

Man Up!

Stereotypes in Household Goods Commercials

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Every day, we see new trends, opinions, and stereotypes being used around the world of television. More often than not, many people spend their free time watching television. This is a good opportunity for advertisers to sell their products. Often, we are influenced by what we hear and see, especially if it's something funny or attractive. It is important to recognize what is being taught to us and know the difference between a reality and something that advertisers are trying to sell. In one Swiffer commercial, we see the stereotype of men being, lazy, dumb, and ignorant to a simple task. This advertisement also suggests the idea that men expect women to be the ones to take care of all the chores that are required to be done at home. Ads like this lead to stereotypes that influence how we see not only ourselves, but also one another.

The commercial starts with the narrator saying, "How to clean a kitchen floor." Next to him appears text reading, "A guy's guide to floor cleaning, with This Guy" (as cited in Civstl, 2014). The guy is an old white man who looks fragile and clueless. The image of this man implies that if he can do it, any other man can do it. The physical appearance of this old, clueless man can boost men's ego into thinking they are just as good, if not better, than that old man. After all, he is just an old man. While we make an effort to not let these advertisements be an influence in our lives, in "Jesus is a Brand of Jeans," Kilbourne (2006) says that, "In truth, we are all influenced. There is no way to tune out this much information, especially when it is designed to break through the 'tuning out' process" ("Tuned In," para. 1). Many will claim that commercials do not influence their reality, but society has already adopted so many of the myths sold to us along with the products being sold, that it becomes hard and almost impossible to distinguish the negative impact that these advertisements have on our everyday lives.

In the next scene, the old white man proceeds, saying, “You see a stain.” He then takes a plate with two weenies out of the microwave, gets one and squirts mustard on it while holding it in midair, spills the mustard on the kitchen floor, and looks around wondering if anyone saw him while taking a bite out of the weenie (as cited in Civstl, 2014). While the advertisement is intended to be something careless and funny, people can also look at this and think this is a clumsy man. If we pay further attention to it, we see that this commercial is trying to tell us much more than that. The simple image of him taking weenies out from the microwave, and then eating them just like that without a bun or anything else, suggests that men are, in fact, either too lazy to cook, don’t know how to cook, or they simply consider this to be a “woman’s job.” The sneaky gesture that the old man makes after spilling the mustard and taking a bite out of the weenie is almost as if he is trying to avoid getting caught by his wife because she might get upset.

In the following scene, the old man says, “You don’t wait for your wife to clean it up, she works just as many hours as you do. She needs time to do, whatever she does, it’s a stinking partnership. Okay?” (as cited in Civstl, 2014). His tone is cold and dry. The phrases he uses, such as “She needs time to do, whatever she does...” and “...stinking partnership,” suggest that the man really isn’t aware of what his wife does in her free time. We can guess that the man is much more interested in doing whatever it is that he does, and doesn’t think what his wife does is equally as important, judging by the phrase “...whatever she does” (as cited in Civstl, 2014). When the man says, “...it’s a stinking partnership. Okay?” we see that the commercial is implying that men don’t really care about the relationship they have with their significant other as they get old because he refers to it as a “partnership.” The myth that men grow cold as they grow old is reflected in this scene with the man’s tone as he talks. As Killbourne (2006)

mentions, “In the world of advertising, lovers grow cold, spouses grow old, children grow up and away – but possessions stay with us and never change” (Unnatural Passions, para. 5). Embedding this myth into advertisements encourages the viewer to look into buying the product being sold, because unlike people, the product always remains the same over time.

Finally, the commercial ends with the man cleaning the kitchen floor. He says, “So, you press the button, you do this bingo, bango, it’s clean. Okay?” At the same time, the screen reads, “This isn’t brain surgery, guys.” the man continues with, “Man up. You don’t know how to clean a floor?” (as cited in Civstl, 2014). It is implied that men are “dumb” and can’t do something as simple as cleaning up a stain, which is why they use such basic and easy language such as “bingo, bango.” Fowles (1998) in “Advertising’s Fifteen Basic Appeals,” notes that

the need for achievement is signaled by the desires ‘to accomplish something difficult. To overcome obstacles and attain a high standard. To excel one's self. To rival and surpass others.’ A prominent American trait, it is one that advertisers like to hook on to because it identifies their product with winning and success (p. 8).

The fact that the man was able to accomplish such a small task makes him feel good and successful even though all he did was drag a mop across the floor, something anyone and everyone could very easily do.

While this advertisement is simply trying to sell a product, and to many this advertisement might be completely irrelevant, it does affect the way that we look at society and how society looks at gender roles. It is important that we learn to identify the difference between reality and the myths that these commercials are trying to sell along with their products, and not get caught up along with them. By showing the man as clueless, messy, cold, and dumb, the

view created of men, specifically husbands, is one that is both laughable and lazy. It creates an image of manliness as packaged with all of those things. Additionally, the references to his wife imply a relationship that is not truly based on partnership, but rather on conflict or deception. These add up to images that both demean men and a beneficial partnership. As roles change in society, we must be aware of the hidden implications in images like this. After all, society will always change what is considered the norm changes as we do. Holding on to old views of marriage and gender only tie us to a past that hasn't helped each of us recognize our true strengths.

References

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