Issue of gender advertisements and stereotyping

Gender Advertising

Gender advertisements are images in advertising that depict stereotypical gender roles and displays. Television and advertisements are a source of information about culture and society through which the " appropriate" roles are portrayed. The advertising world is infamous for taking these gender norms and using them as selling points, and frankly it is working. The purpose of the advertising industry is to change: not change its messages, but rather influence your mind and behavior. Today, advertising and marketing is a $250 billion dollar industry (Killoy). The overall objective of advertisements is to sell products. However, these advertisements are selling much more than that. They are selling values, concepts of love, sexuality, success, normality and telling us who we should be. Often these gender roles include women in the household environment and the submissive role, while the men are posed doing many of the tasks involving skill and leadership. Each gender stereotype can lead to negative consequences which restrict life opportunities, especially for women. The focus on physical characteristics in many ads can lead to emotional distress and a lack of self-confidence in the younger generations. In order to solve these problems, the advertising agencies must make a committed effort to show and present a wider range of men, women and everyone in-between in a larger range of roles. A more gender-inclusive and diverse advertising industry can lead the way for a more inclusive and accepting society.

Background

Advertising first sparked at the beginning of the American Industrial Revolution and has be gaining ground ever since. The Industrial Revolution was the start of many commercial products which required mass marketing (Madigan). With the spark of newspapers and radios there was a new medium for those very advertisements. When many think of the first advertisements they think of the old 1950-60's ads. Often in these ads a women is making dinner for her husband or a woman's social standing with her friends is based upon how clean her toilet is. This beginning era allowed advertisement companies to figure out what strategies sold and what didn't. Next was the switch from words to the use of visuals. Most people when they think of ads they think of the big bright pictures, not the words at the bottom. Almost all ads contain visuals nowadays. Visuals allow your brain to register them before you have time analyze them which encourages consumers to think less when considering buying a product (Madigan.) As advertisers became more experienced they began looking at the science of marketing. In the 1950's the relationship between advertising and psychology formed when advertising agencies began to use psychologists and behavioral experts to help develop their ad campaigns (Madigan). The final growth in the advertising model was seen in recent years through the development of technology and the internet. The internet allows a single ad to be placed on any given website or search page and it can be seen by any viewer, at any time, at any place in the world. This vast diversity of the internet has allowed the online advertising arena to become a $34 billion dollar industry (Evans).

The average American sees on average 3000 ads per day and spends 2 years watching TV commercials (Killoy). The fact is, advertisements effect on us is quick, elusive, cumulative and most importantly subconscious. " Only 8% of messages are received by the conscience mind. The rest is worked and reworked deep within the brain" (Rance Crain, former Senior editor of Advertising Age, Killoy). This passive reception is done without activating the information processing centers in the brain. These advertisements flash across our screens while we sub consciously absorb these detrimental images. Studies have shown repeated exposure to selective portrayals of groups can lead to viewers adopting distorted beliefs about a group (Rubrie-Davies).

Advertising Strategy

The basis of gender being used for marketing has been found to be one of the most influential forms of advertising due to its draw to our natural instincts of wanting the approval of others. These companies tap into the psychology of the consumer. Abraham Maslow, a psychologist in 1943, developed a theory now known as Maslow's hierarchy which says all human decision-making is motivated by unfulfilled needs and people seek to satisfy these needs (Madigan). The creation of a target audience is the most important aspect in the marketing world. Women are the biggest decision makers when it comes to making purchases for the household. Women account for 73% of U. S household spending and also account for 85% of consumer purchases (Shewan). Advertisers rarely show people who look like " us". The people who the advertisement is aimed at very rarely look like the people in the advertisements. Research suggests four different and

independent components that advertisers target. They are trait descriptors (self-assertion, concern for others), physical characteristics (hair length, body height), role behaviors (leader, taking care of children), and occupational status (truck driver, elementary school teacher, housewife) (Signoretti). Each one of these four components has both masculine and feminine versions to it. With each of these versions comes the stereotyping and expectations of the genders. Stereotypical advertisements are teaching society that there is only one right way to be a woman and one right way to be a man. Gender stereotyping blankets the special characteristics many of us have by telling us it's not okay to have these unique things about us. It is putting not only women and men, but teaching our younger generations they must fit into this defined box we as a society deem acceptable. And if you don't fit into this box, if you don't look a certain way, if you don't have certain aspirations that match those of your gender then those must be changed.

Although we can choose what programs we watch when we turn on our TV or start up our laptop, the same cannot be said for advertisements. Therefore, there is repeated exposure to toxic advertisements that display stereotypical perspectives and reinforce cultural views. The lack of control viewers have in the advertising realm is what tends to be the most surprising. Advertisers' scheme is for the viewer to have long term, repeated exposure to an ad. We all can admit to remembering the catchy tune from a commercial or the catch phrase from another. That means advertising has done its job.

Gender Stereotypes and Gender Roles

Today television, print, and online advertisements are a medium for projecting cultural expectations and gender normality in our society. Gender is one of the few things more often than not you can determine about someone through one glance, allowing advertisers to exploit it. Gender advertisements are used in order to establish the role of one gender in relation with the other, and some scholars argue advertisers are obsessed with gender (Grauerholz and Subriena). Our society is based on people defining themselves through gender and the want to fit into a gender role. Advertisers feed off the feminine and masculine gender norms that have been brainwashed into our society. Many people argue gender stereotypes no longer exist, however the society has just evolved, creating " modern" stereotypes. As a woman you are supposed to be submissive, dainty, thin and overall aesthetically flawless. Women are described as openly emotional and sexual because the truth is, sex sells. Femininity is highlighted through many products that have nothing to do with a woman at all, many times women are used to sell products to men. The general theme is women are portrayed as being dependent on men, needing the protection of men, not able to make decisions, homemakers and sex objects (Kumari and Shivani). Men, on the other hand, are typically shown as competent, strong, powerful, active and sexually driven. The focus is on their physical and economic capabilities, not on their emotional health or other skills not involving chiseled biceps or washboard abs.

Not only are the men and women displayed in these visuals borderline perfection, their body language is just as telling. Typically women's body language is designed to be passive and vulnerable with facial expressions of

amazement and playfulness. The models are posed with the graceful bend of the knee, burying themselves within object, or leaning on the product. Everything about the women's body language portrays a lack of control. Often when women touch an object it is dainty and loose, not gripping the object tightly unlike how most men are portrayed. Men's body language usually entails being in control, standing up strong, leading the tasks. Goffman argues often time advertisers exaggerate biological differences between men and women in order to push their message. Men are usually taller and overall larger than women, which is just a biological fact. However, advertisers manipulate this size difference by exaggerating the size of one gender in relation to the other. Men are manipulated to be even taller and larger than the woman in order to convey dominance and a status of power.

A common theme has been present in advertisements involving women in the household environments including the kitchen and laundry room. Many of the advertisements around household products show a woman in the house cooking, cleaning or taking care of the children. Many of these household products target females because historically women are more likely to be stay at home mothers. However these stereotypical gender roles are becoming out of date as more women are now the bread winners of the household while the father stays at home. Women are rarely shown as CEO's, labor workers, or business women. These stereotypical roles in our society lead to restricted opportunities of self-development, and may lead to disadvantages in women's careers (Kumari and Shivani). Women and young girls rarely see women depicted in these positions of power, so how can you expect to be what they cannot see? How can we as a society expect girls to

have daring aspirations and non-gender typical jobs if we constantly show them women in the kitchen?

As a society, we are taught to measure ourselves against the images we see even though often these women in the ads are photo shopped and altered into the ideal woman. Advertisers use these edited images to destroy the body image you currently possess and drive you to want the body you see on the page in front of you. The problem is often the woman before you may not even be a real woman. She may be an ideal version of a real woman that has been nipped, tucked and perfected through various imaging software. By the time a girl reaches her 17 [th] birthday, she will have seen more than 250, 000 ads (Shewan) The advertisement world creates a toxic environment for our children as they grow and learn how to represent and present themselves in society. These images are causing emotional distress, lack of self-confidence and body dissatisfaction.

Solution

The solution starts with first accepting that gender advertisements and stereotyping are more common in our society than we may think. But also have the ability to recognize its need to be a thing of the past. Many times the advertisements we are watching are submissive in their messages of women and men, but is important to identify when it is happening and stand up for what's right as the consumer. Gender roles are diminishing in our society as well as the idea of only two genders. Gender is now a term that encompasses a fluid component that is not described by defined lines. Women now more than ever are in positions of power in the workforce and

becoming the primary breadwinners of the household. Femininity no longer means submissiveness, but rather drive and resilience. Although the stereotypes have shifted they by no means have diminished. As the target audience, we need to recognize when the advertisements are detrimental. The whole advertising scheme is based upon the consumer viewing these messages subconsciously. If we now make a concerted effort to really pay attention to what we and our children are viewing, the advertisements lose a majority of their power.

The solution also stems from the advertising industry itself. There needs to be a movement in the industry to depict a larger range of people of various genders, body shapes, races and ages. Women consumers need to see women that look like them in advertisements. One of the best examples today of companies making a positive change is Aerie, a brand owned by American Eagle Outfitters. The popular brand is mostly worm by young girls and boys throughout their teenage years. They have been known for featuring women of all shapes and sizes. Their current campaign involves the title, " Girl Power: Body positivity. No retouching." (Fecteau) Their most recent lingerie campaign included women with disabilities and chronic diseases. All of these women were not retouched and showed bodies that have disabilities, scars and stretchmarks. The pictures contain women in wheelchairs, crutches, and holding insulin pumps. Young girls that see these ads are able to recognize that their unique characteristics are now longer considered flaws, but rather what makes them beautiful. These ads are a way to promote positive body image, which can help with depression and self-harm that many young girls struggle with.

There has also been big steps in the make-up industry. In 2016, CoverGirl named makeup artist James Charles as their first ever Cover Boy. The 17 year-old boy shattered the gender stereotypes when the company announced its newest spokesperson. Charles appeared in advertisements for CoverGirl's newest mascara and many other cosmetic products. This campaign was a boundary-breaker for many in the industry and opened a new door for young men. Charles and CoverGirl were able to blur the line that divides masculinity and femininity. They gave many the ability to express what it means to be masculine to them.

These solutions will not only influence the industry itself, but will make way for change within our modern culture, which is the overall goal. It will allow our society to evolve and become more educated in order to support others who may travel outside of the typical norms we deem acceptable as a society. This will allow consumers to take the power back from advertisers on what we are viewing and also what our children are viewing. Our children can grow up in a society where they can watch television, walk through the mall, or stand at the checkout line at the supermarket without seeing sexualized images of women or women in a submissive role. Young boys can see men who are not just strong and powerful, but also kind and accepting of emotions. It will allow our children to grow up in a society that accepts them for the unique characteristics they bring to the table, not the ones that fit into the mold. It will increase the overall self-body image and self-confidence of young girls, boys, women and men.

The truth is as technology becomes more vastly used, advertisements will shift to show the societal norms of that time. Advertisements are not a thing

of the past and whether we like it or not they will continue to be present within our day to day lives. It is up to us however to be conscience of the messages being presented to us and know how these ads can affect our behavior and thoughts. We may not know what's coming up next as far as the advertisement scheme, but one thing we do know for sure is they will always be trying to sell us something.

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