

Project 1.1

Analyzing a Visual Text

In the following paper, writer Jacqueline Cruz responds to an assignment to analyze a visual text. Her purpose is to explain how a famous 1980s ad for *Charlie* perfume works. But since the item is twenty years old, she puts it in context for her readers, drawing on research she has previously done on second-wave feminism. Cruz models her analysis on similar essays about advertising by writer Seth Stevenson, who employs the genre routinely at Salon.com (see pages 421–422). Like Stevenson, Cruz uses a personal voice throughout her work and even ends her piece with a grade.

STUDENT PROJECT

Jacqueline Cruz, “She’s Very Charlie”

The paper is edited to conform to MLA style.

The title hints at the subject of the ad analysis: *Charlie* perfume.

The opening ¶ provides a context for the analysis, drawing readers in.

The writer uses the correct MLA form (see fig. 1) to point readers to the visual text included in the paper.

Cruz 1

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RHE 315 Rhetoric and Writing
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She’s Very Charlie

It is 1988. You’re a woman flipping through the pages of *Vogue* or *Cosmopolitan*. You see images of fashion-forward women looking back at you. They may be in a normal pose, or they may be in odd poses with their thin arms placed at awkward angles. Their job is to look pretty, to communicate to you what beauty is supposed to be. But then you flip to this unusual image of a young, confident woman walking alongside a man whose bum she is patting (see fig. 1). You think to yourself, “Women don’t pat men’s bums. They simply don’t.” But you can’t help but admire the woman for doing something that at the time was--dare I say--ballsy. You also notice that she is poised. She is fun and free. She is active. Most important, she looks empowered. You want to be her. The agency responsible for this ad campaign for Revlon wanted women to aspire to be the independent Charlie woman with a self-possessed identity. Therefore it is no surprise that the ad agency allied itself with the feminist movement of the latter part of the century to create the Charlie woman’s personality and to push their perfume sales.

Cruz 2

When Revlon's Charlie ad campaign started in the 1970s, it wanted to associate itself with modern, progressive women. The genius of the campaign was its ability to portray a message memorably, and this ad released in 1987 during the campaign's peak is a classic example of the agency's ability to communicate its message successfully. The ad itself is very simple. It consists of a large picture, the campaign slogan at the top, and a smaller picture of the product at the bottom corner. That's it. It was designed to be eye-catching,

The writer states her thesis at the end of the first ¶. In fact, the final two sentences of the ¶ work together to present the claim she will prove.

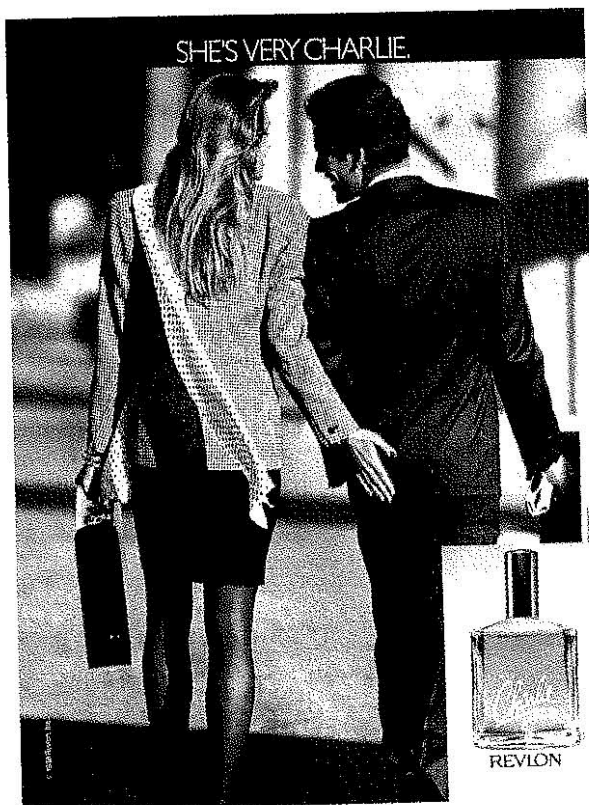


Fig. 1. This advertisement, introduced in 1988 in various publications such as Vogue and Cosmopolitan, featured a confident, young working woman. (Advertising Archive, 1988).

The caption, too, is in correct MLA form.

Even though the writer includes the ad itself in the paper, she carefully interprets its details to explain its strategies.

Having introduced the term "second-wave feminism" at the end of the preceding ¶, the writer provides the necessary background information.

The writer is at the heart of her analysis here, bringing together second-wave feminism and the Charlie ad.

clever, and instantly understood. We can infer from the picture that the Charlie woman is a successful corporate twenty-something because she is wearing a stylish business suit and she carries a briefcase. She is not a docile housewife. Her hair is flowing freely, and if you look closely, she is looking down at the man next to her. When you compare the pair's shoulders, you notice that she is taller than the man too. She does not have overstyled, helmet hair to impress a man she pines for. Instead, she oozes self-assurance and power. This model represents what second-wave feminism strove for.

Second-wave feminism began in the 1960s and continued through the late 1980s. It concentrated not only on de jure inequality, but also on de facto inequality. This movement wanted equality in the law and equality in the general perception of a woman's place and potential. So how do the advertisers simultaneously reject the traditional representations of women while embracing this newfound female bravado and still sell perfume? That is where the butt pat--one of the manliest gestures--comes in. The fact that the model in the ad is a woman challenges the norm associated with that symbolic gesture. She communicates, "If a man can do it, then why can't I?" When we think of a butt pat, we usually imagine it occurring in a sports setting--a male-dominated arena. It is a friendly gesture given to show support or provide encouragement and reassurance. It is common to see it in a football game after a player scores a touchdown, or when a player in a baseball game returns to home plate.

In the ad, though, the Charlie woman defies these norms and yet the man next to her does not seem to mind. In fact, he is smiling. Hence, she is able to get away with the violation of this norm, and give it a whole new meaning. In essence, the Charlie woman is capable of doing anything she pleases. After all, "She's very Charlie." Ironically, of course, feminism--a movement not normally associated with cosmetics and beauty products--is being successfully employed to help sell perfume.

The reason Charlie ads were so successful in selling perfume was that they explored territory that had not been fully charted before.

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The Charlie ad campaign recognized that women were growing tired or bored of stereotypical representations of what women do, or how they should be. Women were joining the work force in greater numbers than ever before, either for necessity or personal satisfaction. They did not have the time to stay home and bake pies while wearing puffy sundresses and three-inch heels. Women were working hard, turning in their sales reports and closing deals with clients while wearing business suits with shoulder pads. However, this did not mean they were unconcerned about being considered feminine and attractive. Revlon adjusted accordingly, associated Charlie with this active lifestyle, and promised women that they could have it all: confidence, power, beauty, and allure. Needless to say, this premise helped sell thousands of the golden bottles.

Looking back, had I been old enough to buy a bottle of Charlie in the 1980s, I probably would have. Besides, the fragrance is strong but pleasant, so it would work nicely in small doses. The idea of the modern and attractive working woman would have appealed to me too. I definitely would have liked to be "very Charlie." Moreover, who does not like to feel celebrated and empowered?

Grade: A. Simple design with powerful cultural message.

Now the writer interprets her findings and considers the implications of her analysis.

The writer concludes with a personal perspective.

The grade at the end reflects the ad analysis genre as practiced by the writer's model, Seth Stevenson (see pages 421–422).