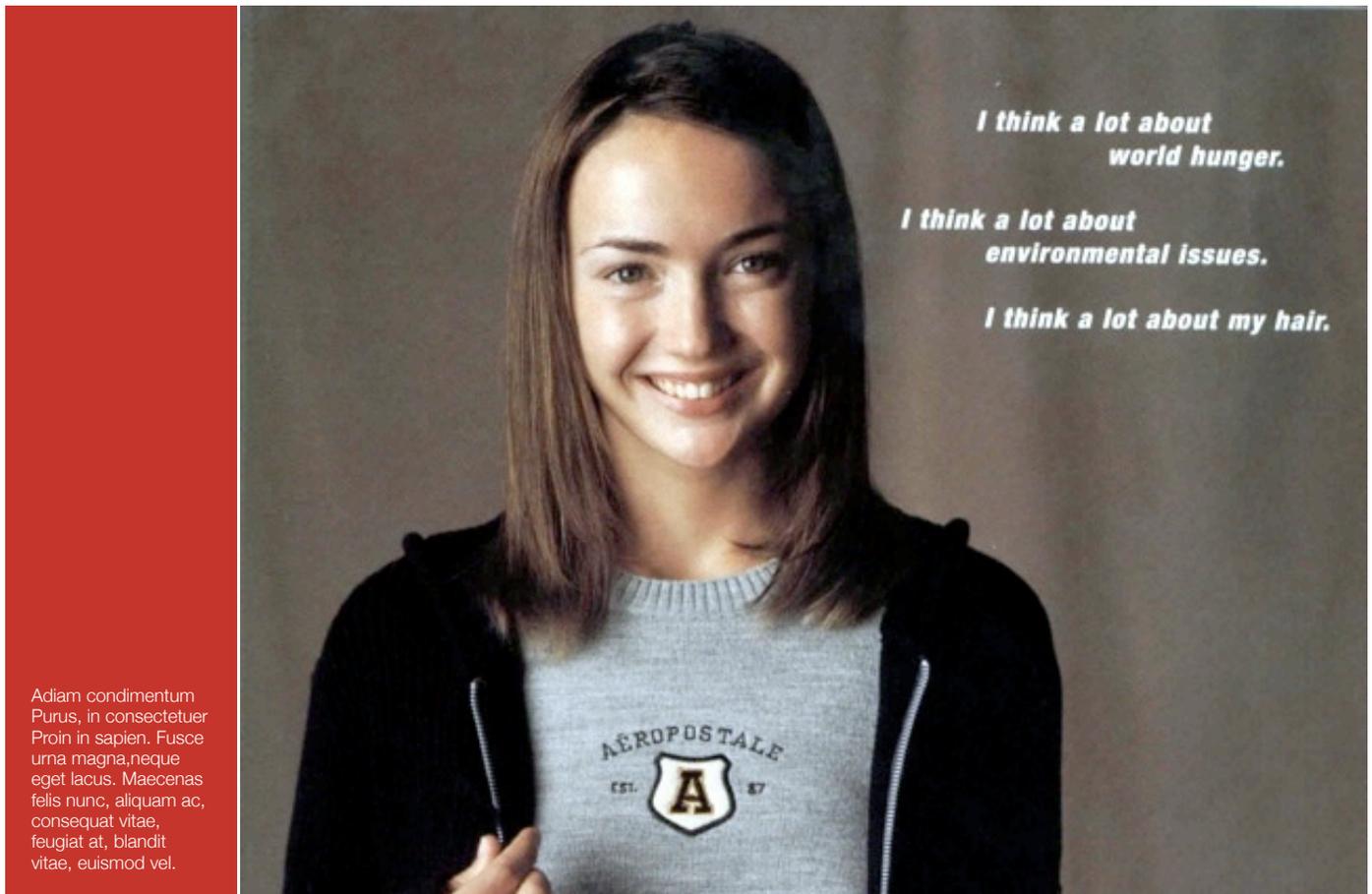


STEREOTYPING



What is Stereotyping?

When applied to people, the word means an instant or fixed picture of a group of people. Stereotypes may be based on gender, race, class, age, disability, and occupation.

Walter Lippmann (1922), believed that we have no choice but to create “pictures in our heads” or stereotypes:

“... the real environment is altogether too big, too complex... We [individuals] are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it.”

They enable us to adapt a very large amount of information on a daily basis, while saving us precious mental resources.

The advantages of using stereotypical representations in media

The average television ad has only 30 seconds to tell a story. Print advertising is limited by space constraints.

Stereotypes offer writers and producers a “short-hand” way of telling the story.

By using stock characters, the media can convey ideas and actions to a broad audience without having to use more complex representations.

Because many of us are familiar with these predictable stereotypes, media producers use them to reach the broadest possible audience.

For example, it takes too much mental energy to define every individual based on their unique characteristics.

By defining them in terms of the characteristics of the group to which they belong, we use stereotyping as an “energy-saving device”.

Stereotyping should not necessarily be seen as negative, and they should not always be associated with prejudice.

The disadvantages of using stereotypical representations in media

Mass media is both a mirror and a conduit.

Its portrayals of groups of people reflect the values of mainstream society and at the same time, feed society’s views about its members.

For example, when successful television characters are continually represented as attractive, wealthy and thin, producers are not only tapping into North American attitudes about class and body image, they are also perpetuating the myth that all successful people must fit into this stereotype.

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Example: How would you advertise yourself as a wedding photographer without using stereotyped images of brides and grooms?

“Misrepresentation” occurs when the media perpetuates images and stereotypes that are not based on fact. However, Avoiding stereotypes is nearly impossible.



Do real doctors look like this?

What are the problems?

When we have categorized someone in a certain way, we are most likely to remember that part of their actual behavior that is most consistent with our view of them.

We may ultimately even remember only the labels we have used for them and forget the specific features that led us to use the label.

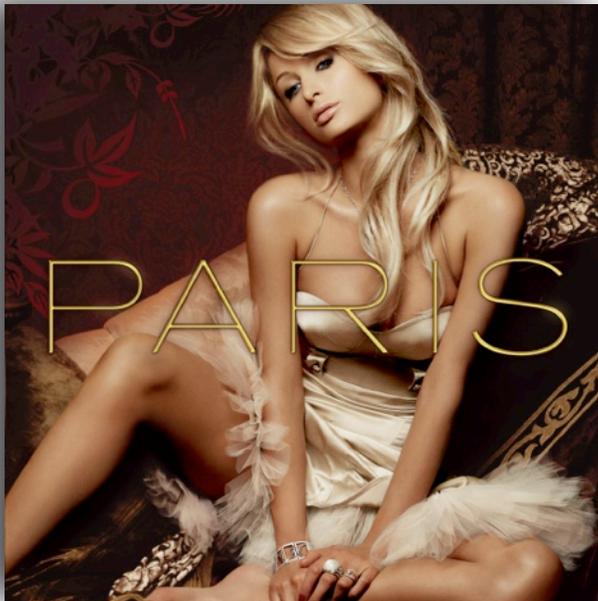
Consequently, stereotyping is a problem because it means that individuals are treated as group members who possess a given set of traits rather than as individuals to be judged on their own merits.

Moreover, in categorizing individuals (e.g. tall /short, young/old) we are creating an in-group and an out-group.

We heighten the perception of similarities within categories and sharpen the perception of differences between categories.

Over-generalization

Over-generalization is a problem because few group members may actually possess the set of traits generally attributed to the group, even when they can be accurately applied to the group.



Is Paris Hilton's life better than yours? We tend to believe it is simply because she is physically attractive and rich.



Example: While it may be true that the average height of the North American female is 5 ft. 3 in., the range of height may be quite large, and few individuals will be exactly 5 ft. 3 in.

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Seeing only what we already believe becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy

For instance, we generally expect physically attractive individuals to lead better and more interesting lives than unattractive individuals.

Therefore, an individual's behavior can be understood only as a part of the expectations that we hold about how others are going to behave.

Representation:

The way in which groups are presented in the media and popular culture, often through the use of stereotypes. The stereotypical

images that are used to represent various groups can affect our attitudes towards them in real life.

The “Dumb Dad”

In recent years television has created a genre of men on numerous sitcoms who could only be classified as “the bumbling husband” type.

Examples range from Homer Simpson to the title character on Everybody Loves Raymond.

It may seem silly, but doesn't this lower in some way the expectations women have of men in a home setting?

Advertising has mimicked this stereotype by picturing both boys and men as incapable of understanding the mysteries of laundry, or cooking a family meal without purchasing it in a bucket, or keeping themselves clean more than a few minutes at a time.

A takeoff on this theme manages to insult both men and women.

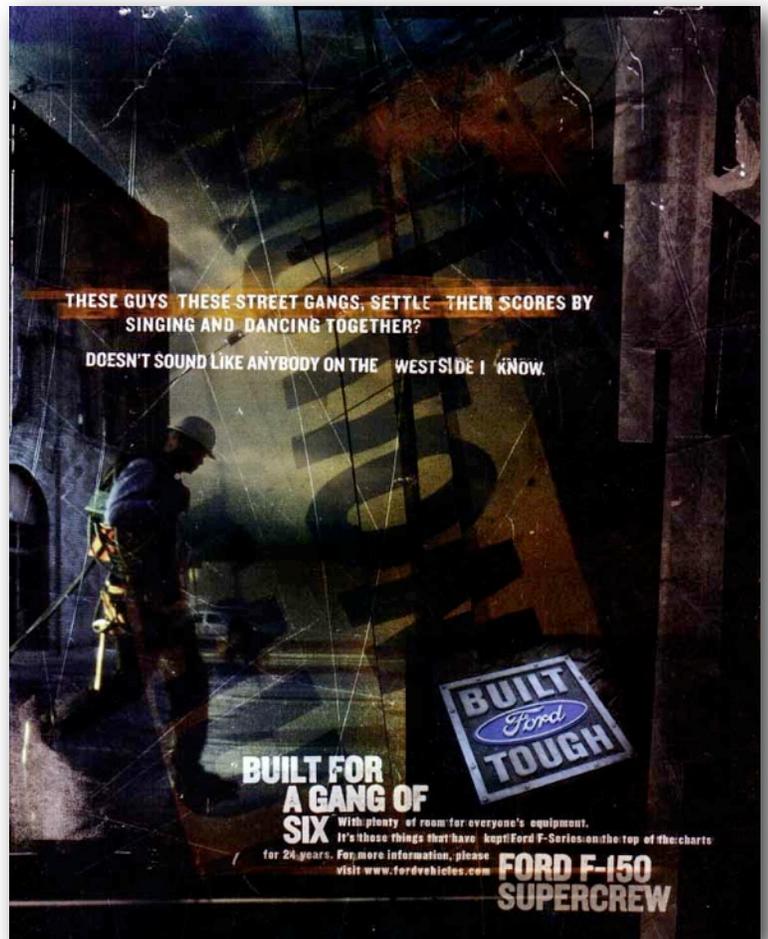
The Retro Male

The Retro Male is a time-honored stereotype highlighting the “mach” image of men as truck driving, beer drinking, football watching American males.

This ad for Ford trucks suggests that “real men” don't go to Broadway plays. They build trucks instead.



This Pizza Hut commercial suggests that men can't cook.



Female Stereotypes

A broad category that types women as brainless sex objects who care only about shopping and looking good in order to attract men, to whom they are ultimately subservient.

This ad suggests that women either don't know how or don't to vote in political elections. They do, however, want to vote for underwear.

Racial & Ethnic Stereotypes

Racial and Ethnic stereotypes have been around as long as advertising. Unfortunately, even in our modern, "enlightened" world, the persist.

SURE BEATS VOTING FOR PRESIDENT.

TERESA Bear, Delaware
PAULA Montgomery, Alabama
MADISON Alexandria, Virginia

WHO WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE AS ONE OF THE WONDERBRA MODELS? VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATE OF YOUR CHOICE AND YOU COULD WIN A 1996 FORD MUSTANG CONVERTIBLE.

THE ONE AND ONLY Wonderbra
THE PUSH-UP PLUNGE BRA.

Charcoal Donut

ENJOY YOUR MOMENT

DUNKIN' DONUTS

This ad appearing in Thailand (but okayed by Dunkin' Donuts) features a black-face made up model selling the new Charcoal Donut.

What about the ones that don't fit?

Because advertising, and marketing in general, rely on demographic information (age, education, income, habits of buying and consuming, etc.) to determine their audience, there is a temptation to ignore certain segments simply because they don't fit into the required demographic—the very young, the very old, the poor, for example. And, when they do get mentioned, it's stereotypically.

THE NEW DEPEND

NEW! Depend Underwear for Women
NEW! Depend Underwear for MEN

Alternatives

How do we overcome problems of media stereotyping?

Some stereotypes need help to change and some may conflict with our personal interests and thus will be highly resistant to change.

Following are ideas for changing our stereotypes.

If you're a consumer, complain.

This ad campaign for Huggies diapers and wipes was stopped in its tracks by consumer complaints from stay-at-home dads, who objected to its suggestion that men can't take care of their infant children



If you're in advertising, do something about it.

This ad for Tide washing detergent has clearly attempted to correct the image of men as inadequate fathers, and especially dismisses the image of African-American absentee parents.

