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Review of Sex in Consumer Culture: The Erotic Content of Media and Marketing

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Sex in Consumer Culture: The Erotic Content of Media and Marketing.

Edited by Tom Reichert and Jacqueline Lambiase (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006; 369 pages; paper; \$42.50; ISBN: 0-8058-5091-0)

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Sex in Consumer Culture, edited by Tom Reichert and Jacqueline Lambiase, is a treasure trove of scholarship exploring erotic content in media and marketing; it is a significant and timely contribution to the field. Divided into three sections, *Sex in Consumer Culture* opens your eyes to a deeper understanding of the content, form and context of sex within mass media, expanding our vocabulary as prominent scholars explore the complexity of eroticism within consumer culture.

Historically, scholars have explored erotic media from the effects perspective, or through the lens of sex in advertising. Reichert and Lambiase provocatively cross these boundaries, encouraging debate across disciplines while exposing diverse viewpoints. In doing so, they provide an erotic feast of academic scholarship.

With non-traditional advertising, a fundamental part of the marketing mix and as consumer-driven media continuing to grow, the need for scholarly explorations of erotic content becomes ever more salient. Considering the rapidly evolving changes in media, consumers' insatiable "appetite for titillation" (p. 1), and marketers' willingness to give "us the sex we want" (p. 1), *Sex in Consumer Culture* provides significant insights to help enliven the debate, while deepening our understanding of the erotic content of media and marketing.

Beginning with sexualized media in Part I, the contributing authors explore erotic content in non-traditional media – from movie trailer to music videos to video games, while exploring the intersection of eroticism, race and gender. Olive and Kalyanaraman address how PR and buzz marketing work in tandem with female-focused erotic content in movie trailers. Andsager explores the sexual branding and rebranding of female musicians in music videos, at the "fulcrum of a symbolic relationship between fans and corporate media interests, using the artist as conduit" (p. 31). Smith and Moyer-Gusé illustrate the extreme objectification and violence (sexual and beyond) in video gaming. Returning to traditional media, Lambiase and Reichert compare the competitive, and highly sexualized, branding strategies among men's magazines, since the debut of Maxim. Skerski's work addresses the world of women sportscasters; she argues that being a "Sports Babe" is all about sex appeal and has little to do with professional

abilities. With the explosive growth of Hispanic marketing, Fullerton and Kendrick's chapter, discussing Spanish-language television promotion and its sexually laced content, is timely and invaluable.

Sex sells—and the contributors within Part II illustrate the sexualization of products, expanding on the debate of what constitutes sex in advertising. The opening chapter, by Pardun and Forde, addresses the sexual content of advertising running during the most watched programming for early adolescents. Ramirez explores erotic content on mainstream Internet web sites, suggesting that the use of sex appeals parallels off-line advertising. Chambers contextualizes the use of sex to sell beer – a seemingly inseparable combination – by exploring controversial, hyper-sexualized beer commercials. Reichert and LaCaze follow the repositioning of the Polo brand and its skyrocketing brand value across a 20-year trajectory, from preppy and wholesome to urban and erotic. Merskin explores the pornographic codes that work to objectify women and girls that reveal “the promise of pornography realized in fashion advertising” (p. 211). Schroeder and McDonagh's chapter expands the discussion of pornography, suggesting that the logic of pornography helps to explain branding codes in digital camera advertising, creating “compelling, complex images of desire, fetishism and voyeurism” (p. 238).

Part III provides a framework for exploring the sexualization of people, challenging readers to consider how consumers participate with erotic branding content. Lambiase begins the discussion by ethnographically exploring how marketers use women (trade show “booth babes,” the Miller Lite girls, and the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders) to sexualize their brands with “sex-tinged commercial encounters (that) mirror private dating rituals” (p. 258). Gould addresses fetishism and “lovemapping” in fashion photography, exploring how advertisers develop and maintain consumer brand awareness by employing women as sexualized objects of fetishized desire. Mastro and Stern look at the racial eroticization of primetime television, exposing the hyper-erotic stereotyping of minorities, especially Latinas. Grimes demonstrates that white men are the standard bearers for sexual health in some Planned Parenthood ads – at the expense of Asian and Black women – through the “marginalization of sexualized erotic Others” (p. 315). Soldow explores how marketers target the gay audience in mainstream media, using “crossover” male models to express an androgynous style that often “allows one to interpret whatever meaning one chooses” (p. 333-34). The final chapter, by Lance, suggests a deeply erotic content within personals advertisements as a means of creating a highly sexualized self-concept and thus attracting a mate. At some point in our lives we have all been mates or in search of a mate, thus the Lance piece is the perfect ending to Sex in Consumer

Cultuer, as it subtly challenges readers to consider themselves as potentially sexualized objects of consumption.

The exploration of the sexualization of traditional and non-traditional media content provides pedagogical opportunities for both undergraduate and graduate courses. At the undergraduate level, it is a most appropriate supplement. Some chapters offer opportunities for insightful, critical additions to courses in mass communication ethics, gender studies, and mass communication and society. Other chapters provide discerning case studies for promotion, media or persuasion classes. Still others provide salient insights on branding, offering rich readings for advertising strategy or integrated marketing courses. Additionally, as a reader, *Sex in Consumer Culture* will be a valuable text for graduate classes exploring critical and/or social issues in advertising and marketing.

In terms of scholarly work, *Sex in Consumer Culture* is extremely important. Scholars working in mass media will find *Sex in Consumer Culture* an exemplary companion text to Dines and Humez's *Gender, Race and Class in Media*, while for scholars working in advertising or marketing, *Sex in Consumer Culture* is "the" book. Reichert and Lambiase's deep dive into erotica provides long overdue critical perspectives, stretching to include new media, while weaving together content and effects discussions with sex in advertising debates. I found the depth and breadth of *Sex in Consumer Culture* inspiring; however, I hope that the next edition includes even more on consumer-generated media, like that which is proliferating on YouTube.

I have no doubt that *Sex in Consumer Culture* will be a consummate scholarly reader, as well as an effective pedagogical tool for advertising and marketing faculty. If we are to understand consumers and the marketers who court them – and the eroticism that binds them – *Sex in Consumer Culture* is a "must read."