

Always be a Girl: Always Doubt

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English 1301: Composition I

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July 19, 2020

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Commercials commonly sell their featured product by portraying a predicament and presenting how their product can solve it. These commercials work by showing the customer a product to purchase which will solve the problem instantly and make the consumer happy. Kavanaugh (1986) explains that advertising in the U.S. continually illustrates disconnect in human relationships and people are only seen “uniformly happy and ecstatically fulfilled” when purchasing or consuming the advertised product (Cultural Ground section). Many advertisements indicate to the viewer that no one truly cares about their problems except for this brand or product, that only they can truly lift a person’s spirit because they care. By playing on a person’s insecurities marketers always have a foot in the door because all humans long for a sense of security. Kavanaugh (1986) explains the consumerism’s theory by asking: “Is it better to have people with stable and happy lives or unstable and dissatisfied lives? Is it better for them to have a sound personal identity and fulfilling relationships, or [to] experience a personal and relational emptiness that must be filled in some way?” (Consumption as Fuel section) Advertisers also specifically target kids in this manner because they know that the sooner they deliver this message the more profitable they will be in the future.

“#Like A Girl” by Always (2014) presents a common insult to the viewer and reveals that it can affect young girls’ self-esteem. The ad opens with a scene of the set; the crew is visible as they are getting ready and a teenage girl walks up and stops at the marked spot. The ad then asks the viewer “What does it mean to do something ‘Like a Girl’?” The director starts explaining that she’ll tell the girl different actions and to act them out the first way that pops into her head. The first action is to “run like a girl.” She starts to tip toe in a kind of silly way, and the ad cuts to scenes of other young women, a young man, and a boy doing a similar, mocking, run. The cast

gets told to “fight like a girl” and to “throw like a girl.” The cast continues demonstrating an over-exaggerated bungling display.

Writing then fills the screen tells the viewer that they asked young girls the same question. Ten year old Dakota introduces herself and when she gets asked to “run like a girl,” she starts running in place as fast as she can. Next are scenes showing other young girls running as hard as they can, one little girl even running past the camera; when asked to “fight like a girl” and to “throw like a girl” the young girls give their best swings possible. One little girl, in a pretty red dress, explains that to “run like a girl means to run as fast as you can” (Always, 2014)

The ad then asks the viewer when to do something “like a girl” became an insult. The director asks the young boy if he thinks he just insulted his sister; surprise shows on his face, and he says “No! I mean, yeah, I insulted girls, but not my sister.” The director asks a young girl if “like a girl” is a good thing. The girl gets thoughtful and replies that she doesn’t know if it is a good thing or a bad thing, but that “it sounds like a bad thing. It sounds like you are trying to humiliate someone.” The ad goes on to explain that “a girl’s confidence plummets during puberty” and that “*Always* wants to change that.” The cast gets asked to reflect and suggest advice for young girls. Music starts playing in the background as a young woman explains that “like a girl” is not a bad thing and the viewer sees scenes of the teenagers changing how they act out the actions to do something “like a girl.” Now not just the young girls are seen giving it their all and a chastised young woman wants a chance to redo her take. The music seems to get louder as the ad calls the viewer to action with: “Let’s make #LikeAGirl mean amazing things. Join us to champion girls’ confidence at always.com.” Finally as the music reaches the crescendo a young woman asks “why can’t ‘run like a girl’ also mean ‘win the race’?” It closes while underlining “rewrite the rules” *always* and giving the viewer different options to take action.

At first glance the ad is touching. The message *Always* (2015) is telling is good; being a girl does not equal incompetence. Girls should be encouraged to give their all in whatever they do. *Always* also makes it personal to other viewers when the boy has to consider that he might have indirectly insulted his sister; this makes the viewer consider young females in their lives that might negatively be affected by this insult, and that's where this advertisement plays on the viewer's guilt. Most people have a young girl in their life that they do not want to hurt; telling the viewer that their girls are already being hurt and calling them to action gives the evoked guilt a purpose and an outlet. Of course it is this brand that cares and if the viewer cares they will turn to the options offered by the brand to publicly show their support of the girls in their lives. When the viewer goes shopping for feminine hygiene products the next time, the *Always* brand will stand out to them, and they will be more likely to consider switching brands because "this is the one that cares."

The ad's target audience isn't anyone except young girls; this is apparent once we consider that *Always* produces feminine hygiene products, and girls entering puberty are their future customers. Knorr (2010) explains that advertisers target kids because "[they] know that the earlier a kid learns about a brand, the more likely she will be to buy it later (or beg her parents to buy it)." Girls entering puberty are the demographic that will be using these products for the next thirty to forty years, so of course, the brand wants to introduce itself early. When the ad is seen from a younger perspective the message changes. A ten year old's understanding might be that no one truly cares about the insult, otherwise it wouldn't have taken this ad to make them realize how it might affect young girls, but *Always* cares. The only adults seen in the commercial are the crew, a young man laughing at acting out what "like a girl" means, and a young woman in the end who is telling girls to be proud of who they are. So the only reference

points to what adults think of the insult are the professionals, who are taking action against it and are on the girls' side; the man whom we only see embracing the insult; and then finally the young woman, who wasn't seen in a negative light previously. She is someone the girls can identify with, she represents someone they want to be, and she is delivering an uplifting message that to be a girl is great. All this shows that the ad is really addressing young girls.

Once all these different factors are taken into consideration it is evident who the target audience is and that while the message appears uplifting, it undoubtedly plays on the insecurities of the viewer. By making the adults feel guilty *Always* (2014) opens that market to consider buying their brand. The subtle message that only *Always* cares about young girls confirms how advertisers promote the sense of disconnect in human relationships even in apparently positive commercials. Encouraging girls to question their existing relationships with such messages ensures a new generation to consumerism where fulfillment can only be found with things and other people cannot be trusted with deeper feelings.

References

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