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'And it wouldn't hurt if you stopped eating like a pig...'
Gender Branding with a special focus on the representation of
women in Nike advertising

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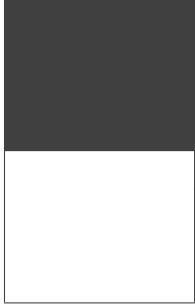
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Wien, den 15. August 2013

Stephanie Hopf



Foreword

During my interdisciplinary studies of Media and Communication at the University of Vienna, the question for an interesting topic for my Master's Thesis appeared more than once. What is obvious is my developing interest in Gender Studies as well as my involvement in many different seminars and research projects within this field: I already wrote my Diploma Thesis in American Studies on the topic of Gender in Performance Art with a special focus on the Austrian artist VALIE EXPORT in 2011. Additionally, my two Bachelor Theses in Media and Publication Studies dealt with the representation of elderly women in the media as well as with the different portrayal of female and male sport stars in advertising. Finally, I visited several Gender Studies-related lectures in the course of American Studies and Media and Communication Studies and participated in a Gender-Queer-Workshop at Saarland University in July 2011, where I presented my Diploma Thesis to Judith Halberstam, U.S. American Professor at the University of Southern California and to Eveline Kilian, renowned Professor in the field of Gender- and Cultural Studies at Humboldt University Berlin.

My involvement in Gender Studies as well as in advertising and my affectation with sports in my leisure time finally converged in a topic for my Master's Thesis which balances all three fields of interest. Within this topic, my research question is how women are portrayed in print advertisements of campaigns by Nike, how gender stereotypes are challenged and what strategies Nike uses to (de-)construct gender norms. The examination of this question is based on print advertisements from 2005 until today, 2013. I chose Nike as the focus of my research because there is already a very interesting thesis about Adidas, composed in 2006 in Sweden, but nothing really similar about Nike.

This study owes much to the generosity of several people. Many thanks to Prof. Hannes Haas for his support and his suggestions during his seminar for Master students as well as in his voluntary seminar for authors of Master Theses where everybody had the chance to present his or her work.

Special thanks to my family and friends for their supportive company throughout the time of my studies, especially during the time of writing this thesis. Thank you very much Brigitte, Alexander, Maxi, David and all my friends who supported me!

Did you ever wish you were a boy?

Did you? Did you for one moment or one breath or one heartbeat beating over all the years of life, wish, even a little, that you could spend it as a boy? Honest. Really. Even if you got over it.

*Did you ever wish that you could be a boy just so you could do boy things and not hear them called boy things, did you want to climb trees and skin knees and be third base and not hear the boys say, Sure, play, but that means you have to be third base.
Oh ha ha ha.*

*But did you ever wish you were a boy just because there were boys, and there were girls and they were them, and we were, well, we weren't them, and we knew there must be a difference because everybody kept telling us there was.
But what was it?*

You never knew. Like you knew that you were a girl (you run like a girl you throw like a girl you girl you) and that was great, that was well, but you couldn't help wondering what it would be like if you...had been...a boy.

And if you could have been a boy, what difference would it have made? Would it have made you faster, cuter, cleaner? And if you were a boy, this incredible bouncing boy, what boy would you have been? All the time knowing no two boys are alike any more than all girls are.

So you wake up. And you learn we all have differences (Yes!) You learn we all have similarities (Right!) You learn to stop lumping everybody in the world into two separate categories, or three, or four, or any at all (Finally!) And you learn to stop beating yourself over the head for things that weren't wrong in the first place.

And one day when you're out in the world running, feet flying dogs barking smiles grinning, you'll hear those immortal words calling, calling inside your head Oh you run like a girl and you will say shout scream whisper call back Yes. What exactly did you think I was?

Text from a Nike advertisement, quoted in Cole/Hribar, p.361.



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Introduction and Background

This research project focuses on the semiotic analysis of print advertisements of Nike campaigns from 2005 until today (2013) and tries to answer the question of how women are represented in these advertisements, how gender stereotypes are challenged and which strategies Nike uses in order to (de-)construct those stereotypes. Additionally, I hope to be able to show what the typical 'Nike-woman' looks like and whom or what she represents. Furthermore, this thesis also aims to answer the question if women in Nike ads are sexualized and subsequently reduced to their body and to their femininity. In the course of this research project, the following questions shall be answered:

- How did communication in Nike print advertisements change from 2005 until 2013, particularly with regard to the representation of women?
- In which way is Nike communicating in print advertisements in order to catch female recipients' attention and to make the brand attractive for women?
- What does the typical Nike-woman look like?
- Does Nike succeed in communicating their core values?
- Which different categories of femininity can be found in the print advertisements by Nike?

This research topic is very important within the field of Media and Communication as brands have been developed from communication. Brands enable a company to be different from another one. As brands are connected with societal values, they develop a certain

momentum within communication and convey meaning which they subsequently communicate to our society. This is where gender comes in. In the majority of cases, a brand communicates only one way: it either addresses female or male recipients. Furthermore, gender is a very important aspect in almost any area of Media and Communication Studies. To merge these two topics, Gender Studies and advertising, promise exciting and absolutely important research in this area.

The first part of this research project deals with a short history of the Nike Company, what Nike is representing today and what the brand Nike is trying to communicate.

What follows is a theoretical background chapter, mainly based on literature research. Key aspects within this chapter are first and foremost the concept of branding, the definition of a brand, the different focus points of branding and sub-branding as well as what it means when to gender a brand. Further aspects are Gender Studies, including definitions and explanations of focus points such as gender identity, stereotypes and gender role portrayal. The representation of the female body in advertising in general is briefly discussed and leads into the discursive representation of women in Nike advertisements. Afterwards, an introduction of the concept of advertising follows. A brief definition of the term leads to the concept of representation which is a very important aspect within the field of advertising. Next, an introduction to Cultural Studies, including a description of the famous Encoding-Decoding Model (Stuart Hall) as well as the Circuit of Culture (Du Gay), is given. The next major topic focuses on theoretical key aspects of semiotics, the basis for all analysis methods within this research project.

The third chapter in this main component introduces the method of analysis and subsequently the images which will be analyzed. This method is based on the semiotic analysis of visual communication (Friedrich/Schweppenhäuser). In a similar study on gender-branding in Adidas advertising campaigns¹, a framework of four major points of data analysis was developed: content, form and material, comparison and analysis of the images. This research framework seemed to be highly relevant for this current research project and was,

1 Berntson/Jarnemo/Philipson.

therefore, adapted to the topic of the representation of women in Nike campaigns.

After elaborating on the results of the analysis and interpreting them in the context of the published literature, the final part of this thesis focuses on answering the research questions, drawing conclusions from the results and establishing a final resume which also includes the answer to the question - what does the typical Nike-woman look like?

The text in italics above, taken from a Nike advertisement in July 1992, was chosen as the initial point for this research project as it introduces exactly the zeitgeist in which Nike applied with their women's sub-brand. The ad shows a black and white photograph of a young, white girl, sitting on a bench, wearing an oversized sweater, her hands gripping a softball. The ad was made at a time where female participation in sports was not at all fully accepted, a time which suggests ignorance, discrimination and unfair treatment of women in sport surroundings. It tells the story which could be a lot of women's story: the story of a woman who is treated differently from a man only because she is a woman; the story of a woman who is not able to do 'boy things' because women just do not do boy things in a world which is not meant for them. This world is a male world where men are participants and women are spectators.

If you think that this world does not exist anymore, that this world has changed completely and that it treats women equally to men, then you are wrong. The treatment of women has improved, like nearly everything somehow improves over time. But if we have a look at the latest report from the Women's Sport Foundation, focusing on the representation of women in the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, we are disabused:

While the United States exceeds many countries with 37 percent female representation on the USOC Board of Directors, eight of the 29 established U.S. National Governing Bodies (NGBs) are below the 20 percent threshold ranging from zero to 18 percent female representation - Judo, Cycling, Triathlon, Table Tennis, Canoe/Kayak, Wrestling, Taekwondo and Soccer - and of 58 executive leadership roles in the U.S. NGBs, only six positions are held by women (10 percent), down from eight positions (14 percent) in 2008 (Carr, Kasie, Press Release, Women's Sport Foundation).²

It is a fact, still today, that women are underrepresented and treated differently from men. I, therefore, see the desperate need for a research topic relating Gender Studies and the representation of women in advertisements. In the following chapters, I will see the female body as mediated, conceived, sensed and torn apart - the body as an object in a phallographic society where women still exist as constructs of the male gaze, a society which is created by male predominance.

Cole and Hribar claim in 'Celebrity Feminism' that Nike rewrote feminist history by stabilizing the pro-women position and defining themselves as alternatives to other brands in the sport surrounding.³ Indeed, it might be true that Nike starts off for a new tradition, a tradition which hails women, which defines women as the new generation. A very good example for this is the running initiative 'Club der Töchter', an international get-together exclusively for women who have fun running, brought into being by Nike. The slogan of this movement is, of course, 'just do it', 'go out, have fun and run'. This 'club' is a community of young women who are interested in the participation of races such as the Austrian women's race, which takes place every year in May, as well as those who just have fun running. With this initiative, and with similar initiatives in other countries, Nike succeeds in motivating women all around the globe to work on their body and to have fun doing it. Still I cannot fully agree that Nike succeeds in all ways. As I have learnt throughout my studies to always elaborate critically on the world, one sentence came into my mind when exploring the Facebook website of Nike's 'Club der Töchter': 'der Club der

2 The Press Release was found on the Website of the Women's Sport Foundation on May 21, 2013: King.

3 Cf. Cole/Hribar, p.362.

Töchter is die Lauf-Community nur für junge Frauen.⁴ With this statement Nike clearly shows that only a specific type of women is allowed to become a member of this club. Only if they achieve a certain privilege, the privilege of being young, they are accepted as a member. Although this initiative is made for women, it is only made for a chosen subset of them. Such expressions make me think and I wonder if they make other people think, too.

I chose 2005 as starting point for my research as this year marks a dramatic twist in the history of Nike advertising. From then on a certain trend for improvement in how women are portrayed in their advertising campaigns can be realized, and this is exactly what I would like to show in my thesis: if, and if yes, how the representation of women in Nike advertisements changed from 2005 until today.

4 'The Club of daughters is a running community only for young women': n/a, *Club der Töchter Facebook page*.

2

Chapter 2

Nike - Just Do It

Before there was the Swoosh, before there was Nike, there were two visionary men who pioneered a revolution in athletic footwear that redefined the industry. (<http://nikeinc.com/pages/history-heritage>)

2.1 A Short History of the Company



Figure 1: Philip Knight; Co-founder and chairman of Nike, Inc.
Source: <http://www.nike.com>

Nike was founded in 1971 by Phil Knight, a talented distance runner from Portland, and his former field coach Bill Bowerman. The encounter of the two men at the University of Oregon built the cornerstone for the success story of the company in the figure of the swoosh. Phil Knight supposed to break Adidas' leading position on the sport shoe market by importing cheap shoes from Japan. The deal with Onitsuka Tiger (today Asics) proved

to be successful and in 1962, the first delivery of 200 pairs of shoes arrived in Portland, Oregon. Founded on a handshake between Knight and Bowerman two years later, the label Blue Ribbon Sports was born and the foundation for what would later become Nike has been established.⁵

In 1965, the first employee, professional runner Jeff Johnson, was appointed to the start-up company. He supported the two half-time workers Knight and Bowerman by creating print- and marketing material, designing the first brochures and even several drafts of Nike shoes. In 1971, Johnson came up with the all-changing name: Nike, deriving from Nike, the Goddess of Victory, was born. At that time, nobody fully appreciated the impact of this moment for the company's future. In retrospect to the early company's days, one can read this as a key moment to Nike's product design.⁶

The relationship with Onitsuka Tiger fell apart in 1972. By then, Nike was strong enough to build up its own brand of athletic shoes. The brand mark today, first and foremost known as the 'Swoosh', was designed by Carolyn Davidson, a graphic design student at the University of Portland, in dependence on the Goddess Nike's wings.⁷ Nike's success accelerated with the jogging boom in 1972. One example may be the influence of the Olympic Marathon performed by Frank Shorter which resulted in the growth of a societal necessity for physical activity and health-awareness. At a time when office jobs were becoming more prevalent, outdoor physical activity became more and more important and, resulting in the slipstream of the running movement, Nike was able to gain an increasing position in the sport shoe market.⁸ By 1978, Nike went from brand to company name.⁹

With a new logo, a new name and a new design innovation, all the Nike line required was an athlete to endorse it. Fittingly for the company founded by Oregonians, Steve Prefontaine, a young man from the small coastal town of Coos Bay, Ore, was found. He had never lost any race at his home track over the one-mile distance, and had quickly gained

5 Cf. Bieber, p.23ff.

6 Cf. Bieber, p.30.

7 Cf. Bieber, p. 116.

8 Cf. Bieber, p.34ff.

9 Cf. Cole/Hribar, p.359.

national exposure thanks to cover stories in magazines such as Sports Illustrated and his fourth-place finish in the 5,000 m at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. In Phil Knight's words, Prefontaine became the 'sole of Nike' (<http://nikeinc.com/pages/history-heritage>). Both the technological and qualitative advances expressed themselves positively in Nike's increasing sales figures. In 1980, Nike quoted a 270 million US Dollar turn-over rate.¹⁰

By the mid-1980s, Nike had slipped from its position as the industry leader, partly because the company had badly miscalculated the aerobics boom. Fortunately, Nike's comeback was made possible by Michael Jordan in 1985 who initiated the beginning of a new era of the Nike swoosh. Nike was revived by an advertising campaign together with the basketball star with his own hallmark and clothes in the colors of his NBA association. By then, Michael Jordan was staged as a godlike creature, the Nike swoosh was omnipresent and the slogan 'just do It' became a tagline empowering a huge series of advertisements. The slogan stands for handicaps and impediments 'that keep people from the experience of transcendence' (Goldman/Papson, p.19). By the end of the decade, Nike had regained its position as the industry leader and has since never given it up again. In 1990, Nike, by then the world's foremost sporting and apparel company founded its world headquarters in Portland, Oregon, a place which also became the first home to a new retail phenomenon called *Niketown*.¹¹

2.2 Nike Today

With 363 U.S. retail stores and 393 non-U.S. retail stores, 'Nike is the largest seller of athletic footwear and athletic apparel in the world' (Nike Annual Report 2011, 3). The company employs more than 38,000 employees worldwide.¹² Almost all products are manufactured outside of the United States by manufacturers located in 33 countries, and a remarkable sum of 10.3 billion US Dollars of future and advance orders for Nike athletic

¹⁰ Cf. Bieber, p.35ff.

¹¹ n/a, *History and Heritage website*, Cf.

¹² Cf. n/a, *Nike Annual Report 2011*, p.7.

footwear was scheduled for 2011.¹³ Considerable emphasis is placed on the segments running, basketball, football, soccer and training which is divided into men's and women's training.¹⁴ Additionally, footwear designed for baseball, cheerleading, golf, lacrosse, outdoor activities, skateboarding, tennis, volleyball, walking, wrestling, and other athletic and recreational uses are marketed.¹⁵ These facts show beyond doubt that Nike is leading a new generation. This success is being commented on the Nike Website with the company's overall mission:

'TO BRING INSPIRATION AND INNOVATION TO EVERY ATHLETE* IN THE WORLD *IF YOU HAVE A BODY, YOU ARE AN ATHLETE.' (www.nike.com)

The Nike group owns several different brands: Converse, Hurley, Jordan Brand and Nike Golf. However, this thesis at hand will focus on Nike exclusively. Moreover, the company is divided into ten different categories: Action Sports, Athletic Training, Basketball, U.S. Football, Soccer, Running, Sportswear, Tennis, Women's and Digital Sport. A fairly new invention is Nike Fuel, a device counting all the users moves of his/her athletic life - 'The Ultimate Measure of [...] Athletic Life'.¹⁶



Figure 2: Nike: 'The Swoosh'

Source: <http://www.nike.com>

¹³ Cf. n/a, *Nike Annual Report 2011*, p.5.

¹⁴ n/a, *Nike Annual Report 2011*, Cf.

¹⁵ Cf. n/a, *Nike Annual Report 2011*, p.3.

¹⁶ Cf. n/a, *Nike website*.

2.3 Nike - The Brand

The unparalleled success of Nike, one of the world's foremost sporting goods and apparel companies, is illustrated by the record fiscal growth of the company during the last 20 years and the pervasive presence and recognition of its swoosh logo around the world. (Helstein, p.276)

As already discussed, the company belongs to the most successful and most famous brands in the world and their logo, the swoosh, is omnipresent. Nike's label is cult. It does not only stand especially for sport shoes, or for sport in general, but instead it has a true mission: a mission that tells the consumer to 'just do it'; to try what he or she has been dreaming of for so long and to truly manage to do it. According to Goldman and Papson, these three words do not only represent an advertising directive; instead, they represent a whole way of life.¹⁷

The logo's derivation from Nike, the Goddess of Victory, underlines and emphasizes this mission. The same as the Goddess' wings, the Nike swoosh seems to flap its wing like the winner of a race. It is a myth and it makes this myth possible and alive: Nike, the Goddess of Victory - Nike, the brand of success.¹⁸ The Nike swoosh is one of the most recognizable brand icons in our society. The two main nouns behind it are movement and speed. As Goldman and Papson put it: '[It] is a commercial symbol that has come to stand for athletic excellence, a spirit of determination, hip authenticity, and playful self-awareness' (Goldman/Papson, p.1).

Nike's partnership with their advertising agency Wieden + Kennedy (W+K) is legendary. The main work is performed in their office in Portland, Oregon, which is one of the largest private advertising agencies in the world and best known for their work with Nike. With the slogan 'just do it', Nike started one of the most successful advertising campaigns ever. As an incarnation of this slogan, Michael Jordan supported this mission statement. Whatever the six fold NBA-champion intended to do on the basketball field, he did it. In the ease of his being, he seemed to have shouted the three golden Nike-words into the audience in

¹⁷ Cf. Goldman/Papson, p.19.

¹⁸ Bieber, p.118.

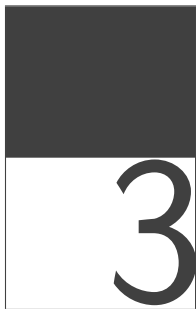
order to encourage everybody to do the same.¹⁹ But why is it so easy to identify with this slogan? The text for the Greatness campaign (July 2012) gives an answer:

Somehow we've come to believe that greatness is only for the chosen few, for the superstar. The truth is that greatness is for all of us. This is not about lowering expectations; it's about raising them for every last one of us. Greatness is not in one special place, and it's not in one special person. Greatness is wherever somebody is trying to find it. (<http://www.wk.com>)

'Just do it' addresses people in their everyday life and encourages them to put their dreams into practice and to overcome barriers in their lives. Like Goldman and Papson express it in *Nike Culture*:

Nothing touches the heart of traditional American ideologies of individual achievement more than sports conceptualized as a level of playing field or competition, because when the playing field is level, the individual may prevail. (Goldman/Papson, p.20)

19 Cf. Bieber, p.122.



Theoretical Background

3.1 The Concept of Branding

A great brand is a compelling, never-ending story that recognizes there are fundamental human truths and needs that it can uniquely serve. Great advertising campaigns [...] bring the brand to life. (Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.315)

3.1.1 What is a Brand?

Philip Kotler defines a brand as follows:

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. (Kotler, p.443)

Kotler's definition points out that a brand can be a name, trademark, logo or any other kind of symbol. Essentially, a brand is a seller's promise to 'constantly deliver a specific set of features, benefits, and services to the buyers' (Kotler, p.443). Different from the meaning of a product, which is a physical object and can be copied by a competitor, a brand is associated with values and is, therefore, unique. According to Kotler, brands can convey up to six levels of meaning: attributes, benefits, values, culture, personality and user. If the brand's meaning is understood across all six levels, it is said to be a deep

brand.²⁰ Transferring Kotler's concept to the Nike brand, it can be assumed, that Nike is a deep brand as it is. First, it brings to mind certain attributes, such as very well produced, high value, stylish, sporty, fashionable, and up-to-date and so on. Second, it has specific benefits for the consumer. For instance 'very well produced' could translate into 'I do not have to buy new gear every year'. The attributes stylish and fashionable might translate into the emotional benefit of looking good when wearing Nike gear. Third, the brand has certain consumer values. Nike stands for sport, exercise, body health, strength and power. Additionally, it represents a certain culture: youth culture, fitness culture, health culture. Nike can also project a specific personality. If the brand were a person, he or she would rather be a famous athlete representing all the brand's values, like Michael Jordan did for instance. He or she would then work as a testimonial. Last but not least, the brand suggests the kind of consumer who buys the product. Nike's target audience hereby is clearly the 18-30 year old fitness society. In Kotler's perspective, the most enduring meanings of a brand are its values, culture and personality as they clearly define the brand's essence.²¹

In terms of the composition of a brand image, Esch suggests that a brand image should always be concrete rather than abstract. Concrete brand images such as Apple or Nike, can be saved permanently after only few liaisons with the image. Additionally, they arouse concrete associations which result in the positioning of the brand image. Esch moreover points out the importance of the shape of the brand image. Acute-angled images such as the Nike swoosh for instance, appear dynamic and powerful.²²

Jean M. Grow defines the concept of branding in 'Stories of Community' in a more cultural sense:

20 Cf. Kotler, p.443f.

21 Cf. Kotler, p.444.

22 Cf. Esch et al., pp.119-121.

Branding, applied through advertising and marketing, is a means of defining products. Advertising is the structural tool that builds brands and symbolically defines products as associated with those brands. In this way, the actual products recede into the background as the brands become enmeshed with the cultural and social referents embedded within the ads. The more embedded cultural and social referents the more significance is attached to their meaning. (Grow, 'Stories of Community', p.4)

In this sense, brands are 'essentially living things, sacred entities, and emotional promises' (Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.321). In short, 'brands are the sum of all impressions, including their emotional promises and consumers' experiences of them as sacred entities and living things' (Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.314).

3.1.2 Branding and Sub-Branding

Schweiger and Schrattenecker provide a more advertising-based definition of branding. To them, a brand is a 'label' or 'marker'. Branding serves to build the brand name as well as the brand logo and the visual presentation of the product. These three elements then build the 'magic branding-triangle' by Langner and Esch. The goal of branding is to achieve the following requirements by efficiently presenting the brand: intermediation of relevant associations, concise composition and the ability for reverse discrimination.²³

According to Jean Grow, successful branding begins with a parent brand, from which sub-brands can then be developed. In Nike's case, the men's brand can be identified as the parent brand with extensions for many different types of sport as discussed previously in the second chapter. 'A parent brand defines the sub-brands, acting as endorser' (Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.314). Before the launch of the women's sub-brand in 1990, Nike was exclusively reflected as masculine, emotional and powerful throughout the media landscape. Campaigns for the parent brand were full of 'masculine signifiers from sweating, muscle-bound male athletes, to body copy predicted on vigorous competition, with the 'just do it' tagline as the ultimate signifier of this masculine promise' (Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.314). Until then, the women's sub-brand was virtually non-existent. In Grow's

²³ Cf. Schweiger/Schrattenecker, p.87f.

words, branding is rooted in storytelling²⁴ and this is exactly what Nike is: an organization living on stories. The only problem is that these stories tend to be of a masculine quality and that Nike is subsequently shaped by masculine branded storytelling. According to Grow, the 'just do it' tagline should be a powerful connection between the parent brand and the women's sub-brand. But as the articulation of this strong slogan was framed by a culturally bound, gendered separateness in the women's ads, with images that were distinct from the masculine paradigm, it is assumed that the tagline itself also separates the sub-brand from the masculine parent brand.²⁵ The proof of this assumption as well as the assumption itself is complex and difficult to elaborate on and will, therefore, have to undergo a close analysis of the problem. This will be examined more closely in chapter 5, the analysis chapter.

3.1.3 Gendering a Brand

It is common sense that many products are associated with either the male or the female sex. In former times, items for the household were associated with women, whereas items for working outside in the garden were associated with men.²⁶ This might be slightly different today, but the basic associations are still prevailing in our society. If not items for the household or for working outside, there are products like slim cigarettes or, more basically, hair foam or soaps which are targeted specifically to women and which have in fact very little male acceptance. One example is the use of color in promotion. The still most obvious example is hereby the usage of bold colors for boys and pastels for girls. To say it in Alreck's words:

24 Cf. Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.314.

25 Cf. Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.315.

26 Cf. Costa, p.3.

Colors, textures, patterns, shapes and sizes all have gender connotations. On the feminine side are lighter colors and pastels; soft, pliable surfaces; blended or natural patterns; smooth rounded shapes; smaller sizes; and lighter weights. By contrast, deep, dense, colors; hard, rough surfaces; solid or geometric patterns; straight and sharply angular shapes; larger sizes; and heavier weights all have strong masculine connotations. (Alreck, p.15f)

According to Pamela Alreck, gendering a brand means to associate its image with a sex-role stereotype, and thus providing the brand with a masculine or a feminine image and identity. With gendered products or brands, the basic characteristics of the goods are accepted by both males and females, but the visible design features, advertising, promotion and distribution of the product are modified to include symbols which clearly identify the product as exclusively for either males or for females. The words and symbols which attach a male or female image to the product or brand, very often depend on society's perception of sex roles and stereotype models of each sex. In other words, they often depend on what each of us indicates as what a man or a woman should do or be like in today's society. Therefore, the contemporary sex roles ascriptions are 'descriptive'.²⁷ In Alreck's words, gendering is accomplished by doing two things. First, the product or brand is designed in a way in which it addresses the stereotypical man or woman specifically. Secondly, the product or brand is provided with a gender image which strongly associates it with the masculine or feminine sex role stereotype with the means of advertising and promotion.²⁸

In her article 'A New Formula for Gendering Products and Brands', Pamela Alreck not only explains the process of gendering a brand. She also clearly outlines so-called sex role requirements for each sex in our society. In her opinion, a 'real' man has to be strong, independent, decisive, tough-minded and be able to earn living and support his family. A woman in contrast has to be nurturing; she has the responsibility for her children as well as for their home and has to act like a lady. These factors discussed present the ideal model of a man and a woman and how it shall appear in advertisements. Additionally, she claims that presenting a sex model different from the ones discussed above, would not only prevent the ad from being successful, but it might as well have negative effects on the brand itself.

²⁷ Cf. Alreck, p.6ff.

²⁸ Cf. Alreck, p.11.

In her words, 'it would be better not to gender the product or brand than to violate one of these main sex role requirements while doing so' (Alreck, p.8). I have to admit that I do not fully agree with this statement. In our society today it is important to challenge stereotypes, to deconstruct them and to finally dissolve them. If this stereotypical thinking is not changed, our society will not change and vice versa. It is important to provoke society by means of working against predominant stereotypes such as the sex roles requirements introduced by Alreck. Especially advertising should play a dominant role in this context as it is often said to be society's megaphone.

3.2 Gender Theory or: The Art of Gendering

If gender is a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not 'do' one's gender alone. One is always 'doing' with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary. (Butler, *Undoing Gender*, p.1)

3.2.1 Gender Identity, Stereotypes and Gender Role Portrayals

In order to understand the concept of gender identity and gender stereotypes, one has to first understand the basic meaning of gender. Definitions by several gender theorists will clearly illustrate this phenomenon in the following section.

The most important aspect within Gender Theory is that categories such as sex and gender, which are closely related to identity, are not considered stable and fixed categories. According to Fischer, the term sex refers to biologically based denominations of male and female whereas gender expresses psychological features associated with sex.²⁹ Margaret Hogg emphasizes the multiplicity and fluidity of gender by describing the term as deriving from socialization and social contexts and therefore being a mutual script for male and female.³⁰ Similar to Judith Butler's approach, Wörsching sees gender as being 'more than

²⁹ Cf. Fischer/Arnold, p.164.

³⁰ Cf. Hogg/Garrow, p.161.

just a 'role' to be cast off like an old garment' (Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.347). This definition implies that social structures are prevailing, which not only define men as the opposite of women, but which also take women's subordinate social roles to those of men into account.³¹ Finally, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, two outstanding U.S. American theorists in the field of Gender Studies, have stressed repeatedly that sex and gender are socially constructed and therefore not stable or fixed at all.³² To them, they are discursive constructions of ourselves, of how we identify with the world and, subsequently, with our bodies.

The category of 'sex' is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a 'regulatory ideal'. In this sense, the, 'sex' not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce - demarcate, circulate, differentiate - the bodies it controls. Thus, 'sex' is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, pp.1-2)

Gender becomes coherent as soon as it is seen as a certain norm. The same norms have to be practiced over and over again, bearing in mind that there is always change going on. In Butler's words,

31 Cf. Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.347.

32 Cf. Butler, 'Performative Acts', p.157.

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.179)

Thus, Butler performs gender as a 'corporeal style, a way of acting the body' (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.256). Gender identity is demonstrated by means of the performance as a set of acts which are unique and special every time they are performed. Gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity, and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way. That expectation, in turn, is based upon the perception of sex, where sex is understood to be the discrete and factic datum of primary sexual characteristics. This implicit and popular theory of acts and gestures as expressive of gender suggests that gender itself is something prior to the various acts, postures, and gestures by which it is dramatized and known; indeed, gender appears to the popular imagination as a substantial core which might well be understood as the spiritual or psychological correlate of biological sex. If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute identity. In other words, all our gendered acts - the way we behave, we speak, we see the world - help us to represent our multiple selves that are so often represented in these performances. For Butler, identities are performative and discursive at the same time; they are discursively constructed by society. Therefore, identity is neither a universal entity nor a fixed and stable possession. (Hopf, p.27ff)

Fischer describes gender identity as characteristics that have been associated with female

This part is excerpted from my diploma thesis which was submitted at the University of Vienna in June 2011 within the field of gender and performance studies. I took the chapter about gender identity from this thesis as I used my own words there and I am confident that I would not be able to find any better wording to explain the complex phenomenon of gender and gender identity for this thesis at hand. Additionally, the works cited are classical theories and will therefore not change their content within this fairly short time. If the reader of the present thesis is interested in further details about the relation of gender and performance art, I would warmly recommend the above 2011 thesis.

behaviors, such as emotionality and sensitivity. These characteristics have been described as the 'essential psychological attributes distinguishing males from females' (Fischer/Arnold, p.166). This does not mean subsequently that men are necessarily identified by the absence of female characteristics and vice versa. Just bear in mind the phenomenon of androgyny which focuses on individuals who feature both male and female characteristics in relatively balanced proportions. The most famous example of our time is probably Andrej Pejčić, an Australian androgynous model presenting both male and female fashion. In advertising, individuals with either a higher level of masculinity or femininity are chosen for a specific product. Worse even, some advertisers find sex to be superior to gender identity, meaning that they consciously choose either males or females to represent their brand or product.

As the aim of this thesis is partly to advise the reader on gender stereotypes and to challenge and deconstruct these stereotypes adherent in our society, it is important to be responsive to this phenomenon at an early stage. Gender role portrayal in advertising has persisted for many years and so has gender stereotyping. According to Costa, gender roles are the most interesting roles associated with statuses. Their content varies between the different societies and is composed of many culturally differentiated features.³³ What these culturally distinct societies have in common is that they gender their brands with the help of sex-related stereotypical messages and portrayals. In doing so, they are, or at least should be, fully aware of the potential effects of this product and brand gendering.³⁴

Scholars such as Eisend and Alreck for instance claim that gender stereotyping in advertising has decreased over the past few years. According to Alreck, due to social, economic and technical changes as well as the Women's Movement, sex role portrayal has changed dramatically over the past few decades.³⁵ I have to admit that I do not fully agree with this statement as gender stereotyping always depends on gender-related developments and value changes in our society. At least it can be said that as the masculine and feminine sex roles are more and more overlapping in advertisements, it becomes more difficult to find either exclusively male or female images. But this is something which will be discussed later

33 Cf. Costa, p.5.

34 Cf. Alreck, p.26.

35 Cf. Alreck, p.6.

in the analysis of advertisements and campaigns performed by Nike. The same as Fischer, Eisend also sees advertising as frequently using gender roles in order to promote brands and products.³⁶ To say it in his words, 'stereotypes are a set of concepts pertaining to a social category [...]. Gender stereotypes are beliefs that certain attributes differentiate women and men' (Eisend, p.419). By stereotypes, individuals are reduced to their characteristics, to their attributes and/or to their appearance, features, these individuals are very often not responsible for as most of them are given by nature. Stuart Hall explains the phenomenon of stereotyping as follows:

Stereotype erfassen die wenigen einfachen, anschaulichen, leicht einprägsamen, leicht zu erfassenden und weithin anerkannten Eigenschaften einer Person, reduzieren die gesamte Person auf diese Eigenschaften, übertreiben und vereinfachen sie, und schreiben sie ohne Wechsel oder Entwicklung für die Ewigkeit fest. (Hall, p.132)³⁷

The problem hereby is that with the help of stereotypes, we find our way through the world; we know how the world operates by having those stereotypes in mind. These stereotypes are so deeply positioned in our society that when we see a person, we automatically search for the categories prescribed in our society and subsequently place the individual in a box provided by or for this certain category. In doing so, we overestimate these features. This is where power comes in. The individual who has been reduced to his or her stereotypical features is not able to defend him- or herself against those ascriptions. He or she is powerless.³⁸ Stereotypes especially refer to social entities, such as gender, age, religion, nationality and ethnicity. Additionally, they are to a huge extent resistant to changes as this way of thinking has been inscribed in our brains over time. The individual is practically not important anymore, overgeneralizations and simplifications have taken over this role. To say it in Eisend's words:

36 Cf. Eisend, p.418.

37 'Stereotypes capture the few simple, descriptive, catchy and widely accepted features of a person. They reduce the whole person to these features, overestimate and simplify them and establish them without any chance for development forever eternally.' (own translation)

38 Cf. Hall, p.144ff.

Each gender stereotyping component can lead to negative consequences that restrict life opportunities, particularly for women. Stereotyping of physical characteristics [...] can lead to reduced self-dignity and body dissatisfaction, stereotyping of role behaviors may lead to restricted opportunities of self-development, and stereotyping of occupational roles can lead to disadvantages in women's careers. Avoiding such stereotypes and achieving equal life opportunities for both genders in different spheres of life is a central concern of gender policy and has become a social objective in many societies. (Eisend, p.119)

As stereotypes are not easily changeable, we have to somehow learn how to cope with them. We have to challenge the deviations as well as to uncover them and respond to them in order to be able to see the diversity we are living in and in order to be able to assess this diversity positively. This is exactly what Feminist Theory tries to tell us: a problem develops only when the role ascriptions are negatively highlighted and when concerned individuals are discriminated against and falsely evaluated. Furthermore, stereotyping is not necessarily a negative judgment as they also lead to expectations which can be useful for living our everyday life.³⁹

3.2.2 The Female Body in Advertising

All our life you are told the things you cannot do. All your life they will say you're not good enough or strong enough or talented enough. They'll say you're the wrong height or the wrong weight or the wrong type to play this or be this or achieve this... THEY WILL TELL YOU NO, a thousand times no until all the nos are meaningless. All your life they will tell you no, quite firmly and very quickly. They will tell you no. And you will tell them Yes. (A Nike magazine ad, In: Goldman/Papson, p.120)

A dominant discourse adherent in our society suggests sport and physical activity as being tools producing a desirable body. According to van Amsterdam and Knoppers, the female desirable body in a Western context is gendered. It is constructed as being slender, white, non-aggressive and passive whereas the male body is considered desirable when being muscular, tall, strong, aggressive and competitive.⁴⁰ Women build self-confidence by the

³⁹ Cf. Eisend, p.419.

⁴⁰ Cf. Van Amsterdam/Knoppers/Claringbould, p.294.

aesthetics of a body ideal which is signified by a controlled, thin and slender body. Sport and physical activity are hereby seen as very important tools to achieve this desirable body. Consequently, the emphasis on physical appearance has intensified in Western societies. Researchers such as Azzarito and Markula for instance have shown the importance of body shape and exercise as well as of physical appearance in the media, which display a rather narrow range of pictures showing the ideal of a sexualized, white, slender female body in perfect poses. To say it in Azzarito's words, the body is inscribed by dominant discourses, is idealized and becomes a site of personal, cultural and economic desire. Sport for instance is such a dominant discourse. It promotes the ideal female body as slender, the ideal male body as muscular and strong. Especially in the Western culture, 'ideals of bodily perfection are promoted and embodied by individuals through power relations and the economy of visibility' (Azzarito, p.21).

An important study by van Amsterdam and Knoppers came to the conclusion that athletic looking individuals are more self-confident, energetic, competitive, strong, youthful as well as happy and healthy.⁴¹ The female desirable body is hereby considered not to be visibly muscular and aggressive. Cole and Hribar suggest that bodies portrayed differently from the ones already discussed are considered as anti-bodies as they do not fit into women's advertising regime.⁴² As long as the bodies portrayed are not white, slender and passive, they are soon considered as 'the Other'. Women with a muscular appearance for instance are considered athletic but by no means considered as heterosexually desirable. Van Amsterdam and Knoppers have found in their study that the athletic undesirable body of women can be symbolized by the image of the female boxer and consequently points to a lack of 'performed heterofemininity' (Van Amsterdam/Knoppers/Claringbould, p.300).

41 Cf. Van Amsterdam/Knoppers/Claringbould, p.297.

42 Cf. Cole/Hribar, p.362.

A majority of advertising directed at women draws in the cultural legacy of the male gaze. Scholars like Laura Mulvey for instance have offered analytic approaches of the male gaze and of women positioned as objects of desire for the male spectator. When aimed at women, advertisements almost exclusively show women exaggerated in fashion, cosmetics, and weight-loss - all performed to be watched by men. According to David Machin, the fictionalized world of sexual power is a world where sex is dramatized and performed and subsequently represents women's power through their sexuality.⁴³

Gender and, therefore, body images are always a means of performance. According to Van Amsterdam, individuals have a special need for performing their gender appropriate to their behavior. They do not only perform what they consider to be male or female but they also position themselves as oppositional to anything which is perceived as belonging to the other sexual orientation.⁴⁴

Performance, insofar as it can be defined as representation without reproduction, can be seen as a model for another representational economy, one in which the reproduction of the Other as the Same is not assured. (Phelan/Lane, p.3)

For Phelan, the concept of performance is very much associated with representation. To her, performance is a means of expressing the self in the world of the Other, and, consequently, combining these two by means of repetition and political provocation.

Butler's theory on gender as performance can provide a possible explanation for that. She writes in *Bodies That Matter*:

Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity. (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p.95)

According to Butler, it is important to not mistakenly identify this act of constraint as something that is naturally a given, because if done so 'power is relinquished to expand

43 Cf. Machin/Thornborrow, p.177.

44 Cf. Van Amsterdam/Knoppers/Claringbould, p.300f.

the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds' (Butler, 'Performative Acts', p.164). Moreover, Butler understands sex and gender in terms of 'citational performativity' (Barker, p.49), meaning that norms are repeated and brought together in performance in order to create meaning. And, as performativity is a reiteration of a set of norms, 'gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect that very subject it appears to express' (Butler in Barker, p.50). 'Gender in life can by no means be put on or put off at will' (Loxley, p.142). In other words, women for instance perform their gender several times everyday by slipping into different roles all the time. These roles include for example being a mother, a daughter, an employee, a carer, somebody who needs help, a customer, and so on. Just for explanation - we have a different role when we are a mother than when we are somebody's daughter for a certain moment.

Annamarie Jagose explains in her introduction to Queer Theory, that it is very important to reiterate

[...] the fact that gender, being performative, is not like clothing, and therefore cannot be put on or off at will. Rather it is constrained - not simply in the sense of being structured by limitations but because (given the regulatory frameworks in which performativity is meaningful) constraint is the prerequisite of performativity. (Jagose, p.87)

According to Butler, the body is only known as body in connection with its gendered appearance. In Butler's words, 'the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time' (Butler, 'Performative Acts', pp.156-157). Therefore, one act alone cannot define the body's gender; it is by no means defined by an individual action. Identity is, much like sexual identity, a matter of representation. Not only identity but also the body is shaped and produced within discourse, according to these power relations. This means that the female as well as the male body are representations in terms of power structures. One cannot be a woman but one can only represent a woman by embodying female attitudes and behaviors, in other words, by behaving like a woman. Sexed bodies are constructions, and, especially the female body is in a rather marginal position which seeks to be deconstructed in order to be adjusted. Therefore, the gender

we portray is performative in the way that it has been rehearsed and influenced.⁴⁵

3.2.3 The Discursive Representation of Women in Nike's World

Sex has always been and still is an important and at the same time dangerous issue which is heavily discussed in women's magazines and in other mass media in order to signify core values of power and subordination. According to David Machin, all cultural texts, such as advertisements for instance, have a fictionalized world of sexual power in common. In this world, especially women's power is represented by their sexuality.⁴⁶ As we have heard so far, Nike is one of the most powerful brands in the world and Nike women's advertising is an issue at the center of debates among feminist scholars and researchers. Grow claims that from a branding perspective advertisements function as 'living stories', portraying women's experiences with an emotional touch (Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.312).

Cole and Hribar understand Nike as

[...] a component embedded in a discursive formation that has generated and legitimated a popular feminism: the rearticulation of what counts as 'women', 'women's problems' and 'solutions' to those problems and, by extension, the production of popular knowledges (sic!) of social stratification that shape everyday lived experiences, pleasures, and values. The high profile of Nike, especially as it has become intertwined with popular feminism, suggests that we consider how ongoing cultural dynamics have rearticulated the public discourses of feminism and fitness. (Cole/Hribar, p.349)

Although Nike is named after a woman - Nike, the Goddess of Victory, the brand was regarded as masculine from the very beginning. Developing from basketball, Nike produced exclusively sports gear for men, created advertisements only connoted with male gender roles and, therefore, only communicated with the male fitness society. The swoosh as a symbol stood for hegemonic masculinity and power. According to Helstein, Nike created the first advertisement aimed at women in 1987.⁴⁷ Prior to this, there were no ads addressing

45 Cf. Hopf, p.27ff.

46 Cf. Machin/Thornborrow, p.177.

47 Cf. Helstein, p.278.

the female audience as Nike believed that this new market could easily compromise their 'serious sport image' (Cole/Hribar, p.359). As Cole and Hribar describe it,

[The ad] featured triathlete Joanne Ernst moving through a grueling workout and a voiceover continuously repeating the 'just do it' directive. The ad ended with what Nike intended to be a humorous tagline: 'And it wouldn't hurt if you stopped eating like a pig'. (Cole/Hribar, p.360)

The advertisement failed miserably to seduce women and Nike had to hire women who were asked to support the company in finding an advertisement strategy which would address and encourage women who would be able to identify with the brand. The new campaigns were then developed by a female team. Created by women for women, the new advertisements were suddenly able to speak to the female audience. They showed women in glossy pictures framed by poetic verses which seemed to fully understand and address the problems of the female world.⁴⁸

Today, women represent the fastest growing group of sports equipment consumers. According to Goldman and Papson, women represent the largest market in the field of workout gear and fitness clothing - much greater than their male counterpart.⁴⁹ But the question is still if women are represented completely free of all stereotypical views. Helstein addresses Nike as performing discourse as the company has chosen to turn its subject of advertising into an object.⁵⁰ This argument clearly indicates that Nike puts the female audience in general, and the female model in particular, in a subject position which is actually the object position of male desire. Although Nike tries very hard to address the female audience in a surrounding of emancipation and serious athleticism, it is still not truly clear if the women portrayed are not still treated as objects of the male gaze. In their advertisements, Nike talks about freedom and the free will. But are the women portrayed and addressed by Nike really free? This is always hard to find out in a sport surrounding. Sport has an important function within the discourse of the hegemonic view of gender role portrayal as the focus on the body is always at the center of debates. Sport is about the body; it is working on

48 Cf. Cole/Hribar, pp.351-360.

49 Cf. Goldman/Papson, p.118.

50 Cf. Helstein, p.278.

the body as well as associating oneself with the body. Therefore, masculine and feminine practices are also associated with the body. Sport's impact and its performance on the body are always driving home messages which are critically linked to the shape of the (female) body.

Nike's advertising team for the women's sub-brand is now almost exclusively female. According to Grow, in the 1990s, a woman's point of view was hardly reflected in advertising.⁵¹ Today, their point of view is reflected, but in a way which does not make the feminist world happy. In her study, Grow found out that the major problem advertisers within Nike's sub-brand had, was that 'social and sport ideals clash'.⁵² Sport has always been and in many areas still is connoted with masculinity and Nike clearly had a masculine quality. On the other hand, there is a social order which controls and constricts women by placing athleticism over femininity. 'Females must thus negotiate two competing cultures' (Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.316). And unfortunately, this is often only possible by portraying femininity in a stereotypical gender role based on sexual connotations. It seems as if attention could only be achieved by putting females in a role of subordination.

During my research, my attention concentrated on two clearly different opinions regarding Nike and the portrayal of females in advertising. Cole and Hribar came to the conclusion in their study that 'Nike presents itself as pro-women, progressive, and socially responsible' (Cole/Hribar, p.362). According to them, phenomena such as equality and justice are treated adequately and women's rights are portrayed in solidarity with this position. Furthermore, Nike is addressed as rewriting feminist history by stabilizing empowerment as well as contemporary popular culture.⁵³ The same opinion is shown in Goldman's and Papson's evaluation of the portrayal of females in Nike ads. According to them, the portrayed images exclusively frame the absence of the male gaze. Indeed, they see a clear difference in the messages which are developed in the advertisements addressing women and men. But still they have the opinion that Nike ads speak to women with true authenticity.⁵⁴ In contrast to

51 Cf. Cole/Hribar, p.312.

52 Cf. Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.313.

53 Cf. Cole/Hribar, p.362.

54 Cf. Goldman/Papson, pp.120-128.

these views, Tara Kachgal finds Nike to be an 'intriguing object of study' (Kachgal in Fuller, p.133). To her, the key initiative to gain control over the women's market, miserably failed in the field of advertising. First, several strategies were used to emphasize the athlete's femininity, their sex and their heterosexuality. Second, sexual references, such as 'Give It To Me' and 'one of the hottest volleyball players' were addressed. Third, female athleticism is always associated with femininity, sexuality or family-centeredness.⁵⁵ Having been aware of these two completely different opinions, for me, the necessity for researching this topic has even become more important. It has always been clear that it is not easy for women to enter the masculine world. This is exactly what Vincent is saying in his article dealing with the portrayal of female tennis players in Wimbledon:

It is claimed that, when women enter the masculine world of sport, institutional, cultural, social, and economic powers are used to reinforce gender differences and patriarchal ideology through their subordination. (Vincent in Fuller, p.174)

Often, the media even encourage this view by portraying male athletes as naturally superior to female ones.

For Foucault, the so-called technologies of the self help to explain how an individual acts upon him or herself. To say it in his words,

The technologies of the self, however, are ultimately about the role of the self within power relations - how an individual makes sense of the limitations set for him/her within the power relations and the truth games she/he is involved in. (Foucault in Markula/Pringle, p.146)

This concept can easily be applied to the concept of advertising. He begins with explaining that every individual can be understood as a subject within power relations. Power hereby refers to relations between people, to an 'action by one person to help guide another's conduct or direct the possible field of actions to others' (Foucault in Markula/Pringle, p.35). Consequently, individuals engage in a process where their identity is being changed by the labeled technologies of the self. In Foucault's opinion, like gender roles, individuals

55 Cf. Kachgal, pp.133-138.

learn how to behave within the discourses of sexuality over time and either put themselves or they are put in the subject positions within power relations. Identity is hereby not freely chosen but is rather built within the relations of power. The problem hereby is that individuals within these power relations are not fully aware that their behavior is not their own natural behavior but instead one which copies certain ideologies unconsciously, one which transforms themselves. In other words, women are put in the subject position of being a woman by emphasizing their femininity and their sexuality in such a self-evident way, that these women then believe that this actually is their role in life. This explains why Foucault does not see power and freedom as two oppositional concepts. The individuals who are put in a certain subject position do not always recognize this transfer. As all these gender roles are predominant in our minds, they seem so normal to us that we live them voluntarily.⁵⁶

3.3 The Concept of Advertising

Advertising is so fascinating, because it's both a mirror of the culture and it moves culture forward. I think the best advertising [...] taps into a direction that we are moving in, but we are not there yet, and it helps take us there. I think we've gotten a lot better at doing that ... in tapping into where they [women] are portrayed in mass culture through advertising. (Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.7)

3.3.1 A Brief Definition of Advertising

Advertising is a complex system which cannot be defined for a specific area. Advertising can be so many things: advertising on TV, in the newspaper, in a magazine, on posters, on banners, in the cinema, broadcasted on the radio or even by post mail. As already discussed, this thesis focuses on advertising in the print media. According to Andresen, advertising is always a reproduction of the spirit of the age. Advertising itself is, therefore, an element of culture. By advertising something, a part of the societal reality is pictured by using positively assigned, and by the majority accepted, values and norms which address

⁵⁶ Cf. Markula/Pringle, pp.139-146.

different target audiences, and by promoting the advertised product in combination with those values and norms.⁵⁷ Advertisements hereby function as texts, as stories, and as conversations in order to be able to communicate with the world. Guido Zurstiege, Professor at the University of Vienna in the field of advertising research, sees advertising as a process of communication in which opinions, emotions, attitudes as well as behavior and actions are conveyed medial and systematically. This process of communication is always planned, paid, success-oriented and pursues a specific goal, namely to sell the advertised product.⁵⁸

A widely discussed phenomenon within the concept of advertising is the so-called mirror argument. According to Eisend, the mirror argument states that 'advertising reflects values that already exist' (Eisend, p.421). In other words, advertising is a mirror of what already exists. Gender roles, therefore, reproduce societal expectations towards sex. As our societal expectations are regularly changing, advertisers adapt those changes and reflect on those conventions which are more widely accepted. This is where stereotypes come in again. If advertisers rely on stereotypical gender roles which are inherent in our society in order to promote their product, this certain stereotype will only be reinforced. And as the individual can hardly escape advertising, he or she will subsequently implant this stereotypical view on gender in his or her brain. A different view is offered by Judith Wiles. She refers to the longstanding concern that society lives after the images which are portrayed in advertising and not vice versa. In other words, advertising constructs cultural values rather than reflecting them. To her, advertising uses stereotypical images in order to establish a certain view within society. It would now be interesting to analyze if Nike adapts itself to the images adherent in society and, therefore, just reproduces them or if they intend to change the view in society and try to make individuals believe what they reflect in their advertisements. Jean Grow discusses in her article 'Selling Truth' the two options of advertising - as either shaping or reflecting culture. Hall suggested a third approach: the possibility of a constructionist view. According to Hall, meaning only exists as soon as it is represented and constructed by signs. In his view, 'meaning comes from the symbols [...] that represent the material world rather than from the material world directly' (Hall in Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.4). According to Luhmann, the decisive criterion of advertising is not that

57 Cf. Andresen, p.96.

58 Cf. Luhmann in Zurstiege, p.16f.

advertising pursues a goal, but rather the obviousness with which it presents our concerns.⁵⁹

In order to draw our attention back to Nike and advertising, Goldman and Papson also provide an interesting definition. They view advertising as a 'system of sign value production' (Goldman/Papson, p.24). Advertising in these terms functions as a cultural mechanism to assemble and reinforce the value of brand icons. In advertising a product, the company tries to link the product's value with a cultural value in order to produce a sign value. Consumer advertising, therefore, works by 'removing meanings from the context, and then recontextualizes those meanings within the framework of the ad itself'. In so doing, advertising works by acquiring meaning from other referent systems.⁶⁰

3.3.2 How does Representation Work?

Identity and the gendered body are both matters of representation related to a power structure. But how does representation work? Stuart Hall, cultural theorist and sociologist and one of the founding fathers of Cultural Studies, devoted himself to the study of representation. Very briefly, representation is 'the production of meaning through language' (Hall, p.16). Representation, therefore, means that language is used in order to present the world meaningfully, to give meaning to the world. In this sense, representation also means to symbolize a certain issue, to stand for something. We all have certain concepts in mind, for instance, what a chair looks like, or a car. These concepts are given meaning through language which means that representation links these mental concepts we have with language and enables us to identify them either as the real world or as an imaginary world. We may all interpret the world individually and in a different sense, since we may have different concepts in our minds. According to Hall, we share nearly the same mind maps and are, therefore, able to interpret the world in a similar way. But just having a conceptual map in mind is not enough to communicate; we also need to share the same language. As we all speak different languages, we need signs to work as a linguistic system instead. To put it into Halls words: 'Any sound, word, image or object which functions as a sign, and is organized with other signs into a system which is capable of carrying and

59 Cf. Zurstiege, p.37.

60 Cf. Goldman/Papson, p.61.

expressing meaning is, from this point of view, 'a language' (Hall, p.19). People of the same culture carry the same mental maps and are able to make meaning out of signs that they can communicate. This is most evident with paintings and pictures because we can actually see what the picture represents. Therefore, the

[...] meaning is not in the object or person or thing, nor is it in the [figure]. It is we (sic!) who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable. The meaning is constructed by the system of representation. (Hall, p.21)

Languages carry signs and these signs symbolize objects, people or events. They can also symbolize rather abstract ideas which are not clearly coded with an obvious item in our minds. A laser installation in a museum once asked: 'Does something exist that cannot be expressed by an image or sign?' Even after having analyzed the advertisements and campaigns by Nike, this question may remain unanswered.⁶¹

61 Cf. Hopf, p.30.

3.3.3 A Brief Introduction of Culture

As already discussed, Cultural Studies are essential for this thesis as their theories deal with the intersection of media and society as well as try to explain inherent power and identity structures. This section shall focus on one particular aspect of Cultural Studies, namely popular culture.

To take John Fiske's view, culture is 'the constant process of producing meanings of and from our social experience and such meanings necessarily produce a social identity for the people involved' (Fiske, p.1). In doing so, meanings can never be identified in a text. The activation of the meaning potential of a text can occur only in the social and cultural relationships into which it enters. In other words, Cultural Studies, and subsequently popular culture, are social processes, a constant creation of social practices, including various forms of social power. Furthermore, popular culture cannot be produced; we can only make our own culture form these resources. Culture is structured within the opposition between the dominant and the subordinate. Additionally, popular culture can be used by the elite to distinguish themselves from the masses and to confirm their power. According to Storey and Mullan, the concept of popular culture emerged within the 18th century alongside intellectual accounts of so-called folk culture.⁶²

In Raymond Williams's view, the word culture is one of the most complex terms in the English language. He suggests three definitions: First of all, culture is 'a general process of intellectual and aesthetic development' (Storey, p.3). This explanation refers to the human being only, the philosophers, artists and poets who, in a way, create culture through poetry, art and literature. Moreover, the term can be used to suggest a particular way of life. In other words, culture is the development of literacy, holidays, sports and religious festivals. Finally, culture refers to 'the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity' (Storey, p.4). Williams calls culture in his third explanation a 'signifying practice'. In doing so, culture is something that produces meaning and sense. This definition includes examples such as poetry, the novel, ballet, opera and the so called fine art. Williams also elaborates on popular culture which is an umbrella term for the second and third definition

⁶² Cf. Storey, p.5ff.

of culture and refers for example to soap opera, music and comics, to things which the ordinary man is familiar with.

The idea of culture has changed over time. In the beginning culture was 'painting, literature, music and philosophy' (Storey, p.3). Only rich and educated people were able to afford this luxury. But culture is much more complex, it is impossible to define it with the help of four terms only. It is the whole way of life, the life in a group or community, the communication among human beings, the exchange of meaning and thoughts between people.

According to Williams, culture is ordinary. It has always been there, it is just developing over time. We grow up in a country and subsequently get to know its people with their attitudes, behavior and sense for culture. We just live in this world and do not think about what culture is doing to it. That is why it is ordinary, we just accept it. It can be said without question that culture is a continuing process, a kind of movement that will never stop expanding. There will always be people who make music, who write new poems and novels, who celebrate festivals, who discuss and who live their life in a different way than we do. There are so many different kinds of culture because of the great variety of human beings. Every human society has its own purposes and attitudes and there are so many differences. Theoretically, culture arises in mind, but practically it has its origin in the discussion and negotiation among human beings.

Within Cultural Studies, the concept of ideology is at the centre of debates. The inscription of meaning is hereby the process with which individuals give sense to their surrounding and to society as such. This happens by representing the surrounding with the help of language, not meaning written words but rather the system of representation including painting, photography and advertising for instance. But Cultural Studies do not deal with cultural products and practices per se but rather examine them. In Marchart's definition, Cultural Studies are those intellectual practices which examine how social and political identities are reproduced within the field of culture.⁶³

63 Cf. Pirker, p.154.

3.3.3.1 The Encoding-Decoding Model

Acting on the discussed assumption of culture, Stuart Hall developed a model for the analysis of mass communication processes which is essential for Cultural Studies, namely the Encoding-Decoding-Model. According to Stuart Hall, the classical linear sender-receptor model is ignoring the complex relationship of the communication process. His encoding-decoding model instead considers these important aspects: production, circulation, distribution, consumption and reproduction. He understands this whole process as a complex and dominant structure which develops from the articulation of connected practices which each have their own modality and existence.⁶⁴

Most important in this model is the emphasis of the discursive forms of the mass communication process. News or slogans in advertising are produced within specific terms and conditions (technological issues, ideologies, evaluation of the audience, etc.) and are translated into a specific character shape: they are encoded and distributed to the recipient. These transferred codes are then decoded, again within specific terms and conditions, and achieve meaning for the first time by being transferred into societal practices, in other words, by being transferred into a discursive matter.

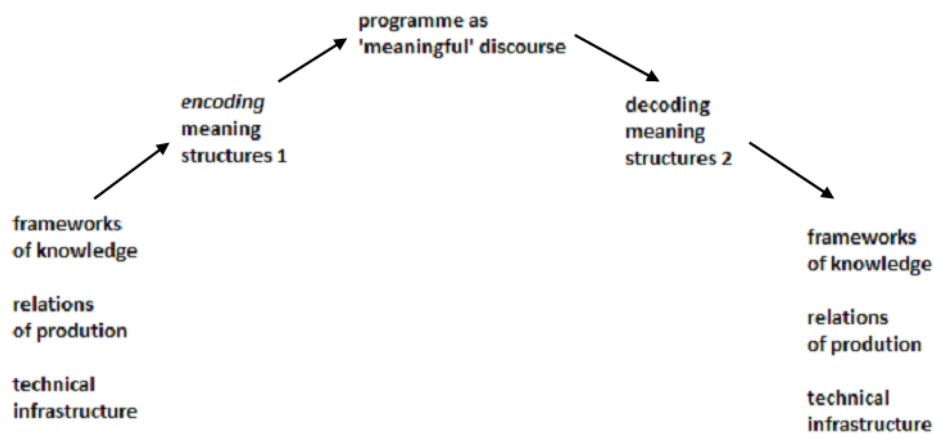


Figure 3: Encoding-Decoding Model

Source: http://luhmann.uni-trier.de/index.php?title=Zentrale_Begriffe_der_Cultural_Studies

64 Cf. Pirker, p.154.

As the process of decoding is nearly always underlying different conditions than the process of encoding, this very process is indeed able to allow favoured reading of the transferred text but is not able to determine it. Hall, therefore, describes three reading options of mass-media texts with the information on how to decode the intended message.

1. The dominant-hegemonic reading

This is the ideal case of completely transparent communication in which the meaning of the message is decoded in the same way as it was encoded. The recipient, therefore, understands the encoded meaning as the same one as the sender sent it through the code.

2. The mediate reading

In this reading, the hegemonic code is indeed understood by the recipient but put in reference to his/her own context and decoded in a way which might not be in full accordance with the encoded message. The mediated codes are then characterized by the discourses of power.

3. The oppositional reading

In this option, the hegemonic codes of the message are understood by the recipient, however they are decoded in an oppositional way to the encoded meaning by imbedding the codes in the recipient's own frame of reference.⁶⁵

While Stuart Hall's model first and foremost refers to news, Johnson developed a circuit model which cannot only be used for mass-media analyses but instead for all popular cultural artefacts.

3.3.3.2 The Circuit of Culture

As the term of Cultural Studies is a very complex one, it is important to capture this complexity. Each of the three elements, production, circulation and consumption, is dependent on the two remaining ones and, therefore, essential for the whole. This model's intention is the association with several other research fields and, therefore, the approach from many

65 Cf. Pirker, pp.154-156.

different perspectives. Du Gay refers to Johnson's model and expands it in the circuit of culture into the areas of identity and regulation.⁶⁶

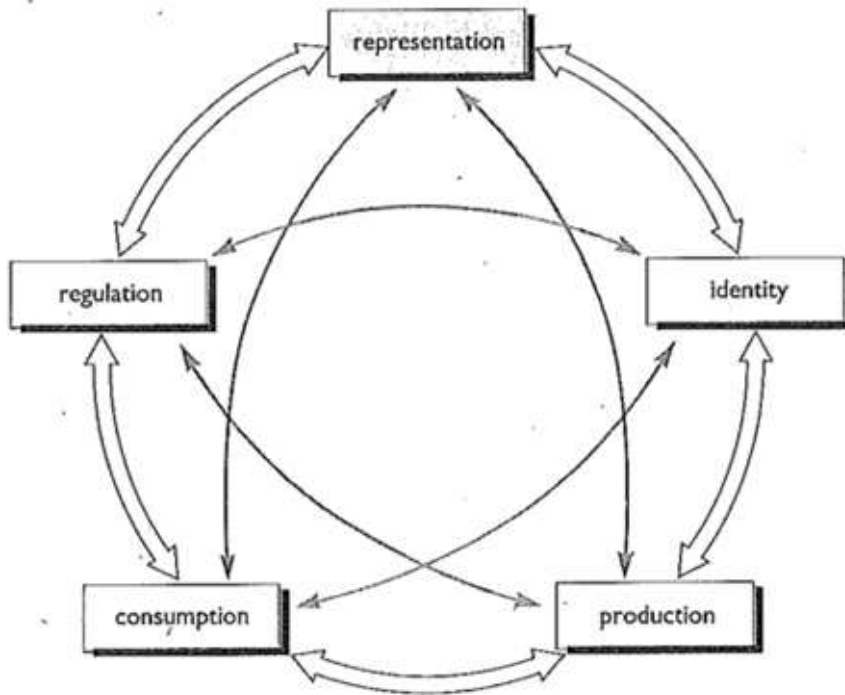


Figure 4: Circuit of Culture

Source: Du Gay, p.1997

With this circuit model, Du Gay shows how cultural meanings are developed by depending on each other through articulation processes. Only by consideration of all processes described in this circuit model, the complex question of what culture is can be answered adequately.

In order to analyse the production of culture (1), it is indeed necessary to consider the economic processes but it is also essential to relate them to the prevailing societal practices. The development of societal artefacts takes then place in the context of a specific culture of production which shows itself in different values, beliefs and practices of intra-organisational decisions.

⁶⁶ Cf. Pirker, p.157.

The area of representation (2) applies first and foremost to mediated texts in the printing area. Cultural Studies, hereby, provide several accounts for these codes, as already discussed in section three.

The consumption (3) of mediated texts cannot be understood as a passive process in Cultural Studies but instead as an active practice of appreciation of meanings. By decoding the representations in the context of the everyday life and the cultural experiences, the concept of consumption is essential for the construction of social identities.

The term identity (4) today is present more than ever in several different discourses and social connections. Identity is a phenomenon often queried and widely discussed on global, national, local and individual levels. The media provide an image of what it means to take a specific subject position. They give us the opportunity for identification or denial; they provide something like semiotic rooms, in which our own identity is put into context with other identities. By popular media, we experience what it is like to be a woman or a man, what it is like to belong to a social group and what it is for instance like to be heterosexual or homosexual. As the media play a very important role in our life, they are often called 'socialisation-agents' (Pirker, p.158).

The prevailing beliefs of race, class and gender in our society (5), the beliefs of what is morally accepted and what is considered as 'normal', are based on predominant discourses and ideologies. The area of regulation within the Circuit of Culture refers to the role of social institutions and cultural meanings. It deals with the relationships of culture and social, political as well as economic structures. On the one hand, culture regulates the different societal practices; on the other hand, culture itself is regulated by these ideologies. The processes of regulation are, like all other areas of the cultural circuit, subordinated to constant articulations, re-articulations and permanent changes.⁶⁷

67 Cf. Pirker, p.157ff.

3.3.4 Semiotics - Communication with Signs

A picture plays a very important role in advertising. It provokes emotions and creates a fictional reality. Kroeber-Riel assumes in his portrait of visual communication the easiest definition of semiotics and agrees with all researchers within this field that semiotics is the science of signs. He classifies semiotics in three branches: syntactics, semantics and pragmatics. He describes syntactics as being engaged with the characteristics and formal relationships of the signs themselves. Semantics deals, according to Kroeber-Riel, with the meaning of the signs, and pragmatics concerns itself with the effects the signs have on their user and on their sender as well as on their recipient.⁶⁸

3.3.4.1 The Approach by Charles Sanders Peirce

A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. (Peirce in Withalm, p.128)

Communication is besides signification and cognition one of the most important objects of research within the field of semiotics - the doctrine or theory of signs and symbols. Semiotics is, therefore, understood as a science within Communication and Media Studies. Charles Sanders Peirce, an American philosopher, can be seen as the founding father of the newer, common semiotics. Contrary to de Saussure's approach, Peirce's model tries from the very beginning to create a general theory not only examining language but instead understanding it as only a further element of signs.⁶⁹ For him, semiotics is the most general science, the basic principles of thinking. In his words, 'semiotics is the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible semiosis. [A]ll thought is in signs' and, additional to this definition, a sign is 'aliquid pro aliquo' - 'something which stands for something' (Peirce in Withalm, p.126; Friedrich/Schweppenhäuser, p.26; Müller, p.159).

68 Cf. Kroeber-Riel, p.8ff.

69 Cf. Eco, p.76.

Peirce's triad of semiotics acts on the assumption of a triadic relation of signs. The components of this triadic relationship are the sign in a narrower sense, the so called 'Repräsentamen' (Nöth, p.62), in other words, the object, and the meaning of the sign, the interpretant (Nöth, p.62).

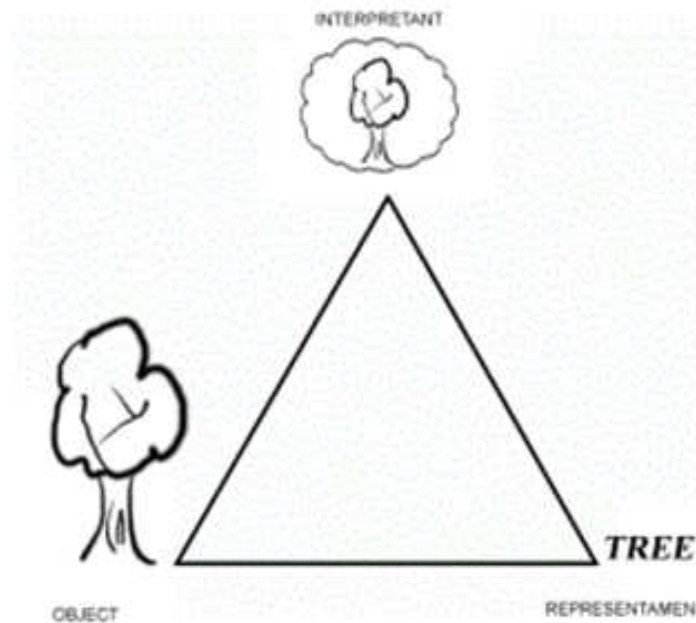


Figure 5: Peirce's Triad of Semiotics

Source: <http://www.ludology.org/articles/thesis/siminterpretation.html>

Pierce understands representation as the appreciable structure of the sign as such, which can by no means be put on a level with the object. The object is, according to Peirce, the materialistic item which is represented by the sign. This object can also be a mental, or an imaginary object. The interpretant, or in other words, the meaning, finally is an additional representation of the object, another sign translating the first sign.⁷⁰ According to Lobinger, a good example for this third and most important part of the triadic representation would be the drawing of a dog which stands for the literary word 'dog'.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Cf. Eco, p.78.

⁷¹ Cf. Lobinger, p.20.

Peirce also divided signs into three different categories, symbols, indices and icons.⁷²

- Symbols are, according to Peirce, signs which characterize the object in an arbitrary way. An example would be a flag representing a certain country but also a cross standing for somebody who died. Symbolic signs are also conventions. In other words, these signs have neither arisen from the described item nor do they have a relationship with it.⁷³
- Indices are indicative signs, relating to an actual, physical object. Examples would be smoke indicating fire, skid marks indicating a car which braked too heavily, or footmarks in the sand, indicating that a person or an animal was there. Indexical signs do not have to be visually related to the item they display. They have a real or causal relationship with the item and are, therefore, called indexes.
- Icons finally are based on the connection between sign and object in relation to similarity. This group includes drawings, pictures, and photography. This similarity of objects is also called iconicity. Iconic signs are signs which feature a certain analogy with an item. This item would then be the icon.

If we transfer this principle to the central focus of this thesis, Nike, we can assume the following: the Nike swoosh is an iconic sign, standing for a boomerang. The criterion hereby is the visual affinity to the item. But it is also a symbolic sign standing for the company of Nike as such. Designed by a graphic student at the University of Portland, the logo is still used today without variation or change and marks the success of the company. If we want to analyse an example from Gender Theory, we can take the one of a female model. The way in which she presents underwear for instance, having her legs crossed in an alluring way and having this special look, connotes a certain advertising codification. According to Müller, the habit of this publicity circulates conventional iconic signs.⁷⁴

72 Cf. Nöth, p.66.

73 Cf. Friedrich/Schweppenhäuser, p.33.

74 Cf. Müller, p.78.

3.3.4.2 The Principle of the Code by Umberto Eco

Semioticians explore codes as cultural systems of different kinds of signs. This could be a traffic sign, but also a morse code or even the system of language. Even if the system of language is sometimes argued to be a code, the two terms differ from each other.⁷⁵

With the help of the code, a connection between sign and meaning can be established. With a language code, it is for instance important, that there is a socialized, conventional correspondence adherent. Both participants in this conversation have to be aware of the code and have to understand the principle of this code. By means of encoding the sign, it is made transferable. The sender encodes the message he or she intends to communicate with, for example, linguistic signs and transfers the message. The recipient has to decode this sign as a semiotic text (see also the Encoding-Decoding Model as already discussed in the third chapter of this thesis). By doing that, the recipient is by no means aware of the semiotic process. According to Lobinger, the importance of the code only becomes apparent as soon as the recipient is not able to decode a message anymore because it is encoded in a foreign language.⁷⁶

Umberto Eco demonstrates this complex phenomenon of the code in the following illustration:⁷⁷

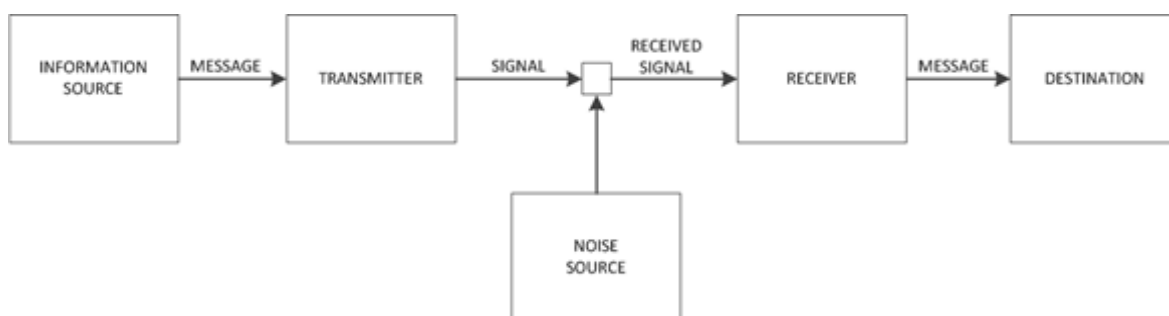


Figure 6: Communication process (uncoded)

Source: Zeichen. Einführung in einen Begriff und seine Geschichte, p.50ff

75 Cf. Nöth, p.218.

76 Cf. Lobinger, p.17.

77 Cf. Eco, p.50ff.

Figure 6 shows the communication process between messenger (information source) and recipient (destination). The messenger encodes the message, sends it to the recipient and because of a disturbing noise source (e.g. lack of understanding, not having in mind the same expectations, etc.), the recipient is not always able to decode the message correctly. This is where the code comes in. With the help of certain signs, the code reduces the danger of misinterpretation and ensures that the message can be decoded correctly.

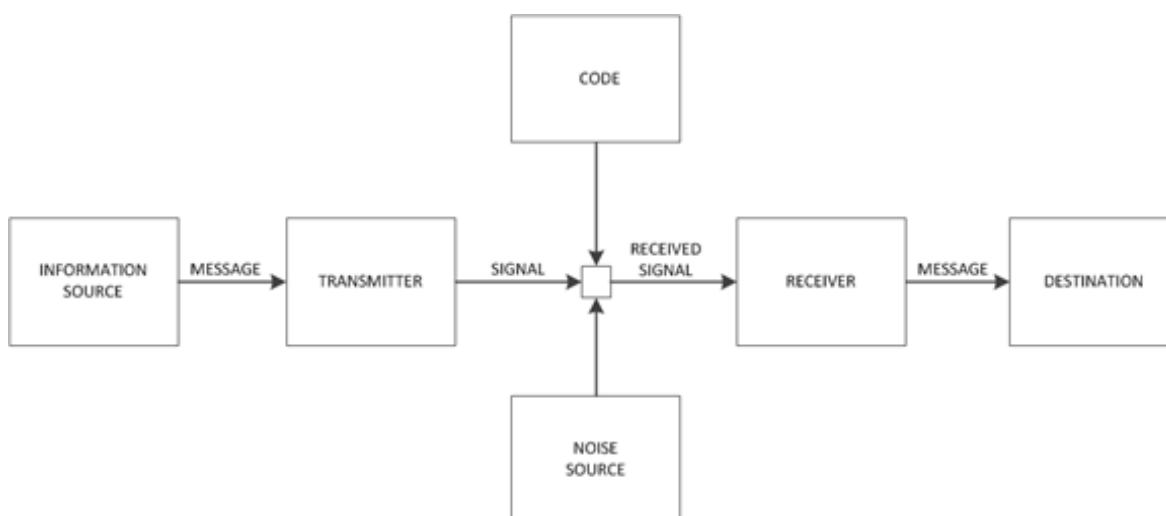


Figure 7: Communication process (coded)

Source: Zeichen. Einführung in einen Begriff und seine Geschichte, p.50ff

According to Withalm, semiotics is the science of signs which stand for something different. Within mass communication, semiotics can be used in connection with great theories, such as Cultural Studies and constructivist theories of the media.⁷⁸ In this thesis I will take the opportunity to use semiotics in connection with both Cultural Studies and Gender Studies in order to be able to interpret several advertisements related to the stereotypical portraiture of women. In close relation with Cultural Studies, the principles of semiotics deal with the analysis of signs and symbols in mass communication, especially in advertising. The semiotic analysis looks behind the scenes, as it were, and describes in a very detailed matter in what way the advertised products or persons should be associated. Questions for mediated values in a message or the way in which those values develop are typical questions which

⁷⁸ Cf. Withalm, p.132f.

can be answered with the help of semiotics.⁷⁹

The central idea of semiotics is the usage of basically two different levels of meaning: denotation, or the basic principle which a sign has in a system of signs, and connotation, the secondary meanings of a sign which vary strongly in the cultural context.⁸⁰ If we try for instance to interpret a picture, it is nearly impossible to speak of communication as this kind of 'text' allows many different readings. Friedrich, therefore, suggests that only as soon as we have words describing this text in addition to the picture itself, it is possible to limit these readings. We can, therefore, also say that the meaning of a photograph or a picture is dependent on the context.

3.3.4.3 Semiotics and Advertising

Barthes assumes that photography or a picture is the perfect image of reality and, therefore, a perfect analogon of reality. If we take his view, we would come to the conclusion that the process of decoding a picture is not necessary in order to decipher and understand it. But as photography is always also a selection by the producer, the picture gains more and more importance. This construction causes a picture which is arranged in a certain way as we find it for instance in advertising or journalism.⁸¹ As already discussed, this construction does not mean that the recipient decodes the image in the same way as it was encoded, in other words, that the recipient understands exactly what the sender tried to achieve. This aspect is especially relevant in advertising where pictures or representations are initiated with the hope and the intention that they are globally understandable. Semiotics is a very complex and process-oriented but also risky theory. On the one hand, the lines of thought as well as the traceability of analyses are complicated. On the other hand, the theory departs through the de-materialization of the icon-term from the concrete image. However, the theory of semiotics has been and still is used within many disciplines, such as Cultural Studies. Moreover, as Cultural Studies play an important role in popular culture, visual communication as a cultural phenomenon is indispensable. As semiotics is very sensitive to the initially unimpressive, its approaches are especially important for questions that deal

79 Cf. Withalm, p.134ff.

80 Cf. Friedrich/Schweppenhäuser, p.170.

81 Cf. Barthes, p.7ff.

with hybrid forms of communication in which auditive, verbal and visual processes engage. This is for example the case in advertising.⁸²

According to Eco, the codes that are used in advertising function in a twofold way: verbal and visual.⁸³ Semiotics and advertising complement each other in a positive way as advertising produces texts that communicate certain values and characteristics of products in order to persuade the customer to buy this product. It is advertising's challenge to encode the intended message in such a clear way that it is communicated with the correct meaning. This can be especially challenging with visual advertisements as everybody has different pictures in mind, as discussed previously in chapter three.

Every advertising copy includes a plea to a potential consumer to buy the product. Although not every advertising copy makes this plea obvious, it is there in every text. Semantically, each advertising copy includes a proposition whose argument identifies the product and inscribes a certain quality to it. We as the consumers are fully aware that this is exactly what the advertising copy tries to communicate about the product, although the message is not always explicit. In so doing, advertising represents itself as a kind of text that is decoded by the consumer on two levels: the hidden and the obvious.⁸⁴

3.3.4.4 Persuasive Communication

The previous chapter discussed semiotics as the communication with signs. Charles Peirce's triade as well as Umberto Eco's principle of the code have been elaborated on. The code is especially important in order to understand the phenomenon of persuasive communication. The code is essential in communication as it establishes a connection between the messenger and the recipient in order to narrow down the number of possibilities of meaning. By this limitation, the intended meaning of the message becomes much more evident and, therefore, much easier for the recipient to decode or, in other words, to understand.

82 Cf. Müller, p.162f.

83 Cf. Eco, p.271.

84 Cf. Nöth, p.508f.

This conscious attempt to code messages with the help of signs is nothing different than persuasive communication. It is the goal of every persuasive attempt to influence someone's behaviour and to persuade the customer in the end to buy the product. Persuasive communication uses signs in order to move someone to a certain behavioural act. These signs can be spoken language and gestures but also written messages, facial expressions as well as visual signs such as pictures, images and photography. To influence someone's behaviour does hereby not exclusively mean to change his or her behaviour. On the contrary, very often, persuasive communication intends to reinforce, or to confirm certain behaviour.⁸⁵

Advertising can be seen as an exception within persuasive communication as it is very difficult for this genre to persuade human beings. For example, recipients do not always pay proper attention to the advertisement, or they might feel irritated. While the reception of advertisements is on demand, personal conversations are unique and require, therefore, much more attention. One of the difficulties of advertising is the increase in our exposure to advertisements over the last decades, also called stimulus satiation. Researchers, therefore, have created ten 'recipes' of advertising, which describe how advertising has to be performed in order to be able to persuade recipients more easily. These recipes are the following:⁸⁶

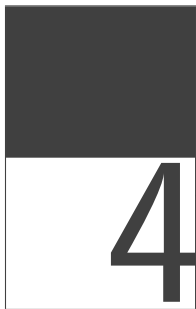
85 Cf. Schönbach, p.28.

86 Cf. Schönbach, pp.71-100.

- Abnormality (advertisements have to be vivid, demonstrative, eye-catching)
- Simplicity (advertisements have to be easily understandable)
- Accumulation (repeated exposure to the audience through different media channels)
- Fringe benefits (casual rewards, i.e. humour, brand entertainment, mystery, puns, erotics)
- Environment (the whole context in which the advertisement is imbedded)
- Switch off the advance notice (lining of announcements)
- Subliminal advertisement (the advertising message is perceived subconsciously)
- Cognitive demands (to make the message generally understandable)
- Effective choice of values (to choose values carefully with regard to different characters)
- Moderate goals (to choose advertising objectives moderately)

Chapter three of this thesis previously introduced aspects of power and identity structures within culture and society. Indeed, persuasive communication is a concept which can be used to manipulate or control the recipient, a concept with certain power structures so to say. Media recipients are in a way manipulated with regard to the consumption of the 'right' programme or product; they are forced into a decision. Putting it in a more positive view, persuasive communication, on the other hand, also decreases the agony of selection. And due to stimulus satiation, this might not always be negative. Prof. Schönbach, therefore, advises that persuasive communication methods should be handled in an ethically conscious manner, and that scientifically based attempts of manipulation should be avoided.⁸⁷

87 Cf. Schönbach, p.143f.



4 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1: How did communication in Nike print advertisements change from 2005 until 2013, particularly with regard to the representation of women?

This research questions tries to examine whether the representation of women has changed since the point of origin of this research piece, namely 2005. I chose this year as initial point because the advertisements from 2005 appear very meaningful and dominant to me. The adverts with the female body parts emerged from all the other selected adverts as powerful in terms of reducing women to their sexual body. The aim is now to examine whether this kind of representation changed in the course of time or not.

- Hypothesis 1.1: Women are these days represented as being much stronger and much more self- confident as back in 2005; they are not reduced to their sexual body anymore.
- Hypothesis 1.2: Women are still not represented different from their image in 2005; reduction to their sexual body is still visible in Nike advertisements.

Research Question 2: In which way is Nike communicating in print advertisements in order to catch female recipients' attention and to make the brand attractive for women?

This research question focuses on Nike's communication rather than on the representation of women. What I would like to find out are the methods Nike uses in order to reach the female audience and to make the brand appealing to women. In other words, if Nike genders the brand in order to let it appear more female and if yes, how this gendering of the brand works for the audience.

- Hypothesis 2.1: Nike genders the brand in order to create a 'female brand'.
- Hypothesis 2.2: Nike does not gender the brand in a way to create a female brand.

Research Question 3: What does the typical Nike-woman look like?

This research question focuses on the typical Nike woman, in other words, on the woman everybody has in mind when thinking of or hearing about Nike. The answer to this question will be difficult to find out as everybody commands different experiences and different mind maps and, therefore, creates a different picture.

- Hypothesis 3: The typical Nike woman is a white, blond, energetic and beautiful American girl between 20 and 30 years.

Research Question 4: Does Nike succeed in communicating their core values?

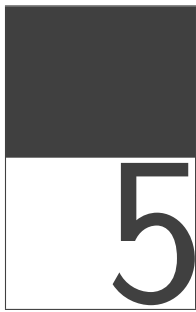
In order to answer this question, literature has to be reviewed in order to find out what can be addressed as the core values of Nike. Having found those, I will then compare them to the adverts and try to evaluate if they correspond to the ones found.

- Hypothesis 4: Nike succeeds in communicating their core values.

Research Question 5: Which different categories of femininity can be found in the print advertisements by Nike?

This research question is aimed at the represented types of women Nike uses in their adverts. The aim of this question is to find out if there are evident types of women and if yes, if these types are stereotypical types as already created by society.

I chose not to frame specific hypotheses here as the reply of this research question will hopefully follow from the entity of meanings and issues which will be found by means of the analysis of the selected advertisements. The reply of this research question will subsequently be the conclusion of this thesis.



The following chapter outlines the approach and the techniques used to undertake this research. Methods of sampling and data analysis are highlighted in order to explain the process and the methodological approach used in this study.

5.1 Research Approach

This thesis follows a research philosophy which is aimed towards the principles of (de-) constructionalism. The research philosophy acknowledges the continuously changing reality in which women are represented in the media and the way in which this representation is interpreted by the surrounding world. The information analysed in this research project is primarily based on words, symbols and pictures.

As mentioned previously, the main focus of attention in this study is the female advertising medium in Nike advertisement campaigns. The research questions, therefore, are preferentially geared to the embodiment of the brand Nike and to the way in which women are represented in Nike campaigns rather than to the reception of the images themselves. To answer these research questions, Cultural Studies and Gender Theory are both of great importance as they reside in an interdisciplinary context and primarily address questions of the multidisciplinary of culture. The goal of the present research project is to illustrate the representational system in which Nike addresses female conceptions of the body and beliefs by means of the image of a woman in advertisements. Hereby, the product itself is not at

the centre of the debate; more important is the process of representational meaning, which develops from certain cultural and social attributions of power. These attributions of power are by no means only objective but are produced by discursive practices, a term which is very popular in Cultural Studies. Additionally, the viewer him-/herself already has certain expectations and experiences in mind, which prevent him/her from objective consideration.

5.2 Research Design

For the investigation of the representation of women in Nike campaigns, it seems most reasonable to use the method of visual semiotics. The approach by Friedrich and Schweppenhäuser shall hereby serve as general background for this analysis. As mentioned previously, the focus of the analysis shall be on the contents visually communicated by the media. Images communicate emotions, they interpret their own contents and, in doing so, create their own emotional reality. Via analysis with the method of visual semiotics, the already encoded contents are being decoded and an independent reality of the image will be created. In order to achieve this, images and text have to be seen as a 'communicative entity' (Friedrich/Schweppenhäuser, p.16). It is the duty of visual semiotics to embank the ambiguity of images and to interpret the image which is imbedded in a certain context.

According to Lobinger, an image can be understood as a sign or even as a combination of signs. The image appears as a perfect alternative appeal for reality. One must not overlook the fact that an image is indeed a perfect copy of reality but still it will never be identical to it. By selection and further adaption, the image gains more and more meanings. This construction is not explicitly evident for the recipient but adds connotations to the seemingly codeless image. This aspect of diverse meanings is especially interesting in the field of advertising as images are occasionally used as elements of international advertising campaigns, with the hope of being globally coherent.⁸⁸

The method of visual analysis is used in many different Cultural Studies analyses. Semiotic approaches are by far the most used method in this field of research and they are used

88 Cf. Lobinger, p.59ff.

to investigate, first and foremost, the question of what images represent. What do images show? Do images show something in particular? Additionally, images also deal with questions for hidden meanings and messages. The central idea of semiotics is the idea of the different levels of meanings (denotation and connotation). Semiotic analysis looks behind the scenes of advertising and describes in great detail the methods used in order to convince the recipient to associate him-/herself with the product and to finally purchase it. Questions for mediated values of a message as well as for the way in which those values develop are typical questions which can be answered with the help of semiotics.⁸⁹

5.3 Research Method

Having identified the concept of branding as well as elaborated on a definition of the term advertising and after having given an overview of the concepts of visual communication as well as on Gender Studies and Cultural Studies, the aim of this study was to analyze selected advertisements by Nike and to elaborate strategies that are used in order to challenge or to prove gender stereotypes. These advertisements were found on Advertolog⁹⁰, an advertising and commercials platform. I paid EUR 39 membership fee for one month in order to be allowed to search their archive. The focus was hereby not exclusively on the images but also on the connotations between image and text. These works were then divided into a set of devices which have been found throughout the study of literature. Based on these concepts, a discussion of the strategies will follow in order to show the deconstructed or proven gender roles.

Methodologically, meta-theories such as Cultural Studies, Gender Studies and visual semiotics as well as theories of medium range such as the Encoding-Decoding model by Stuart Hall and the deconstructed approach of Gender Studies have been used. In terms of Gender Studies, I first and foremost used the approach by Judith Butler as she is one of the most important pioneers within the field. She deconstructs gender stereotypes by challenging

⁸⁹ Cf. Friedrich/Schweppenhäuser, p.74ff.

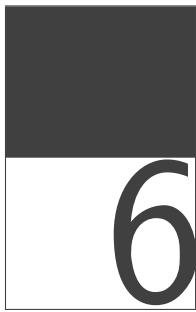
⁹⁰ n/a, *Advertolog Advertising Portal*.

gender norms, breaking down gender hierarchies and positioning a new perspective of seeing gender and sex as constructed by society and culture.

The images were selected arbitrarily from sports magazines as well as from the world wide web. The images were sorted according to the calendar year of the advertising campaigns and interpreted by means of defined categories. These categories were developed first and foremost from literature and from classification of the research material. The qualitative analysis hereby was composed of images and words or rather slogans of the selected advertisements. The most important aspect was hereby to understand and interpret the message of the advertisement. Gradually, a theoretical frame was developed by assembling the primary and secondary data.

A research project about Adidas performed in Sweden in 2006 provides a framework which is geared to three major points of data analysis. These are content (description of what the picture is actually showing; the denotation of the image), form and material (visual appearance of the advertisement) and analysis (the connotation of the image due to literature research and used theories).⁹¹ This research framework seemed to be highly relevant for this current research project and was, therefore, adapted to the topic of the representation of women in Nike campaigns.

91 Cf. Berntson/Jarnemo/Philipson, p.33ff.



Analysis

The aim of this part of my thesis is to go into detail concerning Nike's gender (de)-construction. Advertisements, pictures or photography can always be and have to be read as cultural texts. Keeping with Stuart Hall, every object is a cultural text and can, therefore, be read as a text. Since the iconographic representation of women and the body presented through the male gaze are at the center of debates, the following analysis of selected advertisements will look at these works as cultural texts as well as at explicit body images within these texts. I have chosen to use the selected pictures in my analysis as they are the focused material and, therefore, the essential part in this thesis. In this analysis, not first and foremost the receiver, but rather the represented body image is out in focus. In this case, as already discussed in an earlier chapter, the concepts are content, form and material and analysis of the images. What is also important is the message Nike tries to convey and the target groups they try to reach. Therefore, I also try to elaborate on these two factors in the analysis of the advertisements.

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At least two pictures of adverts from every year from 2005 until 2013 have been chosen and analyzed according to the analytical tools previously presented. All the material collected from different Nike campaigns contains exclusively females. The pictures are presented in chronological order from 2005 until 2013 in order to illustrate the trend and the changes in the portrayal of women in Nike adverts.

6.1 Nike's Core Values or: The Eleven Maxims

The core values of a brand are the most important elements within the analysis of texts as they communicate the image of the brand in order to persuade the consumer to buy the product. They are, therefore, a central issue to find out if the intended message is being communicated to the outside world and, subsequently, if the core values have been fulfilled. The following 11 maxims of Nike are taken from a website called Core Value Institute (n/a, *Core values institute website*).

1. It is our nature to innovate. The company sees innovation as one of its core organizational competencies. Nike is a company.
2. Nike is a brand. The swoosh logo is instantly recognizable around the world. Nike see this as the symbol of its global leadership. It will enter only those markets that it thinks it can dominate. It says: If we can't lead it, we don't need it.
3. Simplify and go. Nike products have short life-cycles in terms both of technology and fashion. The company believes that making quick yet skillful decisions is the key to its success. This aspect of Nike's vision, together with the seventh maxim, is particularly powerful in articulating the company's hugely successful use of emergent strategy.

4. The consumer decides. The company is keenly aware of the sophistication of its customers and it treats them as its key stakeholder.
5. Be a sponge. Employees at Nike are encouraged to be curious and open to new ideas, whatever their source. Evolve immediately. Nike sees itself as being in perpetual motion viewing change as a key source of innovation. This attitude can easily be observed in the wide range of products that Nike offers its consumers. It is another example of the company's use of emergent strategy to good effect.
6. Do the right thing. Nike thinks of itself as a responsible global citizen, embracing the stakeholder view of corporate social responsibility. It encourages its people to be honest and transparent and to promote diversity and sustainability.
7. Master the fundamentals. All the innovation in the world is useless if you can't put it into action. A crucial part of Nike's success is its ability to refine its performance. The recent growth in profits suggests that it's achieving this.
8. We are on the offense always. To stay ahead in an extremely competitive environment, Nike urges its people to act like leaders in their field to achieve victory.
9. Remember the Man. The late Bill Bowerman is still held in high esteem throughout Nike, both for his understanding of athletes' needs and for his innovative spirit.⁹²

In a letter to everybody which is published on the Nike homepage, Mark Parker, Nike CEO, shares five lessons with us which he believes in:

- Transparency is an asset, not a risk
- Collaboration enables systemic change
- Every challenge and risk is an opportunity
- Design allows you to prototype the future, rather than retrofit the past
- To make real change, you have to be a catalyst⁹³

⁹² n/a, *Core values institute website*.

⁹³ n/a, *Nike Biz website*.

According to Parker, '[w]ith each new discovery and partnership, we willingly gave up old ideas to shift our thinking toward a better, smarter, faster and ultimately more sustainable future - financially, environmentally and socially' (<http://www.nikebiz.com>).

6.2 Analysis of the selected advertisements

6.2.1 2005 - MY BUTT, MY THIGHS, MY KNEES, MY SHOULDERS



Figure 8: My butt, my thighs, my knees, my shoulders

Content - These adverts from 2005 feature six female body parts: butt, thighs, knees and shoulders. The body parts are entirely black and white, presented with shades in order to play them to the gallery, framed by colourful splashes, most of them in pink and purple. The woman who these body parts belong to seems to have trained and worked on her body hard in order to create muscles. She looks strong and self-confident, being in balance with her own body, seems sophisticated but still youthful. Each advert has a text accompanying it to the left or right side of the picture. Below every picture, both the Nike swoosh and the slogan are presented with 'Just Do It'.

MY BUTT: *My butt is big and round like the letter C and then thousand lunges have made it rounder but not smaller. And that's just fine. It's a space heater for my side of the bed.*

It's my ambassador. To those who walk behind me, it's a border collie that herds skinny women away from the best deals at clothing sales. My butt is big and that's just fine. And those who might scorn it are invited to kiss it. Just Do it.

MY THIGHS: I have thunder thighs. And that's a compliment because they are strong and toned and muscular and though they are unwelcome in the petite section they are cheered on in marathons. Fifty years from now I'll bounce a child on my thunder thighs and then I'll go for a run. Just Do It.

MY KNEES: My knees are tomboys. They get bruised and cut every time I play soccer. I'm proud of them and wear my dresses short. My mother worries I will never marry with knees like that. But I know there's someone out there who will say to me: I love you and I love your knees. I want the four of us to grow old together. Just Do It.

MY SHOUDLERS: My shoulders aren't dainty or proportional to my hips. Some say they are like a man's. I say, leave men out of it. They are mine. I made them in a swimming pool then I went to yoga and made my arms. Just Do It.

When looking at these pictures, we see a model presenting Nike running shorts and tops atop a pair of appealing muscular legs and thighs, a firm butt and muscular shoulders.

Form and material - The print adverts titled MY BUTT, MY THIGHS, MY KNEES, MY SHOUDLERS were created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in the United States. The advert was released in September 2005.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, USA, Portland.

Analysis - These adverts are aimed at women who have an athletic body and do not respond to today's social standards which require thin size-0-bodies. Nike tries to encourage women to feel self-confident with and in their body, to be proud of their body and not to be afraid of showing it. While talking about marathons and spinning classes, Nike try to encourage women to work on their body in order to achieve strength and muscles by running and riding their spinning bikes. If arms or legs aren't considered proportional to the other parts of the body by societal standards, this is just fine as they are made by doing yoga classes

or swimming sessions. We see, on the one hand, that Nike wants to get away from societal standards and elaborate on what really makes a body, on what is important. Nike, therefore, try to deconstruct gender norms as they are showing a 'normal' athletic woman who does not fully respond to societal standards, who does not care about what people say. Hereby, societal rules are disclosed. On the other hand, Nike uses a much deeper message while applying the female body to sex appeal which makes male recipients sit up and take notice. When looking at the ads, we do not at first look at the sports gear represented. What actually attracts our, and especially men's, attention, is the usage of much skin of body parts which are thought to be attractive and, therefore, attracting the male gaze. The spectator is invited to visit a passive object of desire while he or she is confronted with the female body and its sexuality. The woman is hereby reduced to her sexuality as only those bodily parts which are considered as sexually attractive are shown in the advert. If we go a step further, we can also say that the model herself performs a certain kind of sexuality, in Butler's words, that she performs a stylized repetition of acts.⁹⁴ With this advert, Nike emphasizes on the one hand the excellence for serious female athletes by showing them as free, independent, emancipated women. On the other hand, Nike conceptualizes a specific object which is no other than the female body committed to the male gaze. In Butler's view, this advert would be a perfect example for 'reiterative performative failure' (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p.234), as '[who] I want to be is an idea or image that is a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer'(Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p.234).

94 Cf. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.256.

6.2.2 2006 - I-STORY LOKELANI



(a) 08:14



(b) 08:45



(c) 17:53

Figure 9: I-Story Lokelani

Content - This advert from 2006 features Lokelani McMichael, U.S. American triathlete, surfer and model. In 1995, Lokelani became the youngest woman to finish the Hawaii Ironman. We see a trilogy, built like a story, starting at 08:14 in the morning in Kailua-Kona, a village in the Hawaiian district Kona. Lokelani is doing yoga, wearing black trousers and a white tank top. She seems to be in a yoga studio as we can see mats, a towel and her drinking bottle. The woman is bathed in a warm, natural light; she is concentrating on her yoga exercises, looking away from the viewer, only being with herself and her body. The caption 'I have been told I have too many muscles. But I've had 34 magazine covers. That's not bad for too many muscles!' adds to the underlining of her sporty, fit and model-like appearance on the advert. The story goes on at 08:45; we are still in Kona. Lokelani is lying on her yoga mat, looking directly into the camera this time; the focus is only on her body. The text accompanying the picture says the following: 'I am a triathlete and a girl. I am an early riser and an occasional fast food eater. I am a high-heel walker and a long-distance runner. I set a world record when I was 18, I swim with sharks but I would never skydive. I like an adrenaline rush but I'm not crazy. I am still learning to pace myself'. The third picture shows Lokelani at 17:53 in Hong Kong, again doing yoga exercises. She is now dressed in brown trousers and a beige sports top, looking like a butterfly on her back. The caption 'I think you have to take advantage of the age you are at this moment. You're only 25 once. And you're only going to be 40 once' underlines the meditative atmosphere which the advert displays.

Form and material - The print advert titled I-STORY LOKELANI was created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in Tokyo, Japan. The advert was released in October 2006.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, Tokyo, Japan.

Analysis - This trilogy features a woman who is successful in her sports- as well as in her model life. She appears self-confident and as coinciding with herself and with her body. In Helstein's words, 'Nike suggests that we can be freed from ourselves by offering us a vision of our true self' (Helstein, p.285). This advert shows exactly that. Lokelani is freed from herself; she has made up her mind and arrived at the right place at the right time. With this advert, Nike establishes a true, desirable and achievable condition within its own discourse. On the other hand we can argue an intimate context which is established by the

warm and natural light by which Lokelani is surrounded. The advert, subsequently, creates a certain awareness of being-looked at. 'The sports equipment is turned into a fashion item, as woman is turned into the object of the male gaze' (Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.354). Lokelani is hereby turned into a symbolic object, 'one of a perceived being' (Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.354). Although she does not look insecure, she is endowed with the appearance of having to be protected.

What is interesting here is that this campaign from Japan is not featuring a Japanese model. Lokelani McMichael was born in Kailua Kona, Hawaii, and is a U.S. American citizen. The question is why Nike did not use a Japanese female model to represent its brand. It is a fact that in many Japanese or Chinese campaigns, no or very few local models are featured. And if a local Japanese or Chinese model is representing the brand, it is often the case that her eyes get widened by Photoshop and her skin gets whitened with makeup in order to let her look more European or North American. We can hereby conclude that Japanese or Chinese models are not as widely accepted among society as European or North American models and that they do not correspond to the overall valid ideal.

6.2.3 2007 - ARE YOU LOOKING AT MY TITLES?

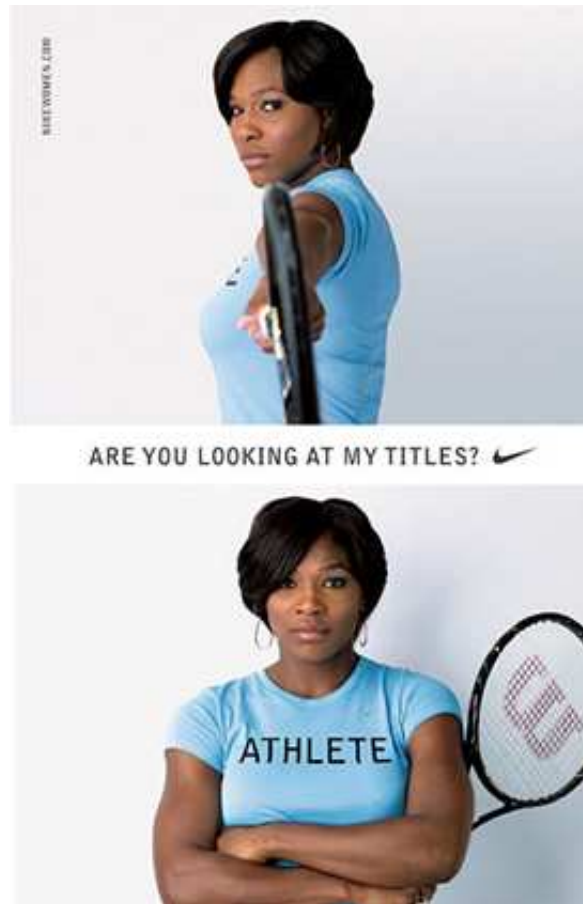


Figure 10: Are You Looking at my Titles?

Content - This advert from 2007 features Serena Williams, U.S. American tennis star. The picture is very simple, without any surrounding; it is just the female model, her body and her tennis racket. We can only see the upper part of her body which makes the advert look like a portrait. Serena is dressed in a light blue t-shirt with the inscription ATHLETE. She wears make up and earrings. The first picture shows Serena facing us from the side; her gaze is serious, nearly provocative. She is holding her tennis racket against us like a weapon which she will use any second. The second picture shows her facing the audience from the front. Her face is a bit more relaxed; she even smiles a little and holds her arms crossed below her breasts. The whole advert creates the intention that Serena is being photographed by a photographer in his or her atelier in front of a screen.

Form and material - The print advert titled ARE YOU LOOKING AT MY TITLES? was created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in the United States. The advert was released in August 2007.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, USA, Portland.

Analysis - This advert is presumably aimed to support women, to encourage women to have more self-confidence in their body and to emphasize the female image in the world of sports. However, a feminist website advises the audience not to congratulate Nike so quickly. The advert has the caption ARE YOU LOOKING AT MY TITLES? The answer here is definitely no. The audience is not looking at the tennis star's titles because they are not shown in this picture. Instead, the recipients' gaze rather follows her chest and, subsequently, her breasts. In my opinion, this is exactly what Nike intends to do with this advert. If the aim had been to show Serena's physical and muscular appearance, a picture of her while playing tennis would also have been adequate. Keeping with Judith Butler, the images of a woman have been constructed by society. The woman is overlapped by codes and projections, created almost exclusively by the masculine eye. Nike confronts the audience directly with adherent gender stereotypes - sexuality is offered to the public. Serena Williams is used in this advert as a sexual object to the male gaze, reduced to her sexual body parts and committed to the stereotypical view of women which society bears in mind. In Van Amsterdam's view, Nike 'produce a desirable body' (Van Amsterdam, p.293) with this advert. Existing gender roles are maintained, reflected and shaped by culture in reducing a female sport star to nothing but her female sexuality.

6.2.4 2008 - ASHLEY NELSON



Figure 11: Ashley Nelson

Content - The advert features Ashley Nelson, British sprinter and holder of the domestic Championship Record. Ashley is captured running on a construction site, tower cranes on each side of the lane, drawn by an agricultural tractor. The construction site is built like a tower which lets Ashley appear as if she ran upwards, right into the sky. We see Ashley from the back, her eyes facing the ground. Three planes are flying through the clouds. The picture shows Ashley training very hard, probably for a competition. She is wearing running gear and running shoes; her body is strong like steel, we can see her muscles, especially her legs look very strong. The text on the advert, accompanied by the Nike swoosh, emphasizes this strength:

The girl who beats boys. Meet Ashley Nelson. 17. Sprinter. Ashley started winning races age 6. So they put her up against the boys. No problem. Now she's preparing for four year's time. And to take on the world. I'll be ready. Just Do It.

Form and material - The print advert titled ASHLEY NELSON was created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in United Kingdom. The advert was released in August 2008.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, United Kingdom, London.

Analysis - The advert is aimed to encourage women to train even harder as they are doing at the moment in any case. Ashley delivers the message that it does not matter where and in which surrounding we are training. What matters is that we are training and that we are training hard. In order to run, we only need running shoes and, in the best case, Nike running gear. Having that, we can just go out and run; running is possible everywhere. The advert displays the fit, feminine body, associated with physical characteristics such as muscles, upright posture and slenderness. According to van Amsterdam, athletic looking people are people, who look self-confident, energetic, extraverted, competitive, strong, youthful, happy and healthy.⁹⁵ This is what Ashley looks like in this advert. We can almost feel her energy as she is running up into the sky. In my opinion, this advert is already different to the pictures from 2005 until 2007 as it shows a different image of the woman. Ashley represents the strong, energetic, competitive woman who also competes with men (see text). She does not have anything in mind but winning; she would rather be dying in order to win this particular race. In this advert, Nike starts to walk away from the female image as sexualized object committed to the male gaze. Different to Serena Williams in the advert from 2007 we indeed look at Ashley's titles here. In van Amsterdam's view, women with a muscular appearance are considered athletic but not to be heterosexually desirable.⁹⁶ In my opinion, Nike have succeeded here in filling a niche between the representation of women as sexualized objects and so called 'gymaholic' women. Ashley's embodiment is true, reliable and admirable. She looks healthy and energetic while still looking like a woman.

95 Cf. Van Amsterdam/Knoppers/Claringbould, p.297.

96 Cf. Van Amsterdam/Knoppers/Claringbould, p.300.

6.2.5 2008 - LINDSEY TARPLEY



Figure 12: Lindsey Tarpley

Content - The advert features Lindsey Tarpley, U.S. American professional soccer player and holder of two Olympic gold medals. In the picture above, Lindsey is cross-training very hard on a running track, probably in a sports stadium. She is wearing functional Nike shorts and t-shirt as well as cross-training shoes. We assume from the twilight in the picture that it is already evening but the two women are still working on their body. In the right upper corner, the brand name Nike is presented. The advert is at the same time an advertisement for a competition to win a free sparq training session. As the text on the advert says, sparq is an acronym which stands for speed, power, agility, reaction and quickness. With entering the Nike website, 'you and your friends [can] get better' by winning a free training session.

Form and material - The print advert titled LINDSEY TARPLEY was created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in United Kingdom. The advert was released in March 2008.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, United Kingdom, London.

Analysis - The same as the advert ASHLEY NELSON, this one from 2008 is aiming at women, who want to gain strength, who want to become quicker and fitter. The audience is women who have already been training hard but whose goal it is to get better. What matters for these women is not that they are doing sports but rather in which time they are doing it and how hard they are doing it. These women really want to reach their goal. What one notices when looking at the pictures is that the represented women in Nike adverts are always exclusively beautiful women. This is also part of the mission Nike wants to bring out into the world: that sports, especially when wearing Nike gear, makes us more beautiful, more attractive, more relaxed and, therefore, more self-confident. What is also new here is the surpassing usage of female testimonials. We already saw Serena Williams, Ashley Nelson and now Lindsey Tarpley, all famous U.S. American sport stars. Generally spoken, testimonial advertising is the identification with an idol, in this case, with a sport star. According to Andresen, testimonial advertising is the quality proof of the advertised brand or product. By using a testimonial, the brand or product is automatically presented in a better light and, therefore, encourages the consumer to buy the product by drawing a certain connection between the product and the testimonial.⁹⁷ Sport stars are representing achievement, success and desirable goals. We as the consumers are sympathetic to the models representing the product and subsequently develop a positive feeling for the product and the brand.

97 Cf. Andresen, p.120.

6.2.6 2009 - JOIN

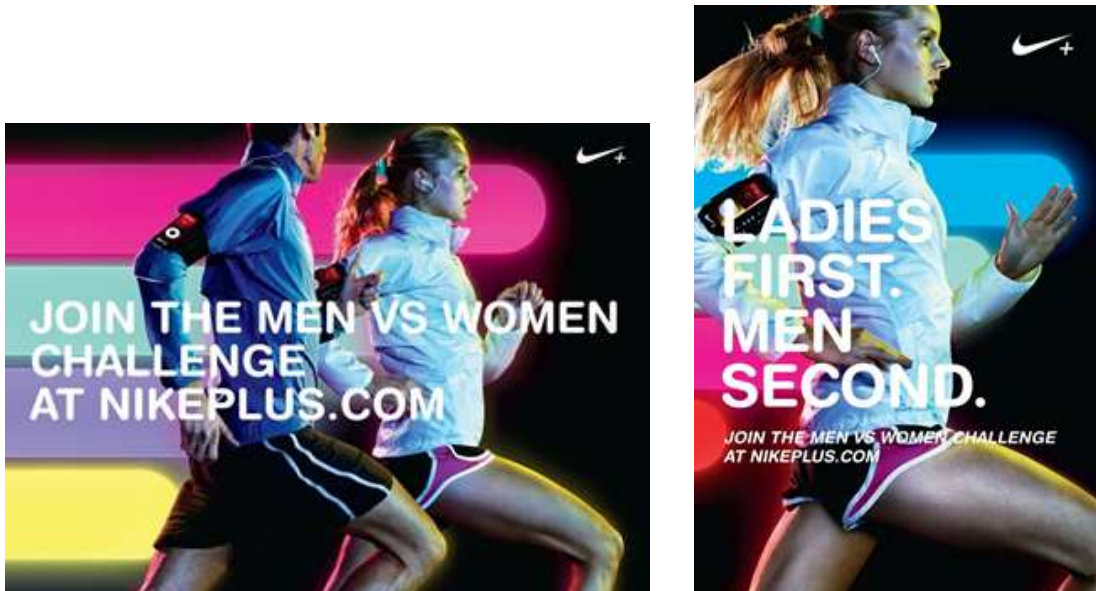


Figure 13: Join

Content - This advert from 2009 is divided into two pictures which tell a story but which would at the time work individually just as well. The first advert shows a man and a woman, probably a couple, who are going for a run together. Both of them are wearing short sports shorts and a functional, light sports jacket. Each of them is wearing ear-phones and carrying their I-pod with a wristband attached to their arms. The blurred colors indicate their quickness with which they are passing by. The Nike logo is presented in the right upper corner. While the man is facing the woman from the side, the woman's eyes are focused straight ahead, not even noticing the male gaze. The consumer assumes that they are doing a challenge as the text on the advert says in bold letters: 'Join the men vs. women challenge at Nike.com'. The second picture is only showing the woman. It is the same woman in the same picture, only amplified. The text is still the same but with an additional comment: 'Ladies first. Men second'.

Form and material - The print advert titled Join was created by 72andSunny advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in the United States. The advert was released in March 2009.

Company: 72andSunny advertising agency, United States.

Analysis - The adverts are working best when communicated together as a kind of photo story. As already discussed the first picture shows a man and a woman running together. While the male runner is facing the woman, her eyes are looking straight ahead, her eyes only focusing on the run. There is nothing else there, only herself, the music and her run. The female runner takes her sport seriously. She is completely focused on her performance, she has a goal and the goal is power. This assumption is even more affirmed in the second picture where the female runner is suddenly on her own. She seems to have overtaken the male runner, who had nothing else in mind than focusing the women from the side. On the one hand, this advert shows a self-confident woman, a woman who knows what she wants in life, an independent woman who has arrived in her world which is a world of sports. On the other hand, this independent and self-confident is suddenly reduced to herself as being an object of male desire with the male gaze focusing in her sexual body. The text in the first picture indicates already that there is certain challenge between men and women and we know that this challenge is not only understood in sportive matters. The debate of oppression of women and women's outcry called emancipation is not something new to the world. Gender Studies are still focusing on unequal treatment of men and women. The second picture is instead only focusing on the female runner. By claiming 'women first, men second' the advert indicates that the woman overtook the man because she has the mental power to succeed. We can also interpret the advert in a more provocative way and say that now the time has come for women to overtake men, to overtake the power men once used to have and to overtake male authority. This theme has also found its way into advertising. According to Helstein, the combination of female athletes and athletics with emancipation has been used severely within the recent advertising efforts directed to women.⁹⁸ Nike tries to create a psychic dimension here, showing that emancipation is not intelligible. It also illustrates the arguably pairing of emancipation as being both 'desirable and possible, but in effect, unattainable' (Helstein, 278). Failure in the case of this Nike advert is being presented on both sides. The man is failing in terms of physical lack as he is not able to keep up with the woman. But the woman is failing, too, namely in being put in the position of a sexual object committed to male desire.

98 Cf. Helstein, p.277.

6.2.7 2010 - MAKE YOURSELF



Figure 14: Make Yourself

Content - This advert from 2010's Nike Women Make Yourself-Campaign features Allyson Felix, U.S. Olympic Medalist in track and field sprint, with the 200 meter sprint being her specialty. In the Nike print advert above, Felix is wearing a grey Nike top, grey leisurely sports trousers with a pullover bound round her hips. She is also wearing biking gloves, which a lot of track and field runners do in order not to lose the echelon on their way to the next colleague. The light reflections hypothesize that Felix is coming back from a training run as sweat can be recognized on her top as well as on her skin. She is wearing her hair loose, which is slightly blown over by the wind. In bold letterhead, Nike motivates the spectators to 'make yourself strong'. In the left lower corner we find the reference to Allyson Felix as a U.S. Olympic Medalist in track in field. The colors of the picture are minimized to grey and a bit of purple, which surround her dark skin and black hair. Felix is not wearing makeup. The second advert features Sofia Boutella, Algerian-French hip-hop and street dancer. Boutella's appearance is exactly the same as Felix's: Nike top and sports trousers, bold letterhead over her breasts and a glare just as Felix.

Form and material - The print adverts titled STRONG and PROUD were created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in the United States. The advert was released in August 2010.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, USA, Portland.

Analysis - This advert presents Allyson Felix as a strong woman, knowing what she wants, and being completely on the right track. She looks directly and straight into the camera which proves self-confidence and strength. This is also the target audience for this Nike advert: women who know what they want in life; women who are aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it. We can assume that Allyson Felix is a strong woman, not only because we know her titles, but because we can also see her abdominal and arm muscles. The picture of Sofia Boutella only confirms this assumption. Although Felix is wearing a very short top, ending below her breasts this advert does not sexualize her femaleness at first sight. The bold letters are written just over the image of her breasts so that we indeed take a look at them but are distracted by the lettering. The picture might appear very strong in the beginning but when looking at it in greater detail we perceive the emphasis on her femininity. Examining her pose, we find something very stereotypical in the representation of women in advertising - the S-curve. Women are almost exclusively shown in this pose, in lying as well as in standing position. The S-curve emphasizes the women's breasts and waist and subsequently reduces the represented woman to her body and her sexuality. If we thought of men in advertising, we would come to the conclusion that men are always shown in an upright position and if not, they are sitting on something. But male poses are completely different from women's. Felix would appear even stronger in this advert when having been photographed in an upright position. According to Helstein, recent Nike adverts 'emphasize excellence for serious female athletes and athletics' (Helstein, p.279). And indeed, we have already sensed a shift in the representational directions of Nike but we have still not achieved our goal. To say it in Butler's words, 'emancipation is intelligible, or more specifically, thought to be a possibility' (Butler quoted in Helstein, p.285). This advert is a possibility, a desire, and is also stays one. What this advert is still lacking is the final step forward to reach full success.



Figure 15: Make Yourself

This picture is also taken from the 2010's Nike Women Make Yourself-Campaign and features, again, track and field sprinter Allyson Felix. The U.S. sprint star is shown in a very athletic and professional pose, just as she would be in when running in a competition. Felix is wearing Nike running gear and running shoes, the whole equipment in the color black. At a first glance, I think it is safe to say that we see a strong, powerful and athletic woman. Looking at the picture in greater detail, what strikes me is the leash which is bound around Felix' hips. The athlete seems to not being able to run away as the leash is holding her back, tied to something we cannot see. What is shown here is the challenge of the traditional role behavior and power structures, viewed as women expressing their place in society. This representation of the running star responds to the suppression of women and to their dependence (on man), to repression and invisibility. Even stronger than in the adverts discussed before, emancipation is a wish which is very far away, which seems unrealizable. It is still a desire for freedom, for empowerment rather than for abasement. Allyson Felix tries to reach exactly this emancipation, this freedom and empowerment, but she is not able to get there as something is holding her back: a phallographic society and the rules established in it over time, stereotypical views on gender roles and expectations as well as the male gaze.

6.2.8 2010 - ROCK VICTORIOUS



(a) Maria Sharapova



(b) Serena Williams



(c) Susanna Kallur

Figure 16: Rock Victorious

Content - This trilogy from 2010 features three sport stars, Russian tennis professional Maria Sharapova, U.S. American tennis player Serena Williams and Swedish hurdle star Susanna Kallur. The images are shown in black and white; also the clothes of the female sport stars are almost exclusively black. We can see particulates of dust and millions of drops of water surrounding them. Each of them is illustrated with the sports equipment they are famous for: Maria and Serena with their tennis rackets and Susanna as jumping over a hurdle.

Form and material - The print advert titled FREE YOURSELF was created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in the United States. The advert was released in March 2010.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, USA, Portland.

Analysis - In Rock Victorious, Nike is celebrating the achievements of the top athletes Maria Sharapova, Serena Williams and Susanna Kallur. Each image of the campaign represents the attitude, personality, competitiveness and grace of the female sport stars. The claim hereby is simple: winning is all which shall be achieved, winning is what we live for, winning is addictive and contagious.⁹⁹ As there are no other colors than black and white, the viewer is not distracted by anything dispensable. The illustrations are focusing on the essence only, the female athletes. The particulates of dust and water drops show the energy these women have. They let us assume at what speed they are hitting the tennis ball and at what speed they are jumping over the hurdles. This illustration is pure energy, speed and power. Rock is powerful music and in order to achieve victory, you have to be powerful and hard to yourself. The same as in the adverts from 2010, women are no more represented as 'creating a dialogue' to their own lives (Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.337) but they are represented in a condition of creating the 'signifiers of freedom and success' (Helstein, p.286). Within this narrative, 'the theme of emancipation establishes a belief that progress, as a result of true and innocent knowledge and effort, will free us to become who we want to be' (Helstein, p.287).

99 n/a, *The inspiration room website*.

6.2.9 2011 - FREE YOURSELF



Figure 17: Free Yourself

Content - This advert from the Free Yourself Campaign launched in 2011 features once more U.S. track and field sprint star Allyson Felix. Different as in the advert from 2010, Felix is dressed in black running trousers, a white long sleeve jacket and black and pink Nike running shoes. With the slogan in the left upper corner, Nike invites the viewers to free themselves with Nike running gear. Felix looks athletic, strong and full of energy. The background of the picture shows a big city, probably New York, which can be assumed from the skyscrapers. The background picture is blurred, probably from the dust in the city. Allyson Felix seems to be running on top of the skyscrapers, she is jumping back and forth between the houses and the trees.

Form and material - The print advert titled FREE YOURSELF was created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in the United States. The advert was released in September 2011.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, USA, Portland.

Analysis - This print advert featuring Allyson Felix is aiming at women to be more natural, to be less determined and rigorous with themselves. The testimonial appears natural and happy, confident with her own body, and agreeing with herself. Comparing this advert with the pictures from 2008 until now, this one seems to be an exception rather than confirming the overall trend, which could be identified as one presenting women as strong, ambitious and determined. The earlier adverts had shown women in a very energetic pose, their eyes aiming straight ahead, completely being aware of the situation. This advert in contrast shows the female model in a playful, nearly flirting, mode. Felix' eyes are playing with the camera, and, subsequently, with the viewer of the advert. We can also go one step further and analyze the title of the campaign. Free yourself - free yourself from what? In my opinion, this advert aims at women to free themselves from the constraint to do sports, from the constraint to always work on the body, to become fitter and more muscular. The campaign invites and motivates women to free themselves from societal stereotypes, rules and codes inscribed in the heads of human beings. Additionally, women shall stop imitating and trying to be someone who they cannot be. The goal to achieve is freedom from all exterior oppressiveness in order to have fun and enjoy oneself.

6.2.10 2011 - FREE YOURSELF



Figure 18: Free Yourself

Content - This advert features Russian tennis professional Maria Sharapova while doing sit-ups. She is dressed in black hot-pants and a white sports bra. She wears her hair loose and her make-up is light. Everything around her is dark; the camera focuses only on her body, on her muscles and on her sweat.

Form and material - The print advert titled FREE YOURSELF was created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in the United States. The advert was released in June 2011.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, USA, Portland.

Analysis - This advert within the Make Yourself campaign is aimed to 'motivate women everywhere to achieve their goals and become the best versions of themselves, whatever this may be: fit, proud, fast, healthy, strong or beautiful' (<http://www.nikeinc.com>). Nike communicates a true, powerful image of female fitness by illustrating Sharapova as charismatic and authentic on the one hand but also as hard-working and eager to reach her goals on the other hand. This advert, the same as the one featuring Allyson Felix, tells an inspirational story of life, trying to encourage women to start their workout today. Nike encourages its viewers to take up unforeseen challenges in life and to gain the strength to

work hard on their bodies. No matter if they sweat and feel pain, this challenge has to be fulfilled and it will be fulfilled with the right attitude.

6.2.11 2012 - GAME ON WORLD



(a) Jump



(b) Run

Figure 19: Game on World

Content - This Nike advert from July 2012 features again Allison Felix who has been acting as a testimonial for Nike for several years. The first picture shows Felix in black synthetic

trousers and an orange jacket. Her hair is tied together. When looking at the picture in more detail, we get the impression that the sprinter is carrying a parachute in her black backpack. She seems to be bailing out with the parachute on her back, being on the verge of pulling the release cord. She looks energetic and in pure action, eager to do something crazy in the very next moment. The second picture shows her in pink shorts and light blue long sleeve running shirt as well as black and light blue Nike running shoes. She looks very professional, especially in these Nike clothes which seem to be the latest fashion. She seems to be running out of a tunnel into a stadium where she successfully competes on a running track with steps measuring the overall length of 3.02 meters.

Form and material - The print advert titled GAME ON WORLD was created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in the United States. The advert was released in July 2012.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, USA, Portland.

Analysis - In the first advert, Allyson Felix appears stronger and more energetic than ever before. Stereotypically, skydiving is not something our society accepts as a so called female sport. In this advert, Nike clearly challenges and deconstructs gender stereotypes by putting a woman into a male connoted activity. Felix takes over the part of a man and shows that it is possible. Nike provocatively reveals the relationship between the sexes by openly responding to the existing power structures between men and women in our society. Suppression of women and dependence on man is being parodied by reversing the gender roles. With this advert, Nike ends the representation of women as sexualized objects in advertising and rather confronts society directly with the opposite.

In the second advert, the focus has been put on the appearance of the sport star as very muscular and strong. Felix' thighs are being played to the gallery, she is in perfect shape, and every single muscle of her body is strained. She is just about to run and the audience is able to clearly feel the speed of the movement. She is concentrated on the run, probably on the competition, her eyes are clearly focused, and for her there is nothing else but herself and her run.

6.2.12 2012 - I WOULD RUN TO YOU



Figure 20: I Would Run to You

Content - This advert is composed like a story and is also available as TV spot. The story is simple: There is a young couple; she is living in New York while her boyfriend is living in Los Angeles. They have a long-distance relationship and only see each other rarely. One day they decide to run to each other and meet up in the middle of the distance. The girl is very athletic; she runs days and nights, never becomes exhausted, always smiles; her goal is her boyfriend. In contrast to her, her boyfriend is not very athletic. He starts running

but soon becomes exhausted; he even hurts himself and almost has a heart attack so that he has to be brought to hospital. After a few days running, she easily makes her way to her boyfriend and arrives at his bedside in the neighbourhood of Los Angeles.

The first picture shows the girl passing skyscrapers, probably in Manhattan, New York. She is defined in the picture while the surrounding (skyscrapers, people who are on their way to work) is blurred; the focus is, therefore, exclusively on her. She is wearing rather girlish clothes such as a pink top, a purple pullover bound around her hips and pink Nike running shoes. She wears a ponytail and looks very athletic due to her long steps while running. She seems to be focused on her goal and concentrated on what she is doing: running. The second picture is a two-folded picture, showing herself running on the left hand side during daylight and her boyfriend running on the right hand side during night time. He is wearing casual shorts and a hoodie sweater. The most important thing is that he is not wearing Nike running shoes.

Form and material - The print advert titled I WOULD RUN TO YOU was created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in the United States. The advert was released in April 2012.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, USA, Portland.

Analysis - This advert tells the story of a couple who has the same goal in mind: seeing each other after having missed each other for a longer period of time. The difference between the two of them is that the girl is very athletic and easily manages to run the long distance between New York and Los Angeles while her boyfriend does not seem to be a frequent runner as he is in bad shape. In the end it is the woman who reaches her goal, not the man. Although the whole story does not seem to be a competition, she succeeds and beats her boyfriend. In this advert, Nike shows a woman winning the race of her life. Looking at the content of the story in more detail, this advert shows that women in general establish a greater power of endurance in order to reach their goal. Women are the ones who clench their teeth and keep focused on the important issue in life: winning. With this advert, Nike aims to motivate women to never lose sight of their goal, to keep focused on what they wish to achieve and to work as hard as possible in order to be successful. Although the girl is represented as very girlish at first sight, she appears as self-confident and eager to

achieve her goals in the end. The question is why Nike illustrated the woman in this girlish perspective. We have already discussed before that brands are gendered with the help of (stereotypical) gender-specific colors for instance in order to response to women in general in a more definite way.

6.2.13 2013 - AGE IS JUST A NUMBER



Figure 21: Age Is Just a Number

Content - According to the statement on the Nike. Inc. Website from February 15, 2013, 'Serena Williams is regarded as the world's pre-eminent female tennis player after capturing gold in London and two Grand Slams' (<http://www.nikeinc.com/news/serena-williams-regains-world-number-one-spot>) in 2012. Nevertheless, she has not officially been No. 1 in the world rankings anymore. With the victory in Qatar in 2013, Serena Williams has yielded this top spot again. The athlete has been a Nike testimonial since 2003 and is now the oldest female No. 1 breaking the record set in 1985. Serena's outfit while winning in Qatar is described in great detail on the Nike Website:

In Qatar, Williams has been wearing the Nike Pleated Knit Dress. The dress' stretch polyester incorporates Nike Dri-FIT material to help pull moisture away from the skin to the surface of the garment, keeping Williams dry and cool. The Nike Sphere mesh has a 3-D structure that provides lightweight ventilation and keeps the product from clinging to the skin. (<http://www.nikeinc.com/news/serena-williams-regains-world-number-one-spot>)

This description lets us assume that Williams' victory would not have been possible without Nike sports gear. Nike's statement is that if we want to win, that if we want to achieve our goals, we have to wear clothes from the brand. With wearing Nike clothes, we are in perfect shape and in our best condition to be able to win. This advert shows Serena in black and white colors. Only her face and part of her right shoulder are shown in the left corner of the picture, photographed from the back. Her look is aimed downwards.

Form and material - The print advert titled AGE IS JUST A NUMBER was created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in the United States. The advert was released in February 2013.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, USA, Portland.

Analysis - This advert features a mature, self-confident and charismatic woman who knows what she wants in life and who seems to have already achieved most of it. She is a successful tennis player, an athlete, a star. She is famous, well-known all over the world and she does not only represent tennis in general and Nike in particular but she also stands for victory, power of endurance, strength and self-confidence. The text 'Age is just a number. Serena's is 1' tells us that age and aiming high do not exclude each other. Although Serena was only born in 1981, with 32 she counts as one of the older stars in the sports world. She is still raising the bar and with her victory in Qatar, she achieved exactly what she deserves: the number 1. With this advert, Nike is aiming at elderly women who might have already given up their goals they had in life. With Serena Williams, these people are retracted to reality where they are motivated to go on and to try to achieve what they have always wanted.

6.2.14 2013 - *Without title*

Figure 22: *without title*

Content - The very recent print advert by Nike shows Serena Williams in casual sports clothes: black running trousers, a black-and-white top and a grey fleece jacket, the Nike swoosh clearly visible on her left upper arm. She is sitting in a gym between apparatuses probably for leapfrogging. She is sitting there in pondering silence, almost meditative, allowing her mind to wonder, not thinking about something in particular. The text accompanying the advert says 'You can become strong and powerful and beautiful'.

Form and material - The print advert without title was created by Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency for Women's Fitness brand in the United States. The advert was released in March 2013.

Company: WIEDEN+KENNEDY, USA, Portland.

Analysis - This advert 'feminizes' Serena Williams and, subsequently, the product by Nike to overcome the brand's masculine associations (Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.353). Serena is illustrated in warm light; she looks dreamily away from the viewer, completely moved by the meditative surrounding. In Wörsching's words, 'the serene scene is a picture of passive contemplation and self-conscious awareness of being looked at, an illustration of the submissiveness ingrained in bodies' (Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.353). The caption 'You can become strong and powerful

and beautiful' contradicts the image as the advert is rather underlining the domesticating and intimate context. On the one hand, it appeals to the viewer's gendered identity by communicating (stereotypical) female experiences, it speaks to the female viewers with authenticity. But, on the other hand, exactly this communicated authenticity is discursive as it produces stereotypes which are effectively to overcome. The advert neither communicates the self-actualization which it wishes to get across, nor the empowerment which is addressed in the caption. It rather reduces the woman in a way to her core values as being experienced by the stereotypical male society. Serena's apparent strength and power are subverted abruptly; what are left are sensitivity and beauty, fragileness and softness. According to Bourdieu, this representation 'turns woman into a symbolic object whose being is one of a perceived being' (Bourdieu cited in Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.354). In the way Serena holds her body in this advert, her 'permanent state of physical insecurity' (Bourdieu cited in Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.353) is being demonstrated to the outside world. This physical insecurity is in turn embodying (sexed, if not sexual) availability.



Answer of the Research Questions

Research Question 1: How did communication in Nike print advertisements change from 2005 until 2013, particularly with regard to the representation of women?

- Hypothesis 1.1: Women are these days represented as being much stronger and much more self-confident as back in 2005; they are not reduced to their sexual body anymore.

After having examined Nike print advertisements from 2005 until 2013 in great detail, I have come to the conclusion that it is only possible to agree with the first part of this statement. It is indeed a true declaration, that female models are represented as much stronger and much more-self-confident in more recent advertisements than in 2005. The evidence for this conclusion is already given in 2008 when *Ashley Nelson* is sprinting up the construction site. Muscles are defined in a clearer way; the focus is more on the athletic than on the sexual body. Moreover, women are illustrated as being aggressive, hard-working, self-confident and strong-minded, which is clearly shown in *Rock Victorious* (2010). If we look at the advert from 2005, which clearly sexualizes women and reduces them to their sexual body parts, we indeed sense the difference between this advert and the more recent ones.

On the other hand, I argue that the adverts examined are somehow two-fold, in other words, they show two different representational orders, namely the societal order and the one of the true self. With this statement I would like to express the fact that women in Nike

advertisements are positioned in different identities, that they are represented in a constant push and pull between the stereotypical (sexed image) and the desirable image. The best example to illustrate this statement is probably the most recent advert from 2013. The text capture expresses the strong and powerful identity, in other words, the desirable order. The image of the woman and the way she presents herself and her body express exactly the opposite order, the societal order or, in other words, the stereotypical image of a soft, weak, sensitive woman who needs to be protected. As already discussed, this physical insecurity embodies sexual availability.¹⁰⁰ Not only physical insecurity but also the focus on the female body parts is still an issue in recent Nike advertisements. I argue that, although society and, subsequently, society's stereotypical image, has changed to a considerable extent, women in advertising are still facing society's boundaries in a way that they are not able to dispose themselves from a view which has been carved in everybody's heads a long time ago. For all these reasons, I argue that the second hypothesis is also to a certain extent correct:

- Hypothesis 1.2: Women are still not represented different from their image in 2005; reduction to their sexual body is still visible in Nike advertisements.

Women are, indeed, represented different in more recent advertisements as compared to 2005 for instance. But I would still say that the main difference is only on the surface. At first glance, the women presented seem strong and self-confident, no doubt about that. But as soon as these images are examined in a more detailed way, the seemingly invisible stereotypical views, which lurk in the background, appear and are made visible. What I would like to say here is that the focus and the reduction to the female and, subsequently, sexual, body parts is not as apparent as back in 2005. But this does not mean that the reduction is not there. The focus is still on the most decisive parts of the body, not only in a sexual but also in a more psychological way, meaning that the stereotypically assumed feelings and thoughts of a woman are presented and illustrated on paper.

100 Cf. Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.354.

Research Question 2: In which way is Nike communicating in print advertisements in order to catch female recipients' attention and to make the brand attractive for women?

- Hypothesis 2.1: Nike genders the brand in order to create a 'female brand'.

Having focused on the examination of the selected advertisements in terms of gender, we can say concluding that Nike genders the brand as well as its products in order to create a 'female brand'. Nike was from the very beginning considered a male brand as its focus points have been on 'male' sports such as basketball, soccer, football etc. The brand was exclusively advertised by male models. Only later Nike tried to also establish a female branch. The advertising team thought that this would be achieved best by just 'pinkifying' (Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.339) the brand. The brand and its products have been gendered, which means that they have been associated with a sex-role and have thus been provided with a female image and identity. As already discussed in chapter three, gendered products are goods which feature certain aspects of colour and symbols for instance, and can, therefore, easily be identified as products exclusively for either males or females. Male or female identities are attached to the product by advertising and promotion and, subsequently, either men or women are addressed by them.

The advertisement from 2005, for example, shows exactly this. By focusing on the female body parts in great detail, women's attention is drawn to the pictures. With the support of persuasive communication, women understand that the advertised body is achievable and that the first step towards it would be the purchase of Nike sports products. Colour is always a recurrent factor. We can see the warm, autumnal colours which create a relaxing and meditative atmosphere in adverts such as *I-Story Lokelani* (2006) or in the most recent one featuring Serena Williams. Other advertisements show female models in pink and purple, such as *Join* from 2009, *Game On World* and *I Would Run to You*, both from 2012. Additionally, the captures coming with the selected pictures only enforce the described intention. Women looking at Nike advertisements want to gain more strength and power, they want to look beautiful and be in perfect shape - just as the Nike models are. After this discussion, we can clearly say that the second hypothesis, namely 'Nike does not gender the brand in a way to create a female brand' can be disproved.

Research Question 3: What does the typical Nike-woman look like?

- Hypothesis 3: The typical Nike woman is a white, blond, energetic and beautiful American girl between 20 and 30 years.

This research question focused on the typical Nike woman, in other words, on the woman everybody has in mind when thinking of or hearing about Nike. As already discussed, the answer to this question is very difficult, if not impossible, to find as we all command different experiences and have different maps in mind and, therefore, create a different picture. While researching for and analysing the advertisements, my attention was drawn to the diverse female models Nike featured and still features in their advertisements. With regard to the named hypothesis above, I agree with the fact that most female models representing Nike products are American and a great part of them are additionally American athletes, serving as testimonials for the brand. Even *I-Story* Lokelani, an advertisement from Tokyo in 2006, features a U.S. American model, namely Lokelani McMichael, instead of a Japanese one. Except for the fact that most adverts feature American models, research in terms of what the typical Nike woman looks like has shown that Nike uses models from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The hypothesis above can, therefore, clearly be disproved. The discussion of research question 5 will show that Nike featured and still features several different types of women in their advertisements which can be classified into categories.

Research Question 4: Does Nike succeed in communicating their core values?

- Hypothesis 4: Nike succeeds in communicating their core values.

As already discussed in chapter six, a brand's core values are the most important elements within the analysis of texts as the brand's image is communicated through them in order to persuade the consumer to buy the product. They are a central issue to find out if the intended message is being communicated to the outside world. We have already discussed that Nike was referred to as a male brand in its early years and critics still claim that differences between the representation of men and women are made, especially in advertising. According to Goldman/Papson, Nike stands for providing 'unisex products oriented towards performance' (Goldman/Papson, p.120). They see Nike's ethos and core in the following text from a Nike magazine ad directed at women.

All your life you are told the things you cannot do. All your life they will say you're not good enough or strong enough or talented enough. They'll say you're the wrong height or the wrong weight or the wrong type to play this or be this or achieve this. . . THEY WILL TELL YOU NO, a thousand times no until all the no's are meaningless. All your life they will tell you no, quite firmly and very quickly. They will tell you no. And you will tell them Yes.¹⁰¹

This text tells its readers to stand up, to motivate themselves, to try as long and as hard as possible and to never give up. According to Goldman and Papson's words, the theme 'Stand up for yourself' echoes throughout Nike campaigns and can, therefore, be seen as the brand's core value.¹⁰² Referring to the selected advertisements which have been discussed throughout this study, we find this ethos everywhere. In 2008, *Lindsey Tarpley* motivates herself with 'My Better is better than Your Better'. In 2009, *Join* encourages women to take part in the men vs. women challenge with women being first. The 2010 *Make Yourself* campaign hails women by telling them to make themselves strong and proud. In the same year, women are advised to *free themselves*.

Primary messages in Nike women's adverts are also to stay in good physical condition, to always be authentic and to exercise in creativity.¹⁰³ During my work with the selected adverts, I noticed several themes which reappeared again and again. I do, therefore, not fully agree with Goldman and Papson's statement that the ethos discussed above is the one and only core value within Nike advertising. For me, the following aspects are also part of Nike's core values as they are communicated throughout women's advertisements:

101 This text from a Nike advertisement is taken from Goldman/Papson, p.120

102 Cf. Goldman/Papson, p.120f.

103 Cf. Goldman/Papson, p.121.

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- Authenticity
 - Competitiveness
 - Empathy
 - Empowerment
 - Innovation
 - Intelligence
 - Naturalness
 - Sexiness

As all these values and especially the ethos of standing up for yourself are adherent and evident in Nike's women's advertising, the hypothesis above can be verified. To take Lobinger's words, these values describe a certain attitude towards life and, therefore, constitute a state of mind.¹⁰⁴ In other words, the customer does not have to identify with the product itself but with the communicated values of the brand.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Lobinger, p.67.

Research Question 5: Which different categories of femininity can be found in the print advertisements by Nike?

This research question was aimed at the represented types of women Nike uses in their adverts. The aim of this question was to try and find out if there are evident types of women and if yes, if these types are stereotypical types as already created by society. I chose not to frame specific hypotheses here as the hope was that the analysed advertisements will give an answer to this question. Research definitely shows that Nike used and still uses several different types of women in their advertisements. I tried to classify those different types into three categories which were evident to me:

- The sexualized woman
- The domestic woman
- The athletic, 'masculine' woman

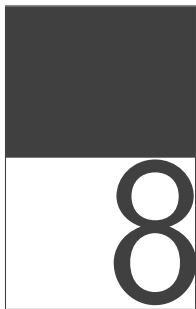
These categories have been found during the time of research and have also been approved by literature (i.e. Goldman and Papson). It can be concluded that adverts such as *My Butt* (2005) and *Are You Looking at My Titles?* (2007) are clearly examples for the category of the sexualized women. The pictures reduce the female models to their sexual body parts and the texts accompanying them even enforce this intention. By asking 'Are you looking at my titles?' the advert directly addresses the male gaze which is clearly not looking at Serena Williams' titles but at her breasts instead. As already discussed in chapter three, the women in these adverts are overlapped by codes and projections and advertised as sexual objects to the male gaze. Nike confronts the audience directly with adherent gender stereotypes committed to the stereotypical view of women within society.

Adverts such as *I-Story Lokelani* (2006), *Free Yourself* (2011), *I Would Run to You* (2012), *Age is not a Number* (2013) and the most recent one, also from 2013, are considered featuring the category of the domestic woman in my analysis. To keep with Wörsching, women in this advertising context are said to have been 'feminized' (Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.353), in order to overcome the brand's masculine associations. Examining these adverts, we come to the conclusion that the women are represented

in warm, homely light, which creates a scene of domesticity and well-being. According to Wörsching, this domestic feeling rather reduces the woman to stereotypical characteristics such as fragileness and softness and, subsequently, turns her into a symbolic object of permanent physical insecurity. This physical insecurity is in turn embodying sexed, if not sexual availability.¹⁰⁵

The third category, namely the athletic and masculine woman, can be found in most of the analysed advertisements: *Ashley Nelson* (2008), *Lindsey Tarpley* (2008), *Join* (2009), *Make Yourself* (2010), *Rock Victorious* (2010) and *Game on World* (2012). We see that the representation of women as athletic, strong and rather 'masculine' has only really started in 2008 and is from then on running like a common thread through the advertised campaigns. Women are shown as strong, powerful, muscular and strong-minded; they know what they want, they are self-confident and are shown in positions which are considered to be rather masculine. Analysing the selected advertisements in terms of these three categories, we can conclude that Nike definitely tried and is still trying to advertise the athletic, masculine woman in their campaigns. On the one hand, due to the fairly strong occurrence of this type of woman, we can also conclude that the athletic, masculine woman is on the right path to become the typical Nike woman. On the other hand, at this juncture, I would argue that Nike somehow reverts to the domestic type of woman. Studies have shown (Van Amsterdam, 2012) that very muscular and athletic looking women are not considered desirable as they do not correspond to the stereotypic expectations of what a woman should look like, still not in our society today. I, therefore, argue that Nike tries to position themselves somewhere between the domestic and the athletic, masculine woman in terms of its target audience. I also argue that Nike has not yet found the full ambition in doing so and that it may well take a few years in order to remark a clearer definition of the target audience.

105 Cf. Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.353f.



Chapter 8

Conclusion - 'So Who Cares If She Can't Play Tennis?'

Desire is not given something in advance, but something that has to be constructed - and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it. It is only through fantasy that the subject is constituted as desiring: through fantasy, we learn how to desire. (Žižek cited in Helstein, p.287)

Emancipation and the desire for it is a great theme within Nike's narratives. It establishes a belief of progress and effort in order to achieve what we want in life. This belief positions the subject in an imaginary status of desire. Desire is always also a performance and, therefore, an imperfect act of embodying the self with the body always being the most important issue. The body is the place where performance, and in this very special case, advertising takes place. In Nike women's advertising, the whole self is expressed by the body image we see every day on the billboard for instance. Advertising is in this case always about the body and about the desire to achieve a certain body image. According to Wiles, it has always been a long-standing concern of advertising to use 'stereotypical imagery as a method of establishing a shared experience of identification with the consumer' (Wiles, p.36). As

The title 'So Who Cares If She Can't Play Tennis?' is taken from Vincent in Fuller, p. 176. This heading introduced an article of The Sun during the 2000 Wimbledon Championships.

Kachgal argues, there is a great deal of ethnic diversity within advertising, and this is also the case in Nike women's advertising. But when we look at the models in greater detail, we discover that they are all petite, muscular, of average height and of average weight - there are no fat models.¹⁰⁶ By emphasizing female athleticism, advertisements almost always also emphasize their femininity and heterosexuality.

In Wörsching's words, 'gendered images of sport inspire the visual language of advertising that targets affluent men' (Wörsching, 'Gender and Sport in the German Quality Press', p.201). As we already discussed, gender is a social construct rather than a biological given or a sexual orientation. These constructs are adherent in our society as stereotypes in the minds of human beings. Advertising reflects these already existing values and, therefore, reflects cultural expectations towards gender.¹⁰⁷ Changing these existing values would, therefore, mean to change cultural conventions, portrayals which are already widely accepted.

Nike's problem was that for most of its history the brand was always associated with male sports. A key initiative was to regain control over the women's market. This key initiative was the *Nike Goddess Website*¹⁰⁸, 'designed for women on the move' (Kachgal, 133). From then on Nike tried to establish new product lines especially focusing on women. The already introduced 'Club der Töchter', an international get-together exclusively for women who have fun running, is another example for Nike's attempt to 'de-emphasize the body and to make sports and fitness consumption about something else, something deeper' (Kachgal in Fuller, p.142). In a world of athletics and sports, social orders constrain women by privileging femininity over athleticism.¹⁰⁹ Nike's advertisements are stories and such stories about women's lives always bare emotional relationships and have, therefore, always a gendered quality. This never-ending storytelling is still decisive in Nike women's advertising and more than ever confines women from men. I, therefore, argue that Nike has not yet fully succeeded in the commodification of feminist values.

106 Cf. Kachgal, p.138.

107 Cf. Eisend, p.421.

108 n/a, *Nike Goddess website*.

109 Cf. Grow, 'The Gender of Branding', p.316.

Cole and Hribar hail Nike in 'Celebrity Feminism' as

[...] a component imbedded in a discursive formation that has generated and legitimated a popular feminism: the rearticulation of what counts as 'women', 'women's problems', and 'solutions' to those problems and, by extension, the production of popular knowledges of social stratification that shape everyday lived experiences, pleasures, and values. (Cole/Hribar, p.349)

I cannot fully agree with this statement as in my view, exactly this rearticulation of what counts as a woman is confining female advertising from male advertising more than ever. The reduction of women to their emphatic, sensitive body is nothing than a setback in terms of progressive emancipation. For me, this shows once more the stereotypical thinking in our society, adherent in our minds. As I have argued in my paper, although society and, subsequently, society's stereotypical image, have changed to a considerable extent, women in advertising are still facing society's boundaries in a way that they are not able to dispose themselves from a view which has been carved in everybody's heads a long time ago. Nevertheless, the focus and the reduction to the female and, subsequently, sexual, body parts is not as apparent as back in 2005. Today, the androgynous look of female models is predominant more than ever. I, therefore, argue that although our society has changed to a considerable extent, feminist advertising still meets society's boundaries. Brand such as Nike extravagate boundaries and perform what was previously thought to be impossible, but they still often offend the female audience.

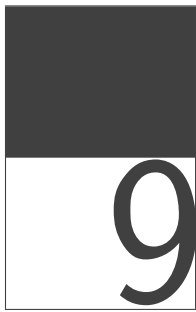
Concluding, I would define Nike's advertising as pleasures with a bitter aftertaste. Pleasures because Nike has, in Cole and Hribar's words, 'indeed captured the mood of the times' (Cole/Hribar, p.365) by appearing as 'celebrity feminism' (Cole/Hribar, p.365), hailing women and providing them with identities and physical activities. Themes such as empowerment, naturalness, strength and self-growth are prominent in Nike's advertisements and are indeed embodied successfully by the female models. The bitter aftertaste because exactly these communicated identities and activities position women through behaviors which are stereotypically supposed to be female characteristics. Nike's narratives

and advertisements in general will always be concerned with the gendered body, continuously searching for progress, possibilities and development and will, therefore, always remain a work in progress.

... And one day when you're out in the world running, feet flying, you'll hear these immortal words calling, calling inside your head - Oh, you run like a girl. And you will say shout scream whisper call back, Yes. What exactly did you think I was? Just do it.¹¹⁰

As a final statement I would like to add here that neither the Nike World Headquarters in Beaverton, Oregon/U.S. nor the Nike EMEA (Europe, Middle East, and Africa) Headquarters in Hilversum/The Netherlands were in any way supportive regarding data collection or general advice. I contacted both departments several times by email and telephone. Furthermore, I did not receive any support or advice from the different departments of Wieden+Kennedy (W+K) advertising agency which I contacted in Amsterdam, London, New York, Portland and Sao Paulo.

¹¹⁰ This text is from a Nike advert from 1993 called Dialogue II; in Grow/Wolburg, p.10.



9.1 Abstract English

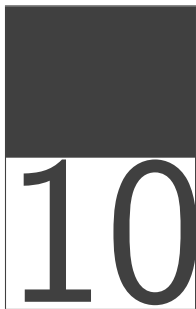
'And it wouldn't hurt if you stopped eating like a pig...'- this thesis focuses on Gender Branding and on the representation of women in Nike print advertisements, constituted within the time frame between 2005 and 2013. It investigates the way in which gender stereotypes are challenged and which strategies the sports brand Nike uses in order to (de-)construct those stereotypes. Furthermore, this thesis also aims to answer the question if women in Nike advertisements are sexualized and subsequently reduced to their body and to their femininity.

It is a general and adherent thinking in our world that the female body is always seen as mediated, conceived, sensed and torn apart - the body as an object in a phallographic society where women still exist as constructs of the male gaze, a society which is created by male predominance. In contrast to this reasoning, theorists argue that Nike rewrites feminist history by stabilizing the women's position and defining themselves as alternatives to other brands and women subsequently as the new generation. This thesis contrasts the two views and investigates their reasonable justification with the help of selected print advertisements by establishing specific strategies Nike uses in order to address women in a male dominated (sports-) world.

9.2 Abstract German

'And it wouldn't hurt if you stopped eating like a pig. . . '- Das Augenmerk der vorliegenden Arbeit ist auf die Markenbildung des Geschlechts und auf die Darstellung der weiblichen Person in Nike Printwerbungen gerichtet. Der zeitliche Rahmen dieser wissenschaftlichen Untersuchung ist hierbei auf die Jahre zwischen 2005 und 2013 beschränkt. Es wird untersucht, auf welche Art und Weise Geschlechterstereotypen hinterfragt werden und welche Strategien die Marke Nike anwendet, um diese Stereotype aufzubrechen bzw. zu konstruieren. Desweiteren diskutiert diese Forschungsarbeit Fragen nach der Sexualisierung von Frauen in der Werbung.

Ein allgemein vorherrschendes Denken in unserer Umgebung besagt oftmals, dass der weibliche Körper als Objekt, als etwas Unausgereiftes gesehen wird, als ein Körper, der auseinandergerissen wird und so in einer phallokratischen Gesellschaft zu existieren versucht, welche Frauen als ein Konstrukt des männlichen Blicks sieht. Im Gegensatz zu dieser Sichtweise argumentieren TheoretikerInnen, dass Nike die feministische Geschichte umschreibt indem die weibliche Position stabilisiert wird. Nike selbst sieht sich hierbei als Alternative zu anderen Marken und Frauen ganz klar als die Zukunft. Die vorliegende Forschungsarbeit stellt diese beiden extremen Ansichten gegenüber und untersucht ihre Begründetheit mit der Unterstützung von ausgewählten Printwerbungen, indem sie mögliche Strategien, mit welchen Nike versucht, Frauen in einer männlich dominierten (Sport-)Welt anzusprechen, bildlich darstellt.



10

Chapter 10

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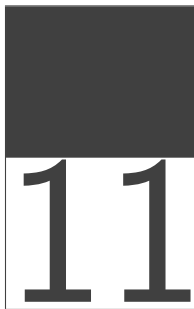
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12

Chapter 12

Curriculum Vitae

Name Mag. phil. Stephanie Hopf

Born 19.09.1984 in Traunstein - Bavaria, Germany

2004 Annette-Kolb-Gymnasium Traunstein/DE
High School Diploma School of Linguistics and Social Sciences
Graduation subjects: English, Biology, German, Religion

2005-2011 University of Vienna/AT
English Studies - focus on Linguistics and Gender Studies
Media Studies
Psychology

2009 University of Copenhagen/DK
Study abroad via the ERASMUS program (six months)
Graduation in Danish language course

- 2010** University of Vienna/AT
Excursion to the United States in line with American Studies: '*Live(s) on the Mississippi*'. In cooperation with Prof. Dr. Fellner from Saarland University and students and professors from Bradley University, Peoria/US (Three weeks)
- Participation in the *Gender-Queer Workshop*, June 30-July 1, Saarbrücken/DE
- 2011** University of Vienna/AT
Graduation in Media Studies - title: Bakk. phil.
Theses: *Female Advertising - Elderly women in the media*. (2009), *Sport Stars in the media surrounding*. (2010)
Graduation in American Studies - title: Mag. phil
Thesis: *The Performed Self - Gender in Performance Art with special focus on VALIE EXPORT*. (2011)