Advertising has the power to make people think. However, it is only as effective as its audience allows it to be. Ads can really only play off the ideas and emotions that are already present in the minds of the audience, even if they are just the seeds of a thought. It is also important to note that most of the effects of advertising are very subconscious—it inspires a thought, an impression seated deep within. This is very evident in how advertising has affected how women, young and old, view food and eating. A good example of this is a recent Dove Chocolate ad, printed in People magazine. This ad depicts an empty chocolate wrapper reading, “Wrap chocolate in a love note and give as a gift” placed on red silk. This ad was released around Valentine’s Day and is obviously supposed to appeal to the romantic side of women. All types of media, but especially advertising, use this method of attracting women towards food. Food is made to be sexually appealing to women. Through colors, words, placement, images, motions, etc, women and food frequently appear to have a love affair. With the idea of food fulfilling this relationship growing in the minds of women across the world, it is no surprise that eating food has a bit of shame and a lot of guilt around it because, like most affairs, it is a secret and should stay that way. Eating food has become a shameful act for women, and is to be hidden from the public eye.
A very visual way the Dove ad shows this idea of ‘hidden’ is by the size of the objects and type throughout the image. The wrapper, the logo, and the type are all very small against the simple, smooth background. They play no big role, and one does not pull more attention to itself than the others. In a sense, these elements hide within the overall image. Although the shiny candy wrapper is placed in the middle of the page, the type going over it holds a symbiotic relationship where the wrapper is blended into the whole and the type is given more attention that it would on its own. This overall ‘smallness’ about the food says that eating should be the same, that it should be unnoticeable and hard to catch. It could even be said that because the type and images are barely there, maybe they do not need to be there at all, and then, neither does eating. Another big role in visuals is that the background can draw just about the same amount of attention as any of the elements. The eye is drawn pretty quickly to the folds in the silk fabric in the bottom left corner and other places where the shadows show high contrast. Given that the red silk is very indicative of romance, the image is putting as much stress on the sexual appeal of the chocolate as the idea of the chocolate itself.

Another piece of visual evidence of this theme is the fact that the chocolate wrapper is empty and crinkled. The chocolate was obviously unwrapped and consumed, but left no evidence of it being there in the first place and definitely no witnesses. It was a secret. The actual candy not being there also leaves the viewer with only the idea of food—no definite food. And yet, it is still very appealing. It becomes attractive to not actually have food, but to only think about it, to fantasize about having it.

There is also plenty of written evidence of
‘hiding food’ within this Dove chocolate advertisement. It is strongly displayed in the tagline “my moment. MY DOVE.” This makes eating the chocolate a very personal and possessive experience, one not shared with anyone else. Eating is then associated as something similar to personal relationships in people. The woman and her chocolate reach each other on a deeper level, like two people in a committed relationship. But having another intimate relationship with anyone or anything else not in the original human relationship, in a way cheating, is poor behavior— one that can be punished. Therefore, having such a good relationship with food is dangerous. If it is not hidden away, serious consequences could ensue or at least negative judgments by others. So in order to avoid any backlash for this love of chocolate, a woman cannot be seen with it.

The main message of the ad also plays a big role in this theme. It reads, “Wrap chocolate in a love note and give as a gift”. Suggesting that the audience should literally hide the chocolate, or have it hidden for them, before they can eat it. Nobody can know that that piece of chocolate exists, it must be kept totally secret, completely hidden. And on top of it, it is supplemental to a love note—it greatly helps to convey this deep and complicated emotion. Chocolate, or other types of food, then become essential in communicating love to others. When it is so closely wrapped in the emotion, it can easily be seen as the emotion. Chocolate is love—the kind of intimate love in a committed sexual relationship. That kind of love is not openly displayed. And so neither is the chocolate. In fact, it becomes rude, disgusting, trashy, etc, to show it off. The intimate love that is chocolate has to be hidden out of public decency.

The strongest piece of evidence for food
being so shameful for women is that the entire image—the type, the color scheme, the background material—is very sensual and romantic. This creates the idea that women do or should have a sexual (intimate) relationship with their food. Relationships like these are not flaunted publicly, they are private and hidden. When this idea is paired with food, it makes it appear that women are not allowed to eat in the public eye, that it too must be hidden—a moment shared only between the individual and her food. As food is placed in such a sexual relationship, it becomes apparent that not eating is pure. Purity has always been a good thing, the moral state of being. So eating becomes contaminating, to the body, mind, and most important, reputation. Women cannot be seen eating or they will immediately be viewed as immoral, dirty, evil.

Anything this immoral comes dripping in guilt and shame. By making food so sexually appealing and satisfying, advertisers have given it the characteristics of such relationships. Food is hidden, cloaked in secrecy, intimate, and ruins one’s purity. Women are not permitted to eat freely. Advertising like this dispels any previously held notions that food could be viewed as (let alone actually be) beneficial, especially food that tastes so darn good. But these ads could not be this effective if they were based on lies or worse, had no basis at all. Therefore, it suggests that women, deep within, don’t like the idea of eating, most notably in public. Admittedly, this idea probably starts only applying to treats, like chocolate; food necessary for survival is definitely good. But advertisers can take that related belief and stretch it to include other types of food, and they do, quite frequently. Advertisers realize that women want their food to be kept a secret from others, out of fear of judgement, and they
play to that. They give women a chance to see it as something more than food, so that hiding it can become more rational. After all, it makes sense to hide sexual relationships.

Reference List


About Artifacts

Artifacts is a refereed journal of undergraduate work in writing at The University of Missouri. The journal celebrates writing in all its forms by inviting student authors to submit projects composed across different genres and media.

Artifacts is sponsored by The Campus Writing Program.

Browse By Issue

Issue 9—March 2014
Issue 8—May 2013
Issue 7—September 2012
Issue 6—March 2012
Issue 5—May 2010
Issue 4—January 2010
Issue 3—August 2009
Issue 2—January 2009
Issue 10—August 2014
Issue 1—Summer 2008