

**Women are Invincible:
PAM Non-Stick Advertisement**

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English 1301: Composition I

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July 19, 2020

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Most of the time, women seemed to be portrayed in the media through beauty, body image, or as sexual objects that are weak and vulnerable. In terms of personality, women are represented as nurturing, sensitive, affectionate, gentle, and dependent. Women have long struggled for equal rights, and many women have aspired to do more than stay home and cook and clean. Currently, advertisements in some way more accurately reflect the true diversity of women's social and occupational roles than earlier time periods, and a recent ad for PAM cooking spray is no exception. This ad works to appeal to women's multiple roles in society and the pressure they face to be superwomen.

In an ad for PAM in *Family Circle* magazine, the attention of the reader is captured by placing a gigantic electric grill on an entire page. On the grill is a grilled cheese sandwich with the cheese melting out of it and clearly sticking to the grill. On the gigantic grill a well-dressed woman appears standing beside the sandwich. She is dressed in a sporty kaki skirt, a red blouse, and is wearing high heel sandals. Her hair is combed back in a ponytail and she has noise proof headphones on. With yellow construction gloves she holds a large jackhammer that reaches all the way to her waist. Her facial expression demonstrates the hard, exhausting work she is carrying out trying to remove the melting cheese from the grill. At the bottom of the page, in the right corner in large letters it reads, "PAM HELPS YOU PULL IT OFF" (ConAgra, 2010, p. 47).

In this ad, ConAgra Foods (2010), the makers of PAM, seek to appeal to working women. Different from other media advertisements that present women as beauty queens, provocative and showing body parts to grab people's attention, PAM demonstrates a woman with character focused on being in charge, acting decisively with emotion at achieving her task. PAM non-stick

spray has been around since the 1960s. In the past, their advertisements showed cookies flying off the cookie sheets, or a fried egg sliding from the frying pan to the serving plate. As more women have been consumed with both family affairs and working away from home, preparing complicated meals for the family seemed to be out of the question. All the hours in the day are hardly sufficient to perform the duties of today's women compared to the 1960s. Life has become too complicated and goals have switched, so that the woman is not only taking care of the family, but also being part of the workforce. Presenting this woman with a jackhammer in her hand speaks to the claim that PAM can help with tough messes, and emphasizes the role of women out of the house as well as in.

Women today demand goods and services that make managing a home easier in order to live up to the myth of the superwoman. Using the words "PAM helps you pull it off" implies a promise to women that they are going to get through their work quickly and easily without the hassle of having food sticking to their pans (ConAgra, 2010, p. 47). The myth of having to be the superwoman in the family circle still prevails, as does the idea that being a good homemaker is always the best and most important thing to do. Women have been sold the idea that a woman is not truly complete or fulfilled unless she personally takes care of the family meals and cleanup.

Women are being encouraged to represent standards of perfection that are beyond reach. Women are more progressive than the 1960, because now they can and do work outside the home, have their own ambitions and money, raise kids on their own, or freely choose to stay at home with their family rather than being forced to. Women now have choices, they are in control of their own destiny, and they have autonomy. Such choice has proved that they are capable of devoting time to their careers, and time to their role at home. Yet, even though women have gone into the work world to bring home the bacon, the home world is still the place

they are expected to do the bulk of the work. It's a well-known fact that working women still do the majority of housework. This ad for PAM offers a relief by implying that it is easier for women to clean pots and grills, and waste less time cleaning after a meal. As noted by Davis (1992), media specialist, ". . . advertisers quickly learned that the most effective way to sell products was not through stories or plain-text facts, but through the creation of image that appealed to the basic human needs" ("The History of Communication," para. 5). The ad appeals to a woman's knowledge that work isn't over even after she clocks out, and her desire to lighten the load just a little bit.

This ad also appeals to ideas of women's equality. This particular PAM advertisement brings back the memory of Helen Reddy's 1972 song "I Am Woman": "I can do anything. I am strong. I am invincible." In the 1970s it paved the way to today's outspoken, independent strong women. This song was the inspiration for women who wanted to do more in life than just be housekeepers. Such strength and independence is depicted in this PAM non-stick spray advertisement. The jackhammer represents a job that is usually considered men's work—construction. The use of this image creates a subtext that communicates the idea that not only can women do any type of work they want to, but also that PAM, and vicariously ConAgra, is a supporter of equality for women.

In her article "Jesus is a Brand of Jeans," Kilbourne (2006) points out,

Advertising performs much the same function in industrial society as myth did in ancient societies. It is both a creator and perpetuator of the dominant values of the culture, the social norms by which most people govern their behaviour. At the very least, advertising helps to create a climate in which certain values flourish and others are not reflected at all. ("Unnatural Passions," para. 7)

This ad reflects society's growth and stagnation at the same time. Beneath the simple picture of a grilled cheese sandwich on a grill, is a larger message. This ad speaks to the desires, pressures, and realities of women. Though women's rights and roles have changed drastically over the last fifty years, women are still faced with the majority of the household chores, the idea that they must do everything, and a subconscious push to go beyond being human and to move into the world of superwoman. This ad for PAM speaks to all of those desires and anxieties and is a good mirror for women in this new century.

References

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