



Context – I found this image looking through a web browser, [d1] but it was originally posted on the Montana Meth Project's website, www.montanameth.org. They inspired a national organization, whose site is www.notevenonce.com. The organization publicized this image in various print media, such as billboards, newspapers and the internet. The

images creator claims to target Montana youth ages 12-17. So while the intended audience seems to be teenagers, the myriad media used ensure a much wider actual audience. Given their policy statement, they are focused overridingly on preventing first-time use. This is reiterated by their motto "Not Even Once." Thus, they're focused on potential meth users far more than they're focused on current meth users[d2].

Emotions – The pathemata in this image come in waves. First, the brightly-colored lipstick and the bright white text to the left jump to the audience's attention, setting a lighthearted tone. At a glance, the appearance of the girls themselves offers no challenge to this. They're dressed in casual, colorful clothing and light jewelry. The content of the text: "my friends and I share everything" reinforces the visual components and instills a sense of fondness and amiability, as one draws upon notions of youthful friendships. Then the audience momentarily glances at the worried look on one girl's face (the girl on the left). This evokes slight apprehension and tenseness by stimulating our human capacity for empathy (ex. mirror neurons). This slight change from positive emotions becomes a complete reversal as the viewer reads the broken, blotchy text to the right: "now we share hepatitis and HIV." The viewer feels alarmed and shocked at the calamity that the second sentence implies. As one looks back at the image, the girls' faces tell a new story. The dark circles under their eyes, their greasy, grimy hair, and the blank, mindless expression on the other girl's face are revealed for what they are. We suddenly realize that their physical appearance isn't the harmless result of a couple of hours spent sweating in a club; it's the beginning stages meth addiction. This changes the pathetic effect of their appearance from one that invokes fondness to one of repulsion[d3]. Dismay and hopelessness set in as we realize the tragic fate of these seemingly innocent young girls, now condemned to suffer through deadly, incurable diseases. The lipstick changes its emotional statement as well, as we realize that the harmless gesture of sharing lipstick is being paralleled to the haphazard way that drug users share needles[d4]. Thus, it finally becomes a powerful symbol of broken trust and lost innocence, invoking anguish and dismay[d5].

Behavior – This image, doubtlessly[d6], inspires the viewer to abstain from doing methamphetamines. It also serves to increase awareness of the risks of unprotected sex and intravenous drug abuse, and may encourage current meth users to quit. Principally, though, it's aimed at getting the audience to never try meth—not even once.

Interpretation – The link between the affect and the behavior is rather straightforward. The audience’s feelings of fear and sadness [d7] are intended to translate into a belief that meth is destructive, in general, and sharing needles (or having unprotected sex) is worse. It is suggested, implicitly, that meth use and sharing needles (and having unprotected sex) are inseparable (that is, everyone who does meth shares needles and/or has unprotected sex). This serves to remove a layer of insulation from the feelings of fear and sadness. Viewers can’t reassure themselves that they might do meth, but would never share needles or have unprotected sex. In a nutshell, this image invokes the following interpretation: Meth use leads to IV drug use and unprotected sex. IV drug use leads to sharing needles. Sharing needles and unprotected sex lead to HIV and hepatitis. Hepatitis and HIV lead to death. But all of this happens so instantaneously that the only conscious interpretation would be “If I try meth, I’m going to end up dying because of it [d8].”

Demographics – This image seems to strongly target a specific group: teenage girls. Some obvious indicators of this are the gender of the people displayed in the image, and the presence of the lipstick. The first phrase, “my friends and I share everything”, [d9] when combined with the lipstick, and the girls’ clothes, seems to target mainstream cliques of girls. The girls are both rather thin and not-unattractive, which can be interpreted two ways. The first, and more direct, is that they are focusing on these types of girls—popular, mainstream, conventional, lipstick-lovin’ American girls, as opposed to the introverted, “loner”, counterculture girls that mainstream society probably associates more with meth use. This is consistent with the sponsoring organization’s note that meth has spread rapidly into the mainstream. Another interpretation would be that they are targeting the other group—the loners. Everything in the girls’ appearances suggest [d10] that these are the “popular” girls whose acceptance would be appealing to a “non-popular” girl. This interpretation might have merit because this loner/non-popular/outcast stereotype is perceived as doing meth for two reasons: to be socially accepted, and to lose weight (stimulants cause weight loss). This image offers this group a caution: if you try meth, you may gain friends, and you may lose weight, but you’ll pay for it dearly [d11].

Whether it appeals to the mainstream, the socially outcast or both, the appeal is clearly tailored to the young. Aristotle’s comments on the young, though meant to apply only to men, might be universal. No matter the gender, we youths tend to “look at the good side rather than the bad, not having yet witnessed many instances of wickedness. [We] trust others readily, because [we] have not yet been cheated.” (*On Rhetoric*, bk 2, ch 12, para 2). This image offers a taste of the bad, the wickedness, and those who would cheat us out of our lives [d12].

Gordon,

This is a very fine analysis. See my specific comments above, but overall, this is very good work. Congratulations.

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