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Principles of Goffman's Analysis: As Viewed in the Advertisements in Vogue October 2014

Introduction

Erving Goffman, in his *Gender Advertisement*, stresses the importance of taking commercial pictures seriously. The main intention of the advertisements is to lure viewers into buying the product depicted in the advertisement. The power of advertisements is so strong that it can immensely influence the viewers, both consciously and unconsciously. However, the problem is that an advertisement is not necessarily the true representations of reality. Not only commercial advertisers, but also governments and nonprofit organizations make use of advertisements in order to deliver their ideas or messages. The advertisements intentionally and unintentionally raise and exploit the “social situations”. In advertisements that contain gender representations, instead of focusing only on the stereotypes on each gender and their impact on our society, “rather one should, at least in part, attend to how those who compose (and pose for) pictures can choreograph the materials available in social situations in order to achieve their end, namely, the presentation of a scene that is meaningful, whose meaning can be read at a flash” (27). The advertisements, distortions of the actual world to some extent, are “instantaneous portraits of our claimed human nature” (27).

The Analysis

Feminine Touch, according to Erving Goffman, is one of common features of advertisements that women tend to use often.

“ their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle it or to caress its surface, or to effect a ‘ just barely touching’ of the kind that might be significant between two electrically charged bodies” (29).

In ritualization of subordination, gender displays in advertisements portray women as physically located lower than men. Such portrayals represent that men to be socially higher than woman.

Licensed withdrawal is when women are portrayed to be mentally unstable relative to men. Therefore, such depictions suggest that women requiring dependence on men, who are relatively more stable.

a. The Feminine Touch

The Chopard, a famous luxury watch and jewelry brand, advertisements can be an example of the Feminine Touch. The beautiful blonde woman is wearing a watch on her left hand while she is firmly grasping the collar of her navy coat at the same time. Even though she is not necessarily touching the watch with her hands, she is displaying her hand in a way to promote the watch’s beautiful features. This advertisement can also be regarded as “ Self-touching” which elevates the model into a more beautiful and ideal woman, who can lead other women to wanting to become like the smiling model in the advertisement. Viewing the advertisement, most customers will naturally think that they can be a beautiful woman too by purchasing the watch. By using the Feminine Touch, this advertisement lures the viewers to pay for the elegance achieved by purchasing Chopard’s luxury watch.

b. The Ritualization of Subordination

In the Banana Republic, a casual clothing brand, the advertisement pictures both a male and female model sitting down on the steps in front of a house.

However, they are not sitting on a single step and at the same level. Even though they are next to each other, female model is located one-step lower than the one occupied by the male model, who is putting his hands around the female model leaning onto him. The female model is bending her knees, which conveys the feeling of “ foregoing of full effort to be prepared and on the ready in the current social situation” (45). Moreover, the male model has his arms against the female’s shoulder, which means that male is controlling and limiting the female’s behavior. This advertisement represents social hierarchy of male superiority.

- Licensed Withdrawal

In Nexplanon advertisement, an etonogestrel implant for birth control, woman is smiling which tells the viewers that she is emotionally happy and content. Broadly displaying her teeth, she seems to be not concealing anything. This female model lost “ control of [her] facial posture” (57). This advertisement gives the feeling that Nexplanon is safe and effective, and it will allow the buyers to have the same satisfying state as the female model in the advertisement. Moreover, instead of looking at the viewers, the model “ withdraws [her] gaze from the scene at large and lock it in such a way as to give the impression of having only minor dissociated concern with what is thus seen, even as [her] mind has wandered from everything in the situation; psychologically, [she] is ‘ away’” (64).

Instead of focusing on what is happening right now, the model is so much engrossed into her happiness of successful birth control.

d. Moncler

In Moncler advertisement, the male figure is sitting straight up on a mound

of soil and ground, puts out his eight arms around him. He is wearing sunglasses, so it is hard to decipher his facial expressions, but he seems to display no emotions and only looking at his lips. He seems to be meditating in a barren and very harsh, yet quiet, surroundings. His posture and the surrounding imply that he is very masculine man who is ready to take on any adventure. In addition, his meditating hands and lack of facial expressions tell the readers that he is calm and not nervous even in a rugged environment. Thus, this advertisement wants to allude that by wearing the Moncler jacket, “ you can also become like this brave male model in this advertisement.”

e. Jimmy Choo

The Jimmy Choo advertisement is challenging to the Goffman’s analysis in many ways. Jimmy Choo is a producer of mainly woman’s goods. Therefore, by using a male model in promoting a Woman’s brand, this advertisement is challenging Goffman’s idea of gender role rituals in advertisement. The model is sitting down, lowering his head and doing a bashful knee bend, which are the features that woman models usually do. He is holding the purse in his hands, which is again usually done by a woman (Feminine Touch). In challenging the conventional styles in advertising, Jimmy Choo is attempting to be perceived as a liberal, open, and rebellious, precisely the qualities that the fashion industry loves.

Conclusion and Reflection

Studying, practicing, and applying Goffman’s analysis was not as hard as I thought it would be. Initially, I thought that it would be very hard thinking

that Goffman's analysis on gender advertisements is outdated. However, it seems that the same rules still apply. Although there are some advertisements, such as Jimmy Choo's advertisement, that challenge Goffman's analysis, most of the advertisements in Vogue October 2014 edition follow the Goffman's analysis. Even though people nowadays believe in female and male equality, it is interesting to see male superiority concepts throughout the magazine. Moreover, another interesting part is that it is hard to find an advertisement with only male model in it. Most of the advertisements had female models in it when there were male models and there was only one advertisement with male model all by itself, which was Jimmy Choo advertisement, which is interesting because it challenges the Goffman's ideas.