

Feminist Theory and Advertisements

Visual Studies

Ashley Paige Young

“The female body is constantly subjected to the judgmental gaze. Whether it be the gaze of a medic who defines the body as healthy or diseased, or the connoisseur who defines it as beautiful or ugly, the female body is caught in a perpetual cycle of judgment and categorization (1).” Visual imagery affects us daily and we are influenced by what we see, whether we believe this to be true consciously or subconsciously. The media sends subliminal messages that alter our thought process, our behaviors and our relationships with the world (and ourselves). Movies, television shows, advertisements, magazines and many other forms of vehicles display idealistic body imagery that cause behavioral changes within the women in society. What type of behavior changes can occur because of a specific style of advertisements or type of media that is being mass produced for the public to see? Eating disorders, negative body image, a change in buying habits and many other alterations can occur when constantly being sold an “ideal,” that is impossible to reach.

“According to objectification theory, because females are socialized to see themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated, they are more likely to feel shame and anxiety for not appearing perfect (2).” Women are constantly being shown the “ideal,” the “perfect,” and the thin body that they should possess. “In 1989, 681,000 procedures were done, up to 80 percent over 1981; over half of these were performed on patients between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. The trendy Details magazine describes, “surgical stretching, tucking, and sucking,” as “another fabulous” fashion accessory (3).”

“During the past decade eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest growing medical specialty (4). Industries have doubled, or even tripled their currency as well because of this “idealized sex and body image” being sold to everyone, everywhere. Within the last decade (1992-2002), the diet industry has grown to be worth 33 billion dollars, cosmetic industry is around 20 billion dollars, the porn industry is now 7 billion dollars and the cosmetic surgery has risen to be about 300 million dollars (5). Since this idea of selling women’s beauty as currency has become, ideas of beauty have furthered into categories that are now not even real anymore (6). These numbers today would be even greater than the numbers reported in the early 2000’s.

Fashion Magazines contain ads, as well as other magazines, but these advertisements seem to show imagery of skinny men and women, who are between the ages of 20-30, are Caucasian, and not only have the *perfect body*, but are tan as well. Most of the time it is hard to distinguish what the ad is actually selling besides the highly idealized lifestyle. Gucci is a brand that is often seen in high end fashion magazines like *Vogue*, or the *W* and contribute to these images that set the beauty standard for the viewer.



Over the last decade our society has seen a rise in body issues in our youth and in



younger adults. A study was conducted in 2011 discussed the link between poor body image, eating disorders, and advertisements by Terri D. Conley and Laura R. Ramsey. The study was “derived [from the] hypotheses from Jean Kilbourne’s observed media analysis presented

in her *Killing Us Softly* film series. A total of 790 advertisements in 19 magazines were coded” (7).

The research goes into detail about specific attributes that fashion advertisements in magazines showcase that differentiate the men and women portrayed in them. Kilbourne points out that the women are always in positions that are more serving to men (8), quite literally, and send subconscious implications of this idea. She also argues that it is mostly women, not men, that are airbrushed and portrayed as flawless (9).

Gucci’s advertisements portray both sexes as “flawless” and airbrushed, however most of their advertisements seem that the women are there for sex or objectification and look as if they are there to service the men. Another study decoded the same objectification of women in magazines, which focused on the types of magazines and how women are “sold to” by the advertisements placed in the magazines. The two types of magazines were high fashion (*Vogue*) and more every day “home” women magazines (*Good Housekeeping*).

“Previous research has shown that women are more often sexually objectified and portrayed as victims in fashion magazines compared to home magazines (10)”. Ramsey and Conley did a study of their own around these same grounds, and concluded that “female passivity was evident in the ads. Female models were portrayed in passive positions more often than male models were (11).”

When comparing men’s magazines, women’s fashion magazines, and women’s home magazines, “female models were portrayed as significantly more flawless in women’s fashion magazines than in women’s home magazines, and than in men’s magazines (12).” This concept is known to affect female adults, but what does this do to our youth, teens, or young adolescence? “Using social comparison theory as a framework, the authors propose that young girls compare their physical attractiveness with that of advertising models and, subsequently,

their self-perceptions and self-esteem may be affected, depending on the motive for social comparison (13).”

“Today's specifications call for blonde and thin - no easy task, since most girls get bigger during adolescence. Many become anorexics or bulimics; a few rich ones get liposuction. We make their focus pleasing other people and physical beauty (14).” Pre-adolescent girls see these advertisements and women portrayed in movies that are highly photoshopped and recognize their mission as one to become beautiful, instead of maybe powerful or intelligent. “Garfinkel and Garner are masters in the study of disordered eating, and they have described this role of the media: “The media have capitalized upon and promoted this image (of thinness) and through popular programming have portrayed the successful and beautiful protagonists as thin. Thinness has thus become associated with self-control and success (15).”

“The phrase identificatory role models suggests a potentially important theoretical mediator of the mass media’s effects. The process of modeling, as explicated in social learning theory provides a theoretical means by which young women may acquire the ideal of a thin body, the motivation to engage in extreme dieting behavior, and instructions on how to do so from the mass media. Two components within the social learning model, prevalence and incentives, provide an explanation of how dieting behaviors may be socially learned from the mass media (16).” Their behaviors alter by becoming so focused on these standards, that they begin to replicate what they see, or attempt to. “Further, studies show that self-esteem drops to a much greater extent for female than male preadolescents and adolescents, with self-perceptions of physical attractiveness contributing to the drop (17).”

There are multiple studies that suggest that advertising sets the standards for beauty and influence consumers and changes their perceptions on what beauty is defined as in the eyes of society (18). “Recent studies have found that female college students and female preadolescents

do compare their physical attractiveness with that of models in ads (19).” This alters the way these females interact with other people, in relationships and with themselves. “Through the flashy images of “perfect” female beauty promoted ubiquitously in magazines, television, and films, female and male viewers alike may quickly infer that a female’s body is her most important attribute . . . This perfect body has flawless skin, a thin waist, long legs, and well-developed breasts (20).”

Advertisements like Gucci, create an ideal that most women cannot achieve. What do advertisements with images that provide an unachievable reach of ‘perfect’ shown repetitively to women produce? “in 1984, a study conducted by Glamour magazine and analyzed by Susan Wooley and Wayne Wooley revealed that 75 percent of the 33,000 women surveyed considered themselves “too fat,” despite the fact that only one quarter were deemed overweight by standard weight tables and 30 percent were actually underweight (21).” Susan Bordo depicts the numbers when comparing to eating disorders, and women’s dissatisfaction with their own bodies.

“The incidence of eating disorders has always been disproportionately high among females: approximately 90 percent of sufferers are girls or women. Second, eating disorders are culturally and historically situated in advanced industrial societies within roughly the past hundred years (22).” “Individual cases have been documented infrequently... but it is not until the second half of the nineteenth century that something like a minor epidemic of anorexia nervosa is first described in medical accounts, and [that is next to] the escalation of anorexia and bulimia in the 1980s and 1990s . . . these elements point to culture (23).”

Another study involved showing females images of average sized models, plus sized models, thinner models, and other types of advertisements that involved cars, houses, and other non-beauty subjects. “It was confirmed that body image for females is much more negative after seeing thin [models in] media images than after seeing images of average size models, plus size

models or cars or houses girls also described the ideal woman as 5'7, 100 lbs, blonde hair and blue eyes (24).” Since not all of these characteristics can be accomplished due to their genetic makeup, plastic surgery, serious bulimia, and anorexia can become an issue, and sometimes are the resolution in the eyes of these women (25). Once again, this information was repeated and backed up when Harrison and Cantor found that women who read more magazines were more likely to adapt eating disorders (26). It is evident that the comparison of the viewer and the model in advertisements can cause psychological and physical behavioral changes of the viewer, especially those who are vulnerable in their own skin.

Lynda Nead, a professor at Birkbeck College, University of London, studied the differences of art and more obscene pieces of media like pornography. “In December 1985 an Obscene Publications Bill was introduced to the House of Commons, designed to deal with the more “extreme” manifestations of obscenity and violence in broadcasting and to bring radio and television into the net of the 1959 Obscene Publications Act. The bill was defeated... but in its final form it included a special amendment introduced by the Labour MP Clare Short, to ban pictures in newspapers of naked or partially naked women in sexually provocative poses (27).” The bill that was being reviewed was one that was specifically focused on “pin up” photographs and imagery that seemed extremely scandalous to be in newspapers and magazines for the public review. “Although there was some agreement amongst Tory and Labour MPs that sex and violence on television could affect social behavior, there was less consensus concerning the boundaries that separated these harmful images from others that were harmless and pleasurable. Short argued that these displays of women in daily newspapers influenced the sexual culture of society and affected men’s attitudes towards women (28).”

The bill that was aimed to separate the “private” and “public” images, could have saved the Western society a great deal of trouble when discussing women and their own body image.

“A study by Kevin Thompson found that out of 100 women, “free of eating disorders”, more than 95 percent overestimated their body size, on average, one-fourth larger than they really



were. . . . American women were suffering from perceptual malfunction (29).” “The better people feel about themselves, the less they tend to overestimate their body size,” However, most women in our culture don’t feel very secure or good about themselves, and then they are labeled “disordered” (30). When viewing advertisements, like

Gucci, it creates a lifestyle, an ideal, a non-realistic lifestyle that may promote their brand, but also this unrealistic body image that most of the human race cannot obtain.

Lynda Nead discusses mostly the separation of images between Fine art imagery and obscene images found in pornography in her book *The Female Nude*. However, her theory raises questions to the very idea of body image and the viewers. “[J. Ann] Tickner, scholar of School of International Services, differentiates images of the female body that can be produced by a woman from those that can be made by men: “living in a female body is different from looking at it, as a man (31).”



Does it matter who is creating the image, or will it resonate with a group more than another? Mario Testino is a fine art fashion photographer who has shot many photographs and advertising images for Gucci. His work is considered fine art, and although it isn’t labeled “pornographic,” it does have a sense of obscenity.

Lynda Nead quotes, “It is significant that Kant expresses the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime in relation to the viewer’s experience of the object. Whereas the pleasure provoked by the beautiful is one of life enhancement, which may be united with the play of the imagination, the pleasure (lust), that is excited by the sublime is of a different and negative order (32).”



Although advertisements sell clothing, accessories, or maybe even a lifestyle that is “obtainable,” in the end it is human nature to look at the body within the photograph. Roland Barthes explains this as the referent of the imagery. First humans will look at the body, then the location of the photograph (or advertisement) and then, finally, will focus on the referent, which is the body in the setting. That is what the human mind will dwell on, compare to, and categorize. “Does that body belong in a category of my body (33).”

Michael De Meyer is an Advertising and Public Relations professor of Grand Valley State University who also has held a variety of executive positions in both the profit and the nonprofit sectors including CEO of a marketing/design agency and a strategic brand consulting practice. When discussing this idea of the influences advertising has on the beauty standards he stated “There is some evidence that the repeated reading/viewing of such advertisements relates to “ideal” body image and with some it can contribute to image dissatisfaction, however this is a point of discussion right now as you see advertisers like Abercrombie, American Apparel modifying their advertising model revolving around the notion that millennials may not relate to the traditional concept of beauty (34).” If this idea is true, then that means there will be a shift in models represented within advertisements and perhaps could help bring the standards of beauty portrayed in them, back to reachable grounds, however, Abercrombie, American Apparel, etc.,

are not considered “high fashion,” and do not use “fine-art fashion photography” within their advertisements. Would high-end fashion companies follow suit to these smaller companies, or would they be unaffected because it is a completely different target market?

When discussing the link between advertising and eating disorders De Meyer stated, that he tends more to agree with Susan Albers, Psy.D. at the Cleveland Clinic, who maintains [advertisements] may be a trigger for an individual predisposed to eating disorders. “This predisposition coupled with spending a significant amount of time with fashion magazines could impact body image and engage eating disorders. I am not sure I subscribe to the concept of the ad itself acting alone (35)”. There are many different factors that can go into behavioral changes because of self-doubt. This means there isn’t one specific fault that can alter a drastic behavior that produces self harm to reach an unattainable standard.

However, many studies have been conducted and prove that advertising images do influence these behavioral shifts, but do not act alone. “Fashion industries advertising is influential and aspirational. It impacts how we see ourselves and creates standards for what we should look like. Like with all influence it can have both a positive and negative effect. With influence also comes responsibility. I think we are at these crossroads of influence and responsibility especially pertaining to millennials (36).”

Advertisements affect people consciously and subconsciously. Most importantly, ad campaigns like Gucci that are displayed in high fashion magazines target young women, and even though they are targeting women, they still display overly skinny, perfect, sexualized images of women, which cause an entire behavior and emotional shift on these viewers. Women can see these images in advertisements and believe that is what they must look like, or to become beautiful, and successful they must replicate what they see within those advertisements.

Gucci's use of white female and male models provide a specific target market and standard of beauty and sell a lot more to their consumers than a perfume or pair of glasses; they sell a lifestyle, a beauty myth, a call to action by their viewers and it may not actually be a call to action to buy their products, but become those wearing their products. "Women whose bodies do not conform to the ideal are beyond the field of vision and the right to self-definition in these cases may mean an insistence on the right to make and be visible. Here, art, may be taken as a reasonable gauge of social visibility in general and the images of the experiences of women within the dominant society and its culture of physical perfection (37)."

Notes:

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Advertising & Body Image

Ashley Paige Young

Feminism Theory

Feminist theory is the extension of **feminism** into theoretical or philosophical discourse. It aims to understand the nature of gender inequality.

Some theorists studied:

Susan Bordo

Lynda Nead

Industry statistics 1992-2002

Numbers on the rise

Diet industry - 33 billion dollars

Cosmetic industry - 20 billion dollars

Porn Industry - 7 billion

Cosmetic surgery - 300 million dollars

“Cinderella ate my daughter” Stats (2012)

Nearly a quarter of teen girls have posted a photo of them nude or semi-nude online

In 2008, 12,000 Botox injections were given to children between 13-19

43% of girls in grades 3-12 polled in 2000 asserted that the most popular girls in school were “very thin,” and in 2006, that number rose to 60%

60% of girls in grades 9-12 surveyed in 2006 that they were attempting to lose weight, only 10% were considered medically overweight

Between 1999 and 2006, the percentage of children under age 12 were admitted into the hospital for eating disorders rose to 119 percent. 89% were girls.

What is causing this?

“... I am convinced that anorexia and bulimia have been culturally produced.”

-Susan Bordo

Lynda Nead

“The female body is constantly subjected to the judgemental gaze. Whether it be the gaze of a medic who defines the body as healthy or diseased, or the connoisseur who defines it as beautiful or ugly, the female body is caught in a perpetual cycle of judgement and categorization.”

“The term male is associated with the higher faculties of creativity and rational mental processes, while the female is demoted to the role of passive nature and associated with the biological mechanisms of reproduction. Thus in western metaphysics, form (the male) is preferred over matter (the female); mind and spirit are privileged over body and substance and the only way to give meaning and order to the body in nature is through the imposition of technique and style - to give it defining frame.”

“According to objectification theory, because females are socialized to see themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated, they are more likely to feel shame and anxiety for not appearing perfect .”

Groesz, Lisa M., Michael P. Levine, and Sarah K. Murnen. "The Effect of Experimental Presentation of Thin Media Images on Body Satisfaction: A Meta-analytic Review." *Int. J. Eat. Disord. International Journal of Eating Disorders* (2001): 1-16. Print.

Lauren Greenfield - Girl Culture





LAUREN GREENFIELD
Spring Break, Panama City, Florida
LG.029



Maureen Connor, Thinner Than You, 1990. Steel, nylon mesh



Fashion Advertisements

A study that was conducted in 2011 discussed the link between poor body image, eating disorders, and advertisements. The study and review was done by Terri D. Conley and Laura R. Ramsey and the study was “derived [from the] hypotheses from Jean Kilbourne’s observed media analysis presented in her *Killing Us Softly* film series. A total of 790 advertisements in 19 magazines were coded”





Stankiewicz, J. M., & Rosselli, F. (2008). Women as sex objects and victims in print advertisements. *Sex Roles*, 58, 579–589.

Studies

In another study looking at the same objectification of women in magazines, the focus were the types of magazines and how women are “sold to” by the advertisements placed in the magazines. The two types of magazines were high fashion (Vogue) and more every day “home” women magazines (Good Housekeeping).

“Previous research has shown that women are more often sexually objectified and portrayed as victims in fashion magazines compared to home magazines”. Ramsey and Conley did a study of their own and concluded that “female passivity was evident in the ads. Female models were portrayed in passive positions more often than male models were.”

When comparing men’s magazines, women’s fashion magazines, and women’s home magazines, “female models were portrayed as significantly more flawless in women’s fashion magazines than in women’s home magazines, and than in men’s magazines.” This concept is known to affect female adults, but what does this do to our youth, teens, or young adolescence? “Using social comparison theory as a framework, the authors propose that young girls compare their physical attractiveness with that of advertising models and, subsequently, their self-perceptions and self-esteem may be affected, depending on the motive for social comparison.”

1. Conley, T. D., and L. R. Ramsey. "Killing Us Softly? Investigating Portrayals of Women and Men in Contemporary Magazine Advertisements." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* (2011): 469-78. Print.
2. Martin, Mary C., and James W. Gentry. "Stuck in the Model Trap: The Effects of Beautiful Models in Ads on Female Pre-Adolescents and Adolescents." *Journal of Advertising*: 19-33. Print.

"Today's specifications call for blonde and thin - no easy task, since most girls get bigger during adolescence. Many become anorexics or bulimics; a few rich ones get liposuction. We make their focus pleasing other people and physical beauty ."

Martin, Mary C., and James W. Gentry. "Stuck in the Model Trap: The Effects of Beautiful Models in Ads on Female Pre-Adolescents and Adolescents." *Journal of Advertising*: 19-33. Print.

2000

Ad was banned from the UK billboards created by Gucci.

The image was of a young woman (Sophie Dahl), in a very suggestive pose, nude, and apparently selling perfume.

That year, Gucci posted a 22.6% rise in revenue, putting them at 375.1 million dollars for mid-year. At the end of that year they would reach 2.2 billion.

Gucci's Opium Fragrance



Gucci Advertisements



Antonio Correggio - Jupiter and Antiope



Banned Ads

“Tom Ford: Shot by Terry Richardson in 2007, this provocative Tom Ford campaign was criticised for its pornographic approach and was subsequently banned in several countries.

Gucci: Responsible for some of the most controversial adverts ever, Tom Fords 2004 Gucci campaign featured Carmen Cass with a the Gucci ‘G’ shaved into her pubic hair. Shot by Mario Testino, the ad was banned worldwide instantly”



Lynda Nead -

“The female nude has been the focus of a certain idealist aesthetic of wholeness and containment and whilst the female body has indeed been the object of relentless display within this framework, it has at the same time rendered certain bodies invisible within the defining boundaries of art. Women whose bodies do not conform to the ideal are beyond the field of vision and the right to self-definition in these cases may mean an insistence on the right to make and be visible. Here, art, may be taken as a reasonable gauge of social visibility in general and the images of the experiences of women within the dominant society and its culture of physical perfection.”



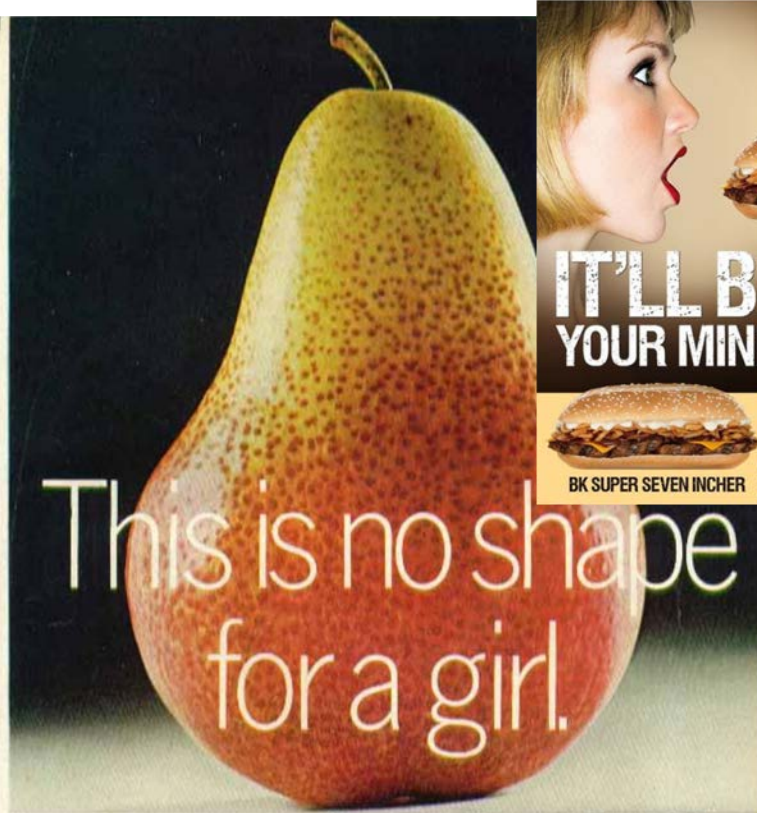


Killing Us Softly

“Previous research has shown that women are more often sexually objectified and portrayed as victims in fashion magazines compared to home magazines”. Ramsey and Conley did a study of their own and concluded that “Female passivity was evident in the ads. Female models were portrayed in passive positions more often than male models were .”

Gucci's ads are typically shown in fashion magazines.

“Using social comparison theory as a framework, the authors propose that young girls compare their physical attractiveness with that of advertising models and, subsequently, their self-perceptions and self-esteem may be affected, depending on the motive for social comparison.”



That's why Warner's has a Body-Do.

Girls with too little top and too much bottom: a Body-Do™ can re-shape you. Here's why. A Body-Do doesn't just bra and girdle you. It equalizes you.

While the contour bra rounds out your bosom just enough for your hips, the girdle pulls in your hips to go with your bosom.



You don't just get more bosom and less hips. You get as perfectly proportioned a shape as you can have. A bra and girdle that work as a combo to balance your body. This is a Body-Do. There's one for a pear. There's one for an hourglass.

There's a Body-Do for every kind of body. Any good store will help you get fitted.

IT JUST
TASTES
BETTER



IT'LL BLOW YOUR MIND AWAY

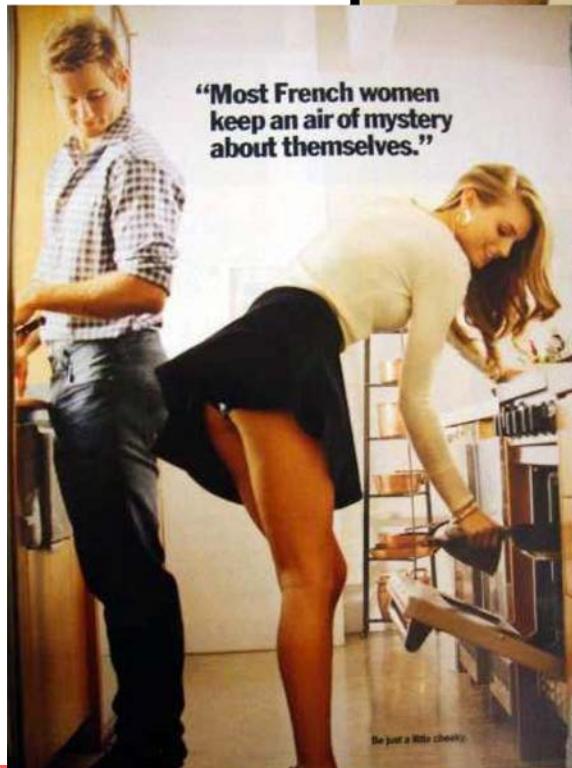


\$6.25
MEAL

BK SUPER SEVEN INCHER

Fill your desire for something big, juicy and flame-grilled with the NEW BK SUPER SEVEN INCHER. Team for more after you taste the mind-blowing burger that comes with a single beef patty, topped with American cheese, crispy onions and the A.T.™ Thick & Hearty Steak Sauce.

"Most French women
keep an air of mystery
about themselves."



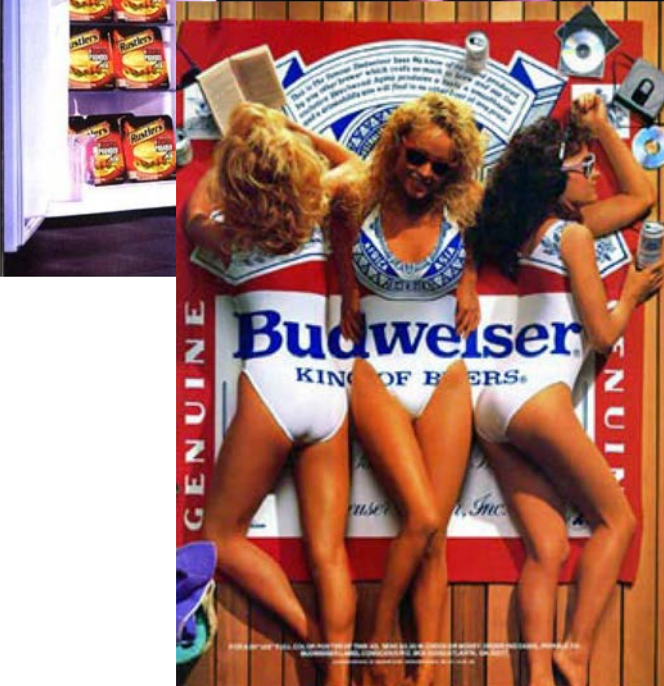
Be just a little cheeky.

CONTACT

James the port has just finished racing the fraternity's old western Aurora Model Motor-ing set. You'll find sets just like it at many Contact dealers. Come on in and race against your friends. (You may even win a set.) For nearest retailer, write Contact, 140 West 51 St., New York, New York 10019



YOU CAN NEVER HAVE TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING...



Meet Trudy.

Trudy is a St. Louis native who has been traveling for the company since 2009 as a store consultant. Her hobbies include college football as well as singing and dancing to 80's Rock. She is photographed here wearing the iconic American Apparel sweatshirt.

To learn more about our company, to shop online, and to find all store locations, visit our website.



American Apparel®

Bodysuits and High-Highs



American Apparel®  Made in USA
Sweatshirt Price - Fair Trade
americanapparel.net

Retail Locations:

Philadelphia - 17th Street
1717 N. 17th St.
Phone: (215) 594-0001

Philadelphia - Market Street
211 N. Market St.
Phone: (215) 594-0001

King of Prussia - The Plaza
1001 N. 93rd St.
Phone: (215) 261-0001

Pittsburgh - Pittsburgh
1001 N. 93rd St.
Phone: (412) 261-0001

St. Louis - Gateway Center
1001 N. 93rd St.
Phone: (314) 261-0001

St. Louis - Gateway Center
1001 N. 93rd St.
Phone: (314) 261-0001

Washington DC - Capitol Square
1001 N. 93rd St.
Phone: (202) 261-0001

Washington DC - Capitol Square
1001 N. 93rd St.
Phone: (202) 261-0001



Gucci's "Below the G-String"



Impacts on Society - Subconscious Behavior Changes

Buying Habits

Eating Disorders

Poor Body Image

Gucci's Beauty





“Art may be taken as a reasonable gauge of social visibility in general and the images of the experiences of women within the dominant society and its culture of physical perfection.” Lynda Nead

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