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REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN
IN IRISH TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS

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ILLUSTRATIONS: ADVERTISEMENTS ON VIDEO TAPE

No.

1. MAXWELL HOUSE Coffee
2. BORD NA MONA Peat briquettes
3. ERIN Low Cal soup
4. H.B. Ice cream "Fruitline"
5. SKI Diet Yogurt.
6. ARNOTTS deparment store
7. IRISH PRESS GROUP Bonanza
8. NATURAL GAS Warm home central heating
9. CADBURY'S Chocolate
10. BRASSO, SILVO & DURAGLIT Cleaners
11. SUPER MILK (Ballet dancer)
12. STORK Margarine (3 generations)
13. STORK Margarine (the birthday)
14. STORK Margarine (4 generations)
15. CALOR COSAN GAS Cooking
16. CALOR COSAN GAS Central heating
17. MCDONNELLS Soup (rural setting)
18. MCDONNELLS Soup (urban setting)
19. E.S.B. "Dreamlover"
20. E.S.B. "Baby"
21. SUPER MILK (Mother)
22. COMFORT Softener
23. AVONMORE Light
24. QUIX Washing up liquid
25. WISK Liquid
26. DUFFYS Cooked meats
27. CORK AND LIMERICK SAVING BANK Promotion
28. FITZ Drink

INTRODUCTION

Commercial ideology, cultural ideology, and most significantly patriarchal ideology contribute to the formation of images of women in the advertising industry.

The effect of representations in television advertisements, on the lives of women in Ireland is deeply engrained in the whole discourse, between the audience and the producers, which revolves around the media. The advertisements which are relevant to this thesis, are those which are designed to be broadcast in Ireland, and which are aimed at an Irish audience of consumers. Since representations of women, is the aspect of advertisements which concerns this thesis, only advertisements which feature images or part images of women are examined. The advertisements which are explored are also confined, to those which have been, or are being broadcast since January 1988.

The ideology which forms images of women encompasses all areas of women's lives. Sexuality, the family and women's interaction within this social unit and a woman's activity and status in the workforce, are influenced. Many advertisements which exhibit images of women are culturally acceptable, in terms of sexism. However these advertisements often show women as subject to men, and inferior to men, objectified and dehumanised.

CHAPTER 1

"Discourse is a language or system of representations which has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area. These meanings serve the interests of that section of society within which the discourse originates and which works ideologically to naturalise those meanings into common sense." (1)

The concept of discourse can be applied to the advertising industry. Advertisements are a cultural phenomenon, which depend on a language which is common to both the producers and the audience. An advertisement works as a text, created by the industry and the producers of the consumable item, and read by the audience.

The advertisers have to construct a set of meanings which the audience will understand and also condone, because the purpose of the advertisement is based in commercialism, and the promotion of a consumable item. The language used consists of an array of representations which portray meaning on many levels.

The representation of a woman is a sign, "a thing plus meaning," (2) which exists within this text. Meaning is defined on one level by the use of the image in relation to all the other signs in an advertisement. It is defined by the form of the advertisement, the medium through which it is broadcast and the whole social arena in which the medium

exists. The images are formed by commercial ideology, and since commercialism is an integrated part of Irish culture, a broader cultural ideology is also prevalent in the formation of a representations of a women.

When a woman is used as a symbol in the ideological system of the advertising industry, this symbolism serves the interests of the system and its ideology. It has been suggested that the function of symbols in this context is to create a mystification, which replaces actual knowledge of many aspects of life, "of history nature and society"(3). The symbol of a woman, bears ideology and as such the symbol of an Irish woman, bears ideology within an Irish context. The images of Irish women are subject to the cultural ideology and bear the characteristics of such.

There are some characteristics of television advertising which affect all images of people. One is the effects which the technical process of television imposes on such images. The mechanical reproduction through its destruction of individuality and uniqueness facilitates the constant characteristic in images of people on television, of shallow, surface gloss.(4) These aspects of flatness and lack of any definite character allows for the manipulation of images for commercial ends.

The technique used in advertising depersonalises the model working in an advertisement, every facet of the image is constructed. Hair, clothes, makeup, camera shots, lighting etc. which are all involved in directing and

formulating an advertisement dehumanises the model and destroys individual characteristics, replacing the image of the individual with a constructed image of a woman who exists as an ideal.

The ideal is used as currency within commercialism. It's value is set, and such value is the value of women within commercialism. Such use of women as currency subjects women totally to the needs of commercialism. Very often the image of a woman in an advertisement, is not treated as being that of a human being, but as an object with a value linked to status. What the woman means in relation to things outside herself, is totally emphasised, instead of what a woman really is.

"Ideology is a system whereby society gives itself a 'meaning' other than what it really is." (5) The images of women in advertisements are ideal in some respects, whether in the way they look, the way that they act and in the attitudes in ideology which they embody and portray. They are always ideal in relation to the product because they promote it. Women as symbols in advertisements mean something, not in their own right, but as tools for commercialism and as such they are stripped of any degree of an autonomous existence, dehumanised, playing support to the product.

Television advertising is an element in Irish culture, it affects culture to some degree. It's ideological, idealised images promote products in a positive manner for

commercial ends. Products which the audience both needs and wants, this needing and wanting being largely instilled culturally. The consumable goods are part of a social, commercial dream and they are presented positively, promoting this dream.(6) In essence, within a commercial ideology, the consumables and their consumption are the dream. Images of women are part of this consumable matter, and they are promoted for consumption in advertisements, by their subjection and reference to the product .

The woman in an advertisement is constructed and formed for the purpose of promoting this social dream. The image can thus be deconstructed and decoded on many levels. The image exists within the content and the form of a commercial and, it is affected by the subjectivity of the audience through the discursive nature of advertising. The images are idealised and stereotyped and the characteristics of such constructed images of women can be regarded in determining the traits ascribed to women in advertisements, and which affect and reflect society on a broader level.

FORM IN ADVERTISEMENTS RELATING TO IMAGES OF WOMEN

The basic message transmitted by an advertisement is consume the consumable item. The images of women are subject to the product and, exist in the content of an advert, in relation to the product. The characteristics of the image are constructed in relation to the product, and

serve specific functions in this capacity. Images of women are thus objectified in advertisements.

Consuming and the expenditure which it entails "is for most of us a grudging and self-wasting business, a dissipation of our resources." (4) So advertisements attempt to distract consumers from this fact, using many ploys which are highly formulated, one of which is the form of representations of women.

The content of advertisement is, to a large extent, institutionalised and accepted by both the producers and the audience. The content is governed by the rigid parameters of commercialism and in this respect is almost entirely subject to form. The inherent brevity of commercials controls and dictates the scope of the content. The basic message is constant, and a brief expansion and characterisation of this message, is what is entailed in the content. Advertisers very often, aim their product at a specific group or section of society, such as homemakers, so the type of ideology, relevant to the targeted audience of consumers in relation to a product, is emphasised. Formulas are tried and trusted, and this is evident in the recurring types of advertisements which appear on television. Content varies from one advertisement to another in it's highly stylised subjection to the strong dictates of the overall form of advertisements.

An advertisements is formularised in ways which do not challenge the dominant cultural ideologies, and many

methods used promote these cultural forces.(7) A commercial is backed by the whole system of ~~commercialism~~ ~~commercialism~~; as it exists, an integral and integrated part of culture. Television's main function, is to reinforce the central value system of the society which it serves,(8) and in this sense the adverts which appear on Irish television are culturally acceptable. Since the adverts must work to some extent or the advertisers would not entail the expense of buying air time and of producing commercials, these commercials are not merely acceptable, but are a significant part of popular, television culture.

A characteristic trait of cultural industrialisation and commercialism, which is integrated in advertisements is individualism. This is perpetrated primarily, through the forms of narrative, realism and the emphasis placed on viewer identification with the formalised characters or figures, in advertisements.(9)

These formulas encourage the viewers to be a "feeling audience not a thinking one, an accepting not an interrogative one, and one that understands incidents and actions through individual experience, rather than through a sociopolitical framework."(10)

The stimulation of the audience of consumers in emotive terms, proffered by advertising is very advantageous to commercial ends. Primarily, the advert and by extension the product appeals to the more irrational and illogical side of the viewer, rather than to logic, and in many cases

intelligence. The advertisement attempts to make its purpose and forms invisible.

SUBJECTIVITY OF THE AUDIENCE

The subjectivity of the audience or consumers, their preception and reading of the text, of an advertisement is integral to the formation of representations and meaning in the text. The nature of discourse and the viewers position as part of a mass audience facilitates the ideological dimension of commercials. To create meaning and understanding of the text it is necessary for the producers to understand the audience.

The viewer is defined by the text, their subjectivity is constructed not by what is individual in them, but by the characteristics which they have in common with other viewers.(11) Thus the audience is defined by broad cultural characteristics. This is manifest in the characteristics of representations of women. The representations are typical to some degree, through sterotyping, of large sections of women in society in general ideological terms. The form which is basic to advertisements delineates the viewing positions of reflection of self and identification with the stereotypes which is proposed for the viewer.

A viewer will, of course, assert individuality in reading the text of an advert, however the forces which define a specific set of reading positions, which are then

proposed by the text, prevail upon the viewer from many areas of society.

THE IDEAL WOMAN

The idealisation of women through stereotypes in advertising is perpetrated through patriarchy. The ideals which are proposed by the stereotypes in advertising, do not exist. Neither does the supreme, ideal image of women which is always present in culture, which for example in the 1960's was the image of an extremely skinny, "Twiggy" woman. Images of women are distorted by such concepts, as ideological form, to create a vision which accords with a male defined ideal. The idealisation of women in advertisements is patriarchal.

The ideal representation of a woman is then either decontextualised, or placed in a fantasy setting. "Placed in an idealised context which puts her in her place"(12)

The male orientated image of women in advertisements which is inherent to form, portrays images to be viewed and consumed.(13) The consumption of the woman in advertisements is related to the ideological reading of images of women, as well as the ideological formation of images of women. Advertisements through their form construct a male viewing position for the audience.

Women are also subject to this viewing position and it becomes internalised with women seeing and judging women from a male point of view. This male view, and position is

inherent to images of women because the representations are the ideal from the male point of view. Patriarchy which is undoubtedly a characteristic of Irish society creates the images of women.

The creation of an image which few can attain because it is based on an ideal is perfectly suited to commercialism. The aspiration to attain this ideal will always insure that there will be a market for products, which can successfully use the ideal in promoting the product. The use of women in this respect, is a very powerful tool used by advertisers in commercials. Male dominated society has always propagated ideal images of women, and then culturally ascribed and foisted the attainment of these ideals, onto women.

The image of a woman, an idealised woman in the context of the advertisement, is often placed in an idealised situation, which firmly defines the place of women in ideological terms. The limited number of situations in which women are shown in advertisements reflects and reinforces the cultural limits which are put on the social freedom of women. The type of attitudes and the very strong cultural idea that a woman has a place, and that she is defined as such is promoted, showing the severe cultural boundaries and restrictions on what a woman can and cannot do.

Individuals can, and do, break away from the idea of a womans place, however the cultural ideologies which define

this placing of women, which are evident in adverts is still very strong.

STEREOTYPES

The idealisation of women, the form of adverts and the subjectivity of the audience of consumers, are all manifest in the stereotypes of women, in advertisements. The female stereotypes have been divided into five basic types, the homemaker, the decorative female, the modern woman, the older woman and any miscellaneous others which appear in advertisements. (14)

These stereotypes fall into three broader categories when seen in terms of the cultural influences which form them. The first category is the decorative woman in which women are used as objects which suggest that they exist only in relation to something or someone, acting in a passive and dehumanised manner. It also includes women as sex symbols, fashionable images of women and carefree women.

Secondly women within a family situation generally within the home, acting in the roles of wife, mother and homemaker, or as a family member. Lastly images of women outside the home in activities which do not pertain directly to the family, and consist mainly of employment situations or leisure activities. Although these parameters can be placed on the stereotypes of women which appear in advertisements the stereotypes are sometimes, used in conjunction, and tend to overlap each other.

The Maxwell House coffee advertisement (Ill.1, on video tape.) uses several images of women which fall into the stereotypical categories. The decorative stereotype is exemplified by the troupe of show girls hurrying in the backstage of the theatre. Women in relation to the family and the home are stereotyped by the elderly woman and the young girl in the farmhouse kitchen, and also by the young wife serving coffee to the workmen. Finally a woman in a work environment, is shown in the role of the secretary bringing coffee to her boss.

The older woman and the young girl, in the farmhouse are exemplary of the mother image. The young girl placed within the realm of the woman in the kitchen, is defined in terms of a woman's place and the early instilling of this cultural trait in females. The men entering the kitchen from outside, have their male domain defined as outside the home. The passivity, reserve and quietness of the actions of the woman and the girl in the kitchen, is contrasted, by the demonstrative argument which seems to occur in the kitchen of the professional chefs.

The young woman serving coffee to the men working on her 'dream house', as the lyrics indicate, exhibits the attainment of the social dream which is ascribed to women, that of marriage and the ensuing domestic bliss, in a perfect, comfortable home. The home is primarily the woman's dream because it is seen as her domain, in terms of work.

The female images are all subject to men in this advertisement through serving and through the male voyeuristic gaze. The male images have power and the female images exist in relation to this power. The old mans gaze and lyrics of the jingle, define the women in the theatre as sexual images. A male viewing position is proposed through the old mans 'contemplating the play house'. The word play in this context has the theatrical play meaning, and also the sexual play meaning, which emphasises the sexual voyeuristic treatment of the images of the women, as objects. The power in this advertisement is male, and the images of the women are subject to this.

The man is in a position of power, in the office scenes, over his secretary. He is the boss and she brings him coffee, when 'work feels like a jailhouse'. Her position is one of servitude and the characteristics of the her actions are those of caring and nurturing.

The Bord Na Mona advertisement (Ill.2, on video tape) contains many images of women. All the images are shown within the context of the home, primarily in relation to the fire, the hearth. The images span females of all ages from children to the elderly. Different lifestyles are exhibited by the images within the context of peat briquettes. The advertisement is atmospheric and the women as symbols transfer this atmosphere to the product. The atmospheric nature of the advert is an attempt to promote the peat as something which in reality it is not, and also

to disguise the fact that the advertisement is selling something. The atmosphere is characterised by strong warm colours and the insights into the ideal home, where the different characters are warm, cosy and secure. There are two young women in this advertisement. The fair haired woman is married while the dark haired image of a woman is not. Both are sexual images. The naked legs of the fair haired woman and the stilletoes and black stockings are sexual signifiers.

The married woman's fairness and the apparent lack of concern and relaxed attitude, she shows for her appearance, wearing just a large man's shirt, is in contrast with the dark woman's adornment in black dress, stockings and stilletoes. The contrast throughout these two images of women, light and dark, black and white, is striking.

The dark woman embodies sexuality as she lounges on the sofa, and flirts and dances with her visiting male companion, whom she appeared to have telephoned. This sexuality is more overt and obvious than the fair woman's sexuality. The type of clothes which she is wearing and her actions seem to suggest that she is sexually available while the fair haired woman is not. The contrast may be due to the matrimonial status of the two. The fair woman is possessed and confined in marriage while the dark woman with her seductive sexuality is presumably attempting to attain a similar status, since this is the accepted norm in society as to what a woman's desires should be.

Chapter 1 references

- (1) John Fiske, Television Culture p. 14
- (2) Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertising p. 17
- (3) Ibid, p. 169
- (4) Peter Conrad, Television the medium and its manners
p. 110
- (5) Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertising p. 169
- (6) Ibid, p.170
- (7) John Fiske, Television Culture p.p. 232-233
- (8) Ibid, p.21-149
- (9) Peter Conrad, Television the Medium and its Manners
p. 103
- (10) John Fiske, Television Culture p.p. 21-14
- (11) Ibid, p.49
- (12) Julianne Dickie Out of Focus p.7
- (13) Ibid, p.76
- (14) Mauve Gasey A Monitoring Study of Images of Women in Advertising p.17

CHAPTER 2

ASPIRING TO THE IDEAL

The emphasis of appearance, in terms of the attainment of an ideal body weight is exemplified by the model in the Erin Low Cal soup advertisement. (Ill.3, on video tape) The female monopoly on concerns regarding appearance is perpetrated by both sexes. By men in patriarchy for objectifying women, and by women through their acceptance and adoption of regarding themselves and other women as objects.

The objectification concentrates on vision, on images of women in the media, and this facilitates the cultural obsession with the appearance and image of women.(1) The images of the woman in the Erin soup advertisement are sexual, especially the opening image of the woman with its close up of the woman easing herself into the seat of her jeans with swaying hip motion.

The close up, the medium and the form of the advertisement create the overtly sexual and sexy image. The advertisement is directed at women through the voiceover. The fact that the opening image of the advertisement displays sexuality in terms of a male audience denotes a female audiences willingness to respond in terms of male voyeurism. Advertisers would not use this technique so rampantly if it did not have some effect.

The final scene in the advertisement is laden with ideological construction. The representation of the woman in the advertisement both reflects and adopts the image of

the woman in the photograph on the wall, against which she is leaning. Her image reflects the image in the picture successfully, because both are images of the same woman, an ideal woman. This promotes the value of aspiring to an ideal image exhibited through advertising. The medium for the woman in the advertisement is the photograph, the medium for the viewer is the advertisement. The ideal is unobtainable by most viewers, but is not unobtainable by the representation of the woman in the commercial because she is the ideal.

The aspiration to attain the ideal is extremely strong, and is inherent to the acculturated characteristics of advertising. So the real message in the advertisement, the promotion of the consumption of the product, works through the disguised form.

FEMALE SEXUALITY AS MALE ORIENTATED

The representation of the woman in the H.B. 'Fruitline' commercial, (Ill.4, on video tape), promotes the fact that she is an image to be viewed, by the way she looks at the image of the man in the advertisement. Her looks are sensuous and smouldering and she accepts her image as a sexual object and her appearance as overtly sexual, she does this through the way she looks at the man with the assumption that he is looking at her. She presents an image which embodies sexuality in advertisements, a male

voyeuristic sexuality "The surveyor of women in herself is male, the surveyed female." (2)

The Ski diet yogurt advertisement, (Ill.5, on video tape), promotes the attainment of perfect body through weight control like the Erin low cal advertisement. In this advertisement the womans perfect body is ascribed almost total weightlessness. Her lounging figure is levitated when the male hand picks her up with his fingers.

The womans subjection to the male ideal of slim, light body is reinforced by the ease with which the male image asserts his power. The image of the man is unimportant beyond the obvious definition of his gender. His appearance is unimportant and all attention is focused on the womans body in the classic lounging powerless pose, draped in a satin dress.

The promotion of the ideal woman in the media is reinforced in Irish society. Catholicism's empahsis on the ideal woman in terms of the cult of the virgin and the myth of Eve is foisted upon women in Ireland.

The myth of the creation of Eve from Adams rib, which is strongly renounced in church circles today, still continues to underpin the church's ideal of women and this ideals permeation through our society. The creation of woman by man who was created by God forms a very strong historical basis for the inferiority of women to men.(3)

This basic premise concerning the idealogical and the cultural statute of woman as subject to man, was extended

with the cult of the virgin. The characteristics of subjection became the virtues of humility, obedience, silence and passivity and reserve. (4) The qualities are encouraged and lauded not just by the church but culturally also.

SEX SYMBOLS

The Arnotts advertisement, (Ill.6, on video tape), for garden furniture, and the Irish Press group, Bonanza advertisement, (Ill.7, on video tape), both use images of women purely as decoration. There is no direct link between the representation of the woman and the product for which the advertisement is made. The image of the woman is a sex symbol draped about the product which is garden furniture in the Arnotts commercial. The image bears ideological meaning like the drink which she holds, and her importance as a symbol is not much greater than the drink. The atmosphere and the sexual dimension which she embodies are transferred to the product.

Her characterisation as a sex object exhibits the attitude of her being defined as trivial, which is degrading to women in general. The trivial quality which is ascribed to this idealised image of a woman is manifested in the sexual characteristics of passivity, powerlessness and subjection to male power.

The Irish press group Bonanza advertisement uses the image of the woman in a fantasy situation. It adopts the exotic sexuality of a Hawaiian dancer stereotype, under palm

trees with a parrot to create an atmosphere. The desert island with buried treasure scenario is used to promote the game "Bonanza" in the advertisement. The possible wealth which ensues from the game also carries the object of the woman as part of the prize, this is evident in the way in which the advertisement is structured, and the way the image of the woman is stereotyped. The game "Bonanza" means money which means power in commercial terms. This commercial power and success means the ability to consume, and the Hawaiian stereotyped image of the woman is part of the possible consumption, and a symbol and object of status in commercial, material success.

The tendency to use women as purely decorative objects, in many newspapers has extended to this advertisement for the Irish Press Group. In a letter from the editor of the Sunday World newspaper, to the Joint Committee on Womens Rights exhibits this trait of newspapers attitudes to women in its extreme. To quote, the editors view is "that there is a considerable difference between men and women. They look different, for a start. And I firmly beleive that a tractor adorned by a girl in a bikini is infinitely more pleasing to the human eye than the same tractor adorned by a man in Y-Fronts. To me, thats the way God planned it." (5)

The human eye and the God, sighted in this letter are male orientated, and the use of a woman in this context is entirely reflective of extreme patriarchy. The acculturated ideas and ideology about women are naturalised into the only

way which things can be, in the scheme of things according to this man's religion at least.

SEGMENTATION AND PART IMAGES OF WOMEN

One of the major characteristics of the form of advertisements which images of women are subjected to is segmentation of the female body. Sometimes only part of the female body is used. The use of the legs in the Natural Gas warm home advertisement is an example of segmentation and it shows how the disembodiment of the female body being used as a sex symbol is doubly dehumanised and disempowered.

The Natural Gas Warm Home central heating advertisement (Ill.8, on video tape) shows, only the naked legs of a woman. This image was used in the advertisement as an extension of and to facilitate the use of the rubber duck placed on the floor. The duck was the main image in the natural gas advertisement campaign, appearing on posters and other graphics, before being decorated by the image of the woman in the television advertisement.

The legs are separate, an entity in their own right as a bearer of meaning which can embody much of what a woman means, facilitating the redundancy of the rest of her body and defining her in these terms. The legs portray the meaning of a woman adequately for the purpose of the advertisement and within the ideological system in which it is formed.

The segmentation emphasizes the parts of the body which can be defined as female and the use of socially constructed gender signifiers, makes this all the more effective.

The Cadburys chocolate advertisement, (Ill.9, on video tape), uses the signifiers of makeup, lipstick and nail polish to define the lips, the eye and fingers used in the advertisement, as female. The advertisement is a succession of closeups and this technique gives the images an element of intimacy. This intimacy of extreme close ups has several effects.

The television through its size has a tendency to make images of people less than human. The big cinema screen has the opposite effect making images of people appear more than human through their size.

The blown up segments of women which appear in the closeups in the cadburys advertisement are almost inhuman. They are recognisable as female, portraying sensual sexuality and an acculturated idea of beauty. This image of a woman segmented and enlarged is larger than life showing the same quality which is characteristic of images on a big cinema screen. However the images are still broadcast through the medium of television and subject to its characteristics. This seems to subvert the larger than life quality into one which is no longer human and which can be totally manipulated by commercialism, and still called woman.

The intimacy technique of closeups, highlights the sexuality and the sensuality of the images, the characteristics of which are transferred to the chocolate, this emphasis on disjointed parts of the female body is akin to fetishism. The content of the sound which accompanies the images is comprised of soft sensual music, and the use of the high pitched female voice singing harmonies to the music highlights the seductive sensuality ascribed to the part images of women and their perverse fetish nature.

The part images of women in advertisements, used as signifiers is also exhibited in the Brasso, Silvo and Duraglit cleaners advertisement, (Ill.10, on video tape). The first image of the advertisement, which consists of two slides and a voiceover, is of a woman's hand partially covered by a cloth, on a door near the door knocker. So little of the woman's hand is seen that the only element in the advertisement which defines the hand as female is the red polish on the nails.

This advertisement uses the representation of the hand with the nail polish to define gender and also to define the role of household cleaning to women. The nail polish is used in an attempt to distract the viewer from the mundane and menial purpose for which the product is used. This glamourisation of products through images of women is common in advertisements, and uses female representations in terms of sex.

The fragmentation of the female body and the subsequent identification of a female body through a fragment of the image creates a disunity in the viewing position of the female audience. The characteristics of segmentation deunifies the female body, it dehumanises the body and proliferates fetishism.

FEMININITY

Another stereotypical ideal which is characteristic of many images of women in advertisements is the femininity ideal. The image of a woman as soft and warm and surrounded by pale and pretty colours and things. This gentile image is exhibited in the Super Milk "ballet dancer" advertisement, (Ill.11, on video tape), the room in which the advertisement is set is pale pink in reflection of the dancing costume worn.

The images are in soft focus and the advertisement portrays the strong characteristics of romanticism, gracefulness and elegance associated with the gentile feminine image.

There are many characteristics ascribed to images of women in the media by the forces which create them. There are contradictions between the mother and whore ideals which are the basis of many ideas in culture about female sexuality. The Eve and the Virgin Mary myths and cults are contradictory and are impossible for any woman to base a cohesive, autonomous sexuality upon.

The fact that a womans appearance is paramount to both the formation and the perception in ideologically formed advertisements and the fact that appearance is a particularly strong bearer of female sexual characteristics and definition, means that images of women portrayed in specific contexts and specific situations, and are not solely decorative, also exude strong sexual characteristics and definition. Many of these characteristics stem from and are extensions of those outlined by decorative images of women. All women in advertisements act as symbols of referral, ascribing characteristics and traits to the products. They can be symbols which are directly linked to the product where the woman is portrayed as the product, or symbols which embody attitudes lifestyles and ideologies in a more abstract sense, which are then transferred to the product.

Chapter 2 references

- (1) Julianne Dickey, Out of Focus p. 75
- (2) Ibid, p. 76
- (3) Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex p. 178
- (4) Ibid, p. 185
- (5) Third Report of the Joint Committee on Womens Rights,
Portrayal of Women in the Media p.74

CHAPTER 3

The sexuality and the characteristics of women, portrayed in advertisements, within home life depends upon the nature of the family, and the home in Irish society. Television has a strong tendency to define the viewer as a family member. This definition is created through many characteristics of television, the main one being through the formation of its programming schedule.(1) This emphasis upon the viewer as a family member reveals the dominance of such social groupings in ideological terms, on television.

The majority of representations of women, which appear in Irish advertisements, are shown in the surroundings of the home in relation to the roles of wife, mother and homemaker. The emphasis on women in the cultural sphere of family life in the home, exhibits the predominance of family orientated roles for women. The nature of the family in Ireland is complex, the historical circumstances of family structure play a major role in its form and characteristics today.

EXTENDED AND NUCLEAR FAMILY GROUPINGS

Both the economic and social base of the family have changed dramatically in recent years "within the sphere of a single generation - from the 1950's to the 1980's - the patterns of the traditional extended family dissolved and were replaced by the norm of the nuclear family."(2) Many of the advertisements which portray women in the realm of

the family exhibit the complexities of such a rapid transition in the formation of the family.

The Stork margarine advertising campaign, which comprised of three television advertisements (Ill.12, 13,14, on video tape), had elements of the extended family structure. Each of these advertisements showed several generations of women of the same family engaged in activities concerned with baking in the kitchen. The theme of these advertisements is the role which the margarine plays within the interactions of the generations, in relation to tradition and the passing of cooking skills from mother to daughter.

The division of labour in the extended family was gender orientated around women in the home and men working on the land surrounding it. This created the strong links between the generations of women and the passing of knowledge and skills from generation to generation. In one of the advertisements the woman making the birthday cake uses her mothers recipe and the girl, her daughter, exhibits the traditional transference of cooking skills, from mother to daughter, because she knows that Stork should be, and was, used in the making of the cake.

The male presence in the form of young boys who are in the kitchen, is totally unconcerned with the baking except in relation to eating the cake. The boys are noisy and rowdy and eventually leave. The separation of the children through gender, into distinct roles exhibiting distinct

characteristics reveals the social pressure to conform to a set pattern of behaviour based on gender at an early age.

Stork used a facet of family life to promote their product in the advertisement. However this facet of family life, the remnants of the extended family is not ideologically compatible with commercialism. The extended family pertains to a community of family members, the nuclear family unit encourages individualism within a family group.(3) The women in the advertisement are aware of stork through the family tradition of passing information and knowledge, While the viewer is being made aware of Stork through a commercial, which uses individualism through its formative techniques, and which is contrary to the ideals portrayed in the advertisement.

The fact that the advert uses a facet of culture with which it is not compatible, is evidence of the fact that, "Advertisements (ideologies) can incorporate anything, even reabsorb criticism of themselves, because they refer to it devoid of content"(4)

The Calor Cosan gas advertisements (Ill.15,16,on video tape) for cooking and heating also features the element of the relationship of members of the nuclear family to the older generation. The family members comprise of mother, father, son, daughter and an older female family member. The advertisement which promotes the use of gas, for the purpose of cooking is formulated to persuade the consumer to install the system of fuel.

The commercial comprises of rapidly edited images of the individual family members, interspersed with images of the cooker and prepared food. The mother figure is represented most often and emphasis is placed upon the other members of the family in relation to her, through actions and exchanges of facial expression. There is no dialogue, the images are combined with a jingle. The older woman acts to reinforce and approve the mothers decision to install a calor gas cooker.

This continuation of extended family characteristics when the dominant family structure is nuclear seems to be more revalent to women than men. This could be symptomatic of the fact that homemaker stereotypes in advertisements are centered on the fact that most homemakers are women. However it may also illustrate that men, in leaving the home to work under the breadwinner system (5) establish ties with their peers in the workplace and are not in as practical position to exhibit recourse to the strength of family ties, as women. The community of female members within a family seems to be stronger than male because the male domain is culturally defined as the outside world and the female domain as the home.

The form of the family has an extensive effect on women in Irish society. "In western societies the Judaic-Christian belief and values about the family have been a major formative influence. While in much of Western Europe these values have been in decline, they have remained stronger in

Ireland than elsewhere in Europe. It has been suggested by sociologist Damien Hannan that the Irish case represents a last stand for these values in the West." (6)

MOTHER IMAGES

The connections between the family and Catholicism in Ireland are very strong. They are mutually supportive of one another. The church promotes the sanctity of the family in particular through its ideological opposition to divorce, abortion and contraception and its preservation of family values. The family supports the church and maintains its strength in society. Both the church and the family structure in society are patriarchal and the church has a great deal to do with the ideal of a woman within family and society in Ireland.

To quote Marina Warner, on the subject of the cult of the virgin "In Knock, now the most popular shrine of the virgin in Ireland the devotions focus on the hardship of Irish Mothers in their family kitchens." (7) The characteristic virtues of the virgin are encouraged in women in Ireland not only in religious ideology but in its interaction and influence on cultural ideology in general. The myths of the virgin become morals which permeate through society.

The virtues which are ascribed to women by the cult of the Virgin Mary and the myth of Eve, are evident in the stereotypes which characterise representations of women

within the family and home. The McDonnells soups advertisements (Ill.17,18,on video tape), use representations of women, particularly exemplary in the exhibition of these virtues and characteristics.

The qualities which the woman exhibits in the McDonnells advertisement are passivity obedience and silence, these qualities are shown in her subjection to her husband the father figure. When her son asks her what she thinks of his haircut her reply is "Lord knows what your father will say...more soup?". The mother image has no opinion of her own, her opinion is based on what her husband thinks.

In the McDonnells advertisement which is set in a rural family home the mother figure treats the father figure with smiling indulgence and tolerance. The father is subject to her mothering and exhibits child like qualities in his excitement over the activities in which he was involved before he entered the farmhouse. The young girl accompanied him in these activities, however she shows none of the babbling and assertive excitement which he expresses.

The boy in the urban version of the McDonnells advertisement and the father in the rural version are paralleled in the advertisements under the slogan "Mother 'em with McDonnells"

The characteristics which are ascribed to children in advertisements , show that a strong gender division is instilled in them at an early age. In the McDonnells soup

advert (Ill.17, on video tape) the young girl, through her silent wondering at her older brothers haircut, identifies her with her mothers passive comments, separated from the male bonding of the boy and the father, through activities in their realm outside matters concerning the home and family.

The E.S.B. 'Dreamlover' advertisement (Ill.19 on video tape) shows young girls emergence into adulthood in cultural terms. Her mother is engaged in helping her to prepare for a deb's ball while her father relaxes. The preparation of the girl is part of the mothers duties. The fathers duty is shown when he answers the front door to admit the young man, who is taking his daughter to the ball. He asserts his authority as head of the household when he hands his daughter over to the young man. The young woman is living out one of her dreams, the song "Dreamlover" which accompanies the images, her wistful expressions, frantic preparations and the look of demure bliss with which she descends the stairs, exhibit the fulfillment of her dream.

The Supermilk advertisement (Ill.21 on video tape) and the Comfort fabric softener advertisement (Ill.22 on video tape) both promote soft feminine images of women in relation to motherhood and family life, respectively.

The Supermilk advert with its soft focus, soft colours and the very feminine images of the mother and the room in which she is placed, revolve around the fact that she has recently given birth and the milk being promoted is counter

acting the effects of the pregnancy on her body. This extremely idealised image of motherhood plays on the sacredness of human life in Catholicism, and also what is often a popular myth that pregnancy is linked to fragility in women. This characteristic encourages the belief that women are the weaker sex.

The Comfort advert shows the feminine soft image of women in relation to nurturing and caring for family. This is extended in the Avonmore 'Light' advertisement (Ill.23 on video tape) where the perfect wife and mother promotes the cream, because it tastes good so her family will enjoy it and also because it is low calorie and therefore healthy and will help her keep her figure. The low calorie aspect of the cream is emphasised as an aside to the fact that it tastes good. This places the main consideration on using the product as family needs, the womans own needs are secondary.

The element of the self sacrificing mother in this representation of a woman regularly appears in advertisements, and shows the social predominance of a womans existence evolving totally round the family and family life. Advertisements play on this social characteristic and often promote products with the message, primarily through inference, that the product will enable a woman to be a better mother or wife. The idealised andf unobtainable image is continually presented because it promotes commercialism and a striving, wanting audience of

consumers. Women in this system are continually subject to patriarchal and male orientated forces.

MALE VOICEOVERS

Male voiceovers in advertisements are used far more than female voiceovers, this has several implications, one is that the voice of authority is practically confined to the male half of the population.

The use of male voiceovers has different effects with the different stereotypes, for example when used in conjunction with a decorative sex symbol image of a woman it reinforces the male construction of this advertisement and the male viewing position. Also it defines the sexuality of the woman in the advertisement in a direct contextual manner.

When male voiceover is used in conjunction with a homemaker image it tends to suggest that women are incapable of doing basic domestic tasks on their own authority and that they need the presence of male authority. In the advertisement for Wisk washing liquid, (Ill.25, on video tape), the male authority voiceover is defined by the scientific nature of what he is saying in terms of "biological" and such words. So the authority of the male voiceover is characterised by a scientific aspect.

Chapter 3 references

- (1) John Fiske, Television Culture p. 72
- (2) Finola Kennedy, Family, Economy and Government in Ireland
p. 9
- (3) Ibid, p. 18
- (4) Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertising p.167
- (5) Finola Kennedy, Family, Economy and Government in Ireland
p. 10
- (6) Ibid, p. 18
- (7) Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex p. 190

Chapter 3: Introduction

- (1) John F. Kennedy, *Profile in Courage*, p. 12
- (2) John F. Kennedy, *Profile in Courage*, p. 12
- (3) John F. Kennedy, *Profile in Courage*, p. 12
- (4) John F. Kennedy, *Profile in Courage*, p. 12
- (5) John F. Kennedy, *Profile in Courage*, p. 12
- (6) John F. Kennedy, *Profile in Courage*, p. 12
- (7) John F. Kennedy, *Profile in Courage*, p. 12

CHAPTER 4

The changing nature of the family in Irish society, has facilitated changes with regard to women working outside the home. This is apparently a symptom of the change in the family system which took place in this country over the last three decades. "The breadwinner system developed slowly in the early phase, characterising the small but burgeoning middle class, rather than the peasantry or the proletariat. Then after reaching a climax in which virtually no married women are employed, the arrangement declines as more and more wives enter white collar employment in offices, schools, hospitals, stores and government agencies." (1) In advertisements the emphasis is placed on these types of jobs even though the marital status of the image of the working woman is rarely defined. The ideological construction of women in terms of the family, sexuality, dependence on men and subjection to men appears to consider the white collar job classification to be the ideal.

These types of jobs give women a certain amount of power, but only in terms of the characteristics of power, which they possessed within the family. The jobs are mainly in the caring sector and this corresponds to the acculturated qualities which women are ascribed and often exhibit.

In the Duffys meat advertisement, (Ill.26, on video tape) a couple are portrayed as professional dancers. The commercial is set in a theatre, and begins with them just finishing a dance routine. There is no dialogue between

them, however, when they sit down after the routine, the woman produces the lunch box containing the food. She has several packets of Duffys cooked meats in the box and she shows these to the male dancer. He responds approvingly of her choice of meat and they proceed to eat the sandwiches.

The couple appear to be on an equal level in terms of the dance aspect of the storyline, however, it is the woman who takes care of the lunch and the man who gives his approval. The woman is subject to the man in the traditional role of caring which she exhibits.

The advertisement for the Cork and Limerick Savings Bank, (Ill.27, on video tape), begins with the opening of a board meeting. The chairman calls for order, with the words "Gentlemen please". There is one female board member, and the exclusion of her in his address to the members denies and negates her existence, on the board. Her reaction to this snub is to clear her throat loudly and to throw back her head in disgust.

This advertisement is not facilitating a feminist approach, which challenges male supremacy at management level in the workforce, because the advertisement is ridiculing the board meeting, and the characters who attend it. This satirical approach includes the image of the woman, because she is a stereotypical sharp, bitchy, touchy and manipulative business woman.

This advertisement serves the interests commercialism. The image of the woman is ridiculous, she is not an ideal,

however her image does identify what is not ideal, and this entails the idea of a woman on the board of directors of a bank asserting her right to be there. The advert is ridiculing its competitors and in doing this it also ridicules the directors sexist attitude, however this rejection of sexism is cancelled by the negative characteristics of the woman.

The Ritz advertisement, (Ill.28, on video tape), portrays a young woman working in the fashionable world of fashion and magazines. She is shown as capable, confident and successful in her field. The attitudes and characteristics which are conveyed through her actions show her to be a well balanced, hard working and socially successful woman.

The stereotype which this image portrays, is of a modern woman. She lives for her work and takes it seriously, is diligent and ambitious. The world in which she works, however, is the woman's world of fashion and so the modern woman portrayed here does not escape the confines of the ideological form of the advertisement.

Images of women within the workforce are subject to the same constraints in ideological terms, which affect images of women within the home, and to a certain extent decorative images of women. These images reflect the cultural ideology and not, in many ways, the social facts concerning working women.

Chapter 4 references

- (1) Finola Kennedy, Family, Economy and Government in Ireland
page 10

CONCLUSION

The images of women in advertisements, are formed and created by the the rigid cultural parameters laid down through stereotyping, by patriarchal and commercial forces.

Even when an advertiser is inclined to challenge the characteristics ascribed to women in adverts, such as the E.S.B. commercial (Ill.20, on video tape), which shows a man getting up in the middle of the night, to feed a baby, the powerful form of advertisements, and the advertising industry, considerably neutralises the effect of the alternative image, and role reversal.

The nature of patriarchal, commercial society, the nature of the medium in which adverts exist and the forms on a structural level which adverts take, all contribute to subversion, and don't leave much scope for an alternative, to the sexist and abusive basis, upon which images of women are constructed.

The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, has a section in its code which deals with the issue of sexism. However as has been noted (1), the section is vague and practically unenforcable. Since the Authority is primarily made up of representatives of the advertising industry, and the percentage of women in the Authority is extremely low (2), it would seem that a predominately male position on the issues involving sexism, prevails.

The Joint Committee on Women's Rights, third report on portrayal of women in the media stated that "The cumulative effect of advertising may influence women and girls as to

how they are supposed to act in society while telling men and boys how to view them and interact with them."(1)

This statement seems to assume that images of women in advertising exist independently of the culture as a whole. The type of conditioning through images which is a facet of advertising is begun with children as soon as they are able to distinguish gender, and to define themselves as one gender or another. Advertising works in conjunction with the dominant cultural characteristics of the society in which it exists. It must do this to develop and attain a language or system of representations with which to convey meaning.

In this sense images of women reinforce notions which already exist in society, about how girls are supposed to act, and how boys are supposed to view and interact with them.

A direct link between sexual abuse of women, and images of women in the media has never been established, however, it seems highly plausible that the type of dehumanisation and objectification of women in many advertisements, condones the attitudes to women in society, of which abuse is a part. Again a reinforcement of existing cultural and social characteristics, relating to the abuse of women, is evident.

The images of women in the media are primarily defined from a male point of view, this propagates a male viewing position, so the definition of women in images works on

women in how they read the text. Although "we need to remember that powerful as the propaganda is, it doesn't entirely work. We do not become robots manipulated at the whim of the image-makers." (4)

The need for women to be aware of how their sex is represented in advertising is extremely important. Although the advertising industry, the television medium and culture in general are extremely powerful, and make improvements in the present situation difficult, it is important for women to continue to challenge degrading and offensive images of women in the media.

Conclusion references

- (1) Third Report of the Joint Committee on womens rights
Portrayal of Women in the Media p 34
- (2) Ibid, p.p.31-32
- (3) Ibid, p.14
- (4) Julianne Dickey, Out of Focus p. 77

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