

Fashionistas, feminist and oil sands advertising

A qualitative analysis of women in oil sand's advertising
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Introduction

- The Alberta Oil sands is a heavily contested area of development in Canada
- Various oil companies such as Suncor and Shell are presently working within the oil sands
- These companies have implemented several advertising tactics in an effort to portray their involvement in a favorable light
- This research examines the advertising campaign by Shell titled "Women in Oil Sands"
- It analyses the messages encoded in the advertisements
- The Shell advertisements shift focus from the environmental discourse of environmental degradation and preservation to social issues specifically the advancement of women
- The Advertising Campaign exemplifies commodity feminism as defined by Robert Goldman

Theoretical framework

- Commodity feminism according to Robert Goldman is the idea that "object and signs are made to stand for and made equivalent to feminist goals of independence"
- Through the understanding of commodity feminism the selected Shell advertisements are examined to see how the idea of feminism is decontextualized and attributed to a commodity that can be purchased.
- Likewise the words in the women's profiles attempt to commodify feminist ideas as being attainable through investments in the oil sands
- In addition the profiles will be further analyzed following the ideas set out by Ervin Goffman in his work on the codes of gender in advertising, as well as explore the theme of masculinity discussed in the work of Mike Gismondi and Debra Davidson

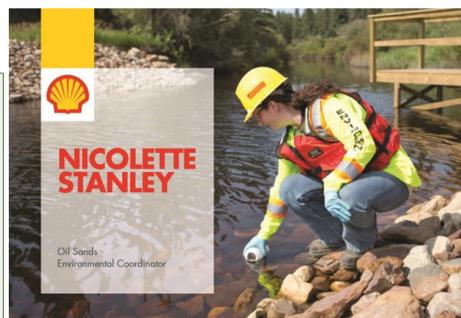
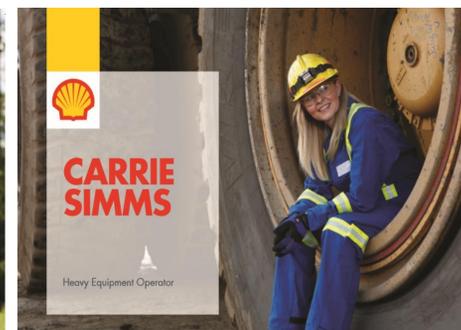
Company profile

- Shell also known as Royal Dutch Shell, is the operator and majority share holder of the Athabasca Oil Sands Project
- Shell has been active in Canada since 1911
- Headquartered in Calgary, Alberta, Shell Canada employs more than 8,000 people across Canada
- The Athabasca oil sands project is one of shell's major project
- The sum of Shell's daily production in both their Alberta mines is 255,000 barrels a day

Methodology

- Four of the advertisements created by Shell were selected to be further analyzed
- Each advertisement was selected due to the varying job types of the women profiled
- Unlike typical advertisements, the Shell advertisements were portrayed in the form of profiles
- Each profile had a section highlighted in red detailing the life of each woman before working in the oil sands. And the large percentage of the profile was highlighted in black detailing the life of each woman as she works within the oil sands
- The advertisements were then analyzed according to the theoretical framework, for each profile a search for words indicative feminist ideologies such as independence, assertiveness, career advancements etc. was conducted

The fantastic four: selected profiles of women in the oil sands



Images of men in the oil sands



A collection of images depicting men working in the oil sands, collected from "Imagining the tar sands 1880-1967 and beyond" by Mike Gismondi and Debra Davidson

Results

1. Men, women and the environment

- According to the work of Mike Gismondi and Debra Davidson, Men are often placed in the context of dominating nature and being in charge of the environment
- In contrast the women in the profiles are portrayed as nurturing, this is evident through their stance and touch. They are often kneeling, crouching, sitting or leaning
- While both have the men and women have machinery and tools men are portrayed as active they are often shown working with the tools
- On the contrary women are portrayed as passive, their tools are shown in the pictures but the tools merely serve as a prop

2. Goffman: codes of gender

The Shell advertising regardless of its feminist intentions do portrays certain stereotypical codes of advertising as described by Goffman.

The themes evident include:

- Function Ranking: "Fashionista? Farm girl? Vice President of Shell's Heavy Oil Business and Joint Venture Management?" the quote taken from the profile of Stephanie Sterling shows that although she is in an executive role, her work is diminished by first labeling her a fashionista.
- Relative size: women are placed in situations that diminish their size.
- Licensed Withdrawal: the women are in solitary situations and often looking away from the camera

3. Family matters

Although the advertisements place women in the context of employment the topic of family is brought up in each profile

- Stephanie Sterling: "Stephanie and her husband have began restoring antique family tractors"
- Carrie Simms: "outside of work Carrie balances her schedule.... With her boyfriend and his little girl"
- Nicolette Stanley: "a family of keen environmentalist"

4. Exception to the rule

- Roxanne Hodgson's profile is the only profile with a woman of a different ethnicity, her profile identifies her as aboriginal
- In the profiles of other women the images of the women at work are the primary images on their profiles, while the image of their social activities outside of work are secondary. The images used on Roxanne's profile are inverted
- More emphasis is placed on her life outside of work instead of her professional life
- Her profile makes little mention of family
- The highlights of her professional life do not involve topics of the environment

Going forward

Further research can examine the effectiveness of this advertising campaign by looking at its success or lack thereof in changing peoples opinion about Shell's involvement in the oil sands

References and Acknowledgment

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