeling happy—or do not. For example, Fay experienced negative feelings in response to the Max Mara ad because, to her, it had a dated 1980s retro feel. Similarly, she disliked the emotions brought out by the Dolce & Gabbana ad (fig. 5) because it was too violent. In contrast, Tasha thought both ads elicited positive emotions; she liked the Max Mara ad for its wild feelings, and the Dolce & Gabbana ad for its passionate feelings.

Women who relied on this mode judged all ads through the personal and idiosyncratic associations the ad images conjured. Davis (1992, 3) notes that fashion can be like music in this way: "Such [fashion] statements [are] more like music, where the emotions, allusions, and moods that are aroused resist, as they almost must, the attribution of unambiguous meanings." Thus, the conceptual metaphor of this engagement style is magazine as radio dial, and ad as song. This consumer flips through the fashion magazine, turning the dial until she finds an ad/song that evokes her desired mood. Either Mozart or Metallica could be equally engaging, depending on the particular type of feeling sought by a particular woman at a particular time.

In this mode, women may be said to use affective processing of ad images. Affective processing can be defined as feeling-based processes that are distinct from either evaluation (i.e., liking) or purely descriptive cognition (Cohen, Pham, and Andrade 2008). When these women find an ad that depicts the mood they seek, engagement can be intense; Isen (2001, 77) notes that positive affect promotes "deeper, richer, thinking." Fay explained her affective processing in this way:

Sometimes you're just floating through the pictures and something catches your eyes. Sometimes you look at the images and you register, and it's a feeling.

Our interviews suggest that in this mode, women use a process of drift to skim through many fashion images that do not express the moods they seek and thus are not engaging. They will stop the process of drift and engage with an ad when they are arrested by an image that fulfills their emotional goals. Sometimes, for some women, grotesque elements will be arresting; at other times or for other women, a more idealized portrayal will be arresting.

These women did not try to create a story out of advertising images and did not fantasize about placing themselves in the clothes or situations. Unlike women who engage with identity, women who engage to feel did not tie positive emotions back to fantasies of product purchase. In response to the Carolina Herrera ad, Fay notes:

I like the color. There is a feeling that resonates with it. I don't think I would ever wear it, but it intrigues me.

It should not surprise us that a product category such as women's fashion may provide an occasion for obtaining and consuming emotions. But this aspect has remained hidden in conventional theories of fashion consumption, with their focus on identity and risk, and neglect of the playful aspects of fashion so crucial to Barthes' (1967) dual conception.

This mode is important in two respects. First, it is ambiguous whether a brand can evoke it by crafting an ad in a particular way. It serves as a reminder of how much consumer response to a given ad depends on that consumer, rather than on any property of the ad itself. The idea that it is consumers who create the meaning of an ad, rather than ads conveying meaning to consumers, has been central both to the genesis of consumer culture theory and to the early application of literary theory within consumer research (e.g., Scott 1994a). It is thus useful to acknowledge that some ways of engaging an ad are difficult to call forth by means of brand action; aesthetic properties of ads need not be determinative. However, this mode, like the mode of engaging to act, creates a space for grotesque ad imagery. Where the consumer who engages to act sees past the grotesque elements, the consumer who engages to feel is as likely to be arrested by a grotesque image as an idealized one. Hence, a brand that chooses a grotesque portrayal need not lose those consumers who engage to feel.

As a route to persuasion, this mode may work via a transfer of affect. If the brand's ads have consistently provided a desired feeling, then it is natural to suppose that the brand's clothing, if chosen, bought, and worn, might also provide that feeling. As Fay explains:

If I like something, even if it is not a designer, then I'd buy it, because that's what makes me feel good. It doesn't matter if I spend \$100 or \$5,000; it's the same feeling.

The difficulty in pursuing this route to persuasion is the idiosyncrasy of the feelings evoked in different consumers by particular ad portrayals.

New Modes of Engaging Ads

Thus far, we have reviewed three modes of engaging with fashion advertising, none of which requires any new theorizing and none of which explains much about why fashion brands sometimes deploy grotesque imagery in their ads. The next two modes of engagement have not been well-theorized in prior consumer research and will explain how aesthetic properties of ad texts can be pertinent to understanding consumer response to ads.

Engage to Transport. In this mode, women pay close attention to the story cues in an ad's images. They are oriented toward the narrative complexity of the images offered in each ad, because ads containing more narrative elements offer more opportunities for transportation. As Young puts

it, such images are "vague, open. . . . The variables in the formulae can be filled in with any number of concrete narrative values. . . . The very multiplicity and ambiguity of the fantasy settings evoked by clothes and by fashion imagery of these clothes contributes to such pleasure" (1994, 208). Tammi, a woman who uses this mode, discusses the fashion ads she prefers to consume:

I think that's important . . . when they're trying to tell a story with the pictures—to captivate the audience a little bit more.

In short, some fashion images invite women to engage with the narrative offered and perform the story, as described in Green and Brock (2000) and Gerrig (1993).

In this mode, women respond to fashion ads using narrative processing (Pennington and Hastie 1988). Narrative processing is episodic processing that creates or imposes a story-like structure on events; it includes a temporal dimension (i.e., occurrences over time) and a causal structure (Adaval and Wyer 1998). The interviews suggest that when ads are engaged in this mode, women use narrative processing to create stories starring the model of the ad in a continuing situation launched off the static image shown. Maureen discusses her processing of the Jimmy Choo ad (fig. 2) as follows:

Interesting. I am definitely going to look at it, because it definitely tells a story or makes me think of a story. It makes me think, "What are they trying to say?" My first instinct is that she's supposed to be powerful, but then I'm like, "Did she kill him? Is he dead?" She's threatening him; she's the devil.

The interviews revealed that women were most likely to engage the ad's narrative and be transported when an ad contained elements of the grotesque. For instance, Maureen responds to the Dolce & Gabbana ad (fig. 5) in this way:

This is just blended in; it's this whole kind of world they're creating. It's more appealing to me. This suspends my disbelief.

Women using this mode tended not to like ads that show pretty, idealized pictures, in direct contrast to the preferences of women who primarily engage for identity. Maureen explains:

One thing I find with lots of ads, with a lot of the models, I feel like they're looking at you. And I can almost feel the model saying "Like this?" It's so obviously staged and that pulls me away from it.

For women like Maureen, idealized ads lack the requisite ambiguity and multiplicity. The problem with ads that conform to the pretty girl + attractive things + lovely surroundings formula is that the story that comes to mind unbidden concerns a model in a photography studio, which is not a story that transports these women. Once the ad is seen to

be a rhetorical document, engagement is broken off or stymied before it can deepen into transportation, as argued by Green and Brock (2000).

Transportation into the ad's story, for women who engage the narrative, differs from the aspirational fantasies of women who engage for identity. When engaging the narrative, women will make up stories about models, clothes, or situations that they do not find ideal or wish to emulate. This mode exemplifies the idea of play in response to fashion advertising that Barthes (1967) counterposes to the search for identity that has dominated accounts within consumer culture theory. In performing the ad's narrative, no more commitment to the identities that might be on offer there is implied than when sampling a new perfume in a department store aisle.

The conceptual metaphor for this mode is ad as fairy tale, specifically the original Grimm's fairy tales, which are replete with grotesquerie never seen in the bowdlerized versions read to children. (For example, in Grimm's version, Cinderella's stepsister cuts off her toes trying to fit into the slipper and is exposed as an impostor when the prince notices the pool of her own blood.) As Young (1994, 207) notes: "Clothing images are not always the authoritative mirror that tells who is the fairest of them all, but the entrance to a wonderland of characters and situations."

Thus, while women who engage fashion ads for identity may initially fantasize in response, they may ultimately find the images there unforgiving mirrors of the gap between the actual and ideal selves. When grotesque imagery is present so that women engage the narrative offered, women can use fashion ads to transport themselves to a storybook wonderland that invokes delight instead of despair. For these women, grotesquerie as an aesthetic property of fashion ads appears to play the role that pathos played within the narratives employed by Green and Brock (2000). That is, any narrative may allow for transportation, but pathos or the grotesque may be required to trigger transportation in a specific instance or to deepen it to the degree that persuasive outcomes may occur.

The importance of this mode of engagement is that it explains why fashion ads do not uniformly conform to the idealized portrayal seen in the Michael Kors ad and expected from prior consumer research. The idealized portrayal fails with a segment of the fashion magazine audience. An idealized ad either does not get engaged or, if engaged, leads only to the struggle to negotiate a feasible identity, a struggle that does not always end happily (Belk 2001). The grotesque appears to be a more successful strategy for some portion of fashion consumers. It will be engaged where idealized ads will not, and, if engaged, can intensify experience of the brand.

How does the experience of being transported into a visual ad narrative function as a route to persuasion? Unlike a verbal narrative, in a fashion magazine ad, there are no characters or narrators making assertions that become effortful to disbelieve, per Gilbert (1991). There are no events or plot to drive inferences about the world knowledge woven

into the narrative, per Green and Brock (2000). What happens is that a woman takes up the occasion offered by a brand to spin a tale. She develops a story occasioned by the ad imagery and, in doing so, she makes the brand part of her story. The brand takes a step toward being a "brand for me," which is to say, her experience of the brand deepens and intensifies. The route to persuasion is an intensification of brand experience, achieved by taking up the occasion for narrative performance offered by the brand's ad.

Any complex narrative image, the Michael Kors ad as much as the Jimmy Choo, has the potential to open this route. The evidence of the interviews, however, is that this potential is unlikely to be realized unless charged by the grotesque. Performance of a narrative is a particularly optional consumer response and tends not to occur without an impetus.

Engage to Immerse. Transportation is not the only possible response to grotesquerie in fashion ads. We discovered from the interviews a related but distinct mode of engaging fashion ads that we term "immersion." Recall that immersion was one of the cognate terms that Gerrig (1993) considered using but ultimately set aside in favor of transportation. Immersion also has been associated with the concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; see also Wang and Calder [2006] for a brief review). We next tease out the distinction between being transported into a story versus being immersed in an image, and then examine the role of grotesque elements in evoking immersion instead of transportation.

In this mode, women approach fashion images as if the ads were on display in an art gallery. Rosemary explains:

I think they are like works of art. I just find everything, the setting, the clothing, the lighting, everything is pretty fantastic. It's a real treat.

A woman using this mode focuses in part on the visual aesthetic elements of the photographic image: line, color, shape, and configuration. More generally, when using this mode, women are looking for creative, innovative, and evocative pictures. Emma describes what she looks for in a fashion ad:

I guess different, interesting. Something that I haven't seen before . . . an interesting shot. Maybe it's a certain level of quality that they come up with . . . I think it has to be refreshing.

Encapsulated in Emma's quote are two concepts that have played important roles in aesthetic theory. The first, defamiliarization, is the idea that aesthetic objects must "make the familiar strange" to engage their audience (Mukarovsky 1964). The second is the notion of artistic quality—the idea that some artworks are better and more artful, while others are of inferior quality. Research has shown that some consumers are differentially sensitive to this dimension of aesthetic quality (e.g., Bloch et al. 2003). Emma indicates that both factors play a role in determining whether she will en-

gage to the extent of becoming immersed in an ad: is this image different, and how high is its level of aesthetic quality?

This mode of engagement bears some resemblance to the sensing dimension of brand experience as discussed by Schmitt and colleagues (Brakus et al. 2009). What's distinctive is that the focus of engaging for immersion is not just the sensory properties of the ad image per se. It's not the richly saturated yellow and orange of the flames in the Jimmy Choo ad that leads to immersion—the placement between the model's legs is important too. It is the artfulness of the image as a whole and not some particular color, shape, or pattern within it that makes the ad sufficiently intense to call forth the immersion response associated with culturally defined "high" art found in museums. Joy and Sherry describe this immersion response in its traditional context of museum and gallery consumption: art patrons "focus not so much on the narrative but on the image itself, that is, on the physical configuration" (2003, 271). We glimpsed the same kind of responses in these interviews, in the case of some women, and in response to a particular kind of ad image, the grotesque.

In fact, some of the women interviewed were explicit in their comparison of fashion ads to works of art seen in museums. For example, the Dolce & Gabbana ad (fig. 5) elicits this response from Eva:

You're looking at this like it's a piece of art, but part of the piece of art is the Dolce & Gabbana purse. It's like staring at the *Mona Lisa* if she had a Gucci purse. You're drawn to just staring at her, but if she had a Gucci purse on, that would be pretty cool.

When asked why a brand might create such an ad, Eva continued:

To do exactly what it did, make me keep staring at it. Just like being at the museum, nobody really goes to the museum or the art gallery and just walks by. You see something, stop, and try to make your own interpretation, figure it out. It will have your mind going.

In this mode, women do not try to create a story around the models in the ads, unlike women who engage the narrative. Aesthetic appreciation, or immersion in an art object, is not the same experience as transportation into a narrative. In addition, women in this mode tended not to put themselves in the ad in the place of the model, unlike the women who engage identity. As Sara explains:

It's more of a personal thing, but I guess I'm not putting myself in the fantasy. I'll appreciate the art.

As to circumstances under which she will or will not become immersed in an ad, Sara suggests that some ads are works of art, while others are "just about showing the clothes." We found in the interviews that "art" ads tended to have grotesque elements. Eva discusses why "art" ads are more engaging:

This picture is very intriguing; it makes me want to keep staring at it. This one makes you wonder . . . wow! This one is like a statement; I'm trying to figure it out. I think I might actually spend 5 minutes or so on this one picture. This one is more like art, as opposed to just fashion as a model. So the artwork catches my eye. It makes a bold statement about something that I haven't figured out yet.

Emma dismisses pretty, idealized fashion ads for their lack of any opportunity to engage:

I've seen it before. It's familiar, so I guess I get kind of bored with seeing something like this.

In summary, immersion represents an engagement response that is akin to transportation, but it cannot be said to be narrative transportation because it has more to do with aesthetic appreciation than with performing a narrative. One is transported into a story world, but one is immersed in the work of art, staying with the image. Nonetheless, as was the case with transportation, ads containing an element of the grotesque were preferentially associated with the immersion response. Here, the grotesque functions primarily to defamiliarize or make strange a stylistic device long viewed as a crucial determinant for achieving an aesthetic response (Miall and Kuiken 1994). Accordingly, whereas the grotesque appeared in this research to be the key means for engaging the consumer in the narrative elements in an ad, it is possible that other kinds of defamiliarization, not specifically grotesque, might also serve to evoke immersion. In fact, a wide range of positions on the nonidealized end of the imagery continuum may be able to combine with some level of aesthetic quality to produce immersion, short of the more extreme kinds of discrepancy associated with the grotesque.

In terms of a conceptual metaphor, in this mode, the ad is a painting. Women consume the ad imagery in the most direct sense, as itself the source of an enjoyable viewing experience. Inasmuch as fashion clothing can itself be considered an everyday art object, affording an enjoyable sensory experience to both the wearer and the viewer, it is no surprise that ad depictions of fashion clothing might strive themselves to offer the same kind of enjoyment. The important thing to remember is that fashion ads that consist exclusively of pretty models, gorgeous clothes, and lovely surroundings may be the least likely to trigger this mode of engagement and produce immersion. The pretty is not the beautiful.

Considered as a route to persuasion, when the ad is consumed as an artwork, aesthetic immersion occurs by agency of the brand's ad. To respond in this way is to choose to engage the ad at length and deepen one's experience of the brand. Sara identified the brands she seeks out in every issue of her fashion magazines:

Usually Chanel ads, just from the photography sense. I've always been a fan of Chanel ads. Gucci, Diesel does some interesting pictures. Those are just ones that over a long

period of time stick out as something that the photography has always appealed to me, or the style.

Immersion leads to a more intense experience with the brand, eliciting positive brand outcomes.

Summary

The interviews indicated that grotesque imagery was associated with the consumer outcomes of transportation and immersion. These modes of engagement had the potential to be advantageous for brands, insofar as they produced a stronger and more intense brand experience. Conversely, idealized imagery could be problematic for brands because of the potential unpleasantness of identity negotiation as experienced by consumers, and because of consumer resistance triggered by images perceived as obvious attempts to sell.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

We introduced the idea of modes of advertising engagement, conceived as routes to persuasion, and grounded it in a particular domain: fashion clothing. This domain was approached as one instance of a broader category comprising expensive, discretionary, socially visible, and culturally laden goods. Within this broader category, fashion also was distinguished as one in which the products advertised are themselves everyday art objects, and where consumers expect to consume the advertising when they buy a magazine. This specificity necessarily places bounds on the generalizability of the modes of engagement identified and raises the question of how useful the concept of engagement might be, outside a constrained set of consumer domains. It could fairly be charged that no consumer "engages" the Pantene shampoo ad in figure 1. This ad is processed either centrally or peripherally, per the elaboration likelihood model if brand outcomes are the focus, or it is interpreted and renegotiated by the consumer, as laid out in consumer culture theory, if culture rather than brand is the focus. The idea of engagement does not apply and adds no explanatory content.

Conversely, it is possible to imagine product domains other than women's fashion, where the idea of engagement might serve the same purpose of integrating and differentiating a multiplicity of potential consumer responses to brand advertisement. Consider high-end home furnishings and decor, such as might be advertised in *Architectural Digest*. It seems dubious that notions such as "central processing," or the "thinking" or "sensing" dimensions of Schmitt, can reveal much about what consumers actually do with ads for this kind of product. Of course, consumer culture theory will have much to say about this category, but consumer culture theory provides few tools for understanding why different home decor ads may be constructed in different ways. That is where the idea of modes of advertising engagement can make a contribution. These modes link what the brand does in its ads to how the consumer responds, by means of distinguishing aesthetic properties of

ad texts and focusing on the intensity of brand experience as the outcome of interest rather than the valence of evaluative judgments.

It seems likely, then, that to distinguish modes of engagement may be a useful practice outside of women's fashion and for consumers other than relatively affluent, privileged, socially established, North American female consumers. However, it is an empirical question whether the five modes of engagement identified here will always be present for each new category examined or whether there might exist other modes, distinctive to other categories and consumer populations. In addition, we cannot say whether an ethnically, socially, or culturally distinct consumer group might have responded in the same ways as did our interviewees to the grotesque versus idealized dimension studied here. We also have passed lightly over the immense amount of cultural knowledge required to make enough sense of the Jimmy Choo ad for transportation or immersion to even be possible, but we do not mean to deny its pertinence or extent. Nonetheless, consistent with the psychological tradition of Green and Brock (2000), the focus has been on fundamental human potentials rather than on culturally constituted and socially circumscribed practices. Transportation and immersion are human responses, within the repertoire of almost any consumer, if the right impetus is present.

A second task for future research is the experimental investigation of the links between ad properties, modes of engagement, and intensity of brand experience, as laid out in this essay. The goal of the experiments in the first instance will be to test whether grotesque portrayals lead to a different and sometimes advantageous consumer response, relative to idealized portrayals. While the interviews were important for establishing that a brand doesn't always benefit from crafting an ad filled with pretty people and things, experiments are important to confirm the causal hypotheses linking the grotesque to transportation and immersion, and subsequent intensification of brand experience. Experimentation can also address the question of whether grotesque imagery can work in more humdrum product categories such as shampoo.

However, experiments focused on fashion ad imagery will have to depart from customary procedures in consumer research. Obviously, the outcome measures cannot be the standard suite of evaluative judgments (e.g., Aad, Abr). The participants cannot be indigent 20-year-old students either; these are not the consumers to which these images are directed, and there is no reason to expect their responses to illuminate those of women who can choose to buy a \$1,500 handbag. Furthermore, it seems doubtful that the brand experience outcomes of interest can be obtained using a single exposure to some fictive brand of the experimenter's concoction. Likewise, although consumer researchers routinely use professional artists to construct visual experimental stimuli, the ads reproduced here were created by a small cadre of elite fashion photographers, a tiny fraternity even within the arts profession. We may question whether the local Photoshop whiz is up to the task of instantiating the aesthetic

properties of interest, should the immersion response become the focus of experimental work. And if real brands and real images must be incorporated into the experiment, internal validity issues grow apace.

Other complexities await. Consider what would be required to create a tractable experimental stimulus out of the Jimmy Choo, Versace, or Yves St. Laurent ads. These complex images are a long way from the simple, isolable image properties manipulated in McQuarrie and Mick (1999), Scott and Vargas (2007), or Veryzer and Hutchinson (1998). It seems unlikely that the aesthetic property of interest, which is causal with respect to transportation or immersion, is a function of some single image element that can be added or subtracted to construct a manipulation. It is the assemblage as a whole, and also the difficult-to-verbalize sensory dimension of the image as photographically treated that makes transportation or immersion a possible response. But to compare two existing complex assemblages (e.g., Jimmy Choo versus Michael Kors), without actually manipulating image properties, would again raise internal validity issues.

An even more profound change may be required in the experimental procedures themselves. To ensure adequate power, most consumer research experiments force exposure to ad stimuli, present only a handful of ads, and present these ads in isolation from editorial matter or any other source of distraction. But the Jimmy Choo ad is designed to work while embedded in 200 or more competing ads, themselves embedded in hundreds of other images within the surrounding editorial. If one purpose of the grotesque is to overcome consumer resistance and to cause the ad to be engaged at all, then a good test of the grotesque must leave consumers free to refuse to engage particular experimental stimuli. Such designs have been rare in consumer research and create many problems, particularly if it is necessary to reproduce the equally complex imagery found in the surrounding editorial. The editorial material in *Vogue* is quite distinctive relative to, say, the magazines from which Richins (1991) drew her ad stimuli. It cannot be assumed that responses to a Jimmy Choo or Versace ad will be the same if presented apart from their native editorial context. The need to treat the editorial context theoretically, as well as the ad stimuli, doubles the complexity faced by experimenters.

None of these challenges is insuperable, but they must be confronted to obtain a convincing experimental test of the proposition that grotesque ads, when viewed in context, can produce positive brand outcomes in the form of a more intense brand experience. That proposition itself has to be parsed experimentally: first, to see if transportation and immersion occur preferentially in response to grotesque narrative imagery; second, to see if arranging for transportation or immersion to occur is actually advantageous with respect to producing a more intense brand experience; and third, to see if transportation and immersion can be distinguished empirically. On a more positive note, good measures have been developed, not only of brand experience (Brakus et al. 2009), but of whether the transportation response occurs (Green and Brock 2000) and also of individual differences

in transportability (Cin, Zanna, and Fong 2004), and sensitivity to aesthetic properties along with the propensity to immerse (Bloch et al. 2003).

CONCLUSION

This article attempted to bridge a series of gaps. We used the interview methodology associated with consumer culture theory and interpretivist perspectives to challenge and refine the construct of narrative transportation, an idea that had originated in the psychological experimental tradition of Gerrig (1993) and Green and Brock (2000). We connected the elaboration likelihood model and consumer culture theory perspectives on advertising by developing a superset in which these could be located as sponsoring two among several modes of engaging fashion advertising. We reconnected literary and aesthetic theories to consumer research, after a hiatus in which social and cultural theories dominated, and grounded these theoretical perspectives in empirical data rather than stopping at analytic suppositions. We bridged the projects of brands and the projects of consumers by linking constructed ad properties to modes of consumer engagement. Nothing less would have sufficed to gain theoretical insight into consumption of that socially visible, culturally laden, everyday art object known as fashion clothing.

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