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Beyond Cravings:
Gender and Class Desires in Chocolate Marketing

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Chapter One: Introduction

Of the many comfort foods available, chocolate is identified as being the most craved, tellingly expressed by the coinage of such terms as “chocolate addiction” or “chocoholic.” It has become a fetishized commodity in the United States that people associate with reward, comfort, luxury and sensuality. “Chocolate consumption” is an appropriately ambiguous phrase for it may refer to either the purchasing or the eating of chocolate. The unresolved tension of this ambiguity draws forth the latent connotation of “consumption” where both meanings are combined – consumption is the act by which a consumer merges with a commodity. It is this deeper significance and its close relationship to the Marxist phenomenon of fetishism that I will explore. This paper seeks to answer the question, “How is chocolate an example of a fetishized commodity in 21st century U.S. society?” My study will touch upon the overall structural and supportive role of fetishism within the capitalist system, but primarily aims to clarify the exact mechanism by which the consumer class is successfully manipulated by it. I argue that chocolate marketing exemplifies the way a commodity’s fetish status may be created and intensified through the promise of an object’s capacity to transform the consumer’s deepest aspects of his or her self.

Construction of the Viewer and Marxist Critique of Fetishization

At first glance, chocolate advertising appears to cater to base appetites, but it simultaneously arouses appetites of a social nature by promising to satisfy viewers’ deep-seated desires for sexual fulfillment and higher class status. These two components are brought into play by different mechanisms, which - far from being independent of each other - are deeply intertwined. Sex is routinely referenced in chocolate marketing. Advertisers have mystified the
commodity, portraying it as an intoxicant possessing the power to comfort, reward and satisfy sexual desires. In particular, advertisers portray chocolate as satisfying female sexual desires. Advertisements depicting a beautiful woman savoring chocolate lead female viewers to understand their own chocolate desires and consumption as natural expressions of their attractive femininity. These ads are *subjectifying* since they help construct the subjective experience of the viewer, instructing the female viewer how to frame and interpret her own chocolate cravings. In addition to considering the framing strategies of advertising, I will also examine why the desire for sexual fulfillment is feminized and sexualized in chocolate advertisements.

While this paper analyzes issues of gender and sexuality, it also considers a Marxist critique of the deeper social function of fetishization and its stable integration within capitalism, namely its symbiotic relationship with false consciousness. Chocolate can bear a prestigious quality if it comes from a particular manufacturer and falls within a certain price range. Many chocolates are marketed to bestow upper class status upon consumers of chocolate. This fetish property directly encourages false consciousness. The design and ideology behind premium chocolates, such as Godiva, promote a more sophisticated chocolate and use powerful imagery to convince consumers that they may attain an unparalleled experience of high-class luxury, thus misleading consumers to form an incorrect assessment of their place in the social hierarchy. A false consciousness is created within the lower and middle classes where the consumption of high end chocolate evokes the attainment of upper-class luxury and identity.

Traditionally, fetishism enables capitalists to reap profits far out of proportion to the cost of production. However, chocolate’s fetishism is partially resolved through Fair Trade, which redistributes some of those profits back to the working class and makes the consumer conscious of the worker. The Fair Trade movement has become particularly active within the cacao
industry, and has also become affiliated with organic growers. While many chocolate companies claim to have ethical cacao harvesting and production procedures, poor working conditions and child labor continue to be serious issues in cacao producing countries (Global Exchange 2009).

**Literature Review**

Other disciplines, such as psychology and media studies, have used the term “chocolate fetish,” however, current sociological literature has seldom concerned itself with analyzing chocolate specifically as a fetishized commodity. Sociologists have either categorized chocolate along with other craved foods or acknowledged the existence of a chocolate fetish but failed to explain its origin. While sociologists, such as Susan Bordo (2000), have conducted a semiotic analysis of food and dessert advertisements, they have fallen short of explaining why the fetishization of chocolate is perpetuated and sexualized in contemporary media. With the exception of Diane Barthel’s analysis of the chocolate box (1989), sociologists have rarely attempted to analyze the status issues surrounding chocolate where certain chocolate brands evoke a higher status among consumers. Matthias Varul’s article on Fair Trade goods (2008) does not mention chocolate specifically; however, he did argue that Fair Trade is a serious challenge to a commodity’s fetishism. Current sociological literature on this topic is scarce; however, there has been plenty of research conducted on broader food and consumption issues.

Research examining the sociology of consumption has discovered that topics that were once labeled as insignificant such as, fashion, advertising and shopping are now crucial to understanding consumers in contemporary society. The consumer is no longer regarded as a passive entity subjected to media programming but rather an active participant in the consumption of items. Contemporary sociologists identify consumption as involving the
“selection, purchase, use, maintenance, repair and disposal of any product or service” (Campbell 1995:102). Thorstein Veblen’s theory on conspicuous consumption (2000) is arguably the most widely referred to of all theories in this field.

Veblen focused upon the dynamics of conspicuous consumption which is less relevant to chocolate culture; however, I will be drawing from his insights into the symbolism of luxury items which create a social distance between classes. The most prominent recent theorist of consumption is Pierre Bourdieu (2000). Bourdieu analyzed the notion of taste, and associated taste with aesthetics and social distinction. Taste, like art, is not innocent but helps enforce and police class distinctions. Thus, the consumption of upper class items can enhance a person’s cultural capital.

While there is hardly any sociological literature on chocolate as a fetish, sociologists have focused on issues surrounding food consumption such as taste, nutritional ignorance, eating disorders and women’s insecurity about food. Much of the recent writings on this topic are concerned about the representation of the ideal female body in the mainstream media. In order to remain slim and attractive, women must avoid foods that are high in fat, sugar and calories. Images of the ideal body have permeated the minds of many consumers who are inclined to view the body as an object of admiration and a model for self-construction. Moreover, consumer goods may serve to compensate for a person’s “feelings of inferiority, insecurity or loss, or to symbolize achievement, success or power” (Campbell 1995:111).

Sociologists identify modern consumers as being concerned with the pursuit of pleasure rather than the obtainment of satisfaction. The argument is that the consumer can take real experiences, such as eating, drinking, and sexual activity, and refashion them into improved, imagined scenarios. The essential activity of consumption is not the actual selection, purchase, or
use of products, but rather “the imaginative pleasure-seeking to which the product image lends itself” (Campbell 1995:118). Thus sociologists argue that real consumption in contemporary society is the result of a “mentalistic hedonism” (Campbell 1995:118).

Some sociologists have expanded on this notion of hedonist consumption and applied it to food advertisements. Kaushik and Sen (1990) praised the value of semiotics when analyzing and decoding chocolate and cigarette advertisements. A semiotic analysis of a Cadbury chocolate ad, which depicts a father and daughter consuming chocolate, indicates that chocolate acts as a signifier of a loving relationship between the giver and the receiver. Therefore, the advertisement has the underlying meaning that Cadbury’s chocolate creates loving and enduring relationships. Semiotic analysis is a useful tool that can help decode the behavior and beliefs present in chocolate advertisements and brand imagery.

Susan Bordo argued that advertisers are aware of women’s insecurity about their bodies; therefore, many advertisements aimed at women portray the ideal female body. While her study focused on food ads in general, Bordo touched upon dessert advertisements. In the Victorian era, the depiction of women eating and demonstrating a sensuous surrender to rich, exciting food, was considered a taboo. Victorians had conduct manuals that educated elite women on how to eat in a feminine way, which forbade showing any desire for food or participating in indulgence and overeating. Bordo discussed how modern women violate this taboo by seeking emotional heights, intensity, love, and thrill from the food they consume.

Food can be constructed as an object of sexual desire for women, and thus eating is legitimized as satisfying more than a gastronomic appetite. Advertisers portray certain foods as able to supply a sensual experience. However, advertisements make sure to depict a woman obtaining gratification from food only in measured doses. Susan Bordo also compared the female
figure in food advertisements to the male figure, which is used in food ads to show that compulsive eating is both ordinary and loveable. Men are typically depicted consuming heartier foods in advertisements and she claims that this is normal since men are supposed to have hearty appetites. Bordo also discussed how advertisers are aware of food disorders among women and therefore incorporate the theme of food obsession into their pitch.

Diane Barthel’s analysis of the chocolate box stated that the design of chocolate boxes can serve as an indicator of one’s class status, social status, and personal identity. Food is fundamental to social interactions, and chocolate has been thought of as a luxury food. She discussed how “chocoholics” are overwhelmingly female and how a taste for something sweet has been socially labeled as a feminine desire. Advertisements in women’s magazines are described as encouraging self indulgence for a food that provides feelings equated to sex and love. Chocolate boxes generally represent luxury items that are appropriate for gift giving. Their design draws upon culturally established symbols of romance and sensuality. Barthel labeled chocolate as a fetishized commodity that carries with it two coveted personal qualities: wealth and thinness. Thus, consumers attach themselves to the image of a product that has been separated from the human conditions of its labor.

The growth of the Fair Trade movement has also attracted criticism. Matthias Varul reexamined Fair Trade consumerism as a serious challenge to commodity fetishism. He argued that the romanticized image of agricultural and artisanal producers promoted by Fair Trade businesses helps hide their failure to deliver full equity and recognition to the workers. Fair Trade items are labeled as alternative goods meant to replace the rejected practices of exploitative labor and environmental damage. However, these items are expensive and have a profit motive similar to other commodities. Fair Trade producers have begun to understand the
power of advertising in enhancing a product’s use value: people purchase images of themselves as much as the material products.

My contribution serves to develop the points made by previous sociologists while using the theories on fetish, taste, and consumption to identify the gender and status issues surrounding chocolate in contemporary society. I use Bordo’s analysis of advertisements and apply them specifically to chocolate advertisements. I also argue that the “mentalistic hedonism” current sociologists believe the modern consumer strives for is in fact created by advertisements that fetishize commodities and create fantastical imagery. Furthermore, I use Veblen and Bourdieu’s theories on consumption and taste and apply them to the status issues surrounding chocolate, while staying consistent with Barthel’s analysis of the chocolate box as a symbol of upper class status. My argument about Fair Trade chocolate partially resolving chocolate’s fetishism is consistent with Varul’s argument that Fair Trade is a fraudulent attempt at challenging commodity fetishism.

Karl Marx and the Fetishism of the Commodity

In Das Kapital vol. 1, Karl Marx examined the central elements of capitalist society: the commodity form, money and capital (Leeb 2007:841). Marx argued that in our capitalist society, we see products as freestanding creations, independent of human labor. Marx used the term “use-value” to refer to the satisfaction of real human needs, material, psychological or biological, through the consumption of objects. He also wrote about “exchange-value,” which refers to the rate and ratio by which one commodity exchanges relative to others, all of which is overseen by the monetary system. The commodity thus consists of both its use-value and exchange-value. The mystical character of the commodity – its “fetish” quality - does not stem from its use-value
but rather from “the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things…the products of labor become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social” (Marx 2000:332). The products of labor, according to Marx, only become commodities when they are transformed into an exchange-value and circulate as such (Leeb 2007:841). He defined a fetish as “a thing which transcends sensuousness” (Marx 2000:331). The fetishism, Marx argued, attaches itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced as commodities. Therefore, fetishism is inseparable from the production of commodities.

The commodity’s fetishism is enabled by the unnatural, alienated labor which produces them (Marx 2000:332). Marx stated that, “Objects of utility become commodities only because they are the products of the labor of private individuals who work independently of each other” (Marx 2000:332). The factory system has led to a great deal of worker alienation. The work product turns into a fetish because its transformation into an exchange value implies a separation from its grounded-in-practicality use-value (Leeb 2007:842).

In this essay, I am consistent with Marx’s definition and theory of the fetish object. I argue that chocolate has become a fetishized commodity that people associate with feelings of love, comfort, sexuality and class status. Advertisers have taken the use-value of chocolate, a food that satisfies a craving for sweets, and enhanced it to have the mystical ability to gratify sexual urges in women and serve as an indicator of class status. The chocolate fetish is systematically created, reinforced, and exploited in chocolate advertisements. Chocolate has become a fetishized commodity in 21st century US society that exerts an irresistible power over consumers and has perpetuated associations that are farfetched.
Methodology

I investigated my research question by conducting a content analysis of popular consumer chocolate ads in contemporary media focusing specifically on magazine and television ads. I analyzed chocolate ads for popular brands such as Ghiradelli, Dove, Hershey’s, and Betty Crocker. Also, I looked at how the depiction of the chocolate fetish carries over into deodorant ads as well. Over the summer, I participated in a chocolate tasting in San Francisco entitled, “Chocolate Obsession – Serious Chocolate.” I was able to meet Michael Recchiuti, the owner of Recchiuti Confections, a small, local chocolate manufacturer in San Francisco. My audiotaped interview with Michael, which covers topics such as women and chocolate, artisanal chocolate versus mass produced chocolate, Fair Trade chocolate, and the New York chocolate show, serves as another source of original data.

I use scientific studies regarding the physiological effects of chocolate consumption as a means of exploring how advertisers have manipulated scientific truths in order to sell a false image of chocolate to consumers. My argument could be proven false if there were serious scientific support for chocolate as an aphrodisiac for women since advertisers could argue that they are not creating or perpetuating the fetish but rather catering to an already established fact. While my study focuses on the genre of sensualized female directed ads in magazines and television commercials, I compare these to male-oriented and youth-oriented chocolate ads as well.

Chapter Two: A Rich History

An examination of chocolate’s history indicates that the commodity’s fetish status began long before capitalism. First roasted and eaten by the Toltecs, cacao’s association with sex and
love was later established by the Aztecs who would eat it off each other’s skin during sex (Rosenblum 2005:11). Xocolatl (pronounced chocolatl) was literally a “holy fetish” and incorporated as the “god’s elixir” into their grand ceremonies (Rosenblum 2005:56). The status component of chocolate’s fetish began when Europeans adopted the commodity and treated it as a luxury item. While chocolate’s fetishistic quality was fully developed during capitalism, pre-capitalist societies began to cultivate the notions of the commodity as an aphrodisiac and an indicator of class status.

When cacao first made its way to Europe in the sixteenth century, it was an elitist drink reserved for the nobility of Spain, Italy and France. Chocolate became a luxury “where dainty ladies enjoyed it and transformed the enjoyment of chocolate into a highly refined social event” (Lebovitz 2004:14), which marks the beginning of chocolate as a fetish that communicates social status and upper-class femininity. It was not until the industrial era that chocolate fully developed its fetishistic nature and became available to the general population thanks to cheap production technologies developed in the late 1800’s (Lebovitz 2004: 15). The emergence of capitalism and the industrial revolution alienated factory workers from the means of their subsistence. Chocolate was no longer a partially fetishized commodity as it was in pre-capitalist society. As a product fully separated from its producer, it attained its full fetish status, as defined by Marx.

Chapter Three: Chocolate and Women

Since chocolate’s introduction to European society, it has been considered a luxurious and fantastical food. Whereas products such as tobacco and alcohol are socially deemed masculine luxuries, chocolate is associated with women. Chocolate is more frequently craved by
women, but it cannot be determined whether this is the reason for the effect of the association (Weingarten and Elston 1991:167). In fact chocolate is the most frequently craved item among females and its frequency far exceeds that of any other food (Weingarten and Elston 1991:169). There is also evidence that fluctuating hormone levels may contribute to specific chocolate cravings in women (Bruinsma and Taren 1999:1254). A craving is “an intense, periodic motivation aimed at gaining the craved substance” and chocolate cravings appear to exist in 40% of women and 15% of men (Bruinsma and Taren 1999:1250). Thirty-two percent of women reported that their cravings were linked to their menstrual cycle (Weingarten and Elston 1991:170). This is not surprising since women typically seek high-fat, high calorie foods around their reproductive cycle in order to support a baby (Aaron and Bearden 2008:165).

Aaron and Bearden (2008) argued that both men and women enjoy chocolate, though women tend to be more vocal in their “needing” chocolate (165). Eighty-five percent of men and 86% of women claimed to give in to their cravings in the majority of occasions, however, 82% of men reported a positive affect after indulging in their craving whereas only 57% of women reported a positive affect after their indulgence (Weingarten and Elston 1991:170). The 77% of women and the 75% of men who reported to crave chocolate also indicated that there was no substitute for their cravings (Weingarten and Elston 1991:172). Weingarten and Elston’s findings have been consistent with previous reports regarding chocolate as a frequently craved food among women. Their finding that women have more of a negative response than men when indulging in their cravings is also consistent with previous sociological literature that examines the discontent women have in connection with dieting and weight.

We typically associate addictive behavior with drugs, alcohol, or sexual behavior. It is becoming more apparent, however, that chocolate may affect similar physiological and
psychological reactions in certain individuals (Bruinsma and Taren 1999). While chocolate is not clearly established as an addictive substance, it is the most commonly craved food in the U.S. (Bruinsma and Taren 1999:1249). Scientists have coined the term “chocoholic” and “chocoholism” to express the helplessness of some in avoiding this “addictive” substance (Rozen, Levine and Stoess 1991).

One misconception about chocolate that is exploited by contemporary advertising is that it is an aphrodisiac. This idea started with the Aztecs who only used the substance for special occasions and for elite members. It has become more publicly known that chocolate contains theobromine, phenyl ethylamine (PEA), anandamide, and cannabinoids, which are similar to the mild-altering components found in ecstasy and marijuana (Lebovitz 2004: 41). PEA also creates a chemical reaction that releases endorphins in the brain, evoking a similar feeling to falling in love (Lebovitz 2004:41). Moreover, the “euphoria” one gets from eating chocolate is associated with chocolate’s high level of magnesium and the presence of serotonin and tyramine which also provide a mild calming effect (Lebovitz 2004:41).

Chocolate’s association with love has also been attributed to psychological and cultural practices of receiving chocolate on Valentine’s Day, which evokes an emotional response toward a “special” friend, or a parent’s promise of a chocolate treat to their child to reinforce good behavior (Aaron and Bearden 2008:165). Others argue that women’s love for chocolate can also come from the sensory experience of simply looking, smelling and tasting chocolate. This can release the serotonin in the brain and enhance a person’s mood. In actuality, other studies on chocolate have indicated that the amounts of these mood-enhancing chemicals, such as alkaloids or phenylethylamine, are at such a low level that it is unlikely that they are the reason behind the euphoria one feels when they consume chocolate (Aaron and Bearden 2008:169). Chocolate is
inherently pleasurable simply because it is delicious and has an appealing texture, but the findings of what could be called “chocolate propaganda research” to validate a deeper relationship to sex are so negligible and trivial that one must conclude that it is only chocolate marketing that perpetuates chocolate’s association with love and sex and its implied special relevance to women.

**Gender Desires**

The main goal of advertisements is to persuade the viewer (or listener) to purchase a certain commodity. Advertisements attempt to change emotions and send out subliminal messages (Kotwal, Gupta and Devi 2008:51). Susan Terrio (2000) claimed that since the creation of chocolate advertisements in the 19th century, images of upper class women have been widely used to promote the product. Chocolate ads associate chocolate with luxury, women and moral taboos. Moreover, they celebrate women’s roles as discriminating consumers as well as the female weakness for chocolate and the surrender to temptation (Terrio 2000:253). In the past black women as well as people of color were often used in chocolate ads to represent chocolate as a natural, raw material rather than a refined consumer good (Terrio 2000:253). White women on the other hand, were used to evoke a sense of “luxury, languor, romantic love, and subtly suggestive eroticism” (Terrio 2000:253). The chocolate advertisements of the 19th century reinforced the notion that white women were the privileged consumers of chocolate, while women of color were seen as third world workers who harvested and cultivated the commodity. Advertisements of the 21st century still portray women in a state of ecstasy and suggest feelings of luxury and love; however, the colonial imagery is removed and a more diverse casting of women is used in contemporary chocolate advertisements.
Sex and Chocolate

A commercial for Hershey’s Bliss opens with the melody, “It’s joy, it’s ecstasy, it’s truth, it’s destiny. Even love is not enough to tell you how you make me feel. There’s only one word for this, its bliss.” While this catchy country song is playing, women, both black and white, young and middle aged, are depicted in a brightly colored sunflower field. A close up shot of the unwrapped chocolate reveals a curved indentation, reminiscent of the hourglass curvature of a woman’s body, in the middle of the chocolate square. One woman is then depicted falling into a bed of white pillows, laughing in an ashamed yet joyful expression. Similarly, another woman is shown lying in a hammock and sensually placing the chocolate on her tongue.

A Lindor’s Truffle commercial depicts a woman seductively eating chocolate behind a silky red veil while the female narrator says in an erotic tone, “Lindor’s lusciously smooth center starts to melt, and so will you.” An advertisement for Ghiradelli goes so far as to give women directions on how to eat their chocolate for maximum pleasure: “We suggest you open your square caringly. Take in the heavenly aroma. Place the silky square on your tongue and let it melt slowly, very slowly. Ghiradelli, a timeless pleasure.” While the seductive female voice is giving these directions, the woman in the ad unwraps the chocolate delicately while staring into the camera so as to acknowledge its taboo nature. She then closes her eyes as she loses herself to the scent of the chocolate. After biting a piece off the chocolate square, the woman slowly licks her index finger. When she finishes her treat, she falls back in her chair with the chocolate bag in hand. As she proceeds to caress her face, a large Ghiradelli square comes on screen and acts as a door which closes on the woman, indicating a private moment.

Dove chocolate is a brand of M&M/Mars that advertises distinctly towards women as their packaging, advertisements and commercials suggest. Just like Hershey’s Bliss, Lindor’s
Truffles and Ghiradelli’s Squares, the chocolates are relatively small compared to generic chocolate bars such as Snickers, KitKats or Crunch. These bite sized pieces are well suited to the female consumer worried about her image. The Dove website states that their chocolate ensures a “silky, smooth texture and delicious, lingering taste,” a seductive catch phrase that borrows the same words used by competing chocolate manufacturers in their advertisements. In *Gourmet*, a magazine devoted to cooking recipes as well as healthy living, travel, entertainment, and culture, a Dove advertisement (see Appendix A1) features a woman wrapped in silk with the tag line, “Now it can last longer than you can resist.” At first glance this ad already suggests a sexual reverie, but the fact that the words “last longer” and “resist” are italicized gives the reader a sense that chocolate is a substitute for sex. This advertisement could just as easily be read as, “Now Dove can provide more pleasure that lasts longer than your lover.” Dove chocolate is aware that it is a woman’s chocolate and as a result, uses its advertisements to depict women in sexual bliss.

Moreover, a Dove chocolate commercial titled “Senses,” begins with an image of a beautiful model caressing herself to the sound of soft jazz while a piece of chocolate emerges in front of her. The ad cuts to a close up of the model’s lips as she takes an innocent bite and then cuts back to a medium shot of her in a euphoric state. A chocolate colored silk comes from off screen and begins to envelop the model’s body while a seductive female voice says, “only a chocolate this pure can be this silky.” The voice continues to say that the chocolate can, “make you savor, sigh, [and] melt,” meanwhile, the silk continues to travel around the model’s body, giving her a sexually gratified expression. The subliminal message is that Dove chocolates can not only satisfy the taste buds but one’s sexual desires as well.
A magazine advertisement for Ferrero Rocher (see Appendix A2) beckons viewers to “Redeem [their] sins” by winning a trip to the “Sea Temple Resort Spa.” The flyer depicts a beautiful naked woman wrapped in the ends of a curtain with her left hand placed over her genitalia and a branch budding with Ferrero Rocher chocolates in front of her, undoubtedly a nod to the theme of sin and the forbidden fruit. Clearly the woman appears as though she just had sex as her nakedness and unkempt hair suggests. The ad asks whether the reader is a chocolate sinner and implies that a chocolate sinner is a woman who uses the commodity as a means of seeking sexual gratification. Other chocolate manufacturers also play with this idea of chocolate as a sexually gratifying experience in their advertisements as well.

One commercial for Betty Crocker opens on a shot of a living room with keys hanging on a miniature statue, lipstick rolling off a table from a purse that is leaking its contents, a pair of pink heels sprawled out on the floor, and finally a coat placed near a microwave. All of which suggest lovers losing themselves in intimacy. The viewer then sees the Betty Crocker box situated next to the microwave and realizes the intent of the commercial. Similar to other chocolate ads, the culprit of the mess is a woman who is enjoying her microwavable dessert by herself on the couch. She stares at her fork with sexual curiosity and has a satisfied look as she lays back and indulges in her treat. The female narrator says that “Now Betty can melt away your entire day in just three minutes. Introducing Betty Crocker’s Warm Delights. In delicious molten caramel cake and decadent hot fudge brownie…for a taste of delight, you are just three minutes from heaven.” What appeared to be the result of a lovers’ endeavor turned out to be nothing more than a late night snack. What is also strange is that the woman seems perfectly content with the lack of a male presence and instead appears to have satisfied all her sexual urges with chocolate. Another Betty Crocker commercial that advertises the same dessert shows a montage
of mixed race women who are either single, married or pregnant all consuming the same dessert. The tag line for this ad is “Just seconds in the microwave and indulgence is served.” The ad indicates that women, regardless of whether they are single, married or pregnant, are all looking for sexual satisfaction. This satisfaction appears to only be attainable if women take huge bites of chocolate and leave no piece behind as is shown in the commercial.

Chocolate’s socially constructed sex appeal has moved beyond the commodity itself and has also been applied to deodorant ads that are meant to stimulate female consumer’s senses and help express their sexuality. An ad for a deodorant called Axe Dark Temptation shows a young man spraying himself with the product and then suddenly transforming into a solid chocolate man with an unchanging white smile. This transformation essentially turns the man into a sex object where women start to hunger for him. As he walks down the street, beautiful women become lost in his aroma and start to pay attention to him. He breaks off a piece of his nose and sprinkles it onto two women’s coffee. He finds himself in a sexually charged picnic where a woman rubs a strawberry in his bellybutton and then viciously eats the fruit. The man is then seen in a movie theater where two women lick and nibble his face, which he enjoys in what appears to be a sexual way for he pulls one of them closer to him. The commercial then cuts to a woman in a hospital bed who is healed in a sense as the chocolate man presents her with a box of his own fingers, which humors her. The montage continues with the man serving melted chocolate to sexually aroused women and a random woman on a bus taking a bite out of his underside. The commercial reaches its pinnacle as a gym full of women rush to the window to lustfully stare at the man as he walks by. The commercial ends with the man waving at his female fans in the gym while a woman in a drive away car suddenly rips off his arm. “As
The consumption of a fat, sweet food is inherently taboo for women and must be where the “naughtiness” or “sinfulness” originates. It is doubtless the chief factor inhibiting women’s consumption of chocolate; consequently marketing must overcome it. As a result, advertisers
have replaced this food taboo with a sexual one. They have turned chocolate into a sexual, self-indulgent, private experience that invokes a taboo similar to that of masturbation. The consequence is that now when a woman feels the compulsion to eat chocolate, which she knows will harm her figure, advertisers have equipped her with an inner-response to overcome her moment of self-restraint: the belief that chocolate consumption represents and enhances her femininity via satisfying her sexually. This precisely contradicts her knowledge that chocolate will harm her feminine appeal.

These advertisements are manipulations of reality all in order to sell a product (Bordo 2000:103). Advertisers, in transforming chocolate desire into a sexual desire, have preserved the taboo aspect of those desires. Chocolate commercials require the sexual taboo because it enables women to transfer their wants and desires into a chocolate sexual fantasy. Women cannot simply forget about their food inhibition, therefore, advertisers enable them to reinterpret it as a sexual inhibition. However, this inhibition is eagerly ignored as modeled by the self-indulging women in the ads. Advertisers have thusly succeeded in manipulating viewers to the extent that they teach them how to interpret and frame their own desires. Moreover, these chocolate advertisements encourage women to take a break from their normal routine and seek pleasure in a chocolate fantasy, thus promoting a “mentalistic hedonism” within consumers.

The Feminization of Sexual Fulfillment

If chocolate is advertised as a sexual desire then why is the notion of sexual fulfillment feminized? Most of these advertisements offer chocolate as a means of satisfying sexual urges. Advertisers must have been inspired by some gender stereotype that led to this notion. Researchers have declared that there is a gender difference in regards to love and that this is the
result of the different socialization of men and women in Western societies (Gonzalez and Koestner 2006:768). Gonzales and Koestner (2006) argued that men may be more reluctant than women in expressing their emotions because of a sense of pride and a fear of displaying vulnerability. The male style of love seems to separate sex and love, deeming it a casual recreation, while women connect the two (Cancian 1986:695). If contemporary women cannot satisfy their need for closeness or their sexual desires with the same ease as men do then advertisers have offered chocolate as the solution to their problem.

Contemporary chocolate ads are perpetuating the idea that women are inherently missing something in their lives and that the purchase of a commodity will fill in that void. As a result, chocolate has come to have an illusory use-value that far exceeds its real use-value. These advertisements not only present sex in a subtle way that caters to women’s preference for subdued sexual imagery in ads (Dahl et al. 2009:218) but they also even more subtly perpetuate the gender stereotype that men do not reciprocate the love women want, therefore, women are forced to find that fulfillment via the consumption of a commodity. In the case of chocolate advertisements, love and sex are one in the same.

*The Problem of Chocolate and the Female Body*

All of the chocolate advertisements mentioned have effectively *subjectified* women, meaning that women are the subject and target of these advertisements and are conditioned to interpret their feelings about the consumption of chocolate in a sexual way. When she discussed female targeted advertisements, Susan Bordo stated that, “Far more innerving is the psychological acuity of the ad’s focus, not on the size and shape of bodies, but on a certain subjectivity….” (Bordo 2000:99). Diane Barthel argued that chocolate provides women with
their “primary identity,” meaning that women have this relationship with food and in essence are what they eat (Barthel 1989:431).

Chocolate advertisements in women’s magazines, such as Health, Cosmopolitan and O, encourage self indulgence. Barthel would argue that these magazine ads promote a self indulgence in a manner that would be unacceptable for alcohol or drugs (Barthel 1989:431). While I agree that some chocolate ads do this, I argue that recently there is a cultural shift where women’s self indulgence is allowed but in limited doses. Some contemporary chocolate advertisements are moving away from enticing consumers to binge and are instead promoting the enjoyment of chocolate in smaller quantities and lower calories while simultaneously maintaining and building on the commodity’s fetish status.

The magazine Health (September 2009), which covers up-to-date news on medicine, diet, fitness etc., features three advertisements for chocolate. One ad is for Breyers Smooth & Dreamy Cookies & Cream that is ½ the fat. The ad says “In my bowl, upon my spoon, sweet cookies & cream, you make me swoon,” and has the self proclamation written in the corner that “this is love.” Another ad is for a York Peppermint Patty that has “70% less fat.” The third ad is for a Hershey’s kiss with a meltaway center that guarantees “Your smile will last.”

Cosmopolitan (October 2009), a magazine that targets women’s interest in such things as fashion, sex advice and dating tips, contains two chocolate ads. One ad is for Dreyer’s Chocolate ice cream in its Jr. size that is 1/2 the fat and has 1/3 fewer calories than regular ice cream. The other advertisement is for a chocolate appropriately called Fling and has a story to accompany the image of the chocolate bar:

Elizabeth lowered the lights, put on some soft music, and lay down on her bed. She wasn’t worried about being interrupted; her husband was out of town. He was always out of town. So she was used to this by now. She thought back to times before – the guilt that quickly followed. But not anymore. Elizabeth had learned to have a little fun. How to be
a little naughty. Excitement raced through her body. She had waited all day for this moment. She grinned, picturing her husband’s face, his reaction, were he to wander in and see her. It would certainly not be a smile. He couldn’t stand the idea of crumbs on the sheets.

Underneath the story, the ad encourages women to “have a fling” that is “naughty, but not that naughty” since this chocolate truffle treat is under 85 calories per stick and not adultery. This story is similar to the ones depicted on television. The lack of a male presence allows women the time to indulge in their sexual cravings. Although Elizabeth is not actually engaging in an affair, her actions are equated to cheating on her husband. It is only after reading the last line that the reader understands the joke that what the woman is hiding from her husband is chocolate, therefore, there is nothing to fret about.

Similarly, chocolate commercials on television are advertising a healthier type of chocolate such as 3 Musketeers with “45% less fat” or Jell-O Dark Chocolate pudding with “60 creamy calories in deep chocolate bliss. Jell-O cause every diet needs a little wiggle room.” Probably the most outrageous chocolate advertisement is a commercial for Oreo Mini Cakesters which consists of an army of beautiful women screaming their lungs out in the middle of a downtown metropolitan while chasing down a 100 calories Oreo Mini Cakesters truck. The ad ends with the tipped over truck spilling boxes of chocolate onto the street where women violently hoard the boxes.

These ads have been consistent with the depiction of chocolate as a sinful treat meant for women while at the same time offering a healthier alternative for today’s health conscientious women. However, it is ironic that ads for chocolate appear in women’s magazines featuring articles on sex appeal, diets and so forth. While these treats may have fewer calories, they still contain a large amount of fat and sugar and these advertisements do not mention an appropriate amount to consume for women who are worried about their body image. Therefore, the
possibility of binging on these lower calories snacks is still possible. Essentially, all of these advertisements legitimize the consumption of chocolate through the depiction of models sharing the same cravings that female chocolate consumers have for both chocolate and sex.

In her article, “Hunger as Ideology,” Susan Bordo claimed that advertisers are aware of women’s insecurity about their bodies; therefore, many advertisements geared towards women portray the ideal body (Bordo 2000:104). The women who advertise for chocolate are generally slender, confident, upbeat and sexy individuals who appear as though they do not eat any food that is high in fat (see Appendix A3). Consumed in moderation, chocolate is a sign for “passion, love, even playful eroticism, and a constituent element of the social order. On the other hand, chocolate also connotes overindulgence, contamination, even illness, and is a symbol of sexual perversion, deceit and class conflict” (Terrio 2000:239). For an industry that markets a specifically feminine mode of enjoying chocolate, the central problem of its product is its well-known fattening effect. Although recent advertising has tried to reduce this anxiety by promoting smaller portions, and chocolate propaganda continuously counteracts it by praising chocolate’s psychological benefits, the high caloric content has been and will remain the unavoidable enemy of the chocolate industry. This problem may explain the systematic sexualization of chocolate in advertising. The transformation of a practical food taboo into an eagerly ignored sexual taboo removes the chief obstacle preventing women from eating chocolate. As the advertisement for Fling makes explicit, the “naughtiness” that women feel in eating a fattening food is re-framed as a sexual desire. Women are trained, through the subjectifying effect of advertising, to reinterpret their own hesitation as the withholding from a sensual pleasure, from which, unlike the real prospect of becoming fat, there is no good reason to refrain. The subsequent choice of the actors in the advertisements to “take the plunge” beyond inhibition trains women do so, as well.
Studies have shown that “46% of 9-11 year olds are ‘sometimes’ or ‘very often’ on diets” (Gustafson-Larson & Terry 1992). This desire to be thinner indicates that the media is affecting young women and chocolate ads that depict the ideal female figure are encouraging this behavior. However, advertisers rarely encourage women’s consumption of hearty chocolates such as Snickers or Twix. The female figure is advertised as delicate and is encouraged to be maintained while it is acceptable for the male figure to have an average appearance.

**Chocolate Ads for Men and Reminders of Childhood**

Bordo stated that the male figure is used to show that compulsive eating is both ordinary and loveable. Men are supposed to have hearty appetites for “it is the mark of a man to eat spontaneously and expansively” (Bordo 2000:104). As a result, chocolates that are advertised towards male consumers, such as Snickers, Twix and 3 Musketeers, are larger in size and have more fillings than the plain and simple chocolates advertised to women. Snickers is a well known chocolate bar that directly advertises to hungry male consumers with its caramel, peanut and nougat filling. The ad campaign for Snickers asks the question, “Hungry?” and then orders consumers to “grab a Snickers.” The ads and television commercials promote the candy as a man’s chocolate that satisfies the natural, hearty appetite of the everyday male. However, the male figure is not the only promotional tool used for selling chocolate to men.

Other chocolate ads cater to the idea of childhood with a promise to escape from the trials of everyday life into “a narcissistic retreat” as one ad for Guittard suggests: “Your chocolate fantasies come true with Guittard” (Barthel 1989:431). Similarly, a Hershey’s commercial depicts a chocolate woman navigating through an entire world made of chocolate. In this world there is “pure simplicity, pure happiness” and of course “pure delicious chocolate.” A magazine
advertisement for a Crunch bar caters to this childlike hedonism by featuring three children on Halloween skipping with their trick-or-treat bags. The ad asks readers to look back to “When candy bars were used as currency. When your best friends were pirates, aliens and vampires. When the three most magical words were TRICK OR TREAT.”

Chlöe Doutre-Roussel, an international chocolate expert, stated that, “Everyone, no matter who, associates chocolate with the best part of childhood...Pronounce the word and people become kids again. It is something precious, a reward” (Rosenblum 2005:37). Several chocolate lovers equate chocolate to a “sweet memory,” or like “being a kid, going to play at the park,” or even “a warm nap on a cold day” (Aaron and Monica 2008:189). On the whole, male-oriented and non-gendered chocolate advertising is much less intense than female-targeted advertising in its subjectifying force, its symbolic sexual content, and its sensual stimulation. The differences serve to demonstrate that chocolate marketing has engineered a drastically gendered example of “mentalistic hedonism” and created a specifically feminine and sexualized modality for enjoying chocolate.

Chapter Four: Class Desires

In our culture of consumption where products communicate class position, confer social status, and define personal identity (Fox and Lears 1983), chocolate has become a fetishized commodity that can serve as an indicator of class position. Chocolate’s fetishism has enabled the commodity to communicate social status via its price and its manufacturer. A consumer’s taste for fine chocolate has been compared to taste for fine wine. Like wine, chocolate can be consumed for its distinct regional flavor profiles. Chocolate and wine production is very similar since the grapes used to make wine and the cacao beans used for chocolate both vary in aroma,
flavor, appearance and nutrients, all of which depend on the region where they are grown. Chocolate makers and connoisseurs pay attention to the characteristics of the beans and study the climate conditions in which they grew in. The richness of the soil, the amount of rainfall, and the type of trees grown in different regions all determine the flavor within the cacao bean (Aaron and Bearden 2008:18). Also, the ways in which the beans are harvested and fermented are crucial in creating the final taste of the bean.

Pierre Bourdieu claimed that taste unites those people who share similar conditions and separates them from all others. Taste distinguishes people from one another for a person can classify themselves and others according to taste (Bourdieu 2000:205). The consumption of luxurious items are “opportunities to experience or assert one’s position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept” (Bourdieu 2000:206). Bourdieu argued that tastes are firstly distastes that are provoked by visceral intolerance. However, because each person’s taste feels natural, they are inclined to reject other tastes as “unnatural and therefore vicious” (Bourdieu 2000:205). Bourdieu suggested that perhaps this aversion to different preferences and life-styles is one of the strongest barriers between the classes. I argue that the upper-class dislike for mass produced, lower-class chocolate reinforces class division.

A gift of chocolate can not only imply a romantic connotation but also an act of patronage (Barthel 1989:433). The packaging of certain chocolates sends a specific message to the recipient of the gift item. It is intended to reflect the good taste of the giver and the exclusive image of the chocolate shop (Terrio 2000:120). Thorstein Veblen examined how the unproductive consumption of goods is a mark of prowess. The difference in the upper-class and lower-class consumption of food is best seen in the consumption of costly articles such as intoxicating beverages and narcotics. Similarly, the consumption of fine chocolates is honorific,
thus giving those who are able to afford the indulgence a “superior status” (Veblen 2000:188).

Veblen argued that the consumption of luxuries was in fact a consumption directed to “the comfort of the consumer himself, and is, therefore, a mark of the master” (Veblen 2000:188).

The taste for and consumption of fine chocolates indicates a higher status in the chocolate world. Chocolate connoisseurs look down on consumers of generic, mass produced chocolates, arguing that these candies do not fit the European criteria for elite chocolate. There is distaste for generic American brands among chocolate connoisseurs, however, American companies are trying to sell the illusion to consumers that they can obtain upper-class, premium chocolates at affordable prices.

News such as “dark chocolate is good for you,” has not only lessened consumers’ guilt about eating chocolate but also created the “premium” chocolate trend (Aaron and Bearden 2008:28). Recently, there has been an elevation in American tastes for finer chocolate. Dark chocolate sales in the United States have increased by 60% in recent years and the premium chocolate category, which includes organic, Fair Trade, exotic, and spiced chocolate, is growing at a fast pace as well (Aaron and Bearden 2008:28). This new found excitement for chocolate has increased chocolate sales to $74 billion worldwide and $17.6 billion in the United States (Aaron and Bearden 2008:28).

In the past several years, affordable premium chocolates have found their place on store shelves alongside Hershey’s and Snickers bars. Instead of buying a $30 box of truffles from Godiva, giant candy corporations have given the average consumer access to premium chocolates. Brands such as Hershey’s and M&M’s are releasing premium chocolates to keep up with the new American tastes while providing an alternative to more expensive chocolate. Susan Smith, a spokesperson for the National Confectioners Association, said that, “Chocolate has
entered the same category as coffee and wine, where everybody has a different opinion about it or different kind they like,” (Choi 2008). Veblen argued that the consumption of luxury goods is an evidence of one’s wealth and the failure to consume these articles in a large quantity and quality is a mark of inferiority and lower-class status (Veblen 2000:190). As a result, chocolate companies have created this new line of premium chocolates to elevate the tastes of lower-class consumers while masking their inferiority to fine, upper-class chocolate consumers.

Premium chocolates are marketed to tacitly legitimize the upper-class and therefore class division. Chocolate companies create the false sense that premium chocolate can raise a person’s cultural capital. Cultural capital is associated with taste, dispositions, and behaviors. It is something you can learn through the education system, however, most often it is something you are socialized into via the class or family you are born into. In consumer society, products sell an image of the consumer to others (Barthel 1989:430). A false consciousness is created within the lower-class where the consumption of premium chocolate evokes an upper-class taste and thus raises a person’s cultural capital.

**Lower-class Chocolate**

Hershey’s began producing milk chocolate bars and wafers on a mass scale in 1900. This was revolutionary at the time since it lowered the price of chocolates, giving Americans the opportunity to enjoy a European luxury. This in effect secured the Hershey Company as an All-American Chocolate company. Despite the fact that Hershey’s is considered a generic lower-class chocolate, the reason the company is successful is because it is the standard American brand that sold the idea of its patronage to an entire nation. Most consumers of fine chocolate do not consider Hershey’s products chocolate but rather “chalk,” “cheese,” or “barnyard chocolate”
(Rosenblum 2005:98). As a result, any “premium” chocolate that comes from Hershey’s is immediately disregarded as true fine chocolate. Despite this shun from the elite chocolate world, Hershey’s bars and Kisses continue to sell in the millions (Rosenblum 2005:98).

The design and ideology behind companies that, unlike Hershey’s, advertise all their chocolates as premium promote a more sophisticated product and attract consumers who desire prominence. Ghiradelli, for example, raised the bar in terms of mass-produced chocolate. They saw the premium chocolate market emerge and tried to deal on a competitive level. As a result, they recreated themselves by releasing chocolates with more sophisticated flavors and changed their packaging. Ghiradelli chocolate is popular because consumers are exposed to their chocolates at practically any drug store and because the San Francisco based factory is a tourist attraction.

One commercial for Ghiradelli plays “The Flower Duet,” a piece of classical music that accompanies the claim that Ghiradelli chocolate is “no ordinary chocolate.” The use of classical music is meant to convey a more sophisticated and upper-class type of product to the viewer. Stock footage of the old Ghiradelli factory is used in the ad to indicate that their chocolate is “the result of over 150 years of perfecting to create our most intense, slow melting, premium chocolate.” Aside from its commercials, Ghiradelli also uses its packaging to connote feelings of luxury. Their chocolate squares typically come in gold colored bags and each piece is individually wrapped in gold packaging. Also, the chocolate is molded with the Ghiradelli label all of which provide the consumer with a sense of affluence. The company aims at convincing consumers that what they are eating is somehow better and more upscale than other chocolate bars in the candy aisle, thus creating a false consciousness within consumers.
Chocolate connoisseurs are less concerned about the lineage of a chocolate company, like Ghiradelli or Hershey’s, and are instead more interested in the chef who makes the chocolate. For example, Valrhona, a French manufacturer notorious for making the best range of commercial-scale chocolate, makes roughly seven thousand tons of chocolate a year (Rosenblum 2005:149). Since the late 1990s, Valrhona has been available to only professionals and those who can afford to pay for it (Rosenblum 2005:152). Rather than worry about quantity, the company is more concerned about the quality of its product. Upper-class chocolate is not so easily accessible to the general public and is not sold for under $3 with a “premium” label. Even chocolates that are more expensive than Ghiradelli, such as Godiva, market themselves as a premium chocolate, however, the taste standards in the world of fine chocolate do not consider Godiva an elite product.

Godiva
In 1926, Joseph Draps created a chocolate company and chose the name “Godiva” because it embodied “the timeless qualities of passion, style, sensuality, and modern boldness,” (Aaron and Bearden 2008:92). The name of a company and its products are very important in conveying a consumer’s status. For example, in France, candies with names such as Le Marquis, Le Petit Comte, and Dauphin were meant to connote high status and social distinction, which are qualities that are reflected in the people who purchase these products (Terrio 2000:106). Godiva was the first widely distributed chocolate that was attractively packaged in gold ballotins and well branded. This earned the company a reputation for its design while catering to female consumers’ desire for beauty. Since its introduction to America in 1966, Godiva continues to be the leader in the premium confectionery category. There is no clear definition for what makes
chocolate premium or gourmet; “it could be organic ingredients, exotic flavors, sleek packaging or a high cocoa content” (Choi 2008). Nevertheless, Godiva chocolates have been associated with the image of luxury and affluence.

See’s candy serves as the alternative to Godiva by targeting a more middle class consumer with its numerous retail locations, lower prices and more generous servings. However, Godiva chocolate prides itself in not being promoted as the common, less expensive chocolate. The company’s website claims that “Godiva was the first to create the concept of premium chocolate,” a statement that many chocolate makers would disagree with (Rosenblum 2005:204). The website also states that generic chocolates tend to have artificial flavors and preservatives to achieve a longer shelf-life. Godiva distinguishes itself as chocolate fit for only “the richest, most discriminating consumer” (Lane 2008). The brand promotes the idea that consumers of Godiva chocolate have a higher cultural capital than most people, as the gold foil packaging which contains their chocolates suggests. People who consume Godiva chocolates are somehow “higher class” and more “tasteful” than people who do not consume their chocolates. As a result, Godiva chocolates have a higher exchange value than the everyday, one dollar chocolates meant for middle and lower-class consumers.

Mort Rosenblum (2005) met with Eugene Dunkin, the chief executive officer of Godiva in North America, who said, in regards to the appearance of Godiva chocolates, that “We go for the glorious gasp…We put a lot of stock in that ahhh factor” (Rosenblum 2005:206). In their interview, Duncan repeatedly referred to “premium chocolates,” and when asked to define what that meant, Duncan replied, “I suppose you would say price point” (Rosenblum 2005:207). If this were true, all Hershey’s would have to do is increase the price of its bars and Hershey’s
would be the world’s greatest chocolate. However, price alone does not determine whether a chocolate is worthy of being categorized as premium, at least in the elitist’s chocolate world.

When asked about Godiva’s packaging, Dunkin talked about how the design of Godiva is supposed to evoke that “ahhhhhh factor.” Dunkin stated that, “It is no accident that our packaging is so rich-looking and our displays are so attractive. We hire the best consultants and designers. Even the experience of opening our boxes is important. We pay a lot of money for those hand-tied bows. This is all about pleasure, the glorious gasp. Across America, we are the gold standard, equivalent to Tiffany’s little blue box” (Rosenblum 2005:208). To equate a food item to a prestigious jeweler is quite a leap. Jewelry is used as a social symbol to convey one’s wealth and status to others. In this case, Dunkin highlighted the fetishism of chocolate for he stated that consumers purchase Godiva chocolate to experience and display their wealth.

The thrill that comes from opening one of Godiva’s gold boxes and sampling one of their chocolates is, according to Dunkin, “not too far from sex,” (Rosenblum 2005:208). As a result, Dunkin has touched upon both of chocolate’s fetishistic qualities: its ability to make consumers feel richer and to serve as a substitute for sex. He also mentioned a special line of Godiva called “G,” that has an even fancier packaging than their normal gold ballotin box and sells for $110 a pound at a limited number of stores. The price of this line of chocolate is twice the price of chocolate sold at La Maison du Chocolat in Paris, a true maker of upper-class chocolates (Rosenblum 2005:208). This indicates that taste, not price, is what determines a chocolate brand’s elite status within the culture of connoisseurs. Godiva provides a fantasy of elite status to consumers who are eager for something more than a Hershey’s or Ghiradelli chocolate. Godiva is not the only company to sell their chocolate in fancy boxes but the company has made their chocolate “prettier than most and expensive enough to be exclusive” (Rosenblum 2005:209).
Every holiday, golden wrapped chocolate gift packages beckon consumers to purchase the commodity as a gift in order to reflect their elite taste and status in the eyes of the receiver.

The company is known for its beautiful displays, however, beauty alone is not enough to change the minds of chocolate connoisseurs. When chocolate expert, Chlœe Doutre-Roussel, tried a piece of Godiva she reported “h branching of an overfilled ashtray” (Rosenblum 2005:204). In fact many chocolate connoisseurs argue that Godiva chocolates taste as though a large amount of sugar has been dumped into melted candle wax (Rosenblum 2005:204). Despite this fact, Godiva markets itself as a luxury label and continues to be one of the most recognized luxury brands in the world.

The professed attempt to purposefully associate Godiva chocolate with high status through the calculated use of imagery is a perfect example of how fetish status is created. A chocolate whose use-value is questioned by connoisseurs nevertheless maintains a high exchange-value by the fabrication of a fantasy of luxury. From a Marxist viewpoint, status-symbol chocolate advertising is highly problematic, exemplifying how fetishization helps maintain capitalism. Such advertising tacitly legitimizes the elite class by reinforcing the image of upper-class superiority and by presenting the luxurious lifestyle as something to aspire to. It also helps foster “false consciousness,” the mistaken belief of the oppressed working class that they have achieved a higher status than they actually have, lulling them into complicity.

The upper-class aspect of chocolate is also the essential enabler of its sexualization and feminization. The elite status of premium chocolate renders its associated sexuality socially acceptable. The sex that is being symbolically alluded to is not that of the “crude lower class,” but clarified as that of the refined upper-class. The pervasive eroticism of advertising, which could potentially repel viewers, is purified as classy. By this means the two principles of
chocolate advertising, sexualized subjectification and status-enhancing fetishization, are tightly bound together.

Chapter Five: A Partial Resolution to Chocolate’s Fetishism

Traditionally fetishism enables capitalists to reap profits far out of proportion to the cost of production. However, chocolate’s fetishism is partially resolved through Fair Trade, which redistributes some of those profits back to the working class and makes consumers aware of the workers. Fair Trade is particularly active with cacao, and is often supported by the same people who champion organic plantations and harsh measures against child slave labor (Rosenblum 2005:265). The Ivory Coast, Ghana, Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil, and Cameroon are the six largest cocoa producing countries in the world. As a result, the harvesting of cacao significantly affects the economy and the population in these countries. In Ghana for instance, cocoa accounts for 40% of total export revenues, and two million farmers work in cocoa production (Global Exchange 2009). The Ivory Coast is the world's largest cocoa producer, providing 43% of the world's cocoa. Advocates of Fair Trade argue that cocoa companies are paying cocoa farmers such low prices that many of them cannot meet their families’ basic needs (Global Exchange 2009). The Global Exchange has estimated that 284,000 children are working on cocoa farms in hazardous conditions, which include the use of machetes and the appliance of pesticides and insecticides without protective equipment (Global Exchange 2009). These children are reportedly trafficked, trapped in poverty, and forced to work on family farms. These questionable working conditions have caused some chocolate makers to become more conscientious when selecting the origin of their cacao (Lebovitz 2004:8).
Fair Trade is an international monitoring and certification system that “guarantees a minimum price under direct contracts, prohibits abusive child labor, and promotes environmental sustainability” (Global Exchange 2009). The system guarantees that farmers receive a “floor price” of at least $.80/pound for non-organic cocoa and $0.89/pound for organic cocoa, giving farmers the stable and sufficient income they need to support their families (Global Exchange 2009). Similarly, the World Cocoa Foundation is an organization that promotes a sustainable cocoa economy. The organization plays a leading role in helping cocoa farmers via the development and management of effective programs, which raise funds and provide a forum for farmers to express their needs (World Cocoa Foundation 2009). International labor and conservative organizations such as World Cocoa Foundation, are working to achieve a mutually beneficial balance between the corporations and the cacao farmers (Lebovitz 2004:22).

The purchasing of Fair Trade chocolate provides the consumer with some emotional comfort; it flatters them just as a high end chocolate product flatters buyers who identify themselves as elite. Therefore, there is an increase in the consumer’s cultural capital with the purchase of Fair Trade chocolate. But at the same time, there is money to be made in selling Fair Trade chocolate. It appears that these chocolates make great efforts to make consumers feel as though they are saving the world and helping cacao farmers. This is most noticeable in the high price of these chocolates and the cost for chocolate producers to purchase a Fair Trade label. Thus, consumers of Fair Trade chocolate build their self-image and gain some cultural capital for participating in an activity that benefits others. Somewhat paradoxically then, the “Fair Trade” label has become a fetishized quality itself.

From a Marxist point of view, the fetish magic of a commodity is a problem. It explains why people are willing to pay such high prices beyond the cost of labor and materials. Without
fetishism, people would only pay the use-value of items, which would deal a severe blow to the profit-making potential of the owner class. Fetishism enables the owning class to make tremendous earnings at the expense of the working class, who both buy products beyond their practical worth and create products without receiving proportionate compensation. As a result, class separation is not only created via fetishism, it is also maintained. Fair Trade items attempt to rectify this problem by redistributing profit back to the working class and making consumers aware of the workers, thus removing the degrees of separation from the products of labor.

What is not understood about Fair Trade is that the workers are being paid minimum-wage regardless of Fair Trade labels. According to Marxist analysis, the workers are always exploited in all for-profit companies that are not worker-owned. The fetishism of chocolate is only partly resolved since the owning class continues to profit from the fetishism of the commodity and from the enhancing status of the “Fair Trade” label. As Matthias Varul stated, Fair Trade does not condone boycotting a product made from extreme exploitation and “does not offer the choice of not purchasing a commodity” (Varul 2008:656). Therefore it does not challenge the status quo, and appears to offer a solution to consumers who have misgivings about exploited workers.

Despite these mitigations of Fair Trade’s charitable-seeming effects, it is a unique development in capitalism, and in some ways fulfills Marx’s belief that in the enlightened future citizens will begin to recognize and take action to eliminate worker exploitation. Fetishism is turned on its head since it can now be employed to theoretically boost the working class by redirecting profits back to them while simultaneously creating a widespread concern for them. It is still fetishism to the extent that the consumer is purchasing a comforting emotion or an image of themselves saving the world, which is encouraged by advertising campaigns and wrapper designs. However, fetishism is used to reverse the effects that fetishism is traditionally guilty of:
benefiting the upper-class at the expense of the lower-class. At the same time, it may simply offer a superficial solution to an increasingly socially aware consumer base, for truly liberating workers from exploitative situations. Fair Trade is “but one step in the right direction, a step that has to be followed by further steps institutionalizing conditions for truly fair interaction between all inhabitants of the planet by at least establishing an embedded world market that matches the embedded national and continental markets…” (Varul 2008:674).

Chapter Six: Interview with Michael Recchiuti

I had the privilege of interviewing Michael Recchiuti, a chocolate confectionary artisan in San Francisco and founder of Recchiuti Confections. The interview will touch upon many of the themes treated earlier in this essay, supporting, among other things, my hypothesis about the primary role played by class and status symbolism in the marketing of chocolate. As an industry insider, Michael Recchiuti also shares a critical perspective upon the elitist posturing, but viewed from the opposite vantage of the classic Marxist “outsider.” Michael claims a socially superior position to that image of the elite fabricated for the general public. To him, the machinery of image production and its inherent falseness are clear for other reasons.

Recchiuti Confections’ core products are their confections, little square ganaches coated in chocolate that are infused with herbs and teas. Mort Rosenblum also had the chance to interview Michael and he described the artisan’s skill as, “turning [chocolate] into delicate finished masterpieces” (Rosenblum 2005:271). The company’s brochure describes Michael’s approach to chocolate making as fusing, “classic French techniques with a global palette” (Rosenblum 2005:271). Recchiuti’s chocolates all have interesting flavors and spices from
cardamom and sesame nougat, Provencal lavender, Piedmont hazelnuts, lemon verbena, spring jasmine tea, to honeycomb and barley malt (Rosenblum 2005:271).

The Wall Street Journal declared Michael the best chocolatier in America in 2003, which gave him lots of exposure and secured his ranking at the top of the chocolate industry. When he started the business, Michael wanted to start as a high end chocolate boutique. Most of the restaurants he worked in were high end so he figured, “why go for this middle market when I can shoot right for the top and go after the clientele who can afford it?” He did state that he gets customers who can afford his chocolate but do not have the budget for it. They will buy his confections because “they are into quality,” though they might not buy it as frequently.

Recchiuti Confections opened in 1997 and started off as a stand at the San Francisco farmer’s market for five years. During this time, Michael would see middle to lower income customers who “really wanted something fine and would save that $20 to buy that box and treat it like gold,” as opposed to some people with a lot of disposable income who would buy a considerable amount of his chocolate for the prestigious, elite image it evokes. Michael equated buying a box of his chocolates to buying a Tiffany box, much like Eugene Dunkin from Godiva did in his interview with Mort Rosenblum. He then asked, “Are [consumers] buying the box, the brand, what’s inside of it? Some things are just vanity purchases and others are just because they really want it.” Michael has highlighted two types of elite chocolate consumers: the upper-class consumer who can afford the luxury item consistently and the lower-class consumer who wants to experience fine chocolates and build their cultural capital.

Michael views himself as a belonging to an elite group, but one whose criterion for membership is a developed and refined sense of taste. From a Marxist perspective, quality in a capitalist culture is never just quality for its own sake. It is inevitably implicated into a system of
establishing social hierarchy and status. Through Recchiuti’s higher quality chocolates, this
group does not only enjoy fine chocolate, but also a sense of superiority and the satisfaction of
“authentic elitism” that comes with looking down upon the false elitism of the Godiva-
worshipping public.

Being an elitist chocolate maker, the largest competitors for Recchiuti Confections are
European companies such as La Maison Du Chocolat, rather than Hershey’s and Godiva.
Michael acknowledged that Europeans continue to occupy the highest tier on the culinary level.
He sees his chocolates at that upper-class level, which goes beyond American standards. Michael
competes with other chocolate manufacturers but some consumers prefer his competitor’s
chocolates for, “the packaging, the flavors, the size, the coloring,” and the price. In the past, the
classic American chocolate was a Hershey’s bar. It was a basic food item that lacked the
sensuousness and luxury associated with European chocolates. Now that has changed with the
emergence of European influenced American chocolatiers.

Recchiuti Confections has a different approach to marketing than its competitors. You
will not find Recchiuti’s chocolates in flashy golden ballotin boxes like Godiva but rather in an
unassuming black ballotin box with the company’s name and a bow. Michael’s packaging is
about something, “elegant, sophisticated, but at the same time understated. It’s not in your face
like these bright gold boxes with pink ribbons but some people just really think that is a sign of
being classy. It depends on the market and the consumer.” Michael was amazed at how far a
company like Godiva will push its brand. He discussed how Godiva’s gold ballotin box was a
real trademark for the company, “they really pushed that, and that became like the tiffany box.”
When Michael first started the company at the farmer’s market, people would ask if his
chocolate was as good as Godiva. Godiva served as American consumer’s only point of
reference for premium chocolate since the company was very effective in selling their illusory association with fine, upper-class chocolate. Michael acknowledged that, Godiva created the illusion that they evoke a higher status but when the company first started producing chocolates, there was nothing else to compare it to. Michael seemed to favor the way in which See’s marketed their chocolate. “They really figured out how to get themselves out there. They hand you samples, they have this very specific way of marketing themselves, old timey, kind of nurturing store.”

When I asked Michael whether or not he found it shocking that statistically, it has been proven that women prefer chocolate more than men, he was not at all surprised. For years, when he worked at the farmer’s market, the majority of his customers were women. Michael said, “Their excitement wasn’t ever seeing me but making sure that they got chocolates.” He also stated that women were really excited about what new creation he had conjured up and what they could taste.

Michael believes that chocolate confections attract female customers because it is about presentation, “it’s a gift, it’s a boutique, its like selling perfume, cologne. It’s a nice gifty item.” Chocolate is part of elegance and women feel special when they receive it as a gift. He went on to say that, “It’s a treat, it’s kinda like they might be doing something wrong, but they do it in moderation, well some do.” Women know chocolate is, “something they have to have but maybe they are not quit certain why they have to have it.” Michael referred to chocolate as having this “magical connotation,” and discussed how the chocolate fetish began with the Mayans who made stimulating cocoa drinks.

Michael described chocolate as transformative, comforting and stated that “it’s love, it’s this wonderful pleasure of chocolate. Not just what we make. It could be a Hershey’s bar or
anything. It’s a psychological effect and physical, and it’s just that people want chocolate.” I agree with Michael that chocolate’s mysticism has its roots in its history; however, it is not only the questionable physical and psychological effects one can have when they are eating chocolate that creates the wonderful pleasure, it is also the way chocolate has been marketed that has perpetuated the commodity’s ability to provide a sexually gratifying experience.

In regards to Fair Trade chocolate, Recchiuti Confections are not Fair Trade: “We know from the people we buy it from that the practices are good.” Michael said that there is not a lot of Fair Trade chocolate that is “interesting.” If there was, he would use it. A lot of the companies he deals with are run by families that have co-ops as well as good manufacturing and farming practices. The bigger companies are more of the culprit in terms of poor working conditions, unfair payment and child labor issues since these companies have huge lots of land in cacao producing African countries.

Michael stated that Fair Trade is a great idea but the problem is that in order to receive a certified organic logo, chocolate manufacturers have to pay for it and as a result, increase the price of their products. There are a lot of chocolate manufacturers that practice organic but choose not to certify their brand because they have to pay to get certified. By default, a lot of chocolate is organic because the soil that it grows in has been pesticide free since the farmers cannot afford to buy pesticides and chemicals. In addition, Michael said that not all the technology is there to make the best chocolate yet. He thinks eventually the technology will be available and once that happens, manufacturers can focus on making better chocolate.

For some consumers Fair Trade is important. Some are very aware of what they eat, where it is coming from, and how it is being managed. However, consistent with other chocolate connoisseurs, Michael does not think that Fair Trade is going to take off since it is still in its
grassroots stage. It would require a big push on a global level to really get chocolate manufacturers to adhere to strict Fair Trade rules and regulations. Michael did state that there is the possibility that Fair Trade issues could eventually fade away if there is enough of a resurgence against it.

I concluded the interview by asking Michael about his participation in the New York Chocolate Show. For the past three years, Michael has participated in this event that allows small producing, upper-class chocolatiers to mingle and advertise themselves. It is a consumer show where one pays an entry fee and is allowed access to sample and buy from a wide range of chocolate manufacturers. The show includes cooking demonstrations and a chocolate fashion show where models flaunt themselves on the runway with outfits made out of chocolate. Michael teamed up with chefs from Valrhona and they made a Laura Croft, Tomb Raider outfit (see Appendix A4). The outfit included, boots, holsters and guns all made out of chocolate. The material is not just straight chocolate but rather chocolate mixed with other liquid sugars that have a higher melting point. Michael described it as “chocolate leather,” that one should not eat because of the manipulations done to the chocolate.

While there were some male models in the super-hero themed fashion show, the majority of the models were women. It seems that rather than invest in advertising their chocolates via magazine or television commercials, small elite chocolate manufacturers rely on word of mouth and their involvement in the chocolate show to promote their products. Thus, the use of female models wearing sexy chocolate attire not only perpetuates the desire for the ideal female body in another venue besides the media, but also reinforces chocolate’s association with love, comfort, sexiness and indulgence. As a result, chocolates translation into the medium of fashion reflects its taboo desires while perpetuating its fetish magic over women and chocolate consumers.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Modern chocolate satisfies Marx’s conditions for and definitions of a fetish commodity. First, industrialization ensures that the finished product stands apart from its means of production. This conceptual separation is the condition required for the commodity to support its secondary attributions that Marx describes as “metaphysical,” illusions that would disappear if the mundane and stark reality of their production were clearly visible. It is the metaphysical set of beliefs pertaining to chocolate and their perpetuation through marketing that I have set out to discover and understand, as well as the subjectifying technique by which advertisers exploit these beliefs to manipulate the consumer class.

My study has focused upon visual advertising in order to understand the modern chocolate fetish. Capitalism has seized visual marketing in order to advance the possibilities of fetishism and make the largest profits possible. Because beliefs in fetish properties do not withstand the scrutiny of logic and fact, imagery and suggestion must therefore be employed to awaken and address the viewer’s semiconscious fantasies and drives. Similarly, the promises to satisfy the viewer’s desires and anxieties must not be made verbally explicit but visually suggested. The most powerful imagery is that which appeals to the emotions and social identity of the consumer, so that even a candidate as improbable as chocolate has been elevated into an agent capable of satisfying class, sexual, and gender desires. Interestingly, even class egalitarianism is promised by a new development in capitalist fetishism, the fair trade commodity. Now an idealized image of the worker is intentionally brought back into association with the commodity, in seeming contradiction with Marx’s conditions for fetishism. But to be sure, it is only an image of the worker, and one which we have seen may ironically contribute yet more “metaphysical” illusions
in the end. The merits and significance of the fair trade development will undoubtedly continue to draw argument and controversy.

Through fetishization, capitalism has transformed the act of consumption into a magical event worthy of the anthropological connotation of “fetishism” implied by Marx: the use of a magical implement in a magical ritual. I have tried to expose the mechanism that is at the heart of Marx’s original connection with fetish magic, namely, the consumer’s belief that she is absorbing the commodity’s apparent properties into herself. To put it another way, I noted at the beginning of this study that the act of consumption can refer to either an act of eating or purchasing. As the example of chocolate makes especially clear, in both cases the consumer eagerly merges with the commodity, and this imagined personal merging is the essential transformation of Marxist fetishism. As long as modern consumers are more concerned with the consumption of commodities for the symbolic and metaphysical pleasures promised by advertising rather than for the simple satisfaction of gustatory gourmet cravings, the chocolate fetish will continue to amply demonstrate that modern capitalism perpetuates magical thinking in a process that fully deserves Marx’s intentionally humbling term “fetishism.”
References


Appendix

A1: A Dove chocolate magazine ad in *Gourmet* magazine depicts a woman in sweet surrender.

(Source: Gourmet Magazine October 2009)
A2: A full page magazine advertisement for Ferrero Rocher depicts a naked model being tempted by the chocolates growing on the branch.
A3: An advertisement placed in front of Godiva stores in malls throughout the United States depicts a model amongst oversized chocolate truffles.

(Source: http://www.twcde.com/maya/)
A4: Michael Recchiuti partnered with Valrhona to make a Laura Croft outfit for the 11th Annual Chocolate Show in New York on November 6, 2008.

(Source: http://www.upi.com/enl-win/77ce4b7e441e0520211b57cc171d662d/)
B1. Interview Script

1. What is your basic background information: full name, place of birth, other details you are willing to share?

2. How long have you been involved with this particular business?

3. What is it like to try and find your own niche in the chocolate industry?

4. Who are your competitors?

5. Statistically it has been proven that women consume chocolate more than men. Do you find that your profession is female dominated?

6. What do you think of chocolate advertisements such as Dove chocolate where they display a woman in ecstasy as she takes a bite?

7. What type of chocolate is looked down on in the chocolate world?

8. Are there certain types of chocolates or brands that evoke a higher status among consumers?

9. What type of consumer does your chocolate target?

10. What are your thoughts on Fair Trade chocolate?
Faculty Supervisor/Principal Investigator: Dolores Trevizo
Student Investigator(s)/Research Assistant(s): Jamal Fahim
Title of research project: Beyond Cravings: Gender and Class Desires in Chocolate Marketing

I acknowledge that on_______, I was informed by Jamal Fahim of Occidental College of the following research project, the way it will be conducted and the conditions of my participation in it:

Jamal Fahim is conducting research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology at Occidental College. The purpose of this research project is to examine how chocolate is an example of a fetishized commodity in 21st century U.S. society. The researcher has set out to analyze how chocolate is marketed and how the commodity’s fetish status is created and maintained. You will be contacted at a later date in order to conduct a 30 to 60 minute face-to-face interview with Jamal Fahim. Participation in this project is voluntary, and consent may be revoked at any point before or during the interview. If at any time, you feel uncomfortable, you may skip a question or terminate the survey or interview. Your name will be collected and used within the paper with your consent, however if you would like to remain anonymous your name will be changed. The interview will be audio recorded to assist in data collection and analysis. The information and data (including but not limited to audio, transcripts, etc) will be kept locked in my research advisor’s office at Occidental College for at least three years. If you have any questions regarding your experience or this process, contact Jamal Fahim at jfahim@oxy.edu or Professor Dolores Trevizo at trevizo@oxy.edu.

I am at least eighteen years of age. I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this research project and the possible risks as outlined above. I understand that I may withdraw my participation on this project at any time without prejudice or penalty of any kind. I hereby agree to participate in this research project.

Name (print): __________________________________________________________
Signature: ___________________________________________________________ Date: ___________________
Address: ____________________________________________________________________________________

Subject should sign two copies of this form. Keep one copy and return the other to the investigator.