

# DECONSTRUCTING A VIDEO ADVERTISEMENT

## STEP 1: MAKE OBSERVATIONS

» Watch the ad from start to finish (*with audio and at normal speed*). Think of five adjectives that describe the ad.

» Watch the ad a second time and evaluate its aesthetics (*Note: the frame is the space the ad takes up, or everything you can see in the “world” of the ad.*):

■ Are there people depicted in the ad? What gender is represented? Are both genders represented equally? What do the people look like (*young, old, stylish, etc.*)? What are their facial expressions? How are they dressed?

■ Where is the person, or subject, in relation to the product being sold? (*Think of this in terms of ‘frame geography’: For example, is the person at the center of the frame, while the product itself is in the lower right hand corner of the ad?*)

■ Estimate how the camera was used. The angles: Does it appear to be far from the subject, or close to it, or somewhere in between? Does the camera appear to be above the subject, below it, or at eye-level? Does the camera seem to move a lot: from right to left, or from top to bottom, of the frame?

■ Take note of the lighting used in the ad. Does it appear to be natural or artificial (*daylight or flashing lights of different colors*)? Why or why not? Are certain parts of the ad highlighted while others are not? If so, why do you think this is? Are there shadows? If so, how big are they?

■ What colors are used? Are they bright or in sharp contrast to one another? Is the whole ad in black and white, etc.? Do the colors change?

■ Does the ad have text or copy? If so, how does it look? What kind of font is used? Is there more than one type of font used? How big is the text? What color is the text? Is there more than one color used? What does the text actually say: the large text and the small text? Where is the text located in the frame? Does the text move?

■ Does the ad contain any other graphics like animation? If so, describe them.

» Play the ad again from start to finish, but this time, listen to the audio only.

■ Describe the sound of the ad: Is it a person talking? What gender is the person? Does the ad have music? What genre of music is used? Do you recognize the song? Does the product have its own jingle (*i.e. the Oscar Mayer bologna song*)?

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## STEP 1: MAKE OBSERVATIONS (CONT.)

- What does the ad actually say? Listen and write it down. Is what the ad says different from the written words or scenario depicted in the ad? If so, why do you think this is?
- What is the product's brand name (*i.e. Campbell's makes **Soup on the Go***)? How many times do you hear the brand name of the product?
- What is the product's slogan? Where is that located in the ad? How many times did you hear it?

## STEP 2: DETERMINE THE PURPOSE OF THE AD

- » Remember that the purpose of an ad is always to sell a product!
- » What product is being sold?
- » Do you find the product appealing? Why or why not?
- » Who is the target audience for this product? Children? Teens? Adults? The elderly?
- » What feelings or emotions is the ad trying to associate with the product? Did it work? Why or why not?
- » Would you, or do you, actually use the product being advertised? Why or why not?

## STEP 3: DETERMINE THE ASSUMPTIONS THE AD MAKES & THE MESSAGES IT SENDS

- » Assumptions may not be contained directly in the ads themselves, but in the messages that are produced from them
- What assumptions does the ad make about gender? (*i.e. Women are powerful when they hold a hair dryer in their hands. Men like to drink beer. Women are primary caregivers, etc..*) Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about gender identity?
- What assumptions does the ad make about race (*i.e. African Americans are excellent athletes. Latinos are sensual and passionate. Etc.*)? Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about racial identity?
- What assumptions does the ad make about class (*i.e. Wealthy people are happy and trouble-free. Poor people are always looking for a handout, etc..*)? Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about class?

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## STEP 4: CONSIDER THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF THESE MESSAGES

- » What are some possible consequences of the message(s) you've identified? (*long-term and short-term*)
- » Do the messages create unrealistic expectations for people? Why or why not?
- » How do the messages in this ad counter or undermine social change?
- » Is this ad socially responsible? How or how not? What does it mean for an ad or a company to be socially responsible?
- » In the closing comments of the video *Killing Us Softly 3*, Jean Kilbourne states that change will depend upon "an aware, active, educated public that thinks for itself primarily as citizens rather than primarily as consumers." What does it mean to think of oneself primarily as a citizen rather than primarily a consumer? Can one be both a citizen and a consumer? How? Reflect on this ad with the above statement in mind.