

20th Century Brainwashing: What's Hidden in Microsoft's Logo

by Dr. Lechnar

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Abstract

The advertising industry, a prominent and powerful industry, engages in deceptive subliminal advertising which most of us are unaware of. By bypassing our unconscious mind using subliminal techniques, advertisers tap into the vulnerabilities surrounding our unconscious mind, manipulating and controlling us in many ways. Since the 1940's subliminal advertising blossomed until now, when you can find subliminals in every major advertisement and magazine cover. Legislation against the advertisers has had no effect in curbing the use of subliminals. In this Information Age, it seems people are no longer in control of the people. The ones in control are the ones with knowledge (as usual). In this case, the advertisers have it; you don't. Until now.

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Foreword

Advertisements bombard every minute of our lives. The advertising industry has

penetrated into every aspect of this society. When I wake up in the morning, the first thing I hear is my radio blaring out the latest ad for Sears or the Penn State Bookstore. At night, the last thing I see is the latest peroxide innovation on the toothpaste tube. Most of us ignore these ads as we drive by the Marlboro billboard on the way to work or to the countryside on a lovely day. However, most of us do not realize the mind games the advertisers have been playing on our subconscious minds for the past half century. It's a scary thought, really, when you realize the advertisers have gained control of our lives without us even knowing it.

Serendipity

I stumbled onto this topic of subliminal messages in advertisements accidentally. Before I became familiar with this subject, I have heard of naked women in ice cubes floating on soft drinks. I have also heard of subliminal messages being flashed in theaters telling people to drink soda and eat popcorn. In fact, I have experimented with flashing messages on the computer screen using a program I made at the beginning of my senior year in computer science class. The subject of a subconscious mind being influenced without a person's knowledge greatly intrigues me. At a science symposium I have attended to present a research poster, I have listened to another presentation about the effects of subliminal stimuli on the left (logical) side of the brain. The presenter was off topic and was consequently marked by the judges. However, she has given me the impulse to further dwell on this topic. Some questions I have asked as I entered this research were, "Are there really naked women in ice cubes?" "If so, are they effective in influencing people?" And finally, "How do the advertisers put these subliminal messages into their ads?" With these objectives in mind, I have discovered the breadth of background knowledge I had to gather before I even attempt to analyze the ads. I had to learn about human perception, subconscious processing, advertising strategies, depth interviews, graphic design, and a plethora of sub-topics. Nonetheless, I have thoroughly enjoyed this research project.

In My Defense

As I read through several of Dr. Wilson Bryan Key's books on subliminal advertising, I was amazed and shocked at the amount of filth and porn in the advertisements. If they were targeted for the conscious mind, the collection of these ads would turn into your average amateur hard-core. As I tried to show and explain some of these advertisements to my colleagues, the first and predominant response I got was "You have a sick mind." In defense of myself and all of the researchers who have studied these ads, I must point out that it is the advertisers who printed the ads. These researchers and I are simply bringing into your consciousness mind what your unconscious mind has absorbed already. It is easy to hide away and reject what we don't understand, as the Roman Catholic Church did to Galileo's theory of the universe. All that I ask is that you look into these ads and explanation with an open, even if skeptical mind.

Research Biases

The existence of a subconscious mind and subliminal perception is still a controversy

today. There is vast evidence for the existence of both, but the evidence is based on a methodology that is by nature not pure scientific. Despite the lack of conventional scientific evidence, I believe there exists a consciousness that lies outside of our normal awareness. Although I will later provide evidence, the paper assumes the existence of such a phenomenon.

Introduction

What is your favorite ad on TV or in a magazine? Why do you like it? Is it the dry humor? Or the dramatic irony? Advertisers use subliminal techniques to put hidden messages into their ads. By now, your subconscious mind has a full load of them, each expertly targeted by the advertisers. Although the exact consequences are unknown, one can guess it is like being brainwashed every time you see an ad.

Heaving Breasts

Do advertisers really put subliminal messages on their ads? Let's explore this topic. Go to the vending machine and buy a can of Diet Coke™. The can looks pretty ordinary--script letters on white bubbles floating on a silver can. Turn your attention now to the passion red glass on the lower left and hold the can arm's-length away from you. Do you see them now? Almost everyone I have shown the can to readily perceived the sexual image. Although this is the most blatant example of embedding I have discovered, Coca-Cola manages to get away with it by placing the image in an inconspicuous spot on the can, masked by the fizzing bubbles and bold print. Since Diet Coke is targeted at female consumers, it would seem illogical to embed female breasts onto the soda can. According to Dr. Wilson Bryan Key, "male genitalia in ads are usually directed to male audiences. Female genitalia are directed to females." I will explain later that subliminal images are most effective when associated with cultural taboos.

Subliminal Perception

Apparently, subliminal perception is not a newly discovered physiological phenomenon used only by the advertising industry. Historical scholars such as Plato, Aristotle, and even texts such as the Bible have alluded to a subconscious phenomenon. Early artists, such as those in the Renaissance, have used subliminal techniques in their artwork. Aristotle first documented the relationship between dreams and the unconscious mind.

Impulses occurring in the daytime, if they are not very great and powerful, pass unnoticed because of greater waking impulses.

But in the time of sleep the opposite takes what often happens in sleep; men think that it is lightning and thundering when there are only faint echoes in their ears, and that they are enjoying honey and sweet flowers, when only a drop of phlegm is slipping down their throats.

Definition

One of the controversies surrounding the existence of subliminal perception is its definition. Subliminal means "below threshold." An apple placed in complete darkness would be below the visual threshold for perception. It is not until the lighting on the apple increases to a sufficient level for recognition is it considered "above threshold." The minimum stimulation necessary to detect a particular stimulus (not necessarily recognize), is called the absolute threshold. However, the required amount of lighting on the apple for identification is different for everyone, and therefore what may be subliminal to one person may not be subliminal to another. It is generally accepted that a perception is subliminal if a great majority of the audience can not perceive it consciously. So what is perception? Perception is the brain's reception of incoming stimuli. Dr. Key said perception is total and instantaneous, but only 1/1000th of this is consciously recognized and processed. The rest is either stored in subconscious memory or dumped as irrelevant information. Although we do not fully understand how the brain perceives the world, advertisers have no interest in the motor and gears of the brain. It only cares that the brain is influenced the most by visual stimulation and there are certain ways to stimulate the brain without its conscious awareness. Dixon provides a good definition of subliminal perception, which he words as "subliminal reception."

The subject responds without awareness to stimulus.

Subject knows he is being stimulated, but doesn't know what it is.

For the rest of the paper, I will use the above definition for subliminal perception. Subliminal messages will therefore be the transmission of subliminal content using methods which the brain subconsciously perceives but is not consciously aware.

Experimental Confirmation

Since the 19th century researchers have been performing psychological tests to confirm the existence of subliminal perception. N. F. Dixon has compiled over 500 studies on this topic and concluded in his book that subliminal perceptions exists beyond any reasonable doubt. He said, "It would seem that reports of percepts may be influenced by stimulation which the percipient is not aware. Certainly, it can be claimed that the having of a conscious percept does not exclude the possibility of subliminal effects." His book is held in such esteem one advertiser quoted "Dixon's book is basic reading for our creative department. We think of it as an operational bible." Ironically, Dixon never guessed his work would be used for commercial exploitation.

Dr. Hal C. Becker has patented a black box from 1962 to 1966 to pipe audio subliminal messages on top of another audio source. He has used this black box experimentally in stores to reduce theft and on weight reduction programs. In the case of the store, which a message such as "Don't steal" was superimposed into background music, theft in the store dropped 37%. However, he has urged caution in the use of such device and keep an eye on "other uses." Since his device is in patent, any company can look up the design and build a similar device to influence the population. Who knows, they may already be using it at every TV broadcasting station.

In 1983, an average class of Tucson eighth graders have taken a self esteem test on

processed paper with subliminal messages on it. Students who have taken the test on paper printed with the subliminal message of "YOU ARE LOVED" have scored 15% higher than the students who have taken test on plain paper. The same test given to underachievers have produced even more remarkable results-the students scored 34.7% higher on processed paper. Dana Osman, president of Osman-Kord, Ltd., the company who printed the paper, claims that subliminal messages only work to influence minor decisions, and they are the most powerful when reinforcing an already made decision.

Researchers have designed tests to quantitatively measure the physiological responses of the body while subjected to subliminal stimuli. The researchers connect sensitive instruments to the subject while they are asked to watch a blank screen periodically superimposed with emotional subliminal stimuli. Tachistoscope projectors, which can flash words or images onto the screen with a duration of several milliseconds, are used to display the stimuli. Although the subject reports to having no awareness of the stimuli, researchers found they can alter the brain's alpha and theta waves, detected using an electroencephalograph (EEG). Similarly, they can detect subtle variations in heart rate using EKG's and higher electrical potentials on the skin using GSR's.

It is clear that humans can be affected by subliminal stimuli without their conscious awareness. The understanding of the our brain is too limited to understand how or why this works. However, the advertisers don't care about the inner workings of the brain. They only care that the population can be influenced and they have the resources to do the influencing.

Physiological Feasibility

While there are centuries of experimental proof to back the existence of subliminal perception, the argument could be made much stronger if there exists scientific theories of human physiology to support the case. Unfortunately, our medical research has only begun to tap into the inner workings of the human brain. There are some theories which could provide support. From an evolutionary standpoint, our brains have not always had the same level of consciousness as we do now. It can be theorized from animals living today that their consciousness is controlled more from automatic responses and unconsciousness behavior. Dixon contends that when our brain has evolved from unconscious processing to conscious awareness, the brain has developed control mechanisms to filter most of the sensory input. To fully utilize the limited consciousness, and to protect the brain from sensory overload, only a fraction of the sensory input is channeled into the conscious mind. The rest is processed by our unconscious mind. Dixon writes:

It is contended that the principles of physiological summation, inhibition, and facilitation, the notion of interactions between specific and non-specific effects, and the existence of centrifugal-centripetal "gating" loops within the central nervous system, provide all that is necessary for a viable theory, without recourse to any concept that is anthropomorphic or supernatural.

In other words there is physiological basis for the possibility of subliminal perception,

but the research is not thorough enough to prove its existence.

Arguments Against

As with every theory, there are people who argue against subliminal perception. Some are intellectuals, but curiously, the loudest and strongest voices come from the advertisers. The most often used argument against this phenomenon is that it is "inherently unlikely, anthropomorphic, unparsimonious, physiologically inexplicable, and based upon shaky methodology." There are many plausible reasons why people vehemently deny the existence of this phenomenon. According to Dixon, people instinctually fear what they do not know. We live in a country where personal freedom is one of the founding principles of this democratic society. To admit to an unconsciousness is to admit to the fact that there are areas of our brain that we can not control, but others can without our knowledge. The resistance is explicated.

Human Psychology

Before one can understand the subliminal techniques advertisers use to influence the audience, one must understand the vulnerabilities in humans they tap into. The human being is a complex creature. The same complexity that gives us the ability to manipulate objects also makes us vulnerable to manipulation. Once the advertisers find these vulnerabilities (and they have done extensive research), there is little the public can do to defend themselves against the onslaught.

Consciousness

It is generally accepted that we possess various levels of consciousness. For example, the state of consciousness while we dream is different from the state when we are awake. Packard has distinguished the consciousness into three levels.

Conscious-rational level, where people know what is going on, and are able to tell why. The second and lower level is called, variously, preconscious and subconscious but involves that area where a person may know in a vague way what is going on within his own feelings, sensations, and attitudes but would not be willing to tell why. This is the level of prejudices, assumptions, fears, emotional promptings and so on. Finally, the third level is where we not only are not aware of our true attitudes and feelings but would not discuss them if we could.

Advertisers use subliminal techniques to influence the second and third level of consciousness. They target the consumer's fears and desires, manipulating them in ways never thought possible. On the other hand, advertisers present to the consumer on the conscious level a safe, neutral, naturally appealing ad to pacify the consumer's resistance to subliminal advertising. While glancing through an ad, the average consumer block-reads paragraphs and barely notices an ad that they have seen many times. This is prime time in subliminal reception because the conscious mind is uninterested in the potentially offensive subliminal material. Key writes:

To be effective, propaganda must constantly short circuit all thought and decisions. It

must operate on the individual at the level of the unconsciousness. Critical judgment disappears altogether.

Perception

As defined earlier, perception is the brain's reception of incoming stimuli. Some of this perception is conscious, while most of it is unconscious. Key has said our primary sensory input is visual perception. There are over 130 million receptor rods and cones packed in less than one square inch of optic nerves in our retina. Key has said that the eyes do not edit perception and the retina transmits everything to the brain's visual cortex for processing. However, Meyers has claimed that "at the entry level, the retina's neural layers encode and analyze the sensory information before routing it to the cortex." Whichever the case, advertisers had done extensive study on how our brains perceives input and has found that "most print advertising is designed for perceptual exposure time of less than one second." In other words, they are designed for the subconscious mind to absorb completely instantaneously while the conscious mind barely catches the headline. Not everyone perceives an image the same, however. Different perceptions would ultimately affect each person's level of subliminal receptivity. For example, "during a hypnotic trance, many subjects read quite fluently textual material presented to them upside down and even in mirror image-an impossible task for most people while awake." Key later concludes "it appears that individuals trained in linear reasoning, cognitively or quantitatively oriented, have higher [perception] thresholds and also appear more susceptible to substimuli." Advertisers take advantage of the fact that our society and its individual is sexually repressed in order to display sexually oriented subliminal messages. This also partially explains why male genitalia is directed toward males in advertisements, and female genitalia toward females. Men would be more reserved in observing male genitalia while they would readily consciously perceive embedded female breasts. After the image is discovered on the Coke can (see Heaving Breasts), the viewer subsequently notices it every time he or she sees the can. Further, the viewer is usually repulsed by the image. This asserts Key's claim that "artists do not hide anything, viewers do."

Perceptual Defenses

The mechanism that blocks subliminal stimuli from our conscious awareness is part of the brain's perceptual defense system. According to Key, this defense mechanism operates automatically and invisibly. It is a double edged sword. It prevents perceptual (sensory) overload, suppresses anxiety, erases bad memories, prevents disturbing conscious memory associations, and basically keeps you sane. Although it blocks these events from your consciousness, it redirects them to your unconscious mind and these events still influences your behavior. Key says the effects of perceptual defense mechanisms at work include repression, isolation, regression, fantasy formation, sublimation, denial, projection, and introjection. He writes, "To avoid anxiety, overload, we construct perceptual defense mechanism to either limit or distort our perception of reality." Repression seems to be the central perceptual defense mechanism. R. D. Lang gives the definition of repression is when "we forget something, then we forget we have forgotten." Dixon writes, "[The] findings from the intensive study of perceptual defence [sic]... put the validity of subliminal perception beyond any reasonable doubt."

Advertisers take advantage of our defense mechanisms to inject subliminal messages into our subconscious mind. By using cultural taboos, our defense mechanisms block sexually explicit images from our conscious mind but our unconscious mind still perceives the image. We associate the message with the product and when we see this product on the shelf at a later date, our subconscious mind would follow the purchasing command and consequently influencing our conscious mind to buy the product. In the case of repression, the subliminal command hides away in unconscious memory until an event, like the sight of the product on the shelf, triggers it.

Memory

Memory, the mental capacity or faculty of retaining or recalling facts, events, impressions, or previous experiences, is one of the defining elements in being human. Without it, we would be in perpetual infancy, and probably would be living in a class lower than most mammals. However, we do possess this ability to use as a tool and to be manipulated without our awareness. Meyers defines memory recall as "the ability to retrieve information not in conscious awareness." Retrieval cues, such as mnemonic devices, facilitate the recall of information. Since we can perceive subliminal information, we must also have the ability to subconsciously store this information in memory. Like conscious perception to subconscious perception, conscious memory is very limited, while subconscious memory has an enormous capacity but lacks the ability to intellectually synthesize and interpret information. The more emotionalized the data, for example sex and death, the more likely it is to be retained in subconscious memory. Dr. Wilder Penfield, a Montreal neurosurgeon, first empirically determined the existence of a subconscious memory mechanism during a brain surgery more than 40 years ago. He also theorized the brain retains every perception it receives. Penfield supported this theory by performing dream experiments and demonstrated that subliminal messages could trigger conscious behavior from hours to months after exposure. From a business standpoint, this could be very useful in influencing consumers to buy their products. The sexually loaded subliminal message works its way into the buyers' subconscious memory and days later when the buyer goes into a store, the retrieval cues activate the command to influence the buyer. This is why the most influential ads are the ones you don't remember consciously. Key states:

Ads that were recalled consciously was a loser. An advertisement is to motivate a purchase decision-days, weeks, or even months after it has been perceived for even an instant. The job of an ad is to sell-not to be recalled.

Knowing this, advertisers will employ every technique in the book to tempt your drives and desires while provoking your fears.

Drives and Fears

We live in a complex society where our safety and well-being is mostly protected. Most of us feel safe driving down to the local supermarket and back, knowing that we will not be assaulted on the way and that our kids and home is safe from harm. What if our society is taken away, or we are taken away from society. If a group of us is dropped on a remote island, it is likely that some of us will survive and procreate. Coded into our

genetic structure are instincts that will assure the continuation of mankind if we are faced with such a situation. Drives such as thirst, hunger, and sex, will propel us to take whatever actions necessary to survive. Meyers has said, "Sexual motivation is nature's clever way of making people procreate, thus enabling our specie's survival. The pleasure of sex is our genes' way of preserving and spreading themselves." Fear of death, pain, and suffering will warn us from dangerous situations. Since we live in a sheltered society, our primal drives and fears have been altered to fit other forms. These diametrical extremes-the beginning and the end, have been molded into desire for attention, reassurance, acceptance, immortality, and the fear of financial hardship, sexual insecurity, and loss of power. Few of us worry about when our next meal is, and whether we will be living tomorrow. If we are ever thirsty, we approach the nearest water fountain or the vending machine. Despite the fact that our drives and fears are subdued and domesticated, they still exist within us. Advertisers take advantage of this to tempt our deepest drives and scare our morbid fears. Dixon has said that since drives exist at such a fundamental level within us, it is prime target for subliminal stimuli.

In linking the more psychopathological aspects of subjective affective states, with their relevance to drive schema, subliminal stimuli seem more effective and supraliminal stimuli, presumably because they bypass the "censoring" and restrictive role of consciousness.

There are experiments supporting the greater influence of subliminal stimuli on drives. Key says that "once primed by drive excitation, an individual is more susceptible to substimuli." For example, Gordon and Spence, in 1966, has shown that hungry subjects are more subjective to subliminal stimulation. To prime our sexual drives, advertisers will frequently embed the word "SEX" into their ads .

Although our drive for physical sustenance has been greatly alleviated, our drive for sexual satisfaction is at its peak. Therefore, sex is the common denominator for all advertisements. Carl Moog claims that "no other type of psychological imagery hits people close to where they live." Remember, we are in a sexually repressed society. Sex appeals to both the conscious and subconscious mind by attracting attention and influencing their behavior through drive control. Advertisers not only projects how their product enhances the sexual experience, but simply gives permission to the public for sexual promiscuity. Moog writes:

Some of the most pervasive, sexual imagery in advertising is more symbolic than blatant, although the connotations are far from subtle. The imagery sends a message to the unconscious, granting permission to fulfill sexual wishes and points the way to an attractor that can facilitate the encounter.

Advertiser's Arsenal

Armed with limitless resources, advertisers spend millions of dollars on researching exactly how to make you buy their product. Knowing that you have crave sex and fear death, Merit would want to know how their cigarettes appeal to you. Schlitz Brewing Company spends 10 million dollars annually to research how you drink beer. The consumer really doesn't know what they want to buy in the mass market. Since mass

production has taken over, the difference in quality and effectiveness between one product and another of a similar price is nonexistent. Some advertisers still boast the quality of their products, but most have turned to more effective means of advertising—subliminal advertising. In order to do this, they must do some background research. After they find your vulnerabilities, they target specific these areas and fire their shots of subliminal messages.

Motivational Research

Advertisers use motivational analysis or research (MR) to find the hidden needs of the consumer. Old techniques such as polls did not provide the depth and accuracy of knowledge advertisers required to create ads. This research method gained momentum in the late 40's and early 50's. Louis Cheskin, director of the Color Research Institute of America, and Ernest Dichter, president of the Institute for Motivational Research, Inc., claim to be the founding fathers of MR. Dichter says that the successful ad agency "manipulates human motivations and desires and develops a need for goods with which the public has at one time been unfamiliar—perhaps even undesirous of purchasing." Psychology not only holds promise for understanding people by "ultimately controlling their behavior." One of the research techniques advertisers used is depth interviews, either in individuals or groups. The researcher would gather a group of people and discuss a topic, like in an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. The psychologist would lead and direct the discussion so people would reveal their fears and desires. For example, an alcoholic might say something about having nightmares after trying to stop drinking. The researcher would then ask exactly what the alcoholic was dreaming about, and then use his dreams as subliminal images on advertisements. Devious indeed. Another method researchers use is the Rorschach Ink-blot test, developed by Hermann Rorschach. The subjects are asked to stare into formless ink blots and describe what they see. Supposedly, the subjects will reveal their hidden needs by seeing what they want to see. Some more commonly used techniques are Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), hypnosis, cartoon bubble filling, and Szondi test. The TAT is similar to the ink blot test, except real images and potential advertisements are used. Researchers might hypnotize a subject and ask him to tell secrets he would never openly reveal. In the cartoon test, the subject is shown an emotional cartoon with the dialogue bubbles blank, and the subject is asked to fill it in. Finally, the in Szondi test, researchers begin with the assumption that everyone is a little crazy. They show their subjects pictures of people and ask them who they would most likely to sit next to and least likely to sit next to. Each picture, however, shows someone who has a psychiatric disorder: paranoid, depressed, etc. In all of these tests, the subject is asked to project himself. After the advertisers find what appeals most to the consumer, they send the ideas to their graphic design artists to include it subliminal in their ads.

Subliminal Strategies

Graphic design artists have a wealth of tools at their hands to expertly embed subliminal messages into their pictures. At the dawn of subliminal advertising, graphic artists painted on photographs. That was very difficult to do without ruining the picture. Later, with bigger budgets and better equipment, graphic artists used airbrushes to craft their design onto billboards and then take a picture of it. Now, everything is done digitally on

the computer with perfection. Key has said there are six general subliminal strategies: figure-ground reversals, embedding, double entendre, low-intensity light and low-volume sound, tachistoscopic displays, lighting and background sound. Graphic artists can take advantage of multiple techniques to produce the desired effects.

To protect the brain from sensory overload, our perceptual defense mechanism distinguishes every perception into figure (foreground, subject) and ground (background, environment). We consciously notice the figure, while the ground floats around it unless something there brings it to the foreground. Perceptual psychologist Dr. E. Rubin created his famous Rubin's Profiles that can be found in almost every psychology text book today. His profiles, the faces and vases, old women and young women, duck and rabbit, are syncretistic (two sided) illusions. Noticing one set of features, you see one thing, while noticing another set of features, you see something else. Advertisers take advantage of this to paint subliminal messages into the picture's background. They are usually cultural taboos, making it even harder for the audience to perceive it.

Microsoft uses syncretistic illusions in the Windows 95 startup splash screen. It's the perfect place to put subliminal messages-most of us ignore it. Furthermore, if we ever stared into it, we are constantly distracted by the scrolling bar on the bottom of the screen. The intended audience are network administrators, corporate advisors, and home users in the power of buying this software-middle age men in their late forties. The slogan for Windows 95 is "Where do you want to go today?" It implies freedom, power, and control. Taken all this into account, you will find a hippie rocker (Woodstock), black stallion, and an eagle painted in the sky. The most prominent image is of course sex, displayed as the classic male dominant side profile of him kissing the female below. No wonder Windows 95 is so popular among zombies.

Embedding is the processing of hiding one image in the form of another. This is a difficult process but if successful, very influential. Key writes, "Embeds enhance perceptual experience of the picture... Emotionalized, repressed information remains in the memory system for long periods, perhaps for a lifetime." Genitalia is one of the most often used images for embedding. The female torso in the Diet Coke can described earlier is an example of embedding. For alcohol or soft drink ads, advertisers like to depict their drink in either the bottle or a glass, half filled ice cubes and half with the drink, with condensation drops oozing down the sides of the glass. Graphic artists has gotten a lot of expertise at embedding objects in these pictures. The advertisers' favorite image to put in here are skulls and screaming contorted faces. Key has analyzed such an ad and found that these are the nightmares alcoholics have in their sleep. Using a similar technique, I also found a dozen or so screaming faces, skulls, and animal faces in a Seagram's Extra Dry Gin ad. If I only found one face in one ad, it could have come from my imagination. The multitude of similar images in several alcohol ads shows that advertisers must have intentionally put it in.

Many images, phrases, and slogans have hidden double meanings behind them. This is called double entendre. Symbolism can also go into this category. Often, their hidden meanings have sexual connotations. For example Microsoft's "Where do you want to go today?" and American Express' "Do more," when taken out of context, could have

sexual implications. Key writes:

Double meanings appear to enrich significance in virtually any symbolic stimuli. Unconsciously perceived information of this taboo nature ensures a deep, meaningful emotional response, and continued memory.

Another example of advertiser's exploitation of double entendre is Crown Royal's holiday whiskey ad. The whiskey bottle is completely wrapped in a purple bag, with a card that says "To: Dad" on it. At the bottom of the page, big bold letters say "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag." Below this in smaller letters there is the phrase, "Those who appreciate quality enjoy it responsibly." The double meaning behind this ad is the call for Dad to have sex. During the holidays, Dad will open the bag (condom) uncovering his masculinity and consequently enjoys sex even more.

There is a plethora of other symbolic imagery that advertisers take advantage of. Advertisers often use lemons and oranges to portray fertility and women. Ties are a common phallic symbol. Through these symbolic images, can present a seemingly harmless ad while entrenching your subconscious mind with deeper meanings. Moog writes about symbolic imagery:

Symbolic communications bypass the layers of logic and cultural appropriateness and head straight for the unconscious, which is then free to find an equivalence between what is symbolized, in this case sexual arousal...

Another technique advertisers use is low-intensity light and its auditory equivalent low-volume sound. Graphic artists paint faint subliminal images below the conscious threshold of perception but above the unconscious perception threshold. By far the most commonly embedded image is the word SEX. Key has said that "advertisers have indiscriminately sexualized virtually everything they publish or broadcast with subliminal SEXes." Often, graphic artists mosaic SEXes onto textured surfaces or in edges, shadows, and highlights. Just pick up any major magazine, relax, and stare into it for a couple of minutes. You will soon find these SEXes popping out at you. Other commonly used words are FUCK, DIE, and KILL, among other emotionally loaded four letter words. Such subliminal instructions are dangerous indeed. Dixon writes, "It may be impossible to resist instructions which are not consciously experienced."

The final two techniques, tachistoscopic display and lighting and background sound, are used in film and video advertisers. As mentioned earlier, tachistoscopic displays flash images onto the screen in fractions of a second not perceivable by the conscious mind. Another method tachistoscopic displays can use is superimposing the image onto existing image just below the conscious perception level, as Dr. Becker has done. Lighting and background sound adjust the mood of the scenery. In most cases, it reinforces the conscious perception.

Using these research and subliminal techniques, advertisers have great control on the consumer. With motivational research, they have found eight hidden needs in the human psyche: emotional security, reassurance of worth, ego-gratification, creative outlets, love objects, sense of power, sense of roots, and immortality. Also, advertisers

found ten areas of behavior they can subliminal influence: conscious perception, emotional response, drive-related behaviors, adaptation levels, verbal formulations, memory, perceptual defenses, dreams, psychopathology, and purchasing and consumption behavior. Anyone has the potential to influence all ten behaviors, but advertisers of course are concerned with purchasing and consumption behaviors. With their billion dollar budgets, advertisers can use this knowledge to break down any consumer barriers.

Legal Issues

It is obvious that by tapping into the consumer's unconscious mind without their knowledge, the advertisers are engaging in deceptive practices. It is also an invasion of privacy. But, is this legal? The answer is no. There are numerous legislation that prohibit advertisers from using subliminal messages in their ads. The FTC (Federal Trade Commission) Act Sec 5 - "prohibits unfair or deceptive acts or practices in interstate commerce." They also claim they "have primary responsibility for regulation of advertising in this country." However, Key writes that "there appears to be nothing here that would provoke the FTC into a charge of deceptive advertising." The TV Code of the National Association of Broadcasters (IV, 14) states: "Any technique whereby an attempt is made to convey information to the viewer by transmitting messages below the threshold of normal awareness is not permitted." Unfortunately, these laws are vaguely stated yet greatly limited. The most potentially effective regulation is made by the U.S. Treasury Department, Division of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF). It states:

Subliminals are inherently deceptive because the consumer does not perceive them at a normal level of awareness, and thus is given no choice whether to accept or reject the message, as is the case with normal advertising. ATF holds that this type of advertising technique is false and deceptive, and is prohibited by law.

The problem in this legal fight is not legislation, unfortunately. It is the proof. Because of its nature, subliminal messages are nearly impossible to prove. How do you prove to the judge there is a naked women in the Diet Coke can? How do you prove to the jury there are screaming faces hidden ice cubes? In this legal system, you can't. The evidence would be considered circumstantial. Advertisers would of course deny any such activity and claim that if you stare into anything long enough, you will find it. The most substantial evidence is they spending billions annually on research and subliminal advertising. Therefore, it must work?!? Another crutch against us is that no one, including the advertisers, know how the brain works. They just know that it does. Until we can scientifically prove subliminal perception, this quest may be in vain. Key writes: "The rules prohibiting repressed media content have been ignored. None of the regulations have ever been enforced." It seems like we are on losing grounds in this legal battle.

Conclusions

Advertisers have taken a firm hold on our daily lives. Half of their dominating influence can be attributed to their use of subliminal advertising. They take advantage of the

vulnerabilities in our subconscious minds. Using the latest computer technology, they have unparalleled resources to manipulate each image to target a specific weakness in us. Key claims that "subliminal indoctrination may prove more dangerous than nuclear weapons. [Our] present odds appear to favor total devastation." Also, he writes that "once the group or collective unconscious is programmed into what has been called culture, virtually any bill of good scan be sold at conscious levels." Although the first statement is rather bleak and melodramatic, his second point is a good one. Congressmen or private companies can use subliminal messages on TV shows to sway votes one way or the other. The military can muffle outcries against war. The potential for control of the American people is enormous. What can you do to protect yourself? Knowledge. Knowledge that advertisers are trying to influence and control you, and that you can fight back. The next time you make a purchasing decision, ask yourself, "Why am I choosing this product?" Buy a product because of its taste, its quality, and its price. Never buy a product because its packaging looks good or because it is a name brand. Remember, it is the major companies that have the resources to do subliminal advertising. Also, harass your congressmen to make and enforce laws against subliminal broadcasting and printing. Write letters of complaint and gather signatures to send to the advertiser. Eventually, it will work. Despite all this, it really is entertaining trying to see through the advertisements and find subliminal messages in them. It's kind of like beating them at their own game. The next time you go out for dinner, stare into the restaurant's placements or a luscious steamy dinner on the menu. See what you can find.