

## Chapter Three

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### **Branding Femininity: The Language and Imagery of Television Advertisements**

Advertisements award us immortality and world-fame for half a minute....We all are *urboshi*<sup>1</sup> for one night and celebrity for half a minute (Humayun Azad 1999, p.42).

The advertisements in the present chapter have been taken as cases from various Bangladeshi and Australian channels to compare the constructions of femininity that exist in both societies. These case studies will present the world of femininity constructed by advertising through an understanding of gender in terms of male/female differences. Food, clothing, technology and beauty products commonly rely on powerful narratives of gender and femininity that circulate in the respective cultures. We shall see how femininity is represented through modes of sexual deference, sensuality, mothering, housewifery, cleanliness, and compassion, females' attachment to nature, nurturing and family responsibilities and patriarchy in advertisements. Powerful messages of dependency, servility and propriety are attached to femininity in television commercials.

The advertisements will be categorised according to modes of femininity that advertising both produces and reproduces. These modes of femininity will be analysed by reading the advertisements themselves from a point of view informed by feminist media theories in order to assess the coherence of these modes both in Bangladesh and Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> *Urboshi* or *Urvasi* is the name of an *apsaras* or *heavenly nymph* referred to in RgVedda V. 41,19. (Hindu Myth) (Stutley and Margaret 1977, P. 313).

## 2.1 All the “*Urvashies*” and “*Venuses*” in Commercials: Reflecting Gender through ‘Male-Gazing’

“Inside every woman, there is a goddess waiting to be discovered” (Venus battery operated razor – Australia)<sup>2</sup>. or “She is a dream queen”- (*Keya Super Beauty Soap*- Bangladesh): these slogans form the mirage of an imaginary world, where a woman is praised as a “Goddess” for her bodily beauty. She becomes here an ‘object’ – an object to be looked at, appraised and desired. The concept of beauty varies from culture to culture. However, from top to bottom, the female body is an ‘object of sight’ targeted by advertisers for beautification. Both in Australia and in Bangladesh, we watch television commercials where women use make up to change their body colour, use cream to hide wrinkles and acne, use shampoo or hair oil for long strong hair. These make men want to look at women and women want to be looked at, the commercials suggest.

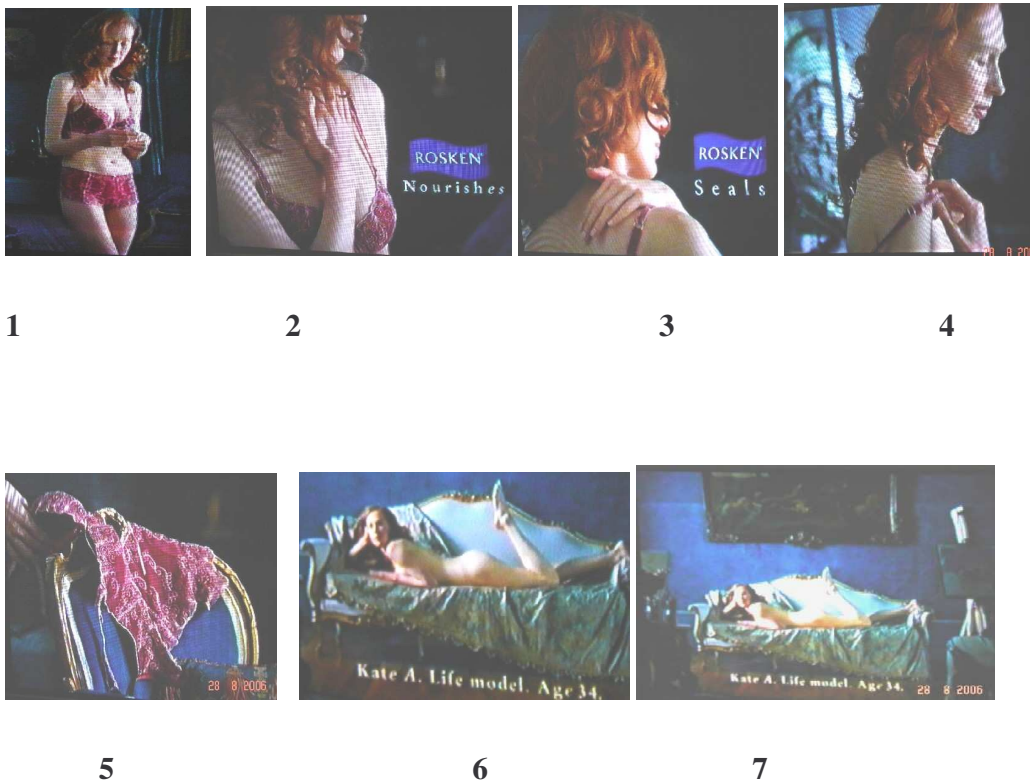
Laura Mulvey writes that women are ‘to be looked at’ (Mulvey 1975 in Bartkowski 2005, p. 299). The same connotation is uttered in the writings of Naomi Wolf; “The beauty myth tells a story: The quality called “beauty” objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it” (Wolf 1991 p. 12). Women are encouraged to buy cosmetics, both to fulfil male desire and because of the impact of mass advertising on television by the cosmetic industries.

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<sup>2</sup>. As Germaine Greer writes that “Women with “too much” (i.e.any) body hair are expected to struggle daily with depilatories of all kinds in order to appear hairless” (Greer 1999, p. 20).

Furthermore, sexual content, as well as the ways that women are sexualised, in the following group of advertisements prove that women's identity is always subject to the need for women to engage in body beautification and to conform to narratives of sexual desirability. Women are positioned as objects of both the male and female gaze. Close readings of advertisements will show how women take up this double position.

**Figure 1: Rosken moisturiser (Aus)**



This Australian advertisement is for Roskin moisturiser in which the female model, identified as ‘Kate A., age 34’, is a life model—a model who poses nude for artists. According to the script, she needs to have beautiful skin because of her job. She uses Roskin, a product that ‘seals moisture for twenty four hours’. She removes her underwear while two male painters

begin to paint. However, these two men do not appear in front of camera, as only their hands are revealed as they are working.

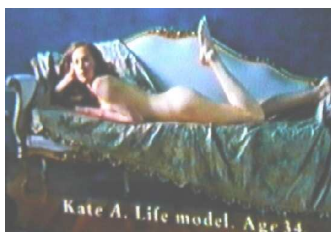
John Berger's notion "men act, women appear" and Laura Mulvey's idea of "Woman as image, man as bearer of the look" are illustrated here. Here the woman 'appears' in several senses: first of all, she is to be looked at because she is an object of beauty; secondly she is both the painters' model as well as the skin cream company's spokes model. As such, she is positioned as overtly subject to the male gaze – both to the 'painters' in the advertisement; but also to the 'male gaze' of television viewers. Whether male or female, the viewer exercises a male gaze because the woman is looked at. Mulvey writes that a woman performs within two narratives, "the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film" (Mulvey 1975 in Bartkowski and Kolmal 2005, p. 299). The model thus becomes the object of the male gaze. The woman in the commercial is reduced to an image.

This Roskin advertisement strongly and overtly draws upon the conventions of art-history/and oil painting of nudes. Nudity is important here in placing the woman within the gaze. According to Berger, nude paintings expose a particular hypocrisy: "You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting *vanity*, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure" (Berger 1972, p. 51). The mirror reflects the woman's naked body and beauty back at her, as if she is its consumer and producer.

Males thus enjoy nude images but do not take any responsibility for this nudity. So, strategically, advertisers make the woman in the Roskin commercial say that she is posing nude for her job, as if she is an active subject rather than the passive object of the male gaze. Here we can see the gap between the body act of the female model (nudity which bears the sexual content) and speech (she is acting for herself, not for male-gaze). This gap, to Butler, is 'chiasmus', where the female model fails to understand that through the gap between the body act and speech (the language of the script) that she is an object of the male gaze.

In this way, we see women occupying a viewing position in which they must imagine themselves as men see them. As Berger suggests, "One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at ... Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (ibid, p. 47).

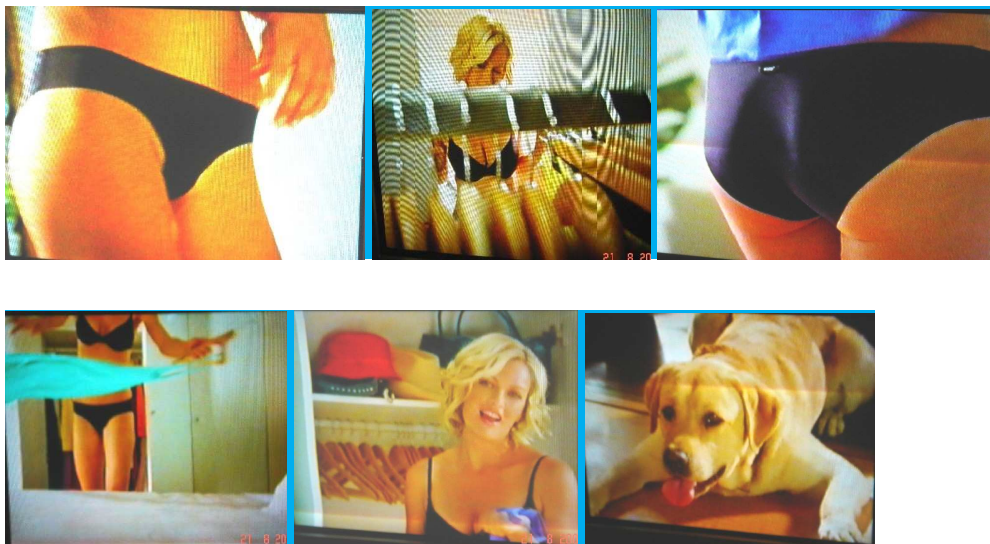
**Figure 2: Rosken moisturiser (Aus)**



Positioning of the female body is an important mode of constructing women as objects. The image above (from the same advertisement) can be explained by Goffman's contention. Goffman's reading is that women posed lying on the floor, or in bed bending their legs, act as though the relevant body parts were being employed in a disassociated or innocent way. But this dissociates of the part from the whole. So, women's consciousness of being sexualised, or

‘engaging’ in the game, is neutralised. This sets up a powerful association between the female body and sexuality (Goffman 1979, p. 68). The image thus contains a sexual narrative. The provocative pose insists that the woman is employing a form of sexual invitation and that this is done knowingly. Women, then, come to be read as complicit in their own objectification.

**Figure 3: Bonds underwear (Aus)**



In a commercial for Bonds underwear, the white, slender bikini clad Sarah O’Hare (former ‘supermodel’ and wife of media magnate Lachlan Murdoch) cannot make up her mind which garment she should wear. As she reaches for a dress in the closet, the camera focuses on her body which is covered only with a skimpy Bonds bra and briefs. The camera focuses on her front and back side, on her smooth buttock unmarked by tan lines, her smooth body and stylish stance. Interestingly, only her pet dog watches her, but its tongue flops out as if it wants to taste her. Its eyes go up and down with despair (as if it cannot do anything). Here the

dog appears as a symbol for a man. The above idea illustrates that the male gaze does not necessarily have to mean a man's eyes in any literal sense but rather represents a (hetero) sexually objectifying gaze.

Further, animals can symbolize men and can be bearers of the male gaze. In one of the advertisements for "Optus 3G", a giraffe, after getting lost, raises up his neck to the room of an apartment building and asks a woman, "Could you please tell me where I am?" The woman is dressing, and is wearing only underwear. The woman screams, seeing the giraffe at the window and run out of the room crossing her hand over her breasts. This is the same reaction a woman would have if it was a man watching her while she dressed. After hearing the scream, the giraffe says "Oh sorry, no I'm not really like that, honest." This is another advertisement in which an animal, is "the bearer of the look" standing in for an actual man.

The following advertisement for *Tibbet* beauty care soap in Bangladesh also carries the connotation of the objectifying gaze:

### **Jingle Text**

I spread love on my body and

I draw love in my mind

Flowers say I want your fragrance

Sun says I want gloss [of skin]

Green leaves want liveliness [of skin] and

Butterflies want beauty

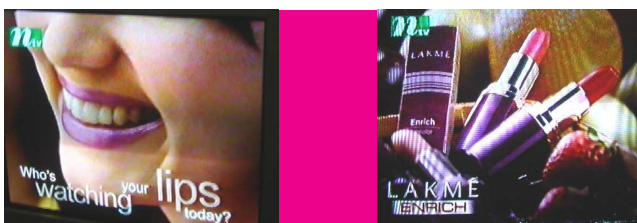
**Figure 4: Tibbet soap (BD)**



The jingle text for this advertisement demonstrates that the female model knows that she is being looked at both by her male partner as well as viewers of the television. In the advertisement, she is unclothed which is a sexual signifier (Godrej 2006, p.6). This is reminiscent of ‘the nude’ theme discussed by Berger (Berger 1972, p. 47). Secondly, as she is taking a shower, the jingle text “I spread love on my body” can be associated with sexual touching. From the background, the male directors and crew produce her as a sexual object to be looked at.

The same contention can be found for the advertisement for Lakme lipstick in Bangladesh.

**Figure 5: Lakme lipstick (BD)**



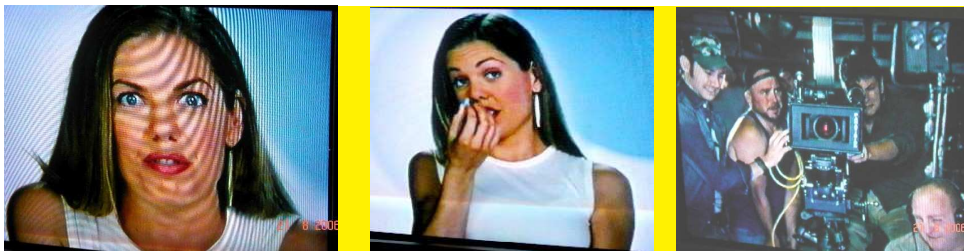
“Who’s watching your lips today” is the motto of Lakme Lipstick, where the closed lips of the model have been broadcast on the television screen in a stadium. Here, the male is the



technician behind the television camera and the audience. The female model automatically comes into the (male) viewing position. Thus women are always supposed to imagine themselves as men see them.

In Australia, the advertisement for Di Flucan One capsule, a treatment for vaginal thrush, also can be explained both by the concept of the male gaze and John Berger's theory that men act and women appear.

**Figure 6: Di Flucan One (Aus)**



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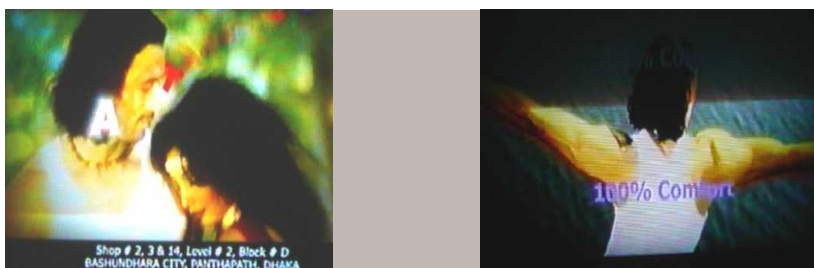
In this advertisement, the female performer says that she is doing a treatment for vaginal thrush on television in front of the whole male crew. The crew are embarrassed, because issues associated with women's sexual health are often related symbolically to pollution.

However, she then takes a Di Flucan One capsule with a glass of water, deactivating their potential embarrassment.

We can get three readings here. Firstly, the ‘male gaze’: both the crew and the viewers are gazing at her. Four male crew members behind the camera and viewers on television look at her, and the female model watches herself being looked at. Thus she turns herself into an object. Secondly, the commercial represents all technicians as male while the performer is female, to be looked at, passively bearing male desire. Thirdly, there is a psychoanalytic reading, as in the number four photograph we see the symbol of laughing red lips, which might be compared to healthy vaginal lips. Irigaray has demonstrated that a woman touches herself all the time as her genitals are formed of two lips that are in continuous contact and caress each other (Irigaray 1977 in Bartkwocki and Kolmar 2005, p. 317). The vaginal lips and the woman’s mouth are conflated in the commercial which symbolically reduces the woman to her sexual organ.

Another example of John Berger’s men act/women appear theory is the ATN collection in Bangladesh.

**Figure 7: ATN Collection (clothing) (BD)**



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In one of the advertisements for the ATN collection, the jingle text with its female voiceover states: “*Khuji Tomake*” (I am looking for you). This means the female model is looking for the male model. The male model works comfortably in his ATN singlet. The female model then appears and becomes happy after hugging him (photo 1). Here, ‘he’ is the subject and ‘she’ is the object of this advertisement and achievement of his romantic goal. This advertisement shows that ‘man acts and woman appears’, because she figures as the achievement of his romantic goal.

The following advertisement also demonstrates this concept.

**Figure 8: Nasir glass (BD)**



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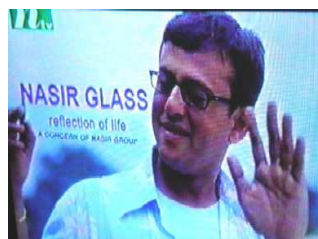
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In the above advertisements for *Nasir Glass* we find that the man is a successful architect and a success in life. The role of the female in this advertisement seems to be to shore up his

masculinity, and to figure as the measure of his status and success. The woman is his all time companion, appearing almost everywhere. In this commercial, “masculinity” is being sold, where the man is active and the woman is passive. The motto of Nasir Glass is “reflection of life” which reflects on the successful life of the man. However, the meaning of mirror (or glass) is used in commercials for reflecting women’s beauty and can convey multifarious meanings.

## 2.2 Mirrors/Vanity: Looking through the Glass

John Berger has suggested that the mirror was often used hypocritically as a symbol of the vanity of women undermining the notion that women are valued in patriarchal terms for their beauty (Berger 1972, p. 51). These advertisements illustrate Berger’s contention that women are condemned for their ‘vanity’ even as they are objectified, usually through the significations of mirrors. The result is a contradictory edict requiring women to be delicately beautiful yet powerfully attractive; ‘naturally’ beautiful yet ‘vain’.

The following advertisements show Berger’s contention clearly.

**Figure 9: shampoo (BD)**



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In this advertisement for shampoo (Bangladesh), a woman ‘prepares’ for her lover by bathing and washing her hair. In the last frame (image number three) the man is positioned as viewing the woman as the spectators do so, the gaze is literally male. An understanding of the phallogocentric manifestation of the Mirror Image is needed here to unpack the content of this commercial. Lacan describes the mirror-moment which predates language as important because it “constitutes the matrix of the imagery, of recognition/misrecognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the “I”, of subjectivity” (Mulvey 1975, in Bartkowsky and Kolmer 2005, p.298). This recognition positions the “I” as separate from the (m) other and is a primary stage of selfhood: the infant recognizes itself as a separate object, begins to position the mother (and, by extension, all women) as other. Although selfhood begins in the mirror stage with the imaginary body, it is not solidified until one enters the symbolic order, symbolised by the phallus. Lacan shows that the figure of non-being has to be woman (Derrida 1987, p.439) because woman is ‘the thing’ and is designated *a priori* as the castrated Other, as the site of the lack of the penis (Feder et al. 1997, pp. 182-83). Derrida admits Lacan’s insight that “man” is the creature of fiction in the sense that man’s reality is given by a symbolic order, in which the phallus is the transcendental signifier and thus the truth of the Being (man). Thus, non-being, as the opposite of being, can be read as a woman. Derrida wrote: “This is not a subject, but a hole, the lack of the basis of which the subject is constituted” (Derrida 1987, p.437). The phallus is the signifier which leads us to understand social order through language (which is a language of patriarchy). Lacan describes women as “being”, as opposed to having the phallus. The woman’s, lack of the phallus means she can gain subjectivity only through being desired by men (Alsop et al 2002, pp.51-53).

**Figure 10: Ligion cosmetic (BD)**



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The above advertisement (Figure 10) can be read from this theoretical point of view. However, the images can also be analysed using Goffman's theory. The Bangladeshi advertisement for a skin cream shows a woman touching her face in front of the mirror. Goffman illustrates that self-touching represents narcissism and conveys the sense that one's body is a delicate and precious thing (Goffman 1979 p. 31). Rishar Hoggard writes in the foreword of Goffman's book, quoting Tom Stoppard, that this seems to be narcissistic at first glance. However, another reading is that "women are being intimately caressed by someone out of shot" (Goffman 1979 pp. vii-viii). That means that the woman touching her own body is symbolically connected to the male desire to possess and caress the desirable female body.

Feminist theorists have suggested alternative significations for mirrors and their reflections of femininity and self identity. Irigaray uses the term *speculum* (the concave mirror - a medical instrument often used in vaginal examinations) to understand the nature of western philosophy and psychoanalysis. She advocates a different type of looking through the mirror. Toril Moi explains that the metaphor of the *speculum* "suggests not only the mirror image that comes from the visual penetration of the *speculum* inside the vagina," but also "the necessity of

postulating a subject that is capable of reflecting on its own being” (Moi 1985 cited in Tong 1997, p. 227).” Julia Kristeva gives a deeper meaning of the mirror: “it is a pool whose tranquil surface covers semiotic turbulence and continual transgressions (Kristeva in Hendricks 1997, p.1). Kristeva's looking-glass reflects "the shimmering of signs set on the instability of water” (ibid, p.1). Kristeva contends that heterogeneity and identity are therefore unstable, covered over by an image of wholeness. However, this instability allows for multiple readings of feminine identities.

Feminist readings postulate positive possibilities for decoding mirror meanings. However, following Hoggard and Berger, this study suggests that mirror is not the signifier of vanity of women but it engages a woman to be beautiful and an object of the male gaze.

### **2.3 Competition between/among women**

In advertising discourses, women are often represented as being engaged in competition among themselves.

“Lux brings out the star in you” – this is the message of Lux soap products. The star of Lux Aqua Sparkle advertisement (Figure 12) is Aishwarya Rai, who was Miss World in 1994 (Wikipedia 2006, p.1). In Australia, the star of Lux body wash (Figure 13) is Jennifer Hawkins who won the 2004 Miss Universe pageant (Wikipedia 2006, p.1). The Lux campaign featuring beauty pageant winners seems to offer a salient illustration of the need for women to

compete against each other. As Berger explains, the logic of the beauty contest is something like the myth of the Judgement of Paris:

The Judgement of Paris was another theme ..... of a man or men looking at naked women.... Paris awards the apple to the woman he finds most beautiful. Thus Beauty becomes competitive. (Today The Judgement of Paris has become the Beauty Contest.) Those who are not judged beautiful are not beautiful. Those who are, are given the prize. The prize is to be owned by a judge – that is to say to be available for him (Berger 1972, pp.51-52).

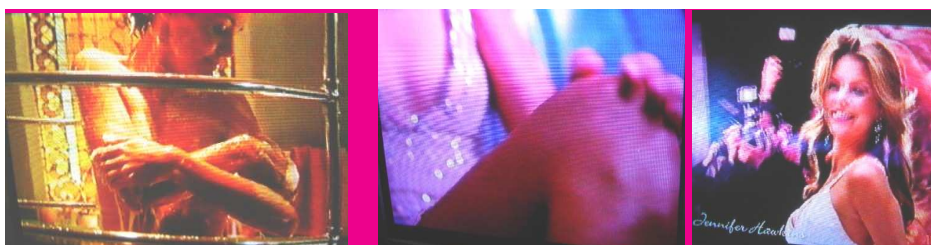
**Figure 11: Lux (BD)**



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**Figure 12: Lux body wash (Aus)**



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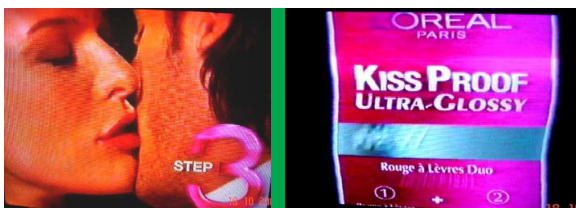


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In the Lux commercials, women are supposed to compare themselves against each other as (male) judges might; the “prize” is to be deemed most beautiful (by a male judge). Radical feminists might say this directly undermines notions of solidarity of sisterhood among females by inviting division.

**Figure 13: L’Oreal lipstick (Aus)**



L’Oreal Paris introduces kiss proof lipstick which needs to be judged by men as to how effective it is.

## 2.4 The (Fe)Male Gaze?

One might expect that where cosmetics are advertised to male consumers, we might find the gender tables turned. We might expect, for example, to find men competing for women’s attention, or being objectified beneath a female gaze. We might expect to find men ‘appearing’ rather than acting. But gender representations are not symmetrical: we do not see

men represented in these ways. On the contrary, even for products used by men we find that women appear as sexual objects.

In Figure 14 (below), we see four women embrace one handsome man who uses *Emami Fair* and Handsome cream.

**Figure 14: Emami Fair & Handsome Cream (BD)**



The man does not compete with other men for the prize of being judged by four women. Instead, the women are competing among themselves for his attention. In this advertisement, the “logic” is the same, even if products are aimed at different users, Still, women are sexual objects in these advertisements.

**Figure 15: Braun shaver (Aus)**



In the case of Braun 360° complete shaver (Figure 15), the female researcher (model) as judge examines the best razor. She examines three men. The first man's shaving is unacceptable, the second one has missed some hair, and the third, who is shaved by Braun 306° complete shaver, according to the researcher, is good. She touches his face with her own cheek to examine the smoothness of his face (Figure 15). She touches and caresses his face and repeats and repeats "good good". This is an example of (fe)male gazing. In this advertisement, the woman is a researcher working in the public sphere of the laboratory who judges the men and the performance of the shavers. On the surface, this seems a quite acceptable representation of a woman's technical expertise. However, advertisers depict in a 'sexist imagery' which degrades her position as an ideal judge and a researcher. Male researchers would not have performed this kind of test. This is an intentional attitude that degrades the woman's position from one of knowledge and expertise to a position of engaging in unacceptable sexualised conduct. In a real workplace, this kind of behaviour might result in a suit for sexual harassment.

In an Australian advertisement for Lynx shower gel (a product targeted at men), the 'dirty' boy gets clean with Lynx Shower gel in the bathroom of an upstairs apartment. The woman downstairs embraces the pipeline through which his shower water is draining (Figure 16). This is a coded image that conveys sexual desire and activity. Here, both the pipe and the bottle of Lynx are symbols of the "phallus" (O'Shaughnessy 1999, p.194).

**Figure 16: Lynx shower gel for men (Aus)**



The female subject, bearer of the look, poses like a participant in pole dance, indicates her desire for phallus. This advertisement can also be understood by using psychoanalytic approach.

The above sections do not wholly suggest that this psychoanalytic analysis of the phallus is true for all the advertisements above. However, it is clear that female positions in these advertisements are not 'subject' positions. Woman's body and beauty is continually constructed within the cultural sphere and the media thus establishes an image of women's lower position. The idea of the male gaze, mirror and vanity, the beauty contest and the (fe) male gaze and John Berger's assertion 'Men act/women appear' all feature. In the above advertisements, it is seen that women's beauty is a commodity, women are represented as objects of sexuality, objects to be looked at and objects of males' unlimited desire. In addition, women are depicted as enjoying this.

## **2.5 Sexualisations/phallic symbols/ 'food porn'**

This section considers the relationship between the phallic symbol and women's representation in commercials which can be understood as an addition of phallic discussion.

The symbolic presence of the phallus can be found in commercials which can be decoded through psychoanalytic theories and feminist approaches. Feminists have critiqued the biological determinism of Freud's theory that women are inferior and have penis envy. The present section aims to find out whether women are being represented as inferior in commercials and whether they can be seen to be desiring a penis, as per Freud's famous contention.

The following advertisement for Magnum ice cream contains both phallic symbols and food porn. Kaz Cooke shows ice cream advertisements as "food porn" in her writings (Cooke 1994, p. 26). According to Rosalind Coward pornography is the extreme ends of using women's images. Like sexual pornography, pictures of food can symbolically represent sexual imagery. Like sex porn, this is also illicit and naughty (Coward 1984, pp 102-03). In the advertisement for Magnum ice cream Elizabeth Hurley features as a celebrity (herself, one assumes) who disembarks from a yacht to a throng of admirers.

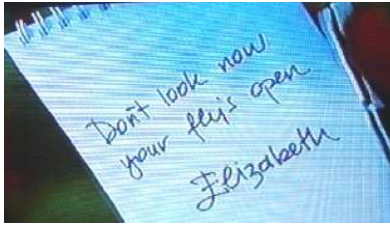
**Figure 17: Magnum ice-cream (Aus)**



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John Berger's contention 'women appear' works here because her job (model/actress) is to be 'looked at'. Hurley is a big 'star' and the crowd is a group of her fans. One of her fans, holding an ice cream in his hand, wants to have her autograph. Strategically, Elizabeth, who wants to have the ice-cream the autograph hunter is holding, writes on his paper, "Don't look now; your fly's open". The next scene shows the man handing over his ice cream, so he can check whether his pant's zipper is undone. Elizabeth then goes away having won the ice-cream, licking it in an attitude suggestive of sexual bliss.

Indeed, the last frames (Figure 17) are symbolic of fellatio, coming immediately after photo 6, which focuses on the man's zipper. Although she is a big star, still she is inferior for not having a real penis—which, clearly, is what she 'really' wants, more than any of the trappings of her success. Following Lacan, it can be said that castration fear exists here. Women is not a subject, she is a hole, that can only become a subject through her desire for a man, that is,

phallus (Derrida 1987, p. 437 and Alsop et al. 2002, pp.51-53). “Ice cream” here has become a symbol of the phallus—which the woman (Hurley) both desires and devours.

Whether famous or not, women are subject to inferiority and secondary positioning by desiring the phallus. This is particularly evident in commercials that takes women out of the public realm and locates them in home.

## **2.6 Separate Spheres**

When women ‘act’ or do things in advertisements, they are usually activities in the service of men’s comfort. They illustrate a ‘separate spheres’ notion: the idea that men may traverse public/private boundaries but that women must remain confined to the domestic sphere. This section helps to understand that other than sexual objects and objects of the gaze, television commercials produce and reproduce images of femininity at the aegis of male understanding. Furthermore it offers an expression of how femininity is constructed by framing representations of femininity within binaries like public and private spheres, and purity and pollution.

### **Public/Private Dichotomy**

The following advertisements establish that the private sphere is still reserved for women. Regina Graycar and Jenny Morgan write that “Public may be used to denote state activity, the values of the market-place, work, the male domain, or that sphere of activity which is regulated by law. Private may denote civil society, the values of family, intimacy, the personal

life, home, women's domain, or that sphere of activity or behaviour unregulated by law" (Graycar and Morgan 2002, p. 10). Feminists have criticised the public/private dichotomy because in patriarchal society, women's positioning in the private sphere reduces them to an equivalence with nature, nurture and non-rationality (Thornton, 1995, pp.9-12). In commercials, women are often relegated to the private sphere. As we have seen previously, where women do operate in the public sphere (for example, in Figure 15) they are linked to the sphere of the body and uncontrollable sexuality. Servility is also an important feature of patriarchal femininity, that is, the images of women which operate in patriarchal society. The following advertisements will show the public/private patriarchal division of labour.

### **The Patriarchal Family and Home: Constructions of Women's Work**

In an advertisement for Tetley tea in Bangladesh (Figure 18), the husband comes home from the office and his mood is not good. He is traversing here the public and private spheres. At home his wife brings him a cup of Tetley tea. The husband becomes nostalgic and remembers his university life in England where he used to have Tetley tea. After having tea, his mood improves and his wife is happy with that. The suggestion of this advertisement is the wife is happy when her husband is.

**Figure 18: Tetley tea (BD)**





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Frames four and five (Figure 18) demonstrate female subordination. In ‘The ritualization of subordination’ Goffman writes that “Holding the body erect and the head high is stereotypically a mark of unashamedness, superiority and disdain (Goffman 1979, p. 40). Here, the woman concentrates on her husband while her husband concentrates on the tea. Her head is lowered, which is suggestive of her subordinate position.

**Figure 19: Pran Scented Rice (BD)**



**Figure 20: Fresh Spice (BD)**



**Figure 21: (Aus)**



In advertisements for *Pran sugondhi chal* (Pran scented rice) and Fresh Spice (Bangladesh), (Figures 19 and 20) female models appear as traditional housewives who serve their husbands and children at the dining table, standing beside them. In Australia this is not unusual at all (Figure 21).

**Figure 22: Bangla link phone (BD)**





Bangla link (Figure 22) offers special deals for women called “ladies first” where women can talk at cheaper rates. In three different advertisements, we see women depicted as the good housewife, the successful businesswoman as well as the busy student juggling everyday chores. This, at first glance seems to uphold the notion of modern women operating in the public sphere. However, the opposite picture comes to our mind when we see men using the Bangla link phone for their business abroad. So women are still depicted mostly as housewives within the range of the home and the borders of own country.

The binary opposition, national/international can also be found in the advertisement for Tetley (Bangladesh), where the man is depicted studying in England and the woman remain at home, in her country and serving her husband. This is an impact of colonialism that still men are attached with power holders and one kind of domination of patriarchy that compels women to think that they are safe at home and in her own country.

#### **‘Superwomen’ of today:**

In an advertisement for Fresh salt (Figure 23), Bipasha Hayat, a celebrity in Bangladesh tries to balance the public/private sphere as she is an actress, a painter, and a model. This “new woman” has emerged in commercials and is represented as “superwoman”. This superwoman

“manages to do all the work at home and on the job (with the help of a product, of course not her husband or children). Or as the liberated woman, who owes her independence and self-esteem to the products she uses” (Kilbourne 1995, p.125).

**Figure 23: Fresh Salt (BD)**



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Furthermore, these images are not at all symbolic of progress, but rather create a myth of progress. Fresh salt and Radhuni spice in Bangladesh bear such myths. In Australia, the same scenario, the myth of progress, can be seen in various advertisements for products (KFC and others). The representations of women’s work in commercials still construct the home as the women’s primary sphere of activity. When women ‘act’, this activity is for men’s comfort. This sphere, however, must be sanitised and regulated. Women are the controllers of the clean and proper domestic space.

### **Women Threaten Contagion: Health and Hygiene**

Advertisements for washing products, house cleaning products and sanitary napkins are attached to the realm of femininity. Ideas about health and hygiene are connected to ideas about pollution and danger signified by the female body, which needs to be purified and

cleansed. Mary Douglas demonstrates that dirt is essentially disorder. However, she believes that dirt exists in the eye of the beholder. Ideas about pollution relate to social life. With our separating, tidying and purifying, we interpret primitive purification rituals for modern life. There is a belief that each sex is a danger to the other through contact with sexual fluids. Another belief exists too, stipulating that only one sex (female) is a source of pollution to the other (male). Women signify both blood and purity and these double positionings are perpetuated in advertising representations. So the female body is understood to threaten contagion, and therefore needs to be purified through elaborate rituals (Douglas 1966, pp.1-3).

**Figure 24: Harpic Max toilet cleaner (Aus)**



1

2

**Figure 25: Harpic toilet cleaner (BD)**



In advertisements for toilet cleaning products, most of the time the cleaner is female, but ‘experts’ or ‘advisors’ are more often male. In an advertisement for Harpic Max (Figure 24), the female model is worried about the smell and cleanliness of the toilet. The female model’s

face and the clean toilet are shown together and conflated, particularly in the first frame, the camera is positioned (very strangely) *inside* the toilet—it's almost as if the *toilet* is animated as the bearer of the gaze. In this sense it is the 'germs'/ dirt/ pollution which 'act' or 'view', while the woman (of course) continues merely to appear. In a commercial for Harpic screened in Bangladesh (Figure 25) the advisor is male but the toilet cleaner is female. We can conclude that women need to (be) clean because their bodies signify pollution and disorder.

Again, the mother's duty is to clean the baby's bottom (Huggies Baby Wipes), or use Dettol as a disinfectant in both Bangladesh and Australia, suggesting that women clean household dirt while men work outside.

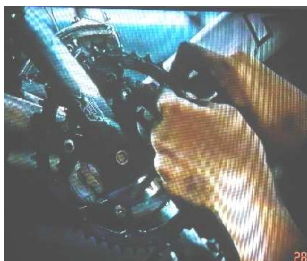
**Figure 26: Dettol hand wash (Aus)**



1



2



3

**Figure 27: Dettol soap (BD)**



1



2

In Australia, to change a child's nappy, to wash a young baby's hand, to prepare chicken are all female duties. Here, we see that the male's hands are dirty from gardening or repairing a bicycle and he washes his own hand. If we analyse the photographs we can allocate the man's hand (Figure 26, frame 3) in the sphere of technical work while, figure 26 and frame 2 suggests that women do not do heavy manual work. The women's hands are decorated with long nails (Figure 26, frame 1) and gold bangles, (figure 27, frame 1) (Winship 1987, pp. 26-30). These images produce and reproduce the traditional divisions of labour.

Five years ago, it was rare to see any advertisement for sanitary napkins on any Bangladeshi television channel. In that sense 'Senora' (Figure 28) is a unique advertisement.

**Figure 28: Senora sanitary pad (BD)**



1



2



3

However, the representation degrades women. We see in the advertisement that on a college campus, a menstruating girl seeks a sanitary napkin from her female friend with lots of hesitation, simply saying “Have you one?” This hesitation signifies the unspeakable leakiness and messiness of the female body which symbolizes disorder. She does not mention the name of the product. Her friend provides one Senora sanitary napkin. The jingle text expresses “whisper, otherwise everybody will know it.” The need to whisper connotes cultural shame, a kind of acknowledgement of women’s capacity to pollute. Having a period is a matter of women’s reproductive health. In Bangladesh, it is a hidden subject because of its association with the leaky female body. Shame and secrecy is used in the advertisement to remind women that the “ultimate humiliation would be any indication that they are menstruating” (Houppert 1995 cited in Merskin 1999, p.947). The Motto of the Senora Confident is “use senora and be confident.” Here the confidence arises out of not having a leaky body.

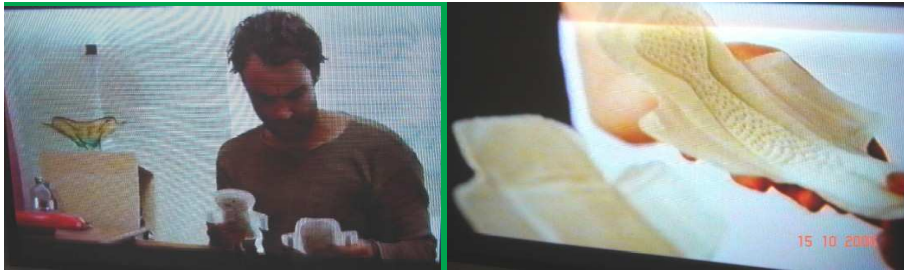
**Figure 29: Libra sanitary napkin (Aus)**



1

2





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4

In Australia, the Libra sanitary napkin commercial promotes the ‘comfort’ theme.

These advertisements focus on the hygienic conditions necessary for female health in patriarchal societies. Emily Martin suggests that menstruation is a form of “failed production”. It suggests a failure to provide a “warm womb to nurture a man’s sperm” and it relates the “leak”, to “deterioration” and discharge (Martin 1987, p.47). Patriarchal views construct barriers against the transmission of information about menstruation. Merskin writes that “as a social construction, femininity involves the cultivation of a body that does not leak” (Merskin 1999, p. 948). In these two advertisements [Figures 28 and 29] the terms “confident” and “comfort” remind us of the opposite view that women are sometimes “unconfident” and “uncomfortable”. Women’s blood is always a hidden subject in sanitary napkin advertisements. Most of the sanitary napkin advertisements use blue fluids to demonstrate the pad’s absorbency. However, no woman leaks blue fluid from her vagina. Realistic menstrual discharge is taboo and unrepresentable, so menstruation is sanitised in these commercials.

In contrast, in an Australian advertisement for Tetley, a woman cleans elephant’s dung, holding a sack, while the spectators are advised to see the positive things in life – such as drinking Tetley tea [Figure 30].

**Figure 30: Tetley tea (Aus)**



This advertisement collapses two kinds of readings regarding women. At one level, the woman is an independent working female, able to successfully deal with the challenges of her job. A more negative reading is that the female body is associated with elephant dung, signifying her relationship to bodily wastes, fluids, leakiness, and messiness, just as menstruation is associated with “leak” and “discharge”.

Based on Mary Douglas’s theory of purity and danger, Julia Kristeva introduces the concept of “abjection” in her *Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection*, under which the clean and proper body, the obedient, law-abiding, social body emerges. According to her, there are three broad categories of abjection: abjection toward food thus towards bodily incorporation, abjection toward bodily waste; and abjection toward the signs of sexual difference. Kristeva, like Douglas, conceives of fluids as objects (Grosz 1994, pp.192-195). The bodily waste of the elephant is associated with the fluidity and leakiness of the female body. In these ways, television commercials continuously produce and reproduce images of femininity and remind us how to behave as clean and proper bodies.

## 2.7 Fragmented Body of Women

In viewing a large number of advertisements for this research, it is apparent that women's body's are frequently—even normally—fragmented. The effect, in sum, is that women's bodies are represented in ways which bring to mind a Rubik's cube. The following images reveal that advertisers use all the various parts of a woman's body in advertisements both in Australia and Bangladesh. Women's heads, faces, trunks, lips, eyes, hair, backs, hands, breasts, waists, curves, buttocks, lower abdomen front, thighs, knees and feet are all separated and used in the advertisements. One can make a whole woman's photograph with these body parts like cells make the organs and the whole body. The female body is represented here as always partial, always synecdochal, rather than as a whole human being. Fragmented body parts represent fragmented women who cannot become whole human beings, and thus cannot be proper subjects.

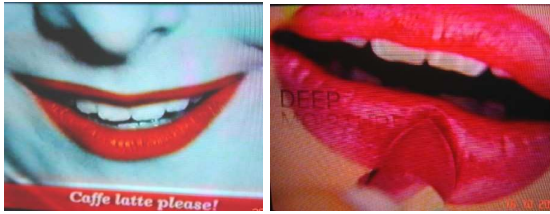
**Figure 31: Rubik's Cube of Female Body Parts**



**Face and hair:** Keya Super Beauty Soap (BD); Meril Beauty Soap (BD)



**Eyes:** Toshiba television (BD), Meril Amla Shampoo(BD), Lux Aqua Sparkle (BD)



**Lips:** Cibo café Latte (Aus), Maybelline New York Lipstick(Aus)



**Trunk:** David Jones (Aus), Magnum ice cream(Aus)



**Breasts and back:** Jenny Craig(Aus), Crunchy Nut(Aus), Coco skin Butter (Aus)



**Hands:** Wheel (BD), Lux Aqua Sparkle (BD), Rexona (BD)



**Waist and curves:** (Front and Back): Jesmin Detergent Powder (BD), Reverse (Aus)



**Genitalia/buttocks:** (Covered up/ back and front views): Nivea (Aus) and Bonds (Aus)



**Knees and hands:** Roskin (Aus) Palmer's Cocoa Butter (Aus) LUX body wash (Aus)



**Lower legs and feet:** PHP glass (BD), Butter (AUS) Keya super beauty soap (BD)

Mulvey argues that “one part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative; it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon

rather than verisimilitude to the screen” (Mulvey 1975 in Bartkowski and Kolmar 2005, p.300). Bordo contends that the cultural fetishisation of women’s bodies and body parts “are arranged in representations precisely in order to suggest a particular attitude—dependence or seductiveness or vulnerability” (Bordo 1997, p. 125).

In commercials patriarchal constructions produce and reproduce the meanings of femininity. My research suggests that patriarchy is embedded within the text of Australian commercials. From above the advertisements, the sexual representation of women suggests that patriarchy is embedded and talks, not through language, but through behaviour. For example, advertisers sometimes use animals as bearers of the look instead of men to avoid charges of sexist representation. It may be matter of complaint if a man is shown watching a woman in underwear, but if a dog or a giraffe is the ‘voyeur’, men can be readily ‘absolved’ from blame. Patriarchy is arguably more overt in Bangladeshi commercials. Several Bangladeshi advertisements show a housewife being ridiculed by her husband and in-laws because the quality of the food she prepares is ‘inferior’ (*Pran Spice Powder* and *Rolex Suji*).

In every section of this chapter it is found that representations of women are linked to the body and beauty, purity and pollution and marginalised as the object of the male gaze, passive and fragmented. Overall, patriarchal constructions of femininity act as rules and regulations framing women’s roles and desire. Having identified gender codes, it important to now consider how racial identities are produced in Australian and Bangladeshi commercials.