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Communication Design Theory

Research paper 2

How have advertisers perpetuated societal biases, whether intentionally or unintentionally, through their advertising messages both in the past and the present?

Advertisers have mistakenly or actively reinforced cultural biases through their advertising messaging in a number of ways. One of the most frequent methods is the use of gendered language, images, and roles to reinforce gender stereotypes. Similarly to this, advertising frequently reinforces racial and ethnic stereotypes by stereotyping or disparaging particular groups. This may involve using derogatory language or parodies or portraying just specific groups in restricting and frequently stereotypical roles. This can also be seen in the lack of diversity in advertising campaigns. For this specific research paper, we'll be focusing on the reinforcement of gender stereotypes by critically analyzing a Weyenberg Shoes ad that ran in Playboy magazine

"Keep her where she belongs" Weyenberg shoes, 1974.



This Weyenberg shoes ad ran in Playboy magazine in 1974. The advertisement shows a woman lying on the floor staring at a Weyenberg shoe, admiring it, as the advertisement reads "Keep her where she belongs". Originally this ad was supposed to mean that the woman was so taken aback by the quality and appearance of the Weyenberg shoe that she lay on the floor to admire it but I strongly believe that the company used the concept of "death of the author" by Roland Barthes to reinforce the sexist meaning behind this ad. The concept of the "death of the author" was introduced by Roland Barthes in his essay of the same name. According to Barthes, the role of the author is not to dictate the meaning of the text but rather to create a space in which readers can engage with the text and create their own interpretations. The phrase "Keep her where she belongs" can be seen as an attempt to amplify traditional gender roles and blatant sexism that was so rigidly defined during the 1970s. Considering the gender roles in the 1970s, this message was left to interpretation by the viewers, and with the opinion

men had towards women, it only meant one thing which was to keep the woman near a man's shoe because that's where she belonged. At the time, this ad was widely criticized for its sexist and offensive tone and sparked a backlash for the women's rights movement. This ad is now seen as a prime example of how advertising in the past perpetuated harmful gender stereotypes and reinforced traditional gender roles.

Now to analyze the visual aspect of this ad, you can see a woman lying on the floor next to a man's shoe all dolled up and as you look closer you notice that the woman is naked which really makes this ad misogynistic and extremely sexist. Since the nineteenth century, advertisements have used sexual imagery to boost sales, and the saying "sex sells" is so well-known that even children are familiar with it. Everything is sold through sex, from cigarettes to soap to underwear to jeans, and this Weyenberg shoe ad is one of the more popular ones in history. Despite the fact that the woman in the Weyenberg advertisement is selling shoes, she is topless and only covered by her own arm. The company used this image even though a man's shoes have nothing in common with a naked woman because men are more likely to buy shoes if the advertisement makes them think of sex. The problem with "sex sells" is that it actually does and male consumers are first in line to pay for it. The greater issue is that it perpetuates women's bodies as mere objects of desire for male consumers and promotes the objectification of women's bodies which can lead to harmful physical expectations for women that are absolutely unrealistic and hard to achieve. It gives off the idea that women are for sale and if you have enough money they have to oblige to your wants and needs which also contributes largely to men feeling entitled and rape culture.

This image is laced with encoded messages. According to Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist, sociologist, and public intellectual, media messages are encoded with specific meanings by their producers, but these meanings are not necessarily received or understood in the same way by audiences. Instead, audiences decode media messages based on their own cultural and

social contexts, which can lead to a wide range of interpretations. The main encoded message you can see is the woman and the shoe being placed on the ground, showing that they belong in the same place. Her position next to a shoe, an inanimate object, further emphasizes the derogatory idea that men are superior to women and deserve to step over them and that women are so shallow and naive that they should oblige to men as do so as they please with a smile on their face, which is also very prominent in this ad.

Overall, this ad is extremely problematic and perpetuates and reinforces, in my opinion, intentional gender stereotypes. From the imagery of a naked woman laying on the floor next to a men's shoe with a smile on her face to the phrase used in the ad "Keep her where she belongs", this ad is immensely discriminatory towards women and blatantly misogynistic. This ad implies that women should be subservient to men and should not challenge their authority or independence. This entire campaign is a stark example of how advertising was and can be used to reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and promote negative views of women and their bodies. It serves as a reminder of how crucial it is to promote gender equality and combat sexist beliefs and actions in all aspects of life.

Citations

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