

Old Navy and the Infantilization of the American Consumer

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It is certain that the Old Navy store is full of clothes and accessories for all shapes, sizes and genders. Its presupposition, however, is that all shapes, sizes and genders will be of one primary inclination: that of the infant. In front of me as I peruse the Old Navy is a pink purse with metallic flecks infused into its plasticine construction. I find this purse in the "Woman's" section, next to the display rack full of puffy-sleeved t-shirts, whimsically cut blouses, flare pants and lo-rider blue-[jeans](#) embroidered with alarmingly cute curlicues. All this is, appropriately enough for a consumer juggernaut like Old Navy, sized to fit the adult woman.

What is revealed in the Old Navy is an ideology, [objectification](#) of the self-as-consumerist entity, indeed of the child-as-consumer to a patriarchal Capitalism. Althusser asks it this way:

Why do [people] "need" this imaginary transposition of

their real conditions of existence in order to

"represent to themselves" their real conditions of

existence? (241)

In the case of Old Navy, the answer lies in the combined natures of Capitalism and the infantalist regression it engenders.

Capitalist objectification of the self, the subjectification of Althusser, begins with the Old Navy ad. Here, kindly old mother-figures or warm and attractive young women assure us in their slightly lobotomized ways that shopping at the Old Navy is "fun," that their [cargo](#) pants are all the rage, that their carpenter jeans are the perfect thing. The representation of the self as Platonic form in the person of the model on the television screen recreates the self as consumer object:

[I]t is not their real condition of existence, their

real world that "men" "represent to themselves" in

ideology, but above all it is their relation to those

conditions of existence which is represented to them

there. (Althusser 242)

Ideology is created by the double-movement of idealization and desire. The model, the idealized Capitalist figure for the self, creates its own ideological structure as a means to selfing, as an objectified desired on the official apparatus of the communication and creation of Capitalist ideology, the television screen:

[H]is ideas are his material actions inserted into

material rituals which are themselves defined by

material ideological apparatus from which derive the

ideas of that subject, (Althusser 243)

that subject of ideology, that objectified self. Thus the consumer is removed from the self by the ideological system of the Old Navy ad.

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