

MASS MEDIA IN SOCIETY ASSIGNMENT II
SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF AN ADVERTISEMENT
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Abstract

This semiotic analysis will examine the cultural context of an advertisement produced by Zillow Group. The analysis will be conducted to understand the audience it was designed for, the signs used, the ideologies associated with real estate in America, the representation of cultural and social values and the symbols and codes used to relay a persuasive message. The semiotic analysis will be conducted through five stages of examination: the identifying and examination of vital signs in the product, a paradigmatic analysis, a syntagmatic analysis, intertextuality analysis and the effect of myth.

Thesis:

This add by Zillow Group confronts the concept of obtaining the American dream, In a easy, and fast way. Its representation of possessions and excess idolizes that the American dream can only be purchased, and your relative success is determined on amount of stuff possessed.

Content Review:

This advertisement in *Men's Health* published in 2018 expresses the needs of the modern family. In the left upper corner, text appears over a grass field, boys playing and a playground. It states, "Four bedrooms, two bathrooms, and one big yard where brothers will forge a lifelong bond, one Full Nelson at a time." Under the boys in white, the text states, "Everything you need to buy, sell or rent, with ease." Next to that statement, separated by a white vertical line is, "Find your way home." Zillow is perched above.

The playground is out of focus but is a large, green, multi-level structure, a sandbox under, and a slide, monkey bars, and two swings. The boys, young and probably twins, are rolling around yelling together. One wears glasses. They are dressed in blue and gray. The grass is perfectly manicured.

Identifying and Examining Important Signs in the Product:

Examining the advertisement, one can infer ideological symbology. The playground is massive, but it is blurred. For many children, this would be the ideal place to play, allowing interaction and imagination to flourish. It is a symbol of wealth. The cost for a structure that size could range from hundreds to thousands of dollars.

The perfectly manicured grass signifies one of two things: either the time required to maintain both the equipment and the property or the economic means to hire help in order to achieve this pristine condition.

The boys are well dressed; one wears glasses, which indicates responsible parental figures with the ability, time, and awareness to supplement the child's vision. They play with free abandon. Assuming that means stressors are not present, this is a safe environment that offers proper nourishment, parental oversight (taking a photo), respect for each other, and no reason to compete for resources.

The connotative inference is that they are from a middle-to-high socioeconomic class. Parental figures participate in a team dynamic, creating a stable household for the offspring, which requires separate rooms for both and excess unused space.

In terms of code, the boys are playing, laughing, and embracing each other, representing love, or, as the text states, "forging lifelong bonds"; that is, they are learning how they might express love.

Other denotive meaning: Zillow Group's logo is a white house on a field of blue, with a Z in the same blue through it. Zillow is an online real estate database company. The logo symbolizes not only the housing market but the ease with which one can zip from home to home using their database.

Paradigmatic analysis:

Symbols selected for review: the play structure, landscaping (self or employed manicure), grass, the boys, clothing, glasses, and assumed parental presence.

These symbols enhance the syntagmatic meaning presented in the text portion of the advertisement. However, regarding paradigmatic analysis, they merely refer to what the ideologized family and home should contain: safety, privacy, and personal space. This is only conceptualized within the middle-high socioeconomic class.

To perform a commutation text, we would substitute, alter, or delete symbols present in this advertisement. Let's delete the well-manicured lawn, then the playground. We may still preserve the boys in play, but we may assume that this family is no longer as well-off. This may represent a family of low-middle socioeconomic class.

If we alter the age of the children and make them older, we can assume that there is anger or disagreement between them. This might lead one to believe there is less parental supervision or a violent environment.

Likewise, if you took the children's clean name-brand clothing and glasses away, we might assume a change in the parental ability to care for their charges and thus represent a lesser idealization of the American dream through the perspective of child wellness and release ownership.

We could delete, alter, or substitute many things in this advertisement to keep the meaning the same. Add a pool instead of a playground. Have girls interact. Include flowers or other manicured features other than grass, and the idea of the American Dream would be intact because this is what this ad is selling us. Perfection in play, a beautiful lawn, and a simpler time.

Syntagmatic analysis:

The syntax of this advertisement is concise. It consists of two sentence fragments and three sentences, one of which is semi-complex.

It states, “4 bedrooms. 2 bathrooms. The big yard where brothers will forge a lifelong bond, one Full Nelson at a time.” Then, at the bottom, “Everything you need to buy, sell or rent, with ease. Find your way home.”

Zillow has made a statement here. What else is required? A large property with at least one extra room. Their own room for the boys. A private bathroom. A large yard. This leaves the consumer with the sense of “everything you need” in the idealized American suburb.

The syntax allows for multiple audiences. Maybe the dream is to have 2.5 children, but buying is not always an option, so they provide an alternative to “buy, sell or rent,” but what is important is, “with ease.” This product is a convenience, presented in a database of a range of options.

Moreover, Zillow makes another assumption – that we are unhappy with what we have, and do not belong where we are, with, “Find your way home.” A statement that if we live in any other kind of home, then what has been presented is incorrect.

The term “Full Nelson” is used to describe a bond forged that will last a lifetime. In application, a Full Nelson is a submission grab that is executed from behind, where the arms

are wrapped under the opponent's armpits, then the hands are secured behind the neck. This move is aggressive and presents dominance through the submissive aspect of the move. How does that forge bonds? For what reason was it used? In the photo, why is this action described but not present? One may find this term inappropriate or unbecoming of equal social engagement.

Intertextuality analysis:

Though no specific image examples will be provided, the context from which one assumes Zillow is referring to the American dream in this advertisement comes from contextual experience. The *Simpsons* are often cited in intertextual analysis. The Simpsons borrow large portions of content from media in many forms. They do represent a family in pursuit of the American dream. Their family consists of 2.5 children, a dog, a cat, and four rooms, one for each family member. They do not have a playground but have a tree house. An exterior place designed for children to express play and imagination.

Family Guy is another show that similarly capitalizes on this dream. A household that consists of a heteronormative relationship that has produced 2.5 offspring. These offspring are similar in age and struggle to acclimatize to their social environments. The household is a traditional single income home where the second partner's hobbies subsume the income: piano, cleaning, and modeling.

Both examples represent a patriarchal household, but that is not what is under analysis. The interactions between the children and the size of the properties are. Both households contain a room for each family member, giving them privacy, dominance over territory, and space to freely express their personality.

The children's interactions are similar to our example as well. All participate in the physical play. Fighting teaches them the strengths and weaknesses of their physical aptitude. Connected to the term used of Full Nelson, there is some form of competition for dominance between siblings. The interactions we have with media content such as the *Simpsons* and *Family Guy* prepare the consumer of this advertisement to have a frame of reference for what it means to be an American pursuing their dream. Both the size of the property needed and the interaction of siblings.

The effect of myth:

The denotive meaning produced from this semiotic analysis is the ease of which one can achieve the American Dream through the use of the Zillow Group's database.

The myth of the American Dream has been manipulated, distorted, and propagated through the entirety of this country's history and in the media's existence in the United States. This propagation exuded its most potent content beginning in the 60s, becoming more intrinsically connected to the concept of Americans' identity to the present day.

The American Dream is never mentioned in this advertisement. Consumers will see the picture and think, "Boys will be Boys," an artefact of the male higharched that has been propitiated through advertisement, cinema, tv programming, news, and educational reinforcement. This statement is one of many intrinsically American syntactic excuses for biggety propped up by the notion of purity and social ambivalence by the American idolization.

Conclusion:

This advertisement did not need to explicitly state what the American dream is. We interact with it on so many levels and through such divers' interactions that no one definition can explain what it is. However, we can specify aspects that are seen as dream-worthy. A house with

“*Four* bedrooms. *Two* bathrooms. *The big yard* where brothers will forge a lifelong bond, one Full Nelson at a time. Everything you need to buy, sell, or rent, with ease. *Find your way home.*”