

Did Mad Men write this commercial?

Now, I should say upfront that I do NOT watch Mad Men, the AMC series about the advertising business in New York City in the 1960s. However, I do know that it shows the very real sexism of the time that ran rampant in advertising agencies. Women were generally in support staff positions rather than as creatives or agency principals (come to think of it, even in the 1990s, when I worked in advertising, the agency principals were all men...).

On the radio a couple of days ago, I heard a commercial for a home security company. In the spot, a woman is narrating and telling the audience that since her husband started traveling a lot for business, she is afraid to be alone in her house. And because she wishes to retaliate against her husband for taking the job that makes him go out on the road so much, and leaving her all alone, she has decided to get a home security system so that she can feel safe. Now, if she hears a noise, she doesn't need to reach for the Xanax, but rather look at her computer screen and monitor all the rooms in the house. (I am not making this up, except for the Xanax part.)

The commercial makes several assumptions:

- 1.) Women are afraid to be alone (being the weaker sex and all).
- 2.) Only men have (big, important) jobs that require travel.
- 3.) Women can make the decision to buy something, but the husband (who is the breadwinner after all) is the one controlling the household finances.
- 4.) Only married people own homes that would require home security (single people always live in apartments apparently).

(I could add 5.) Marriage is only between a man and a woman , but this is so ubiquitous in advertising that it's a topic for another day).

When I heard it on the radio, I couldn't believe that a company wanted to advertise its services in this way in 2014. Women have been in the workforce for a long time and they travel for business. In fact, I found the commercial to be quite offensive. But clearly, in the mind of this sexist home security company, as a single woman who is not afraid of being in my own home by myself, I am not the target market.

What is particularly a bad marketing decision is to be so narrowly focused when home security is something that could be sold to every home owner. This commercial not only is **too narrowly targeted but it could serve to turn off potential customers** due to the various outdated assumptions it makes.

Other companies are being more reflective of the reality of gender roles. For example, a national detergent brand has a TV commercial where the dad is doing the laundry of his very rambunctious (and dirty) little girls. Or the insurance company that shows a single mother shopping for life insurance.

We are not living in the 1960s. Companies that use dated (and sexist) notions are alienating potential customers...and that is not good for the bottom line.

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