Rhetoric of Imagery: Gendering and Consumption Throughout Interwar American Advertisement

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RHETORIC OF IMAGERY: GENDERING IDENTITY AND CONSUMPTION THROUGHOUT INTERWAR AMERICAN ADVERTISEMENT

by

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B.S. University of Central Florida, 2011

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ABSTRACT

Interwar American advertising rose alongside new levels of hygiene, personal appearance, and technology in order to sell their products to target audiences. Despite the abundance of scholarship on media and gender, few studies have examined the gendered techniques through which interwar advertisers communicated with consumers in response to changing social norms and economic stability. The question this thesis explores is how these changes and communication shifted in response to consumer culture and how advertisers utilized early market research and persuasion techniques to target their audiences. Building on the studies of gender, consumption, and identity, this thesis examines the relationship between American advertisers and their targeted male and female consumers between 1920 and 1940.

By exploring how admen and women within Madison Avenue’s top advertising agencies utilized psychology and consumer feedback to develop a two-way communication with middle-classed consumers, this thesis draws from social, cultural, and gendered studies to understand how advertisers communicated with and tried to appeal to their target audiences. Utilizing both copy and imagery as sources of communication, this study examines every issue of the top circulating American magazines between 1920 and 1940 to explain how advertisers rose with early consumer behavioral psychology and new standards of sanitation and hygiene, how a growing consumer culture and American notion of identity and gender affected the selling of selfhood and personal beauty products, and how gendered media representations and persuasion techniques helped advertisers sell modernity and individuality to readers. This analysis surveys specific advertising
campaigns before, during, and after the Stock Market Crash to follow shifts in appeals to masculinity and femininity in response to changing social norms. By delving into this intersection of gender, media, and identity, this study finds various nuances through which advertisers and their audiences communicated in and alongside a growing consumer culture.
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CHAPTER 1: HYGIENE AND PSYCHOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING THE CONSUMER IN A CHANGING AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

Advertisers have one main goal—to sell their product or service. Whether their advertisements create, change or divide markets, these ads relay information to affect consumer-spending habits. From the turn of the twentieth-century, advertising has seen both vocal criticism and proponents, many in academic scholarship. Disagreements on advertising as a guiding force in consumer trends and the construction of identity or as an industry that is merely a part of a larger changing commodity culture places the craft in the center of long-standing debate.

Advertising in twentieth-century American society was not a given. With the rise of a consumer-based society and its commodification, advertising rose in accordance as a means to sell. Many of the same techniques perfected and tweaked in the 1920s and 1930s are still utilized today and rely on the same power dynamics. This study analyzes how advertising rose alongside changing social norms and heightened levels of hygiene and personal appearance as a mechanism trying to both gain legitimacy and develop a specific place in the market. These ads and their campaigns are a part of a larger discourse between advertisers and consumers, a two-sided conversation based on supply and intended demand. Within this two-way communication channel, advertisers explicitly communicate to the consumer via image and copy, while the consumer is not a passive observer. Through buying power, criticism, and consumer demands, consumers relay information back via various channels. Advertisers have channeled this dialogue intentionally, seeking to
accentuate communication channels by attempting to understand consumer thoughts and changing trends. For this reason, I utilize psychological theories such as brand identity, the predecessor to behavioral research, and theories on consumer behavior such as symbolic self-completion theory to point to some of the ways advertisers viewed the consumer and his or her ability to be shaped and directed.

This study seeks to understand which techniques and imagery advertisers used to remain in dialogue with the consumer in order to affect spending habits. Without analyzing these advertisements as both presenting ideas and the advertisers’ goals, researchers are vulnerable to assuming too much influence on the consumer’s spending habits. This study specifically reviews interwar American advertising directed to a presumed white upper middle class of men and women to understand the techniques through which advertisers sought to persuade consumer’s views of the self and of consumption. Advertisers did not necessarily need tremendous influence for their industry to rely on specific techniques based on the consumer persuasion analyzed in this chapter. Initially in my research, I assumed advertising at least perpetuated insecurities, only to realize this flawed understanding consigned too much power to the advertiser. Although insecurities were exploited in the process, advertising primarily aimed to create a need and then fill it.

This claim builds upon various studies on gendered target advertising discussed below to better understand advertising images, claims, and copy. By tracing both the

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1 “Many arguments revolve around not only the political and economic intentions of advertisers but the ethics and pedagogy attached to each and every advertisement.” Kathrin Toland Frith, Undressing the Ad: Reading Culture in Advertising (New York: Peter Lang), 1997, xv.
scholarship and specific campaigns, this analysis seeks to understand how advertisers presented specific ideals and gendered realities to the consumer. Utilizing psychological and scientific theories to back up their claims, advertisers sought to create, divide and connect various markets. Shifts in these specific campaigns I examine reveal how advertisers changed their marketing techniques according to economic and social trends. Advertising images were more than merely accentuating the advertisement’s copy; they presented various conversations to the consumer as visual discourse themselves. As such, this study analyzes advertising trends by asking how advertising arose alongside psychology and rising levels of hygiene, how advertisers utilized these same techniques with gender and identity within the consumer culture, and how advertisements reflected agencies’ ideals while reproducing gendered images and representations.

This analysis focuses on the highest circulating national magazines between 1920 and 1940 that targeted male and female consumers. While national magazines cannot represent local differences and trends, my research consolidates urban and rural American cultures through the archetypical middle class targeted. These advertisements represent sweeping trends almost exclusively created in the urban, high-class offices of Madison Avenue and permeated many classes of society including those not specifically targeted, such as the working or rural class. This study examines every issue or edition of Time Magazine, Life Magazine, The Ladies Home Journal, Harper’s Bazaar, The Saturday Evening Post, Vogue and The New Yorker between 1920 and 1940 accessed from the New York Public Library microfilm collection for changing advertising trends on hygiene, self-care and personal appearance within specific markets and campaigns. By relying purely on print
advertising in national weekly and monthly circulating magazines, I exclude early radio advertisements.

This study does not use race as a lens as most of these ad images only represented a false, homogenous society. For this reason, when referring to male or female consumers, this study views the target audience as interwar advertisers saw them—upper middle class, white, non-immigrant, heterosexual, married or seeking to be married, and adhering to strict gender roles. These images, both subtly and not so subtly, excluded everyone else. Although African Americans and immigrants read national magazines and their advertisements at almost the same rate, advertisers frequently ignored their existence.  

Similarly, class difference was a large yet ignored role in advertising discourse.

Class affected levels of consumption and the impact advertisers had on their consumers. Even so, advertisers specifically targeted the large middle class. As far as they were concerned, the working class could not afford the commodities of the middle class nor the luxuries of having one single breadwinner, while the upper class, where most advertisers fell economically, were considered too intelligent to succumb to the same marketing tricks, appeals to insecurities, or celebrity endorsements that resonated with the middle class. With the exception of *Vanity Fair*, every national magazine analyzed in this

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2 “Many historians, cultural critics, and industry insiders have argued that their power not only led advertisers to be out of touch with their markets, but also be disdainful and elitist in their approach. One key aspect of this argument was that advertisements did not reflect the broader society because of advertisers’ limited range of viewpoints. Critiques came mainly on three issues: the exclusion of African Americans from the industry; the nonexistent or limited role women had within agencies; and the distorting perspective of class that ad executives brought to their work.” Katherine Parkin, *Food Is Love: Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 12.
study targeted the heterosexual middle class nuclear family, where advertisers regarded middle-class women as making up 80% of the consumption within the household.³

This analysis utilizes gender, deconstruction, and discourse theories to further understand advertisers’ goals in the gendering or formation of the individual. According to Katherine J. Parkin, reading advertising fully requires looking at the dialogue between the advertisement and its audience. Parkin also notes that ads are not one-way messages but instead “[they] offer recipients the opportunity to interact with and interpret complete ideas.”⁴ Representing this dialogue between the reader and advertisers is an extremely important analytical approach to understanding advertising and its relationship to consumer identity. As such, this study utilizes discourse analysis theory for both image and copy to understand the techniques advertisers used to try to persuade individual readers. In doing so, I utilize these methodical tools to deconstruct specific interwar advertisements and campaigns, reading magazines as evolving and having goals of their own.⁵

By deconstructing the ad, an ad’s significance appears not in the “implied meaning but in [its] unintentional meanings,” both within its historical context and current interpretation.⁶ In this case, the ideas advertisers are presenting both inadvertently and purposely play a significant role in advertisement’s message. Discussed further in the

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⁵ For Frith, “the benefits of critically examining the whole advertising message, not merely the surface or sales message, is that it helps to sharpen one’s critical sensibilities.” Frith, Undressing the Ad, 31.
⁶ Frith, Undressing the Ad, 4.
second chapter, ads have multiple layers that can be stripped down and read at once. This analysis will only deconstruct the advertisements as far as advertisers’ goals. Frith claims that the aim of deconstruction is to expose “the social and political power structures in society that combine to product the text,” therefore by specifically analyzing “both the foreground and the background of the advertisement-as-text, it is possible to reveal the secondary social or cultural messages in which the primary sales message is embedded.”

In other words, both the content and context of an advertisement create the various meanings. Interwar advertisements tried to reproduce reflections of societal norms in order to sell by reflecting society in their own way. For this, a close examination of advertisement requires undressing and deconstructing both the image and copy within ads.

To do so, I utilize Walter Benjamin’s theory on the dialectical image that views advertising imagery as dialect capable of discourse, in this case with the audience. According to Greame Gilloch’s analysis of Benjamin’s theory through the lens of advertising, “texts, objects and images have a particular existence, or ‘life’ of their own which goes beyond, and cannot be reduced to the intentions and purposes of those who

7 Frith, Undressing the Ad, 4.
8 “Analyzing the cultural content of an advertisement involves interpreting both verbal and visual aspects of the advertising text to determine not only the primary sales message but also additional secondary social or cultural messages.” Frith, 4.
created them.”

By relying on dialectical image theory, I examine advertising images as rhetoric capable of both discourse and power.

Changing modes of production and a new infatuation with hygiene defined the American interwar period. When these concepts intersected with a growing consumer culture, advertisers sought to mark themselves as a legitimate profession at the center of it all. This power dynamic and these channels of communication favored advertiser’s goals and allowed for a growth of consumer brands, commodification and changes to public identity, as discussed in Chapter 2. This study examines the relationship specifically through gender, defined as the socially constructed binary differentiation between males and females. While the structures of femininity and masculinity already existed before advertisements, within a growing consumer identity-based society, these ideals manifested as the personification and gendering of specific products and brands.

Though advertisers played some crucial role in the changing commodity culture, assuming as a whole advertisers affected the direction of interwar American culture does

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10}} \text{\textsuperscript{11}} \text{\textsuperscript{12}}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10}} \text{“Benjamin is important not only for the history of the image, but also for the image of history. And this image of history, of the recent past, of the prehistory of modernity, is perhaps the most bitter and biting element of his critique. His historiographical theses interweave theological and historical materialist motifs to unmask progress and the ultimate myth of modernity.” Greame Gilloch, } \textit{Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations} \textit{\textup(Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002)}, 2. According to Gilloch, Benjamin’s ‘dialectical image’ was inspired by both the experience of the modern city and the photography of the time. The dialectical image transposes involuntary memory from these snapshots of modern life. Gilloch, } \textit{Critical Constellations}, 245.\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}} \text{Susan Dente Ross and Paul Martin Lester, } \textit{Images that Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media} \textit{\textup(ABC-CLIO, 2011).}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{12}} \text{Butler notes that the “presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that } \textit{man} \text{ and } \textit{masculine} \text{ might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and } \textit{woman} \text{ and } \textit{feminine} \text{ a male body as easily as a female one.” Judith Butler, } \textit{Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity} \textit{\textup(New York: Routledge, 1990), 10.}\]
not take into account consumers’ will or identity, trends in supply and demand, or changes in response to economic success or struggle. This is where scholarship disputes and diverges. To what degree did advertising affect interwar culture and gender relationships? For many, the answer is simple: advertising might have sought to create new markets, divide submarkets, and affect consumer trends, but proving their efforts were successful is impossible. Other historians have argued that advertising did in fact affect and direct changing American culture by bombarding the American public with similar advertisements until the images became reality. There are two concurrent historiographies and dialogues on advertising’s influence. The first looks at it behind changing consumer ideals while the other looks as advertising’s agency through the lens of gender, specifically how advertisers affected male or female consumers. Instead of a linear trajectory of scholarship claiming limited or significant influence, discourse on advertising’s power has jumped back and forth in response to changing late 20th century and early 21st century culture.

One of the earliest analyses of advertising’s influence on consumers as a whole is Alice E. Courtney and Thomas Whipple’s 1983 study of stereotypes, which asserts that the main issue with arguing advertising reflects or influences reality lies in trying to prove this argument. Courtney and Whipple stress that some scholars “begin with the view that advertising merely reflects reality and then have to admit on the basis of their study that advertising reflects it badly.”13 The same issue arises in trying to prove advertising’s

influence. While this analysis is limited by looking specifically at stereotypes rather than representations as a whole, it allows for a vital part of the dialogue: no matter what research approach, “the conclusions of all major studies are essentially the same.”

On first impression, Courtney and Whipple’s argument seems to touch on the overall dialogue, yet this analysis does not take into account scholars that analyze the same sources and draw different conclusions, namely that advertising did reflect and influence consumers.

Few studies of advertising influenced interwar research and analysis discourse more so than Roland Marchand’s 1987 *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity: 1920-1940*. In this text, Marchand acknowledges the limitations of advertising’s influence in society. Whether Marchand came to the same realization prior to or during research remains unknown, yet he affirms that he cannot prove “conclusively that the American people absorbed the values and ideas of the ads, nor that consumers wielded the power to ensure that the ad would mirror their lives.” Instead, Marchand argues that the images distorted reality, presenting something different than the reality of life for the consumer. More specifically, Marchand argues that the process occurred from a direct dialogue with the consumer. Ads were enlisted to present a more luxurious and unattainable reality to sell modernity, not to merely present reality as it was.

Marchand’s study opened the door to looking at advertisers as professionals with goals in direct dialogue with the consumer rather than as merely reflectors or influencers. For Marchand,

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14 Courtney and Whipple, *Sex Stereotyping*, 5.
16 From this, Marchand indicates that advertisers attempted to “reflect public aspirations rather than contemporary circumstances, to mirror popular fantasies rather than social realities.” Marchand, xvii.
their influence remained limited even as they shifted techniques and imagery. Only through a cumulative effect did advertisement “reinforce the readers’ impression of being surrounded by a host of accusing eyes” and other fears and insecurities.17

But one question lingers: Did the ads work? According to Simone Davis’ 2000 Living Up to the Ads: Gender Fictions of the 1920s, “ads do ‘work,’ but their primary function is not to lead a consumer to choose between brands. Rather, through inundation, ads serve to produce an all-around ambiance that encourages consumerism in total, making it seem as a desirable and natural as air.”18 Rather than reiterate the discourse on limited ad influence, Davis indicates that advertisers succeeded in their goal of becoming a fixture of modern society through their professionalization and bombardment of the consumer. Therefore, the power appears not in affecting purchasing power or consumption but in making consumerism seem natural. This analysis develops an argument rarely examined before, yet it remains in direct dialogue with Marchand, pointing specifically to his theory of the cumulative effect rather than the specific campaign or advertisement. Following this trajectory of theory, Diane Barthel reiterates Marchand’s claim that it is “very difficult to prove direct relationships of causes and affects. Much of the power of advertising is indirect.”19 This analysis builds upon deconstructionist views of both direct and indirect messages. Yet in her analysis, Barthel still assumes advertising had some level of indirect

17 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 217.
19 Instead, Barthel argues that, what advertisers to manage to accomplish is to plant an image in audiences’ minds of how the product can give them the good life, facility their goals or fix their appearance. Diane Barthel, “When Men Put On Appearance: Advertising and the Social Construct of Masculinity,” in Men, Masculinity and the Media, ed. Steve Craig (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications), 152.
power on audiences, contradicting the arguments in Marchand or Courtney and Whipple’s texts. Reiterating this past scholarship, Margaret Duffy’s article “Body of Evidence: Women and Advertising,” also asserts that earlier scholars have not adequately understood advertising’s role in society, as they “incorrectly ascribe powerful direct effect to advertising and assume that advertising” perpetuates ideals.

By the end of the 1990s and with the growth of American capital, scholars on the relationship between advertisers and consumers tended to view advertising as a positive influence on audiences. It is no surprise then that Barbara Phillips article “In Defense of Advertising: A Social Perspective” deviates from past scholarship and tries to do just that. For Phillips, the past scholarship did not explain the actual impact of advertising or its manipulation of the consumers. This argument on limited proof of power is based on a common understanding that the power could not be proven. Phillips instead proposes that culture is to blame, and advertising is just a mechanism through which culture affects society. Phillips contradicts most scholarship by proposing advertisers affect identity all within the context of capitalism. In fact, Phillips argues advertising’s effect on society rather than the individual does not have to prove agency for it to be true; advertising is merely a tool utilized in the framework of capitalism and consumption. Not only does this

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20 Frith, *Undressing the Ad*, xiv.
displacement of power place influence on advertisers but also completely neglects consumer agency altogether.

This argument was not limited to Phillips’ analysis. Douglas Bishop’s 2000 study similarly contradicts the larger discourse by placing blame on advertising while also warning against giving too much influence to interwar advertisers. Bishop points to consumer agency to prove the extent of ad influence, claiming consumers interpret advertising “not as promising they will look just like the pictured model, but rather that they will look more [emphasis added] like the model; let us give the consumer credit for realizing that they will never achieve surreal perfection.”26 His claim that advertisers are not manipulators upon first impressions seems as if it follows past scholarship, but Bishop bases his argument and utilizes this presupposition to argue that campaigns or advertisements are not “morally responsible for the unintended social consequences of their actions, or the cumulative consequences of a type of action.”27 In this text, Bishop takes Marchand’s theory of the cumulative effect to blame the audience rather than the specific advertisers.28

27 Though Bishop initially notes that advertisers do not have an effect on individuals, he then argues that this effect is not their responsibility. It is as though he is in direct disagreement with himself in trying to disprove ethical consequences to advertisement. Bishop 2000, 378.
28 In this case, bishop tries to argue that the presentation of public shame is not the issue but instead the impossible standards advertisers set that the Other holds audiences accountable for. Bishop also argues that it is the audience’s fault as they can ignore advertising, since outdoor advertising has always been limited and magazine advertising requires opening the magazines themselves: “people choose to be viewers of image ads. Most image ads are concentrated in fashion and special interest magazines that consumers pay money to look at. This willingness of consumers to actively seek and pry for image ads reduces the problem of passive exposure to the level of billboard bylaws.” Bishop 2000, 382.
These varying arguments converge within gender studies of advertising, a developing field and historiography that utilizes a binary approach to gender and discourse analysis. Developed from early sex-role theory and women studies, gender analysis within media and advertising has sought to understand portrayals and differences in representation. Starting from the first empirical examination of women and men’s portrayals in advertisement by Alice E. Courtney in 1971, scholars have criticized the way both genders were depicted differently.29

Gendered analysis of media can be traced back to Erving Goffman’s 1979 Gender Advertisement: Consumer and Culture.30 In his analysis, Goffman claims advertisement had influence over the consumer by presenting representations, or “ritual-like bits of behavior which portray an ideal concept of the two sexes and their structural relationship to each other.”31 In other words, Goffman argues that these representations were hyper-ritualized gender displays. Taking directly from Goffman’s analysis, Courtney and Whipple delineate various studies on the percentage of women shown in specific roles and conclude that while advertising played a role throughout interwar American culture, ascribing more influence than merely reinforcing [gendered] roles is overreaching.32 This argument is weakly supported as well as in direct clash with itself. They present advertising as having limited influence yet argue that advertisements did in fact reinforce gender roles while also

30 Erving Goffman, Gender Advertisement: Communications and Culture, (Pelgrave, 1979).
31 Goffman, Gender Advertisement, 84.
32 For Courtney and Whipple, a reason for limited aspirations of men, women and children is occupational stereotyping in advertising, which encouraged them to follow and judge others for following these stereotypes. Courtney and Whipple 1997, 55.
overlooking analysis of gendered imagery, and instead focusing merely on the copy. This argument neither deconstructs nor reads the imagery as part of the dialect, drawing only from the written messages. In contrast, Daniel Horowitz's *His and Hers: Gender, Consumption, and Technology* builds directly upon Marchand's analysis of advertising language. According to Horowitz, the words used to describe audiences in the 1920s had a strong similarity to words used to describe women: “emotional, capricious, irrational, passive and conformist.” This language is no coincidence, as advertisers heavily feminized the consumer.

Until recently, few studies have paid specific attention to portrayals of men in print advertisements the same way they have analyzed portrayals of women. As such, in his 2000 text, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture 1900-1950*, Tom Pendergast notes that the study of male representations have a direct link to women’s studies and early gender analyses. For Pendergast, there is a considerable divide between what the magazines sought to do and what they actually did. For this, Pendergast too warns about attributing too much influence to advertisers and editors, favoring the overarching discourse of limited agency, in this case in terms of gendered media. This claim opens the door to specifically analyzing the direct and indirect gendered message without having to prove influence, a concept that still follows through scholarship today.

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33 Roger Horowitz and Arwen Mohun, *His and Hers: Gender, Consumption, and Technology* (University of Virginia Press, 1998), 12.
Building on this concept, Katherine Parkin’s differentiation between what advertisers tried to do and what they accomplished utilizes this claim in one of the first studies to take on intention versus achievement. Arguing that scholars have “long debated the role of advertising, with some speculating that it reflected the culture and others charging that it shaped it. Fundamentally, advertising seeks to shape. That it might at times have reflected reality was coincidental, but not its purpose.” Parkin utilizes the dialogue around influence and presents it specifically within the topic of gendered food advertisement, directly referencing Maureen Honey’s analysis of advertising’s broader messages, and the grand effect of all advertisement rather than a select few. This mirrors Marchand’s ‘cumulative effect,’ though Parkin does not directly reference Marchand. In this way, Parkin’s analysis utilizes sweeping generalizations about the changes in gendered advertising throughout the interwar period rather than specific advertisements and campaigns in order to see these changes on a more defined platform.

Building off Pendergast gender analysis of male representation, J.R. Macmanara’s *Media and Male Identity: The Making and Remaking of Men* delves into gender discourse by viewing changes in male identity and societal roles in response to changing women’s roles. Like Macnamara, many gender scholars reference, dispute, and build upon arguments from both masculine and feminine studies. For Macnamara, media does to an extent influence consumer culture. Macnamara stresses that arguing against advertising’s influence eliminates a large part of the culture. Mass media, for Macnamara, is a significant aspect

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37 Parkins. *Food is Love*, 5.
38 Parkin, *Food is Love*, 8.
of modern society, not just entertainment and that it is never simply ideologically innocent, rather a sender of messages to consumers about what they can be and should be.\textsuperscript{40} This argument completely fails to produce sufficient evidence to this claim, instead building upon this premise to analyze advertising influence on the male consumer. While attributing too much influence, this study does an excellent job of presenting changing masculine ideals according to cultural shifts of femininity.

The overall dialogue and scholarship on advertising influence throughout the second half of the twentieth century and in recent years has followed a back of forth rather than a linear trajectory, with studies offering varying levels of advertising influence or displaced blame. Asymmetrically, the dialogue on gender presentations in advertising tend to build-upon past scholarship, utilizing shifts in theory, varying studies on masculinity and femininity, and the overall dialogue on advertising influence. This intersection is fundamental to analyzing the relationship between interwar advertisers and their consumers.

\textbf{20\textsuperscript{th} Century Inquiries into the Individual}

Examining of the development of consumer and hygiene culture directly following the First World War is vital to understand interwar advertising’s goals. Advertising and branding in the early 1920s stemmed from a budding turn of the century trade and developed into a large facet of a modern free enterprise.\textsuperscript{41} While established before the First World War, advertising gained steamed shortly following the end of the war. In fact,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Here, Macnamara is in direct dialogue with Nathan and Young. Macnamara, 2006, 81.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Dawn Spring, \textit{Advertising in the Age of Persuasion: Building Brand America 1941-1961} (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2001), 10.
\end{itemize}
between 1914 and 1929, advertising revenues in the US “increased from $682 to $2,987 million [while] between 1916 and 1926, national magazine advertising grew by 600 percent.” 42 Though national magazines had existed before, an advertising culture of that magnitude had not.

The 1920s were a decade of strong economic growth, with an average yearly GDP growth of 5.9, compared to an average 3.0 yearly GDP growth of the rest of the 20th century. 43 Even still, for working class Americans, the reality of the 1920s was very different from the reality of the upper middle class advertisers targeted. Working class families who were uncomfortable economically still outnumbered those that weren’t in many places, though a close examination of contemporary advertising would not in any way represent this reality. 44 How working class families viewed and interacted with the consumer culture and the world around them was heavily shaped by their “subordinate class status but race and gender imposed further economic burdens on people of color and women.” 45 As opposed to the representations in the media, a large percentage of Americans fell under these categories. In fact, one nationwide study conducted in 1929 months before the stock market crash by economists at the Brookings Institution showed that “59 percent of the nation’s families appeared to be living below a minimally decent standard; needless to say, that figure went up, rather than down, during the next decade.” 46 As such, both

42 Simone Weil Davis, Living Up to the Ads: Gender Fictions of the 1920s, 23.
46 Cowan, More Work for Mother, 181.
reality and advertising imagery after 1930 had to change and show a different economic norm. Their target audience, the upper middle class, was now economical hurting, and to keep up these advertisements had to reflect reality accordingly.

The stock market crash in 1929 changed the trajectory of growth and left many Americans that had been part of the economic boom prior feeling completely insecure.\(^47\) In the month following the stock market crash, the market lost $50 billion, $15 billion alone just on October 29\(^{th}\).\(^48\) The unemployment reached 12 million by 1932, with business collapsing on all fronts.\(^49\) Companies were forced to significantly cut advertising budgets and spending. According to Tawnya Covert, advertising spending fell to 1.36 billion in 1932 from the 3.5 billion in 1929.\(^50\) Those that had prospered throughout the last decade were no longer able to pay for the same comforts, and businesses felt these changes heavily.

For the American public, life was extremely difficult the years following the market crash. The majority of middle class Americans that did enjoy a prosperous 1920s had been influenced to believe that consumption and modernity went hand in hand through standardization for personal experiences.\(^51\) For the majority of the middle class, the years following the Great Depression economically affected everything, and made life incredibly worse for the working class. These realities were not transparent in advertising

\(^{49}\) Egendorf, *Prosperity, Depression, and War*, 20.
immediately, though eventually they would appear in images and copy throughout many interwar newspapers and magazines.

In his analysis of gendered media, Michael Kimmel stresses that “the optimism ushered in by the Roaring Twenties was ushered out by the Great Depression and widespread unemployment in the 1930s.”52 With no jobs, opportunities, or money, unemployment reached 28 percent within three years—one in four men and even fewer women were still working. For those who still had jobs had no job security or reliability, with wages plummeting.53 This was the reality of life for the average Americans, and advertising needed to navigate these changes. While Roosevelt’s New Deal helped create jobs, it would not be until the Second World War that the economy reached pre-Depression levels once again.

Gaining Legitimacy: The Promise of Science

For advertisers, a major driving force throughout the interwar years remained gaining more legitimacy against criticism and outrage. Though it existed in the early twentieth century, the First World War helped solidify advertising as a part of society. Advertisements for new hygiene products and technologies proved handy for American culture, leaving advertisers able to define and create a new service and industry in a post-world America. In fact, according to Covert, “with the success of war advertising, the industry came to be a business, a profession, not only respectable, but admirable.

53 These statistics only present white, working and upper middle class Americans. For immigrants and nonwhite workers, job opportunities are even more scarce. Kimmel, Manhood in America, 128.
Additional professional organizations were developed for copywriters, art directs, and agency managers.”54 Advertisers emphasized steering away from the tactics and bad publicity of Barnum & Bailey to become professionalized.55 Still, in this context Covert’s analysis overlooks extensive, even legal, attacks on the advertising industry’s practices. Criticism was rampant, and advertisers felt they had to prove their worth and importance in business and society, working diligently against past bad reputation with audiences and their attachment to “the ‘quackery’ and deceptions of patent medicines, the first products to be heavily advertised across the United States.”56 Advertising as an industry was no longer closely attached to deceptive medical products of the turn of the century, but proving so to society involved work.

One way advertisers sought to prove their professionalism involved channeling the prestige and reputation of science. Throughout the 1920s, agencies hired social researchers, sociologists, specialists, and psychologists to prove their scientific capabilities. By creating marketing campaigns to understand consumer motivations and spending habits, advertisers organized themselves into a capable industry to combat criticism. Many agencies such as J. Walter Thompson even hired resident psychologists to work in-house.57 Due to the emphasis on the individual and identity rather than the group or society as a whole, early advertising connected more to psychology than to sociology. This relationship grew into early studies on consumer behavior, which sought to understand how and why

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consumers bought specific products and preferred specific brands. According to cultural historian Juliann Sivulka, “the science of psychology held a great interest for two reasons: first, it provided information about the instincts, drives, and wants of people. Second, it suggested new ways in which they might be controlled.” 58 Before the development of consumer behavior studies, advertisers relied heavily on the psychology of market research to understand buyer behavior. 59 For advertisers, behavioral psychology helped overcome many objections consumers could or may have.

Through its use of psychology, the advertising agency J. Walter Thompson in particular developed specific methods for early consumer research. Interwar psychologists not only studied education but also began working closely with top agencies to understand the consumer. 60 From opinion polls to specific market research departments, advertisers created a profession on understanding and persuading consumers, and no in-house psychologist affected interwar advertising more than Dr. John Watson of JWT, known as the ‘originator of behavioral psychology.’ 61 Along with Ernest Dichter and his Institute for Motivational Research (IMR), Watson believed that by using behaviorism, advertising could harness human motivations and drives. 62 In other worlds, by understanding the consumer, advertisers could better connect to persuade their behaviors. In fact, JWT routinely “commissioned market investigations to acquire a feel for consumer tests and retail

59 Sivulka, 176.
60 For the agency Raymond Rubicam, George Gallop helped conduct some of the first opinion polls. Opinion polls would strictly be used for advertising for decades before utilized during political elections. Spring, Advertising in the Age of Persuasion 14.
61 Watson left John Hopkins to help advertisers gain legitimacy in their profession. Spring 2011, 14.
62 Parkin, Food is Love, 32.
problems."\(^{63}\) One such study alongside Curtis Publishing “provided a factual base on which future marking research would build.”\(^{64}\)

Through these studies and the agency’s ability to investigate consumer behavior, by 1932, ad agency J. Walter Thompson called itself the world’s largest agency, and it very well was due in part to the help of in-house psychologists such as Dr. John Watson.\(^{65}\) While JWT was not the only advertising agency succeeding and creating throughout the interwar, highlighted by the success and prominence of adman Bruce Fairchild Barton’s advertising agency Barton, Durstine & Osborn (BDO) founded in 1919 and its 1928 merger with the George Batten agency to become BBDO, JWT specifically created many if not most of the advertisement campaigns analyzed in this text and established the women’s editorial department under Helen Lansdowne analyzed in the third chapter.

Though criticism eventually slowed, with the Depression advertisers were once again fighting against growing accusations of exploitative behavior. Critics argued advertisers were promoting the waste of money when no one had it, including the advertisers themselves.\(^{66}\) Arguing otherwise proved difficult. As criticism flowed, early

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\(^{64}\) “Many approaches to understanding the complex concept of buyer behavior, later known as consumer behavior, can be traced back to psychological theorists who began to develop these perspectives in the early part of the twentieth century. These perspectives were qualitative, in the sense that they were largely based on an analyst’s interpretations of a patient’s accounts of dreams, trauma, sexual experiences, and so on… By acquiring the product, the person was able to experience his or her true goals, which otherwise might be unacceptable or unattainable.” Sivulka, 176.

\(^{65}\) And would be for the next five decades. Parkin, 32.

\(^{66}\) In response, advertisers self-regulated through a 1934 ‘ethical code’ and a committee to regulate products including over-the-counter drugs. Not surprisingly, it failed, leading the Copeland bill in 1938, which gave the food and drug administration the power of the manufacturing and selling of drugs and food as well as the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) control over deceptive acts of commerce. Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and its Creators* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 126.
advertisers began practicing these psychological marketing techniques with one of the largest markets of the early twentieth century—hygiene.

Changing Ideals of Personal Hygiene

Hygiene's rise in the American consciousness can be traced back the First World War. When drafting American men into the military, a shocking one-third of draftees were 'physically unfit' specifically because of personal hygiene. Throughout the war, the American military introduced millions of American soldiers to soaps and toothbrushes. After the war, soldiers brought these habits home to their families. By 1920, soap was no longer a luxury product but instead a necessity. As a staple part of the American lifestyle, it became more than just fashionable. Americans began to wash their hands and bathe on a daily basis. The percent of Americans that placed importance on teeth cleanliness rose to 40 percent in 1926 from 26 percent prior to the war. Likewise, purification of milk, sewers in neighborhoods, trash collection, vitamins, and inspections of meats raised the standard of living and lowered illnesses and even death. Physicians could now treat and prevent infant mortality, tuberculosis, diphtheria, cholera, smallpox, and syphilis. Americans changed their habits, and they became healthier for it.

67 Each soldier's knapsacks and kits were equipped with products that they had not utilized before, as an army requirement. By giving access to new hygiene products, the US Army helped implement daily rinsing into the American routine.
68 Sivulka, Stronger Than Dirt, 14.
70 Cowan, More Work for Mother, 184.
But these ideals also furthered “Othering” in society, and immigrants felt the brunt of the contrast.\textsuperscript{71} Cleanliness indicated whether someone was morally superior or more civilized, which tended to fall in line with white, protestant American culture.\textsuperscript{72} Juliann Sivulka’s analysis of American personal hygiene assigns tremendous influence to advertisers on changing ideals of personal hygiene, claiming advertisers both “reflected and shaped consumers’ insecurities about their physical appearance during the 1920s and 1930s, particularly as people motivated by high standards of self-presentation strived to pattern their behavior on the perceived expectations of society.”\textsuperscript{73}

In 1927, the big soap companies, Palmolive, Procter & Gamble, Colgate, Lever Brothers, and a few others established the Cleanliness Institute to presumably teach the public about cleanliness and hygiene.\textsuperscript{74} Along with the Association of Soap and Detergent Manufactures, the institute instead sold cleanliness. By 1930, “odor was virtually an obsession.”\textsuperscript{75} Magazines and advertisements were filled with the preoccupation of eliminating natural smells and dirt. Advertisers promised these hygiene products could make the consumer more successful both in business and romantic relationships, warning against the repercussions of failing to buy the products.\textsuperscript{76} Soaps were sold as capable of

\textsuperscript{71} These new hygiene ideals projected a white vision of a clean, odorless, sweatless world that directly Othered minorities, which used spices and came with their culture’s varying levels of personal hygiene. Fox, 101.
\textsuperscript{72} Sivulka, \textit{Stronger Than Dirt}, 18.
\textsuperscript{73} Sivulka, \textit{Stronger Than Dirt}, 164.
\textsuperscript{74} Sivulka, 229.
\textsuperscript{76} Covert, \textit{Manipulating Images}, 6.
making audiences desirable, beautiful, and acceptable. Thus, “bad breathe, body hair and body odor” could all be defeated by the right products and remedies.77

For scholar Simone Weil Davis, advertisers began utilizing personal and physical shame purely to sell their product: “‘How to keep free from a wretched glisten’; ‘how to prevent the homeliness that creeps upon you unawares’; ‘he was his own worst enemy...oh why had he neglected the bath that morning, the shave, the change of linen?’”78 Throughout this analysis, Davis subtly indicates advertisers successfully influenced their consumers. Though possible, Davis’ study places too much influence at the hands of the advertisers. While these marketing techniques were used universally, they were not necessarily major influencers of spending habits.

Advertisers hoped these techniques would produce consumer desire and purchases. Regardless of their level of success, that was very much their intention. Their ads encouraged salvation through consumption.79 But why? Ruth Schwartz Cowan points to psychology: “in the years between the wars, [advertisers] thought about ‘guilt’ and did so intentionally, because psychologists were telling them that ‘guilt,’ ‘embarrassment,’ and ‘insecurity’ would sell goods faster than any other pitch.”80 By ‘scaring’ the audiences into believing in accusing eyes, advertisers could use legitimate concerns of illnesses or germs to sell products. Audiences were urged to wash their hands consistently and pay close attention.

77 By utilizing advertising and testimonials, advertisers throughout the 1920s would connoted a connection between the rich and powerful and their cleanliness. Those that were not modern in their use of soap were ostracized, evil or old. Myra MacDonald, Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media (Bloomsbury Academy, 2009), 85.
78 Davis, Living Up to the Ads, 11.
79 Parkin, Food is Love, 10.
80 Cowan, More Work for Mother, 188.
attention to appearance. Cleanliness became another way to try to other and highlight guilt. Myra MacDonald points to hygiene as a major influencer in this public fear. She notes that, “since germs, as advertisers frequently emphasized, were invisible, the housewife could never be totally sure that she had exterminated them...[and] fear of scorn from neighbors or friends could be equally effective.”81 This marketing technique proved profitable, and was utilized for other products accordingly.

Interwar ads presented these ideas as fact rather than fears or opinions. The consumer had to follow correct standards of comportment at all times for fear of public scrutiny. This ‘First-Impression’ formula became the model for the rest of the decade and beyond, discussed in further chapters. The most exploitative approach of this first impression formula utilized was what Marchand calls the ‘scare copy’ or ‘negative appeal.’82 This technique employed both copy and imagery to try to instill fear in the potential consumer by depicting anecdotes of others’ social failures or lapses of judgment and presenting how the product could then come to the rescue. This technique reiterated how the product could fix the fate of those in the traumatic episodes, emphasizing a cure through consumption.83

From analysis of two decades worth of advertising campaigns, patterns and definite changes in campaign techniques affected all national circulating magazines. In June 1920, all the highest circulating magazines had an obsession with Soap, followed closely by other hygiene and cleanliness products. Hand-drawn images of youthfulness or precaution

81 MacDonald, Representing Women, 81.
82 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 14.
83 Marchand, 14.
infiltrated women’s magazines, men’s magazines and family magazines of the early interwar period. The only exception remained the literary and satirical magazine, The New Yorker, which from its founding in February 1925, specifically prohibited advertisements that instilled public fears or utilized shame to sell. Between 1925 and 1940, not one advertisement within The New Yorker explicitly exploited readers’ insecurities to sell a product or service. That was not so much the case within Ladies Home Journal, Saturday Evening Post, Harper’s Bazaar, Vogue, Life Magazine, and Time Magazine. By the end of 1920, every magazine had at least one deodorant and soap campaign advertisement or editorial, drawing stronger appeals to insecurities. Whether the relationship between these campaigns and American buying trends were causational or correlative, and to what extent, did not matter to advertisers; their campaigns were on some level working. By January 1921, national magazines were advertising not only soap but deodorant, mouthwash, toothpaste, face creams and hair products. Even within the same campaigns and magazines, ads differed. Advertisements in Harper’s Bazaar emphasized appearance and shame for not conforming, while Vogue advertisements in the early 1920s remained more positive in ads for creams, soap and antiperspirants.

Not surprisingly, advertisements for the same products by 1930s advertised prices and affordability as well as durability rather than the modernity and elegance. For Harper’s Bazaar, appeals to insecurities by 1931 became less negative and explicit, rather promoting health, happiness and reusability. These shifts coincided with increases in advertisement

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84 Hand-drawn images by the top illustrators remained the norm until advertising budgets declined directly after the stock market crash. Although photography in advertisements began appearing in limited accounts by early 1924 in a few magazine campaigns, illustrations remained the norm until budgets began to affect advertising campaigns.
for stocks, insurance, and bonds. Advertisers knew better than to send negative messages to the masses during economic hardships. Instead, “as the depression deepened, advertising men found ample reason to favor inspirational messages.”

Life Magazine’s emphasis on imagery allowed for more powerful messages. The (mostly) men’s magazine emphasized looks, power and protecting of family. By contrast, The Saturday Evening Post used advertising in its appeal to male and female consumers as well as to children. Advertisements for products emphasized children’s health and finding romantic partners. Much like the other national magazines, Saturday Evening Post limited advertisement using shame and insecurities to sell throughout 1930 and 1931, but returned to these marketing techniques by the summer of 1932. Overall, however, the specific techniques utilized changed very little. In other words, though the Depression heavily affected advertising messages, within a few years of the Stock Market Crash, advertisers resumed pre-Depression persuasion techniques they believed worked. The themes and overall ideas did not change; how far advertisers would take their messages to scrutinize consumers did.

Marchand echoes this same analysis: “from the stock market crash of 1929 through the mid-1930s, advertising themes and motifs remained remarkably consistent.” Instead, the changes in advertisement were subtle; from early copy full of objective information about the product to inform the audience in the early 1920s to ads full of subjective information about what the product hoped to accomplish. Images became larger and more pronounced instead of an afterthought alongside the copy as advertisers noticed, “pictures

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85 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 286.
86 The Saturday Evening Post had at a higher percentage of advertisements in every issue than many of the other high-circulating national magazines since they could appeal to every member of the family.
87 Marchand, Roland, Advertising the American Dream, xv.
surpassed copy not only in their ability to intensify emotion but also in their capacity to say several things at the same time.”

Selling Clean: Antiperspirant, Mouthwash, and Soap

Proctor & Gamble’s successful model for mass production, marketing and branding of their soap became the basis for advertising for decades. One reason for their successful model was Proctor & Gamble’s use of in-house advertising rather than hiring an outside firm. Much like early advertising campaign techniques for billboards stemmed from over-the-counter medicine, early print advertisement owed its techniques and methodology to soap, Listerine, deodorant, and other products of personal hygiene that completely changed the selling of selfhood. The first 1919 deodorant campaign for Odorono, the first nationally marketed deodorant, in the Ladies Home Journal caused hundreds of women to cancel their subscription immediately. Publicly speaking of odor or hygiene prior to the interwar years was seen as crass and improper. Though the criticism and disgust at the frankness was almost immediate, so were the increases in sales. James Young, a relatively new copywriter before the Odorono campaign, along with the

88 Marchand, 154.
89 Spring, Advertising in the Age of Persuasion, 11.
90 There were a few exception in campaigns created alongside J. Walter Thompson.
91 These advertisers introduced the ‘new social diseases’ of body odor, body hair, and bad breath. David Kyvig refers to specific lifebuoy soap ads that used the model: one “featured a man with ‘B.O.’ who luckily discovered ‘what they’re saying behind my back!’ before losing friends and a job promotion” while another advertising showed a woman “with underarm odor who men avoided until she was rescued by the proper soap.” David Kyvig, Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1940: How Americans Lived Through the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression (Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 128.
92 The copy for this specific advertisement read: “Within the curve of a woman’s arm,” a taboo subject during the Victorian era. Spring, Advertising in the Age of Persuasion 14.
founder of the company Edna Murphey, had not only created a market but also presented a new, solid campaign technique: social anxiety.

For many magazines, presenting these advertisements was a game of chance on whether consumers would be receptive or repulsed by these ‘sensitive’ topics. The end of Victorian ideals and the rise of a consumer culture finally allowed for public discourse of subjects that had been taboo before, but just how much meant magazines had to gamble on readership response. When Odorono first began advertising, many magazines were weary of printing the ads in their page, but by 1919, the idea of a deodorant connected strongly to a new sterile and cleanliness-obsessed economy. Though Odorono “was ‘pretty hard on sensitive skins,’ not to mention clothing...the user had to hold his or her arms aloft for ten minutes after applying the ruby red paste, take care not to let it touch any clothing, as it would eat into the fabric,” sales soared.93

93 Lears, Fables of Abundance, 171.
Early advertisements for Odorono targeted both male and female consumers similarly—with the fear of not finding a romantic partner. One August 1920 advertisement in *Harper's Bazaar* shown above claims, “The Most Humiliating Moment of My Life: When I Overhead the Cause of my Unpopularity Among Men.” The image shows a young woman sitting alone at an elegant event, while other women mingle to her left and groups of men speak to other young women to her right. Her face showed her humiliation. Copy aside, the drawing asks the reader to identify with the young woman. For *Harper's Bazaar*, a women's
national magazine that targeted an upper-middle class female reader, the image itself develops a dialogue with the female reader: She could be you. What if it were you? What if our product keeps you from becoming her? It is no coincidence that the exact same advertisement appeared the same month in the August 1, 1920 edition of Vogue, another magazine targeting an upper-middle class female consumer.

In this editorial-like advertisement, a reader praises the openness of the advertisements my exclaiming, “Many times I have heard women criticize you for publicly discussing such a delicate personal subject. But I know what I would have been saved had I known these facts sooner, and I know that many of these women who criticize you would benefit by taking your message to themselves.” In this professed reader’s testament, talking about the sensitive issue, though it may be criticized, helped the young woman as well as the critics fight against the unknown body odor. This advertisement specifically targets critics by arguing that the product itself has helped them or would help them, thus subtly calling them ‘odorous,’ and purposely uninformed. The writer uses her personal anecdote of overhearing two female friends talk about her ‘dreadful perspiration’ and its effect on why men would not dance with her to present Odorono as the cure. The advertisement follows by using scientific-sounding rhetoric to argue that everyone suffers from perspiration and underarm odor. The well-groomed men and women of society, the ad claims, “have learned that it cannot be neglected any more than any other essential of personal cleanliness. They give it the regular attention that they give to their hair, teeth, or hands.” In the cleanliness-obsessed rhetoric of the early 20s, connecting deodorant to soap solidified Odorono as a staple of the beauty and cleanliness routine. Advertisers knew that
by presenting underarm odor as something to fear and as Odorono as a physician-developed cure, the antiseptic would hopefully become just as important as soap, and return the ‘daintiness’ to women ‘so satisfying to men.’ Upon a closer reading of the ad, we see the advertiser solidifying the product’s scientific background and importance by specifying multiple times the physical importance and physician-created formula. Intentionally, the ad tells the reader that both the product and the company advertising it are doing so for the greater health and cleanliness of society.

Figure 2. Odorono, “He Cannot Tell You—but You Have A Right To Know” Harper’s Bazaar, October 1920. This advertisement comes from the same campaign as Figure 1. New York Public Library Milstein Microfilm Collection, General Research Division, New York, New York.
This first campaign worked, noted by another Odorono advertisement in the October issue of Harper’s Bazaar titled: “He Cannot Tell You—But You Have A Right to Know.” The image shows a young woman and a man, sitting and facing one another dressed for a formal event. The advertisement claims that proper etiquette does not allow a man to mention the odor to a young woman, but that does not mean odor does not exist. This subtle call to anxiety tells the viewer that though they may not themselves smell their perspiration and hear comments, potential romantic interests could be silently judging. The advertisement directly calls to the audience by proclaiming, “I have felt justified in taking up arms against the conspiracy of silence that surrounds the subject, and publishing the facts about perspiration. In doing so, I counted on criticism, and I got it.” By analyzing this text as not just a one-way conversation, we can see criticism from the consumer. Rather than merely presenting information, this advertisement is in direct conversation with the audience, especially those that criticized its frankness by both diminishing the criticism’s legitimacy and negatively blaming the silence for young peoples’ lack of potential romantic partners. This type of direct dialogue with critics diminishes over time as Odorono and other deodorants such as Immac had increases in sales and decreases in criticism.

Following the success of Odorno’s campaign, many other deodorant campaigns copied the fruitful techniques. In the April 15, 1923 issues of Vogue, Immac too presents the potential male romantic partner as silently thinking about the young woman’s odor and perspiration. The advertisement states, “The enchanting play stirs her emotions. She is aglow with pleasure—almost radiant. Yet could she but read his thoughts, how embarrassed she would be, how unhappy!” This imagery and copy once again unsubtly
alludes to the potential romantic partner silently judging the odorous reader, duplicating the exact marketing technique as Odorono.

Figure 3. Immac, “And She Doesn’t Even Know.” Vogue, April 15, 1923. This Immac advertisement takes a direct campaign strategy from the Odorono deodorant advertisements.

No product arising from hygiene obsession affected advertising more or served as a better example of how to market products using fears of public scrutiny and exclusion than Listerine. The Lambert Pharmaceutical Company’s antiseptic mouthwash had very low
sales for the first decades until advertisers began warning about the dangers of ‘halitosis,’ a word for bad breath admen found inside a 1922 British medical journal.\textsuperscript{94} The advertisers immediately used this new scientific-sounding word for their Listerine campaign. The copy of these now infamous advertisements warned of halitosis and how the condition could ruin not only social relationships, but romantic and business relationships as well. Sales for Listerine skyrocketed, claiming odorless breath a necessity of modern society and creating a marketing technique that other advertisers followed. For these advertisements, “the protagonist was not the product but the potential consumer, suffering vicariously a loss of love, happiness, and success.”\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{94} Kyvig, \textit{Daily Life in the United States}, 194.
\textsuperscript{95} Marchand, \textit{Advertising the American Dream}, 18.
Many researchers point to the 1920 “Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride” Listerine advertisement for not only incorporating the saying to popular vernacular but also instilling the same fears of not attracting a romantic partner. The ad shows the image of a young woman alone, obviously distraught from the lack of romantic interests by men. The Listerine ads that made Lambert the third largest pharmaceutical company used the embarrassment model in almost all high-circulating national magazines throughout the
interwar period, referring to silent judgment from friends or a romantic partner. These campaigns utilized fears of ending up alone almost equally on both men and women. In an advertisement for Harper’s Bazaar’s March 1924 issue pictured above, the copy claims “He Never Knew Why”. The image shows a man sitting in his desk in the dark, reading a newspaper visibly upset. The image alone connotes feelings of solitude and sadness. The reader is to feel a connection to the distraught man. Below, the copy explains, “One the first things that greeted him on his return to town was a newspaper announcement telling him that the girl he had hoped to marry was engaged to another man. And, moreover, to a man he had never head of.” Rather than overhearing someone discuss his misfortune, the copy explicitly states that he never knew why she married someone else. This courtesy silence limited him from fixing his problem. Here the advertiser, though not explicitly, warns the male reader that the same could happen to him. Silent judgment could lose the male reader a future romantic partner were he to have bad breathe. By finishing the anecdote with, “and he never found the real reason why his courtship had been so complete a failure,” the ad drives home fear of public scrutiny. But finding a romantic partner was not the end; Listerine aimed to instill fears of losing husbands and wives to cleaner, young and lovelier partners. For interwar advertisers, marriages were no longer safe.
In a July 1924 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, a Listerine ad anecdotally claims, “Her Husband Would Never Tell Her.” The image depicts a young, modern woman with the popular bob haircut and long necklace, looking off to the distance, noticeably confused and distraught. Her “woman’s intuition told her that *something* was wrong. She could sense it in her contact with other people: some strange aloofness, a hold-back that her natural charm and beauty did not seem to deserve.” When the woman asks her husband, even he could not find the courage to tell her. Advertising prior to the Depression did away with
Victorian ideals in that private matters were discussed openly in print, but the stock market crash and the limitations of consumer spendable income turned insinuations into unsubtle statements. By the 1934, men were capable of leaving their wives, and women would no longer silently judge a man’s lack of hygiene.

In a Listerine advertisement for *Life Magazine* issue of July 1939 pictured below, the copy exclaims, “Go Out With Him? NOT ME!” The image shows a woman’s face, scrunched up in disgust. She does not seem to have a body, drawing emphasis to only her facial impression. She is not just unimpressed; she is overly disgusted. The text claims, “The things that women simply loathe in men is the thing of which men are frequently guilty...halitosis. It is the offense unpardonable, the bar to friendships, romance, and business relations.” For men, halitosis could affect all relationships, but more importantly, in finding a romantic partner. Men’s offensive breathe, the ad indicates, has gotten so bad that women were writing to the advertisers to “do something about it.” Much like in the early Odorono advertisements, the copy communicates directly with the reader, both the targeted male consumer and the women in his life. According to the copy, women needed advertisement’s help to let him know his offense. This advertisement, as opposed to those of the 1920s, was smaller in copy with larger images, a change in magazines that happened not just in advertisement but also in overall formatting. Much like the shift of *Time Magazine* from a majority of writing to one that put emphasis on imagery, so too did the advertisements change. By late 1930s, Listerine no longer needed to provided instructions

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96 For analysis of male appeals to insecurities about business and power, see Chapter 2.
for use or claim a physician-backed medical reason. Having to no longer educate, copy became shorter, and more exaggerated.

Figure 6. Listerine. “Go Out With Him? Not Me!” *Life Magazine*, July 1939. By the late 1930s, advertisement for Listerine had become less about information and more about appealing strictly to social anxiety and insecurities as shown in this ad above. New York Public Library Milstein Microfilm Collection, General Research Division, New York, New York.

When manufacturers created the sensitive toilet soap for the bodies, hands and hair, advertisers had to distinguish them from the soap used to wash clothing. The soap industry hoped to create this shift and rise of the specific market through the use of pseudo-science
and a connection to new standards of cleanliness and sterilization obsession. Not coincidently, these years also created the female beauty routine of face creams and powders as well as the male beauty routine of shaving creams and hair regrowth products. Advertisers presented anxieties as valid and overcome only through consumption and refining of individuality. The individual, the self, became commoditized. Coinciding increases in electricity and plumbing allowed for constant showering and hand-cleaning. Soap and cleanliness sold, and Proctor & Gamble created one of the first market research departments in 1924. Many major companies followed.

97 For more on the commodification of identity, see Chapter Two.
98 Spring, Advertising in the Age of Persuasion, 14.
An advertisement for Crème Oil: The Cream of Olive Oil Soap in the February 7, 1920 issue of the Saturday Evening Post, commented on a woman’s “Personal Charm.” The advertisement shows an elegant woman, dressed in modern fashion alongside an image of the soap. The advertisement claims: “a clear complexion is the first essential to personal charm.” Unlike many of the other soap companies, Creme Oil advertised like cosmetics: by subtly comparing skin and beauty to youthfulness and delicateness. That subtly was not employed by Palmolive.
Palmolive, instead, drew upon many of the same marketing techniques as Listerine and Odorono. In an advertisement for the April 9, 1921 issue of *Saturday Evening Post*, the ad asks: “Would Your Husband Marry You Again?” The image shows a husband and wife sitting in a living room beneath a lamp, both dressed for an elegant evening. The man sits in a suit not making eye contact with his wife, who looks off to the floor. Taking the same ideas from Creme Oil, the Palmolive ad claims that “a radiant skin, glowing and healthy, is more than a ‘sign’ of youth. It is youth. And any woman can enjoy it.” For the soap industry, cleanliness purposely equaled youth, the ultimate goal for a woman. Even after being married, advertisers directly asked the female reader to question her marriage and fear, above all else, aging and grime.
Palmolive’s campaign was quite successful, becoming the marketing technique of all soap companies for the next decade. In another advertisement in the *Saturday Evening Post*’s January 5, 1924 issue, the copyparallels the Palmolive advertisement from 1921, asking, “Would You Be His Choice For the Dance?” Pictured is a young couple in an embrace mid-dance. The woman looks directly at the reader, questioningly. Below, an image of Palmolive Soap appears. The copy indicates that admiration from a group of young men ready to dance “makes girlhood days the happiest time of a woman’s life...to miss this
popularity is a tragedy.” The advertisement unsubtly claims the all women hope to get the attention of young men, and that could only be done by using their product. “How to have this perfect complexion is the problem of many girls, but we can solve it for you.” How? By using a technique the ad claims Cleopatra discovered using palm and olive oils to clean her complexion and soothe her skin. A small image of Cleopatra with her servants appears to the left of the soap to further produce the imagery of a time-tested technique from antiquity.


By the 1930s, advertisements for soap also dropped the subtleness much like Listerine and Odorono. A Camay Soap ad in the Saturday Evening Post’s November 28, 1931
issue asked, “Are You the Kind Of Girl Men Want to Marry?” Similar to past soap ads, the image shows a smiling young woman from close up. The ad claims that of 100 men interviewed, 94 said they preferred a natural beauty, which could only be reached via gentle soap.


These images and copy were not thrown together haphazardly; they took psychological theories, early market research, refined selling techniques, and constant
communication with audiences to create a combination of image and text. Advertisements specified magazine personalities, basic readership demographics and past campaign successes when developing these ad campaigns. Discourse between consumer and individual however shifted through new gendered technologies and ideals of feminine and masculine roles that defined a society coming to terms with women’s suffrage and economic hardships. As such, the following chapter will highlight these techniques and the creation of identity and gender within the framework of twentieth century consumption.
CHAPTER 2: 
PERSUASION AND PERFORMANCE: 
BRANDING GENDER & IDENTITY

Early twentieth-century advertising utilized multiple techniques to target both male and female consumers beyond consumer hygiene products. Though some consumer products for hygiene and cleanliness appealed to male and female consumers with similar fears of finding a romantic partner, many others focused their specific attention to producing stronger brand loyalty. Various ad campaigns and products paralleled already engrained ideals of gender dynamics and separate spheres, and the cult of commodification and a growing consumer culture allowed for this binary approach to branding and identity.

Throughout the interwar decades, marriage and the American family stood as the center of both men and women’s lives. Whether in attracting a romantic partner, keeping a spouse satisfied, or providing for the home through business success, the nuclear family played a tremendous role for American men and women. Ads for cleanliness tools, clothing for appearance, or the latest technologies promised they would helped individuals perform gender according to societal expectations. The point of these advertising messages? That appearance symbolized individualism more so than character, moral, or personality.

The Consumer in a Commodity Culture

Twentieth century American culture was heavily tied to the growth and trends of consumer products. Consumer culture affected both public and private life, paralleling economic growth and turmoil. Interwar American society was had come a culture of
consumption. As products became a symbol of class and purchasing power, advertisers assured consumers these products were a representation of their gender, agency, identity, and success. Interwar consumption, Barbara J. Phillips notes, relied specifically on self-interest and made it possible for advertising, branding, and specific markets to flourish. If brands signified identity, then purchasing power reflected more than merely social standing. Everyday choices of brands through advertising could present the same products as different, creating an illusion of differences within small markets through what advertisers called mass-market individuality. In other words, the same products would produce different identities for different individuals. Diane Barthel defined this phenomenon as: “each consumer [fancies] himself an individual wearing and using the same goods as millions of other men [and women].” By selling personal satisfaction, advertisers used it as an excuse for the “accumulation of material possessions during the 1920s.” Not surprisingly, this commodity culture grew exponentially throughout the Interwar years.

99 Katherine Toland Frith, *Undressing the Ad: Reading Culture in Advertising* (New York: Peter Land, 1997) I.
102 David E. Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States*, 88; In his *Anxious Decades*, Parrish echoes this argument by stating that “consumption, not hard work and self-restraint, became the path to fortune and personal happiness. In an increasingly urban and bureaucratic society, when the presentation of the self and effective interpersonal relationships became key ingredients to success, one could not hope to move ahead in business, consummate a good marriage, or run a decent home without certain commodities that enhanced one’s appearance and personality.” Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression 1920-1941* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 76.
Few means of communication within a blossoming consumption culture announced new products and technologies more so than the American magazine. According to Tawnya Covert, through these magazines women “received information and guidance...as they shifted from a primary producer of goods consumed within the home to the primary consumer of newly available mass produced goods.”¹⁰³ Covert points to magazines as providing upper middle-class American women advice on coping with societal changes that put them in the middle of consumption rather than as the producers they once were. Housewifery and motherhood as forms of consumption took off in magazine advertising, making sure women remained in the household yet still felt part of the industrialization and commercialization of the public sphere. Manufacturers perpetuated these ideas within advertisements by reinforcing the idea that women could find total fulfillment through their roles as both a housewife and eventually a mother. American women were not trapped, advertisers promised. Instead, the average middle-class woman was contributing just as much as her male counterpart to the ‘progress’ and modernity of the American society through her role inside the home.

Power and hierarchy played a tremendous role in these ideals of production and consumption. From advertisers’ point of view, producers were male while consumers were female.¹⁰⁴ Within this framework, female agency and assertiveness had limited affect beyond consumption and buying power. As such, advertisers estimated the female

¹⁰⁴ In fact, these hierarchal relationships within the commodity cultures viewed male production through rationality and feminized consumption through needs and desires. Simone Weil Davis, *Living Up to the Ads: Gender Fictions of the 1920s* (Duke University Press, 2000), 7.
consumer garnered important information from magazines and then decided which products to buy for the household. Only through brand diversity did the female consumer have the opportunity to exert her power and agency.

Even prior to the 1920s, advertising agencies had already cemented themselves within the American magazine landscape. In fact, by 1917, advertising agencies were in charge of more than 95 percent of the advertisements within magazines. For the largest circulating women’s magazine, the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, more than two-thirds of its revenue in 1919 came from advertising alone, having a large sway on the contents of these magazines. By 1926, the *Journal* was devoting more than half of its pages to advertising. Advertising’s influence and appearance within the magazine overtook many editorials and articles. The *Journal* changed the face of interwar advertising and consumer culture by providing a place for print advertising to boom and target a specific and intended audience. This in turn led to the *Journal* becoming the first magazine to reach a circulation of one million. The key? Addressing the subject of women in the workplace and employing women in its ranks. Not short of remarkable for its time, the *Journal* sought to both define and present American womanhood. In many ways, it succeeded.

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105 Simone Weil Davis, *Living Up to the Ads: Gender Fictions of the 1920s* (Duke University Press, 2000), 9; In Dona Schwartz’s “Women as Mother” article, Schwartz parallels this argument by corroborating that “consumer capitalism transformed the family from a unit of production into a unit of consumption. This transfer of authority created a need for new sources of information, a role that could be assumed in part by mass circulation magazines.” Dona Shwartz, “Women as Mothers” in *Images that Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media*. ed. Susan Dente Ross and Paul Martin Lester (2011), 76.


On the one hand, advertisers assumed their targeted female consumer was guided purely through emotion and persuaded via emotional images and copy as well as “idealized visions, not ‘prosaic realities.’” On the other hand, advertisers assumed male consumers reacted better to advertising copy that was “tight and terse, attempting to create and convey” masculinity and male productivity. Copy and imagery told male consumers they could consume and still keep their masculinity, whereas their female counterparts could not partake in production without losing their femininity. Even so, ideals of masculinity throughout the Great Depression were malleable. As noted in Pendergast’s Creating the Modern Man, interwar maleness became “closely associated with self-realization, other-direction, and personality.” Though these binary ideals were never fully followed by the American public, advertisers still perpetuated these images in magazines of the consumer versus producer. Specifically, these magazines offered an “abundance of ads for the products that men needed to wear as the garb of success—He-Man razors, the right clothes, a good shoe polish,” in other words, “every possible opportunity to use goods and service to improve their chances of achieving the success that the readership of [these magazines] implied they sought.”

112 “[Scholarship] has shown how these divisions are produced ideologically, and how women and men continually cross, contest, accommodate, and renegotiate them.” Kathy Peiss, “‘Vital Industry’ and Women’s Ventures: Conceptualizing Gender in Twentieth Century Business History,” The Business History Review 72, no. 2 (April 2016): 238.
113 Pendergast, Creating the Modern Man, 124.
Creating two fixed, gendered spheres and roles in early print advertisers did not come naturally. In fact, according to Davis, two major issues faced advertisers both before and after the stock market crash: gender roles were “always more constructed than intrinsic” and defining the female consumer highlighted anxiety about the profession as a whole, its ethics and the consumer’s agency.114 The truth was, American men and women could not be placed within nicely fitting boxes of masculinity and femininity, though advertisers tried. Reproducing these gendered representations allowed for more specified targeting of audiences and niches.

In this standardized consumer culture, objects took on characteristics. For Walter Benjamin, this obsession with the object manifested itself in what Gilloch calls “an eroticization of the lifeless artifact” through modes of “design, display and advertising.”115 Even as 1930s audiences insisted they needed “cheap, honest, durable products” instead of “wasteful, shoddy, unnecessary frills and gadgets,” consumerism remained a vital aspect of American culture.116 Admittedly, there was not enough expendable income available to utilize the same buying and spending techniques in ad imagery and copy. Consumer needs shifted, and advertising techniques had to follow.117 Advertising imagery of the 1930s,

114 Davis, Living Up to the Ads, 80.
115 Graeme Gilloch, Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 127; Gilloch stresses that “the commodity was to be the key category for Benjamin’s prehistory of modernity. For him, consumption was the key to, and had to be located within, wider cultural contexts and patterns: fashion, advertising and display; architecture, design and lighting; notions of progress and technological changes; and fantasy, fetishism and sexuality,” Gilloch, 241.
117 For more on consumption and gender, see Elizabeth B Silver’s “Gender, Class, Emotional Capital and Consumption in Family Life” in Gender and Consumption: Domestic Cultures an the Commercialization of Everyday Life, ed. Emma Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2000).
unlike the decade before, focused not on freedom and justice, but instead on the individual’s pursuit of happiness, self-actualization, and self-expression.  

These advertisements took the stuff of everyday life and “magically [transfigured] it into idealized fictions—fictions set in a world where personal satisfaction and positive human relations [were] for sale.” Identity was profitable, and the right object could produce personal identification. Through the ability to purchase identity and satisfaction, American consumers could take off and put on various, sometimes disparate, identities in the quest for self-fulfillment and belonging, maintaining agency by constantly producing new selves. By selling selfhood, advertisers put themselves at the intersection between producers of goods and composers of individualism.

The Performed Individual: Selling Selfhood

The creation, presentation, and performance of identity through purchasing power was an intrinsic part of the economic boom throughout the 1920s. Multiple identities in a consumer culture allowed for further product consumption. According to MacDonald, when targeting female consumers, interwar advertising constructed “multiple possible identities for women in an effort to enhance their spending power.” To do so, advertisers had to

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121 MacDonald, *Representing Women*, 73.
utilize discourse between their consumers and themselves, a back and forth culmination of idea exchanges to further purchases.\textsuperscript{122}

Critical discourse analysis refers to reading magazines as evolving and having goals of their own through analysis of their advertising copy and images’ messages. One of the key ‘technologies of the self’ highlighted by Foucault, it allows for the construction of identities from materials available.\textsuperscript{123} In the theory of the technology of the self, gender becomes one of the “primary categories through which [consumers] evolve socially appropriate behavior patterns, develop expectations about [their] lives, and interpret experiences.”\textsuperscript{124} As a result, consumption developed through discourse between advertisers and consumers, leading many aspects of interwar identity to be closely tied to the ‘material worlds.’\textsuperscript{125}

By stressing this ‘self-fulfillment’ through purchasing power, advertisers depicted identity as capable of shifting.\textsuperscript{126} But what exactly does identity mean in this context? According to Litosselotti, the notion of identity “is a slippery one, often used but rarely defined, varying from one discipline to another, and an on-going subject of academic endeavor.”\textsuperscript{127} Therein lies the problem. In an analysis of gendered media and consumption,

\textsuperscript{122} MacDonald notes that Foucault made a “major contribution to understanding the relationship between identity and discourse” with his ‘Technologies of the Self.’ Myra MacDonald, \textit{Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media} (Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 11.


\textsuperscript{124} MacDonald, \textit{Representing Women}, 16.


\textsuperscript{126} Michael Parrish, \textit{Anxious Decades}: American in Prosperity and Depression 1920-1941 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 158.

identity becomes a bought and performed self. The imagery in advertisement presents the consumer with a utopia where they may find self-actualization and self-expression by purchasing advertised products.\textsuperscript{128} In this back and forth, ad campaigns are the vehicle through which advertisers relay information to the consumer about style differences, new products, and the ‘progress’ of technology, while reviews, purchasing power, and behavior studies communicate audience preferences and inclinations. Defining the self via consumption became especially important, according to Sivulka, “when people filled new and unfamiliar roles, as young working women did after World War I.”\textsuperscript{129} This gender crisis affected both men and women after the Stock Market Crash, as many women found themselves for the first time having to work while men were unable to support their families independently during hard economic times.

One way advertisers sought to ‘alleviate’ the gender crises throughout interwar economic shifts was the persuasion technique of ‘Symbolic Self-Completion Theory,’ one of many utilized to persuade the consumer that “people complete their identity by acquiring and displaying symbols.”\textsuperscript{130} Through this technique, specific brands became a symbol of the selfhood by taking on symbolic characteristics. In other words, through this theory, self-identity, discussed further in next chapter, becomes a process and a narrative of the self.\textsuperscript{131} By constantly reconstructing, purchasing, and rebranding selfhood, the technique calls on the consumer to utilize the brand, the product, and media representations to define and

\textsuperscript{129} Sivulka, \textit{Stronger than Dirt}, 181.
\textsuperscript{130} Sivulka, 181.
\textsuperscript{131} “These narratives are not created once early in our lives, but are ongoing constructions.” Macnamara, \textit{Media and Male Identity}, 5.
perform the narrative of their selfhood. As such, gender as well as identity becomes a process. The years between the two world wars was marked by uncertainty, as regimes grew, political unrest bubbled at the surface, and modes of comportment changed. Ads assured male and female consumers these ‘crises of identity’ could be avoided by using their purchasing power. After all, purchasing power could cure most uncertainty. Or so these advertisements reassured.

Rather than a by-product of nature or biology, gender is constantly changing and shifting according to cultural norms. At the center of this discourse between advertisers and consumers, the creation, reproduction, and formulation of masculinity and femininity developed into a new gender process. Defined as “the cultural and social basis of roles assumed daily by men and women,” it is an evolving process rather than an assigned position. Studying gender as a construct instead of a natural phenomenon helps resolve the “complex relationship between gender representations in media and our own constructions of gender identities.” The two are not the same, defined as an internal constant conflict and a performed, public adherence to expectations. Studies of the

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132 “Given the historical incommensurability of some subject positions, therefore, identity is best understood not as a product, but as a process that involves the constant negotiation and renegotiation of multiple subjectivities in which human beings have unequal investments. Identity is the feigned product of interest intersubjectible mediations.” Diana Saco, “Masculinity As Signs: Poststructuralist Feminist Approaches to the Study of Gender,” in Men, Masculinity, and the Media, ed. Steve Craig (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications: 1992).

133 Constructionists argue that gender is a by-product of gender discourse. This analysis relies and builds upon the claim that gender performance is a product of the gender discourse within the consumer society. “Gender is the effect of and is constructed in our everyday involvement in culture.” Vickie Rutledge Shields and Dawn Heinecken Measuring Up: How Advertising Affects Self-Image (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), x.

134 “Acknowledging that gender representations are culturally produced and reproduced allows us to deconstruct, or analytically take apart, how seemingly ‘natural’ gender relationships came to be and how they are maintained.” Heinecken Measuring Up, 2002, xi.
intersection between gender and media is still relatively new, and these studies have struggled to define media’s exact influence and effect on the gendered individual.  

Constructing Gender: Purchase and Performance as Identity

The concept of gender as performative builds on Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and has been “widely and diversely taken up by others and indeed revisited by Butler herself.” In one such example, Meta G. Castarphen calls for gender scholarship that “reflects how the print media...represent and portray sex-defined images.” Such a view would analyze the changing ways in which consumers understand what it means to ‘be’ a man or woman, and how individuals negotiate these roles between images of advertisement and societal expectations. While most scholarship on gender and media agrees or builds upon Butler’s analysis, not every study has utilized Butler’s study of gender as performance. Still, though the consensus remains construction and performance, the ways in which Butler’s theory of gender has been analyzed within media at times leaves much to be desired.

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139 Michael Cramphorn’s asserts that gender is neither constructed nor performed and argues rather unsuccessfully that both gender and identity begin ‘in utero.’ His deviation from the claim that gender is performed and constructed undermines and ignores a strong basis of scholarship from the last thirty years. Michael Cramphorn, “Gender Effects in Advertising,” 2011.
A large portion of past scholarship on gender and media has regrettably focused on feminine rather than both masculine and feminine identities, in effect ignoring Butler’s understanding of identity through othering the opposite gender. According to Macnamara, “a half-century of research has identified that mass media portrayals of women are influential in shaping their self-image and self-esteem...[while] comparatively few studies have examined mass media portrayals of men and male identity." If consumer identities are shaped by their perceived gender, then limited scholarship on male portrayals restricts a full understanding of gendered media and its significance. This small, yet extensive, intersectional study of gender and media forms a significant analysis within the larger scholarship. As Karen Ross explains, “Any book which has ‘gender’ in its title is likely to talk about power, patriarchy, and culture. Any book which has ‘media’ in its title is likely to talk about influence, hegemony, and institutions.” When these two studies intersect, the study of gender and media employs power, culture and influence. By highlighting this, we can further understand how the consumer utilizes advertised products and goods to reinforce and continuously redefine his or her masculinity and femininity. In this way, advertiser’s social identity theory highlights how consumer behavior became vital in the creation of advertising campaigns.

140 In advertising and media, masculinity and femininity remained binary, detached, and separated by othering the opposing gender. Heineken and Shields explain that, “an important concept in symbolic interactionism is the ‘generalized other,’” or a representation of member roles that allow for the individual to “align his/her behaviors with those of others within a social setting” Heineken, 37.
141 Macnamara, Media and Male Identity, 1.
143 The idea that these definitions are not natural but rather are socially constructed is given weight and credibility when we look at how such definitions have changed over time. Barthel, 138.
144 Social identity theory relied on two notions: “first, people are posited to take actions and consumer products (at least in part) to enact identities consistent with their ideal self-images...second, there is not
Even so, for interwar advertisers, the ideal consumer remained female. Whether real or believed, the consumer was a ‘she.’\textsuperscript{145} Though demographically she was half of the population, “statistics indicated that women did the bulk of the nation’s retail buying.”\textsuperscript{146} To target the female audience, advertisers turned to the American magazine, the easiest way to get into the home of Americans across the nation. For many scholars analyzing the intersection between consumption and gender, magazines of the 1920s were “consumer colleges that helped women learn about different products, techniques, and ideas.”\textsuperscript{147} They told women how to act and what to buy, how to dress and who to aspire to be. Although the 1920s to 1940s saw multiple, varying representations of women in the media, gender scripts and designated roles for men and women in society remained rather constant.\textsuperscript{148}

Interwar masculinity, on the other hand, weaved both within the confines of a consumer culture and outside the realm of consumption. The male consumer was at once unaffected by advertising techniques that supposedly affected women and also capable of extending his consumer power when necessary. His masculinity, and manhood, was constantly changing “neither static nor timeless” and was continuously reconstructed.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{145} Marchand, \textit{Advertising the American Dream}, 66.
\textsuperscript{146} Marchand, 66.
\textsuperscript{147} Parkin, \textit{Food is Love}, 6.
\textsuperscript{148} Throughout the interwar period, advertisers relied on three constructs of femininity, three forms of womanhood identity that dominated gendered discourse: the household manager or housewife, the mother consumed with guilt, and the selfish and immature flapper. MacDonald notes that these categorist were not presentations of real women but instead manufactured versions of what was appropriate for the women of the period. MacDonald, 77.
\textsuperscript{149} “Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our culture.” Michael S. Kimmel, \textit{Man in America: A Cultural History} (The Free Press, 1996), 4.
Masculinity, like femininity, reflected power relations in society and was both political and economic.\textsuperscript{150} Rather than the fixed masculinity of the Victorian Era, interwar manhood became closely defined by self-realization through consumption. The Stock Market Crash and the Great Depression blurred these lines, pummeling male ego so much so that the promise of war appeared as a reclaiming of masculinity.

Throughout the 1930s, as jobs and resources remained scarce, many American men felt emasculated both at home and at work—that is, if they still had a job. Throughout this crisis, male consumers turned and favored more inspirational advertising messages about the future and their lives.\textsuperscript{151} In this way, advertiser’s approaches to male and female consumers were already defined according to concerns their consumers felt and expressed.

Femininity, Masculinity, and the Ideal Consumer

The most recognized image of the interwar American woman in advertisements is the young, unmarried woman. The younger generation, represented by images such as the flapper, not only symbolized new and modern femininity but also appeared as an escape for the traditional housewife, at least on the surface.\textsuperscript{152} As much as she symbolized new freedoms, the young woman’s direct connection to the frivolous and leisure helped to devalue her politically and socially rather than garner power. This dichotomy allowed for


\textsuperscript{151} Marchand, \textit{Advertising the American Dream}, 286.

\textsuperscript{152} The unmarried and modern flapper loved to “enjoy and indulge herself, participating in sport, dancing or driving open-topped motor cars. Her spending power was earned by working in the public sphere, most probably as an office employee, or sales assistant. She occupied the public domain of the street or the dancehall while her married sister kindled the domestic hearth.” MacDonald, 77.
her to exist as both a free woman and a traditional representation of femininity and consumption, discussed further in Chapter Three.

This 1920s new, ‘independent’ woman exemplified by the freethinking, carefree, boyish college girl, presented new ideals of educated womanhood at a time when the number of women attending colleges and universities dramatically increased.\textsuperscript{153} While advertisers presented their new freedom of education and public life as offering endless opportunities, in reality, the gained freedom for women remained in spending power rather than economic, political, or social. This ‘freedom’ offered women the opportunity to choose between various goods and services while discerning which was best. Advertisers accordingly dressed this choice as modernity.\textsuperscript{154} At the end of the day, she still eventually married and became a housewife. Her autonomy did not clash with her eventual domestication. These two specific roles’ representations in advertising are further discussed in the next chapter.

Even so, this new ‘freedom’ of the 1920s significantly diminished in the years following the Stock Market Crash. The Great Depression pulled back many women’s political and economic strides, declaring them frivolous during a time of economic hardship. The newfound independence, even in its most basic form, went against new social mores of the 1930s. In a time of monetary turmoil, domesticity once again rose. As Fox notes, “If the 1920s confirmed a culture defined by advertising, the ensuring

\textsuperscript{153} Scanlon, \textit{Inarticulate Longings}, 41.

\textsuperscript{154} Kitch argues the “domesticated flapper wore her newness on her body as well, in her slimness, hairdo, makeup, and clothing” instead of presenting her modernity in a non-appearance form. Carolyn Kitch, \textit{The Girl in the Magazine Cover} (University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 183.
Depression decade denied that culture.” Beauty and personal cleanliness products were one of the few consumer goods to remain largely untouched. For interwar advertisers, appearance did not reflect self-interest—rather, it offered a better chance in romantic conquests, in public spaces, and in overall social success.

The Great Depression did not only affect advertising representations of femininity. New ideals and images of men were also paralleling and playing against the economic and identity crisis of the 1930s. Many American men could no longer measure up to a vague standard of manhood or society’s expectations when they could not provide for the family, find a romantic partner, or achieve the same success or power they once had or once found easier to achieve. Advertisers knew better than to heavily emphasize these realities. Instead, early 1930s male imagery challenged these prevalent fears with positive images of the hero, the father, or the moral guider discussed in the next chapter. If he could no longer prove his masculinity and heroism through labor and economic success, he had to find other outlets. According to advertisers, the solution was simple: through buying the correct products, the male consumer could facilitate the creation of his ideal self in an unfamiliar economic landscape. Magazines and advertisements offered the male

155 Fox, The Mirror Makers, 118.
156 “Never before had American men experienced such a massive and system-wide shock to their ability to prove manhood by providing for their families.” Kimmel, 128.
157 “For most men the depression was emasculating both at work and at home. Unemployed men lost status with their wives and children and saw themselves as impotent patriarchs. And the consequences for men were significant.” Kimmel, 132.
158 “With nearly one in four American men out of the work, the workplace could no longer be considered a reliable arena for the demonstration and proof of one’s manhood. And many men simply lost faith in a system that prevented them from proving their masculinity in the only ways they knew. Even those men who still had jobs had a more difficult time proving their manhood in the 1930s. The competition was increasingly fierce, and the complexion of the American workforce seemed to many to grow increasingly dark.” Kimmel, 128.
consumer a means by which to preserve his failing masculinity. The product, the good, and the brand became a mark of interwar male identity.\textsuperscript{159} As such, advertisers assured male consumers their goods were an extension of a man’s power and of the self.\textsuperscript{160}

Beyond persuasion techniques, advertisers sought to influence consumers through the development of brand loyalty. Brand loyalty was the consumer’s commitment that drew him or her to repurchase the same products over and over again\textsuperscript{161} Not necessarily for the quality of the good or service, but for what the brand itself epitomized. Therein advertisers found the perfect way to confirm audiences would keep buying their products. Many advertisers declared consumers’ choices were much more than just a purchasing decision in a supermarket. The new notion of brand loyalty sought to create “a brand personality, an iconic connection between the advertised product and other symbolic associations.”\textsuperscript{162} By utilizing symbols, companies could transform themselves into indications of social standing and identity.

\textsuperscript{159} Commodity fetishism claims that “we no longer have power over goods. Rather, they have power over us. They rule our lives and determine our actions. We use consumer goods to define and reinforce definitions of what is masculine and what is feminine,” Barthel, 138.

\textsuperscript{160} “In and through products, [consumers] actually hand over [their] identities.” While this argument is oversimplified and attaches too much influence on the advertisers, products were influential in how identities were perceived. Barthel, 138.

\textsuperscript{161} According to Scanlon, advertisers did not necessarily take this brand loyalty for granted. Instead, while advertisers may have hoped for the brand loyalty, they made sure to keep said loyalty by continuously appealing to their base’s changes. Scanlon, \textit{The Gender and Consumer Culture} (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 102. For more on consumer behavior analysis and brands, see Terence A. Shimp, “Attitudes Toward the Ad as a Mediator of Consumer Brand Choice,” \textit{Journal of Advertising} 10, no. 2 (1981): 9.

\textsuperscript{162} Sivulka, \textit{Stronger Than Dirt}, 177.
Through association with a brand’s identity, the consumer had the ability to choose who he or she wanted to be and how he or she wanted to present themselves.\footnote{It is advertising, more than anything else, which brands use to establish their identities and to portray the kind of people who, or should use, that brand.”\, Arthur Asa Berger, “The Branded Self: On the Semiotics of Identity,”\, \textit{The American Sociologist} 42, no. 2 (2011).} This allowed similar brands to maneuver through the same markets, appearing distinct and seemingly giving their consumers freedom of choice. In doing so, advertisers hoped “each consumer fancies himself an individual wearing and using the same goods as millions of other men.”\footnote{Barthel, “When Men Put on Appearances,” 144.} For many men and women, this included personal hygiene and beauty products. In purchasing the right products and brands, the consumer would achieve their version of the American dream. This connection to a brand or product did not eliminate consumer agency. Heavily emphasized and analyzed in current consumer research as well early version of the field, this need for expression of self allows for various forms of consumer agency.\footnote{Given the focus on fit between brand and consumer identity, which is theoretically founded in drives to define and express the self, there has been less attention to another equally fundamental drive: consumers’ need for agency. Whether described in terms of agency, autonomy, choice freedom, locus of control, or self-determination, a consensus across research traditions emphasized the need for agency of self-expression. While agency is often defined in terms of the presence or absence of choice, many other factors contribute to the satisfaction of consumers’ need for agency.” This same study proposes “strength of consumers’ need for agency relative to their drive for identity expression predicts their [consumers’ s] response to identity-marketing messages.” Amit Bhattacharjee, Jonah Berger, and Geeta Menon. 2014. “When Identity Marketing Backfires: Consumer Agency in Identity Expression”. \textit{Journal of Consumer Research} 41 (2). Oxford University Press: 294–309.}

Buying Beauty: Hair, Face, and Body

Personal satisfaction for interwar American men and women in advertising relied heavily on appearing attractive enough for romantic partners, business advances, and
social standing. Culturally, women were expected to remain youthful and beautiful well into adulthood. While the same emphasis and priority did not exist for men, professional and romantic success relied on acceptable appearance. Advertisements repeated that personal appearance relayed information about the individual. According to Melissa A. Mceuen, since the turn of the century, the most closely scrutinized aspects of American women’s bodies was their face. As such, “advertisers for lotions, creams, and powders promised to help women achieve ‘beauty’ and it’s attendant rewards.”\textsuperscript{166} Less explicitly, advertisers promised male attractiveness could propel social standing. According to image and copy, a beautiful face promised marriage, success, and a faithful spouse.

Many ad campaigns claimed outside appearances represented and were channels into the inner self. Through purchasing power, both beauty soap and cosmetics promised an end to any public scrutiny via their products.\textsuperscript{167} Few beauty soap or makeup brands of the early interwar period utilized this fear more than Pond’s, a cosmetic company that relied heavily on first-impression formulas, celebrity endorsement, and editorials. For the woman who used Pond’s, the product would guarantee youthfulness and attractiveness. No woman would want to be a ‘Plain Jane,’ a woman whose looks spoiled her, whose pores appeared to be ‘little coal mines’ in her skin.\textsuperscript{168} For cosmetic companies such as Pond’s, pores were ‘dirty pockets in your skin’ that could age a young woman. One such January


\textsuperscript{167} “As the business of the beauty culture emerged in the 1920s, soapmakers also came into direct competition with cosmetic manufactures, who promised products like face creams as a substitute for soap in cleansing the face.” Sivulka, 231. Similarly, soapmakers had competition from cosmetics, where women American women spent much more than on soap.

\textsuperscript{168} One advertisement for Pond’s in \textit{Harper’s Bazaar} in the April 1920 issue emphasized female beauty above all else. This specific campaign would last through the end of 1922.
1920 advertisement for Pond’s in *Harper’s Bazaar* directly spoke to the reader, exclaiming, ‘You’re 20, 25, 30, the years are slipping.’

The product promised itself as the end of dry skin and pores. Only through purchasing power and the discernment of choosing their brand could the female consumer avoid public scrutiny and the shamefulness of growing old. Similarly, in another advertisement for the same Pond’s campaign in the March 1922 issue of *Harper’s Bazaar*, comparable copy accused the female reader of not knowing just how to treat her blackheads, instead utilizing the wrong cleaning methods and ruining her skin. In this message, the blame lay on the consumer for not knowing better.

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Pond’s was not the only company selling youthfulness and vitality to the female reader. Woodbury Facial Soap, a beauty routine product, promised the reader youthfulness by merely cleaning her face and pores, utilized many of the same techniques perfected by hygiene products. Pores, in many these images, were the enemy, a technique still utilized today. In one Harper’s Bazaar January 1922 advertisement for Woodbury Facial Soap, the copy exclaims, “Strangers’ Eyes, Keen and Critical—Can You Meet Them Proudly—
Confidently—Without Fear?” The image shows a large formal gathering of people. Women and men sit and talk, dressed in elegant clothing to depict a formal function. On the left, a woman, accompanied by a male, looks straight at the reader. Her face is that of fear and apprehension. To her right, a quote claims “…Watching her from every corner of the crowded room.” She is not making eye contact with any other party goer, instead directly looking at the reader as if to warn the reader to watch out. The image lets the reader know to avoid her situation, even before having read the copy. The worried look on her face communicates the sentiment of the advertisement and the promise of the soap. Below this imagery, the copy parallels the imagery by claiming, “strangers’ eyes, watching you in crowded restaurants—in theatres and ballrooms—can you meet them without awkwardness or dread?” This appeal to the first impression formula tells the reader accusing eyes are forming a negative opinion. The copy reiterates, “The possession of a beautiful skin gives any woman poise and confidence. It is a charm that any woman can have if she will.” This copy asserts that by using the product, the female reader could stop the “little defects that spoil so many complexions.” Here, the ad directly asks the reader if she is using the right treatment on her type of skin. Claiming A ‘Cake’ of Woodbury Facial Soap could be used for every skin type, including sensitive skin, the advertisement tells the female reader flawless, young-looking skin was just one product purchase away.

This campaign worked, illustrated by another Woodbury advertisement from the same campaign in the May 1922 issue of Harper’s Bazaar, showing a man and woman in a close embrace, not surrounded by a crowd but instead alone. The woman and man are

170 More information on the First Impression Formula in Chapter Three.
looking into one another’s eyes, with very little around or behind them. The lack of background detail emphasizes the embrace between lovers. ‘Nothing quite effaces that momentary disappointment,’ the advertisement claims. Below, the copy tells the woman that up-close, her appearance needed more attention, noting, “instinctively, perhaps without even stating it to himself—a man expects to find daintiness, charm, refinement in the women he knows.” The copy warns the woman to not let her negligence for her skin allow the gentleman to have a first impression of ‘untidiness.’ Here too the first impression formula appeals to the woman reader’s insecurities about finding a romantic partner. Below, the copy speaks directly to the reader and her fears. If she purchases the product, then she too can avoid the advertisement’s heroine’s ordeal. ‘Any girl can have a smooth, clear skin, free form little defects and blemishes.’ Having already appeared in various issues, the ad anticipates a reaction from the audience, directly responding to past criticism by telling the female reader how the skin will react to the treatment. According to the copy, the sensation of feeling tight means the cream is working. This direct reference to past critique depicts a two-way conversation between the female reader and Woodbury advertisers. This is not characteristic of Woodbury alone; within the same issue, multiple beauty soaps advertisements directly reference reader concerns and criticism within the copy.
Within the same campaign, another Woodbury ad from the December 1922 issue of *Harper’s Bazaar* mirrors the imagery from earlier the same year, utilizing fear of public scrutiny. The advertisement tells the reader rather aggressively, “*All Around You People Are Judging You Silently.*” This emphasis on a silent judgment mirrors the techniques utilized by Listerine and Odorono. The ad image shows a woman dressed in the latest fashion, surrounded by a group of people. Like the others, she is also accompanied by a gentleman.
Looking directly at the reader, she has the same distressed expression as the woman in the January advertisement. She clasps her long pearl necklace with anxiety. Below, in a smaller font, the copy declares, “the friends who greet you in your own drawing room receive an impression of you that you will never know.” The reason? Not body odor, but ‘neglect.’ The woman need to not only fear odor but also ‘carelessness’ in her appearance. The copy claims, “If you have an unattractive complexion—a skin that is dully, and sallow, or marred by ugly little blemishes—begin now to overcome this condition.” Here too Woodbury promises the woman ready can purchase a clear complexion through the right treatment. Rather than presenting Woodbury as having multiple techniques depending on the type of skin, this ad presents only two examples: a treatment for oily skin and a treatment for a ‘pale, sallow skin.’ If the woman reader wants to achieve flawless, youthful skin, purchasing the ‘Cake’ Woodbury Facial Soap and Cold Crème for 25 cents remained the answer.

Though these ideas were not merely present in Harper’s Bazaar, the firmness with which the copy spoke to the reader was indicative of pre-Depression Harper’s Bazaar. Even as these more aggressive advertisement filled Bazaar and a handful of other women’s magazines, advertisements for other top circulating women’s magazines such as Vogue between 1920 to 1924 remained much more positive. These differences highlight the brand characteristics not only of the products but also the magazines themselves. Though these ads sold the same crèmes, hair removers and makeup, for Vogue the copy and imagery appealed to women’s insecurities without over-utilizing guilt.

However, this imagery and copy shifted quite a bit after 1929. Throughout the early years of the Depression and in response to consumer spending abilities, advertising
techniques notably shifted. Between 1929 and 1932, advertisement for all major circulating magazines analyzed in this study tried to avoid referring too negatively about appearances, especially that of hair and face. Instead, these magazines emphasized more technologies such as household appliances and automobiles that were investments rather than frivolousness. Though the first few years of the Depression saw an increase in positive imagery and copy, by late 1931 and early 1932, a handful of magazines had returned to selling beauty soaps and razors. Still, the effects of limited consumer finance were felt in the type of advertisements. Though advertisers were once again selling beauty products, many ads still referenced 'bargains' when selling non-hygiene personal appearance brands. This upward trend toward pre-Depression persuasion techniques kept increasing at the 1930s proceeded.
By 1937, Pond’s persuasion techniques had reached pre-Depression aggression. A January 1937 *Harper’s Bazaar* advertisement for Pond’s mirrored the same shift seen in soaps and deodorants advertisements. The advertisement exclaims, “Get At That Faulty Under Skin.” For Pond’s “the starting place of large pores, lines, blackheads” were specifically the unclean chin and cheeks. Utilizing photography, a new advertising trend due to the high prices of advertising artwork during the Depression, the ad shows a close up of a woman. She is looking off to the right of the reader, half-smiling. A drawn version of her face to the
right shows where the large pores and blackheads are appearing, with a close-up pointing to specific areas. The image attempts to instill public fear in the reader about what pores look like from close up. In other words, what others can see. For the reader, the under skin that she has not noticed is at fault for the blackheads, causing pores to look larger. Only through Pond’s deep skin treatment can the female consumer avoid the embarrassment and humiliation of bad skin. Science, the ad claims, has culminated into a new cold cream that ‘contains specially processed oils which go way down deep into your pores.’ The cream will make the reader’s face fresher and brighter, promising youth, health and hygiene. Similar advertisements for creams and cosmetics appeared that same year targeting women in most magazines, including a 1937 *Time Magazine* issue.
A November 1937 advertisement for the same Pond’s Crème campaign exclaims, “Now—This New Cream Brings to Women the Active ‘Skin-Vitamin’”. The advertisement shows a common close up of a smiling woman, looking off to the distance. To her right, another image of a woman and man riding horses. The copy below claims science has found the way to have healthy skin specifically for this product. It claims, “First doctors found this out. Then Pond’s found a way to put ‘skin-vitamin’ into Pond’s Cold Cream. Now everyone can
have it.” According to the copy, the new cream is better than ever because of scientific progress. Much like other advertisements of the late 1930s with an already established brand identity, most of the Pond’s advertisement’s copy is dedicated to selling rather than explaining how the product worked. Instead, the copy claims sameness, “same jars, same labels, same price” relying heavily on brand loyalty.\(^\text{171}\) Any woman could afford Pond’s youthfulness, the advertisement claimed. All that stopped her was the right product purchase.

Much like with Pond’s, later advertisements for many other cosmetics distanced themselves from the Depression, the more their techniques once again appealed to insecurities about appearances. One Marie Earle advertisement for the August 1937 issue of *Harper’s Bazaar* claimed “a woman has so few years of radiant beauty...unless she learns a really effective system of skincare.”\(^\text{172}\) Similarly, a Lady Ether advertisements in the same issue for a beauty product claimed, “7 out of 10 women blame their skin for blackheads when they would blame their cleansing method.”\(^\text{173}\) For the female consumer, cosmetic companies advertised beauty soaps and makeup as the solution to aging and imperfect skin, two things that needed to be avoided above all else.

While beauty was a vital aspect of an interwar American woman’s social standing, appearance also played a significant role in American men’s successes. For the male consumer, a prominent source of public scrutiny was a less-than-perfect face and hair. A

\(^{171}\) “Pond’s, like Woodbury’s, existed for every woman, queen or commoner, society matron or housewife.” Scanlon, 219.
clean-shaven face and a head full of hair were the required physical characteristics to both win a romantic partner and succeed in society for the interwar American male consumer. One such product that promised success on both fronts was shaving cream, correlating to the rise of a hygiene obsession. The end of the First World War saw an increase in clean-shaven faces rather than the large beards and mustaches of the Victorian Era. To stay in style, the male consumer was required to buy the correct products to maintain the clean face symbolic of better hygiene. And no thing showed lack of modernity and charm more than a cut or stubbled face.

![Figure 16. Colgate Shaving Cream. “Colgates Softens the Beard at the Base,” Time Magazine 1925.](image)
An advertisement for Colgate’s Shaving Cream in the September 14, 1925 issue of *Time Magazine* claimed, “Colgate’s Softens the Beard at the Base.” Above, the image depicts a before and after of a ‘cousin Anon,’ whose clean-shaven look has freed him from ‘facial encumbrances.’ The shaving cream promises the end of the old, the obsolete, the unsanitary. The copy claims, “How dear to our hearts are the old-fashioned albums…it’s a treat to go through them and look at the whiskers that our great-uncles wore when smooth faces were few!” By associating facial hair to past generations and nostalgia, Colgate connects its product to the new, the clean, and the modern. The copy reiterates that the clean-shaven look has “effectiveness as a sanitary measure.” The product promises the male consumer his face will keep him both young and fit. While the emphasis on attractiveness as vital is not apparent here, modernity is seen as necessary for success in life.
Colgate was not the only company to connect shaving to youthfulness, modernity, and success. In another advertisement for shaving cream, Williams Shaving Cream mirrors the same fear of public scrutiny representative of many women’s beauty creams. The advertisement in the April 7, 1928 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* exclaims, “Condemned...without a hearing.” The advertisement shows a man sitting at a desk. He seems distraught by what is written on the page he reads. Behind him, another man bows his head and is turned away from the sitting man. The copy asks why he is already
condemned. “Well, perhaps that first impression was not good. And first impressions, as we all know, are made mostly by men’s faces.” Here too the advertisements for Williams Shaving Cream utilize the pre-Depression first impression formula to tell the reader to purchase its product. Much like women’s beauty facial soaps and creams, the shaving cream promises to “gently cleanse facial pores. Tone up facial tissues. Help to keep complexions clear.” For the American man as well, pores and face smoothness said more about his appearance than even personality, according to these advertisements.174 While ads directed to female consumers utilized first impression models and appeals to guilt at a less subtle level, advertisements for male personal beauty and creams utilized very similar techniques. Still, the male consumer’s emphasis on his appearance was presented as neither vain nor vital to his everyday life but rather a stepping-stone for his economic and business success.

174 “Ads not only promoted the ability of products to make you more desirable and successful, but also warned of the consequences of failing to use them.” Covert, *Manipulating Images*, 6.
Much like with advertisements directed to female consumers, the degree to which appeals to insecurity and negativity were utilized in male-driven advertisements was dependent on economic shifts. In one depression-era advertisement for Williams Shaving Cream, the copy shifts away from earlier negativity seen in the 1928 campaign, “Out into the World with a Mind that’s Fit and a Face that’s fit.” Here the ad claims that a man’s cleanliness represents his intelligence and personality. The image shows a man, holding
what appears to be a diploma, looking off to the distance. He is dressed in a formal suit with people standing behind him. To his bottom right, an image of the shaving cream and Aqua Velva. The copy utilizes positivity rather than fear or guilt, instead telling the male reader, “School or College behind him...the world in front of him...eagerly he steps out to make his place. Fit in mind. Fit in body. Face fit, too.” As with other magazines of the early 1930s, this advertisement from the June 8, 1931 issue of Time Magazine keeps the advertisement positive, appealing to the potential power and success of the male reader. As the male consumer was already dealing with economic loss and loss of job security, advertisements of the early 1930s steered clear of pushing too hard on an already wary and cynical audience. Rather than utilizing a more positive fear of public scrutiny as with advertisements targeting female consumers, early Depression advertisements for male consumers presented a purely positive, simple message. The product was not only vital but also affordable to the soon-to-be successful reader.

Another beauty product advertised to interwar American men was the anti-hair loss cream and shampoo. A Pinaud’s Eau de Quinine advertisement from the Saturday Evening Post’s April 28, 1928 issue told the consumer, “3 Minutes a Day will Stop Thinning Hair!” If the consumer bought the product, he would remain youthful, with luxurious hair. “There’s just this difference between the man who is going to become bald and the man who will keep thick, strong-growing hair.” That difference, the ad claims, is the purchase of their product. In these campaigns, a problem was only a problem if the consumer did not utilize his spending power to fix it. Through this purchasing power, the male reader would prevent balding from an early age simply buy utilizing Pinaud’s. Mirroring the above copy, the
image shows a visibly happy man with thick, full hair. He is smiling because he has bought the right product and stopped his thinning hair.

In a similar advertisement for the men's conditioner Vitalis, the copy also promises a clean, full set of hair. Above the image, the advertisement exclaims, “Good-Looking Hair is a Social Asset.” The ad image shows a smiling man, with a full lock of hair. Above, another image of a man and woman smiling at one another close-up. The copy reiterates to the reader: “Well-kept hair stamps him as a clean-cut sort of a fellow, properly respectful of himself and his appearance—it is a definite asset to his business as well as his social life.” His emphasis on personal appearance is not vanity but dedication to both his professional and personal relationships. Utilizing the same scientific support as hygiene products, the ad tells the reader its product “quickens the circulation of blood through the scalp—restores the flow of natural, nourishing oils.” Here too the advertisement copy is only starting to sound less positive than Depression-era copy. Scientific progress now allows for the male consumer to avoid the success setback of thinning and disappearing hair by simply spending his money on Vitalis.
Following the same trajectory as other men's face and hair creams, Vitalis advertisement campaign of the 1930s offered a more positive outlook on business and success. In a campaign the following year for *Time Magazine*’s April 26, 1937 issue, an advertisement titled “*Good-Looking Hair is Your Aid in Every Enterprise*,” reiterates to male readers once again that the product restores youthfulness and power. The image depicts a smiling man with an effortlessly pulled back hairstyle, noting, “*In any enterprise—business or social—the well-groomed man usually comes through with flying colors!* And nothing adds
to good grooming as healthy, well-kept hair.” This campaign works, noted by a November 1936 advertisement that claimed, “Vitalis stimulates circulation—loosens that tight, dry skin—encourages the flow of necessary oils.” This allusion to scientific findings reassures the male consumer that science has promised its power and safety.

These characteristic differences in advertisements directed to male and female readers for beauty products looked to already established gender roles to promise product and brand abilities. Through specific persuasion techniques and appeals to insecurities, interwar advertisers were able to utilize already established gender scripts to sell to target audiences, as for example, according to advertisers, the female consumer was exclusively in a state of apprehension or guilt over her insufficient beauty routine. The copy, on the other hand, promised her that by following the correct beauty routine, the female consumer could do her part in her performing and purchasing her identity. Simultaneously, these same advertisements presented masculinity as both a personal and public identity. Rather than shown at home or in an evening event, advertisements for men’s cleanliness rituals showed the man at work, graduating, or in another position of power. He was not detached from public success; he was merely maneuvering within it. His cleanliness ritual was not wrong but merely lacking. His emphasis on looks did not indicated vanity or insecurity but instead attempts at climbing the social latter or finding a romantic partner. Social, economic, and romantic success were only a purchase away. These gendered representations were far more polarized in other markets beyond personal appearance. In the next chapter, this text will dive further into the creation of these ads and their imagery.

175 “In new industrial America, personal cleanliness rituals ensured order and advancement; they are disciplined, built character, and created new customers for an emerging consumer society.” (Sivulka, 79); Sivulka notes that in studying advertising and consumption, the consumer cleanliness ritual should not be overlooked.

176 “Objects and personal rituals, however, also acted as a sort of security blanket by reinforcing people’s identities, especially in unfamiliar situations.” Sivulka, 23.
CHAPTER 3:  
CREATING THE ADS:  
MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND PERSUASION TECHNIQUES

Interwar advertisers promised male and female consumers their inner and outer selves were separate elements combined together to make an individual. Outer appearance highlighted a person’s morals, personal hygiene, and success while possession of technology, clean faces, full hair, and the latest fashions made success. After all, beauty and wealth could not come to those undeserving on the inside. For the interwar American consumer, appearance stood as a site of not only strength and success but also one of “anxiety, regulation and surveillance.”  

In order to promise American men and women the outside world was watching, advertisers used the specific persuasion techniques highlighted in the last chapter as well as the First Impression Formula, perfecting these techniques through trial and error and common representations of femininity and masculinity.

Public life for the interwar American woman was very different from that of her male counterpart. The majority of professionals in the public eye were male, while interwar house makers were almost exclusively female. As distinct as the public and private self felt for the interwar consumer, culture construction of these differences. For Jackson Lears, these differences were always artificial, weighed down by signals and representations.

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177 Beverly Skeggs, Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable (SAGE, 1997), 107.
Throughout interwar advertisements’ copy but more specifically imagery, these differences were pronounced.

The American family maneuvered around two separate, gendered spheres: the feminine domestic and the masculine public. The former characterized by domestic work, technology and consumption—an integral part of women’s lives, allowed for purchasing power, domestic technology and interior decor.\textsuperscript{179} The latter provided the male head of the nuclear family self-realization through business and success. His role of hero exemplified by his providing for his family and doing his duty. By dividing the domestic and public lives, advertisers could better study male and female life as separate psychologically, socially, and economically, thus creating media representations of these common tropes of the heroic father or the fallible flapper.

How did interwar portrayals of men and women differ? While advertising represented men through various occupations and autonomy, women were commonly represented as housewives and mothers. Likewise, men appeared disproportionately in advertising for business, alcohol, vehicles, and other more public products as well as in outdoors or business settings while their counterparts were represented through domestic products, rarely shown outside of domestic settings or in roles of authority.\textsuperscript{180} Even as advertising appealed to women in ads for cigarettes and automobiles, their domestic role overpowered any autonomy in the products.

One such example of this imagery is in a *Harper’s Bazaar* advertisement in the June 1937 issue for the Packard Six and Packard 120 automobiles targeting female readers. The image shows a close-up of a young woman, with a picture of the automobile below her. The copy is written from her point of you, exclaiming, “*For every mile he drives, I drive four or five! While he’s at his office, I’m busy half the day playing taxi-driver and errand girl.*” It was no accident that all advertisements for automobiles and other public or masculine products were presented as an extension of domesticity. Her freedom went so far as to extend her domesticity into public place. Even as advertisers targeted male and females with the same products, the language, imagery, and representative roles were never the same. Traditionally male gendered technologies such as the automobile were marketed to women not as powerful but as necessary or *fashionable* in order to expand the automobile market.\(^{181}\) While this example is only one advertisement, these same images appeared in every automobile advertisement directed to the female consumer.

One Family, Two Spheres: Public and Private, Masculine and Feminine

Even as women assumed commonly male public roles throughout the interwar period, ideas of two spheres remained. Scholarship disagrees on the exact reason for this separation and gendered of spheres, yet points specifically to the media as an influencer in
such divided roles. Regardless of changing realities, the interior of the home remained advertised as the woman’s job while the outside and maintenance fell into the masculine role. Advertisers had a vested interest in reproducing common images of femininity and masculinity. If men and women were to stop subscribing to strict gender roles, targeting them specifically could prove more difficult.

For advertisers, the private sphere or home, was at once “valued as a peaceful sanctuary, and yet devalued as the non-public space which [advertisers worried] about only when its aberrations [filtered] through into the public arena.” Instead, national magazines and advertising campaigns made sure to promote these safe and uncomplicated ideals of separate spheres. This is why throughout interwar advertising images that depicted male and female interactions, the man stood, held the job, showed power and confidence while the woman sat, showed submission, and kept to the home. These images’ reappearance was not so much that advertisers believed in these specified roles so much as they were easily reproduced images familiar to their readers. They therefore appeared over and over in print advertisements, reflecting Marchand’s cumulative effect. As with the advertisements of soap and cosmetics, the cumulative effect occurred with many types

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182 For Tawnya Covert, the political, economic and social structures created interrelationships that “shape women’s roles within the society and create a dominant gender script for women’s lives.” Covert, xii.
183 “Because the domestic sphere was women’s sphere, buying and arranging domestic objects was woman’s work.” Horowitz, 9.
184 MacDonald, Manipulating Images, 48.
185 “Articles inside mass circulation magazines reinforced this notion of feminism as a daily and private matter.” Kitch, 183.
186 “[The] cumulative effect was more likely to reinforce the readers’ impression of being surrounded by a host of accusing eyes than to reassure them that new furniture, familiarity with good silverware, or ‘a face that fits’ would testify to their innocence and spare them social shame.” Marchand, 216.
of advertisements from the bombardment of similar images and messages. Through this cumulative effect of gendered representations, advertisers hope to "reinforce readers’ impressions of being surrounded by a host of accusing eyes and unspoken comments...worrying about how their friends and acquaintances perceived their personal appearance.” After all, according to Sivulka, “the right image was a simple matter of using the advertised product.”

Yet even as advertisers promoted these social roles, they never subscribed to them in their daily life. One such place of disparity where the idea of a male-dominated space was not reality was the ad agency itself. Despite the presence of many women in the field throughout the interwar years, the term ‘admen’ connoted a group of white, educated, intelligent men influencing the feminine domain of consumption through various persuasion techniques.

Women in the Public Sphere

This cliché of the admen persisted, even as women began to fill the positions and generate advertisements in many of the top American advertising agencies such as J. Walter Thompson. Advertising agencies acknowledged adwomen could better understand

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187 “Soap ads pictured case after case of women committing unforgivable social offenses, because their complexion, hands, or laundry didn’t measure up. The Cumulative Effect likely reinforced readers’ impressions of being surrounded by a host of accusing eyes and unspoken comments...Thus, the ads began to look more like public service messages from the soap manufacturers.” Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt*, 184.


189 Sivulka, 184.

190 Davis, *Living Up to the Ads*, 2.
their domestic counterparts and were more capable of influencing other women. Whether these advertising women internalized the gendered roles being prescribed or embraced their employer’s view of gender is difficult to say without first-hand account, yet their actions spoke otherwise.

Early adwomen wavered between manipulating the female consumer and at times advocating for her. In general, historians have defined interwar woman’s roles through consumption or passivity rather than as creators of the persuasion techniques and advertisements that facilitated consumption. This view denies the fact that many women in advertising agencies were not just influencers but existed in the first place. In her study of the J. Walter Thompson Company’s Women’s Editorial Department, Jennifer Scanlon highlights this error of overlooking women in advertising even within the specific studies of consumer culture and advertising.191 Though they have remained rather invisible in recent scholarship, these women played active and vital roles in many of the profession’s top agencies. While adwomen did not initially accept advertising jobs expecting to exploit other women, many of them did just that. Through their economic and personal agency as well as their autonomy, adwomen had vastly different lives than the women their copy targeted.192 Even so, rather than exploitative, adwomen saw their work in these companies as helping other women and part of a greater political good.193 Still, as adwomen gained

192 Scanlon, “JWT”, 201.
193 “Their [adwomen’s] feminism could translate into a sense of allegiance with and responsibility to the women they addressed, or, contrarily, an embrace of a widely maintained professional posture of disdain for the consumer in the name of their own right of access to full-fledged professionalism.” Davis, 81.
more and more prominence, many men in their workspaces grew nervous at the prospect of overthrowing the salesman and the easily influenced woman model.\textsuperscript{194} No advertising agency paved the way for interwar advertising and women in the field more so than the J. Walter Thompson Company.\textsuperscript{195} With its own public relations department, women’s department, and top clients such as Kodak, many of the most prominent advertisements and copies created throughout the 1920s and 1930s were developed within its Madison Avenue offices. JWT’s opportunities for women were a source of pride for the successful advertising agency. Despite existing in an era of male professionalism and limited female involvement, JWT actively opened its doors to more and more professional opportunities for female copywriters.\textsuperscript{196} By the 1930s, JWT had established a “reputation for taking a more progressive position on the employment of women.”\textsuperscript{197} Though they were rarely working alongside admen in all departments, these women formed specific departments with hierarchies of mentorship and management.

But interwar adwomen were not merely copywriters. A 1926 study of fifteen of the top agencies in the U.S. found women had a variety of jobs in these agencies including “research, space buying, and writing copy.”\textsuperscript{198} While JWT may not have been the only agency hiring women for many of the advertising positions, its reputation and achievement in position opportunities for women was exemplified by its successful separate department of female copywriters. The JWT women’s editorial department was independently run by

\textsuperscript{194} Davis, Living Up to the Ads, 81.
\textsuperscript{195} Spring, Advertising in the Age of Persuasion, 16.
\textsuperscript{196} Scanlon, “JWT,” 202.
\textsuperscript{197} Scanlon, “JWT,” 173.
\textsuperscript{198} Scanlon, “JWT,” 174.
and targeted almost exclusively to women. Writing copy for beauty products, household items, and fashion, this editorial department lauded itself as the first and only of its kind. Much like their male counterparts, these adwomen were not a representation of the masses. They were white, upper middle classed or upper classed, native-born, and, more importantly, educated. They were not house makers or mothers. Instead, they were successful professionals navigating in a male-driven profession, and excelling.\textsuperscript{199} They had very similar social standings to the rest of the copywriters in the agency. In a 1936 survey, more than half of the admen had never lived near the average income while more than two-thirds had employed servants even as fewer and fewer Americans were doing so.\textsuperscript{200} Further, at JWT, most admen had in fact attended an Ivy League University.

J. Walter Thompson was tremendously successful, creating many of the advertisements analyzed in this text and partly due to the head of the women’s editorial department, Helen Lansdowne. Unlike the women she hired, Lansdowne was not college educated. However, she had been valedictorian at her Kentucky high school, landing her first job in advertising not long after. At JWT, Lansdowne had her office at the opposite end of the floor, with her own wing of professional women.\textsuperscript{201} As the first woman to find success in writing copy, Lansdowne hired almost exclusively college-educated women from the top women’s colleges. As the 1920s progressed, such a requirement was not as hard to come by. While in 1910, nearly 40 percent of all students in college were women, by 1920, that number had risen to 47 percent.\textsuperscript{202} Young women were entering college en masses,

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Scanlon, 174.
\item “These women handled most of the food, soap, and cosmetic accounts.” Fox, \textit{The Mirror Makers}, 91.
\item Scanlon, 180.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotes}
and advertising agencies noticed for both selling and hiring purposes. This context is vital to understanding how advertisers created and targeted their male and female consumers.

For example, in connection with the *Ladies' Home Journal*, the JWT women's editorial division perfected many of the techniques to sell and persuade consumers that are still used today. According to Scanlon, together the *Journal* and JWT promised women “that [facial] soap, rather than attentive or cooperative husbands, would enhance marital happiness [and] vacuum cleaners, rather than economic analysis of women’s and men’s work, would improve women’ social status.” By successfully utilizing and developing these techniques, for the next five decades, JWT would stay at the top of all advertising agencies, remaining stable even through economic turmoil and societal changes. These successful persuasion techniques were vital to the bottom line of advertisers, both men and women.

**Enticing Purchases: Persuasion Techniques in Advertisement**

Many of these persuasion techniques capitalized on public fears and personal goals. Stephen Fox notes that advertising of the 1920 “stressed the results of a given purchase—health, happiness, comfort, love, social success—and the corollary disadvantages of not

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203 “In making such offers, in couching these offers in the language of choice and social progress, advertisers and women’s magazines helped set the limited both on women’s demands for change and on cultural expectations of men, for the most part, other than through consumption, these cultural messengers urged women to refrain from attempting to change their own situations, confront men, or alter social relations. And men… remained free to pursue their individual and collective privileges.” Scanlon, 231.

204 “This durable achievement belongs preeminently to Stanley and Helen Resor, husband and wife, a team of oddly matched but complimentary skills and dispositions.” Fox, 79.
having the product.” This selling technique sold the object’s life-changing use to the consumer, as discussed in the previous chapter. Most advertisement campaigns copied the overall formula, regardless of the specific persuasion technique utilized. In magazines such as the Saturday Evening Post, ads copied the JTW formula and page format: “under the illustration, a prominent headline introduced a half-page of copy.”

Likewise, most pre-Depression era advertisements stigmatized the old, referring to it as outdated, obsolete and inferior. After all, if the consumer was content with the old product, he or she would be less likely to buy a newer version. Advertising campaigns sold this newness, progress, and technological advancement as an extension of the self. These admen and adwomen proudly proclaimed themselves “missionaries of modernity” by championing the new and modern instead of the old and outdated. One prominent persuasion method ad agencies utilized was the ‘Self-Identity Technique,’ where an idealized character told the consumer to identify with that specific representation through the purchase of a product. Many of the advertisements analyzed in previous chapters utilized this technique. By identifying with the advertisement’s character, the audience would feel the shame, regret or confusion the characters were feeling. Whether selling hygiene or beauty products, the message was always the same: this nameless character is a representation of you.

205 Fox, The Mirror Maker, 95.
206 Fox, 95.
207 Parrish, Anxious Decades, 76.
208 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, xxi.
209 “Exposure to advertising like Woodbury’s and Palmolive’s that featured beauty appeals could also trigger a process of “social comparison,” whereby readers tried to evaluate themselves by comparison to these artificial images. A consumer might have asked, “am I as attractive as I would like to be?” Many advertisers tapped into this need by supplying images of happy, attractive people who just happened to be
To develop many of these techniques, resident psychologist John B. Watson of JWT utilized blind tests to determine that consumers could not distinguish between different brands. Instead, it was through the branding and ads that the consumer would determine which product to purchase. Another one of the most successful persuasion devices and techniques the JWT utilized in the 1920s was the age-old testimonial. Landsdowne’s women’s editorial department’s repackaging of the old testimonial format for JWT in the 1930s specifically by utilizing celebrity endorsement rather successfully.²¹⁰

First Impression Formula: Public Opinion as Fear

Even as many of these techniques flourished, the most common persuasion device utilized throughout interwar advertisements remained the First Impression Formula. This persuasion technique used purchasing power as a way to produce the public self. The first impression formula was not a new technique, but it found a new use in commodity culture as people assumed new and unfamiliar positions and roles after World War I.²¹¹ At the center of the first impression formula, a hero (or heroine), "overcame some obstacle or personal or domestic disaster simply by using the advertised product."²¹² The wrong product, advertisements warned, could have the opposite effect. As many historians have pointed out, this first impression formula proved extremely successful. Advertisements using the product. Although the gender depictions forwarded by the media were narrow representations of what it was to be female or to be male, the viewers could situate themselves close to the stereotypes.” Sivulka, 221.

²¹⁰ Fox, The Mirror Makers, 89.
²¹¹ Sivulka, Stronger Than Dirt, 181.
²¹² Sivulka, 184.
throughout most interwar magazines utilized this persuasion formula to sell the
betterment of mind and body. Not only could it sell soaps and deodorants but also books on
intelligence or new technologies, both domestic and public. The product always promised
to provide the male or female consumer with the right self-confidence. To Juliann Sivulka,
the underlying argument of the first-impression advertisements was always the same:
“appearance and material goods had a significant impact on the context of a mobile, urban
society.”213

Ads utilizing the first impression formula assured the consumer that the line
between success and failure was both tricky and narrow. The saving grace to avoid failure?
Their miraculous products. As the company to most utilize the formula and perfect it, JWT
recognized the value of promoting consumer products as “solutions for fearful individuals
in a hostile world.”214 These ads relied heavily on the copy but more so the images
themselves due “not only in their ability to intensify emotion but also in their capacity to
say several things at the same time.”215 The images for first impression ads proved even
more vital as the interwar years progressed and copy became shorter and shorter.
Advertisements then established a ‘visual syntax’ through which advertisers crafted both
copy and image in “anticipation of the audience’s probably response.”216 As the Depression
and economic tensions furthered, the First Impression Formula gained more significance. If

213 Sivulka, Stronger than Dirt, 188.
214 Sivulka, 188.
215 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 154.
216 “The sender’s intention is understood to be manifested in the argument, the evidence, the order of
argumentation, and the style of delivery. Formal elements are selected according to the sender’s
expectations in accordance with how the audience will approach the genre, the speaker, and the topic.”
Perspectives on Sexuality, Gender, and Identity by Meta G Carstarphen and Susan C. Zaviona.
advertisers could persuade their products were *necessities* rather than luxuries, the consumer would be more open to spending their little expendable income on new products.\(^{217}\)

One explanation for the popularity of the First Impression Formula is the ‘Symbolic Self-Completion Theory’ referenced in the last chapter that claims consumers complete their identities by acquiring specific symbols that have an association with an identity. This theory argues that a product can present a specific identity to the consumer that they may want to emulate. As such, in Social Identity Theory, the product develops an identity and a meaning.\(^{218}\) Social comparison then becomes an added source of anxiety. In one such example analyzed by Sivulka, through “exposure to advertising like Woodbury’s and Palmolive’s that featured beauty appeals,” the targeted reader “tried to evaluate themselves by comparison to these artificial images.”\(^{219}\) These images were more than merely representations; they formed representations, societal roles, and expectations.

**Media Representations of Masculinity and Femininity**

This reading of advertisements emphasizes context, non-verbal elements, and images as text. Ad images are “ubiquitous forms of communication within magazines...[and] it is impossible to ignore them in analysis.”\(^{220}\) As such, discourse is both

\(^{217}\) Marchand, 290.  
\(^{219}\) Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt*, 220.  
an element of text and imagery. Both are equally capable of communicating information and remaining in dialogue with the consumer. For this, media representations of men and women are intrinsically part of the discourse between advertisers and consumers.

According to Macnamara, the term “media representation” refers to advertiser’s construction of a reality, “the relationship between ideological and the real.” Macnamara points to Stuart Hall’s analysis of identity as “always constituted within, not outside representation.” However, Macnamara’s analysis attaches too much agency to the representations themselves. They intrinsically did show gender identity, but presenting them as the framework within which gender identity manifested places too much power on the ads and their imagery. This limited analysis eliminates the possibility of varying identities performed by the same consumers and those that did not in fact build their identity from a handful of representations in the media.

Proponents of deconstructing advertisements, like Katherine Toland Firth, hail it as “a way of reading against the text.” By doing so, the text illuminates more about the cultural and social meanings at play, giving both imagery and text multiple meanings.

221 “Discourse has been theorized as a form of social practice and ‘the sort of language used to construct discourse of politics.’ Discourse in this sense is centrally associated though not unproblematically) with Foucault, who contrasts discourse and language.” Jule, A Beginner’s Guide, 9.

222 “A definition of discourse analysis [that] involves consideration of texts as inseparable from their context, and which therefore includes image and implied relations between text and audience.” Jule, 169.

223 Macnamara, Media and Male Identity, 12.

224 “We cannot escape the representations of our gender and form our gendered identity framed within representations of it,” Macnamara, 12.

225 By choosing and discarding of identities through purchases, the consumers were given the agency to change the self. Jennifer Scanlon, 10.

226 “The aim of deconstruction is to expose the social and political power structures in society that combine to produce the text. By analyzing bot the foreground and the background of the advertising-as-text it is possible to reveal the secondary social or cultural messages in which the primary sales message is embedded.” Frith, 4; Firth claims that there are three ways in which an ad can be deconstructed: surface meaning; the advertiser’s indented meaning; and the cultural or ideological meaning.
Rather than relying purely on the foreground of the advertisement or its image, context and content are equally important, by utilizing the visual aspects or the image and text to read gendered power relations. Through deconstructing these varying levels, not only can we read advertiser’s messages but also their motivations and those of the audiences they are speaking to.

One way Firth does this is by utilizing what she refers to as ‘sex-role reversal,’ which exchanges the male and female in the advertisement and asking if the ad would look off or ridiculous.227 Within these power-dynamics in advertising imagery, the man is never seen sitting beside a standing woman, while the woman is “more likely to be shown in recumbent positions, including lying on the floor or a bed.”228 Even if the man were sitting and the woman standing in advertisement images, it is only in reproducing domesticity. As with the example below in the October 2, 1926 issue of the Saturday Evening Post, the wife stands only to expand her domesticity, as she overlooks the pancakes and syrup she has cooked for her husband. Here, utilizing Firth’s concept of the ‘sex-role reversal,’ the advertisement does look out-of-place. If it were the male character dressed in house-wear overlooking his wife as she eats the home-cooked breakfast before going off to work, the advertisement at the time would neither make sense nor look right according to common gendered representations.

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227 Firth, Undressing the Ad, 9.
228 Courtney, Sex Stereotyping in Advertising, 12.
Advertisers utilize these representations in order to “convey messages in the short
time or visual shorthand” thus reproducing limited gender representations in order to
“convey a great deal of information about a product and its target consumer.” These
images were in no way a representation of current life, but instead ideals of a more perfect
world or reality. Through their early market research, advertisers knew consumers would
rather identify with high class and status than be presented with their reality, especially as

229 Covert, Manipulating Images, 30.
the Depression completely altered many consumers’ resources and statuses. Advertisers and copywriters did so by looking through various representations and appearances and choosing a select few that were both acceptable and could stand as examples over and over again. As far back as the 1970s, scholars warned against the use of the term stereotype, so this analysis will not delve into the complex and heavily subjective term.230

Still, these representations were highly stylized, exaggerating attitudes, behaviors, and roles. Looking at the top circulating magazines throughout the interwar period, advertisers relied almost exclusively on three constructs of femininity and womanhood identity: the household manager or housewife, the mother consumed with guilt, and the selfish and immature flapper. Macdonald notes that these categories manufactured versions of what was appropriate for the women of the period.231 In the interwar years, women who had been employed during World War I or had become used to pre-marriage employment, had to be enticed back into domesticity and the home.232 Women were both “barred from many jobs because of essentialist notion of ‘women’s work’ and often prevented from continuing to work after marriage.”233 Even at its peak, only 24 percent of Interwar women entered the workforce.234 In this context, the domestic or at least

230 “Testing a stereotype or role means providing some kind of adequate definition for it. The terms stereotypes and role are subject to unconscious or unintended bias even in the most rigorous studies.” One example Courtney and Whipple give is the study of women’s roles in print advertising, where the woman’s role is wither working or nonworking, where studies inadvertently place the home as nonworking representations, even as the characters in the ads are “engaging in household chores.” Courtney and Whipple, 5.
231 MacDonald, 77.
232 “In the interwar period, a number of developments conspired to redefine women’s domestic responsibilities as a science or a skilled craft.” MacDonal, 77.
subordinate female consumer had limited media representations.\textsuperscript{235} As for the male consumer, his representations were surprisingly even more limited, though less subordinate. He was confined to two media representations: the businessman and the hero. Whether he was single, married, childless, or the father of many, he was first and foremost a businessman and a hero.

Limited Representations: the Housewife, the Flapper, the Businessman, and the Hero

In this context, most ads resorted to four major and common media representations. The woman consumer for advertisers was either the young and trivial flapper or the housewife that found fulfillment in the ability to buy the latest trends, décor, and technologies.\textsuperscript{236} Even after the stock market crash and the end of the flapper culture, the young, often educated women still reflected these same ideals in advertisements. By limiting their representations, advertisers whether intentionally or not, masked women’s presence in the public sphere.

Though only a small part of the 1920s, the flapper image and her derivative played the role of antagonist to the domestic mother—though they were both still characterized by their consumption.\textsuperscript{237} MacDonald defines the flapper as the unmarried ‘modern miss’
who loved “to enjoy and indulge herself, participating in sport, dancing or driving open-topped motor cars.”\textsuperscript{238} She was androgynous in her look and lack of curves, her bobbed hair, and her exaggerated characteristics. She smoked, she was outgoing, and she was irresponsible. She was a teenager or young women with very little substance. She maneuvered in the public sphere at dancehalls or other places she would be seen, but her connection to only leisure took away any power, socially or politically, that she could have. She was also modern and narcissistic. She had gone from a “serious-minded college (or working) woman to a care-free, scantily clad ‘flapper’ who existed to wear modern clothes, have fun, and, ultimately, catch a man who would support her.”\textsuperscript{239} Self-obsession characterized her. For advertisers, she was the perfect consumer. She derived her identity almost exclusively from what she wore and what she owned. Aside from her frivolousness, consumption defined her.

John Held’s \textit{Life Magazine} carefree flapper from many of his covers exemplified the ‘Roaring Twenties.’\textsuperscript{240} Even in her sexuality, she was never serious.\textsuperscript{241} Yet the flapper’s looks defined her, making her imagery in advertisements for makeup, face creams, and fashion almost sweeping. In fact, according to Kitch, “the only behavior that could truly upset a society flappers’ boyfriend was letting her appearance go.”\textsuperscript{242} Her image in advertisement connoted youth, beauty, and consumption. Even as the Depression and the

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{238} MacDonald, \textit{Representing Women}, 82.
\item\textsuperscript{239} Kitch, \textit{The Girl on the Magazine Cover}, 12.
\item\textsuperscript{240} She had “had “nothing better to do than drink gin, neck in the backseats of cars, and dance the night.” Kitch, 15.
\item\textsuperscript{241} “In Held’s drawings: she was flat-chested, skinny, and hipless, with awkwardly long legs and arms.” Kitch, 15. Though she looked sexually free, her entire look was asexual.
\item\textsuperscript{242} Kitch, 123.
\end{itemize}
1930s moved beyond the flapper, young and carefree women still appeared in advertising only less so than the housewife. Fortunately, the independent flapper, and her derivatives, would eventually marry and become a housewife. Her time in the public sphere was freeing but ultimately limited.

Figure 23. Pillsbury. "And he Still Loves Me...In The Kitchen!" Saturday Evening Post, September 30, 1933. New York Public Library Milstein Microfilm Collection, General Research Division, New York, New York.
In the private sphere, the housewife appeared in ads as both home scientist and mother. The housewife played one of two roles: the young, newly married housewife that was only learning to tame the home and the guilt-ridden mother. One example of the newlywed housewife pictured above in September 30, 1933 advertisement for the Saturday Evening Post for Pillsbury shows a young women dressed in the most current hairstyle and makeup, smiling happily with her baking skills above copy that says, “Nowadays we modern girls have so many things to think about that we wait till we’re married to learn about homemaking! But we don’t disappoint our husbands—for we learn to be hood housekeepers before they even have time to think about it.” Here her youth is indicative of her just learning to perform housewifery. Though this advertisement of the early 1930s steers clear of exploiting guilt, earlier advertisements were not so positive. This image is indicative of utilizing the once-flapper character as the new unlearned housewife that would eventually become a mother.

Even in her domesticity, advertisers claimed she did in fact have agency. In an early 1920s editorial for the Ladies Home Journal, one female writer applauded the housewife for her ‘free will’ in purchasing specific products as a “result of intelligent choice.” According to this adwoman, “the most modern expression of feminism was marriage and motherhood.” When it came to female roles such as motherhood, the line between

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243 Arguably the most successful women’s magazines, The Ladies’ Home Journal promoted these new women’s household roles and expectations not as socially mandated but instead as freedoms and new choices. According to the Journal, “[it was] an example of women’s emancipation rather than an obstacle to it.” Scanlon, 56.
244 Kitch, 183.
producer and consumer became even more blurred. According to advertisers, this new housewife was free within her home due to her freedom to select which products and technologies to utilize and purchase. Her freedom of choice allowed her to discriminate between different brands and products, eventually selecting the best through her ‘new freedom’ as a modern woman. As soon as the electronic industry noticed the housewife was the primary consumer of appliances, advertisers shifted their sales approach. They sold modernity by urging women to buy the latest and best. At the same time, these advertisement campaigns seemed to “discourage men’s involvement in the domestic sphere, regardless of changing work and family patterns.” After all, it was the housewife’s responsibility to provide her children with the correct food and clothing, toys and technologies. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, housekeeping was advertised as a fulltime job more so than ever before, as “standards of cleanliness, requirements of parenting, especially mothering, and expectations of meal variety increased.” Image after image of the consumer mother and housewife appeared in magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, continuously praised these new roles and technologies in helping women find

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245 In Janelle Taylor’s dissection of scholarships on motherhood and its relationship to consumption, she acknowledges that scholars of consumption have argued that consumption is at once both a “site of cultural creativity and political agency, and also of subversion and resistance.” Taylor, *Consuming Motherhood*, 11.


249 Scanlon, “JWT,” 56.
more leisure time, though in reality, these new technologies along with rising ideals of hygiene, increased women’s daily chores.  

Alternatively, representations of masculinity throughout interwar advertisements instilled a fear of being dominated or appearing feminine. The two most common stereotypes of masculinity, the successful business and the father as hero, both exerted tremendous stress on American men trying to navigate a changing and unpredictable economy. In reality, these roles were often “totally and completely unattainable.” Yet, this did not stop advertisers from claiming every man needed to achieve specific successes, and many scholars argue the unattainability did not deter American men from trying to emulate these behaviors.

As opposed to representations of women, representations of interwar American men rarely showed “decorative poses or exaggerated bodily proportions.” Instead, the modern man stood with both feet on the ground, showing his power and ability to remain unfazed. This new typical American man and father was always breadwinner and center of the household. He almost exclusively worked in an office, even as a growing portion of the American public did not have office jobs. His office always contained a large window with a “majestic view” and a “pristinely uncluttered desk.” This connoted power, prosperity,

250 “Advertisers wanted women to think about how efficiently they operated their house, and argued in advertisements that a well-run home reflected on the quality of women’s lives.” Parkin, *Food is Love*, 96.
253 The fact that this is something that is often unrealistic doesn’t deter men and boys from modeling their behavior and aspirations on an unreachable set of assumptions. Moss, 2.
254 Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 190.
255 Marchand, 238
and promise. The successful businessman appeared in many advertising campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s. He lived in a city, a modern metropolis, and worked in a modern high-rise. Everything about his job and success symbolized power. In fact, the skyscraper in particular [in the] the 1930s [had] come to dominate as a male archetype and symbolize masculine pride in the built environment.”

His lifelong success was not in a private space, but in the most public. This “solitary male figure” was always dressed in a “three-piece suit and top coat. He [was] the existential executive. He [stared] out confidently at the camera or [seemed] lost in his own deep, important thought.” The background to this successful businessman always the same: “a panoramic view through a skyscraper window of other corporate towers.” This imagery depicted the man as powerful. Everyone else, physically and successfully, stood below him in the building, in the company, and in life. In ads featuring a husband and wife, whenever the husband’s job was stated, “role of husband was almost invariably identified as a businessman.” This idealized male media representation appeared before, during, and after the Depression, never wavering even in the face of economic turmoil.

The successful businessman was not the only representation of masculinity American men had to strive to emulate. At the end of the First World War, the advertisement’s target upper middle-class men “entered the decade optimistically convinced that they could be successful breadwinners.” Yet, as discussed in the previous

256 Moss, 140.
257 Barthel, 139.
258 Marchand, 189.
259 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 127.
chapter, this optimism of the Roaring Twenties was dismantled by the Depression. The idea of the warrior, hero, or adventurer were not new to American society, but shortly after the First World War, the modern American hero reinvented himself as a father and family man rather than a loner. As the 1930s dragged on, American men turned to their sons for optimism and enthusiasm for the future. In fact, “by the 1930s three-fourths of American fathers said they regularly read magazine articles about child care, and nearly as many men as women were members of the PTA.” A reoccurring and essential role of masculinity, according to the media, was how men interacted with other men, in any capacity. No male relationship throughout the Depression represented masculinity more than the father-son relationship.

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260 “Never before had American men experienced such a massive and system-wide shock to their ability to prove manhood by providing for their families.” Kimmel, 128.
261 “The ‘loner’ as hero [was] constructed in part from the popular culture of the time, this autonomous individual—whether cowboy, detective, soldier, or superhero—seemed to reaffirm for many men the importance of masculinity in a time when technology was taking over.” Mark Moss, The Media and the Modes of Masculinity (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group: 2011), 87.
262 Kimmel, 133.
263 Craig, Men, Masculinity, and the Media, 5.
This father-son bond promised a new man: one that was the head of a consuming household dedicated to the rearing of children. Images of the father and son relationship with the father as hero appeared throughout various magazines of the 1930s. Two such advertisements for the same campaign appeared in *Life Magazine* a year apart. The first from the June 20-1938 issue reads, “You’re A Hero...To Your Son.” The image above shows a father and a son walking, the father with his hand around his son and the son looking up.
at his father with pride and idolization. The copy states, “Most boys worship their Dad as a Hero whose standards and ideals they gradually acquire on their own. Nothing is quite so disillusioning to the clear eyes of a youngster as the sight of a man—his own father—who has used liquor unwisely. The damage goes much deeper than a momentary shame.” According to the copy, any father that cannot drink wisely or moderately owes it to his son to not drink at all. The copy finishes by claiming: “Drink Moderately.”

In the following year’s advertisement for the same campaign, the copy and image reiterate the father as hero. Here, for the June 19, 1939 issue of Life Magazine, the same father and son are shown more close up, the father with one hand in his pocket and his other hand extended to shake hands with an unseen friend. The son looks up at the father with the same pride. “That’s My Dad” the ad exclaims. Below, the copy echoes, “EVERY father gets a warm feeling around his heart when he hears his son say ‘That’s my Dad.’ The spirit behind his words is so revealing—the look in his eyes and tone in his voice—when he says ‘That’s my Dad.’ In his boyish way he is proudly saluting his hero—the pal he adores and admires.” According to the copy, it is a responsibility to have a son say that, warning, “When a boy discovers for the first time that his father—his own Dad—has been using liquor unwisely—immoderately—something fine between them may be lost.” The reader here, specifically the father figure, is told to put his relationship with his son above all else to maintain his role as Hero.
Advertisers told the male reader, he could become a self-made man and “achieve success via consumption, like buying Listerine to eradicate halitosis [or] acquiring the pleasing personality that assured the sale.”\textsuperscript{264} By doing so, the male consumer could purchase more personal care products such as the shaving cream and hair growth

\textsuperscript{264} Pendergast, \textit{Creating the Modern Man}, 145.
shampoos not as frivolous purchases but instead investments in success. In other words, “by spending just a little men could reshape the way they presented themselves.”

The male consumer and his representation in the media for interwar advertisers was much more nuanced than his female counterpart. As with the young, unwed college-educated and homemaker female representations in media, images of the male businessman and father as hero were produced and reproduced from ever-changing market research analysis and trial and error advertisements. Ideals of cleanliness, hygiene, and beauty expectations as well as changing societal norms allowed early advertisers to refine persuasion techniques for selling. Still, the average American consumer was not without agency. Whether consumers affected advertising agencies or the great and powerful admen and women of Madison Avenue really were ‘makers of modernity’ relies on a close examination of a rather unlimited amount of information. What we can be certain is that advertisers, regardless of their ability to achieve their goals, sought to persuade and at times manipulate American men and women. Their use of a predefined power dynamic, separation of public and private, and American obsessions with identity and individuality gave way to distinct ways of representing consumers.

While there is quite a bit of information to take from this intersection of gender and consumption through advertising, this text has only focused on specific case studies—essentially those of hygiene and personal appearance. That is not to say other vital industries throughout the interwar period cannot be examined via these theories. In fact, this thesis originally sought to examine gender and consumption in technologies from the

265 Pendergast, Creating the Modern Man, 148.
automobile to household technology. However, gendered technology advertising is a study in and of itself. While this text could have touched upon technology and its relationship to gendered media representations, separate spheres, and the creation of identity, that is a topic for future analysis.

An analysis of gendered interwar technology should highlight advertising for the automobile and its connection to freedom as well as domestic science and the concept of the “domestic engineers” utilized by advertisers to promise that household technologies allowed women to take part in the technological revolutions of the early twentieth century while remaining in the private sphere. These ideals led to the teaching of home technology in American high schools and the consumer mother. In fact, training for this ‘new career’ “mushroomed during the period, with the growth of domestic science courses and a steady stream of manuals offering advice and instructions.”

What this did instead is lead to longer hours of housework for American women. These ads and the rise of the consumer mother and housewife worked because of a growing American Nationalism that focused not only on and had an obsession with hygiene but also technological advancement. Upper middle class Americans bought automobiles and electronic appliances at higher levels than ever before, and advertising messages followed. Therefore, for an analysis of

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266 MacDonald, 77. According to Marchand, “Women’s role in the domestic sphere was given a new lease on life in advertising discourse that turned unpaid labourers into technologically sophisticated craft-workers within special competences and skills. By drafting discourses of domestic labour, advertising both brought them into line with modernity and flattered women into taking pride in their traditional place within the home.” MacDonald, 86.

267 Scanlon, Inarticulate Longings, 55.

268 David Nye, The American Technological Sublime (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of technology, 1994).

269 Ferguson, “Prosperity in the 1920s,” 113.
gendered technology utilizing the approach discussed in this text, the automobile played an exceptional role for both male and female consumers. In fact, Marchand asserts in *Advertising the American Dream*, “it is difficult to overstate the role of the automobile in generating economic gains of the 1920s.” As such, analysis of the automobile requires looking at how the technology was targeted to male and female consumers differently as an extension of their identity, purchasing power, domesticity or success. The automobile shaped 20th century American society, and advertising agencies has a tremendous role in this relationship.

With these technologies as with hygiene and personal appearance, many of the early techniques that are still utilized today, rely on societal roles that were exemplified through interwar advertisement. This larger discourse between advertisers and consumers proves the consumer was never in fact a passive observer. And by understanding the nuances at play, we can better understand how and why many of these images are still reproduced today.


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