

A Fat World Wearing a Skinny Mask

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We all know that in today's society advertisements are an everyday thing. We can see them everywhere we go such as television, radio, and the internet. The images that we see in these advertisements affect how we live our everyday lives. Even kids see the standards and stereotypes that we hold the rest of the world to, as Kavanaugh (1986) states in his article "Idols of the Marketplace":

Before she had ever gotten to primary school - if she is an average child in the United States - she had spent as much time in front of a television set as she would spend in classroom lectures throughout four years of college. Her home life is dominated by television. (Cultural Ground section)

Even when kids are learning to listen and speak, they are also learning how advertisers portray the world. One of the stereotypes that advertisers usually show is how people can be happy if you look how their actor or models look and if you have what they are advertising. A clear example is in KIA's (2014) "2014 Kia Soul Hamster Commercial Lady Gaga Applause," where they show the stereotype that if people change themselves to be skinny, good-looking, and drive a nice car, then people will be liked more and treated as a celebrity. The thing is not everybody can be like the actors and models, and there is nothing wrong with that. The problem comes when people start thinking less of someone, or treating them differently because they don't meet the stereotypes or standards that we have put on each other.

In KIA's (2014) "2014 Kia Soul Hamster Commercial Lady Gaga Applause," it begins on an empty beach with three hamsters who are jogging along the water. They quickly stop and start gasping for air, and then the scene changes to a gym. There the same three hamsters are working out. The gym is pretty packed with people that are already fit and look strong. After that,

they show one of the hamsters lifting with two big and strong guys—one on each side—which make the hamster look pretty fat. The scene cuts and then they show a clip of a designer drawing the car they are advertising, then it goes back to the hamsters. It shows a hamster running on a treadmill next to two fit and pretty women, and then they turn and look at him and he trips and falls. The commercial goes back to the designer, but now he is sculpting the car out of clay, then the commercial goes back to the hamsters.

It continues to show clips of the hamsters working out, and then all of a sudden it shows the hamsters at a hair salon getting their hair done (Kia, 2014). One of the hamsters looks at his watch then shakes his heads at the other two to signal that it's time to go. After that, the car being advertised comes out and they make it seem as if the hamsters are riding in the car. "I live for the applause" are the lyrics that are coming from the song in the background. Finally, the car arrives at its destination and parks in front of a red carpet. Many people are there, and a lot of camera flashes can be seen. The door to the car opens and the hamsters walk out—they are a lot thinner than before and have much more sleek haircuts—and as soon as they do, the all the people there start cheering and screaming, but the ad focuses more on screaming beautiful women. They continue to walk inside, taking pictures with people and kissing girls hands along the way. Right before they walk inside one of the hamsters looks back at the car and it reads above the car, "Totally Transformed," then the ad ends.

To most people this commercial would be both a fun and funny commercial, but what they don't realize is that this commercial is implying the stereotype that people need to change themselves to be good looking and to be liked. This is a very common thing in our society. People feel that they aren't good enough to meet society's standards of having a lot of people liking them and them feeling they are good-looking. In the ad when the hamsters are bigger and

working out in the gym, nobody is paying attention to them, almost as if they aren't even there. The fact that most people in the gym are already fit and healthy looking just makes the hamsters stand out more, almost as if they are outsiders and don't belong with everybody in there that is already fit and good looking. In addition, the fact that they make the hamsters clumsy while they are still big gives the impression that if a person is bigger other people won't take them seriously, and they will just embarrass themselves. A clear example is when the hamster is running on the treadmill next to the girls, and as soon as they look at him, he gets distracted then trips and falls. Here it is almost as if the advertiser is saying that if people are big and overweight then they will embarrass themselves and not be able to talk to women.

After they have worked out and gotten haircuts—changed their looks—they show up to the red carpet. Now that they are skinnier, have better haircuts, and drive a nice car, everybody loves them and treats them as celebrities. The fact that they were only treated like this after they changed how they look goes to show how our society works. We hold ourselves and other people to a standard that we like. The fact is that not everybody can be defined and good-looking. There are people with thyroid problems and other genetics that may not allow them to be thin and good-looking. There isn't a problem with having a standard of health, but the problem is when the people are held to standards that only a small proportion of society can achieve. There are numerous commercials like this that bring down people that might not be considered good looking and thin with muscles. They usually don't do it in a mean way, usually as jokes to make it funny, but the thing is we are taking it to the real world and holding everyday people to that unreachable standard, and this causes problems.

This problem is not just in this commercial, but most commercials where we see people that don't look like the average person we would see in our classrooms and jobs. In fact “The

body type portrayed in advertising is portrayed naturally by only 5% of American females” according to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, a non-profit organization since 1976 (n.d., Did You Know section). Anorexia and other eating disorders are still very prevalent and actually increasing in men too. This is because media places such an emphasis on how they portray people—even though they use models—to look a certain way; we see them as standards that we have to meet or else people won’t like us and we won’t fit in with society.

Don’t get me wrong, there isn’t a problem with having nice things, and working out to be fit and to have a better body. The problem is when people think that if we don’t have nice things and don’t look a certain way then we aren’t as much as person as someone who is. In his article “Power of Images: Creating the Myths of Our Time” Davis (1992) states, “Many-if not most-of the women and men we see in the media are slim, muscular, and good-looking. We, on the other hand, are always too fat, out-of-shape and smelly... We are never told that almost all photo-advertisers make their subjects look better, so that legs are slimmer, eyes are bluer and faces have no freckles” (MYTH #5. Your Body is not Good Enough section) Countless people suffer because of the way media portrays people, but we add gas to the fire when we take it into the real world.

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