

Women in Advertising

...But the body is also involved in a political field, power relations have an immediate hold upon it, they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use...' (Foucault, 1975)

Highly sexualized, alluring images of the semi-naked female body are used in advertising to sell virtually *everything* - *Her* body is manipulated at the will of the advertiser, whose primary function is to sell products by stimulating desires of the audience (*J'hally*, 2012). Her body is; stripped of nature's 'imperfections' (hair in the 'wrong places, blemishes, wrinkles, fat), transformed to reflect the product (alcohol bottles, handbags and anything edible) and placed in a submissive role to men (despite the sexual power she assumes over them).

Some women enjoy, perpetuate, or simply don't take offence to the sexualisation and objectification of women in advertising. They take the view that women are intelligent consumers who can use their sexuality to their advantage. They feel as though they are free to choose how they use their bodies and how they consume products. They believe women as individuals, can identify what makes them feel beautiful, and to what lengths they will go to achieve that feeling, independently of media influence (*The Beauty Myth* – Oprah Winfrey, 2011). While they may recognise, to some degree, that their freedom is limited by capitalist structures that dominate society, they ultimately believe they are making choices for themselves. *Sut Jhally* argues that the dominance of advertising within our culture makes it impossible for anyone not to be affected and influenced– whether they realise it or not (*Advertising and the Perfect Storm*, 2012).

One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in - Marshall McLuhan

The system is so well oiled, appealing to basic human desires of sex, love, freedom and lust, then wrapping them around their own commercial ideals and presenting the whole package back to the consumer as if it were the exact thing they had asked for (*womeninads.com*). This system of manipulation works not just to sell the product but also the ideal, which includes the ideal of feminine

beauty. Jhally explores this type of advertising ‘...where desire and identity would be fused with commodities’ (*Advertising and the Perfect Storm*, 2012) and labels it the ‘narcissist stage’ (1989). In these advertisements, women create an intimate oneness with the product, embodying it with ideals of feminine beauty and sexuality. This creates a desire within in the viewer to reflect the perfection that they witness.

The strategic adversary is fascism... the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us - Michel Foucault

Women, such as author of *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf, are concerned that the constant portrayal of women as objects of sexual desire in the media means ‘women have become victims of a punishing cult of beauty’ (*The Open Mind*). A cult so heavily manipulated by capitalist ideals and digital enhancement that it no longer represents anything real for women to aspire to. A cult that appeals to her senses and dangerously implies that her worth will be judged on her ability to *be* the women in the advertisements (Wolf, 1991). Wolf argues that the women’s movement of the 1970’s, while remarkable to women’s liberation, has still not freed women from the oppressive role to which she has been bound for centuries.

Just at those historical moments, when other material constraints on women loosen, the beauty myth, especially here in the west, tightens to take on the role of social control’ (Wolf, The Open Mind, 2012).

While empowerment through sexuality (and otherwise) is possible for women they must realise they are living in a capitalist, male dominated society (Wolfe, 1991). The advertising industry is ruled by men who are happy to give women the illusion of control, while they enjoy the benefits of a highly effective money maker – the female body.

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