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Candidate session number

0

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Candidate name

School number

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School name

Examination session (May or November)

MAY

Year

2009

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: Psychology

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: Should the use of Subliminal Messaging in Advertising be allowed?

Candidate's declaration

If this declaration is not signed by the candidate the extended essay will not be assessed.

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

Candidate's signature:

Date: 19.02.09

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The supervisor must complete the report below and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator. The supervisor must sign this report; otherwise the extended essay will not be assessed and may be returned to the school.

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters)

Comments

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

The candidate was not my student. She came to me with her topic already chosen and the research question in place. We discussed appropriate choices of resources and the approach to the question in four brief meetings, during which Karin exhibited control over the direction in which she was heading. During the meetings we also focused on clarity of expression and mechanics, with which Karin, being a 2nd language user of English, initially encountered some problems. I felt her knowledge of the topic was very good, although she may have improved on her arguments and analysis.

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature:

Date: February 23'0

Should the use of Subliminal Messaging in Advertising be allowed?

School:
Supervisor

candidate number:

Word Count: 3,690 ✓
27-01-09

Abstract

The aim of this investigation was to seek an understanding of the use of subliminal messaging in advertising and what kind of effects it has on human behavior. The use of subliminal messaging has been a debatable issue for over a century. Some say it has little to no effect, and others disagree and say they feel as if their unconscious is being intruded. To gain an eclectic view of the issue, I gathered a range of sources from both sides and analyzed their arguments as well as their evidence. I also gathered a large number of case studies and experiments conducted on this issue, then picked the ones with the strongest and weakest outcome and evaluated their methodologies and conclusion. After thorough research, the investigation came to the conclusion that it is in fact not the subliminal messages that are infiltrating the brain and causing undesirable behavior, but it is the people's stubbornness to blame external factors for their undesirable behavior. In fact, subliminal stimuli are too weak to influence a human to the extent that the person acts involuntarily. These findings can be applied to people who work with advertising, as they can see that subliminal messaging is not an effective technique as some insist it is. It also supports how humans tend to hold on to old beliefs, no matter the new evidence. In addition, it would be interesting to investigate further how occupations other than advertising use subliminal messaging, i.e. the government. ✓

Word Count: 246

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Introduction to Subliminal Messaging

The word *Subliminal* derives from *Latin*; *Sub* meaning beneath, *liminal* as in *Limes* meaning sensory threshold. Therefore, the common definition of Subliminal Messaging is stimuli that appeal to the five senses but are not registered at the conscious level. Instead, they are captured on a sub or unconscious level and are believed to influence human behavior. ✓

According to Freud, our unconscious is what ultimately drives our behavior, as it contains information that is near impossible to reach the surface of the conscious. Therefore, when subliminal messages enter our brain, into the unconscious, we are unaware of it and, as a result, defenseless. Such findings have started a controversial debate whether it is ethical for advertisers to use subliminal messaging and whether it should be permitted. Some say there is no such thing as subliminal messaging, and some say there is and are strictly opposed to it, and then there are those who admit that subliminal messages exist in advertisements but counter by saying that humans have a free will to act as they please. This argument would agree with the Humanistic perspective which states that our unconscious could impact our behavior, but only to the extent that we allow it to do so. ✓

Subliminal messaging has been of interest since E.W Scripture wrote his publication "The New Psychology" in which he laid out the basis of subliminal messaging in 1898. This publication sparked the interest of psychologists who began to conduct studies on the topic. The most infamous study was done by James Vicary, who coined the term subliminal messaging. Vicary claimed to have conducted a study in which during the movie *Picnic* he flashed the phrases "Eat Popcorn" and "Drink Coca-Cola" at a 1/3000 of a second at five-second intervals and the results were that the sales for popcorn and coca-cola increased by 57.8%.¹ ✓

However, he eventually admitted that the results of the experiment were fabricated. There has even been talk that the experiment never even actually took place. Regardless, that experiment was the offset of many more to come. ✓

Not everyone was fascinated by the revelation of Subliminal Messages; some were even upset and outraged. The issue was even taken to trial in front of the American Federal Communications Commission which is in charge of all non-governmental TV and radio broadcasting. The Commission decided to ban the use of subliminal messages in advertisement in the US. There have even been cases where the effects of subliminal advertisement or messages have been considered to be harmful, like in the criminal case of Judas Priest. ✓

In December 1985, two young Nevada adolescents attempted suicide after listening to the heavy metal band *Judas Priest*. One was successful while the other survived. The parents sued the heavy metal band for having subliminal messages embedded in their songs and could prove that there was something at a very faint level saying "do it!" in one of the tracks. The parents accused the band of encouraging suicide. ✓

However, the lawyer of the defendant had strong evidence against the parents, which led to the case's dismissal. The lawyer argued that the boys were diagnosed with depression, and that they both had lived unhappy lives. They both had criminal records and were high school drop outs; it was also found that they had experienced abuse at home during

¹ Brannon, Laura A., and Timothy C. Brock. THE SUBLIMINAL PERSUASION CONTROVERSY Reality. Enduring Fable, and Polonious's Weasel. EF Reality. By Michael Lynn. 1-15 ✓

their childhood. Due to this strong upholding evidence, the court decided that it could not be solely the music (if at all) that drove them to commit suicide. The case was therefore dismissed.²

Other famous examples of subliminal messaging, and less morbid ones, are related to certain Disney movies. There have been instances in which, at fast speed, the word or implications of sex are flashed during scenes in Disney movies. In the classic of 1994 movie "The Lion King", when Simba exhaustedly collapses on a cliff, dust flies up in the air and for a split second the dust supposedly spells out the word 'sex' (See appendix 1). Another example would be in "Bernard and Bianca" from 1977, when they are flying on an albatross, and for a split second there is a poster of a naked lady behind them (see appendix 2). The most controversial example however, is in "The Little Mermaid" from 1989 for which the official movie poster is said to have a phallic shape pillar built on the castle (see appendix 3.) ✓

Of course, Disney has denied all allegations and claims that there is no such thing as sexual subliminal messaging in any of Disney's movies or posters. In addition, there have been no reported incidents in which misbehaving of children has been linked to Disney movies. According to the Learning perspective, if children perceive the word or implication of sex in the movie they will most likely want to *model* this behavior (as in replicate it.) On the other hand, the Psychodynamic perspective would say that the children perceive the messages unconsciously and it will therefore have an effect on the behavior. What parents fear is a mix of both of these explanations; they're afraid of how the messages will affect their kid's behavior. ✓

There are different types of subliminality: Ebbinghausian, Pavlovian, and Freudian. The Ebbinghausian subliminality is when forgetting lowers the effect of the stimulus, Freudian is when the latent content is stored in the unconscious and surfaces in dreams, and Pavlovian, which is the one the marketers are accused of using, is when the information is caused associatively. ✓

Ivan Pavlov explains that behavior is caused when an unconditional stimulus (unlearned) is paired with a conditional stimulus (learned) and the result will be a conditional response. As an example; if a company wants to market a car, it might place a pretty woman in or on the flashy car. The woman would be considered the unconditional stimulus, the car is the conditional stimulus, and the excitement the consumers would ideally feel would be the conditional response. Since the consumer *learned* to feel excitement, the effect will ultimately be that they feel excitement everytime they see the advertisement and this will theoretically influence them to buy the product. ✓

Even though it is the Pavlovian subliminality that media and advertisers are accused of using, there is a lot of Freud involved in the use of Subliminal Messaging. Freud believed that our strongest innate drive was sex. This biological drive is what the media is supposedly trying to appeal to. Associations to sex are seen everywhere: in TV-shows, heard in music, and part and parcel of advertisements. However, the bottom line is whether these messages exist or not. If they do, is it ethical for the companies to invade the unconscious? And if they don't what is it that upsets the people? ✓

This para. Needs to be more developed

Subliminal messaging should be allowed because it is not harmful. ?

One side of this controversy believes that subliminal messaging, if even present, is too weak to work in the ways proposed by some research. It is said that it is not the presence of the subliminal message that persuades the consumer, but the belief that it does and therefore it is the consumers that are to blame for their actions. Subliminal stimuli in advertising cannot be

² Ingwerson, Charlyn. "Is it Subliminal?" Annals of the American Psychotherapy Association 10 (2007): 1

successful against the will of the receiver, according to research, because of two factors: subliminal stimuli are too weak to be observed, and even if they were observed they would be overpowered by stronger stimuli; secondly, if the subliminal stimuli were present, the consumer can control their responses and reject any undesired reaction or product through self control (Moore 1982) *reference?*

Furthermore, social psychologists have suggested that there are five tendencies as to why people insist that subliminal messaging affects behavior: the tendency to blame undesired behavior on external forces, the tendency to want to continue long held beliefs despite new evidence, experiences in which they have responded in an unusual way, and the tendency to respond to a topic and thinking it is the persuasion of subliminal messaging when in fact the behavior is a cause of past forgotten experiences.

In an experiment carried out by Vokey and Read (1985),³ participants were shown three vocational images. In the first image sex was embedded three times, in the second a three word non-sense syllable was embedded, and in the third there was no word embedded. According to psychodynamic theories and the concerns of the consumers, the image that should have made a larger impression would be the first image. Instead, it was found that there was no difference in recollection of the pictures. *ref?*

There are issues with this study that could interfere with the results. If the words were not embedded well enough it could increase participant bias, meaning the participants try to help or destroy the experiment. Also it lacks ecological validity, as the participants were in a confined area which could cause some stress that would interfere with results. However, the strength of this experiment is that the results clearly support the theory that subliminal messages are too weak to direct behavior. ✓

Similarly, studies have been conducted on self-help audiotapes which are claimed to have subliminal content that help people overcome bad habits. A double blind study was conducted by Greenwald et al. (1991).⁴ Both the participants and the supervisor were not aware which tape was the Self-esteem boosting tape or the Memory-increase tape. Participants first completed a memory and self esteem pretest. Then the participants were given a tape at random either labeled "memory" or "self-esteem", but the tape had the opposite content of the label. That way the researchers were able to see whether the Placebo Effect would occur. The findings suggested that any effect of an audiotape is associated with the participant's belief concerning the self-help tape. ✓

This experiment contains strong evidence that subliminal messages are too weak to influence humans. The experiment takes into account experimenter bias, and to some extent mundane realism. The tapes are meant for listening, which is how mundane realism is achieved, but humans will rarely be asked to complete memory and self esteem pretests. Participant bias was increased as the tapes were labeled. The experiment was testing the placebo effect, and therefore increasing the participant bias would be able to support the theory. If a participant received a tape labeled Memory, but the subliminal messages were about Self-Esteem, and yet they showed an increase in memory, the placebo effect has been achieved. In addition, it provides evidence for the use of placebo effect being more profitable than subliminal messaging. ✓

As a conclusion, Greenwald and his associate Pratkanis (1988) summarized their results

³ Vokey, John R. "Subliminal Messages." Wilson Bryan Key and Subliminal Advertising. By Wilson B. Keys. 1976.

⁴ Greenwald, Anthony G. "Double-Blind Tests of Subliminal Tapes." Dr. Anthony Greenwald, PhD. Mar. 1991. Greenwald. 9 Nov. 2008

on subliminal research: marketers will profit more by not using subliminal messaging as it includes only a low level of cognitive processing.

Even though these researchers provide strong evidence that subliminal messaging does not work as effectively as some may believe, people still seem to believe that subliminal messaging is an invasion of privacy and unethical. ✓

Subliminal Messaging is unethical as it intrudes the defenseless unconscious

Those who are opposed to subliminal messaging in advertisement believe that it is unethical because the advertisers are intruding the consumers' unaware unconscious. These people seemingly agree with Freud, who said that the unconscious is stronger than our conscious and it is the unconscious that drives our behavior, and that we are determined to behave in a certain way; i.e. Psychic Determinism. One of the ways that marketers have been allegedly using ambiguous subliminal messaging is in sports. For example, Nike slogan is "Just do it." This statement can be perceived in different ways, but some are convinced that it's sexual. ✓

Freud conducted studies on the unconscious mind and how to treat neurosis. These studies are good examples of why people believe that subliminality has an effect on the unconscious. Anna-O is a notorious case among neo-Freudians and in psychology; she was a patient of Josef Breuer and Freud, suffering from hysteria. Anna-O was 21 years old and before the illness had struck, she had been healthy. Freud and Breuer suggested that the problem lay in the unconscious and that the problem was looking for some external expression, hence the hysteria. The treatment lasted for a year and a half, in which the *talking cure* was utilized. Each symptom was dealt with separately and according to Freud, as soon as the psychotherapists had identified and talked about the problem, the symptoms miraculously disappeared. ✓

Freud's study on Anna-O was included in this essay to express how far back the belief that the unconscious has control over human behavior can be traced. For Anna-O, it was explained that her unconscious troubles were looking for an escape from suppression which resulted in hysteria. There are, however, problems with this study: Anna-O was placed in a sanatorium shortly after treatment, where she became addicted to morphine, and she continued to experience loss of her mother tongue language, German. This shows that it couldn't only be the unconscious probing, but that there has to be some other explanation for her hysteria. ✓

Freud is famous in psychodynamics for his dream analysis; he described dreams as *the road to the unconscious*. This idea supposedly helped Freud relieve many of his patients' unconscious troubles that were, according to Freud, affecting their behavior. ✓

An infamous Freud case study is the *Rat Man*, whose real name was Ernst Lanzer. He was diagnosed by Freud to have obsessional neurosis. His fears included his lady-friend getting hurt and that his already deceased father would die. He was also often faced with the urge to cut his own throat. However, his biggest fear derived from a story he had heard about prisoners being punished in the old Orient by having a pot filled with rats placed on the prisoners' rear. The rats would eventually find the anus, and crawl into it. Freud traced this fear back to Ernst's childhood. Ernst had had sexual relations with his tutor and Ernst was afraid that his father would discover them. He therefore associated sexual pleasure with the fear of punishment and hostility towards his father. He also felt that he should be punished for his endearment of his lady friend. The Rat Man feared punishment but displaced this fear onto those close to him. ✓

Freud treated Rat Man for 11 months and by the end of the treatment, Rat Man was cleared with no neurosis. Although the findings from this case study were groundbreaking in

the Victorian era, modern psychology has found issues with Freud's technique. Freud is very nomothetic: he tries to fit this study into an already existing assumption. The problem with this is that, since Freud was trying to support his theories it seems that he forced explanations for the Rat Man just to make his own theories seem true. ✓

Recent studies have been conducted on the unconscious and how it affects human behavior. Silverman conducted a study on patients with Schizophrenia, a disorder in which an alteration of perception, thought, language and emotion occurs. Twenty-four schizophrenia patients were given psychological tests to measure their Thought Disorder (illogical reasoning, confused recall, strange speech) as well as Non-Verbal Pathology (smiling or laughing at inappropriate times, strange gestures and speech blocking.) The participants were asked to look into a tachistoscope, a device which flashes images for a split second. The participants received several exposures to one of three stimuli; one stimulus was "MOMMY AND I ARE ONE" with an image of two people connected at the shoulder, the second was "PEOPLE ARE THINKING" showing people in deep contemplation, and the third stimulus was "KILL MOTHER". The image of "PEOPLE ARE THINKING" was the control in this experiment and as expected, it showed no change in behavior. "MOMMY AND I ARE ONE" showed a relaxation in behavior for about 15 minutes, while as "KILL MOTHER" showed intensification in thought disorder, and verbal distortion for about 15 minutes. (Silverman 1969.)⁵ ✓

This study supports the theory that subliminal messaging can affect human behavior, although the fact that the effects only lasted for fifteen minutes suggests the weakness of subliminal stimuli. The problems with this study are several: there are ethical problems, ecological validity problems, and its validity in general. Flashing phrases such as "KILL MOTHER" could affect the unconscious, according to this study. These patients are already not well, therefore flashing phrases that imply killing of their own mother could increase stress or discomfort. The experiment was held in a confined area, where all the variables could be controlled, which causes problems with the ecological validity. Attempts have been made to replicate this experiment, and none have succeeded (e.g Allen & Condon 1982, Emmelkamp & Straatman 1976.) Therefore this experiment should be disregarded as evidence for the assumption that the unconscious affects our behavior, since *replication* of an experiment is a must in the psychodynamic perspective. ✓

The magazine Times published an article in 1979 about a case of department stores trying to reduce shoplifting by playing music in which subliminal messages were embedded. The message embedded in the music was "I am honest, I will not steal". The message was repeated 9000 times in an hour. This type of anti-theft experiment was installed in about 50 department stores throughout the US and Canada. It was found that theft was reduced by 37% in one department store, and they save \$600,000 during a nine month trial. ⁶ ✓

The experiment can be used as an argument against the use of subliminal messaging because it supports how subliminal messaging influences behavior. Or does it? There is not clear relationship between cause and effect in this study, as there could have been many factors that could have affected the decrease in theft. In addition, the experiment was successful in just one store out of fifty. If it was in fact the subliminal message that changed the behavior of the shop lifters, it was so faint that only 1/50 succeeded. This finding would support the idea that subliminal messaging is not harmful, since it's too weak to steer behavior. ✓

⁵ Rofe, Yacov. The Rationality of Psychological Disorders: Psychobizarreness Theory. New York: Springer, 2000. 5-6

⁶ "Secret Voices." TIME 10 Sept. 1979: 1-2

Conclusion

Based on the evidence of this research it can be concluded that we as humans have the ability to choose how we want to respond to situations as well as to stimuli. This conclusion is based on the Humanistic perspective which implies that we humans aren't simply machines that respond to stimuli from the environment, nor are we doomed by our already determined behavior from our unconscious. The difference between humans and other organisms is that humans have a developed frontal lobe which allows them to make rational decisions. Therefore, humans have the ability to think and analyze a situation based on our past experiences and future aspirations. ✓

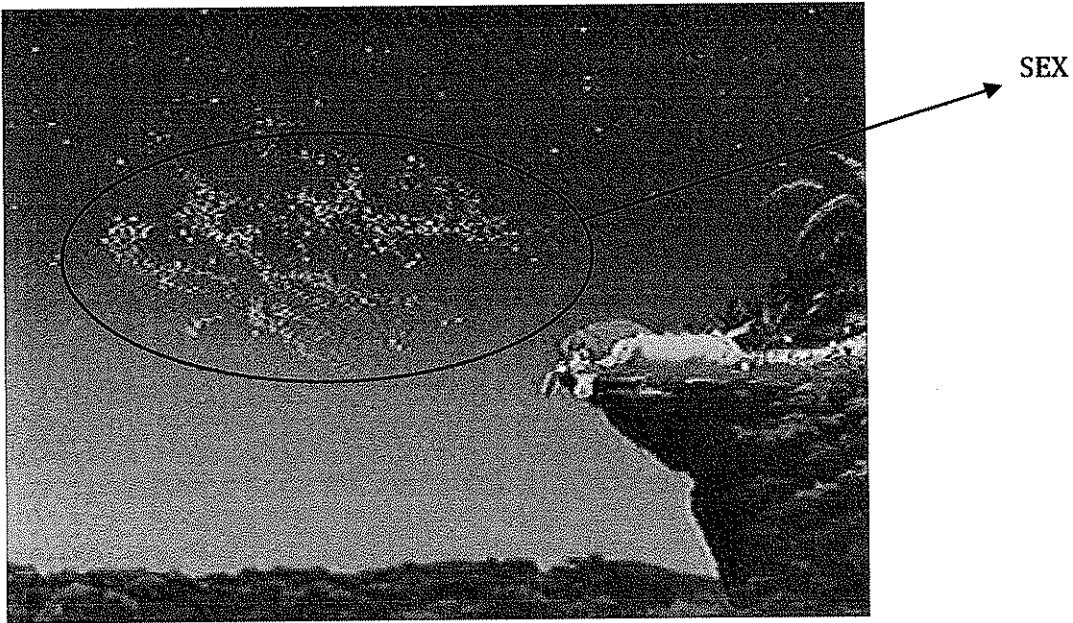
Applying this concept to the topic of subliminal messaging, it can be concluded that it is up to the consumer whether to fall for the tricks of marketers or not. If we are gazing upon an expensive car we have the ability to reject the attractive advertisement and think logically about whether we should or shouldn't purchase. By accepting the idea that subliminal messaging has a power over us, it will evidently change our behavior, but on a conscious level. For example, if consumers gaze upon expensive cars and tell themselves that there are hidden subliminal messages that have power over them, they are only making up excuses for their undesired behavior. There is a difference between being unaware of the hidden stimulus and actually being helpless and searching for an excuse for one's own behavior. ✓

The evidence from studies of Vokey and Read^{date?} as well as Greenwald leads to the conclusion that there is no overpowering effect of subliminal messaging. The advertisers use the concern of the consumers that there are hidden messages to their own advantage. The marketers do this by having obvious sexual inferences in their advertisements, which allows the consumers to think that by detecting this "hidden" message the consumers have advantage. As the consumers are consciously aware of the product and its sexual inferences they will want to buy the product, but because the consumers look for an excuse for their undesirable behavior they say it is the marketers' fault. This concept was explored in *the five tendencies* (Moore 1982.) It is due to the consumers feeling ashamed of their undesirable behavior that they grasp onto the overexploited idea of subliminal messaging. ✓

Therefore, **Should the use of subliminal messaging be allowed in advertising?** Based on the provided research, it would only be logical to say that it should be allowed, and that it does not cause harm as is alleged. The evidence against the use of subliminal messaging is too weak to classify subliminal messaging as harmful. In fact, the use of subliminal messaging is so weak that not many marketers use it maybe because of the studies^{which studies?} done they consider it useless. It is much more effective to have the consumer aware of the sexual inferences. To clarify this idea: if there is an advertisement about the new Maybelline lipgloss and the model looks very attractive and her lips look very luscious, there is obviously no hidden sexual content in this advertisement it's all very explicit. The consumer will thus want to look like this model, consciously; therefore, she will buy the lipgloss. This technique is much more profitable for companies rather than using subliminal messaging. ✓

To sum it all up, it is the responsibility of the consumer to respond appropriately to stimuli; humans have the ability to think about their actions and not act as machines. If we were to say that humans respond to hidden subliminal messaging like a computer would to a mouse click, we would feel Darwin roll over in his grave. Evolution has set us apart from all other organisms who survive on their basic biological instinct. We are much more complex than a computer. Therefore, it would be wrong to suggest that we are victimized by our environment. ? Subliminal messaging is evidently not as effective as some insist it is. In fact, the research conducted on its effectiveness supports not that it's a harmful force but instead supports how humans tend to hold on to old beliefs, no matter the new evidence. Therefore, based on the research conducted, ? yes, subliminal messaging should be allowed in Advertising. ✓

Appendix 1 the word 'sex' supposedly appears as Simba collapses.

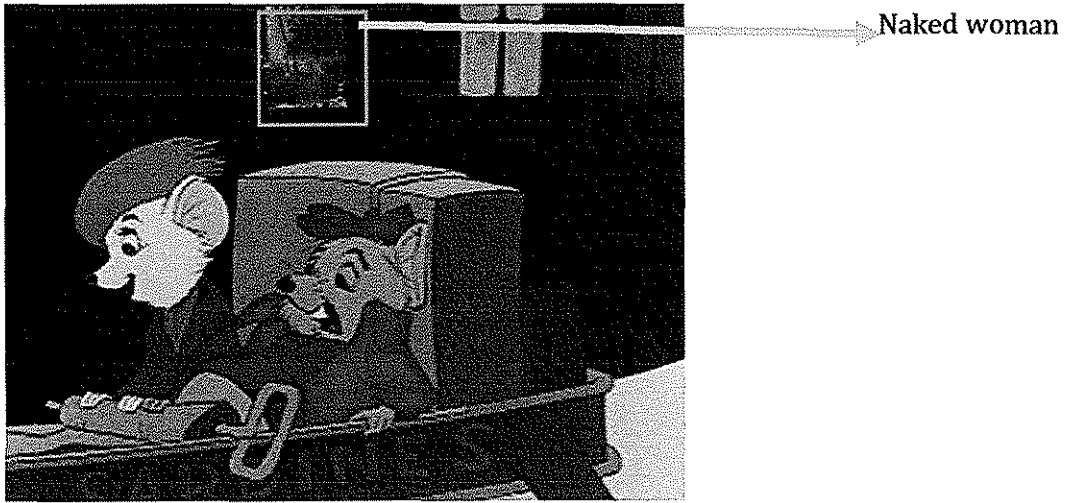


<http://www.putoslokos.com/images/lion%20king%20sex.jpg>

Comments:

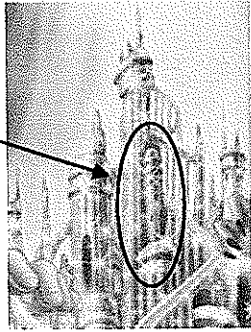
The candidate has produced several interesting findings from her reading. There is a need to provide empirical evidence for several of the assertions that were made in the essay. All studies & authors mentioned in the essay should be referenced in an academically approved manner.

Appendix 2: Bernard and Bianca, naked woman is apparent in the window/poster.



http://www.jamais203.net/images/Mixage_Video/resc1big.jpg

Appendix 3: Little Mermaid movie poster:



<http://www.jigsawgallery.com/prodpics/ED13457.jpg>

✓

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http://faculty.washington.edu/agg/pdf/gwald_sprang_partk_esk_psychsci_1991.ocr.pdf

Several cited studies do not appear in this section. They should do so,

Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Candidate session number	0	0							
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Assessment criteria	Achievement level		
	First examiner	maximum	Second examiner
A research question	1	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
B introduction	1	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
C investigation	2	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
D knowledge and understanding	2	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
E reasoned argument	2	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
F analysis and evaluation	2	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
G use of subject language	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
H conclusion	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
I formal presentation	2	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
J abstract	1	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
K holistic judgment	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total out of 36		21	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of first examiner: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: _

Name of second examiner: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: _____