Isaiah Hoffer

Prof. Craig Bubeck

English 1300-003

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Kilbourne Response 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,"* the objectification and sexualization of women in advertising promote male dominance and violence, creates impossible beauty standards, and leads women to broken and addicted.

The 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. William Kennedy was charged with rape charges, but the assaulted woman wore Victoria's Secret underwear, which proved her guilty.

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. 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 it. 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. Japan also had an increase in child advertisement, known as Loli-con, and here, men were able to create any fantasy they wanted with fake schoolgirls. 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.

Objectification, violence, and impossible beauty standards lead women to be broken and addicted. Kilbourne 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 you 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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