## Chapter Five

## Conclusion

This concluding chapter summarises the main ideas and issues, identifying the politics behind existing representations and proposing a way to work towards future equality. Its main aim is to suggest some potentially fruitful avenues for future research.

A total of 780 commercials were observed in researching this thesis, 500 from Australia and 280 commercials from Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, there was 85% female participation in commercials as opposed to 63.57% male participation. In Australia, female participation was 70.6% while male participation was 55.8%. However, the form of female participation was passive, rather than active. These statistics suggest advertisers need women to sell products. In Bangladesh, although it is a Muslim state, female participation rate in commercials is much higher than in Australia. The study sees it as an impact of westernization also. As models wear dresses like western people and behave likely. Furthermore, the representation of indigenous and ethnic minority women in advertising was zero. This exclusion suggests that advertising perpetuates myth about majority cultures as much as it perpetuates myth about femininity**.**

Chapter three shows images of femininity such as mothering; the beautiful bodies of young women; sexuality; the ideal housewife; and women's compassion feature strongly in Australian and Bangladeshi commercials. Sometimes female models' body, eyes, hair or lips are used 'part and parcel' so that women appear as fragmented objects. Using both Laura Mulvey's and John Berger's theories, it has been shown that women

function as objects to be looked at. An interesting feature in this regard is that even animals can take up the position of male gaze. Some advertisements suggest that patriarchal domination is linked to the fear of castration, posed by the female, so that women are positioned as secondary. Chapter three argued that patriarchy produces and reproduces images of women in ways which serve men's interests, that is, as 'the good mother', 'good housewife' or as sexual objects. It was suggested that patriarchy plays a key role in producing stereotypical images of femininities in both Australia and Bangladesh.

In Australian and Bangladeshi advertisements, all the women are white. This suggests that images of femininity are heavily racialised in both cultures. Elements of multiculturalism are sometimes evident in some advertisements, but Indigenous women are entirely absent from Australian advertisements. In Bangladesh also, women must be white: the representation of black or 'yellow'-skinned ethnic women in television commercials is zero. This invites questions concerning power, race and representation.

The thesis has analysed 'advertising' as 'discourse'. Stereotypical images inform viewers' understandings in both countries of standards and codes of behaviour for men and women. Representations of gender and race in Australian and Bangladeshi commercials circulate within historical, social and cultural fields of power relations. Three issues working as catalysts for sexual and racial discrimination in commercials are apparent. These are:

1. The definition of obscene content in code and ethics in commercial
2. Dreaming of an imaginary world
3. The historical shaping of gender and race

**Definition of obscene content**

In Australia, one can complain about objectionable advertisements through the Australian Standards Bureau (ASB). However, the result depends on what the ASB defines as 'obscene' and/or 'objectionable'. For example, a recent advertisement for Mentos Chewing Gum (figure x) was criticised openly in Australia through the media. A number of complaints from the public described the advertisement as "pornographic" (Jolly 2006, p. 1). In this advertisement, a male beachgoer's nipples extend to ridiculous proportions after he tries 'cooling' Mentos chewing gum. He uses his new appendages to catch frisbees, spin discs on a DJ's turntable and press lift buttons. An admiring bikini-clad girl looks at him. The audiences see his bare breast throughout the whole advertisement. At the end, he is alone in a lift. A girl, also needs to use the lift, and raises her hand to stop it so that she can enter. The boy presses the lift button with his nipple. Then, he offers Mentos chewing gum to the girl in the lift. The door of the lift closes. Before the door closes, he exchanges a knowing, mischievous look to the camera/viewer, suggesting that a similar nipple extension may take place in the woman. The subtext is that nipple erection is a sign of sexual arousal as well as chilliness. ASB chief executive Fiona Jolly said. "The advert is being rushed on to the agenda of the next meeting of the board this week (Sherwin 2006, p. 1)."

**Figure 41: Mentos chewing gum (Aus)**

1

2

3

4

5

In a follow up, the ASB concluded that the advertisement did not contain sexual overtones. The hyper-erect nipples were a result of the cooling effect of the product rather than of sexual contact. This was intended for humorous effect and was not so offensive that it should be taken off air (Jolly 2006, p. 1). Sexist advertisements can be removed if the regulatory system defines sexist imagery in a proper way. It should not be the case that imagery minimised as humourous, as in the Mentos commercial.

Advertising for feminine hygiene products, undergarments, and contraceptive products are prohibited in Bangladesh as it is a Muslim state (Advertising in Asia 2006, p.1) However, both contraceptive products (Nordette 28 pills) and sanitary napkins (Senora) are advertised on Bangladesh television channels. Moreover, the *Bangladesh Broadcasting Act 2003* (which could potentially offer a stronger regulatory framework for broadcast media advertising) is yet to be enacted by the Bangladesh Government.

However codes of ethics, whether in Australia or in Bangladesh, may not be adequate to deal with embedded objectification or racial stereotyping, as these codes rely on consumer complaints. This thesis therefore recommends that sexual and racial discrimination be reduced by implementing these laws properly.

## Dreaming of an imaginary world

Advertisements promote images of "the good life", images of beauty and norms of behaviour. The conventions of gender display are easily recognised by audiences as they figure prominently in the image system (Goffman in Jhally 1995, p.79, p.80). In advertising, women are defined according to codes of (hetero-)sexuality. Sexuality provides a resource that can be used to get attention and communicate instantly (Peach 1998, p.82). As commercial times are brief (sometimes fifteen seconds or shorter), advertisers responded by creating a new type of advertising – what is called the "vignette approach" in which they directly sell feelings and emotions rather than the products. Edger and Mcphee argue that advertising perpetuates an image of women and an image of a glamorous lifestyle held by the society: they conclude that that images are unreal (Edger and Mcphee 1974, pp. 1-25). So advertising creates an image based world that is not real, but has real effects in society. This distinction is needed to identify sexual and racial discrimination in commercials.

## The historical shaping of gender and race

Stereotypical gender roles have been repeatedly performed in both countries' advertisements. Butler writes (citing Victor Turner and Clifford-Geertz) "As in other

ritual dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (Butler 2005, in Bartkwoski and Kolmar 2005, p. 503). Gender performance in advertising re-enacts gendered myths of culture. According to Butler, "Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts…If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative" (Butler 2005, p.503). Furthermore, history, time and space play a significant role in producing the subject positions of genders. Butler posits "history created values and meanings by a signifying practice that requires the subjection of the body. The corporeal destruction is necessary to produce the subject" (Butler 2005, p. 497). Foucault claims that the subject's act is "to expose a body totally imprinted by history (Foucault 1977 in Butler 2005, p. 496-497). The result is the gendering of human subjects who comply with these cultural myths, values and meaning in order to take up their positions within the signifying practice. In accordance with the above theoretical points, it is clear that in both countries' advertisements, the female body performs roles that are historically and culturally already established in these societies.

Modern media is a kind of conveyor belt of meaning between, or in the middle of, 'the world' and audiences, producing images 'about' or 'from' this or that debate, event or place. These meanings occur in an iconography of femininity shaped by constructions, significations, denotations, connotations and semiotics. Broad cultural and social *agreement* (or sometimes *force*) is needed for meaning to be produced (Branston and Stafford 2003, pp. 9-23). This thesis has shown that the media does not invent new

images of women, but circulates images that already exist as cultural forms. However, the study also shows that media gives image or icon (like the myth of superwomen of the day) in front of audiences for their approval. So, advertising both produces and reproduces images.

In terms of participation, it seems that women dominate the commercial sector. However, the position of women in Australian and Bangladeshi television advertising is peripheral, passive and negative. It is only because of the representation. Women are objects, packaged for the pleasure of patriarchy, or bodies of pollution and subjection. Overall, following Antonio Gramsci, it can be concluded that commercials in Australia and Bangladesh demonstrate or reflect male dominance over female and majority over minority cultures.

Cultural representations are subject to political critique. During the 1960s, alternative representations of gender, race, and class began to appear in television program content (Durham and Kellner 2001, pp. 25). This is yet to occur in advertising. Advertising itself an industry, as a worker in the industry, women have rights not to be treated as sexual objects. The advertisers will need to take account of the ways that existing representations alienate women and minority women from their products. One recommendation is that these inequalities of gender and racial representation in commercials be used to further feminist and anti-racist political agenda. This may be a productive avenue for future study.

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