



Searching for Winks and Nods: The Complications of Analyzing Corporate Intent in Historic Branding Campaigns

NORA DRAPER¹

Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania

The Fetishization of Instant: Polaroid's Cultural Legacy

In recent years, there has been a surge of nostalgia for Polaroid instant cameras. The company, which has undergone three sales and two bankruptcies since 2001, has fully rebranded, with plans to open a number of stores across the United States in 2013. Polaroid, famous for its iconic designs and innovative technology, is a cultural icon. Polaroid advertising experienced its golden years at a moment when marketers in the United States were engaged in a celebration of youth culture characterized by individual liberation, sexual fulfillment, and personal pleasure (Radner, 1999). Many of the company's campaigns reflect the excitement of creativity and self-expression. By giving people the opportunity to develop their own images, Polaroid cameras created spaces for experimentation, self-documentation, and image sharing. As Polaroid rebuilds its brand around a new era of commercial products, it has called on its cultural legacy as the innovative force behind instant camera technology. A promotional video for the company's year-long 75th anniversary celebration states, "Polaroid has always been an important part of the creative community and today Polaroid continues to be an integral force in popular culture, stimulating creativity, authenticity and self-expression" (Polaroid, 2012). The Polaroid brand has strong resonance in contemporary media culture. The popular photo-sharing application Instagram, whose logo includes a rainbow that evokes Polaroid packaging, allows users to add a sepia-toned filter to digital photos to create an aesthetic that is similar to the earliest instant prints. A smartphone application called Shake It! allows users to add Polaroid's iconic white boarder to any image. Noting the centrality of sharing to the Polaroid brand, the company suggests "some might even say that we were the original social network" (Polaroid, 2012). Before Facebook or Instagram—even before the cultural phenomenon of "sexting" using cell phone photos—there was Polaroid.

¹ Special thanks to Timothy Mahoney and the staff at the Baker Library, Mark Ekman and the staff at the Paley Center for Media and Elizabeth Brake at Duke University's Special Collections for their assistance and support.

Of course, before Polaroid, there was Kodak. The heavyweight of amateur photography, Kodak predated Polaroid by about a half century. However, when Polaroid introduced its first instant camera in 1948, it offered something existing Kodak cameras did not; by eliminating the need for an external darkroom and shortening the time between taking and using a picture, Polaroid's instant camera technology changed the possibilities of amateur and professional photography. Much of the ensuing excitement and nostalgia around Polaroid comes from the ways that instant photography created new photographic possibilities. Not only, as Peter Buse (2010) notes, did instant development allow people to share images in the moment, but Polaroid cameras also made the taboo pictureable. Artists, including Robert Mapplethorpe who is remembered for his highly sexualized and often controversial images, have commented on the importance of instantaneousness in creating intimacy and excitement around their photographs. In her book about Mapplethorpe's Polaroid photographs, Sylvia Wolf (2007) writes, "A camera that produces an instant photograph allows both photographer and model to respond to the image as part of their interaction. Indeed that was the primary appeal of the Polaroid process for Mapplethorpe: it was immediate" (p. 31).

Commercial brands, such as Polaroid, play an important role in popular culture as subcultural referents, generational icons, and identity markers. Replete with meaning, brands can act as markers of belonging and differentiation. Stuart Ewen (1999) describes how the industrial revolution gave the working class opportunities for self-expression through style (see also Cross, 2000). While companies invest heavily in the construction of their products' identities as ways to differentiate between similar products (Strasser, 1989), there is often a struggle over meaning between the brand creators and those who incorporate the products into their lives. This co-creation of brands through a process of negotiated meaning-making (Banet-Weiser, 2012), has lasting implications for the cultural position of artifacts. Focusing on the legacy of Polaroid instant cameras and the nostalgia that surrounds the brand—particularly the company's knowledge of, and response to, off-label uses of its instant camera products, including their role in the production of personalized pornography and erotica—this article argues that it is important to untangle the corporate motivations behind brand construction from the broader cultural legacies of iconic products. Engaging in archival work undertaken in support of a larger project on the branding strategies of Polaroid in the mid-to-late 20th century, this work discusses a number of the methodological challenges faced when conducting research on the role of popular and sexual cultures in institutional histories. This article briefly charts the cultural history of Polaroid, focusing primarily on the Swinger camera, a model whose promotion was replete with sexual innuendo. I then turn toward the methodological issue of interpreting archival silences to reveal the ways in which the Polaroid Corporation responded to popular uses of its product as a tool for the production of personal and artistic erotica.

The Institutional Archive: The History of Polaroid

All archives represent constructed histories. This is particularly evident in the case of official institutional archives where the company has a stake in the presentation of information. Therefore, archival research of this sort presents a variety of methodological challenges. Some of these challenges are familiar across archival explorations, while others are specific to institutional histories. Many of these challenges become all the more salient in archival research on sexuality and popular culture, where meaning is often coded and motivation is difficult to interpret. This article examines three of the

challenges that presented themselves in a study that was focused on understanding the brand construction of Polaroid instant camera products: (a) interpreting gaps in the archives; (b) drawing conclusions from incomplete records; and (c) reading the evidence in the broader social and institutional context.²

This research project grew out of an analysis of media anxiety around teen sexting. That research revealed a popular narrative reconstruction of the mid-20th century as a period of teenage chastity, which had been corrupted by the introduction of digital technology (Draper, 2012). In observing how mobile phone providers had responded to the use of their products by teens to send everything from virtual love notes to erotic images without the oversight of parents or another external authority, I wondered how other companies had dealt with similar anxieties, when changes in technology altered the structures through which content was produced and shared. Polaroid, the original instant messenger, seemed a natural place to begin looking. This form of historical inquiry helps communication scholars interrogate assertions of “newness” around the role of technology in the production of public sexual cultures and private behaviors.

Polaroid founder, president, and inventor Edwin H. Land intended to inject a sense of intimacy into the photographic experience through the near-instant development first offered to amateur photographers by Polaroid cameras. A 1973 *Popular Mechanics* article describes the Polaroid founder’s philosophical approach to instant camera technology. Land stated that his goal was “to generate a new intimacy between the human being and the world around him” (Berger, 1973, pp. 105–106). Buse (2007) provides a useful definition of intimacy as “a conjunction of immediacy and proximity” (p. 42). In the case of instant photography, this formulation combines the speed of development with the photographer’s ability to share the image with the subject. Immediacy, which is often viewed as the instant camera’s defining feature (Bonanos, 2012; Buse, 2010; Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011), is a central component of this form of intimacy. Unlike pictures taken with a Kodak camera, Polaroid images did not require the film to be sent away for development. The temporal distance between capturing the image and being able to look at it meant early Kodak images were necessarily artifacts of the past. Conversely, the near instantaneousness of development, even in early Polaroid cameras, created what one scholar has called “an instant fossilization of the present” (Trotman, cited in Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011). This collapsed the time between taking and viewing the photograph (Buse, 2010), which changed how the image could be used.

The potential for Polaroid cameras to foster intimacy between the photographer and subject, as well as among those sharing the images, was celebrated in the company’s advertising. Although overt references to sexual intimacy were largely absent from advertising, commercials used themes of distance

² Many of the advertisements created for Polaroid have been archived, most notably at the Polaroid Corporation Archive at the Baker Library Collection housed at the Harvard University Business School; at the Paley Center for Media in New York City; and at the Roy Lightner Collection of Antique Advertisements at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library housed at Duke University. The Baker Library collection also contains internal documents, press coverage, and annual reports. These resources were supplemented with secondary sources, including contemporary accounts of life within the Polaroid Corporation.

and time to promote the instant camera's unique features. The idea of time was present in Polaroid commercials from the company's inception. A commercial shown during the Howdy Doody Show, likely in the 1950s, asked, "Want to see a party come to life? Just take out your Polaroid Camera, snap it, and show your guests while the fun is still going on. It's photography's biggest thrill" (Howdy Doody, n.d.). Decades later, Polaroid ads were still playing with the notion of time. A television commercial for the Polaroid Spectra, a camera introduced in the 1980s, had this tagline: "The only camera system that lets you hold the picture in your hand while you still hold the feeling in your heart . . . Polaroid. Make time stand still" (BBDO, n.d.). Commercials also highlighted the value of photographs for creating intimacy through the act of bringing people together. A Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) commercial launched in 1985 showed a couple sitting at the kitchen table. When the man tells his wife that he had an awful day, she replies that she also had a terrible day. To prove it, she hands him a Polaroid picture. He responds by handing her a Polaroid depicting one of the terrible events in his day. The couple proceeds to exchange photos, trying to one-up each other, while a voiceover reads "Whatever kind of day you've had, Polaroid is a great way to share it with those you love" (DDB, 1985). The sharing of images remains so central to the Polaroid brand that the company's website encourages people to share their digital photographs through the My Polaroid program, which has the tagline: "Polaroid -- the original social sharing brand!" (Polaroid, 2012).

In addition to sociality and immediacy, instant cameras provided alternative strategies for generating intimacy. By allowing people to develop pictures without taking them to a camera store, Polaroid introduced the possibility of privacy—including sexual privacy—into the photography experience. Secrecy had not previously been possible for photographers without access to a personal darkroom. With the introduction of Polaroid, amateur photographers had been given access to a production-oriented technology that allowed for the creation of new forms of personal content. Without the meddling eyes of the commercial developer, the production of erotic images became possible for the everyday photographer (Buse, 2010). The ability to develop photographs at home is particularly important in light of the "folklore of Kodak that people believe that prints will be returned blank if the user attempts to send pornographic shots to commercial laboratories" (Edgley & Kiser, 1982, p. 60).³ Privacy between the photographer and subject offered an additional sense of intimacy, as experiences could be documented, reviewed, and enjoyed in secret. This aspect of instant photography has become central to the popular memory of Polaroid; however, the intimacy generated through privacy and secrecy is seldom depicted in the company's advertising campaigns. As will be subsequently discussed, it is unclear if this gap is due to a sense of propriety among Polaroid executives or simply an ignorance of the range of product uses.

This is not to suggest that associations made between Polaroid and sexually intimate photos are nostalgic fantasy. There is ample evidence that amateurs availed themselves of the privacy created by the camera's internal darkroom to expand the range of pictures they took. In an article titled *Polaroid Sex: Deviant Possibilities in a Technological Age*, Charles Edgley and Kenneth Kiser (1982) include several examples of personal ads in magazines for sexual partners that asked respondents to send a Polaroid. An exhibit at the Museum of Sex in New York City in 2011 titled "Obscene Diary," illustrating the life of

³ This may have been more than a myth. John D'Emilio (1983) notes, in response to obscenity laws in the 1930s, Kodak Eastman "exhibited caution in accepting film for processing" (p. 130).

professor and tattoo artist Samuel Steward, whose drawings, letters, photographs, and sexual paraphernalia document his experience of life as a gay man in 1950s America, provides further evidence that Polaroid cameras were used to take pictures of nude and often sexually posed subjects (see Spring, 2010, which expands on the exhibit). While he was not an amateur, Robert Mapplethorpe used a Polaroid camera for a number of his controversial art projects (Wolf, 2007). There are also plenty of images in the Kinsey Institute that document the use of Polaroid cameras to photograph nudes (Bonanos, 2012). However, the decision by Polaroid to depict intimacy through themes of immediacy and sociability rather than accentuate privacy in its advertising campaigns raises the question of whether the technologically progressive Polaroid Corporation intended, encouraged, or even acknowledged these off-label uses of its products. Such an analysis is important considering the retrospective assignment of progressive intentions to the Polaroid brand that extend beyond uses of its products to involve the motivations of company executives. This approach, however, faces a number of methodological challenges, including how a researcher can access conversations about promotional strategies that were not recorded and how to tease apart the motivations of a company from the cultural context that surrounds it.

Meet the Swinger: Reading Historic Allusions

While assertions are made about Polaroid's explicit reference to the off-label uses in their marketing campaigns, these claims tend to be notional and unsubstantiated. Much of the speculation that the Polaroid Corporation knew about the erotic potential of its products comes from the advertising campaign for the company's Swinger camera. In the mid-1960s, a decade and a half after first introducing instant camera technology to the consumer market, Polaroid released a new, less expensive camera. Although color film had already been introduced, the Swinger exclusively used black and white film, so it could be sold at a recommended retail price of \$19.95 in the United States, a much lower price point than that of previous models. A press release from Polaroid noted that the Swinger would be most popular among teenagers, young married people, and families who wanted a second camera (Polaroid, 1965). This product was initially very successful and was viewed by Polaroid as an opportunity to convert a generation of amateur photographers to instant photography (Polaroid, 1966). Advertisements for the Swinger tended to feature teenagers gathered in large, mixed-gender groups in outdoor settings, including beaches, parks, and ranches, to emphasize the social nature of the camera. The images often pictured the teens with their heads close together, either posing for a picture or waiting for an image to develop. The theme of impulsivity was used repeatedly in advertising copy promoting the Swinger. A "Meet the Swinger" brochure reads, "Polaroid believes picture taking should be a spontaneous act, something exciting that happens between you and your subject. So we made the Swinger the most spontaneous camera in the world" (New one from Polaroid, 1966). The brochure goes on to read, "[n]ever before have there been so few steps between the impulse to shoot a picture and the finished print."

While the name "Swinger" referred explicitly to the camera's strap, which allowed the device to hang from the wearer's wrist and swing, much has been made by contemporary observers looking back on the Polaroid advertising of the 1960s of the possible double-entendre in the name of the Swinger model camera, including suggestions that Polaroid knew about and encouraged the sexualized uses of their cameras. If the Swinger campaign is read as a coded reference to sexual liberation, it appears to mark the earliest use of sexual innuendo in Polaroid advertising. The frequent associations in print copy between

the camera and themes of impulsivity may support such a reading. In noting how the Polaroid camera's "way of making every couple their own pornographers has become stock-in-trade in the swinging world," Edgley and Kiser (1982) argue that the name Swinger "may well have been an intentional gambit, or if it wasn't intentional, the company at the very least stumbled onto a gold mine" (p. 61). Peter Nowak (2010) goes further to argue that the Polaroid Corporation knew about the practice of creating sexual images at home and referenced the practice in its marketing campaigns: "Television commercials for the camera showed good-looking, nearly nude couples frolicking on the beach, taking pictures of each other. With the sexual revolution in full swing, Polaroid was clearly looking to cash in on the new wave of liberation" (p. 104). Such statements, however, appear to be based solely on semiotic readings of advertisements and on existing knowledge regarding uses of Polaroid products rather than on systematic inquiries into the development and production of marketing material for the Swinger and other Polaroid products. Currently, there is little evidence to support assertions that Polaroid knew about these unintended uses of their product beyond a series of advertisements that could be viewed as much as celebrations of 1960s youth culture as of sexual practices. The question remains: To what extent was Polaroid alluding to erotic uses of its products through its advertising campaigns? As this article will point out, there are a number of challenges in answering this question.

Challenge #1: Reading the Silences

In her introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* on theory, methods, and praxis, Julian Carter (2005) asks an important question regarding the interpretation of "evidence" in historical research on sexual cultures: "What do gaps in the historical record mean?" (pp. 8–9). Institutional archives tend to represent the information the company wishes to be made public. Despite the presence of many of Polaroid's completed advertisements, content describing the production of these campaigns was notably absent from the official archives. True to Polaroid's reputation as a technology-first company, the bulk of the intracompany memos in the archive focus on the chemistry and engineering behind various products, rather than on discussing marketing strategies or reflecting on consumer use. Historian John Wrathall (2002) suggests an approach to archival research where the absence of information, particularly around issues of sexuality, is given equivalent analytic weight to the presence of such information. For Wrathall, a lack of information on issues of sexuality in an institutional archive should be read as an archival silence. Given the partial nature of any archive, however, caution must be taken when assuming that a lack of discussion is representative of an institutional silence.

The question of how to interpret silences around the various uses—including sexual uses—of instant cameras in the Polaroid archive is central to this research inquiry. The Baker Library's Polaroid archive contains more information on the company's technological developments than on how to sell those products to consumers, likely a reflection of the company's priorities. Information in the archives about how Polaroid cameras were used by consumers tended to reside in magazine articles that focus on the camera's contribution to artistic pursuits and social gatherings rather than on private uses of the technology. Prior to visiting the archives, I expected I might find references to various uses of Polaroid products in transcript records of focus groups conducted by the company in support of their advertising campaigns. Polaroid executives and their external marketing teams, however, took the approach that the innovative characteristics of the company's products made such research unnecessary. For example, Land

dismissed the usefulness of focus groups, noting, "Market research is what you do when your product isn't any good" (Bonanos, 2011). Reflecting on the golden years of Polaroid advertising of the late 1950s and 1960s in a session at the Paley Center for Media, representatives from the advertising firm DDB and Polaroid noted the limited role of focus groups in directing their advertising campaigns (Paley Center, 2006). Therefore, it is unclear if the dearth of material reflecting the uses of Polaroid products in the archives simply reflects a disinterest on the part of the company in this information or if it suggests a willful exclusion of these details from the corporate history.

Challenge #2: Interpreting the Evidence

The second challenge in archival research into sexual cultures and themes is how our own cultural context may influence our readings of historic documents. This is what Sally Newman (2005) has referred to as the need for scholars, embedded in the narrative structures of their own culture, to acknowledge their limitations in recognizing "the ambiguous textual traces of desire" across cultures and time periods (p. 53). Being informed by contemporary cultural discourses complicates not only our ability to identify subtle sexual allusions but also may encourage inaccurate semiotic readings. Georg Iggers (1997) recalls that historical research in the 1980s was characterized by a turn toward everyday histories, where Clifford Geertz's notion of "thick description," as it is applied in cultural anthropology, gained prominence. This approach, which focused on the lived experiences of individuals, served as a model for historical research in that moment. The benefit of this approach is that the research recognizes how the tendency to read one's own preconceptions onto the past obscures the researcher's ability to recapture history in its purest possible form (Iggers, 1997, p. 104). Iggers, however, notes a problem with such an approach: Geertz's thick description focuses on the culture in which the individual is embedded rather than on examining the motivations of the individual. According to Iggers, Geertz felt that immediate access to the experience of others was not possible and that the culture they were embedded in, with its everyday rituals, allowed for an approximation of individual experience.

A similar problem befalls the researcher using semiotic analysis of advertisements as a way to understand the motivations of a company. After days in an archive, staring at old commercial reels with little to show, it is tempting to read more into a text than is actually there, often resulting in incorrect and unhelpful, if amusing, results. The images and text in the Swinger campaign offer an illustration of the difficulty associated with reading meaning into a historic advertising campaign. The first television commercial for the Swinger, which aired in 1965, was shot in black and white. "Meet the Swinger" showed teenagers playing and running on the beach, dancing, hugging, and picnicking. Looking at the advertisement now, it is not surprising that recent commentators find it replete with sexual innuendo. The jingle for the Swinger ad included the following lyrics:

Swing it up {yeah yeah}
 It says yes {yeah yeah}
 Take the shot {yeah yeah}
 Count it down {yeah yeah}
 Zip it off

This was the first time the act of removing the backing of the Polaroid photograph after the image had developed had been referred to as “zipping it off.” The commercial is also filled with images that tempt the imagination, including one of a young man feeding a woman a hotdog on a fork. In her introduction to an edited collection entitled *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, Victoria de Grazia (1996) notes the problems with the “present-minded” approach that cultural studies brings to examinations of trends in consumer culture. She argues that these approaches “are especially concerned with cultural meaning and often use textual analysis applied to literature, film, and other cultural artifacts to delve into the physical mechanisms as well as the social drives that shape and were shaped by consumption activities” (p. 6). As this article’s next section explores, however, there are myriad considerations that go into the production of an advertising campaign that may obscure corporate intent. While it may be tempting to interpret text and images through present narrative structures, it is essential to contextualize advertisements using additional source material.

Challenge #3: Understanding Institutional Structures

The third challenge in historical institutional research stems from the complicated partnerships and negotiations that underlie a marketing campaign. The best evidence that the Polaroid Corporation intended the sexual allusions others have read into the Swinger advertisements comes from the memoirs of Peter Wensberg, who worked at Polaroid for over two decades, including serving as the company’s senior vice president for marketing from 1971 to 1982. Wensberg (1987) recalled a conversation between the Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) employees responsible for the Polaroid Swinger account—Bob Gage and Phyllis Robinson—and DDB producer Joan Scott:

“What are you going to call it?” asked Joan.

“Phyllis wants to call it The Swinger. We’ll show it swinging from the girl’s wrist.”

“The client will never buy that name.”

“We’re betting they will. Phyllis says no one in Cambridge knows what a Swinger is.”

“But the kids will.”

“That’s the beauty part.” (p. 141)

According to Wensberg (1987), when the DDB representatives saw the ugly white box of a camera, they “decided the camera would only look good hanging from the wrist of a beautiful girl” (p. 140). They settled on the not-yet-famous Ali McGraw for the commercial. Wensberg recalled that DDB had “produced a set of exciting storyboards, simple and, in a daring departure from Polaroid television style, sexy” (p. 139). The first Polaroid Swinger commercial was filmed at Treasure Cay on Abaco Island in the Bahamas, with McGraw wearing the “smallest bikini available at Sacks in 1965” (Wensberg, p. 142). After showing the footage to Land and Executive Vice President for Advertising Stan Calderwood, Calderwood made Wensberg “reshoot the still for the print material at the last minute, not with a different bikini but from a different, presumably less swinging, camera angle” (p. 143). It is important to note that, even in this version of the Swinger story, it is the advertising agency that is pushing the use of sexual allusion to sell the product—not the company. In fact, Wensberg’s account suggests that while no one could miss the sexiness of the commercial, the allusion in the camera’s name was likely lost on the Polaroid executives.

In 1996, after weak sales and a split with BBDO, which had returned briefly as the company's ad agency, Polaroid signed with Goodby, Silverstein & Partners (GS&P) a hot advertising agency that had developed a reputation for saving struggling brands. Scott Aal, a copywriter with GS&P, suggested that they were asked primarily to help Polaroid solve what had long been their biggest problem: People had Polaroid cameras, but they were not buying film. GS&P's goal was to help Polaroid sell enough film to generate a profit while the fledgling company figured out where to go next. As Polaroid noted in its 1996 annual report, the goal of the GS&P campaign was simply to "reintroduce consumers to the exciting immediacy of instant imaging" (1996, p. 10). The advertising agency came up with an award-winning campaign titled "See What Develops." The campaign is described by Aal as a series of storytelling spots that introduced the practical uses of having an instant camera. He says the spots were really "reminders of why you might consider pulling your Polaroid out of the closet or off the shelf, wherever it was, and go buy some film." Far from the instructional messages of early Polaroid advertising intended to teach consumers how to use the product, these spots were creative attempts to remind people of the ways in which they already used their cameras. A particularly well-received spot called "Architect" was the first television ad to explicitly articulate the use of the Polaroid camera to take erotic pictures. Aal, who worked on the campaign, suspects that the spot was approved in large part, because the campaign was so rushed that there was little time for Polaroid to object. In the commercial, an architect is shown in his office during a tense client meeting when he gets a phone call from his wife. She wants to know if he can meet her at home for lunch. As his colleagues grow increasingly irritated, he explains that he's tied up in a meeting. "Have you looked in your briefcase yet?" she asks provocatively. "I left something for you this morning." As he frantically rummages through his briefcase, we see his eyes widen as he holds a Polaroid photo. "I'll be home in ten minutes," he says.

Aal notes these spots were intended to reflect existing uses of Polaroid cameras rather than to invent new uses. This approach represents a softening in the Polaroid Corporation's disdain for focus groups that had been so clearly articulated in earlier decades. In fact, the Architect spot was reportedly the product of a focus group, where one participant took to heart the assignment to take a Polaroid camera home, take photos, and bring them to the session (Cardona, 1997, p. 38).

The Value of Institutional Histories for Popular Culture Research on Sexuality

Julian Carter (2005) argues

our attempts to reinterpret available evidence and unearth new material need to be highly self-conscious, in part because the sexual past they engage has important political ramifications in the present, and in part because those ramifications are situationally diverse and sometimes unpredictable. (p. 4)

This is the particular problem faced by researchers hoping to reveal motivation and intent from historic sources. Considering current knowledge about the use of instant cameras to create erotic and sexual images and a popular culture landscape where almost any vernacular can be read with sexual overtones, it is easy to read both knowledge and intent into the advertising decisions of the Polaroid Corporation's executives. We know that individuals used Polaroid cameras and film to create erotic images. From the recollections provided by Peter Wensberg and others, we can assume that people in the creative team at

DDB understood the double-entendre when they selected the name for the 1960s camera. Neither of these pieces of evidence, however, allows us to conclude definitively that Polaroid itself actively promoted these practices or considered sexuality to be a central component of the Polaroid brand.

Some may argue that such a distinction doesn't matter—that it is not important to distinguish between how a company intended for its products to be used and how consumers actually used them. Either way, they may argue, the opportunities afforded by the instant camera technology introduced by Polaroid changed the relationship between the amateur photographer, the subject, and the image. In many ways, this is true. If we, as communication researchers, are simply concerned with the uses of a consumer product, this argument makes a good deal of sense. There are plenty of products that have been widely adopted for uses other than those intended by the company or that have been adopted by a subculture other than the intended target market.⁴ Often, these unintended uses or markets are themselves an important story. The study of popular culture, however, is also interested in the industrial conditions under which brands and artifacts are produced. Scholars of consumer culture are engaged in the study of brand culture development that often reflects the negotiation of meaning between industry actors and consumers. Therefore, it is essential that we look beneath popular usage and beyond semiotic readings of advertisements to understand how the motivations and intentions of companies shaped the marketing decisions that have a lasting impact on cultural memory. The examination of the Polaroid Corporation's marketing campaigns presented here reveals both the importance and difficulties associated with such research.

When possible, interview-based approaches, including institutional oral histories with employees, can help supplement archival and semiotic analyses. While the structure of the Polaroid Corporation has changed drastically in recent years, the possibilities for former employees to network online makes it possible to tap into this resource. Historically motivated institutional analyses also require methodological creativity in seeking sources that might provide unique and relevant insights. For example, individuals external to the company, including artists who used Polaroid film and the curators of the Polaroid art collections, likely had institutional relationships that differed from those between executives and advertising teams. Interviews with such individuals may go a long way in uncovering some of the details missing from corporate archives and vetted biographies. Asking questions about institutional practices related to sex requires unique approaches, as these conversations often take place during discrete interactions, outside the official communication channels, where they will be missed by the corporate record keepers and left out of the institutional archives.

⁴ Examples of this type of appropriation include the adoption of Timberland footwear (designed for factory workers) by "urban" R&B and hip-hop artists (Walker, 2009) and the adoption of Hush Puppies by trend-setting youth in New York's East Village and SoHo neighborhoods (Gladwell, 2002).

References

- Banet-Weiser, S. (2012). *Authentic™: The politics of ambivalence in a brand culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- BBDO. (n.d.). Make time stand still. *Paley Center for Media*. Reference number: BAT:85615.
- Berger, I. (1973, March). Our dream was to change photography. *Popular Mechanics*. Publicity – Cameras – SX-70 – publicity info, 1973. Polaroid Folder I. 72, f. 15. Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard University Business School, Cambridge, MA.
- Bonanos, C. (2011, October 7). The man who inspired Jobs. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/07/opinion/the-man-who-inspired-jobs.html?pagewanted=all>
- Bonanos, C. (2012). *Instant: The story of Polaroid*. New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Buse, P. (2007) Photography degree zero: Cultural history of the Polaroid image. *New Formations*, 62(1), 29–44.
- Buse, P. (2010). Polaroid into digital: Technology, cultural form, and the social practices of snapshot photography. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 24(2), 215–230. doi:10.1080/10304310903363864
- Cardona, M. M. (1997, August 4). Goodby's naked strategy for Polaroid. *Advertising Age*, p. 38.
- Carter, J. (2005). Introduction: Theory, methods, praxis: The history of sexuality and the question of evidence. *Journal of History of Sexuality*, 14(1/2), 1–9.
- Cross, G. (2000). *An all-consuming century: Why commercialism won in modern America*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Doyle Dane Bernbach. (1985). Polaroid cameras: Did I have a day? *Paley Center for Media*. Reference number: AT:21830.045.
- de Grazia, V. (1996). Introduction. In V. de Grazia & E. Furlough (Eds.), *The sex of things: Gender and consumption in historical perspective* (pp. 11–24). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- D'Emilio, J. (1984). *Sexual politics, sexual communities: The making of a homosexual minority in the United States, 1940–1970*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Draper, N. R. A. (2012). Is your teen at risk? Discourses of adolescent sexting in United States television news. *Journal of Children and Media*, 6(2), 221–236.
- Edgley, C., & Kiser, K. (1982). Polaroid sex: Deviant possibilities in a technological age. *Journal of American Culture*, 5(1), 59–64.

- Ewen, S. (1999). *All consuming images: The politics of style in contemporary culture*. (Rev. ed.). New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gladwell, M. (2002). *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.
- Howdy Doody Show. (n.d.). Want to see a party come to life? *Paley Center for Media*. Reference number: BAT:85841.
- Iggers, G. G. (1997). *Historiography in the twentieth century: From scientific objectivity to the postmodern challenge*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Newman, S. (2005). The archival traces of desire: Vernon Lee's failed sexuality and the interpretation of letters in lesbian history. *Journal of History of Sexuality*, 14(1/2), 51-75.
- New one from Polaroid. (1966). *Publicity – cameras – product line brochures*. Polaroid Folder I 64. Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard University Business School, Cambridge, MA.
- Nowak, P. (2010). *Sex, bombs and burgers*. Toronto: Viking Canada.
- Paley Center. (2006). Instant gratification: The development of Polaroid advertising. *Paley Center for Media*. Retrieved from <http://www.paleycenter.org/video-discussion-with-alan-alda-and-mariette-hartley>
- Polaroid. (1965). *Publicity - News/Press Releases, 1965*. Polaroid Folder I-63. Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard University Business School, Cambridge, MA.
- Polaroid. (1966). *Polaroid Corporation Annual Report*. Cambridge, MA: Edwin Land.
- Polaroid. (1996). *Polaroid Corporation Annual Report*. Cambridge, MA: Gary T. DiCamillio.
- Polaroid. (2012). Polaroid, 75 years young. Retrieved from <http://polaroid.com/75-years>
- Radner, H. (1999). Introduction. Queering the girl. In H. Radner & M. Lockett (Eds.), *Swinging: Representing sexuality in the 1960s* (pp. 1-38). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Savras, R. & Frohlich, D. M. (2011). *From snapshots to social media. The changing picture of domestic photography*. London, UK: Springer-Verlag London Limited.
- Spring, J. (2010). *Secret historian: The life and times of Samuel Steward, professor, tattoo artist, and sexual renegade*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Strasser, S. (1989). *Satisfaction guaranteed: The making of the American mass market*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Walker, R. (2009). *Buying in: What we buy and who we are*. New York, NY: Random House.

Wensberg, P. C. (1987). *Land's Polaroid: A company and the man who invested it*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Wolf, S. (2007). *Polaroids: Mapplethorpe*. New York, NY: Prestel.

Wrathall, J. D. (2002). Reading the silence around sexuality. In K. Peiss (Ed.), *Major problems in the history of American sexuality: Documents and essays* (pp. 16–23). New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.