

Aileen J. Dingus

Prof. Marilyn Ortega

01 July, 2016

WGSS 333

But Does It Smell Good?

Advertising for colognes and perfumes has always had a disadvantage. How do you convince people to purchase your product when they're not able to smell it? Many perfumiers choose to insert a scratch and sniff element to their print advertisements, but more often than not, that strategy fails. Over-saturation of smells in one magazine, complaints from consumers with allergies, or unreliable printing render the process nearly useless. Due to these complications, perfumiers like Dior have had to become more creative in their advertising, as is emphasized in their campaign for the J'adore perfume line.

According to www.dior.com: "With J'adore, Dior created a *universal*, generous, feminine and highly floral perfume...It represents the energy of life, *pleasure and glamour*." (all emphasis mine) Why then, when calling it a "universal" perfume, and with "women of colour making up the global majority of the women's population" (Mia, "Racism within White Feminist Spaces") would Dior seem to deliberately ignore that universal majority by featuring a white woman in its advertisements for J'adore? (fig. 1) I believe the reason lies in the description of the scent itself: "pleasure and *glamour*."

With those few words, we are able to understand why Charlize Theron is the face of J'adore, instead of Fan Bing Bing, Salma Hayek, Lupita Nyong'o, or any one of myriad other women of color. She is white, and "Whiteness is an asset for anyone white." (Pierce 45) Additionally, according to author Audre Lorde, the "mythical norm" is something we should all

strive to attain – “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure.” (Lorde 116). In the grand Venn diagram of intersectionality that makes up glamorous Charlize Theron, being tall (check), thin (check), successful (check), heterosexual (check), white (check), and blonde (check) all combine to outweigh any drawbacks she may experience by being female and African (having been born and raised in South Africa). She is shown to be the epitome, and if we wear J’adore perfume, we too, can be part of the mythical norm.

Beyond highlighting Ms. Theron’s obvious association with the mythical norm, the advertisement’s designers made her (and thereby, J’adore perfume) even more appealing by the age old process of the “touch up.” Her skin is flawless, smooth and unwrinkled. Why would the designers feel the need to touch up one of the most beautiful women in the world though?

Because, as author Susan Bordo says:

“With created images setting the standard, we are becoming habituated to the glossy and gleaming, the smooth and the shining, the ageless and sagless and wrinkleless. We are learning to expect “perfection” and to find any “defect” repellent, unacceptable.” (qtd. in Dolezal 364)

Indeed, while Charlize Theron does exemplify what Rosemarie Garland-Thompson would call “the corporeal incarnation of culture’s collective, unmarked, normative characteristics (qtd. in Dolezal 365), she is still not considered to be perfect enough on her own to increase sales of perfume. By manipulating her looks, Dior helps perpetuate faultless images as “emblematic of the dominant reality, setting the standards for normal bodies” (Dolezal 365).

It is interesting then, that the more subtle parts of the advertisement may appeal to those who fall far outside the normative standards. The necklace that Theron is wearing echoes not only the shape of the bottle, but also the neck rings worn by women in the Padaung sub-group of the

Karen people of Thailand and Myanmar. As young girls, the Padaung women begin to practice a form of body modification by stacking brass rings higher and higher on their necks, because “an extra-long neck is considered a sign of great beauty and wealth and that it will attract a better husband” (Waddington). While Charlize Theron’s neck is definitely long and graceful on its own, the necklace, and the aforementioned “touch up” give her an extra push to be even more appealing, even though it may not be as obvious at first glance.

As discussed in *The Nature of Body Panic Culture*, “media forces in particular, and advertising specifically, conspire with more diffuse notions of power in contemporary society to simultaneously produce a “culture of lack” and an endless array of products to assuage the lack” (Dworkin 10). In addition to pushing Charlize Theron as the mythical norm and as someone who will attract a better husband, the ad’s designers also appeal to consumers’ sense of lack by appealing to their desire for wealth. By clothing Theron in a gold gown, and by making the overall color of the ad gold, Dior is taking advantage of humankind’s desire for gold, even if that’s not what the ad is selling. The ad’s designers understand Pindar meant when he wrote “But gold shines like fire blazing in the night, supreme of lordly wealth” (Pindar).

The J’adore campaign is not the first time fashion has appealed to the masses by exploiting humanity’s obsession with gold. Writings from as far back as ancient Rome discuss fabrics laced with gold, with Petronius mentioning Fortunus for his clothing and gold embroidered shoes. From the 14th to the 17th century, cloth of gold was considered to be the “zenith of luxury” and Edward III of England forbade “aspirant people” from wearing cloth of gold, only royalty was allowed to wear it. It was also around this time that “bezants, clinking gold and jewelled chains were essential accessories” (“History of Gold in Fashion”) much like the accessories shown in the Dior ad. In 2000, Christian Dior haute couture “featured a gold slip

dress by John Galliano, also featured in American Vogue wearing gold trousers” while other design houses showed their creations in Milan, “a city where gold has been the bedrock of its culture since the Dark Ages” (“History”). To attire Ms. Theron in clothing that “has defined social position, signified wealth, given iconic, quasi-religious status to royalty” (“History”) was a strategic move, remember- the perfume “represents the energy of life, *pleasure and glamour*”(Dior).

Looking again at the original advertisement through the lenses of normalcy, body panic, societal body modification, and history, we find a very different product is being sold. We are being sold the beauty myth as described by Naomi Wolf. “The quality called “beauty” objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women” (Wolf 12). By using a woman who embodies the mythical norm, making her “sagless and wrinkleless,” and by appealing to mankind’s infatuation with gold, the designers of the J’adore campaign are selling a unattainable goal, not perfume.

Works Cited

<http://thebeautysmith.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/CharlizeTheron.jpg>

“Dior Official Website.” Dior Official Website. Web. 22 June 2016

Dolezal, Luna. "The (In)visible Body: Feminism, Phenomenology, and the Case of Cosmetic Surgery." *Hypatia* 25.2 (2009): 357-75. Print.

Dworkin, Shari L., and Faye Linda. Wachs. *Body Panic: Gender, Health, and the Selling of Fitness*. New York: New York UP, 2009. Print.

"History of Gold in Fashion - An Overview." *History of Gold in Fashion - An Overview*. Web. 28 June 2016.

Lorde, Audra. "Race, Gender, Sexuality." *Sister Outsider*. Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1984 Print.

Mia. "Racism within White Feminist Spaces." *Black Feminists Manchester*. 2013. Web. June 22, 2016.

Pierce, Linda M. "Pinay White Woman." *Whiteness: Feminist Philosophical Reflections*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999 Print.

Pindarus, "Olympian Odes; Pythian Odes." 1997. Print.

Waddington, R. (2002), *The Karen People*. The Peoples of the World Foundation. Web. June 20, 2016, from The Peoples of the World Foundation.

Wolf, Naomi. "The Beauty Myth." *From The Beauty Myth*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991. Print.



Figure 1