

Social class in popular medua



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The very notion of “ class” is one of the most taboo subjects in American culture today. The connotations brought about by saying this one syllable word can have drastic effects on people’s behavior and thoughts. While it may be obvious if the subject of class is brought up in normal conversation, it is not as obvious when the subject is slipped into our daily lives in other more subtle ways. The majority of Americans believe we are a classless society. The presence of different social classes, however, is not a secret to those who open their eyes to its existence.

The differences between different classes can be seen almost everywhere, especially in popular media. They are portrayed through movies, television shows, and even articles and advertisements in magazines. The easiest way to observe the presence of social class in our society is to take one type of media, such as a magazine, and compare it to another. The differences between them, such as their target audiences, the products they endorse, or the content of their articles, will help reveal the presence of different social classes.

Two magazines, that when compared can help reveal different social classes, are Cosmo (Cosmopolitan) and GQ (Gentlemen’s Quarterly). Cosmo is a woman’s magazine that focuses on educating women in areas such as fashion and beauty. GQ is a men’s magazine that focuses on fashion and style for men. There are however, less obvious differences between the two.

Cosmo is aimed toward young women in their twenties and thirties, but the magazine’s content can offer advice that reaches beyond it’s target audience. GQ, however, contains sophisticated content that applies

exclusively toward an older male audience. Despite the differences between them, both magazines have a similar goal, which is to reach their target audience by offering both articles containing useful advice as well as advertisements that appeal to them. The most obvious indication of social class in any magazine is not the articles, but the advertisements. Whether a magazine advertises Gucci and Versace in comparison to Cover Girl and Foot Locker, reveals a lot about the magazine's target audience and what assumptions concerning social class are being made. It is in observing the differences in products that both target audiences have in common such as clothing, shoes, and alcoholic beverages, for example, where the distinctions can be made.

The advertisements for clothing in both magazines are excellent examples that reveal distinctions between different social classes. The ads in Cosmo advertise for stores such as Old Navy, while the ads in GQ advertise for brand names such as Guess. The brands and stores each magazine is advertising for are in themselves good indicators of social class. While Old Navy provides affordable clothing to mainly the middle class, Guess is usually considered more high-class and exclusive. These ads are intended to appeal to different audiences based on their social class. For Cosmo the target audience is mainly working class women in their twenties and thirties.

Most of the people in this class could not afford the high-end brands such as Guess, which are the main advertisements in GQ. Therefore, it is safe to assume, based on the ads present in both magazines that Cosmo readers are of a lower class than those who read GQ. The same is true for the ads on shoes and alcoholic beverages. The ads from Cosmo range from Nike athletic

shoes to Vodka, and the ads from GQ range from Cole Haan footwear to Jameson whiskey.

For these ads it is not the differences in the brands, but the differences in the ads themselves. Those observed from Cosmo include a woman running as well as a humorous spin-off of stereotypical gender roles. Both ads appeal to their target audience, the first by relating and the second by offering understanding through humor. The ads from GQ feature detailed profiles of the products they are selling, such as a pair of shoes and a bottle of whiskey. Both appeal to their target audience through simple, precise pictures and statements. Both magazines make bold assumptions of what will appeal to their target audience based on stereotypes that exist in each social class.

For Cosmo, the assumption is made that readers will respond better to relatable and humorous ads because they are easier to understand. This implies that those in lower classes are not as intelligent as those in higher classes. For GQ, the assumption is made that readers are above using humor and everyday activities that are needed to help the lower classes understand the different products. This implies that those in higher classes are not only more intelligent, but more sophisticated as well.

The very concept of class in our society creates false assumptions and stereotypes, and in effect influences choices we each make on a daily basis. These choices can include the clothing we wear, the drinks we consume, and even the magazines we choose to read. These distinctions between classes are especially present in the media, whether one is actively looking for them

or not. By creating these subtle distinctions, the media has substantial power over each of us.

Even though these distinctions are constantly surrounding us, by taking a closer look at the skewed version of reality the media presents, identifying true social classes in American Culture is no longer a mystery. Once society stops blindly accepting the media's view on important issues individuals can choose for themselves what definition of social class they want to follow.