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Sheryl Sandberg: A look at Women in the C-Suite

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Sheryl Sandberg: A Look at Women in the C-Suite

Hope COLLEGE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: This study set out to understand the ways that society discursively constructs female leaders in the workforce. Although women currently make up a little under half the workforce, very few women are at top-level positions in hierarchical businesses. This project used semiotic analysis, discourse analysis, and intersectional analysis to deconstruct texts centering Sheryl Sandberg. By deconstructing multiple texts, this study uncovers explicit and implicit messages that persist in the conversation about women in the workplace. This study found that while women are welcome in the workplace today there are still deep-rooted cultural oppressions at work that must be addressed and even affect the career and experiences of women in powerful leadership positions.

Semiotic Analysis

Basic Reading
Woman, dressed professionally
The colors are dark but they allow Sandberg to be in the spotlight
The magazine is honoring this successful business woman; the title states "She is the most powerful woman in cyberspace"
The shadow behind Sandberg is prominent

Analysis
• Dressed as a man would dress=to be as successful, a woman must downplay her femininity
• Her name is found only at the bottom most corner=it does not matter who the success belongs to, only that she is a woman
• Lighting placement sheds a spotlight on her=stands as an outlier and thus society pays close attention to her every move
• Crossing arms=fear, anxiety, and insecurity- not what many would attribute to a powerful business person.
• In a highly edited photo, the choice to retain the shadow begs the question if her shadow is supposed to signal other "shadows" or baggage in her life.
• Writing on the cover is misogynistic and runs counter to the main message, thus subtly chippings away at the core message

Silences:
• Sandberg is celebrated, but this celebration of an individual deepens the silence of the "glass ceiling" still existing in Facebook itself
• Sandberg's race privileges are silenced by spotlighting her gender

Foucaudian Analysis

Identifies power and knowledge within a society by looking at the ways in which everyday discourses limit its subjects while simultaneously granting power to certain groups.

Sheryl Sandberg's TED talk, *Why We Have SO Few Woman Leaders* works in 3 ways:

1.Challenge

Her talk opposes discourses that claim the C-suite is for men only. She encourages women to join and remain in the workforce. Many women feel as though there is no space for them in the corporate world. Sandberg rejects this and insists that there is space and that this space needs to be filled, especially in C-suit positions.

2. Support

Her talk supports postfeminist visions of liberation by emphasizing individual responsibility and ignoring systemic biases. Part of Sandberg's claim is that women do not take as active of a role as they should when it comes to their career. They do not accept a "place at the table" and check out before they are even ready to leave the workforce. Drawing on post feminist concepts, she dangerously claims that women should accept more personal responsibility and intentionally push upwards.

3. Complicate

She challenges women to work harder and smarter in the system that exists.

Her discourse presents her experience as the exemplar even while ignoring the systemic privileges she enjoys. She highlights her gender but simultaneously depoliticizes it, thus embodying a strand of feminism that is docile and centers the self.

Deconstructing Identity: Intersectional Analysis

Intersectional analysis explores how oppression rooted in identities can operate simultaneously and how privilege and power emerge or operate at intersections of oppressions

Where is Sandberg's argument lacking?
• Race
• Education
• Socioeconomic Status
• Sexuality

So What?

Because Sandberg is in the dominant group in the majority of all of these social identities, her perspective is limited. Her solutions, therefore, do not work for women who do experience intersectional oppressions and she ignores them in her solution.

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