

# Just Buy It: Nike Advertising Aimed at *Glamour* Readers: A Critical Feminist Analysis

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Erratum: Unfortunately as a result of a typesetting mistake the paper by Darin J. Arsenault and Tamer Fawzy was printed with the first paragraph missing. We, at *Tamara*, hope that Darin and Tamer as well as our readers can forgive us for this oversight. In an attempt to put right what we made wrong, we have reproduced the first section of the paper as it should have appeared.

## ABSTRACT

The growing popularity of women's sports has helped steer fitness companies such as Nike to carefully craft advertising messages aimed at women. The current study assessed Nike's marketing campaign in *Glamour*, a popular consumer magazine aimed at women aged 18-34, using a rhetorical analysis known as the critical feminist approach. This approach was utilized as a means of discovering how the construction of gender was created in this Nike advertising campaign, how this construction represents a dominating ideology of patriarchy, and how this oppressiveness can be recast into a picture that is more positive toward women. A total of five Nike advertisements were discovered by the investigators in the 1999 issues of *Glamour*, and each was analyzed according to image and content. Results indicate that although this advertising campaign appears to represent positive images of women connected to their experiences, patriarchal values still exist within this campaign. Narrative storytelling offers a further explanation for understanding these advertisements in that Nike uses the strategic narrative of epic genre to appeal to women and to enhance the image of Nike as being supportive toward women.

## SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN IN SPORTS

Social attitudes toward the participation of women in sports in general have become more positive over the past several decades at both local and national levels (Ebenkamp, 2000). Although this report states that currently twice as many men as women play sports frequently, it also notes that women are becoming more involved in organized sports. For example, high school teams during this decade reported an increase of 31% of girls, while that of only 9% for boys. Sports that were traditionally closed to women have more recently begun to open their doors to this group. In the past year, daughters of former boxing champions have begun professional boxing careers, or announced intentions to do so, including Laila Ali, Freeda Foreman, and Maria Johansson (Timmons, 2000). Movies such as "Love and Basketball" and "Girlfight" offer contemporary storylines of girls resolving romantic situations while making good in the court or in the ring (Carson, 2000). Women's Sports Network, an Internet company, went online in September 2000, and it features content, such as athlete news and information, audience chat areas, and personal club pages. It allows girls to register for local and national events, and brokers sponsors into its teen events (Petrecca,

2000a). Outward Bound has dispatched Girls on the Move, a team of women bicyclists, to cycle across the country to promote self-esteem for women through playing sports (Aanderud, 2000). Nike Corporation has also become involved in this arena. The purpose of this article is to report on the persuasive strategies utilized by Nike in its 1999 advertising campaign in a woman's consumer magazine through a method known as critical feminist analysis, in order to gain a better understanding of its storytelling approaches. The value of this approach is that it helps to deconstruct the gender dimensions of this advertising campaign through deliberate role reversal of gender perspectives. By doing this, it is possible to understand Nike's use of narrative and storytelling to attract women consumers.

As we shall see, Nike's strategy involves transforming traditional patriarchal images and stories into images of female authority that are socially acceptable to its intended consumers. This article begins by reviewing how marketing groups target consumers through the use of persuasive strategies. Next, we discuss the critical feminist approach by way of introducing its application to Nike advertisements in a consumer magazine. After presenting our results, we conclude with a discussion of Nike's narrative and storytelling.

So, why are attitudes changing toward inclusion of women in sports? Some of the change appears to be based partly in public perceptions toward Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which mandated that institutions receiving federal funding cannot discriminate on the basis of gender. Suggs (2000) reports on a poll that surveyed public views toward Title IX and found that most Americans support Title IX. Yet, there is some concern about the mechanisms underlying this change in attitude. Cole (2000) argues that it is unfortunate that people are encouraged to think of Title IX as an expression of gender equality, particularly because gender equality does not exist. Rather, Cole charges, the multinational companies have encouraged the growth of girl's and women's sports solely to reap profits, rather than doing so for the public good, and

they have used Title IX as a stepping stone toward this goal. Cole (p. 5) states that:

*"using sports, these corporations have found new arenas for profit in ways that range from using Third World Labor to creating new forms of feel-good consumption. Representations of women's sports as more enlightened, authentic, and pure than men's sports make it difficult to imagine the connections between women's sports and multinational capitalism. Women athletes, like America's most beloved sport icon Michael Jordan, are represented as "real athletes" dedicated to sport's mythic norms. Never mind that these representations of women's sports, touted as victories, are enabled by and help justify the gendered remuneration in sports, as they cultivate a particular fantasy of political efficacy through consumption."*

In essence, Cole is arguing that social attitudes toward women are being changed by the persuasive strategies of organizations that are profit-seeking. These strategies distort and alter images of women. People identify and accept the images that are provided by profit-making corporations, and, in turn, consume their products. This is not a new idea. Increasing consumer identification with products in order to bolster sales is a traditional sales approach, and Nike is no stranger to it.