

It Only Does Family Togetherness

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Family is something most of us cherish and work hard for; it's a bond between people that is made up of honesty, love, and trust amongst each other, yet the concept of a typical family consisting of a mother, father and their children has drastically changed over the years. Before, families were close and happy; mothers and fathers had more time to talk with their children unlike today. They would do many different activities together, but today's modern family is depicted as one that is separate and misunderstood. What can desperate mothers and fathers do to have a good relationship with their children once again? According to Playstation the only thing they have to do to achieve a close family relationship instantly is to buy a new Playstation 3 console. This appeal to families is nothing new; in Kilbourne's (2006) article "Jesus is a Brand of Jeans," she explains how companies use our needs and desires, and how they exploit them in everyday ads we see on TV and billboards. Playstation does that same in one of their ads entitled "It Only Does Family Togetherness." This ad appeals to the desire to have a good family relationship and it shows that the only quick and easy way to achieve this is to buy their product. Kilbourne (2006) says "Ads have long promised us a better relationship via a product: *buy this and you will be loved*" [emphasis in the original], and this is proven to be true with this Playstation commercial as it sells the idea and myth that through buying material objects, people can achieve not only happiness, but build better relationships instantly with their families.

The commercial begins with a man, who is outside in his backyard. Behind him is a homemade water park ride that the man has made by using simple household materials such as a ladder, lawn chairs, a slide, and two inflatable pool beds. He starts with the ad series' catchphrase "Dear Playstation..." (Playstation, 2010). As he begins to speak, his name, Aaron

Howe, appears in text below him with the title “Desperate Father.” He explains how his kids never want to spend time with him, which leads to his explanations for why he built the crazy and dangerous water ride behind him. When the desperate father concludes his motive and explanations for the water slide, the commercial skips to a different scene located in a business office, which appears to be Playstation’s headquarters. A different man appears with his name Kevin Butler and his position “Family Activities Director” shown in text below him. Butler then tells Aaron Howe, the “desperate father,” that a less lethal and better way to spend time with his family—Kyle, his son; Abby, his daughter; and his lovely wife Jenny—is to buy them a new Playstation 3 Console. As Butler introduces Aaron Howe’s family, the Howe family is shown in the same room with Playstation’s family activities director playing the PS3 game, *Little Big Planet*. The commercial then skips again to Aaron Howe the “desperate father” as he is shown with a look of disbelief and confusion.

As the commercial comes to an end, Kevin Butler is shown with a puppy in his hand next to Jenny, Aaron Howe’s wife, and she is laughing as the puppy licks her ears. Butler is now portrayed as the more fun and charismatic father figure that Playstation implies every family wants (Playstation 2010). The commercial comes to an end with picture of a PS3 and the words “IT ONLY DOES” in bold black letters and below it “FAMILY GAMES,” then it changes scrolling to “BLUE RAY MOVEIS,” and finally scrolls to the word “EVERYTHING” in bold blue print. The commercial ends with “Playstation it only does everything.”

This commercial is meant to catch the attention of parents; the “desperate father” portrays not just fathers but parents in general who find it hard to bond and form a well-balanced relationship with their children. Butler presents the solution, which is to buy a new Playstation 3 console, and is then portrayed as the more fun, charismatic, and a more perfect father.

Playstation is not only selling the idea and myth that material things can form instant relationships, but is also changing the values of family. Schudson (1986) states in his article “Advertising: Hit or Myth?” that

Dominant culture reminds with the authority of the whole society. In our society advertising uses this dominance to defend the virtues of private life and material ambition. It idealizes the consumer and consuming. It holds implicitly or explicitly that freedom, fulfillment and personal transformation lie in the world of goods. It proposes that we transform our lives by buying something more. (Potent Symbols section)

This is true with this commercial. Although it is witty and humorous, consumers know that family is something that they must work hard for, and that there is nothing they can buy to give them that relationship instantly.

Interestingly, even when the mom and kids are pictured as a happy family with Butler as the stand-in father, they are still not together. Granted they are in the same room, but the kids are pictured sitting on the floor in front of the Playstation, while mom is some sitting on the couch and playing with the puppy not even interacting with the kids. Nor is she interacting with Butler in his role as stand-in husband. The kids have been pacified by giving them the distraction of the game, and mom has been pacified with the gift of the puppy. In all these ways, this ad underscores buying and owning things as the key to success, and emphasizes that a good father and husband will provide those things for his family. It shows joy not as coming from personal connections, but from product purchases.

Overall, the implication that a family can be brought together by a simple purchase dominates not only this particular commercial, but also numerous media messages we are surrounded by. The idea that family happiness can be purchased and that the person who buys

those things will be respected is widespread. While video games can provide a means for families to play together, in the end, “It only does everything,” is a Band-Aid on a deeper problem that cannot be solved by shelling out \$300 at the local Best Buy.

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