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Expository Writing E-25

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He's Waiting for You! The Exploitation of Sexual Violence Against Men Through Advertising

Three middle-aged men appear on screen one after the other, furtively describing a life partner.

The footage resembles christianmingle.com as they grin, expressing suggestive thoughts. Fidgety body language adds a sense of the men being out of place and out of sorts: an eye darting to the left, a swallowed giggle, one looking sideways as if acknowledging an unseen person in the space.

Next, three aggressive-looking men appear, looming large with a threatening demeanor they assume a truculent stance, insinuating violence at the hands of convicted predators. Their words drag the viewer into an imagined dystopia—a hostile *Blade Runner* world, strenuous and confrontational with an extraordinary undertone erupting into a slogan: “Daddy is waiting for you.” This article focuses on a growing media tendency to frame societal issues by irresponsibly conflating unrelated abstractions.

In this case, a South African advertising campaign features the threat of male rape as retribution within the context of diverse and multiracial communities. Sociologist Erving Goffman demonstrates in *Frame Analysis*, how referenced frameworks assist people in analyzing their daily experience of life. He describes how we “locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences” (Goffman). In other words, when viewed as a syntactical series of symbols, these metaphoric visual tropes have the power to juxtapose or, at worst, demonize and alienate another group standing outside the tribe.

Habituated within the penal system, the inmates in the commercials perpetuate mythologies of violence and fetishization ascribed by prejudiced societies, specifically within prison culture. Besides overt indications of racism, the advert hands the viewer a promissory note of forced sexual violence.

Produced by Brandhouse Beverages, a joint venture between Diageo, Heineken International, and Namibia Breweries Limited, the 2012 campaign was conceptualized for South African television. The commercial is a study in male anxiety, etched against a harsh, bleached tonality. Halfway through the advert, a language shift occurs through the use of phrases like “heavy situations” with visible trepidation, further amplifying a sinister tone. The print campaign emulates the video footage, manifesting a lack of redemption while revealing a world defined by grit and threat. When the dominant inmates appear, any humor or any dating allusions dissolve, as the once-nervous tone becomes ominous with phrases suggesting they will “never let you go” and the assurance that they are “demanding physically.” A crime barely acknowledged, theorized by some to be impossible: it is rarely formally studied and worse, chronically underreported to authorities. Nevertheless, here it was: used in an advert portentous of sexual brutality, by pushing primeval buttons of submission, conquest, and rape (Melanson).

Besides context and framing, Goffman’s *Gender Advertisements* highlights metaphors contained in transactional behavior and visually illustrates gender messaging, through physical signals. He contextualizes gender signaling in a resolutely homogenous setting, however, and Goffman’s images are exceedingly focused on white models. His oversight causes significant complications with interpretation and application of data, not to mention a degree of data obsolescence in our diverse zeitgeist. Should any of the figures in the examples he provides be replaced with a person of color, gender dynamics will be affected by the viewer’s racial bias. Gender determinants do not function in isolation, and any of the Goffman themes will take on an enhanced timbre when augmented by racial components. An image, representative of ritualized subordination portrayed by a submissive white woman and a dominant black man, would be viewed asymmetrically by disparate segments of the audience. It is for this reason that these adverts present an intersection between gender, sexual identity, and racism is placed under the magnifying glass. Many dynamic signals are transmitted subconsciously, however, reception of these codes becomes rigidly contextual (Goffman).

The advert offers a textbook example of Goffman's observances on subordination with primary visual mechanisms, but they are steeped in racial bias while portraying male bodies hierarchically in a blatant statement on violence. At least one of the men displays symbols of attempted withdrawal from the situation and angst as he touches the back of his neck, looking sideways while his eyes avoid the camera. And with good reason as the hand gestures of the second group of men are exaggerated and expressive, establishing dominance. The footage aims to threaten the male viewer with sexual abuse at the hands of potent men within the prison system. It unrepentantly equates social pathologies while brazenly attempting to gaslight a fractured society by appealing to a brand of toxic humor frequently condoned as "locker room banter" (Fisher). If the incarceration machine is calibrated for rehabilitation and eventual re-acclimatization into society, this rendition of the penal system creates an incendiary impression of out-of-place timorous white men trapped in an adrenalized prison/sex structure. It shows a place of sexual brutality that is comprehensively owned and operated by men, who appear acculturated, homogenized, and at home within a precarious habitat. They also happen to be black. The further implication is that the fetishized black male thrives in a sexually charged atmosphere, while whites do not. The creative framework deliberately commodifies racism by harnessing homophobia and capitalizing on white fear. It does so within a context of habitual male rape denial and wholesale subscription to rape mythologies. The creative execution takes advantage of the fact that the thorny issue of sexual aggression against men is legislatively underestimated.

The print version of the campaign uses similar visual metaphors based on fear rhetoric. The success of this sobriety campaign would rely on linking two disparate ideas: if a man drives while intoxicated, he will be raped in prison at the hands of violent men. The two print advertisements continue the divisive theme, albeit with murkier tonality and revised text suggest violence and sexual aggression. In the first print advert, the viewer is introduced to the alpha male, Daddy, as he stands at an entrance as a gatekeeper. He is a marked map of delinquency, his tattoos revealing habitual

crime patterns and long-term incarceration. Many will say that the advert reflects man at his worst, acting as shorthand for the fatal results of inebriated driving. South Africa, after all, has one of the highest per capita rates of road deaths in the world due to driving while under the influence of alcohol (Meiring). Instead of directly addressing the scourge of drinking and driving, the adverts default to conservative, patriarchal value systems of revenge and retribution, in the form of an exaggerated eye-for-an-eye punishment.

The second print advert announces spartan domesticity as inmates share cigarettes, and a chessboard lies interrupted mid-game. Some of the men share a bed. Camaraderie pervades the staged atmosphere hinting at unseen activities, while some men posture dominantly. The inmates display different versions of Sartre's *le regard*, the gaze, the intention of the leer signaling simultaneous cynicism and lust. Goffman mentions the deployment of the gaze, long held as the gold standard of arousal codes, while it equally applied to fetishize material possessions: think of men staring lustfully after a Ferrari. A variation on this theme is the gay gaze, consisting of barely perceptible eye contacts laden with meaning where suddenly Freud's cigar is not just a cigar anymore (Gottlieb). The men engaged in afternoon activities are caught in various stages of that gaze, averting their eyes and searching for receptive safety. Sharply contrasting with the solitariness of the first advert, the alpha figure is standing adjacent to his tribe. His ranking is amplified through posture and antagonism transcending carnality as he assumes a combative role. Directed at the viewer, his stare remains confrontational, leaving little doubt about the adversarial dynamics. In his analysis, Goffman pauses at the symbology of the smile, and here a premeditated grimace, an absence of enunciated kindness stokes the atmosphere of bereavement. In these images, the presence of a furtive smile or a knowing smirk underlines powerful role-play with a transactional quality defying the misreading of material in a non-sexualized way.

In *Age of Propaganda*, Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson describe advertising and propaganda tools, hinging on basic psychological processes. In short, exaggerated emphasis on

differences between groups, accompanied by a level of dehumanization, facilitates random creative abuse as a form of propaganda. In its identifying and courting of kinfolk, groupthink defaults to “a form of reverse Groucho Marxism: ‘I’d be more than happy to join a club that would *have* me as a member.’¹ In efforts to obtain the self-esteem the group has to offer, members defend the group, adopting its symbols, rituals, and beliefs” (Pratkanis). Put differently, fear-based advertising galvanizes groups against divergent stereotypes who exemplify core-value conflicts. In this case, the prison is black, gay, and a hyper-criminalized sexual space: in diametric opposition to a world inhabited by gray heads, who enjoy a drink, and then drive home. Skeptics may object to interpreting the image as commentary on a coital event, but any doubt must be alleviated by the presence of the tagline, “They’d love to show you a good time.” The sexual innuendo supporting the slogan is a primal, caged expression of an erotic stereotype. The dirt of the space they occupy, and the grime on their bodies, add to the virulent drama. The color palette appears saturated yet washed-out, while the set design, with graffiti on the wall and makeshift laundry lines, add Dickensian dynamics alluding to a class structure. Few types of advertising do better at award shows than those tied to nonprofit organizations and commercials capitalizing on base responses to behavioral predicaments. Pratkanis writes in *Age of Propaganda*, that “a vivid presentation is likely to be very memorable and hard to refute” (Pratkanis). He knows what he’s talking about. The campaign is undeniably striking. The viewer is given a deus ex machina, which eliminates the scourge of drunk driving while avoiding resultant sexual violations. The concept, tone, and narrative, however, make troubling points about the penal system, correctional officers, and a police force complicit in neglecting to take proactive measures to contend with the problem. The viewer is left with the impression that part of any prison term will be sexual assault, tacitly endorsed by an industrial prison complex.

¹ On October 20, 1949, the Hollywood columnist Erskine Johnson published Groucho Marx’s letter of resignation to the Friars’ Club: “I don’t want to belong to any club that would accept me as one of its members.”

The continued denialism of violent, sexual aggression recalls a Stalin quote that “one Russian soldier’s death is a tragedy, but one million deaths is a statistic” (Bailey). Should the sexual violation of a man have been an anomaly on a crime spectrum, by Stalin’s standards, it could have registered as a tragedy—causing outrage leading to legislative action underscoring the gravitas. Sexual assault of men is more prevalent than acknowledged, with victims routinely prejudged and subject to speculative mythologizing (Walfield). When the scale of male rape is recognized, and the intersection with other forms of sexual violence appropriately charted within the bulkier context of victimology, it may be possible to refrain from victim shaming. It may even be reasonable to expect media to re-evaluate its perpetuating of unevolved rape-humor sentiments. And perhaps we will be outraged when rape is used as a marketing tool that expects us to laugh at something while denying it happens. But it does happen. And we know it.

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