

Analysis of old spice advertisements



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When you read this, realize that I could have talked to you about the appalling American Apparel ads, which literally show girls lying in bed with their legs spread open. I had the option of ranting about Dolce and Gabanna, or Calvin Klein or any of these typical “ lets have sex” ads. We all know sex sells, and I would only be savagely beating a long-dead horse to devote an entire paper to the ultra-sexualized way in which women are portrayed via submissiveness, insatiable lust, lack of intelligence.

The advertising world has already marred so much of the image of women that the occasional positive ad is refreshing to say the least. But this paper is not about sex, so I will curtail my “ everything is going to hell” rage that seems to be sprawling its way across this keyboard. No, I will instead focus on Old Spice, and more particularly its “ Old Spice Guy” ads, which you will (hopefully) be able to recall with a smile and laugh as I delve into my insightful analysis.

Unfortunately, the printed Old Spice ad simply captioned “ smell like a man, man” doesn’t do this ad justice. But here are the main components to this ad campaign: A handsome black male in good physical condition (as expected) is shown with a variety of attributes that make him “ manly” with a caption that reads “ smell like a man, man”. In the particular advertisement I’ve selected he is riding a gallant white stallion, but the various ads of this campaign are interchangeable.

The “ Old Spice Guy”, as he’s called, is sometimes shown adorned with gaudy, golden medals for “ winning at everything”, other times portrayed holding glistening white pearls in his hand, riding a horse backwards, wearing some massive prize fighting belt, a bow and quiver of arrows strung

across his shoulder and always with an ultra-confident, smug look across his face. The reason I found this ad worth writing about was not because I laughed and watched all of the Old Spice commercials on YouTube, although that is part of my explanation.

In all seriousness though, this ad is an interesting case to apply our class discussions of hegemonic masculinity and its implications in a society made very malleable in the hands of social media. Furthermore, this ad leads to contemplation about the role of the hero as a measuring stick of masculinity. Is this commercial merely an outgrowth of the stereotypical hegemonic masculinity that leads to male dominance?

Or, as I will argue, is this commercial actually a positive influence, since its depiction of “ the perfect man” is so exaggerated, and so unattainable that it is merely a farce meant to unearth the ridiculousness of society? When I see the Old Spice Guy in his unattainable perfection, I see several things. Firstly, what makes this ad campaign unique is its lack of focus on showing females as subordinates, as weak, and as objects of sexual desire. In fact, women aren’t even present in the ad, which is peculiar for a deodorant or body-wash commercial for men.

Generally these products are pushed forward through sex appeal. Secondly, this commercial ignores race, which is another reason I’m championing this ad for its positive value in a rather bleak and sex infused commercial landscape. This isn’t about the fact that the Old Spice Guy is black. Thus I find it unique for its lack of offensiveness. This main character could have been any number of different races, as long as he maintained a supremely

confident demeanor. Also, this ad resonates because of absurdity, humor and random creativity.

We associate Old Spice with laughter and a commercial of a guy riding a horse backwards or gallantly swan diving off of a waterfall while talking calmly to the audience. Old Spice is not selling sex like so many of the Axe ads I saw. (Hell, the back of the Axe cans show a guy showering with two girls). Neither is it duping the audience into thinking of Old Spice with aspirations of being athletic, or more attractive, or unique and creative.

Old Spice is pushing forth manliness, but in a way that we can only laugh at. So instead of seeing this campaign as enforcing hegemonic masculinity, and female subordination, my inference is that it breaks through the mold of what it is to be masculine. Ultimate masculinity is a joke. It's as ridiculous as Arnold Schwarzenegger or Sylvester Stallone. Normal people aren't expected to strive for Rambo-esque physique or bawdy John Wayne demeanor. Through our analysis of hegemonic masculinity, it would be expected to assume that these ads are pushing forth an "idealized" form of what it is to be masculine.

That would be the face value of Old Spice and of course hold negative connotations. But when we can look beyond the commercial and instead laugh at the satire of the whole advertising strategy, I think we can grow as a society. With regard to the academic context of sociology, I noticed this Old Spice ad as a proponent of resistant or protestant masculinities, or at its worst interpretation, a definite change of pace in what commercials deem as acceptable behavior for a man. But, if we're peering through my optimistic looking glass, then the Old Spice Guy becomes a more revolutionary figure.

Largely, as stated before, this stems from the absence of a patriarchal system in this ad campaign. What makes the Old Spice Guy desirable is not his ultra manliness; instead it is his attributes that can make the ladies feel “special”, and this is without sexual connotation. For instance, at the beginning of one of these commercials, the Old Spice Guy states “ Ladies, can your man bake you a gourmet cake in the kitchen he built with his bare hands, bring you pearls from the bottom of the ocean, pick you roses from the side of a mountain and look like me? No. But he can smell like me”.

Thus, the measuring stick for men has been redefined. Old Spice Guy isn’t meant to be taken seriously and have his product actually associated with ultimate male achievement. Instead, the product changes what attributes are viewed positively. Now “ baking a cake” for your “ woman” is a virtue worth championing. Impressive, Old Spice. At least now we have an excuse to watch the YouTube videos for this commercial in class to kill some time.