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“She’ll Be Happier with a Hoover”: An Analysis of a Hoover Vacuums Ad from November

30,1953

November 30, 1953

Give her a Hoover and you give her the best

Christmas morning
(and forever after)
**she'll be happier
with a Hoover**

P. S. to husbands:
She cares about her home, you know, so if you really care about her
... wouldn't it be a good idea to consider a Hoover for Christmas?
Prices start at \$66.95. Model 29 (shown here) \$95.95. Low down
payment; easy terms. See your Hoover dealer now.

THE HOOVER COMPANY
North Canton, Ohio

In this paper, I will be discussing this advertisement created by the Hoover Company during the 1953 holiday season. This poster appears to be advertising their vacuum cleaners as a gift worthy of gifting your wife on Christmas. The intent with this ad was to speak to American husbands and persuade them that buying their wives a Hoover vacuum cleaner for Christmas would make them “happy”. However, this ad also played into stereotypes of women that we see today as sexist. Here, I will further explain how this ad uses gender stereotypes in order to persuade purchasing of their vacuum cleaners.

Before identifying how the ad utilizes gender stereotypes, we must first analyze the contents of the ad itself. The poster itself showcases an illustration of a white woman lying on the floor whilst embracing a Hoover vacuum cleaner and reading a note attached to it. The primary colors seen throughout this ad are red, white, and green, possibly as a way to relate to Christmas. Along with that, there are presents adorned with the same colors and the woman's dress is adorned with festive illustrations. At the top right of the poster, we see cursive text which reads “Christmas morning (and forever after) she'll be happier with a Hoover”. The text is script-like and colored in red, adding to the Christmas theme of the advertisement. To the bottom left of the ad is a paragraph of postscript supposedly written by the Hoover company, addressing American husbands and persuading them on how buying a Hoover vacuum for their wives is a “sign of love” and a way for them to show that they “care about their wives”. The advertisement was made with the clear purpose of persuading American housewives that a Hoover vacuum cleaner is a sign of love from their husband and American husbands that buying a Hoover vacuum cleaner will serve as a thoughtful gift for their wives. It was clearly made during a time when gender roles were more restrictive and a time where society expected men and women to take on

certain roles. In the 50s, men were expected to go out and work to earn money for their wives and families whilst women were primarily homemakers who were expected to tend to their home and tend to the needs of the families. Today, thanks to movements like feminism, women today have the opportunity to work and provide for their families without being restricted to the homemaker role. However, they still live on in some ways as women are still expected to provide their families with meals and tend to chores around the house (although household chores have largely become unisex tasks). While advertising has distanced itself from the usage of traditional gender stereotypes, these expectations of the roles men and women are supposed to take on are still ingrained in American society and perpetuated through certain media. When this ad was first released, an average viewer probably wouldn't have criticized it as much due to how ingrained and present those gender roles were in their media and society. Today, this ad would be seen as sexist for how it perpetuates stereotypes that infantilize and dehumanize women as nothing more than homemakers and child-bearers that need only a vacuum cleaner to make them "happy". Through visual language like the woman's small, stylized waist and the position she is lying in (which is very reminiscent of how a child lies on the ground when they open a present), this ad subliminally perpetuates unrealistic body standards for women as well as an infantilization of women that treats them less like capable human beings and more like simple creatures who can be easily pleased with something like a vacuum cleaner.

The linguistic messages of the poster can be seen through the two main paragraphs of text present within the advertisement. The paragraph written in script sends the message to the viewer that buying their wives a Hoover vacuum will make them happy even after Christmas. The second paragraph at the bottom left also sends a direct message to husbands interested in buying

the product. It persuades men into the idea that buying a Hoover vacuum is a more romantic gesture and that buying one for their wives would show that they “care for them”. The advertisement also is deliberately coded with messaging that reflects traditional gender roles. This can be seen through the coded iconic message of the woman embracing the vacuum cleaner and smiling. Through this image, the viewer is meant to infer that providing a woman with a gift like a vacuum cleaner makes them more happy and fulfilled. It relates heavily to the myth imposed by 50s society that housewives are simple beings and that a majority of women are happy living as housewives and being subservient to the needs of men. This is of course untrue as many women during the 50s were unhappy with their lives and were forced to live as “happy housewives” or else be shunned by their families and husbands. Through visual imagery such as the housewife lying like an infant on the floor happily embracing the vacuum cleaner, the myth that housewives can be easily pleased became naturalized throughout 50s American society. The text present within the poster states that buying a Hoover vacuum will make them “happy” is also a polysemic message that could mean different things. It could be interpreted that by buying a Hoover brand vacuum over any other brand, husbands can make their wives happier. It could also be interpreted as her being generally happier, indicating that she may not always feel happy and that by buying her a Hoover vacuum, she will feel happier and distracted from her mediocre position in life as a housewife. This interpretation plays more into the fact that housewives and women in general were infantilized in the 50s and could be easily pleased or distracted through meaningless gifts and empty affection. The advertisement also relies on encoding in order to relay the message that housewives will be happy when their husband gives them a vacuum from Hoover.

When this advertisement was created by the Hoover Company, it was intended to mainly be read by American husbands as during the 50s, women were mostly confined to being housewives and were probably less likely to view this advertisement. The rhetoric present in the advertisement was probably effective at the time because it used persuasive language in such a way that it made buying and gifting Hoover vacuums to be more of a romantic gesture. This is proven through the paragraph on the bottom left which reads “...so, if you really care about her...wouldn't it be a good idea to consider a Hoover for Christmas?” The Hoover company is using persuasive language to make it seem that buying their wife a Hoover vacuum cleaner is the equivalent to a husband showing that they care and love their wives. Husbands would identify with the messaging within the advertisement because during that time, they were positioned as the breadwinners and protectors of the family. By buying their wives this vacuum, they would be showing their wives appreciation for the deeds they do. I do believe that the impact was significant as it contributed to 50s gender stereotypes and perpetuated the sexism of society and their views on women. I also believe that due to the advertising design field being dominated by white males, advertisements reflected their own views on women and then influenced other members of American society into thinking about women the same way (especially in other white males). Around the same decade as this advertisement, the Hoover Company had released advertisements similar to this one advertising their vacuum cleaners and other household appliances. This ad doesn't do anything to provoke any thought other than “buy this vacuum cleaner, it'll make your wife happy”.

As for my own personal reading of this ad, I am negotiative towards it. I don't agree with the messaging and the ideas it reinforces about gender roles in society. I believe society has evolved

past the traditional male and female archetypes of the 50s and 60s and the roles of a husband and wife become ever-evolving thanks to movements like feminism. However, I can acknowledge that this advertisement was created during a time period where gender roles were a lot more reinforced.

Works Cited

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