

**Prompt:** Obtain a print magazine that at least partially subsidizes content through advertising (and has been published this semester) and write a 5-7 page detailed critical analysis of it that supports a specific interpretive thesis about the specific ways the that a single representative advertisement in the magazine “interpellates” (Althusser) a “public,” “counterpublic,” or multiple “publics” (Warner). The support for your thesis must come directly from specific analysis and inductive interpretation of specific examples of acts of representing and/or addressing a public in the focus ad and the surrounding magazine (other ads and editorial content). Use the set of critical intervention questions on the following pages to direct your analysis, and keep in mind the specific constraints of the assignment below.

**Your Media Analysis Project must:**

- Focus on the detailed analysis of a single ad but be connected to specific examples from the rest of the magazine.
- Build a detailed, inductive analytical/interpretative argument that identifies and demonstrates the interpellated public(s) of the ad and the magazine as a whole in a coherent 5-7 page double-spaced essay (1500-2100 words).
- Critically engage course readings in making the argument, with at least 4 direct references to them with full citations in a Works Cited page.
- Include a separate document called “Coding,” which comprehensively accounts for all of the patterns you discovered in your analysis of your central ad and the other ads and the editorial content--regardless of whether the patterns end up being central to your argument. (Note that there is no page limit to this part as each coding/analysis will be different). And then include direct references to your “coding” of the data in your essay as you make your argument about interpellation and publics.
- Submit the essay, the coding, and the entire magazine by the due date.

Electronically submit the essay and the coding document, and submit the physical magazine separately, using a post-it note label to indicate the ad you are focused on as well as any other specific elements of the magazine that you directly call out in your essay.

**Context:**

Interpellation is the key mechanism by which all kinds of publics are formed. As Michael Warner argues, publics “do not exist apart from the discourse that addresses them” (416) and are called into being through media using an “indefinite address” that is projected with the “hope that people will find themselves in it” (418). This process of addressing or “hailing” an audience ideologically as if it is already known--which

audiences either align themselves with, resist, or reject--is what Althusser calls "interpellation." The process is ideological because it treats audience members *as if* they *already* agree or identify with an established discourse. Althusser puts it this way: "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*" (141; emphasis in original). That is, advertising is encountered by actual individuals but is addressed to "subjects," or already defined *types of people*. We will not be analyzing those actual "concrete individuals" but the ways that individuals are addressed as "concrete subjects"--as if they are already a public--in the magazine content itself.

We are studying commercial magazines because they provide a compact and contained example of how mediated publics work in the contemporary commercial media environment. Advertising is both an economic and a cultural practice. Obviously, advertisers advertise their products to sell products and thus maximize their profits. However, in order to achieve this larger goal, an ad must first *appeal* to particular consumers. And in order to appeal, an ad must *interpellate* a public, or articulate an *imagined* relationship between the meanings the ad associates with the product and the projected desires of the people potentially viewing the ad. In short, an advertisement not only tries to get people to *buy* products--it does so by trying to get people to *buy into* the values, ideologies, identities, narratives, etc. "sold" in the ad. If you encounter an advertisement and "find yourself in it," as Warner says, you are placing yourself in the projected "subject position" advertisers imagine for you, which aligns you with its interpellated ideologies. If, however, you consciously consider the ad as an object to analyze as a *cultural text*, your approach to the ad will be more critical.

One important way to do this is to study the way a print ad interacts with its surroundings in the magazine where it is found--to study how the ad as a *text* speaks to and from the *discourse* of the magazine as a whole, which itself speaks also to and from wider discourses circulating in the *culture* at large. The spatial and temporal juxtaposition of even seemingly unrelated articles, pictures, and advertisements assures that they will be consumed in proximity to one another. An analogous process works when we watch commercial television or encounter ads or endorsements in social media platforms. By slowing down our encounter with a magazine ad, and analyzing the words and images in the ad as pieces in a larger discourse, we can produce a much more complex and complete version of the advertiser's conceptions of its target audience and its strategies for ideologically interpellating that audience as if the public already exists.

When you are doing your analysis and building your argument, keep in mind that all effective persuasive analytical writing is based on a productive balance of thesis and evidence. An essay with all details and no thesis is just as ineffective as one with all thesis and no detailed evidence. It is important to draw your generalizations directly from your analysis of specifics, and not vice-versa. Move towards the big picture, but always keep your eye on the detailed analysis/interpretation of details to *show* what you think they mean instead of just *telling* what they mean.

Unlike the list of “must” statements on the first page of this assignment, the questions on the last two pages are meant to *guide* your analysis, not provide you with a “checklist” of things that must be included in your essay. The general rule of media analysis is: “Everything counts . . . until it doesn’t.” You should pay attention to all these things and use them to guide your Coding document and formulate your argument, but you must decide which of the many details you notice are central to your project’s interpretive argument and emphasize them. Use it or lose it. Do not try to be definitive, just provocative. Curiosity invites; preaching polarizes.

Finally: Most magazines have “media kits” available at their websites that offer demographic profiles of the audience that the magazine has identified and is selling to potential advertisers. These are great resources to study, but only if you also analyze them *rhetorically* to see how they relate to your own inductive analytical and interpretive work instead of substituting for it: they are *part of* the discourse you study, not simply a short-cut *explanation of* it. In short, they are selling a public to a public as if it already exists, just as the ads do. In this case, they are also interpellating potential *advertisers* as if they are already known, not only potential *readers*.

## Critical Interventions for Your Media Analysis

### I. Questions About Your Particular Advertisement as a Text:

- What product exactly is the ad selling? How does it sell what it is selling? How do you know?
  - What are the key graphical design elements represented in the ad? What is the relationship within the ad between the graphical design, images (photos, logos, etc.) and the "copy" (the written text, slogans, etc.)?
  - What knowledge does the ad assume that the viewer will bring to the ad? Precisely how is this knowledge activated semiotically?
  - What are consumers supposed to do with the product, and what is it supposed to do for them? How do you know?
  - Are depicted bodies ascribed different intersectional identities represented differently in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, class, age, ability, region or some other representable subjectivity? How are they presented in relation to each other and to the product?
  - If the ad directly or indirectly addresses a "you," who exactly is it interpellating? If the ad depicts people, and you were to directly identify with the people depicted in the ad, what gender would you be? What sexuality? what race? what ethnicity? what social class? what socioeconomic class? what age? what ability/disability? what region, what subculture, etc. In short, if the ad seems to say “Hey, You!”, who would you have to be to unproblematically say, “Who, Me?”

- What are the *presumed* desires, needs, values, motives, fears, behaviors, etc. of the interpellated subject of your ad? Show.

## II. Questions About Magazine as Physical/Discursive Space:

- What kinds of other products are advertised here and how? What is the general pattern of where and how the products advertised here can be purchased? How does your particular advertisement relate to them?

- What kinds of bodies are pictured in the other advertisements? Who are they? What are they doing? Where are they doing it? What are they doing with the products? How does this relate to what the people in your ad are doing or the way the product/service is represented?

- What does a general consideration of the advertisements as a group tell you about the magazine's assumptions about the gender, race, ability, ethnicity, sexuality, economic status, social status, subcultural identity, aspirations, fears, and/or values of their target audience? How does your particular ad relate to these general patterns?

- What is the magazine's ratio of advertisements to writing? So what? Where is the advertising located in the magazine? Is it only in separated sections, or does it run throughout? Do advertisements interrupt the articles? Are ads usually on the left or right page? So what?

- Where in the magazine does your ad appear? What is the relationship between it and things above/below/before/after/near/next to it?

- What topics are covered in the editorial content and how are they covered? Are certain topics, phrases, words, images, themes, etc. prevalent, and how do they relate to patterns among the ads? So what?

- Is the magazine owned by a larger media conglomerate? Other magazines do they publish? Other media forms? Synergies? So what?

- Who works for this magazine? Are there significant apparent gender or ethnicity patterns regarding writers and editors? So what?

- How does the publication look and feel (size, quality of paper, typeface, ink, reproductions, layout)? Are these things significant?

## II. Overall Questions:

- How would you precisely describe the “world” depicted throughout the magazine, and what are the predominant settings, props, characters, situations, worries, desires, and plotlines in this world? So what?

- How are interpellated readers positioned in relation to this world? What particular identity group or “subjectivity” is addressed here as if it is already a public that “naturally” belongs in this world, and which subjectivities are represented as if they “naturally” do *not* belong?