

Ad Cultural Analysis



Illustration 1: Potato Quality :(

As of late, my wife has been learning a lot about bra sizing and as I've come to learn, the science of supportive bust wear can be quite involved. We've begun to see quite an influx of Victoria's Secret catalogs in our mailbox, no doubt resultant of the application of her new found knowledge, but she often is disinterested in their offerings. However, this disinterest does not stem from a lack of product or need but rather the marketing approach itself. When the new catalog arrived, entitled "Swim 2016" in which the adjacent photo is

affiliated with, she idly flipped through it and

stopped momentarily to say to me, "I don't quite understand how these photos are supposed to encourage me to buy bra's, the women all look like they are attempting to seduce me or in the middle of having an orgasm."

Looking at this photo, I have no doubt in my mind that she is correct, and yet this has been the ongoing strategy of Victoria's Secret for as long as I can remember. Back before the internet when I was approaching my teenage years I vividly remember Victoria's Secret catalogs arriving in the mail and feeling a great deal of confusion. I was not supposed to be looking at my Dad's Playboy's but yet here was this objectifying catalog that urged my boyish self to quickly become

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a man.

I chose this photo in particular because it was one of the featured images in the catalog my wife was flipping through but also because it accomplishes many things from a marketing standpoint. As a man looking at this advertisement I can imagine that this image was taken from a vantage point to make the woman appear to be unapproachable, a symbol of perfection and beauty. The blurring of the golf cart's supporting frame in the foreground begs me to feel ashamed that I am watching this woman from afar yet unable to look away. Her relaxed posture and over-sized sunglasses make me feel as if I could watch her all day and not be caught staring. Her legs intentionally spread wide to guide your eyes towards a bikini bottom with a print which is just busy enough to hold your gaze. Her mouth slightly open, her lips appearing engorged and forearms tensed close together against the steering wheel as if she is in a fit of passion. And yet this catalog is for women – women interested in shopping for bikinis.

It is an odd sort of psychology they use to exploit sexuality. They assume women want to be her and men want to be with her. This is the expectation American society has created and injected into our minds from the day we are born. While many industries are berated for exploiting sexuality so explicitly, Victoria's Secret is able to get away with such provocative messages because of the product in which they are attempting to sell. And in their attempts to whittle you down to nothing more than objects of sexual desire they hope that a connection is made in which you will purchase this bikini.

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This second image I chose is much more subtle in its message and possibly more damaging. What peaked my interest was that the marketing campaign was outside of the United States yet still resonates loudly with American culture. This advertisement for Slim-Fast, a well known weight loss supplement utilizes a collapsing Russian doll to depict the image of shedding pounds. While I cannot read the text, the visual speaks loudly. Russian dolls are traditionally pear-shaped women which by American standards is unattractive and undesirable. Playing off of the nesting of Russian dolls where we find a smaller Russian doll within the larger Russian doll, Slim-Fast seem to be implying that within each of us is a smaller more desirable version of ourselves that is waiting to get out. While this advertisement is not using sexuality explicitly, it does in its own way seem to be telling women that you may not be beautiful right now, but you can be and Slim-Fast can make it happen.

I see these two advertising campaigns and find myself questioning how they play off of each other. One company attempting to show me who to be, the other telling me how to get there. Victoria's Secret could have just as easily used stand-a-lone images of their product or used what is considered to be an average-sized woman to show off how the product will actually look. Conversely Slim-Fast could have just as easily displayed images of their product and provided information on how to live a healthier lifestyle. Instead we are left feeling inadequate because the

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people who develop these products and develop these marketing strategies have no care for the end-user. They only care about the sale and it is much easier to make a sale through exploiting human nature rather than through an intelligent and informative campaign.