Pardon Me, Do You Have Any Grey Poupon?

Advertising is a cut-throat field that makes or breaks a company and its products; if there is no advertising, there is no product. Advertising has become part of the mold that defines our culture. Society is formed by the ideas that are sold to us. If the common image of a tall, thin woman with perfect hair and the perfect body was not shown to us everyday, would we still think that was the standard? Americans are ambushed with advertisements everywhere they turn; there is no escaping them. The purpose of an ad is to persuade an audience of who or what one can be if they only had the product to improve themselves. Advertisers try to sell an image with their products. This works because people always want to be somebody different than who they really are. Before any image makes it on to a page, it is analyzed until it is proven to please the demographic the ad is aimed towards. An analysis of any ad will give us a look at American culture and the people advertisers think we primarily want to be.

People Weekly magazine targets middle-class audiences - women in their mid-twenties and over. Most of this demographic is interested in celebrities and Hollywood. Many people enjoy this magazine for the celebrity gossip and the current event stories that are always featured on the cover. Ads are targeted towards women by displaying beauty products such as lotions and makeup. Housewives and mothers are also targeted by the ads for lunchmeat and the ideas for Father’s Day gifts. Many women might feel stuck in their current situation in life, and they may feel revitalized by the images that advertisers try to sell them. A suburban housewife may
imagine being a part of high society and entertaining her snooty friends with gourmet dinners. Ads in People Weekly may try to sell the image of snootiness to the average American woman.

One particular ad in this magazine is for New Grey Poupon Yellow Mustard. It is a plain ad without a lot of clutter. The page shows a few phrases and pictures. The colors used compliment each other to catch the reader’s eye, while the pictures shown tell a story about the product’s brand name. More importantly than what the ad is showing is what the ad is saying to consumers.

One of the first things that might attract the reader’s attention to the ad is the background color of the ad. The whole page is black, which sticks out from the more common white background of other ads. The black color gives the ad a formal look, almost like a black-tie affair. This could have been done because Grey Poupon is usually considered fine mustard, to be used in conjunction with elegant dining. You normally do not see someone using Grey Poupon on a hamburger or a hot dog. The name, Grey Poupon, carries a snooty air about it. Previous advertising for Grey Poupon was based around the image of someone in a classy car pulling up next to another car and asking in a British accent, “Pardon me, but do you have any Grey Poupon?” The British accent itself is a popular characteristic in American media to show a higher class or snootiness. It almost seems like the advertisers are trying to convey a classier image for their mustard by using the color black.

Less noticeable on the black background is a thin border around the product. The border consists of a double line of red and yellow. This framing of the product might signify another clue to class stature by making the new mustard appear like a fine piece of artwork. The frame adds a nice finish to the ad. Because fine artwork is a necessity to be accepted as a part of upper-class society, this framing of fine mustard is quite suitable for the image the advertisers are trying to portray.
More noticeable than the background and the border is the actual bottle of mustard itself. It is a bright yellow, making the color really stick out against the black background. The bottle is also spotlighted with a white haze around the edge, maybe to signify that it is to be showcased. This new yellow mustard might be an attempt for Grey Poupon to appeal to the more common person, not someone who is always enjoying a gourmet meal.

Near the bottom of the page is a hand holding a large hamburger. The manicured hand is a woman’s, and she has red nail polish perfectly applied. There are multiple pieces of jewelry on her hand: a large ring on her ring finger, a solid silver or gold bracelet, and another bracelet with multiple stones going all around her wrist. These jewels are obviously there to show us that this hand belongs to a person of class. The most noticeable part of the hand is the pinkie finger, which is standing upright; this is another sign of snobbery. Even so, there is a contradiction of societal roles displayed in the picture. Most upper-class people are thought not to eat things as common as a plain, old hamburger, much less use their fingers to eat their food, especially a burger as large as this one.

Less noticeable than any of the artwork, is the writing used in this advertisement. The writing style is a fancy script, something else that might be trying to show a little bit of class. The first and largest phrase on the page says, “Hey, put that pinkie down.” This might be trying to imply that even though this ad may be advertising something as fine as Grey Poupon mustard, it is also trying to appeal to those who may not be the type of person to put their finger up in the air when they are holding their hamburger. The lower phrase states, “Yo, pardon me.” This is definitely not a refined phrase and is commonly seen as being used among those of a lower class. Even so, it is still displayed in the same fancy script writing as the first phrase.
The ad might be sending out a few messages. This particular magazine is read by many women who wish they could lead the lives of Hollywood stars and live vicariously through the stories and the gossip they read about in *People*. In this respect, the mustard ad fits in perfectly because, most likely, these same women are not of a higher social status but still dream they are. This ad calls to them, telling them they do not have to be wealthy or a debutante, but can still have class by using Grey Poupon yellow mustard on all their common food, even things like hamburgers and hotdogs.

Overall, this ad and many others like it try to appeal to a certain audience. This particular one is trying to sell the image of a classy snob to someone as common as a housewife who longs to be more of a socialite. Even so, just because an ad is interpreted in one way, it does not mean that is its only interpretation. Ads are meant to sell to whoever sees them, even if not for the specific demographic the ad is geared to. The ad may still appeal to someone else just because of certain colors or phrases used. Not only is the advertising industry trying to sell a product, but even more importantly, they are trying to sell an image. Whether it is an image of wealth, power, or snootiness, Americans will buy it.