18 Ads That Changed How We Think About Women

Samantha Felix | Oct. 28, 2012, 11:36 AM | 35,924 | 7

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When people say sex sells, most of the time, what they really mean is that sexy women sell.

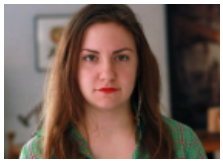
For decades, advertisers have been finding different ways to feature women in ads in order to entice buyers. And, it would seem, the strategy works.

But the way women have been portrayed in advertising has changed over the decades, and changed the way society views women because of it. From housebound drudge to sexpot to business leader, ads are constantly arguing with us about women's role in society.

Here's how advertisements featuring women have shifted throughout the last century.

Ads of the World

See Also



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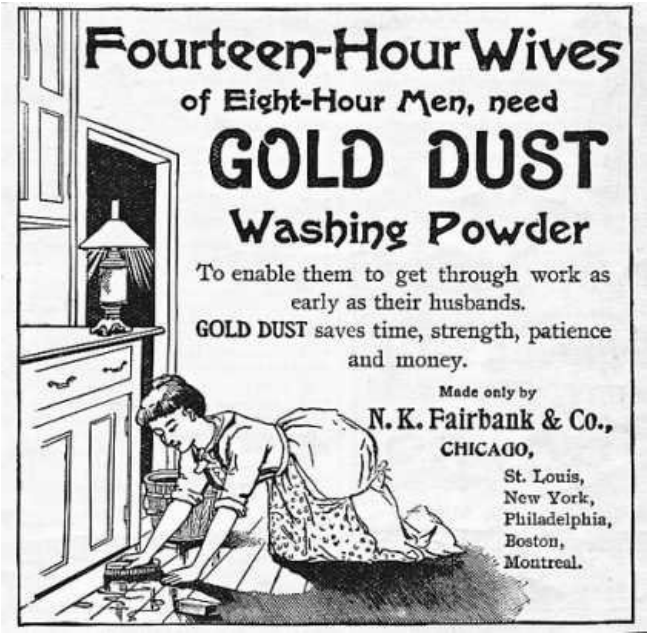
1890s: Led by Susan B. Anthony, the National American Woman Suffrage Association was formed in May 1890. At the same time, this ad from 1893 clearly says that a woman's place was in the kitchen, far from polling sites.



1900: Women were fighting for their rights across the nation, but it seems advertisers were not taking them very seriously. Note the quotation marks around "her declaration of independence."

Vintage Ads

1920s: The 19th Amendment to the Constitution was signed, giving women the right to vote. Yet this ad

suggests that women were afraid to go beyond the walls of their kitchens.

Vintage Ads

1943: This ad, created by J. Howard Miller for Westinghouse Electric, was designed to boost morale during wartime as women took over jobs vacated by men who joined the military. As one of the first depictions of an empowered woman in an ad, the poster was revived by the feminist movement in the 1980s.

Vintage Ads

1950: TWA asks, "Who says it's a man's world?" Women are starting to take on a more active role in ads.

Vintage Ads

1950: But more often than not, it still was a man's world.

Vintage Ads

1960s: At this point women were voting, sexually liberated, and intellectually relevant — but they better not be pear shaped! The '60s marked the beginning of an intense period of diet-oriented advertising targeting women.

Vintage Ads

1970s: Virginia Slims' "You've come a long way, baby" contained a cunningly mixed message, with its feminist assertion wrapped in a sexist pejorative. This campaign by Leo Burnett ran through the 1990s.

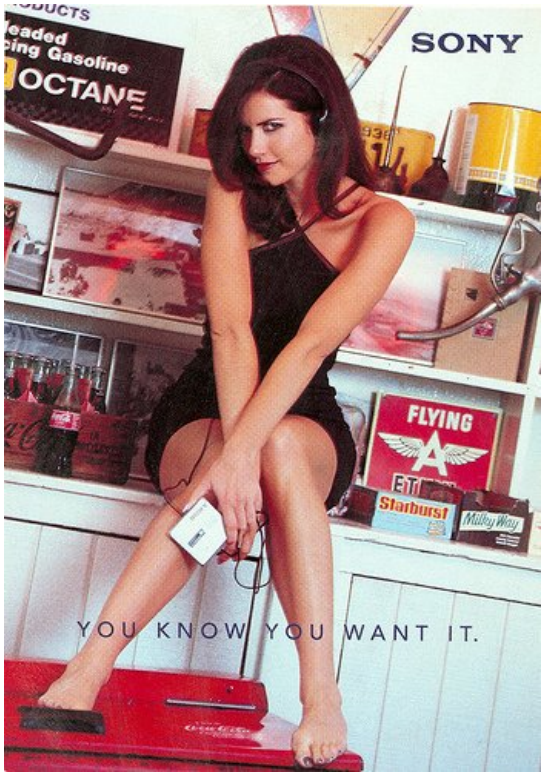
1980s: Enter a new kind of woman, who can have it all — be a mother, a professional, and ... wear power suits.

Vintage Ads

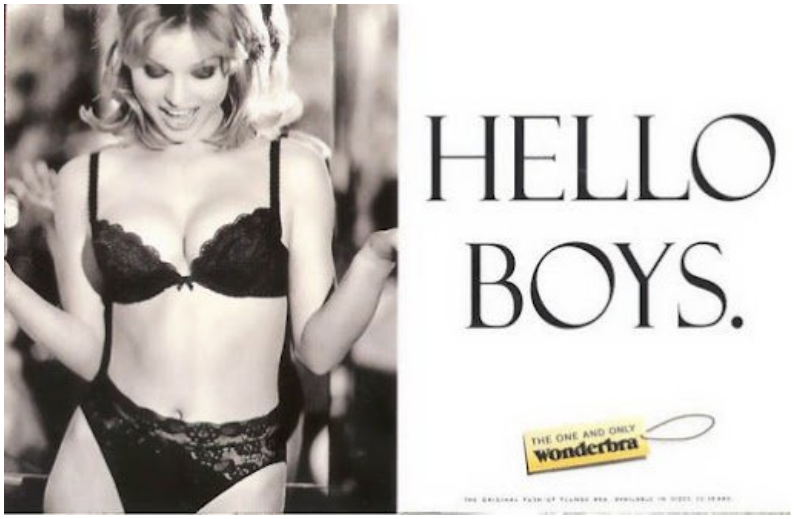
1984: Geraldine Ferraro was the first woman to run for vice president. But her campaign pin was a girly heart-shape.

Sodahead

1990s: The era of the hyper-sexualized woman in advertising begins.



1994: Eva Herzigova's curves caused a sensation when she posed for Wonderbra's "Hello Boys" campaign.



Wonderbra

2004: A backlash (of sorts) begins. Ogilvy & Mather created this ad for Dove featuring "real" women with "real" shapes. (According to Business Week, Dove still used Photoshop to erase imperfections from their intentionally imperfect forms.)

Dove

2005: Keeping with the theme of "real" bodies, Nike's "I love my butt" ads celebrated strong athletic forms.

Ad Land

2006: American Apparel repeatedly pushes the limits with its nothing-left-to-the-imagination ads.

American Apparel

2010: Then there's Axe. The ads are supposed to be a joke, but it's not clear who, exactly, is being laughed at.

2012: JC Penney featured a lesbian couple in its 2012 Mother's Day campaign. The ad drew protests, but consumers who liked Penney's campaign -- which also featured Ellen DeGeneres -- far outnumbered them.

JCPenny

2012: "Bic for Her." Decades ago, a female pen campaign would have made sense. Today Bic's effort drew only ridicule. Here is Ellen DeGeneres' hilarious spoof on the ballpoints.

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Calvin Klein

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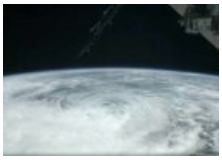

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cmonster on Oct 28, 11:49 AM said:

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"Why is that women are always laying down, delicate, or almost naked?"

Because on television commercials, men are always portrayed as clueless, bumbling, doofuses.

Reply

Boodrow on Oct 28, 12:18 PM said:

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@cmonster: Oh look... a woman bitching about how mean men are. How avant garde.

Reply

R U Serious? on Oct 28, 12:27 PM said:

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The caption under the picture attributes the ad to Absolut Vodka. The bottle in the picture is CLEARLY SKYY Vodka. So which is it, wrong caption or wrong ad?

Reply

Jim Edwards on Oct 28, 2:12 PM said:

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@R U Serious?: Oops. Fixed that.

Reply

Jay Carter on Oct 28, 12:30 PM said:

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The only way to found out why women lay down all the time is to ask all of them, all over world and compile the results in some sort of chart.
Until then we'll guess and I think that women are happy to accept money for doing sexual things, maybe men would as well. Who Knows.
http://idealtrends.ws/my-bad-experience-part-2-of-3-to-be-continued/

Reply

Clete on Oct 28, 12:54 PM said:

1 0