ADVERTISED IDENTITY: A POSTMODERN FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF FOOD
ADVERTISEMENTS FROM WOMEN’S MAGAZINES DURING THE 1950S, 1960S,
AND 2000S

By

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ABSTRACT


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Food advertisements represent complex and constant conversations about race, class, gender, and modernity within an American context. Inherently visual, food advertisements suffer from a lack of research that analyzes them in their entirety. By taking a postmodern feminist approach that considers the imagery of food advertisements as a text, this thesis will attempt to unravel the complex messages that food advertisements relay about a person's identity, particularly, what these messages say about gender and gender roles. Present-day food advertisements are shown in comparison with food advertisements from the 1950s and 1960s, seeking to discover whether the messages regarding gender and identity have changed, or if the only the image has changed. Additionally, this thesis examines gender attitudes and beliefs connected to the messages in food advertisements. Food advertisements’ visual components are analyzed as texts, searching for signs, signifiers, and postmodern imagery, while also acknowledging the inherently gendered canvas, on which the advertisements are printed. A content analysis of three women’s magazines, Good Housekeeping (founded in 1885), Ladies Home Journal (founded in 1883), and Better Homes and Gardens (founded in
1922), from three different time periods, 1950-52, 1960-62, and 2009-2013, was used to survey a breadth of food advertisements, while also providing a method to individually examine many of the advertisements. Only magazines geared toward women were utilized with the goal of analyzing the messages food advertisements send to a mostly female audience. This thesis suggests that these advertisements not only harbor American gendered societal requirements and desires but also carry a heavy, influential, gendered anchor.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*When society asks so little of women, every woman has to listen to her own inner voice to find her identity in the changing world.*

When I was 13 years old, my older sister had her first child, a little girl named Eamly. My interest in feminism, as a theory and in action, began with her. I come from a long line of strong women and the idea of Eamly’s ferocity being dimmed by American society infuriated me. Eight years later I found myself deep in the midst of an eating disorder, one that plagued my life for five years. The birth of my second niece, Chadlynn, prompted my recovery. Having had my light dimmed for years, I could not bear the thought of being anything but a strong, feminist aunt. This history led me to the topic of how gender and gender roles are portrayed in food advertisements. I want my nieces to grow up in a better world, a world that does not dim their fire.

Food advertisements do not simply sell food; they sell ideas, beliefs, and definitions about women, gender, and race. Food advertisements tell people who they you are, who they should be, and how they should behave. This thesis analyzes food advertisements in American women’s magazines from the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s, seeking to discover what messages they send out about gender and gender roles. Additionally, this thesis also seeks to discover if the messages about gender and gender roles are different throughout the time periods.

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Chapter two includes a brief overview of the evolution of the food system in the United States, incorporating the growth and influence of food advertisements. I then review the literature on food advertisements, focusing on how food advertisements are framed and discussed, and the gaps that remain in analysis. These gaps are present theoretically, as there is a small amount of postmodern feminist analysis of food advertisements, and methodically, as a comparison of food advertisements from three different time periods is lacking. Postmodern feminism is introduced as the framework of analysis and presented as an appropriate approach for the analyses of gender and gender roles in food advertisements. Finally, chapter two will include information regarding the methods used to test the theory that there would be a difference between food advertisements in the 1950s and 1960s, and food advertisements in the 2000s.

Chapter three will contain a presentation of the data collected. Charts showcasing the codes gathered during the content analysis process and graphs provide a visual display of numerical data. These visual representations of the data will provide a foundational understanding of the method processes used and of the analyses to come.

Chapter four will discuss the four main themes found within all the food advertisements surveyed. First, I will use examples of food advertisements to discuss the themes of finding love, becoming married, satisfying the family, and becoming a mother. Second, the themes of sexualization, objectification, and body image, so commonly found within food advertisements, will be discussed. Third, I focus on the theme that describes how to become a smart, modern woman. Finally, I examine how race, ethnicity,
and culture are portrayed within food within an overarching gender analysis. Exemplary food advertisements from each time period will be thoroughly examined. These visual and analytical examples of food advertisements come from all three time periods. This chapter will highlight a historical comparison between the food advertisements of the 1950s and 1960s to those of the 2000s.

Chapter five will further discuss the historical comparison of the advertisements analyzed in chapter four. Postmodern feminism will be employed to further analyze the implications of the four themes, discussed in chapter four.

Chapter six will provide a conclusion for this thesis and a note to future research that could be followed up on. After the conclusion is a bibliography, including all the primary and secondary sources referenced for this thesis, and an appendix of all the advertisements cited.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Building on and manipulating the sense of gendered inferiority that has already been entrenched within women and American society, the food industry in the 1950s and 1960s produced advertisements that attempted to make women feel as though they could not cook, should not cook, and that, if they did cook, it would never be perfect. Women were targeted by advertisements that tried to degrade their abilities to please their husbands, nourish their families, and maintain good health. Advertisements also attacked a woman’s ability to create good, wholesome food for their families in the rushed, modern society they lived in. Food advertisements in the 1950s and 1960s reduced a woman’s worth to whether the ham came out just as juicy as the canned version, her marital status and ability to keep her husband happy, and whether she had embraced her fate of motherhood yet. Fast forward to the current era, and one might expect that these messages have disappeared, considering the several feminist movements that have occurred in the last 50 to 60 years since then.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the evolution of the food system in the United States from the 1880s onward, noting the emergence and influence of food advertisements during this process. I then provide an overview of the literature discussing food advertisements. Next, I discuss the postmodern feminist framework—how this framework began amid various other feminist theories stemming from second-wave
feminism, as well as the critical differences among them. I assert that postmodern feminism is a useful lens to analyze food advertisement’s portrayals of women and gender roles during the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s because of its assertion that social constructions are based on language and the encouragement to view and to analyze images as texts. Finally, the methods used to gather data for this thesis are discussed.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE FOOD SYSTEM AND THE NECESSITY OF FOOD ADVERTISEMENTS

Food advertisements can be found as early as the 1880s-90s; however, these types of advertisements are drastically different. Early advertisements (circa 1890) tended to focus on the product being sold, placing emphasis on the attributes of the product. They also spoke to the target audience—usually women—who comprised a vast majority of this targeted audience due to traditional, rigid gender roles of the day. Food advertisements were simpler in appearance, typically having minimal writing and seeming to be more comparable to artistic drawings than to the food advertisements that we know today. Food advertisements were relatively uncommon. Their rarity was due to the lack of radio and television and the small, decentralized firm structure. While some food companies existed in the late 1800s, the food industry system, as society is familiar with it today, did not.

Life in the United States in the 1800s was predominately rural aside from the northern and eastern seaboard towns which were fairly urbanized. During this time in
American history people began to migrate westward to settle the western frontier of the United States. In this time “the great majority of Americans still had a hand in raising most of their own food”; however, “the roughly 6% who lived in the nations small cities … were already beginning to confront the quandaries of the attenuating food system.”² While some Americans began to notice changes in the food system, most Americans did not due to the rural nature of the population.

The period from the late 1800s to the early 1900s represented a major transition period for the American food system as it moved from rural, local food to industrialized, mass-produced food. While many changes in the food system occurred after the early 1900s, “the greater part of the evolution from the old regime to the new occurred between 1865-1915.”³ This conversion came not only from industrial changes but also from food advertising and a changing American attitude toward food.

Three key national events during the 1800s helped propel changes in the food system. The Civil War, from 1861 to 1865, increased the population’s trust and use of canned foods because of the integral role these foods played in the war. The Civil War “marked a turning point in the canning industry; the post-war annual output of canned food was thirty million cans, compared to five million in the pre-war years.”⁴ Since canned foods had been around since the early nineteenth century, the shift from local to mass production of canned foods did not present much of a market shock to homemakers

already skilled in the task of preserving foods. Now unconfined by nature and eating seasonally, the public viewed canned foods as a symbol of American advancement.

Second, the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 allowed for the relatively easy transport of food from across the country. This new transportation led to the consumption of out of season food, which divided people from the farmland. It also promoted the consumption of pristine, packaged meat, which separated people from the animal source of their food. The ability to ship produce from California to New York meant that not only could food be eaten out of season, but also that food was no longer place-based. The railroad contributed to the gradual estrangement between Americans and the origins of their food. The railroad also opened the door for the creation of many more food companies, because food sources and the American population were more easily accessible. Campbell’s Soup Company began in 1869, the California Packing Corporation (the company, Del Monte, was a branch of this corporation) in 1875, Dole Food Company, Inc. in 1851, and Hunt’s in 1888. The connection of the country via railroad provided the means to turn the idea of modernizing the food system into a reality, and “before long, the scale, complexity, and anonymity of the emerging food supply system made such awareness impossible as fewer and fewer people with more and more machines delivered food products from farther and farther away.”

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6 Vileisis, Kitchen Literacy, 5.
Finally, the rapid industrialization and transformation in U.S. agriculture taking place throughout the country also encouraged changes in the food system. In 1862 the Homestead Act was passed, granting plots of land in the Midwest and West to Americans for a small amount of money. This spurred a massive migration of people from the East Coast to the West Coast and everywhere in between. During this time, large farms began to form as small homestead plots were combined and farmed as monocultures, in part to meet the needs of food companies. “This revolutionary industrial land ethic rested on a full-fledged vision of nature as little more than a means to maximize economic profits”; water, land, and landscapes began to be viewed not as what they are, but as what they offered.7 This mindset and push of industrialization created the ability to have even more food companies, because not only was food more readily available, but also it was able to be processed, standardized, and manufactured faster. Because of this mindset, the number of food companies began to steadily increase, for example Wonder Bread began in 1921, Chef Boyardee in 1924, and Kraft Foods in 1937.8

As industrialization spread throughout the country so did ideas about modernity and progress. While these ideas were not novel, the idea that modernity and progress could be applied to food was, and this idea had to be taught to the purchasing public. As the food industry changed, the definition and use of “food” began to change as well; this

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new understanding of “food” needed to be explained and imposed. Modern, progressive food was not the food that existed before industrialization; it was bigger, better, faster, and scientific. Similarly, the “modern” woman did not make food from scratch; she purchased the product that was scientifically approved and manufactured. Beginning in 1900, food advertisements as we know them today began to emerge, becoming increasingly wordy and prevalent. As the United States began to embrace industrialization, “some believed that Americans ought to be freed from the drudgery of farming so they could join the labor force in offices and factories, and that food and farming needed to be cheaper so Americans could afford the products offered by emerging industries.”

Progress and modernity were now seeking to be applied to food production and manufacturing.

One of the ways food advertising was utilized was to promote the idea that progress and modernity could be applied to something as simple as an apple. Progress was applied to an apple by transforming it into something better, such as canned apple pie filling. “Advertising also stimulated the popular conviction ‘that what was new was desirable,’” and that mindset is “crucial to an acceptance of modernity and [one] that twentieth-century advertising leaders saw as indispensable to mass production and economic growth.” To maintain this idea of progress, food companies depended on the American public to not settle and always look for something new and better. This concept

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was pushed not just in the content of food advertisements, but also through the quantities of food advertisements as “the number of food ads in women’s magazines nearly doubled [between 1940 and 1950].” Food advertisements became a tool to alter Americans’ perceptions of not only the new food products but also the drastic changes in the food system.

Yet, it was not until the 1950s when the number of food companies and convenience food products steadily and rapidly began increasing that food advertisements became prominent in scope and substantial in number. During the 1950s, food companies turned to the creation of convenience foods specifically for public sale. While convenience foods had been available to the public before World War II (1939-45), after the war purchasing a can of Chef Boyardee or any other product involved in the war effort became a way to dine on the same food on which our victorious soldiers had dined. Canned foods, during and after WWII, became edible symbols of American efficiency, ingenuity, and progress. Following the war, companies needed to market their products to sell to a new peacetime demographic. Since the companies had already conquered nature through canning, they now wanted to enhance nature. Convenience foods changed, and new products emerged as food companies discovered creative new ways to improve on nature’s ingredients. Cake mixes, pancake mixes, TV dinners, and sugary cereals

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presented themselves to housewives in grocery store aisles, promising them healthy families, slimmer bodies, recognition, and money saved.  

The growing population of working women throughout the United States during and after the war opened up a new market for the food companies to target through the use of strategic, modern advertisements. The story of convenience food acceptance would be rather simple if the majority of women were working in the 1950s. However, Ann Vileisis in *Kitchen Literacy* states, “eight million [women]—roughly one in four—had a job outside the home,” indicating that a minority of women could find convenience foods relevant. Even though most women were not working outside their homes, food companies still pursued the idea that women were tired, did not have enough time to complete all of their daily tasks, and would gladly welcome any helping hand. Food companies began a new wave of advertisements that turned a woman’s time into currency; women could either waste their time preparing meals on their own, or they could save their time by simply opening a can or reheating a frozen TV dinner. The middle class has a long history that leads to the need to market convenience foods to women. Following the American Civil War and the elimination of slavery more people, particularly white women, had to begin working. The Gilded Age, ranging from about 1870 to 1900, represented a period of rapid economic growth and vast social changes. During the Gilded Age an expanding middle class emerged, an even more affluent elite class grew, and the amount of people in poverty grew as well. Immigration to the United

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States also grew during the Gilded Age, contributing to the work force, the emerging social classes, and the market demands. By the time WWII ended the middle class had grown even more. However, despite the growth of the middle class and their contributions to the work force, being “middle class” did not mean one could always hire help. The hired help gap is what convenience foods began to fill. Marketers knew that to sell their convenience food products, they also had to convince housewives that they had no time to spare for a home-cooked meal. Convenience foods represented hired help in a package.

Not only could many white, middle-class women not relate to working women, but they could also not relate to disliking cooking altogether. In the 1951 Gallup poll, 43% of the women surveyed answered “cooking” in response to the question “which household job do you like most?” Dividing their responses among other chores, such as laundry and dishes, women ranked the task of cooking, whether it be for their family, for themselves, or just for fun, highest. Despite the fact that they were constantly being told that they are too busy and that their time is too scarce, women continued cooking and continued defending their kitchens from the food industry’s pursuits.

Even working women did not find cooking to be a burden that they would have joyfully rid themselves of. Laura Shapiro, in *Something from the Oven*, states, “working women appear to have handled their time problems … by doing less cooking per meal.”

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15 George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 1972, vol. 2, 965. The Gallup Poll did not disclose their demographic surveyed for this percentage. Looking at the date when this survey occurred, I believe that the demographic was mostly white, middle-class, married women.

Standing in stark contrast to the idea that women, especially working women, did not have any time to prepare a meal, Shapiro illuminates that the idea that women had no time was merely an advertisement ploy, not a fact. Working or not, women felt drawn to the kitchen and felt responsible for the culinary results they plated for their families. Resorting to many convenience foods, such as TV dinners, was not only a sacrifice of their kitchens but also of their role in nurturing and caring for their families. Women placed the care of their kitchen and family in the hands of factories and strangers with every new, convenient purchase.17 This sense of accountability and embarrassment was shared among many working women and homemakers.

While many women reacted negatively toward the food industry’s attempts to propel them from their kitchens, many others established their independence and autonomy from convenience food by embracing it. Poppy Cannon, author of *The Can-Opener Cookbook* in 1952, exemplifies this type of reaction by employing a convenience food product in every recipe found within her cookbook. Cannon argues that convenience foods used to be a “badge of shame, hallmark of the lazy lady and the careless wife,” but in today’s [1950s] modern society, “the can opener is fast becoming a magic wand” for modern women.18 By embracing convenience foods on their own terms, housewives maintained control and supremacy within their kitchens despite the food industry’s intrusions.

17 Shapiro, 52.
The confidence that housewives donned worked directly against the hopes of the food industries that wanted to make women feel apprehensive about their food choices and thus susceptible to their advertised persuasion.\(^{19}\) Gordon E. Bivens, at the Fourth Annual Institute of the New York State College of Home Economics’ presentation on “The American Consumer: A Critical Appraisal,” claimed that “consumers are ‘actors’” and must take control within the food market by voicing their opinions.\(^{20}\) Bivens promoted the idea that women, through their purchases in grocery stores, could gain control of the food market and thus retain control of their own kitchens. Many housewives recognized that the food industry viewed them as “nitwits, swayed by all the advertising, not caring what [they] payed for an item as long as it was in a pretty package,” and through their resistance, women demonstrated how much they do care about what they purchase.\(^{21}\)

The evolution of the food system was not a straightforward event; it was a multifaceted, iterative process. As society moved toward industrialization, food advertisements promoted the idea that progress and modernity could be applied to food. Food advertisements were also used to normalize the changes that occurred within the food system, showcasing new food products as liberating or examples of American resourcefulness.

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FOOD ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE LITERATURE: OVERVIEWS AND GAPS

Just as food companies discovered creative, new convenience foods in the 1950s, they also discovered creative, new ways to advertise these food products. While food advertisements were not revolutionary, they began to flood into American women’s magazines, filling pages and pages with not only images and beliefs about food but also images and beliefs about women and gender roles as well.

Food advertisements sold much more than food. They sold ideal body images, rigid gender roles, ideas about a woman’s place in society and life goals, and ideas about a woman’s worth and sexuality. Food advertisements are not alone in their social and gendered commentaries. Practically all advertisements, regardless of what is being sold, deliver messages far beyond the product for sale.

Society and individuals are greatly influenced by the power of images although this power often goes unnoticed. John Berger, in Ways of Seeing, emphasizes that it is human nature to give and to recognize the power of imagery since “we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.”22 It is part of the human experience to be constantly trying to either relate to things or to relate things to ourselves. This aspect of human nature is what makes advertisements successful. Advertisements are typically highly visual, and this allows the viewer’s eye to analyze, compare, and identify with components of the image. This act of relation is one that Jean Kilbourne focuses on in her video series, “Killing Us Softly.” Kilbourne states

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that “the first thing advertisers do is surround us with images of ideal female beauty....[W]omen learn from a very early age that we must spend enormous amounts of time, energy and above all money, striving to achieve this look and feeling ashamed and guilt when we fail.... [A]nd failure is inevitable because the ideal is based on absolute flawlessness.”23 Because humans never simply look at something without trying to relate to it, the ideal representation of women becomes internalized; the same can be said for the representation of people of color, the male gender and ideas of masculinity, and homosexuals. Similarly, the text on advertisements also has influential power. J.L. Austin, in How To Do Things With Words, states that speaking is actually an act, either by promise or by causation.24 Thus, as viewer’s read text on advertisements, saying it either out loud or in her mind, she is giving the text performative power. Advertisements not only capitalize on the human tendency to relate and the power of language, but also on creating insecurities and building off of pre-established ones.

Food is fundamental to a person’s identity; thus, food advertisements are also intrinsically tied to one’s identity. Food advertisements tell people who they are, who they want to be, who they should be in relation to food identity, and personal identity. Many scholarly articles that focus on food advertisements analyze their effects on children—how children are impacted and how food industries attempt to create lifetime consumers out of children. By introducing brand names, slogans, and mascots to children, food companies hope to generate a loyalty to and preference of their food product that will last

throughout the child’s life. The rich literature analyzing food advertisements and children tends to focus on the weight and health of children, making claims, such as “exposure to food adverts promotes consumption,” and “commercials broadcast during children's Saturday morning programming promote foods predominantly high in fat and/or sugar, many of which have relatively low nutritional value.”

The topic of advertising is also analyzed for the social and cultural implications it has on children. The common argument in this literature is that advertisers commodify and capitalize on the idea of childhood. Many food advertisements’ target audience is children. These advertisements play on children’s television stations and during primetime television watching hours, such as the several hours after school and weekend mornings. Additionally, these food advertisements use many tactics aimed at making children want the food product and requesting it from their parents. Eric Schlosser, in *Fast Food Nation*, states, “in 1978, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) tried to ban all television ads directed at children seven years old or younger ... [because children] could not comprehend the real purpose of commercials and trusted that advertising claims were

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true ... [and] children need to be shielded from advertising that preys upon their immaturity.” Children’s naivety is targeted by food advertisements, as is the very idea of childhood. Advertisements claim that to have a fulfilling childhood children need to eat the right food from the right brand—as if a childhood would be lacking with Jif peanut butter and General Mills cereal.

Within the historical literature on food advertisements, there is a lively discussion on the historical relationship of Americans to food, the food system, and food advertising. There are two common themes within this discussion. The first is the idea that advertisements are intentional and crafted primarily to influence women. The second is that food advertisements played (and play) a highly influential role in the food system and Americans’ relationship to food.

Several scholars discuss the first theme of women and food advertising. However, only a few scholars make this the main focus of their work. Veleisis surveys the history of American’s changing relationship with food and the various ideas and events that shaped this relationship. Veleisis discloses that most women were not employed and did not have a strict daily itinerary that would force them to be require convenience foods to make their household run smoothly. Veleisis also explains that most women enjoyed cooking and “thought they should know something” about the food products they were being advertised. The fact that women still clung to the desire to be

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29 For a sampling of this literature see: Pollan, The Omnivore’s Dilemma.; Marchand, Advertising the American Dream.; Daniel Delis Hill, Advertising to the American Woman, 1900-1999 (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2002).
30 Veleisis, Kitchen Literacy, 190.
knowledgeable about the food they were serving their family altered the way in which convenience food products were depicted in advertising campaigns. The small amount of literature narrowly focusing on identity and food advertisements has mainly focused on the construction of the female identity.

Laura Shapiro thoroughly analyzes the relationship between women and food during the 1950s and 1960s, also noting the influence that food advertisements had on this relationship.\(^{31}\) Finally, Katherine Parkin, in *Food Is Love*, discusses food advertisements throughout history and the gender-related messages. Parkin’s thesis, common among this body of literature, is that food advertisements "[isolate] women in the kitchen, [suggesting] that preparing food for the families [is] not work, but an act of love."\(^{32}\) Food advertisements taught women that the only way they could show their love was to cook, pamper, clean, and purchase whatever product the advertisement sold.

The second theme that food advertisements played a significant role in the food system evolution and American’s relationship to food is also. Within this literature, scholars agree that food advertisements were indispensable to the growth and changes made in the food system. Scholars also agree that food advertisements are deliberately constructed for profit.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{31}\) Shapiro, *Something From the Oven*.; Shapiro, *Perfection Salad*.


Another body of literature focuses on food advertisements and their link to the rise in obesity in the United States—however, this linkage is questionable. This research relies on several assumptions. The first is comprised of three related assumptions, that obesity is always negative, always preventable, and has a simply solution—just stop eating bad food. The second assumption is that individual agency is minimal; people choose food and obesity because of food advertisements. Finally, it suggests that the solution to the obesity “problem” is to turn off the television and close the magazine—as if escaping advertising were that simple. The foundational issue with the linkage of food advertisements and obesity is that “simplified problems lead to simple solutions ... [and] the solution has become education to encourage us to make a different set of choices” instead of making changes in the food system.

Within postmodern and postmodern feminist theory there has been a fair amount of work done examining food advertisements for traces of postmodern themes or using a postmodern feminist framework to analyze food advertisements. Postmodernists and postmodern feminists tend to analyze food advertisements

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Deconstruction, a term coined and developed by Jacques Derrida, is a complex theory, which aims to “show that things--texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need--do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy.”

Deconstruction holds that everything not only has an intricate meaning but also a broader reach in society. Nothing exists in a vacuum and nothing is simple. Everything is connected in some way and so to deconstruct something is to also find these connections. However, there is also a risk in Deconstruction that during the process of analysis one will “affirm what it set out to deny.” By deconstructing something, one must first acknowledge it, giving it legitimacy. Additionally, Deconstruction claims that there is no absolute truth because of the matrix of meanings connected to everything. There can never be an absolute truth if everything is polysemic and complex.

Postmodernists and postmodern feminists doing work on food advertisements problematize what has been normalized. Images are not passive; they represent the signifier, the mental image, and the signified, the association with the image. Roland Barthes states that “pictures … are more imperative than writing, they impose more
meaning at one stroke, without analyzing or diluting.” Postmodern feminist work layers feminism atop postmodern analysis, showing how not only do the signifiers and signified represent privilege and oppression in society, but also how they represent gendered issues.

Most feminist literature about women and advertising does not focus specifically on food advertisements but rather on advertisements in general—and there has been a great amount of work done on this topic. This work tends to focuses how a woman’s body is sexualized, objectified, commodified, and racialized. The literature also focuses on how these unachievable, “ideal” women presented in advertisements negatively influence a woman’s beliefs about and treatment of her body. Most works that discuss this tie the “ideal” female body in advertisements to the stronghold of eating disorders and disordered eating mostly among women.

Betty Friedan, in The Feminine Mystique, pioneered analysis that focused on how food advertisements, among other things, influence a woman’s identity. A common theme in the literature on a woman’s identity is that women find knowledge, power, and identity based on how knowledge is presented to them in a patriarchal way. Scholars exploring women and identity generally agree that despite the strong wills of women, most struggle to fight through the oppressions of a patriarchal society to create an untainted identity. Dorothy

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Smith, in her analysis of a woman’s identity in a patriarchal society, applies Marx’s cycle of oppression to the process of identity creation.

Marx’s concept of alienation is applicable here in a modified form. The simplest formulation of alienation posits a relation between the work individuals do and an external order oppressing them in which their work contributes to the strength of the order that oppresses them. This is the situation of women in this relation. The more successful women are in mediating the world of concrete particulars so that men do not have to become engaged with (and therefore conscious of) that world as a condition to their abstract activities the more complete men’s absorption in it and the more effective its authority.  

Smith describes the cycle of a patriarchal society, noting that as women navigate such a society they are also strengthening it. There has been a vast amount of literature on a woman’s identity, identity creation, and societal influence.  

The literature discussing the topic of food advertisements is substantial and well-developed. Generally, most works identify the influence food advertisements had (and have) over the food system and Americans’ relationship with food. Similarly, most works also recognize how food advertisements are designed with a female audience in mind. The literature also distinguishes the power of the visual, noting that images can say just as much, if not more, than words. Work focusing on a comparison of food advertisements from the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s and the messages about gender and gender roles within those advertisements is needed.

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Print advertisements may be silent, but they command attention and deliver heavily gendered messages. Friedan contends:

The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity. It says that the great mistake of Western culture, through most of its history, has been the undervaluation of this femininity. It says...the root of women’s troubles in the past is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love.44

While Friedan wrote this definition in 1963, the fact that it is still relevant and applicable to today’s society indicates the necessity for further study of women, identity, and advertising. Women today are still celebrated for their femininity and how well they can commit their lives and bodies to the feminine mystique. This celebration and commitment to the feminine are visible within food advertisements.

POSTMODERN FEMINISM AND THE ANALYSIS OF FOOD ADVERTISEMENTS

The postmodern era, denoted by the idea that there are no original ideas, began circa 1970 following the modern era, represented by the ideas of the avant-garde, innovation, and the breaking down of traditions. Several events and changes led to the creation of postmodernity. First, historical events, such as World War II and the Vietnam War, created a disillusioned public and the need to speak to and visually represent this public increased. Additionally, society was embracing mass media at a rapid pace

44 Friedan, 35-36.
changing how people interacted. Finally, circa 1970 represents a time when society began to include socially-oppressed groups. A new language and medium was needed to exemplify this new society. However, one cannot speak of a new society using the language of an old society. The innovation and breaking down of tradition characteristic of modernity could not speak to the new society post-war. Postmodernism recognized that modernity broke from tradition and the new society had to create new traditions. However, postmodernism also notes that there are no original ideas. Thus, postmodernism is characterized by concepts such as: no informative source, diversity, polysemy (the idea that an image has many meanings), social construction, everything as an allegory or referential (there is nothing inherent or unique), and the concept of floating signifiers.45

In “Answering the Question: What is the Postmodern,” Jean-Francois Lyotard discusses the complex topic of how postmodern art began and, most importantly, how it interacts with society. Lyotard addresses the postmodern by stating that the postmodern is part of the modern; so much so that “a work can become modern only if it is first postmodern.”46 Lyotard claims that postmodernism does not mark the end of the modern, because if the modern is intertwined with postmodern it does not end. Lyotard lays out the postmodern condition as

that which in the modern invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself, which refuses the consolation of correct forms, refuses the consensus of

45 Staci Gem Scheiwiller, “Postmodern Art: What Are Some Characteristics of Postmodernity” (lecture, Postmodern Art course at CSU, Stanislaus, February 2012).
Lyotard explains how the postmodern is a reaction against modernity. The postmodern attempts to put content and self-identity back into art and replace the concept of “art for art’s sake.” The postmodern recognizes that someone cannot take themselves out of the art. Finally, while modernism was a collaborative reaction against the control and formality of the academy, postmodernism is a much more fragmented and individual movement. Postmodernism’s attempt to put content and self-identity back into images is a prominent reason that this theory can analyze advertisements so well. Postmodernism recognizes that viewers self-identify with images and that this identification contributes to the matrix of meanings and symbols connected to the image.

Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* defines postmodernism as the disbelief in the concept of metanarratives. Metanarratives are large narratives used to describe and define smaller narratives, a sort of umbrella term used to encompass the experiences of many. This is one of the defining features of postmodern feminism, the idea that metanarratives cannot speak to the experiences of people today because of the multi-layered and complex blocks that construct those experiences. Lyotard further defines postmodernism as “not simply a tool of the authorities; [postmodern knowledge] refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the

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47 Lyotard, "Answering the question: what is the postmodern?", 9.
incommensurable.”48 Lyotard explains how postmodernism provides a knowledge and language capable of speaking of a postmodern society. Judith Butler builds on Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism, stating that “part of the project of postmodernism, call[s] into question the ways in which such ‘examples’ and ‘paradigms’ serve to subordinate and erase that which they seek to explain.”49 This speaks to the postmodern concern for metanarratives. Metanarratives, in their attempt to collectively define a multitude of individual experiences, risk making those individual experiences inferior and invisible. Julia Kristeva explains how postmodernism can be understood as “writing-as-experience-of-limits': limits of language, of subjectivity, of sexual identity and, we might also add, of systematization and uniformization.”50 The limitations described by Kristeva are partially caused metanarratives oversimplifying experiences, and postmodern analysis recognizes these limitations and explores them.

The guiding light of the analysis throughout this thesis is postmodern feminism. A very brief overview of postmodernism was provided at the beginning of this section to provide a clearer understanding of postmodernism before delving into the literature of postmodern feminism. Postmodern feminism includes three aspects that make this framework well-suited for the analysis of food advertisements. The first is that images must be analyzed as texts; the second is that gender analysis is central to societal analysis; and the third is that postmodern feminism recognizes the power of language.

The first aspect of postmodern feminism is the concept that the visual must be analyzed as if it is literary, and that this analysis must include the role of gender. The postmodern framework “illuminate[s] the gender assumptions in advertisements when it is read as one form of discourse characteristic of the patriarchal society.”51 This key inclusion of literary criticism in the analysis of images within postmodern feminism provides a magnifying glass through which deep analysis of advertisements can occur. By understanding that images contribute to conversations just as verbal or written speech does, a new analytical door opens. Roland Barthes, in Mythologies, states that “a photograph will be a kind of speech … in the same way as a newspaper article; even objects will become speech, if they mean something.”52 Barthes supports this statement by citing the history of language and writing because “long before the invention of the alphabet, objects…or drawings, as in pictographs, have been accepted as speech.”53 Barthes illuminates how speech is not restricted to only verbal and written language. Speech and imagery have a long and entwined history and are not separate ideas. Language, be it speech or imagery, has an immense amount of power in shaping individual thoughts and actions, societal thoughts and actions, and power itself.

Postmodern feminism places feminism and feminist issues directly within language and imagery. Feminist issues are not reserved to sexist comments by co-workers or laws targeting women. Rather feminist issues are everywhere and in everything. It does feminism an injustice to presume that feminism issues are only those

51 Stern, “Feminist Literary,” 556.
52 Barthes, Mythologies, 111.
53 Barthes, Mythologies, 111.
that can be physically experienced by women or enforced on behalf of women, such as
laws aiming to control a woman’s body. Postmodern feminism understands feminist
issues as ever present and deeply ingrained within everything.

Eileen Fischer, in “Consuming Contemporaneous Discourse: A Postmodern
Analysis of Food Advertisements Targeted toward Women,” emphasizes the importance
of analyzing food advertisements, because “social constructions of food, food prep, and
eating and those of gender under-grid and reinforce each other.”

Fischer also describes postmodern analysis as

historical and genealogical approaches to discerning the symbolic webs of
meaning in which advertising texts are embedded and the bricolage of sign
fragments on which they draw…[and] reading for absences or ‘gaps’ in or
out of texts to unsettle stable readings, challenge taken-for-granted
hierarchies, and surface tacit contradictions.

Postmodern feminist views advertisements as a complex array of signs and
symbols, and detangling these signs and symbols is a key aspect of postmodern
feminist analysis.

Postmodernism’s emphasis on textual analysis and the belief that the verbal will
be replaced by the visual indicates that it would be a complementary match for the
analysis of food advertisements. Moreover, most analysis of advertisements is textual
analysis even if not stated, because to analyze an image is to assume that it has deeper
meanings beyond the surface. The face value of an image represents a complex

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54 Fischer, “Consuming Contemporaneous Discourses,” 1.
55 Fischer, 2.
conversation about society, history, gender, and race. To deconstruct an image one must first recognize that images are not only visual but also verbal.

Postmodernism, as described by Linda Scott, “is the artform of the consumer society, an outgrowth of mass production, mass media, and mass marketing…. [It] represents the rise of the visual at the expense of the verbal, and the archetypal example is often the advertisement.”56 A postmodern framework could allow the researcher to examine “the advertising visual as a postmodern text,” promoting a deeper level of analysis of images as texts.57 Similarly, postmodern feminism allows for the same deep level of analysis by “treating advertising as a form of discourse with literary dimensions and by adapting literary theory to present gender as a core category in the experience of text.”58 Postmodern feminism provides a useful analysis that can accommodate the complex topic of women and gender roles in food advertisements.

Second, postmodern feminism holds that gender analysis is not only important but also necessary for a thorough societal analysis. As such, any societal analysis that does not include gender is not only lacking but also heavily misconstrued. Susan Hekman, in Gender and Knowledge, states, “[F]eminism can contribute to the postmodern position by adding the dimension of gender, a dimension lacking in many postmodern accounts.”59 By adding a focus on gender to the postmodern analysis, postmodern feminism is better

56 Scott, “Playing with Pictures,” 596.
57 Scott, 596.
equipped to deconstruct societal issues and structures since gender is engrained in every aspect of society.

“The ‘Difference’ of Postmodern Feminism” by Teresa Ebert states that “feminism raises the issue of gender as the basis for the organization of society—from the production and distribution of wealth and the division of power to the construction of identities and ways of making sense of reality.”60 Within any aspect of society, gender permeates and represents a foundation on which reality is constructed. Ebert describes the importance of feminist analysis in its “[articulation of] the gender differences patriarchy requires but naturalizes as ‘the way things are,’ and conceals in the illusion of universality.”61 Feminist analysis reveals the controversial in the mundane, problematizing things that would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Building on Ebert’s claims of gender and society, Mary Frug, in “A Postmodern Feminist Legal Manifesto (An Unfinished Draft),” contends that, “the postmodern position locating human experience as inescapably within language suggests that feminists should not overlook the constructive function of legal language as a critical frontier for feminist reforms.”62 While Frug is describing legal discourse in particular, the same can be said for food advertisements. Food advertisements also represent a “critical frontier” for feminist analysis. Postmodern feminism recognizes that society cannot be fully understood or analyzed without the inclusion of gender. Therefore, any analysis of

61 Ebert, 888.
society and language, which shapes and influences society, that does not include gender is severely lacking. Society cannot be analyzed without including gender.

John Berger, in *Ways of Seeing*, emphasizes the gendered representation of people in imagery noting that “her body is arranged in the way it is, to display it to the man looking at the picture….the picture is made to appeal to his sexuality.”

The pictorial representation of women is designed for the gaze of men. This design has a well-established foundation that can be found within art throughout history.

Exemplifying the male gaze is Olympia by Edouard Manet, which shows a nude, white woman reclined on a day bed (Image 1). Her red hair is tied back, the bedding is

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disheveled, a black woman attends to her, and a black cat stands on the foot of the bed. The red of her hair is indicative of the femme fatale and the black cat indicates that the nude woman is a prostitute, as the color black denotes sin and a cat represents not only female genitalia, but also the craftiness of a femme fatale. She lays propped up with her right arm atop of the pillows and her left arm is draped over her body covering her genitalia. The way in which she is positioned puts her breasts on display. Her facial expression is one of the most unique aspects of this painting, as she stares directly into the viewer’s eyes. Olympia directly confronts the male gaze as if to say that to see what she is covering up will be extra. Olympia’s confrontational stare coupled with her exposed position indicates that the intended audience was male.

Finally, postmodern feminism recognizes the power of language, including verbal and literary signs. Frug suggests that coercive power does not stand alone; it is accompanied and supported by linguistic power, which influences and molds society and reality.64 Discussing the power of language, Foucault states, “a language is still a system for possible statements, a finite body of rules that authorizes an infinite number of performances.”65 Foucault asserts that language shapes action and, in doing so, holds an incalculable amount of power over reality. Not only does language have the power to influence reality, but it also has power to go unnoticed. Language is often viewed as a paper tiger, relatively harmless and without muscle (i.e., common phrases, such as “actions speak louder than words,” and “sticks and stones may break my bones, but

64 Frug.
words will never hurt me”). However, language is laced with power and has the capability to alter actions and to create realities.66 This power vested in language, both verbal and non-verbal, has been thoroughly discussed with the general agreement that “language is centrally involved in power, and struggles for power.”67 Language defines experience and power, and experience and power define language.68 In a society centered around men, power and experience are based on the understanding of men, specifically white, heterosexual men. Due to this, knowledge construction and language creation are geared toward defining a man’s experience. Women are left with male-centric language to construct their identity, thus the importance of exposing the gendered foundation on which knowledge, language, and power are built.

American society, formatted with phallocentric language, has an iterative relationship with advertisements. Fischer argues, “postmodern discourses highlight a culture of consumption, in which consumers are active producers of consumption symbols.”69 Advertisements have a cyclical relationship with society. Advertisements draw from society’s already established discussion and beliefs about gender and gender roles to create visual content. Similarly, society is influenced by advertising’s visual interpretation of gender and gender roles.

As mentioned above, the three main aspects of postmodern feminism that this thesis will incorporate include a literary analysis of the visual, the necessity of including

66 Austin, How To Do Things With Words.
69 Fischer, “Consuming Contemporaneous Discourses,” 3.
gender in societal analysis, and the recognition of the power of language. All three of these aspects provide an ideal framework for the analysis of food advertisements. Considering how well-suited postmodern feminism is for the analysis of food advertisements, there is a surprising lack of scholarly work done using this theory to examine these types of advertisements. However, there is a small amount of scholarly work done analyzing food advertisements using postmodernism theory, but for the exploration of gender roles and women in food advertisements this theory is missing the foundational feminist aspects necessary for a comprehensive analysis. This lack of postmodern feminist analysis of food advertisements from three women’s magazines during the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s is the gap that this thesis will fill.

METHODS

This thesis surveys three women’s magazines, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *Better Homes and Gardens*, from three different time periods, 1950-2, 1960-2, and 2009-13. These time periods were chosen to challenge the idea that women and gender roles are discussed and portrayed differently in the 2000s than they were in the 1950s and 1960s. Commonly the treatment of women and understanding of gender roles in the present day is compared to the treatment and understanding of women and gender roles in the 1950s and 1960s—with the assumption that there lies a drastic difference. These time periods were chosen to contest this assumption of difference. The questions of inquiry that have guided this research are: How have food advertisements changed over time? Has the message changed or has merely the image changed? How are gender and
gender roles depicted in food advertisements? Finally, what is the importance of food advertising within American society, and why does a study of them matter? These questions, coupled with postmodern feminist framework, led the analysis of the food advertisements and the messages found within them.

This survey viewed food advertisements within the chosen magazines, tallied every food advertisement, and photo-documented many of the food advertisements. For the purpose of this thesis “food advertisements” are defined as any advertisement from a food company specifically selling a food product. Advertisements were not included from non-food industries, even if the advertisement featured food. I eliminated advertisements from non-food industries from analysis to focus on how food industries and their food advertisements discuss and portray women and gender roles.

The three magazines, Ladies Home Journal, Better Homes and Gardens, and Good Housekeeping, were chosen for four main reasons. First, they are three of the most popular magazines among female readers, ranking in the top fifteen magazines in the United States in terms of paid circulation. In the first six months in 2013 Better Homes and Gardens had a paid circulation of 7,624,505, Good Housekeeping with 4,396,795 magazines, and Ladies Home Journal had 3,229,809 magazines.70

Second, these three magazines are geared toward a specific audience of women, particularly working mothers and housewives. Good Housekeeping editor-in-chief Rosemary Ellis states that “[she] know[s] how fast-paced your life can be, and how

challenging it is to balance family, housework, and time for yourself.”71 The editor-in-chief of Good Housekeeping pinpoints the magazine’s target audience as she addresses working mothers and housewives across the United States. Similarly, Better Homes and Gardens states that their focus is “on decorating, building and remodeling, crafts, entertaining, cooking, and gardening [and] also has extensive information for women and families.”72

The third reason these magazines were chosen is that all three women’s magazines span the time range that this thesis observes, from 1950 to 2013. Ladies Home Journal began publication in 1883, Good Housekeeping began in 1885, and Better Homes and Gardens began in 1922, all are still in print today.

Finally, these magazines were chosen because they all have an abundance of food advertisements and offer a fruitful medium to gather data on this specific type of advertisement. Women’s magazines are often filled with food advertisements, which generally target a female audience. In 1950, Better Homes and Gardens had 268 food advertisements, Ladies Home Journal had 414 food advertisements, and Good Housekeeping had 296 food advertisements. In 2013, Better Homes and Gardens had 110 food advertisements, and Good Housekeeping had 139 food advertisements. While the appearance of food advertisements has decreased over time, women’s magazines still have a significant amount of them. During the 1950s and 1960s, convenience foods were

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new to the American food market and needed to be advertised heavily due to this. The American food market in the 2000s does not need constant and heavy advertising of many of the products that were introduced in the 1950s and 1960s.

This thesis focuses on the female gender and discusses the male gender very minimally. The demographic of food advertisements is usually females and, as such, the analysis of food advertisements within this thesis focuses on the female gender. Similarly, the content and demographic of food advertisements is commonly heteronormative and so this thesis is also focused on the heteronormative.

Data was collected for this thesis using a content analysis approach. Content analysis was applied by systematically recording food advertisements found within women’s magazines with an alphanumeric code. I flipped through every page of every monthly magazine issue for *Good Housekeeping, Ladies Home Journal*, and *Better Homes and Gardens* during the time periods 1950-2, 1960-2, and 2009-13. I extended the years for the 2000 time period from 2009-11 to 2009-13, because there were many missing months, and it was important to use the same number of magazines for each time period to ensure ease and accuracy of comparison. As I flipped through each page, I used a tally system to keep track of how many food advertisements appeared in each year of magazine issues for each different women’s magazine. During this time, I photographed certain food advertisements for future deeper analysis. I chose the food advertisements that I photographed to illustrate key themes of gender and racial representation highlighted by the postmodern feminist framework.
This thesis analyzed over three hundred food advertisements for several themes and imagery:

- Woman present in advertisement
- Physical stance of woman
- Assumed job/task of woman
- Appearance of woman
- Emotions portrayed by woman
- Same analysis applied to man if present in advertisement
- When a woman and a man are present
- Woman’s physical position compared to the man
- Image perspective and scale (for example: is the food larger than the woman)

After completing this first level of advertisement analysis, 314 advertisements were divided into three main categories. The 314 advertisements were ones chosen for further analysis for this thesis out of the 5,163 food advertisements viewed in all the issues of women’s magazines surveyed. These categories represent the three main topics and ideas that kept reoccurring as I analyzed the advertisements based on the common themes in the bullet points above. The three categories are: the importance of finding love, becoming married and having children, the sexualization of women and the discussion of body image, and the how to become a smart, modern woman. Additionally, a discussion of how race is represented in food advertisements is also integrated into these three
categories. The advertisements categorized in each of the three themes were analyzed for what they said about their given theme. The textual and visual analyses of each advertisement were completed using postmodern feminism, which aims to not only deconstruct the longstanding ideas about gender and gender roles but also to problematize these ideas. Through the multilayered analysis described in this section, this thesis was able to thoroughly explore the theory that there would be a difference in how gender and gender roles were portrayed between 1950 and 2013.

CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the evolution of the food system, showcasing food advertisement’s crucial involvement. An overview of food advertisement literature was given, noting the shortfalls and gaps within the literature. There are several strengths of the literature that discusses food advertisements. The first is that the literature recognizes the influence food advertisements have in shaping the food system and Americans’ relationship to food. Second, the literature identifies that food advertisements are targeted specifically toward women aligning with the rigid understanding of gender and gender roles within American society. Finally, the literature discusses how food advertisements influence and shape a woman’s identity, both in society and personally. Despite the comprehensive literature discussing food advertisements, the comparative postmodern feminist analysis of food advertisements from the 1950s and 1960s to those of the 2000s has not been done. This work is needed to explore the depiction of gender and gender roles throughout history and to discover the current ways gender and gender roles are
portrayed. A discussion of postmodern feminism described three main aspects of the theory, which make it well-suited for an analysis of food advertisements. Those aspects are: the ability to apply literary analysis to the visual, the requisite of including gender in any societal analysis, and the acknowledgement of power that language possesses.

Finally, I thoroughly discussed the methods that were used to gather and to analyze data for this thesis. In the next chapter, I will outline the data that was gathered using the methods described earlier.
CHAPTER 3: DATA

In this chapter, graphs showing the annual number of food advertisements to appear in *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Ladies Home Journal* will be shown. Similarly, there is a chart showing the percentage of advertisements within each theme that identifies with a specific code. This raw data was accumulated using the methods described in chapter two. Additionally, this data was used to aid in analysis.

A discussion of my biases is important to include, especially within this chapter. All the judgments regarding, for example, the softness or sharpness of facial features or the portrayed emotions were based on my understandings of them. Throughout this process I remained cognizant of my bias and understanding of each different code, and to also control my biases so that it does not heavily sway the data. Additionally, I actively tried to judge each advertisement and its codes according to how mainstream media would judge each code. For example, sharp facial features in mainstream media are commonly indicated by protruding cheek bones, an angular and defined jaw line, and a relatively angular face overall—I used mainstream media portrayals as guidelines for judging this code. My own bias and understanding of each code is a social construction. My views were, and are, formed and informed by the media and culture. John Berger states that “seeing comes before words,” thusly my beliefs and understandings are constructed of the imagery around me.73

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The graphs below show the number of food advertisements within a yearly cycle of magazines for all three women’s magazines, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Ladies Home Journal*. Food advertisements were tallied as I went page by page through every magazine. As discussed in chapter two, convenience foods began to debut and to increase throughout the United States during the 1950s. Corresponding with this, there were over 250 total food advertisements in women’s magazines during the 1950s, with the exception of 1952 for *Better Homes and Gardens*, which had between 150-200 food advertisements. Women’s magazines during the 1950s were filled with food advertisements, ranging from two-page spreads to small, sidebar advertisements. The introduction of convenience foods during a pivotal point in United States food system history, discussed in chapter two, explains this large number of food advertisements in current women’s magazines.

Today, there is a significant downward trend in the number of food advertisements in women’s magazines. There are a few reasons for this downward trend exists. First, the women’s magazines surveyed also had a downward trend in page number. Over time, these three women’s magazines have become smaller, making advertising space not only more scarce but also more valuable. Second, as technology has changed, the methods of delivering advertisements have changed as well. While the television debuted in the United States in the 1940s, not every household was able to own one. The television was reserved for households with the monetary means to afford one. However, this quickly changed as “the number of homes with TVs increased from 0.4
percent in 1948 to 55.7 percent in 1954 and to 83.2 percent four years later.”74 Having another effective method of advertising to households, the number of food advertisements in women’s magazines began to decrease. This downward trend does not mean that the number food advertisements within society have also decreased. There are many more media outlets in the 2000s than there were in the 1950s and food advertisements have more options.

Figure 1: Line graph showing the number of food advertisements appearing in an annual cycle of Better Homes and Gardens

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Figure 2: Line graph showing the number of food advertisements appearing in an annual cycle of Good Housekeeping. Some annual cycles could not be completed during research, for those the months surveyed are listed.
Figure 3: Line graph showing the number of food advertisements appearing in an annual cycle of Ladies Home Journal. Some annual cycles could not be completed during research, for those the months surveyed are listed.
Overall, the above graphs (Figure 1 through Figure 4) show a significant decrease in the number of food advertisements in an annual cycle (12 months, 12 magazines) of Better Homes and Gardens, Good Housekeeping, and Ladies Home Journal. I argue that this downward trend is due to both the decrease in page numbers of women’s magazines over time and the increase of technology and other advertising media outlets.
Figure 5: Chart showing the total number of times each code occurred in a food advertisement per each theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Woman's Duty</td>
<td>Race, Ethnicity, &amp; Culture</td>
<td>Sexual &amp; Beautiful</td>
<td>Smart, Modern Woman</td>
<td>A Woman's Duty</td>
<td>Race, Ethnicity, &amp; Culture</td>
<td>Sexual &amp; Beautiful</td>
<td>Smart, Modern Woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman present in advertisement</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Man present in advertisement</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical stance of man:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Standing</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sitting</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying down</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Lying down</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bending down</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bending down</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kneeling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Kneeling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumed job/task of woman:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Misc. (not apparent)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athlete</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. (not apparent)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Athlete</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance of woman:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharp features (ie. Defined bone structure...)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Sharp features (ie. Defined bone structure...)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft features (ie. Fuller face, less defined bone structure)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Soft features (ie. Fuller face, less defined bone structure)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light skin tone</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Light skin tone</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium skin tone</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Medium skin tone</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dark skin tone</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Dark skin tone</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curvy figure</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Curvy figure</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin figure</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Thin figure</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdued hair style (ie. Pulled back into a bun or out short)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Subdued hair style (ie. Pulled back into a bun or out short)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-subdued hair style (ie. Long hair or loose curls)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Non-subdued hair style (ie. Long hair or loose curls)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5 shows the number of times a certain code appeared in food advertisements for each theme. There are several key points from figure 5 that I will discuss below. For example, while there were more occurrences of women having softer facial features (i.e., fuller cheeks, less defined bone structure), men more often are displayed with sharper facial features (defined bone structure, thinner face). This tendency to display women with softer facial features supports the finding that a majority of women (71.54% of women in surveyed advertisements), in the advertisements I surveyed, were portrayed as housewives. The idea of softness goes along with other motherly characteristics, such as being nurturing, loving, and feminine. An advertisement featuring a housewife tends to show the woman with softer features. According to figure 6, women are more likely to be portrayed with softer features, while men are more likely to be portrayed with sharper features.

Figure 6: Column graph comparing the percentage of total women and total men portrayed with soft or sharp facial features.
Second, within the advertisements surveyed 65.68% of women were standing. This propensity to show women as standing also coincides with the finding that 71.54% of the women in advertisements were portrayed as housewives. As discussed in chapter four, women are given the duty of pleasing their husbands, satisfying their families, and becoming mothers. Women must also be constantly working to improve themselves by becoming thinner. Comparing all these factors, a majority of advertisements show women standing, because women simply do not have time to sit or to lie down. A woman is constantly busy maintaining the contentment of her family, and even when that work is done, she must be focusing on improving herself.

Finally, while 52.85% of men were shown standing, 53.84% of men were also shown as working professionally (indicated by the attire worn, such as a suit). The men standing were often shown as coming home from work, standing in the doorway, peering into the kitchen, or kissing their wives. Along with this, 32.85% of men were shown sitting down. This showcases the gender roles heavily present in food advertisements, as there were no women clearly shown as professionals.
Figure 7: Column graph comparing the physical stance of the total women and total men in the advertisements surveyed.
Figure 8: Column graph comparing the assumed job/task of the total women and total men in the advertisements surveyed.
Figure 9: Column graph comparing the skin tone of the total women and total men in the advertisements surveyed.

Figure 9 displays the tendency of food advertisements to show mostly people of a lighter skin tone. In fact, 84.61% of men and 88.70% of women present in food advertisements had a lighter skin tone.
Figure 10 shows the displayed emotions of the focal person in the food advertisement. This list of emotions was compiled by doing several cursory looks at all of the food advertisements surveyed and noting which emotions stuck out the most. “Upset” is visually defined by body language, such as a downward furrowed brow, lack of a smile, narrowed eyes, and pinched lips. “Stoic” or neutral is defined as a resting face devoid of any recognizable emotions or a look of concentration. “Admiring” is defined as appearing content and proud, for example a woman often looks down at the food she just prepared with an admiring expression. “Cheerful” is defined as having the facial cues of
smiling or laughing. “Stressed” has facial indications, such as a furrowed brow, an open mouth is common, and hands on the head or in the air is also common. “Loving” is a combination of smiling, puckered lips, subtle grin, and glossy eyes. Finally, “relieved” is how a person would look if one just exhaled a deep breath. In the food advertisements I surveyed there was no significant difference between the emotions displayed by men and women.

Overall, the data presented in Figures 5-10 represents the significant findings from the initial coding process. Women and men are represented in food advertisements very differently. While a majority of men are shown as having professional jobs, a majority of women are still depicted as housewives (this is based on how I perceive housewives as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter). Additionally, women are regularly shown standing up, coinciding with the idea that women must be constantly working to please people and to self-improve. Finally, a vast majority of people within the food advertisements surveyed have a lighter skin tone. This finding coincides with the analysis in chapter four, that there is a startling lack of racial diversity within food advertisements within these magazines. Racial diversity is extremely low in my sampling of food advertisements. Additionally, as noted in chapter four, women of color are commonly shown as wanting to assimilate into the white, American standard of beauty. The data gathered from the initial coding supports the analysis in chapter four.
Following World War II (1939-45), as young men returned as war heroes, young Americans were quick not only to marry but also to start families—this period in American history, 1946-64, is generally referred to as the Baby Boom. World War II caused a massive shift in the American public’s mentality. While the 1920s was a decade of excess, bottomless hope, and a preference for the individual, the 1930s was a decade of economic and social devastation, quickly bringing the hope of the 20s to an end. While many historical events, such as the Great Depression (in the US, 1929-41) and the increase of women in the workforce during wartime, presented a challenge to traditional gender roles and family life during the early 1900s, young Americans after World War II still rushed to marry, have children, and fall into traditional gender roles. This rush to embrace the traditional American family and gender roles could be partially explained by several key components. First, United States Cold War propaganda often pinpointed the traditional, hardworking American family as the nation's first line of defense against communism. Propaganda “promoted the American way of life as the triumph of capitalism,” which was the viewed as the antidote to communism—as long as the American middle class remained consumers in United States capitalism, communism did not stand a chance. Secondly, the reality of global warfare, the atomic bomb and mutually assured destruction, and the massive amount of American war casualties in

76 Kallen, A Cultural History of the United States.
WWII, created a culture that was not only in need of stability and hope, but also longing for the good ol’ days.\(^{78}\) Wartime and the continued uncertainty of the Cold War made the stability of the traditional family and gender roles very appealing. Additionally, the 1950s family was “created, sustained by, and depend[ant] on the unprecedented economic growth and prosperity of the postwar economy.”\(^{79}\) The political and economic atmosphere of the 1950s post-WWII created a society where a conventional family experience could flourish. Finally, advertisements, including food advertisements, made traditional family and gender roles not only seem alluring, but also seem normal, as if everyone was doing it.

Being a middle class family was American, stable, and the way out of communism and war. However, the middle class has a very elusive definition as “growing up in the 1940s, for example, Kaufman [a writer for the New York Times] viewed those who owned refrigerators as middle class as his family had only an icebox…. [I]n the 1950s, his definition shifted to owning a television set; this was followed by a series of other things or experiences--summer camp, orthodontia, even English muffins--that other families could afford but his could not.”\(^{80}\) While many white Americans could easily fall into the middle class, Black Americans did not have such an easy path to American-deemed normalcy. During the 1950s and 1960s, as racial integration was underway, “Black Americans were excluded from most suburbs, even if


they could afford suburban homes ... [denying] them the opportunity for capital accumulation and upward mobility.”\(^81\) This denial made the suburban life of the middle class and the traditional family and gender roles an exclusively white, privileged way of life.

In the decades between the 1960s and the 2000s many events shaped the course of the American middle class. Firstly, a changing economic climate not only impacted the status of the middle class, but also the stability associated with being middle class. During the 1970s, recession and inflation made the economic status of the middle class unstable, and during the 1980s an economic platform known as “Reagonomics” produced policies that were preferential of the wealthy. The middle class during the 1990s was “the group perhaps feeling more financial and emotional pressure than ever.”\(^82\) Secondly, the Vietnam War, from 1965 to 1975, coupled with a new feminist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s created a society rebelling against the stringency of traditional family and gender roles.\(^83\) Women demanded more than marriage and motherhood, and men pushed back against the stress of breadwinning and war drafts. During the late 1960s and the 1970s, the middle class began to discover and use their social power to mandate for more than what was advertised to them. Finally, Civil Rights Movements, which gained significant momentum during the 1960s, not only began to alter society allowing Black Americans to make social and economic gains, but also began to spotlight white

\(^81\) May, *Homeward Bound*, 11.
\(^82\) Samuel, *The American Middle Class*, 11.
privilege, especially in the middle class.84 The middle class, between 1970 and 2000, was greatly influenced and shaped by many historical events.

This morphing middle class made up the base of American consumer culture, and thus, advertisements often shaped their messages to not only appeal to this base but also to shape their behavior. Food advertisements were used to not only sell food but also to sustain American political and economic ideology. During the 1950s and 1960s, American political ideology was centered around the containment policy, focused on “containing” communism. Hence, food advertisements during this time heavily pushed a “contained” domestic policy of traditional family and gender roles. Additionally, since the middle class was primarily an exclusively white social class, food advertisements’ depictions of people of color were heavily racist and stereotyped, showing people of color in background positions and supporting white people. Political ideology in the 2000s, following the 9/11 attacks, “[echoed] the emphasis on consumer freedom and the ‘American way of life’ that was central to cold war propaganda.”85 Additionally, a renewed admiration and nostalgia for the traditional family values, which include traditional gender roles, stirred. Political ideology for Americans post-9/11 was to renew loyalty to consumerism and the traditional, American family. President Bush, following 9/11, told the American public to not let the attacks interfere with their daily lives of shopping and contributing to the American economy. Food advertisements are just one part of a complex matrix that supports political ideology. However, they hold a

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significant amount of power over swaying American public opinion and American consumer culture.

This thesis seeks to analyze how gender and gender roles are portrayed in food advertisements. Additionally, this thesis strives to discover what messages are being sent in food advertisements about gender and gender roles. Finally, after viewing food advertisements from the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s, this thesis seeks to ascertain if the messages about and the portrayal of gender and gender roles have changed throughout time. The brief history of American consumer culture, the American middle class, and American political ideology above serves as foundational knowledge and a historical backdrop for the food advertisements analyzed below.

Postmodernism states that texts and images are all unstable and polysemic. The meaning of a text or image is constantly changing because of the changing society and culture, changing political environments, changing consumer culture, changing technology, the changing viewer (not only does each individual person change the meaning when they view/read a piece, but the viewer themselves are constantly changing on a personal level as well), and so on. This concept is one identified and discussed in *Image, Music, Text* by Roland Barthes. Barthes states that “for the message itself, however, the method is inevitably different: whatever the origin and the destination of the message, the photograph is not simply a product or a channel but also an object endowed with a structural autonomy.”

> Regardless of the intent behind an image or text, once they are released they become their own entities that morph and take on new meanings. The

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text or image is an unstable, polysemic piece within an unstable, polysemic world. That being said, in the analysis of advertisements below I attempt to provide a feminist reading of the advertising content.

A WOMAN’S WORK

Image 2: Advertisement for Reddi-Wip, 1950
This section will discuss three common themes found in food advertisements from the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s, regarding a woman’s duty. The first theme is that women are charged with the persistent task of finding, pleasing, and keeping a husband. Second, women are given the duty of keeping their families not only happy but also nutritionally satisfied. Finally, women are told that it is not only life fulfilling to become a mother, but also that becoming a mother is their fates. Advertisements from the 1950s and 1960s will be shown in comparison with advertisements from the 2000s.

Within food advertisements, women are tasked with the lifelong pursuit of finding, pleasing, and keeping a husband. This is a task that, according to the discourse in food advertisements, is not easy or quick and takes constant thought and effort. Reddi-Wip’s advertisement for whipped topping gives women a clear way to please and hold onto their husbands (Image 2). Showing a woman with short, softly curled hair and wearing a full face of makeup and nice, modest clothing, Reddi-Wip’s advertisement illustrates just how easy it is to please a man. The woman in the advertisement holds a cup full of dessert in one hand and a can of Reddi-Wip in the other, while her adoring husband kisses her on the cheek. The writing below this image leaves women with the final message that Reddi-Wip is “your dessert magic secret that helps to hold a husband.”

The woman appears to have a cheerful, relieved look on her face, and with the message that if you do not use Reddi-Wip your husband may leave you, one can see why. Finding, marring, and holding a man is not only something women are meant to do,

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but also something that comes with lifelong pressure and expectations. This Reddi-Wip advertisement normalizes the idea that this pursuit of love and marriage is the greatest one of a woman’s life. There is nothing more to search for once you have found your husband, there is nothing more to do with your day than work to please him, and there is nothing more to hope for once you have earned his approval.

Bearing a similar resemblance to the Reddi-Wip advertisement, Pillsbury’s advertisement for boxed cake mix tells women in 2011 that this task of pleasing a man has not gone away (Image 3). This advertisement shows a small picture thumb-tacked to a date slot on a calendar. In the small picture, a woman wearing an apron stands in the kitchen behind a counter and a big, chocolate cake. She holds a plate with a slice of cake and a fork and looks at her husband who is sitting at the other side of the counter with his back to the viewer. Her fork is floating next to the cake as if she cannot take a bite until she knows her husband is pleased with her baked good. It may also be read that the woman is in conversation with her husband, perhaps about the quality of the cake they are eating. On the woman’s face is an expression that seems to be a mix of longing and love as she looks at her husband. The way to be happy is to please others, especially your husband.
The writing below the image boasts how exciting this new cake mix is “because now you can bake your cake and eat it too.”88 This message has two main issues, the first being that it eludes to the cannon of the stupid, clumsy housewife. Claiming that with this cake mix a woman will finally be able to bake something, suggests that her prior attempts

were baking failures. Secondly, the wording seems to be giving women permission to eat. This idea of needing permission to eat will be more fully discussed in the section, “Sexual and Beautiful.” Suffice it to say that this advertisement asserts itself into two areas of a woman’s life, eating and body image.

However, there is a feminist reading of the wording on this advertisement. The statement “because now you can bake your cake and eat it too” may also be read as though women can now have it all—the ability to bake and consume. Instead of just being expected to bake, women can now bake and consume their baked good.

This small picture of the adoring wife and grateful husband is pinned to a day square on a monthly calendar. The marking on the calendar mirrors the Reddi-Wip advertisement, which suggests that women “plan a quiet evening at home … serve him your own special chocolate pie glorified with Reddi-Wip.”89 Women are still shown as needing to put in extra effort to please their husbands. Satisfying your husband is not an easy task. It is one that requires hours of effort, planning and baking, and one that marks a special day on the calendar.

89 Reddi-Wip, “How to Hold a Husband.”
The second task assigned to women is that of satisfying their families and keeping them happy. Velveeta’s advertisement for their pasteurized processed cheese spread shows women just how dedicated they must be to please their families (Image 4). In this advertisement a very pregnant woman carries a tray of food and beverages to her husband and young son who are occupied sitting in a chair and reading a book. Even though this
woman is pregnant, nothing will stop her from serving her family. Additionally, the lively grin on her face indicates that not only is she content with her position in the family, but also that keeping her family happy is fun and fulfilling. Below the image, the advertisement reminds women that “keeping the ‘expectant’ little brother happy is important, as well you know.”90 She will serve them their snacks, as there are only two cups on the tray, and then fall back into the background again. This pregnant woman shows the viewer that there are no excuses when it comes to fulfilling your motherly duties.

Sandwiched between a recipe suggestion and a nutrition notice on the right side of the advertisement is a small paragraph that reminds women that part of being a mother is watching the scale. The advertisement states, “[I]f you're one of the many young mothers who has to weight-watch, both before and after a new baby comes, you'll be glad to know that Velveeta's extra goodness comes from the non-fat part of the milk.”91 Not only does the woman in this advertisement have to worry about pleasing her family, feeding them nutritious food, and being pregnant, but now, she also has to worry about watching her weight. It sure is a “big job [to be] a mother.”92

Women of color are often depicted in background service positions, as well as being given the tasks of finding, pleasing, and keeping a man, nourishing their family, and becoming a mother. Showcasing this theme is Aunt Jemima whose advertisements for pancake mixes shroud the secret recipe with slavery imagery and Black women

90 Velveeta, “The Big Job of being a Mother” advertisement, Good Housekeeping, September 1960, 33.
91 Velveeta, “The Big Job of being a Mother.”
92 Velveeta, “The Big Job of being a Mother.”
stereotypes. Using the storyline of a Black house slave who developed a secret pancake recipe that she withheld from everyone, including her master, these advertisements send the message that women “can’t duplicate it in a homemade batter.”93 Busy housewives cannot afford to go spend their time and money on the four different types of flour Aunt Jemima uses to create her magical pancakes, and they certainly should not purchase a different mix—Aunt Jemima has already been preapproved by rich, white American slave owners, after all. Showing Aunt Jemima in all her “mammie” glory, these advertisements continue and glorify this stereotype of the simple, ignorant, and nurturing Black woman. By only presenting this “mammie” stereotype, Aunt Jemima, in turn, shows Black women that this is as close to white housewifery that they will ever come

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93 Aunt Jemima, “4-Flour Flavor” advertisement, Better Homes and Gardens, January 1955, 75.
In Aunt Jemima’s advertisement, “Honey,” the proportion of the plate of pancakes accompanied by a fork full of pancake and the image of Aunt Jemima’s head are unnaturally distorted (Image 5).\textsuperscript{94} The plate and fork full of pancakes are massive in comparison to Aunt Jemima playing with proportion indicates that Aunt Jemima’s place—and the place of any other person of color—is in the background. Women of color, regardless of the stereotype they are portrayed in, are regularly made small, seemingly unimportant, and ignorable. Food advertisements, such as Aunt Jemima, portray women of color as the background, the ignorant one, and the server with handy tricks but no agency.

Success’s advertisement for “boil in a bag of rice” reinforces the idea that the task of pleasing the family belongs to women (Image 6). However, this advertisement adds a thick layer of pressure to it. Stating that Success Rice will enable you to create a “dinner where the only glitch is that there isn’t enough for thirds” suggests that a dinner without
this product is bursting with problems. Additionally, the wording on this advertisement dehumanizes the woman shown and, by association, all women. The word “glitch” is a term more commonly attributed to machine and technology, not to people. Applying this terminology to women turns her into a machine, nothing more than the means to an end.

The woman in the advertisement stands proudly with her hands on her hips but not because of her own doing or personhood. The woman stands proud because she just satisfied her family with the irreplaceable help of the boil-in-a-bag rice. Success’s advertisement suggests that because of this product, not the woman, this meal will be problem free. However, if this woman cooks with any other product, her family should expect a malfunction. The small print below the picture of a pot states that this product is “foolproof.” In the context of the advertisement, this delivers the message that making this product is so easy even she can do it. This advertisement turns women into machines and this product is the best fuel to make them perform at their optimum level.

Food advertisements tell women that it is their duty to feed their families and keep them happy, and this message has not changed from the 1950s and 1960s to the 2000s. Women are expected to not only feed their families but also to do this effortlessly and flawlessly.

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95 Success, “Dinner where the only glitch” advertisement, *Good Housekeeping*, March 2013, 176.
The final duty food advertisements assign to women is that of motherhood. Not just being a good mother, which is tied to the second theme of satisfying your family, but that becoming a mother is fulfilling and is a woman’s destiny. Quaker Oats’s advertisement for quick oats shows a young boy holding a spoon and looking very excited because of the bowl of oatmeal that his mother just placed in front of him (Image 7). The mother is leaning down to place this breakfast bowl in front of her son and also smiling. Her beaming smile as she mothers her child is indicative of the role she fills.
This kind of happiness cannot be purchased. Only by becoming a mother can a woman experience this kind of joy while serving someone breakfast.

Image 8: Advertisement for Campbell’s Soup, 2011.

Picking up this same theme developed in the Quaker Oats advertisement, a Campbell’s Soup advertisement for tomato soup and Goldfish Crackers states, “Some
combinations were just meant to be” (Image 8). Directly above this statement is an image of a mother and daughter joyously hugging each other, and below the statement is a picture of Goldfish Crackers falling into tomato soup. The two images mirror each other in such a similar way that it is difficult to tell what is being sold: the food or motherhood. Just as the little girl falls into her mother’s arms for a hug, the crackers fall into the soup. Just as the soup provides the perfect liquid cushion to fall into, the mother provides the perfect person to hug. The combination of Goldfish Crackers and Campbell’s Tomato Soup is meant to be. Similarly, the combination of mother and child is meant to be. Motherhood is made to seem as though it is no longer an optional life decision. Whether a woman wants to, becoming a mother is her fate.

Food advertisements outline and discuss three main responsibilities of women. The first is the enduring task of finding, pleasing, and keeping a husband. Second, it is up to the woman to satisfy and feed her family. Finally, food advertisements tell women that they are destined to become mothers, and that this will be the most gratifying job. These three tasks are assigned to women regardless of the time period the food advertisement originates. Food advertisements in the 2000s deliver the same messages about a woman’s place that have been delivered since the 1950s. These advertisements reinforce not only gender roles but also a patriarchal society. By constantly portraying women in service and background positions, food advertisements tell women that they should be content in those positions and to not strive for anything different. Becoming a mother, serving your

husband and family, and making other people happy is a woman’s lot in life whether she agrees.

USE YOUR BRAIN

In this section, I discuss the pervasive theme of becoming a smart, modern woman found in food advertisements. There are two main messages in food advertisements within this theme; the first is that cooking is too hard and so risky that it is not enjoyable. Secondly, food advertisements promote the message that women should not bake anything; instead they should buy it premade.
In the previous section the assigned tasks given to women by food advertisements were discussed. One of the tasks is to cook and to feed your family. However, food advertisements also tell women that cooking is not fun and that a smart woman avoids it.
These messages seem to be quite contradictory, but no one ever said being a woman was easy. In a Bakers of America advertisement for pie the message that cooking is not enjoyable is at the forefront (Image 9). Below the words “Why drudge away your day like this” is an image of a woman pitting cherries.\(^97\) This woman not only looks bored, but also she appears to be daydreaming of a better way to spend her day. Below that image is a picture of a slice of pie with “when bakers bake such luscious pie as this.”\(^98\) This advertisement tells women that not only can the Bakers of America bake a better pie, but also that a smart woman would not waste her precious time baking from scratch. In the text below the images, the advertisement asks women, “[I]s it worth the time ... is it worth the trouble ... is it worth the risk of failure?”\(^99\) A woman’s time is better spent doing other household chores. This advertisement places a value to a woman’s time, turning it into something that can be misused and exploited.


\(^{98}\) Bakers of America, “Why Drudge,” 98.

The advertisement also makes it clear that there are two different makers of pie: the professional baker and the woman. The professional baker can produce perfect pies with flaky crusts and scrumptious fruit filling. The woman can try to prepare a pie, but if she does, she risks culinary disappointment and wastes her time. Doing something as risky as baking a pie cannot possibly be enjoyable.

Another advertisement showcasing that cooking is too hard and too risky is from Swanson Broth. This advertisement states that women should “use the broth cooks trust most ... because this meal doesn’t come with a do-over” (Image 10).100 Again this advertisement draws a distinction between women and professional cooks. Women should trust the brand that the professionals use, not just any old brand of broth. This language makes it clear to women that although it is their duty to cook for their families,

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they are not professionals. Additionally, women should not trust their own opinions or learned tips from family members. They only person a woman should listen to is the advertisement and the experts.

The Swanson advertisement also tells women that if they ruin dinner, which is bound to happen if they do not use this broth, they do not get any second chances. There will be no “do-over.” The amount of pressure imposed on women and their culinary creations in this advertisement makes it nearly impossible to conceive dinner without this product. Not only would it be stupid of a woman to not use this broth, since it is expertly approved, but also it would be awfully precarious as she would be walking a fine line between an acceptable dinner and a ruined one.

Alternatively, Swanson’s advertisement can be read as providing a time saving service for women. Instead of having to “do-over” dinner or attempt another meal, women can simply use Swanson and not waste their time. This advertisement can be read as providing women with a product to take back the control of their time.
The message that cooking is too hard and not enjoyable is not as prevalent in the 2000s as it was in the 1950s and 1960s, but it still lingers. After decades of being told this message through advertising, perhaps advertisers no longer saw the need to push this message as virulently. Additionally, the 2000s has seen a renewed interest in not only cooking, but also in the origin and production of the food. With movements, such as the Slow Food Movement, “localvore,” and the popularity of buying organic, the renewed interest in food and cooking could also be a reason that food advertisements do not push the message that cooking is too hard and not enjoyable. Food industries are already demonized for separating people from their food source, so perhaps also pushing the message the cooking is too hard is too risky in the 2000s.
The second message sent to women is that to be a smart and modern woman, she must buy her food, not make it herself. The advertisement for Bakers of America above demonstrates this message (Image 11). A woman is shown putting the finishing touches on her pie, and beside her is a text bubble belonging to an unknown person who says, “Whoa there, lady! Be modern … buy it baked!” This advertisement tells women that modernity does not allow for wasted time, wasted effort, and homemade goods. The woman will never be able to create a pie as well as the experts of Bakers of America, so why even attempt to.

Another Bakers of America advertisement that drives home the message that women should buy and not make states, “A smart little girl like you ought to buy ‘em

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baked” (Image 12). The wording of this advertisement belittles a woman, as if she is a naïve, ignorant person who must be told what to do and looked after. A smart woman would never bake homemade cupcakes when she could simply purchase them instead. The advertisement goes on to tell women to “think of all the things [they would] rather do than stay home baking cupcakes.” A smart woman would recognize that her time is better spent out of the kitchen.


This message of how to be a smart, modern woman is geared toward the amount of time and effort it takes for a woman to complete her duty of feeding her family.

102 Bakers of America, “Psst” advertisement, Good Housekeeping, September 1950, 171.
103 Bakers of America, “Psst.”
Campbell’s Soup, in the advertisement above is trying to sell their product, a can of chunky soup, by telling a woman how fast she will be able to feed her husband (Image 13). The advertisement tells women to “give [their] meat and potatoes guy a meat and potatoes dinner.” This language harkens back to earlier discussions about a woman’s duty to please her man. A woman is expected to “give” and constantly search for ways to please her husband. This advertisement also has a sexual reading, telling women to give their men what they not only want, but also need. The woman is not important or valued beyond what she can provide, especially for the man in her life. Finally, the advertisement states that women can present this meal to their husbands, using only four minutes of their time and about four dollars. For such little time and effort a woman can fulfill her role. This dinner option makes such good sense, according to the advertisement, that any smart woman would choose it.

Food advertisements tell women how they can be smarter and more modern by showing how cooking is not only too difficult for a woman to do well, but also how cooking is far too risky to be enjoyable. Second, food advertisements show women that buying food products instead of making the food themselves is the smarter and superior option. These messages have remained the same throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s. However, the imagery has drastically changed. Food advertisements in the 2000s do not often show the bewildered woman who is common in the advertisements of the 1950s and 60s. Additionally, food advertisements in the 2000s often focus on the amount of

105 Campbell’s, “Give your Meat and Potatoes.”
time it will take to prepare the food or how much time it will save a woman in the kitchen. Purchasing the time-saving product is the smart, modern choice.

**SEXUAL AND BEAUTIFUL**

This third section will describe the messages about sexualization and body image that are present within food advertisements. The first message is that it is a woman’s responsibility to sell herself. She must become sexier, flawless, spunky, charming, and interesting to find a man. Second, women are constantly told that they need to lose weight. Women need to lose weight to be healthy, to be beautiful, to have more energy, to find a man, and to finally be happy. The body that any woman has is not good enough and can always be improved on. These two messages are pervasive throughout all three time periods, 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s. Third, food advertisements show a woman and her body as highly sexual. While this message of sexualization is prevalent throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s, the sexualization message is especially potent in advertisements of the 2000s. Women are shown as sexual beings, and this sexuality objectifies them, making them less than human. Food advertisements tell women that they are not charismatic enough, not small enough, and innately sexual. They should be happy with the attention they receive from society and men, and that it is their duty to fix their imperfections. A small amount of historical analysis will follow each theme. However, the majority of this analysis will be found in chapter five. Food advertisements tell women to make themselves appealing for the male gaze because “to be born a woman
has been to be born within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men."

This self-improvement is not reserved for just a woman’s physical appearance. Her behavior and personality are also scrutinized and in need of improvement.

Displaying this theme is an advertisement by 7UP (Image 14). In this advertisement a young woman and a young man are on a date. The woman is wearing a

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strapless, full, white gown. The man is wearing a white-and-black suit with a black bowtie. The way the two people are dressed in the advertisement alludes to an event, such as prom night. While the man sits on a bench, the woman appears to be in the middle of sitting down or standing up. Behind them is a cartoonish drawing of an outdoor setting, and in the sky is a winking moon. The man is looking up at the woman with an adoring smile on his face, and the woman looks out in the distance with a rather stiff smile on her face. She seems to be very conscious of how she is behaving on this date. However, the man appears carefree and relaxed. Underneath this image the advertisement tells women that “the brightest thing a girl can do on any date is to keep sparkling.” A woman must be constantly aware of how she presents herself and how she acts while she is on a date. She must worry about pleasing the man who took her out, because, as discussed earlier, pleasing a man is her lifelong duty. She must present a perfect version of herself because dating is not something to take lightly. The pressure put on a date is evident in the imagery, as she stands ambiguously next to a seat that appears too small to contain her big, white dress. She is not just out on a date; she is out to sell herself.

In a Niblets advertisement for canned corn, both the original sweet corn and “Mexicorn” are displayed under the title “feast or fiesta” (Image 15). In the

\[\text{Image 15: Advertisement for Niblets, 1952.}\]

\[\text{Niblets Brand, “Feast or Fiesta,” advertisement, Ladies Home Journal, November 1952, 20.}\]
advertisement, a larger-than-life, green man dressed in foliage holds his hands out with
two dining options. The right hand holds a pilgrim’s hat with plain corn on the cob on the
brim, and the left hand holds a colorful sombrero with yellow corn, green peppers, and
red peppers on the brim. In front of the large, green man stand two women, much smaller
than the man. The woman closest to the viewer is assumed to be the everyday American
housewife, wearing a red dress in the 1950s style and an apron, and her hair up in a classy
twist. The put together appearance of the white women sends the message that women
should always look their best. A woman’s appearance needs to be constantly maintained
because it is meant to distinguish her from other women, such as the Mexican woman in
the advertisement, and it is meant to be something for the male gaze. A woman must
always look her best because she is a consumable image. This is not to say that women
cannot or do not maintain their appearance for themselves, but the media tells women
that their appearance it meant to please others, not themselves. Beside the white
American housewife is a Mexican woman, who is dressed in a “traditional” embroidered
dress, black strappy heels, plenty of jewelry, and her hair in two long braids. While the
American housewife is dressed very modestly, the Mexican woman has the two cap-
sleeves of her dress falling off her shoulders, revealing her chest and one shoulder. The
differences between how the two women are dressed alludes to differences between how
the two women are viewed: the white American woman is portrayed as classy, modest,
and modern, while the Mexican woman is portrayed as sexual, traditional, and savage.
Although the American housewife reaches for the food on the sombrero, the imagery makes it very clear which one of the women is the respectable one.

Crystal Light continues this message that woman must sell themselves with their advertisement for Crystal Light “Mocktails” (Image 16). However, this advertisement takes this message several steps farther. The advertisement states that with this product women can “bring on the wardrobe malfunction.”\textsuperscript{109} The use of the phrase “wardrobe malfunction” is a pop culture reference to Janet Jackson’s Super Bowl performance in 2004. During that performance Justin Timberlake tore off an outer layer of Janet Jackson’s bra. However, the inner layer also came off, revealing her breast on live, national television. A woman’s body is so heavily sexualized that even showing a breast for a few seconds created a massive media scandal. There are several problems with this advertisement. First, it sets up a dichotomy between who can reveal one’s body and who cannot. Having only consumed a mere five calories per drink, women can feel free to not be embarrassed if their bodies are exposed while they are outdoors. This advertisement insinuates that women who have consumed more than five calories and are not consciously watching their calorie intake should feel ashamed if their bodies are revealed. Second, it perpetuates the idea that a woman’s body is overtly sexual. A woman’s body is meant to be covered up, because if it is shown, it will cause an attention-grabbing incident. Finally, it reinforces the idea that thin is the only pretty and acceptable option. Only a thin woman’s body can be exposed without embarrassment. Only a socially-deemed thin woman can feel carefree enough not to worry about a “wardrobe malfunction.” Beyond that, the advertisement makes it clear that consuming anything more than five calories per drink will lead to guilt or fatness. The amount of calories a

woman consumes is directly tied to how she should feel about herself. As if women did not already understand that only being thin is acceptable, the advertisement ends by telling women to “stay light.”

Food advertisements tell women that they have so much to worry about, so much to improve on, and so much to be thinking about. A woman cannot simply be herself and

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110 Crystal Light, “Wardrobe Malfunction.”
love herself for whom she already is. She must position herself correctly, remember to
smile, watch her calories, be perfectly groomed, keep him interested, be funny, be dainty,
and be feminine. Imperfections are something to constantly strive to fix, because you
never know when you will have to attract and to please a man.

The second message food advertisements deliver to women is that they need to
lose weight. Diet Delight’s advertisement for canned fruit shows a half-woman, half-can
standing on a scale and looking down at it with an anxious, hopeful expression (Image
17). This woman is not just a woman. She is constructed out of the food she eats. The
image of a woman with part of her body replaced with a can of fruit is especially
dehumanizing. No longer just a human, she is defined by her food choices, so much so
that those choices occupy the most space on her body.
Additionally, the food she eats is not a secret. This mirrors the saying “you are what you eat.” A woman’s body is not her own, and her worth is not given over freely. Her worth is directly connected to her weight. Similarly, her own self-worth is directly connected to what number she will see on the scale.

Special K, in many of their food advertisements, takes the idea that a woman’s worth is linked to her weight and further develops it. This minimalist advertisement for Special K food products shows a white scale on a pink-and-white tiled background (Image 18). The color of the tile on the background of this advertisement is heavily gendered, indicating who the target audience is and which gender needs to focus on weight. This imagery mimics what a woman would see if she looked down at the
bathroom scale. At the bottom of the advertisement asks their female audience, “What will you gain when you lose?” Special K answers this question for women by putting the word “joy” on the scale instead of the weight. This advertisement promises women that if they just lose another pant size, another ten pounds, or another dress size that they will finally be happy. A woman’s happiness is directly tied to the number that appears on the scale. This message is not only false but also perpetuates the idea that a woman can never be thin enough. Her happiness, or discontent, is all in her control. The ideas of control and never being thin enough are not just offensive, but they are also dangerous. Special K is promoting indicators of eating disorders, disorders not specific to just women, but that most often occur with women. While this advertisement does not overtly promote eating disorders, it does promote symptoms of these disorders. This advertisement tells women that to be content they must occupy less space. The smaller they are, the happier they will be.

Food advertisements send women contradictory messages about weight loss and their bodies as well. Special K states that women are “so much more than a number.” However, directly below this the advertisement tells women that with this product they can “drop a jean size in two weeks” (Image 19). Women are told to be confident and happy but to never stop improving. They are told to appear “sassy” but also to change

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114 Special K, Size Sassy.”
their bodies. Society is supposed to see a confident, effortless, and flawless woman. However, the woman is expected to be silently battling to improve her imperfect body.
Food advertisements commonly tell women that their bodies are not good enough and not thin enough. Women are told to constantly be counting their calories, watching their weight, and improving themselves. However, this struggle for perfection is not one that she is supposed to share with society. This struggle is internal; it is a constant struggle for success and happiness. A woman’s worth is defined by her appearance and how much space she occupies. Food advertisements promote a society of shrinking women.

The third message food advertisements send women is that they are not only sexual beings, but also that they are sexual objects. Nonni’s advertisement for biscotti shows women as a sexual object meant to be consumed and used at a whim (Image 20). The advertisement shows a woman in a dark red, form-fitting dress seductively, holding onto a “life-size” biscotti. This advertisement is laced with thinly veiled sexual innuendos that contribute to rape culture. There are several messages being sent about women within this advertisement. First, the size similarity between the woman and the biscotti dehumanizes her, making her equal to the food. While the advertisement is supposed to be about biscotti, the equality between the woman and the food makes that distinction very hard to distinguish. Second, the advertisement describes this biscotti/woman duo as “rugged … Italian … [and easy to undress].”115 This advertisement sends the message that this woman, and by association all women, are easy--easy to undress and easy to consume. The woman pictured is portrayed as an easy sexual conquest. She will not deny your advances; after all that is what she is there for and what she wants. Finally, the

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115 Nonni, “Rugged” advertisement, Good Housekeeping, February 2009, 211.
advertisement states that their product is “individually wrapped to have when you want.”  

Another reading of the Nonni’s advertisement is that the woman is holding a biscotti that also represents a large dildo. In this reading, food, eating, and sex are interchangeable and consumable. The woman is a very sexual being toying with the idea of having sex with the large dildo in the advertisement.

This message lingers at the bottom of the advertisement and sends a very poignant message about women. Women are sexually available to have at any moment. Regardless of the woman’s own feelings and convictions, this advertisement reduces her to a sexual object. A woman’s worth is based on what she can provide sexually and how easy she is. Women are nothing more than a sexual conquest that is easily won.

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116 Nonni’s, “Rugged.”
While food advertisements show women of color in service positions, they also hypersexualize women of color and their bodies. A food advertisement for M&M’s shows six M&M’s characters sitting in a dimly lit study with their “clothes” off and posing for the camera (Image 21). There are four male M&M characters (denoted by their lack of eyelashes) who are either posed as coy, shy, or confident. Of the two female M&M’s characters, the one in the center of the advertisement lays on the floor with her legs posed openly and her “clothes” draped across her body to barely cover the physical parts that would be there if she was not an M&M. The second female M&M’s character sits on an old chair with her “clothes” draped across the arm of the chair. She has her legs
crossed, but her arms confidently placed on the arms of the chair. This female M&M’s character has glasses on, a smirk, and narrowed eyes, placing her firmly in the jezebel stereotype of a Black woman who is overly and overtly sexual and seeks to prey on white men. In this case, both female M&M’s characters are not only much more sexualized than the male characters, but they both are also not trying to hide their seduction. The anthropomorphizing of chocolate M&M’s into black men and women not only hyper-sexualizes their bodies but is also highly racist. The humanized M&M’s are available for purchase and are meant for consumption.

Further objectifying and sexualizing women, Reddi-Wip’s advertisement for their canned whipped topping shows an anthropomorphized strawberry, wearing tall black
boots and holding a whip (Image 22). In this highly sexual advertisement, the woman has been completely transformed into an edible object. This strawberry woman is shown completely “nude,” only wearing thigh-high boots and a swirl of whipped cream. Holding the whip, this strawberry woman is sexualized as a dominatrix. Above the image the advertisement states that it “feels naughty, but it’s not.”117 Being this highly sexual object is not naughty, showing women as sexual objects is not naughty, and using those objects is not naughty.


Finally, Velveeta’s advertisements for their cheese product show yet another visual method for objectifying women (Images 23 and 24). In these advertisements

women are only shown as body parts. The women in the two advertisements are cropped so that only their chests are shown. The women have no faces, no identities, and no other human features. The only important aspects about these women are their bodies. Cropping their identities away from these women not only objectifies them but also makes it very easy to forget the fact that they are human. They are not individuals with identities; they are sexual objects to be viewed and used. Furthermore, the writing on the aprons of both women, “The hottest thing in the kitchen may not be you,” and “Trust us this cook will be kissed,” tells women that not only are they sexual objects, but also the attention they receive is directly related to what they can produce. These advertisements drive home the message that women are the sums of their parts.


Food advertisements sexualize and objectify women, showing them as things to be used at a whim and gazed on. A woman’s body does not belong to just her. This message is not one that was found during my survey of 1950s and 60s food advertisements. While women were sent many other messages and dehumanized in other ways, sexual objectification is an advertising message that developed since 1962 (the end of the 1960s time period used for this thesis). There is an increasing trend of portraying women as sexual objects, and this trend is prevalent in food advertisements of the 2000s.
Black women and other women of color have historically been stereotyped and depicted as hypersexual beings who must be tamed and contained.\textsuperscript{119} A woman of color deemed as “overly sexual” poses a threat to patriarchy, because not only is patriarchy particularly beneficial to white men but also dependent on keeping women divided. Aunt Jemima, “unlike Jezebel, who represented the nightmarish consequences of lascivious black women free to tempt white men … affirmed the other side of the story, how black women behaved when under proper white control.”\textsuperscript{120} Due to the threat that women of color pose to patriarchy, the history of being positioned as hypersexual, and a highly racialized society women of color are typically shown as either a threat or a diffused threat. For example, women of color are regularly shown as a threat, either by challenging patriarchy or being put in the jezebel stereotype. Similarly, women of color are commonly shown diffused threat by assimilating into white American culture, by being put into the mammy stereotype, or by being shown as having European features. Jif’s advertisement (Image 25) for peanut butter with Omega-3 showcases this assimilation. A Black woman with pearl earrings and very straight, pulled-back hair eats peanut butter off a spoon and looks blissfully away from the viewer. Her skin tone is light, especially when compared to the way Aunt Jemima is portrayed. She has a narrow nose, almond shaped eyes, and a narrow face. These features are commonly associated


with people of European descent. Additionally, the woman in the advertisement is shown with very protruding collarbones that are not representative of the average woman. This woman is representing how Black women, and most women of color, are not only told to conform to American culture but also to make their bodies conform to the white, American standard of appearance.

Women are sent many messages about their bodies, their identities, and their sexualities through food advertisements. The first message is that a woman is never good enough and must always be attempting to better herself. Women must work to sell themselves in order to become funnier, more joyful, and more fascinating. Finding a man is not an easy task and not something that women should take lightly. Second, women are regularly told to lose weight, and that this weight loss will make them happier. Finally, food advertisements in the 2000s tell women that they are nothing more than sexual objects. This message reinforces the sexist idea that women exist to be used by men to please men.

CONCLUSION

The food advertisements surveyed displayed four main themes. First, they discussed a woman’s duty to find, please, and keep a husband, satisfy their families, and become a mother. These duties are assigned to women within food advertisements, and this assignment reciprocates the gender roles within society. Second, food advertisements

teach women how to become smart and modern. These qualities are usually gained by purchasing the food product advertised and assuming the role portrayed. Third, women are sexually objectified, and the topic of body image is discussed in a convoluted manner. Women are shown as sexually available for the taking and regularly shown in such a tightly-cropped manner that their identities are stripped from them. The topic of body image is represented in food advertisements in an often mixed way. Women are told that they should always be trying to lose weight, while also being told that they should be more confident in the appearance. Additionally, women of color are not only portrayed as hypersexual, but also as having to conform to the white, American standard of beauty. Food advertisements deliver messages about identity, how it should be constructed and the fulfillment that comes from following this outline.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will further reflect on how three aspects of postmodern feminism, discussed in chapter two, relate to the analysis of food advertisements done in chapter four. A deeper historical comparison will follow, elaborating on the changes and similarities found in food advertisements from the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s. Finally, I will end with a look back at the various barriers that I encountered during the course of this research.

APPLIED POSTMODERN FEMINISM

As discussed in chapter two, postmodern feminism was chosen as the framework of analysis for this thesis because of three main aspects. First, postmodern feminism empowers the researcher to view and to analyze images as though they were texts. This freedom allows for a more thorough analysis of imagery. Secondly, postmodern feminism acknowledges the power of language and the language of power. This theory bases the understanding of text and imagery on a belief that language is a tool of power. Finally, postmodern feminism notes the importance of including gender and race in societal analysis.

This thesis incorporated the first aspect of postmodern feminism throughout the analysis of food advertisements in chapter four. While the text was analyzed, the imagery was not only examined as a text, but also it was the focal point of analysis. I based my discussion of food advertisements on the belief that the images said just as much, if not
more, than the text. This level of analysis echoes the discussion of postmodern feminism
in the literature review in chapter two: postmodernism notes that the verbal is replaced by
the visual, and postmodern feminism notes that the visual represents a dynamic
conversation about gender and society.\textsuperscript{122} In my analysis of food advertisements, I found
this aspect to not only hold true, but also to provide a rich dialogue about gender and
gender roles.

Another aspect of postmodern feminism is that language is powerful, building on
the first characteristic discussed above. The messages sent and gleaned from imagery
have power within society. Food advertisements are just one of the ways ideas of gender
and racial superiority are normalized. As mentioned in chapter two, language has the
power to influence society, shape action and reality, and define experience and power.\textsuperscript{123}

\begin{quote}
this image—created by the women's magazines, by advertisements ... on
marriage and the family, child psychology...shapes women's lives today
and mirrors their dreams....[women's magazines are] crammed full of
food, clothing, cosmetics, furniture, and the physical bodies of young
women, but where is the world of thought and ideas, the life of the mind
and spirit? In the magazine image, women do not work except housework
and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep a man.\textsuperscript{124}
\end{quote}

Advertisements have the power to shape the lives and identities of all who come into
contact with them. For example, according to the food advertisements surveyed for this
thesis, the “standard woman” spends her life searching for a husband, pleasing him, and
trying to keep him. This “standard woman” lives to satisfy her family and become a
mother. She also constantly strives for bodily perfection and is always sexually available.

\textsuperscript{122} Scott, “Playing with Pictures,” 596; Frug, “A Postmodern Feminist Legal,” 1046.
\textsuperscript{123} Frug, “A Postmodern Legal Manifesto”; Foucault, \textit{The Archaeology of Knowledge}, 27; Keating, \textit{Power Sharing},
156.
\textsuperscript{124} Friedan, \textit{The Feminine Mystique}, 24, 27.
The “standard woman” is not a woman of color, so women of color must attempt to fit a mold that was not made for them. This idealistic “standard woman” is presented to society as normal and society supports it. The visual language within food advertisements is composed of the gendered and racial language of society. Thus, identity construction within food advertisements, and because of them, is based on and reinforces inequalities within society.

Finally, a third characteristic of postmodern feminism was incorporated throughout the analysis of the food advertisements in chapter four. This thesis focused on how gender and gender roles are portrayed in food advertisements, and what messages these advertisements send about gender roles and gender. This focus on gender is crucial to understanding how society views gender. The inclusion of gender analysis allows for a more thorough discussion of society and, when analyzing advertisements, is invaluable.

Through the use of these three tenets, this thesis sought to problematize the messages in food advertisements that have been normalized by drawing into question the way food advertisements discuss and portray gender and gender roles.

WHAT’S CHANGED?

The three aspects of postmodern feminism were the foundational knowledge that I used during my analysis of food advertisements. During this analysis, one of the driving questions was whether the messages sent about gender and gender roles have changed since the 1950s and 60s. If they have, I sought to discover how. Throughout the research
process three main themes developed in the messages about gender and gender roles: a woman’s duty, how to become a smart, modern woman, and the push to become sexual and beautiful. Within all of these themes there were many key points of historical comparison.

First, within the theme regarding a woman’s duty, the historical comparison of food advertisements revealed that gender roles are still shown just as stringently in the 2000s as they were in the 1950s and 1960s. Advertisements still show that a woman’s duty is to find, please, and keep a husband, satisfy her family, and become a mother. Women are valued based on what they can produce, such as meals and babies, and how they can gratify a man. Harkening back to the historical foundation section at the beginning of chapter four, this finding of a lack of change is not surprising. During the 1950s and 1960s political ideology combined with other events, such as WWII and the Cold War, pushed for a strong American middle class that embraced traditional family and gender roles. Similarly, during the 2000s, post-9/11, political ideology pushed traditional family values. As food advertisements are one of the tools used to push American political ideology, the absence of change in messages about gender and gender roles expected. Additionally, since the traditional family associated with the middle class is composed of white Americans, it is also expected that food advertisements would not challenge this tradition of racial exclusivity.

Within the advertisements in this theme, those in the 2000s are far more likely to be minimalistic, only having a few words or phrases on the entire advertisement. This
greatly differs from the advertisements of the 1950s and 60s, which were densely filled with long paragraphs, small print, and full recipes; this trend toward the visual echoes back to the discussion of postmodern feminism in chapter two. Postmodern feminism asserts that the verbal and written language will be replaced by visual language, and this assertion has held true throughout the analysis of food advertisements from the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s.

Secondly, in the theme discussing how to become a smart, modern woman there were several comparative notes. The idea that cooking is too hard and not enjoyable, which was present in the advertisements of the 1950s and 1960s, is still present in the 2000s. However, this idea has become less obvious and more focused on the pressure and time attached to cooking. Food advertisements in the 1950s and 60s began to place value on a woman’s time; however, a woman’s time in the 2000s has become even more commodified. Instead of telling women that cooking is too hard and will take so much time, which was common in the 1950s and 60s, food advertisements in the 2000s focus on how much time a woman can save if only she bought the product. Additionally, the idea that women should buy food products instead of making them is still as prevalent in the 2000s as it was in the 1950s and 60s. While the American middle class was typically more financially stable than those in poverty, simply being middle class did not mean a family could afford in-home service, such as maids and nannies. Similarly, the middle class, while being told that they were the bread and butter of American culture, was also told to constantly strive for more. This middle class struggle is observed in food
advertisements, as food advertisements try to offer a solution to their dilemma.
Advertising baked goods made by professional bakers and promoting the idea of buying instead of making, offered the middle class a way to have servants without having the financial status to actually have servants. Furthermore, the political ideology of the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s is to promote and enhance the American consumer base, which is largely formed by the middle class. Food advertisements encourage consumers to buy more products, contributing to American consumerism and capitalism. Many scholars now claim that our society has become a hypercapitalist society, which means that the function of every institution is to make as money as possible. This monetary gain focus of institutions does not bode well for the middle class. As more and more things become monetized (such as the push towards privatized water), the middle class will begin to dissolve and be filtered into either the upper or lower classes in society. Those in the middle class who can afford privatized water will join the more privileged of society, while those who cannot afford the water will join those in poverty.

Third, the theme of how to be sexual and beautiful also had many notable historical comparisons. The ideas that women must sell themselves, perfect themselves, and lose weight are still just as pervasive today as they were in the 1950s and 60s. However, I would argue that the message of weight loss has become even more pervasive in the 2000s. The sexual objectification of women, which was not common in the 1950s and 60s food advertisements, is dominant in the 2000s. Women are regularly shown as sexual objects, and this was obvious in the food advertisements of the 2000s.
Additionally, women of color are still portrayed as hypersexual beings who must be controlled or avoided. Women of color in the 2000s have been portrayed as not only having to assimilate into white American culture but also having to make their bodies fit the white American standards of beauty. This is not very represented in food advertisements of the 1950s and 60s.

Overall, food advertisements may have changed their imagery and may have rid themselves of the paragraphs of text, but they have not rid themselves of the gendered and racial messages. The trend to decrease the amount of text on food advertisements and to increase the amount of imagery in the advertisements aligns with the postmodern belief that the visual will replace the verbal. The increase in the visual can perhaps be explained by the postmodern use of polysemy. Imagery is more polysemic than written language and can contain and portray many more meanings than a phrase can. The multiplicity of meanings and the trend toward the visual show how food advertisements from the 1950s to the 2000s have been influenced by postmodernism.

BARRIERS

There is one main barrier that I encountered during the course of this research. Unrealistic body images in advertising are often cited as contributing to the development and maintenance of eating disorders. However, due to the mental and emotional aspects that lead to the development of these disorders it would be difficult to make this case. Advertisements do not overtly support and promote eating disorders. They do, however,
promote indicators and symptoms of these disorders, such as needing permission to eat, feeling guilty for eating, regretting eating, never feeling thin enough, and that weight is a secret struggle.

CONCLUSION

Overall, postmodern feminism was utilized throughout the analysis of food advertisements from the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s. Three aspects of this theory provided both foundational knowledge and a framework of analysis. Additionally, many of the messages in food advertisements of the 1950s and 60s carried over to advertisements of the 2000s. There are some historical differences between the messages sent. However, these historical differences have not been for the better.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis analyzed food advertisements from the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s to discover what messages they send about gender and gender roles, and if these messages have changed throughout time. The analysis of gender and gender roles would not have been complete without the inclusion of race, ethnicity, and culture as people of color, especially women of color, are commonly portrayed differently than white people. Thus, any analysis of gender and gender roles that did not acknowledge these differences would be lacking a critical component. Advertisements show a heavily gendered and racial representation of people and roles, and this representation is generally supported by American society. This thesis problematized what is normalized with the intention of revealing that food advertisements, as passive as they may appear, are harbingers of oppression and inequalities.

Postmodern feminism acknowledges the power of language, the importance of gender analysis, and the conversation in images, making it suitable to examine advertisements. While there is a significant amount of work done on food advertisements, advertisements in general, and women, a gap still remains. Work narrowly focusing on the historical comparison of food advertisements and the messages about gender and gender roles they send was absent. This thesis attempted to fill that gap by showing how food advertisements not only deliver gendered messages, but also that these messages have not changed throughout time.
From over 300 food advertisements surveyed and analyzed, four main themes emerged. First, messages about a woman’s duty appear in many advertisements. Women are told that fulfillment comes from finding, pleasing, and keeping a man, satisfying their families, and becoming mothers. Second, advertisements show women how they can become smart, modern women. Third, advertisements regularly tell women to sell themselves and send negative messages about body image. Additionally, women of color are hypersexualized and often shown in background positions.

Historically, these messages have not changed much at all. Food advertisements in the 2000s send the same messages as those of the 1950s and 60s. This lack of change in the messages in food advertisements corresponds to the political ideology and American society of the 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s. The political ideology placed highly value on the traditional American family and the middle class. Food advertisements are one mechanism within American society that supports and pushes the political ideology of the time. Additionally, the middle class was highly valued and strived for as it was said to be the antidote to communism, the savior of American culture, and a social status to land after pulling yourself up from your boot straps. However, this American middle class was status reserved for white Americans, as people of color were both excluded from this status and told to strive for it. Food advertisements flowed with the tide of American political ideology.

American culture is becoming increasingly more technology based, and technologically advanced. As such, paper magazines are on a downward trend of
influence and use. While paper magazines will not completely disappear from society and will not completely lose their influence, they will be replaced by digital versions. Many magazines already have digital magazine subscriptions and smart phone applications, providing people with an even more accessible version of the same magazine. Instead of carrying around a paper magazine, a person can now always have the digital version on their phone or computer. Similarly, television is not the only visual method of advertising anymore. Jean Kilbourne, in her *Killing Us Softly* video series, discusses how prevalent advertising is in the present day society. Digital billboards, product placement in shows and movies, advertisements on websites, and advertisements sent through email all contribute to the abundance of advertising within society. The abundance of advertising in today’s society means that the messages about women and gender roles discussed throughout this thesis are even more available and even more influential. In today’s digital and global age, postmodernism is still a viable method for analyzing text, images, and their messages and influence. As society becomes even more digital and global, images and text become an even more complex matrix of symbols and meanings. Postmodernism’s recognition of the power of language and the polysemic nature of everything makes it well suited to be applied to a digital age.

Future research should continue to examine the messages sent about gender and gender roles that commonly go unnoticed. Within the food advertisements I surveyed another prominent theme that emerged was the idea of separating people from their food, both the source and basic knowledge about it. This topic did not fit into my narrow scope
for this thesis but should be analyzed. Similarly, messages about race, ethnicity, and culture should continue to be examined as well. This thesis primarily focused on gender and gender roles. However, a discussion on those topics would have been severely lacking without the inclusion of race because white women and women of color are not only portrayed differently but also sent different messages as well. Research should continue to problematize that which has been normalized.

The study of food advertisements is crucial to understanding society, as society and advertisements often mirror each other. The messages sent by food advertisements within women’s magazines contribute to identity creation, leaving women with little else but phallocentric, racialized building blocks. By promising women fulfillment, joy, beauty, and feminine success, food advertisements make choosing any other identity seem innately wrong:

I love the kids and Bob and my home. There's no problem you can even put a name to. But I'm desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality. I'm the server of food and a putter-on of pants and a bedmaker, somebody who can be called on when you want something. But who am I?\(^{125}\)

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SECONDARY


