

Looking at gender in Playskool advertising

This is an interesting ad. On the surface it tries to be gender balanced but really it is full of traditional gender stereotypes. The surface or explicit message of this ad is to buy Playskool toys since they are fun and promote active learning for kids. The hidden or implicit messages are really about gender and reinforcing gender roles. I have created the diagram below to help explain what I mean.

The diagram consists of two vertical panels representing Playskool advertisements. The left panel is for 'PLAYSKOOL 1-2-3 BASEBALL' and features a young girl in a white baseball uniform holding a blue bat. The right panel is for 'PLAYSKOOL PLAYSTORE' and features a young boy and girl playing with a toy cash register. Six callout boxes with lines pointing to specific elements in the ads contain the following text:

- Boys play sports** (points to the baseball ad)
- Showing both a boy and girl playing with the cash register under the headline "Run your own business"** (points to the Playstore ad)
- This could be a girl or boy but it's deliberately vague--if you aren't sure you can look at the pictures of boys using the toy above** (points to the baseball ad)
- Taking a closer look, the boy is running the business and the girl is shopping** (points to the Playstore ad)
- If this is a girl, she is passively holding the bat where the boys in the photographs are actively participating in using the toy** (points to the girl in the baseball ad)
- The use of adult high heeled shoes is showing that this girl is pretending to be a grown up reproducing the stereotypes she is used to seeing** (points to the girl's shoes in the Playstore ad)

It's interesting to see how this ad on the surface looks like it's presenting a balanced view of gender roles. What would a redesigned ad look like? Is it enough to reverse the roles? What if the boy was shopping and the girls was handling the money? Are there versions of this ad for adults? What do adult 'toys' look like? I am not sure that this is enough to correct the imbalances especially when this message reinforces similar messages in other media texts.

It might be interesting to explore where these gender messages are challenged in the media. Is there a relationship to the #metoo movement to these stereotyped gender roles?

What message are Valentine's Day cards sending?



Since it's almost February 14 and everything around me is turning into red hearts, I thought this might a great opportunity to start looking at Valentine's day as a media text and apply some of what I have been learning in the course.

Valentine's Day is about rituals and traditions--if you are in a significant relationship, then you belong; relationships and love are valued above all else.

Heterosexual couples are still the mainstream, though I am starting to see examples of valentine's day cards that value same sex romantic love as well as non-romantic friendships. This has changed significantly from when I was younger to better reflect a welcoming and increasing diversity in society.

I did a little research and I think there are commercial implications to why we have this change. In 2017, people spent 18.2 billion dollars on Valentine's day (fortune.com/2017/02/07/valentines-day-2017-spending/)

If companies are going to continue to grow their profits, they have to make sure that their products appeal to more and more people with buying power. This also explains why everything sold around February 14 is linked to Valentine's Day, like the ads for beef and food processors I found. Even though there is diversity in some of the advertising, the majority of cards and ads I see are still represent a very white and traditional world view. It makes me wonder where else Valentine's Day is celebrated? What does it look like in other countries? This might make an interesting cultural study or inquiry project.



It occurs to me that I learned about Valentine's day very early but it wasn't from my parents. They were Greek immigrants who knew nothing about Valentine's day. Where did I learn about the rituals and traditions surrounding Valentine's Day? My earliest memories are from school, where I was excited days before as the class made containers (really just decorated paper bags) for all the valentine's day cards we were going to receive. I dragged my parents to stores to buy just the right cards and they always came in class sets, with a special one for the teacher.

Over the years, giving and getting valentine's day cards went in and out of cool. We took turns embracing and rejecting what Valentine's represented, often based on how much we felt we were being represented by the rituals.

Another exploration might be around the 'anti-valentine's day' movement. Why has that emerged? What created it? Whose values are represented and whose are not?

