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Examination of TimeOut New York Ad For The Boys in The Band

Shown on the back of the TimeOut New York magazine article is an image of 9 men, crouched in a loose formation of three rows of three men each all looking forward to the viewer, none of their bodies, minus a few, are directly facing the viewer so most are at an angle. Regardless the deep black of their skin tight suits makes their very formation an unignorable feature in the advertisement. Behind them is a soft gray gradient reaching up the first third of the page where it provides the backdrop for the large words which follow in a old sans serif: SWISH, MARY, Sissy, QUEER, FAIRY, FAGGOT. The first, SWISH, is slightly cut off by the paper itself. Together these two visual elements take up the first two-thirds of the page. Towards the bottom we have the first piece of color, now in magenta reads "THE BOYS IN THE BAND" under which read the names with a smaller first name and a large last name "JIM PARSONS" "ZACHARY QUINTO" "MATT BOMER" "ANDREW RANNELLS" "CHARLIE CARVER" "ROBIN DE JESUS" "BRIAN HUTCHISON" "MICHAEL BENAJMIN WASHINGTON" "TUC WATKINS" "BY MART CROWLEY" "DIRECTED BY JOE MANTELLO". Finally, we have inside a rectangle of a thin white line the words "STRICTLY LIMITED BROADWAY ENGAGEMENT • 15 WEEKS ONLY BOOTH THEATRE • BoysInTheBand.com"

Having covered iconography and typography, we can now examine the underlying messages. Being together, with their dark outfits melding into a solid black visual object one could draw the conclusion that we are to understand these group of men to be allied with each other, of a single mind or goal. One could also deduce by the cut hair that they're disciplined and ready for action. The typography above them seems a bit more obscure, it seems that it could be something that is being said of them, such as an insult considering especially that words like "faggot" in the culture of New York City for 2018 was considered a highly offensive word. Further, we can

deduce from other words such as sissy and queer, and the bright text name that this group has something to do with the LGBTQ community, perhaps they are all a part of it considering that these all have associations in American culture with the gay and trans community.

Further, considering the normal conventions of typography in American advertising I would say that the name of the event would be “THE BOYS IN THE BAND”, there’s no clear distinction given but there are signifiers. The head of one of the men pictured is given priority in the ad over the text behind him, meaning he’s layered above, but further down we see that the pink text is over the black bodies of the dancers, meaning the pink text is above the dancers in layers. This would indicate priority since the advertiser chose not to put it in a different location, the text is also the only colored spot in the entire ad. This, the indication of the men being a group, and the meaning of the large text are all coded in cultural and historical meaning that is assumed of the reader rather than indicated anywhere in the actual advertisement. Another deduction from the ad would be that this is in fact an ad for a “STRICTLY LIMITED BROADWAY ENGAGEMENT” since this relies on an understanding of Broadway and so on which isn’t communicated directly to the reader.

The ad has several strengths and weaknesses, one of the strengths would be that the minimal use of color adds a mysterious air to it making the reader want to look in, and the strong words are bound to draw attention to themselves, themes of provocativeness and perhaps injustice are shown, finally with the solid image of the men we have a sense of power and readiness. This gives to me the sense that perhaps they’re standing strong against the words flung at them. This being on a magazine that’s given strictly to New Yorkers in the city area minimizes the amount of confusion that the audience would get from the cultural understandings assumed of the reader. One questionable feature is how the one black man is placed further down to the right of the image, but I wouldn’t want to draw too many conclusions from it.

One disappointment is aside from the obvious LGBTQ culture and implied musical topic there’s very little being told. The suits look like they might be dancers but there’s no indication of that other than the outfits which, supposedly might mean that there is some target audience that

would be able to deduce even more, but then where does the line for too much implication come in? Upon research by looking at the website, we see that this was in fact a play, the event being the recreation of an older one, the website reads “Celebrating its 50th Anniversary, the fiercely funny and groundbreaking play THE BOYS IN THE BAND was presented on Broadway for the first time ever in a strictly limited engagement”(1) but there is no indication of any of this on the website. It would seem then that this ad is betting on the reader possibly having some experience in the Broadway world to have the intrigue to look at the whole ad, then go to the website and learn what was going on, but is that too much work for the advertisers to assert onto the reader? I would think so, and yet I’m sure that considering that the website also brags about them winning a Tony Award, that this would have had to have been successful, so it’s left rather obscure as to the effectiveness of the ad overall, since the success of the play does not mean the success of an individual advertisement for it.



(2)

Works Cited

- 1) "The Boys in the Band on Broadway." The Boys in the Band on Broadway, boysintheband.com/#.
- 2) "The Boys in the Band." TimeOut New York, 11 Apr. 2018.