Gender-Targeted Marketing In North America

Marketing in North America employs different tactics when trying to reach consumers of different genders. The strategies employed attempt to evoke a variety of emotions and often have a foundation built upon socially constructed attitudes towards each gender. Marketing has also been shown to have an effect on the way that Americans make food choices and behave in situations where food is being prepared. The primary goal of this section of the wiki is to find specific examples of gender targeted marketing and to try to interpret the rational behind their tactic(s).

When advertising food to men, marketers often rely on the stereotype of a male who is inept in cooking ability and is in for a "quick fix" at satisfying his need for nutritional sustenance. Fabio Parasecoli reflects on the articles he encountered while reading a men's health fitness magazine: "When actual food is advertised, it is ready-made or fast food. Potential readers are not supposed to have any connection with buying, storing and cooking food, all activities apparently belonging to the feminine. Male subjects cannot perform activities related to the preparation of food without affecting their masculine traits and the inscription of these in a cultural order that is deeply gendered” (Parasecoli 2008:194). This article resonated with my personal experiences as a male consumer. One of my favorite marketing campaigns was recently aired by the fast food chain Burger King. It sold the "Texas Double Whopper" on the basis of it's essential masculinity. An example from this campaign can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGLHlvb8skQ>. great use of the possibilities of the wiki

These gendered images associated with food go beyond advertisements to the products themselves. For example, a study conducted by a group of psychologists found that the characters shown on cereal boxes are heavily gendered, with males outnumbering females 2 to 1. They interpreted this information by saying that society finds men to be more significant role models than females, a doctrine enforced even by product packaging in the grocery store (Black et al. 2009:887).

These attitudes are not surprising when considering the history of marketing and gender. As early as 1947, a Columbia University researcher wrote that, "experimental psychologists have discovered a number of characteristic differences . . . between the sexes. These differences may be of value to advertisers” (Alexander 1947:17). He goes on to describe in full the many differences in perception and capabilities between men and women and how to gear advertisements to exploit these differences. It is attitudes such as this which formed the foundation for the gendered marketing still existent today.

The unhealthy habits / lifestyles perpetuated in these marketing campaigns have not gone unnoticed among the medical community. In a recent (2004) publication in Annals of Behavioral Medicine, researchers concluded that, “Cooking and nutrition are socially constructed as feminine. On television, far more women than men are homemakers and cooks, and men's magazines suggest that food choices are irrelevant to men. In the minds of both girls and boys, the enjoyment of cooking is associated with feminine behaviors,... Most men lack basic knowledge about foods and nutritional risk factors, which are considered essential in improving dietary practices and reducing health risks” (Courtenay 2000:13).

References Cited:

Parasecoli, Fabio

Courtenay, Will H.

Alexander, R.S

Black et al.