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Kilbourne Rhetorical Situation Analysis

In the late twentieth century, Jean Kilbourn decided to focus her attention on advertisements and how they affect our lives. According to Kilbourn, advertisements undermine intimate relationships and instead promote sexual and dominant relationships. Kilbourne furthered this claim by using children's products because these products are sexualizing boys and girls at a young age, giving them the idea that they need to be dominant and sexy to have a relationship instead of intimacy. Another support is that advertisements photoshop women so they can be seen as the ideal women with no imperfections, creating impossible beauty standards for women. The primary support Kilbourne has for her claim is that advertisements sexualize their products in any way they can because making something erotic increases people's desire to buy that product and creates a sexual mindset. All these claims show that advertisements harm our love life and remove our desire for intimacy. In Kilbourne's *Two Ways A Woman Can Get Hurt,"* she convincingly argues thatthe objectification and sexualization of women in advertising promote male dominance and violence, create impossible beauty standards, and lead women to broken and addicted.

Kilbourne wrote her essay following a logical and topical approach to argue the issues in the advertisement. The medium Kilbourne used to write *Two Ways Women Can Get Hurt* was a small chapter in a book she published. This medium allows Kilbourne to continue to bring up future points and keep her previous points with all the supporting arguments, allowing her to reinforce her argument as the years go by. On top of this, Kilbourne used a logical topical genre because it will enable her to argue that pornographic advertisements lead women to self-harm and addiction as well as male supremacy. Kilbourne starts her argument with "sex in advertising is more about disconnection and distance than connection and closeness. It is also more often about power than passion, about violence than violins" to give readers the explicit purpose of her essay and after this begins her argument with facts people cannot argue against, like advertisements being pornographic (270).

Kilbourne's past allows her to relate to women who are addicted and objectified. The author's mother died when she was eight, and at thirteen, she started smoking and later went to college to get her English degree. However, the author, as a woman, could not find a job and was forced to model for erotic advertisements. The author soon quit modeling because she felt it was destroying her soul or self-image, and in nineteen sixty-eight, she saw an ad that gave her an idea. Kilbourne, the author, knows that modeling destroys a woman's self-image and can lead them to severe trauma, which can lead them to addiction and fear and from her past, she knows that "advertising helps create a climate in which certain attitudes and values flourish, such as the attitude that women are valuable only as objects of men's desire" leading these women who objectify themselves to addiction and self-mutilation (290-291).

Kilbourne's audience was those who were victims of advertisements. She used her essay to spark relevance to those who were abused, raped, and objectified within her community. She also wanted to call out girls who are just starting to think about their beauty and how advertisements make them feel ugly and disgusted with themselves, persuading them to follow unhealthy habits and idealized beauty. Kilbourne explains that "today, every girl is endangered, not just those who have been physically and sexually abused. If girls from supportive homes with positive role models are at risk, imagine how vulnerable the girls who have been violated," showing that advertisements put all women and girls at risk of trauma and addiction. She creates this essay to try to speak to all these girls that they should not change their bodies based on advertisements and they should not legalize rape and abuse because advertisements show it's the women's fault (288). Kilbourne also explains that boys are raised to have the mindset that women are them to please their desires, which leads men to be abusive. She shows her male audience that they do not have to be abusive and dominant to have a relationship with a woman.

Kilbourne's purpose is to argue that ads give society a toxic vision of how women and men should be. Kilbourne argues that advertisements show women impossible beauty but, at the same time, show men preferred beauty. Men are looking for the women they see in ads, which forces women to change themselves because they want to have that beauty men fantasize about. This leads women to self-mutilation, addiction, starvation, and self-hatred because the beauty they idealized is unhealthy and impossible. Kilbourne argues that "Addictions are not incidental in the lives of women. . . they are fueled by a culture that sexualized children, objectives, trivializes, and silences women, disparages our interest in and skill at relating, and constantly threatens us with violence. Feeling isolated and disconnected, a girl or woman reaches out to a substance to numb her pain. . . she reaches for men who don't love her, or she reaches for food. The advertisers are ready for her," and her rhetorical exigence is to stop this pattern that will continue unless women stop trying to please the fantasies of men.

Kilbourne uses Kairos to show the results of unnecessary advertising trends. She showed examples of advertisements that used dominance, violence, or death to promote their product. At the same time, violence, dominance, and murders were happening to most women in America, giving a clear connection between the advertisements and our subconscious. The occasion for Kilbourne to write her essay now was to show the issues advertisement holds for the new generations that will feel the effects of advertisement, which she explains in her essay, giving her more support and credibility. Her essay used correct appropriateness because these advertisements that sexualize their products are targeted to women who were or are being sexualized and abused because of the sexualized advertisements. Kilbourne shows good decorum by not arguing against a single company but argues against the whole advertising industry, giving her argument more value and meaning. In her talks, she used good pertinence by showing examples of her relating to these advertisements as she grew up, giving her essay more credibility and support from others. Kilbourne's main exigency is to argue for reform in the advertisement industry because abuse and value of women are getting worse as these ads go farther and farther down male supremacy, and the only way for change to come is for people to realize there is an issue.

Kilbourne is right to be concerned about how sexualization and objectification of women promote male dominance and support legal violence. Advertisements almost always portray the men as the dominant figure, the one in control over the women, and normalizing these advertisements over many years gave men the idea that this domination is allowed and preferred over being gentle and kind. Having men dominate over women furthers objectification, which means seeing someone as nothing more than an object because men see women as something to dominate over and take advantage of.  When someone becomes an object, violence usually comes close after because doing violence to an object is more effortless than someone who is an equal. Advertisements promote objectification, and from this, Kilbourne says, "Male violence is subtly encouraged by ads that encourage men to be forceful and dominant and to value sexual intimacy more than emotional intimacy" (272). The mindset to be forceful and dominant leads to one out of five women being sexually assaulted because advertisements portray women who refuse sexual activities as playful talk, and women never mean no when they say it. Advertisements increase violence toward women, but men face no charges for assaulting women who wear sexy clothing because the clothing is seen as an invitation for men to get sexual with women. Kilbourne points out how William Kennedy was charged with rape charges, but the assaulted woman wore Victoria's Secret underwear, which proved her guilty (275).

Kilbourne also laments how advertisements create an impossible beauty standard. Since advertisements sell their products with sexual implications, the women promoting the product need to be beautiful. Advertisements, to make their model more desirable started using Photoshop to make their model bodies more desirable. They removed all imperfections and created an impossible beauty standard for women. Kilbourne says, "Several trends in fashion and advertising could be seen as cultural reactions to the women's movement, as perhaps unconscious fear of female power. One has been an increase in thinness . . . Most disturbing has been the increasing sexualization of children" (281). The first trend creates eating disorders and unhealthy body fat percentages, and sometimes the advertisements photoshop their weight, furthering the impossible beauty and at the same time harming women who aim for this beauty. The other trend is to play on the desire for innocence in men, which means women look beautiful, vulnerable, and young. Women who have all three traits are usually young girls, which leads to them being sexually objectified. Kilbourne recounts how an advertisement campaign by Calvin Klein showcased children in advertisements that resembled child pornography; however, people protested his advertisements, and the federal government got involved with them. Klien had to take down the advertisements, but in the end, Klien doubled his yearly sales because he gained more publicity from the free advertising he got from the federal government. She also points to how Japan had an increase in child advertisement, known as Loli-con, and here, men were able to create any fantasy they wanted with fake schoolgirls (282). Women at a young age see these advertisements and believe they must look young, beautiful, thin, and vulnerable, which is an impossible and dangerous task to push on young girls (285,286).

Kilbourne correctly concludes that objectification, violence, and impossible beauty standards lead women to be broken and addicted. She says, "We are so desperate to believe we are in control of what happens to us," leading women to self-harm and addiction (275). Since young women are shown absolute beauty, they live their lives thinking they are unattractive, and this undermines their self-worth, which leads to self-harm because women believe they have control over their bodies, leads them to eating disorders, excessive shopping, or even physical changing their bodies because of the beauty advertisements created. Advertisements bring trauma to women because advertisements give women the idea that their value is only in the eyes of men and any violence done to them was their fault because they dressed too sexy or walked alone in the dark or any other reason men must assault a woman. This trauma leads women to self-harm and addiction to alcohol or drugs. Kilbourne finishes by saying, "Addictions . . . are fueled by a culture that sexualizes children, objectifies, trivializes, and silences women, disparages our interest in and skill at relating, and constantly threatens us with violence" showing the life women must live and how their lives are affected from advertisements, which furthers addiction (291).

Kilbourne believes that advertisements further objectify and undermine intimate relationships, which increases violence, allows men to dominate women, and produces unrealistic beauty. Advertisements take ideas from pornography to advertise products with an erotic stance to feed our sexual desire. Advertisements displaying their products and models in a pornographic setting create this sense of objectification toward women because men dominate the women in the advertisement. Advertisements also insist that women who say "no" or "stop" do not mean no, and you can continue to assault them. Kilbourne gave an example of a perfume advertisement: "Apply generously to your neck so he can smell the scent as you shake your head 'no'" (273). Alcohol advertisements promote sexual assault under the consumption of alcohol; for example, in this advertisement, Kilbourne says, "The night began with a bottle of Cuervo and ended with a vow of silence," which is frightening because Kilbourne states that at least half of sexual assaults on colleges starts with alcohol (274-275). Advertisements, to increase profits, photoshop their models to create the perfect women without imperfections. The imperfections advertisements removed, fixed, or added were thinness, body parts, youthfulness, and vulnerability. This rise of beauty made children the desired model because they were young and vulnerable, the traits men long for the most. This trend sexualized children and created an environment where young girls were at risk for assault. This trend also furthered the impossible standard for beauty advertisements placed on women. Women cannot be forever young and beautiful, and the desired thinness was so thin it was unhealthy and could give them eating disorders. All this violence, domination, and unrealistic beauty leads women to self-harm and addiction because this creates a culture where everything is blamed on women. Women blame themselves for being abused because they think she should have dressed less appealing and taken more thought into where she was walking, and it is no one's fault but hers. This culture created by advertisements forces unrealistic expectations on women and allows men to follow their desires however they want.

Works Cited

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