

WARNING: Advertising Can Be Dangerous To Your Health

The average American is exposed to thousands of advertising messages per day. The United States, with 6% of the world's population, receives 57% of the world's advertising. Unless you are stranded on a desert island, you are affected by commercial messages. To avoid brainwashing, practice critical thinking.

Advertising serves a useful function. It helps us make choices about spending money. We decide among cars, kitchen appliances, health clubs, books, plants, groceries, home builders, dog groomers, piano tuners, vacation spots, locksmiths, movies, amusement parks---the list is endless.

Advertising space is also expensive, and the messages are carefully crafted. They can play on our emotions and be dangerously manipulative.

For example, consider the messages that advertising conveys about your health. Advertising alcohol, tobacco, and pain relievers is big business. Newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and Internet sites depend on advertising these products for much of their revenue.

Ads for alcohol glorify drinking. One of their aims is to convince heavy drinkers that the amount they drink is normal. 27% of all people who drink consume 93% of the alcohol sold. Advertisers imply daily drinking is the norm, pleasant experiences are enhanced by drinking, holidays naturally include alcohol, parties are a flop without it, relationships are more romantic over cocktails, and everybody drinks. Each of these implications is questionable.

Advertising can affect our self-image. A typical advertising message is "You are not OK unless you buy our product." These messages are painstakingly programmed to get you to buy clothes, makeup, and hair products to make you look OK; drugs, alcohol, and food to make you feel OK; perfumes, toothpaste, and deodorant to make you smell OK. Advertising also promotes the idea that buying the right product is essential to having valuable relationships in your life.

Advertising affects what we eat. Multimedia advertisers portray the primary staples of our diets as breakfast cereals, candy bars, and soft drinks. **A U.S. Department of Agriculture study revealed that the least nutritious foods receive the most advertising money.**

Another problem with advertising is the image it has commonly portrayed of women. The basic message has been that women are inferior to men, lack intelligence, and are sex objects. The woman presented in many ads either spends her day discussing floor wax and laundry detergent or sits around looking sexy. Other women handle everything from kitchen to bedroom to boardroom---Superwoman.

These images are demeaning to women and damaging to men. Women lose when they allow their self-images to be influenced by ads. Men lose when they expect real-life women to be as shallow or as beautiful as portrayed. Many men pointlessly search for a woman who looks like the ones they see on television and in magazines. Advertising photography creates illusions. The next time you're in a crowd, notice how few people look like those in the media.

Though advertising is making progress in representing racial diversity, it still frequently excludes people of color. If our perceptions were based solely on advertising, we would be hard pressed to know that our society is racially and ethnically diverse.

Know how a multibillion-dollar industry threatens your health and well-being. Use advertising as a continual opportunity to develop the qualities of a critical thinker.

Becoming a Master Student, 9th Edition, by Dave Ellis