

**Popular Media Ad Analysis**  
**(Weight 25%) approx. 3-4 pages, double-spaced, plus bibliographic references page**  
**DUE ONLINE (via CULearn upload<sup>1</sup>):**

<sup>1</sup> Be advised that .pages format files are not compatible with the Microsoft Office software standard used across campus, so it is recommended to save your documents in formats such as .docx, .pdf, .odt or .rtf files to ensure that all submissions can be read (and evaluated). Do not upload .zip files.

**Goals:**

In this exercise, you will:

- 1) identify an example of a contemporary social problem manifested or perpetuated within a popular media advertisement
- 2) describe how the social problem is represented or 'framed' within the ad and what techniques the advertiser used to try to compel the viewer/consumer to (re)act e.g. to purchase a product
- 3) conduct some *scholarly research* to provide support of your critical analysis of the advertisement via two peer-reviewed, scholarly sources of sociological evidence
- 4) practice standard elements of style commonly used in research papers e.g. how to cite sources and write bibliographic references

After completing this assignment, you should:

- 1) better understand how sociologists approach the study of contemporary social problems
- 2) be able to distinguish between popular media sources and peer-reviewed research sources
- 3) have experience reading academic writing and summarizing in your own words
- 4) have experience relating general evidence/research to a more specific, current issue

**Getting Started:**

Browse some popular media advertisements e.g. those found in newspapers, magazines, YouTube or other online videos, on websites, television, billboards, posters, and the like – and **locate an advertisement that demonstrates some engagement with, or an example of a contemporary social problem that interests you.**

**Topic Selection (What kind of problem am I looking for?):** The definition of a social problem here can be broadly understood to be any issue as it pertains to relational dynamics, everyday practices, or patterns of human behaviour (e.g. it may involve some form of social inequality related to race, class, sex, gender, age, religion, and/or the body).

There are many issues to choose from, including but not limited to: racism and ethnocentrism (including concerns dealing with religious intolerance, institutional racism, colonization, concerns publicized by movements such as Black Lives Matter and Idle No More, issues that come up when discussing immigration, refugees, migrant labourers), sexism, trans/homophobia, gender norms (e.g. performance of masculinity and femininity), beauty standards and body norms, ageism, crime (street or white collar), homelessness, suicide, bullying, violence (state or domestic), abuse, missing and murdered indigenous women, risk and environmental issues, prohibition, penalty (e.g. work about prison (in)justice, incarceration and punishment), income inequality, rationalization principles, consumerism, media bias

and public opinion, medicalization, problems relating to differential mobilities (e.g. car dependency, urban planning issues, gentrification), privacy and surveillance, terrorism, access to care (e.g. health technologies, home caregivers, childcare), stigma (e.g. of mental health issues) and just about any form of exploitation or social exclusion!

If you are uncertain whether a topic will be suitable for this assignment, please feel free to ask.

### **Formatting Guidelines:**

- Include page numbers in the bottom right corner of each page.
- Include your student name and number as a header.
- Use standard fonts and margins (e.g. Calibri 11pt, Times New Roman 12pt, etc. i.e. typically your word-processing program's defaults).
- Double-space.
- Indent paragraphs, but do not add extra space between paragraphs beyond the existing double-spacing.

### **Layout and Organization:**

- title
- body: description of advertisement and critical analysis of its relation to a social problem
- bibliographic references: one for the advertisement (including web URL if online) and two scholarly, peer-reviewed sources (see citation and referencing instructions below for details)

### **Create a Strong Title for Your Assignment**

Give your ad analysis a **unique title relevant to a social problem and the way it is represented in popular media**. There is no need to make a separate title page; the title should be on the first page at the top of the page, centred, and underlined. It might be helpful to try to create your title last (after you have already selected your topic and advertisement and put some thought into analyzing how the social problem is represented in this medium). Hint: Sometimes sub-headings make it easier to create a title that is creative and specific to some aspect of your topic, both elements of an ideal title.

### **Body: Descriptive and Analytic Components**

**First, write a paragraph or two describing the social problem that is the focus of your analysis while situating the problem based on how it is represented in the advertisement.** The goal here is to introduce both the social problem and its relation to the advertisement, describing how the advertisement perpetuates and/or is an example of a manifestation of the problem. This introduction should be clear and concise; in other words, stay focused and to-the-point (e.g. while you may briefly address the cultural and historical context that will be developed further beyond the introduction, avoid using an overgeneralization about 'human nature' as a jumping-off point). The following questions may help you get started:

- What is the **focus** of the advertisement? What elements or dimensions of the social problem are portrayed?
  - Does the advertisement focus on a product that embodies a social problem? Is the problem to do with the way a product is advertised? Both?

- Is the problem presented satirically, with, or without humour? Does it seem intentional or unintentional? Is it implicitly or explicitly part of the ad? Is it central or peripheral to the product being advertised?
- What seems to be given most importance/value in the advertisement?
- What (visual) rhetorical devices are being used to compel the audience or draw its attention? Describe specific elements of the advertisement so that the reader can follow your analysis without having seen the ad.

After identifying the social problem and how it is represented in the advertisement generally, **focus on further developing the critical analytical question of how the social problem was ‘framed’ by that source, and situate this advertisement within a broader cultural and historical context.** Make specific reference to elements and descriptive details from the advertisement. The main purpose of these developing paragraphs is to identify and describe ways that popular advertisements ‘frame’ or represent social problems, and (re)produce meanings which mediate the understanding and experience of social and cultural reality. To accomplish these goals, address the following questions using two peer-reviewed, sociological sources (i.e. journal articles or books from university presses) to help you develop and support your arguments:

- In what ways does the advertisement mediate some dimension of our social reality? How does it (re)produce cultural meaning?
- How is what is being portrayed in the advertisement problematic?
- How might this example be extrapolated to the broader cultural and historical context of the social problem’s existence?

Lastly, given the evidence you’d provided to support a critical analysis of the current advertisement, write a concluding paragraph (2-3 sentences) wherein you **suggest how the issue might be constructed differently** (e.g. by advertisers); any suggestion offered should be informed by a sociological understanding of the current problem.

### **Referencing: Selecting Scholarly Sources, Inclusion of In-text Citations, and Bibliography**

**Three external sources should be referenced in this assignment: one for the advertisement (including a complete reference in the bibliography that includes details such as retrieved-from URL and last-accessed date for advertisements found online), and two scholarly, peer-reviewed sociological sources that will help inform your analysis and cultural contextualization of the advertisement.** To ensure that your scholarly sources are peer-reviewed and sociologically relevant, it is recommended that you use the MacOdrum library database where you can add filters: “full text”, “peer-review”, and then further filter results by “social science and social history” or “sociology”.

Peer-reviewed sources undergo a blind screening process where they are reviewed and vetted anonymously by a group of established professionals in the field. The “social science and social history” filter will allow searches for relevant articles in various branches of sociology, criminology, race and gender studies, anthropology, social psychology, and critical theory. However, it is recommended that you avoid journals of “behavioural” studies (behavioural psychology), addictions, adolescents, criminal justice, epidemiology and other types of medical journals. Though these sources may be scholarly, peer review, and evidence-based, they may frame issues through disciplinary lenses that may are not considered “sociological” (e.g. individual-level analyses or biological determinism approaches). For this assignment, look for sociological sources or scholarly sources that complement a relational viewpoint fitting the broad definition of sociology described in the first lecture. If uncertain whether a source seems sociological or not, email the instructor or your TA and ask.

Choose sources that address the social problem or cultural mediation by the advertisement outlined in your introduction. At the very least, you need to be able to make the argument that the sources address the problems somehow. If your social problem is quite specific and is situated in events that are more current than the available academic research, then you will look for articles that seem closely related, or address similar topics and make a creative application/extension of their findings/insights to this specific example of the social problem that's of interest to you. It is okay to look at how academic sources approach the topic more broadly.

After the body of your analysis, include a separate bibliographic reference page where complete references for each source are listed alphabetically by author last name (or in the case of the ad, should an individual author's name be absent, by name of organization/company responsible for its publication along with all other pertinent referencing details such as time of publication or any other publication details relevant to the medium; refer to the citation and referencing guide linked below to see different rules for print versus online media). Peer-reviewed journal articles obtained online through the MacOdrum Library website do not need to include URLs, DOI numbers, or last-accessed dates; you may reference them as if you are citing the print version (which would be author(s), year, article title, journal title, volume, issue, page number range).

In addition to the complete reference page, there should be in-text citations within the body of the analysis where sources and page numbers are referenced, **even when paraphrasing!**

For the sake of consistency and evaluating a common standard, **follow the style guide outlined per the source below for referencing and citation rules** (e.g. use a hanging indent for your bibliographic references). This guide was prepared by a Canadian sociology department and covers of a broad sampling of sources using the referencing standards seen in the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* and the *Canadian Review of Sociology*. [For those students who want to know whether it is APA, MLA, Chicago-style, etc. this style isn't exactly any of those, but most closely resembles a slightly-modified APA.] Click the hyperlink below or view the document on CULearn:

Department of Sociology, Mount Allison University. 2015. "Sociology Citation Guide." Sackville, New Brunswick: Mount Allison University, Retrieved Jan. 20, 2017 ([http://www.mta.ca/library/sociology\\_citation\\_guide.pdf](http://www.mta.ca/library/sociology_citation_guide.pdf)).

Note that on pg. 5 of the guide, the subheading *should* state **Journal article with two or more authors**, rather than "**three or more**". Also note that many scholarly journals include both a volume number and issue number before the page range. The issue within a volume is the number within brackets. Following is an example of a complete journal article reference (note the hanging indent):

Lim, S. R. (2015), "Feeding the "Greenest City": Historicizing "Local," Labour, and the Postcolonial Politics of Eating," *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 24(1), 78-100.

### **Composition/Style:**

Write full, complete sentences. Create a new paragraph when shifting topics or subject matter. Spelling and grammar will be included in the evaluation. Your analysis should be clear, cohesive and make sense on its own without requiring a general audience to have read the assignment guidelines in advance to make sense of it.

Evaluation for this component is largely based on the degree to which your writing is clear and easy to follow. While that may intersect somewhat with spelling and grammatical correctness, this category has more to do with logical organization and whether you can communicate clearly. Do not bullet

list or number answers to questions. Instead, structure your answers in sentences and organize your work into logical paragraphs. You may follow the question outline in sequence to help you organize your work.

While describing your observations, you may write in the first-person (“I”), but do not base your analysis on personal anecdotes. In other words, contextualize your details and descriptions using sociological concepts and research (from the scholarly sources), and keep your analysis structured and grounded by not straying too far from the questions in the assignment guidelines. Do not paraphrase any one source at great length; instead, try to integrate the findings into the main body of your analysis in a way that is logically organized and focused on your critical analysis – use them to guide and support your trajectory. In other words, try to find a balance somewhere between personal speculation/tacit insight (pure speculative analysis) and taking a back-seat to what others have written or described (pure description/paraphrasing).

The full evaluation rubric is posted on CULearn. It is strongly encouraged that students refer to the rubric before submitting assignments to gain a clear sense of how the marks will be distributed.

In addition to meeting with or emailing the professor and teaching assistants, students are encouraged to take advantage of the following resources:

**Assistance for Students:**

Department of Sociology & Anthropology Style Guide (Note: this short guide may be useful for learning how and when to cite sources and write in-text citations, however, use either the Mount Allison University guide or the instructions I wrote above for a better and more accurately-detailed description of how to write complete bibliographic references,):

<https://carleton.ca/socanth/information-for-students/undergraduate-students/style-guide/>

Student Academic and Career Development Services: <http://carleton.ca/sacds/>

Writing Tutorial Services: <https://carleton.ca/csas/writingservices/>

Peer Assisted Subject Coaching (PASC): <https://carleton.ca/csas/people/sociology/>

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