

ABSTRACT

VISUAL RHETORIC AND ITS REPRESENTATIONS IN CULTURE: THE COMPLEX WEB OF DESIRE IN MASS CONSUMERISM

The term *visual rhetoric* is one that represents the messages that are imparted to us through the medium of the visual image. These messages are often powerful and persuasive and can affect us in ways that we are unaware of. In this thesis, I seek to deconstruct the ways in which mass media, via advertising, sends us messages about appropriate modes of behavior including standards of beauty, success, gender roles, and other markers of so-called normalcy and status. These messages appeal to us both on the conscious and unconscious levels by engendering attitudes that appeal to our basic human impulses. This in itself is not a problem but the repercussions of these influences can, and do have long-term and far-reaching effects on the population, often in highly detrimental ways. For instance, the link to eating disorders in young women is directly attributed to women's body images in mass media. The purpose of this thesis is to better understand the use of visual rhetoric in mass media advertising and then to begin identifying the coded messages that are sent in an effort to become more media literate and develop agency. This will ultimately empower and educate us to avoid the traps in mass media rhetoric and also allow us to become more aware of the choices we have and hopefully encourage us to choose more wisely and avoid becoming active citizens of the culture of consumerism.

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