

Rebellions, Sexuality, and Advertising

Advertisements are joined by one common theme, the usage and creation of ideology, or a false view of the world. This usage and creation can be seen in a series of three ads that all employ and create a specific idea of femininity. They portray femininity at an adolescent age as something that entails embracing one's sexuality, but also a rebellion against society. As if accepting one's sexuality is a trespass against it.

The first piece is an advertisement for Kingston memory cards. It features a teenage girl standing in what is presumably her bedroom attacking her skirt with a pair of scissors with text superimposed to the side and at the bottom of the image. (Kingston). The second is an advertisement for Proactiv starring Katy Perry staring into the camera with her chest bare and her fingers at her lips. The words, "I'm not polite. I'm Proactiv," appear over the image in bold capital letters Proactiv). The final advertisement is a "Got Milk" ad with the Olsen twins standing side by side with their arms around each other. The words "All grown up" are located between the two and more text appears at the bottom of the advertisement (California).

The first advertisement quickly reveals its stance on rebelliousness as an aspect of adolescent femininity. The words to the side of the model read, "Don't wear minis, Don't pierce, Don't color your hair, Don't do this... Don't do that... Blah Blah Blah..." The tone of the text is reminiscent of a teenage child mocking or imitating their parent after being told to behave a certain way. The text fits quite well with the model, who is in fact doing a couple of the things that the text warns against. She is wearing a miniskirt (which she is in the process of cutting even shorter), and her hair has a highlight in it. In the background, her room has clothes strewn all about. Clearly, she is rebelling against

something. In this case, she is presumably rebelling against the expectations of her parents. But there is more than just rebellion in play. The model is also quite sexualized. In addition to her miniskirt, her midriff and breasts are exposed. Her hips are cocked to the side, and she is showing off her legs. This all goes along with the rebellious themes in the rest of the advertisement. Her acceptance of her own sexuality is itself a form of rebellion. It is her taking a stance against society and their “blah blah blahs” (Kingston).

Now, there is nothing inherently rebellious about hard drives. However, Kingston attempts to connect these ideas and feelings of sexualized rebellion to their product, a process that Ramamurthy refers to as the fetishism of a commodity (170). Kingston ties this rebellion into their product using the text at the bottom. It reads:

In a world of boundaries and controls, you need space. Space that's yours and yours alone. Space that stays with you and lets you save and carry whatever you need in life: from music to pics and movie clips and more. Which is where Kingston comes in. Easy to use, friendly and reliable, Kingston's drives and cards will always be by your side to expand your world. Get one and get ready to live.

The tone at the beginning is rather confrontational and rebellious and fits in well with the imagery in the advertisement. But the product itself still doesn't fit the idea of rebellion. Purchasing a Kingston hard drive will give the consumer digital space to store files, but it won't give them the personal space to be themselves as the advertisement suggests. So while the ultimate purpose of this ad is to sell product, it does this by using and creating an idea about women and how they should feel as adolescents, and attempts to attach this ideology to an unrelated product.

The second advertisement does this as well, albeit in a slightly different manner. When compared to the first, it uses a lot more sexual appeal with Katy Perry front and center; her chest is bare, with her cleavage in the bottom center of the image, framed by her arms. Her skin is completely clear with no blemishes, and her hair is neatly arranged in her classic style. She is poised and dressed in an alluring manner, too, just as with the model in the first ad. Her fingers on her lips, paired with her gaze into the camera combine to create an aura of seduction that paint a picture of her as a sexual being. In short, she is beautiful, and conventionally so. Her sexuality is on display, as with the Kingston ad. However, unlike the first ad, she is the only thing presented in the image; there is no background, only a simple color. But the sexuality is also a passive one; she is static, not making any moves, but inviting the viewer towards her (Proactiv).

Like the first advertisement, this one uses text to create and show its ideas of rebellion. Superimposed over the image of Katy Perry are the words, "I'm not polite, I'm Proactiv." It says to the audience that Katy's a bad girl (this is also another example of sexualizing), who doesn't play by the rules. But what in the image shows that Katy is rebellious? She isn't throwing a brick through a window, marching on Washington, or cutting up her own shorts like the model in the first advertisement. The only thing that can be rebellion is her sexuality, because it's the most significant aspect of the image. So the rules she's breaking in this case are those expectations set forth by a more conservative suburban White society that expect women to behave themselves and repress their sexuality. This offers a real and tangible sense of rebellion, and suggests that buying this product will let the consumer join Katy in her rebellious sexuality and set them apart from and against the rest of society. This is much like how in the first

advertisement buying a Kingston memory card will give the consumer personal space. The text at the bottom of the Proactiv advertisement reads, "Katy Perry doesn't play nice with acne, she fights back." Obviously, Katy Perry isn't physically fighting with her acne. Rather, the purpose of this text is to further tie the knot between the product and this construct of rebellious femininity.

The third advertisement, a "Got Milk" ad featuring the Olsen twins also contributes to a picture of sexualized adolescent femininity. However, in this piece, the rebellious aspect is not apparent. Like the Proactiv advertisement, the visual focus is entirely on the models, with no background besides a simple color. In this ad, there are two models, the Olsen twins, with the actresses positioned with one on the right, her hands on her hips with her thumbs hooked on her belt loops, and the other twin to the left, one arm wrapped around her sister and the other at her waist. Their heads are leaned to the side with their temples touching. They have milk moustaches, and the words "All grown up" are written between them at about chest level. At the very bottom of the page the signature question, "got milk?" is asked, and slightly above that is a short passage on the Olsen twins and their relationship with milk. The sexuality in this piece is subdued when compared with the other two ads, but the combination of the twins slightly exposed midriffs, their hip-cocked poses, and the milk mustaches offer visual cues towards their sexual availability. The text saying "All grown up" along with the introduction to the bottom passage, "We're not little girls anymore," also add into the idea that these once-child stars are now becoming adults, and therefore beginning to embrace their sexuality. For most people, milk and adolescent sexuality are not too closely related. However, just as with the other advertisements, the creators are

attempting to connect an unrelated product with a social construct readily available in society in order to better sell. In this case, the construct is the idea that adolescent women should begin embracing their sexuality. As the advertisement puts it, they are not little girls anymore. The main difference between this ad and the other two is the lack of a rebellious aspect. While the models are poised in a slightly sassy way, it is not enough to give the piece a rebellious feel as with the other two works. But it does share the main theme of adolescent femininity, and its relationship with its sexuality (California).

The creators of the Proactiv and Kingston ads have used an abstract idea of what adolescent femininity should look like and attached it to an unrelated product. They do this in order to effectively advertise and sell their product, but it has a side effect. The usage of this construct of femininity also contributes to the perpetuation of the idea that adolescent women should begin to embrace their sexuality and, with the exception of the “Got Milk” ad, simultaneously learn to repress it. This is because embracing it would entail an act of rebellion. As Ramamurthy says, “Commercial photographs, because of their profuse nature and because they have never sought to challenge the status quo within society (since they are only produced to sell products) have also aided in the construction and perpetuation of stereotypes, to the point at which they appear natural and eternal” (179). These advertisements do not seek to comment on the pictures of femininity they have set forth; their sole purpose is to use the stereotypes to sell. Kingston and Proactiv are not attempting to challenge the notion that young women should not embrace their sexuality. In fact, it is quite the opposite. They are using and inadvertently encouraging this idea, and capitalizing upon the

accompanying sense of rebellion. The only difference with the “Got Milk” ad is that it capitalizes upon the sexuality itself, and not the rebellion. All three are exploiting these ideologies, for better or for worse.

Works Cited

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Kingston Technology. Advertisement. June 2008

Proactiv. Advertisement. June 2010

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