

The female body as an advertising tool

analysis by Sandra Corbett
 "Advertising is effective because it organizes people and motivates them to buy certain products." (from *Killing Us Softly*)

On Tuesday, October 26, the woman's drop-in centre, Every Woman's Place, held a seminar to discuss sex role stereotyping in advertising. Speaker Laurie Wallis represented the Grant MacEwan Community College Consumer Education project.

"Sex role stereotyping is portraying people, males or females, in roles that are related with that particular sex," said Laurie Wallis. Women are either portrayed as sex objects or as morose housewives pathologically obsessed with cleaning.

Men are usually shown as a boss figure upholding a definite macho image. These stereotypes originated in the 1920's and the 1930's with the advent of mass advertising campaigns.

A film was shown called *Killing Us Softly*. It discussed the powerful socializing forces which advertising

exerts. "Advertising shapes our attitudes and our attitudes shape our behavior."

Advertising presents a very negative image of women, it represents women as being inferior beings. It creates an ideal of beauty which cannot exist as it is achieved by the clever artistry of cosmetics and photography. Women of minority cultural backgrounds, such as blacks and orientals, are presented in an even more negative stereotyped image. One ad for a perfume called Tigree portrayed a black woman dressed in a leopard-skin suit crouched like a beast over a bottle of the perfume.

Women are told that the products they purchase will give them the achieved ideal of beauty, not their character or their personality. A woman will not be lovable or desirable until she purchases and uses the advertised products.

Advertisers also present a woman's body as being an object. Women's bodies are dismembered in many advertisements, all that is seen is either the women from the waist

down or from the waist up.

A woman must never gain weight, she must be beautiful, have beautiful hair, and above all, she must never age. Aging women are usually presented as being unattractive, demented housewives, and are treated with derision and contempt.

Another serious problem is the portrayal by advertisers of the sex appeal in innocence. The "little girl look" is often exploited in a potentially dangerous manner to young girls in society. For example, a caption for a Love's Baby Soft ad read "because innocence is sexier than you think." The social implications in this ad are potentially harmful; it is possible that ads of this type promote sexual abuse of young girls.

A dilemma created by advertisers concerns competition among women. Women are told that if they finally achieve the ideal of beauty, it is

probable that they will also lose the love and friendship of other women. Therefore, after achieving the look, it is likely that the woman will alienate other women.

Women are not alone in this abuse, often male sexuality is blatantly portrayed. For example, one ad for Winston cigarettes portrayed the male as claiming "I don't judge my cigarette by its length." However, males are usually portrayed in an overly masculine manner or in a brutal manner. Sex is often associated with violence, the male is weaponlike, and the female is passive.

The men are "in control" and the women are "powerless and helpless." In order to emphasize this image, women are positioned lying on beds, sofas, and the ground. Many advertisements play on a woman's fear of rape and pursuit by placing women in positions which imply or mock rape.

The violent images imply that women deserve, and love to be beaten.

A very powerful example of this image came from a display in a store window. A woman mannequin was placed on the floor with blood coming out of her mouth and her body covered in a white shroud. On her head was a pair of shoes, and the caption declared that men would kill to have these shoes.

Advertising is a powerful force which is used to emphasize the rigid roles and ideals of masculinity and femininity. It causes women to devalue themselves and other women and it also causes men to devalue women.

It is necessary that full qualities of character and personality are portrayed in both male and female role representation. Otherwise, these stereotypes and the social implications which they create will never escape us.



October 28

Well, I'm shocked. This morning I found a bottle of Extra Strength Tylenol on my office desk. I really cannot understand what goes on in some people's minds. I have never accepted any sort of gift that could be considered a bribe and I am not going to start now. Anyway, I prefer Excedrin.

I had a meeting today with some of the most ill-informed, obnoxious, hysterical complainers I've ever met. Apparently this is disarmament week. Now that is silly enough on its own: how are the army going to shoot anything if we take their guns away? What these people want is to stop the testing of Cruise missiles in Alberta. Can you imagine what a disaster that would be, diary?

Now I keep up on all this sort of international cold arms stuff so I was prepared to sit these no nukers down and explain a few obvious facts. First of all, testing the Cruise missile is crucial for national safety. The last thing we want is a bunch of Cruise missiles that don't work properly and drop nuclear bombs just anywhere. And testing the Cruise will bring a lot of jobs to Alberta and make Cold Lake a boom town.

More importantly, these nattering nabobs of negativism (what ever happened to him?) have complete-

ly missed the fact that the Cruise is not a bomb but a delivery system. There is no reason why it could not be adapted to a whole range of peaceable uses. With its pinpoint accuracy the Cruise missile would be a great boon to Canada Post. For example, all the mail from Edmonton going to Winnipeg could be loaded into a payload at the end of the day and delivered in three minutes. Reusable Cruise missiles could criss-cross the country speeding up service and cutting costs.

Also a Cruise missile could be enlarged and become a terrific ride for Klondike Days. Or enlarged further it could replace the LRT. The obvious thing to do, as I explained to the group (I must say they were stunned silent by my reasoning) is to do everything in our power to make Alberta and especially Edmonton the center of Cruise missile technology.

Well, diary, they left after that and I do believe I talked some sense into their heads. One said that some uses of the Cruise missile might be justifiable after all. I think he's starting to see the Cruise missile my way.

But that is all in a day's work for an alderwife. Still, all that arguing has given me a terrible headache. I wish I'd kept that bottle of Tylenol.

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