

#LikeAGirl: Realizing the Communicative Potential of Fourth Wave Feminism

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## Introduction

Feminine products are generally not an appealing topic of choice on one's radar, and tend to make many feel uncomfortable. Although advertising these products on television can be a difficult task, *Always* Feminine Products took the challenge and succeeded. With over eighty million views, the producers truly succeeded in proliferating their commercial worldwide. With their "Like a Girl" ad, how did *Always* grab the attention of so many with such a relatively bland product? By strategically building an association with a powerful feminist movement as well as utilizing juxtaposition in various ways throughout, the commercial effectively portrays that by purchasing *Always*' products, one is also supporting a movement dedicated to destroying the negative connotations associated with what it means to be a girl.

To explore *Always*' success further, I will first define and discuss the ambiguity of the word *Feminism* and elaborate on why feminist movements have and continue to generate public support and activism on a global scale. I will then offer a brief history of each historical feminist movement, ranging from first, second, to third wave feminism, and discuss how each of these movements utilized unique communicative strategies to enhance feminist ideologies specific to their generational societies. I will then discuss the emergence of the most modern feminist movement to date, known as fourth-wave feminism, and how activists of this movement utilize technology to enhance the globalization of contemporary feminist ideologies. After discussing the opportunities technology has to globalize modern feminist ideologies, I then rhetorically analyze the *Always* #LikeAGirl commercial, specifically focusing on how the commercial utilizes juxtaposition, as well as fourth wave feminism as a whole, to challenge the negative hegemonic connotations associated with the term "girl."

Given our primarily media-based society, I argue that the production and success of this commercial exemplifies how this new wave of feminism is the most beneficial way to spread and accentuate the need for gender equality in the present day.

### **What is Feminism?**

*Feminism.* The term has been around for hundreds of years. In fact, it is argued that the concept has roots in ancient Greece, dating as far back as 1179 (Rampton 1). Although this notion of feminism has existed among human knowledge for quite some time, it remains one of the most controversial terms in today's society. What is feminism? Who is a feminist? What are the most effective ways to go about advocating for feminist ideologies? The answers to these questions are by no means black and white; instead they encompass many shades of grey, which creates a diverse range of connotations associated with the term, as well as increases the overall complication and confusion amidst the concept. Although dictionary.com currently defines feminism as "the doctrine advocating social, political, and all other rights of women equal to those of men," the definition of feminism remains extremely subjective. Feminism is a word that is both politically and emotionally charged, making it difficult to reach a general societal consensus.

Regardless of the fluid nature and ambiguity of the word, feminism has remained an anticipated goal, in which both women and men over time have and continue to express passion and activism towards. Throughout history, there have been numerous efforts enacted among humanity aimed at honing women's rights, such as advocating for women's suffrage, equal pay, and embracing the third wave notion of "girl power". All of these historical examples demonstrate the significance feminism has upheld in society for decades.

Although we often talk about the feminist movement as a whole, it is important to note that there are distinct movements within, all of which embody different goals and thus diverse communicative strategies to enhance these goals. Each of these feminist movements falls under the category of either first, second, or third wave feminism. Each wave denotes a generational difference, thus in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of feminism, it is imperative that we take into account these different movements because each represents a unique product of their society and time period. Although each movement shares the same purpose of enhancing feminist ideals, each does so with different rhetorical methods and premises in mind.

### **First Wave Feminism**

The first wave of feminism signifies the beginning of the women's movement in America and took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As stated previously, each wave embodies different thematic goals and challenges, each unique to their social contexts. The social context of the nineteenth century is attributed to "an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics" with opportunity and rights strictly reserved to wealthy, white males (Rampton 1). First wave feminism is predominately associated with opening up opportunities for women, with a strong focus on advocating for women's suffrage. Efforts to communicate these concerns began at the Seneca Falls Convention in July 1848, "when three hundred men and women rallied to the cause of equality for women" (Rampton 1). Feminist and abolitionist Elizabeth Cady Stanton led the convention, invigorating her fellow activists utilizing powerful rhetoric. She read what is now known as the *Declaration of Sentiments and Grievances*, a treatise she strategically modeled closely to the Declaration of Independence. In fact, in the beginning, and arguably one of the most powerful lines of her

speech, she modifies the preamble: “We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men *and women* are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...” (“Seneca Falls Convention Begins” 1). Although an addition of the two words *and women* seems simple, it signifies the immense power that can be associated with the simplicity of words. The Declaration of Independence represents one of the most significant documents in American history for it marks the birth of our country and symbolizes the activism it took for the colonists to gain our independence from Great Britain. Therefore, the mere inclusion of the word *women* to this powerful historical document signifies that women are calling attention to the patriarchal nature of the contra from the beginning and asking for things to be different in the future. The remainder of Stanton’s speech discussed the injustices inflicted among women and called for women to organize a petition to gain the rights they deserved.

Although in terms of gaining women suffrage, the Seneca Falls Convention was subjected to public ridicule, it marks the beginning of the first wave feminist movement in America. Stanton’s failure to gain women’s suffrage at the Seneca Falls Convention did not impede her efforts to continue with the movement; instead, she sustained her protests. Amidst the ending of the Civil War, women were not pleased with the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment’s exclusion of women’s rights. As time went on and women’s protests were still not being heard, creating an alliance with Susan B. Anthony, Stanton and her established the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), where they united American women and together protested for women’s suffrage (“The Women’s Rights Movement: 1848-1920” 1). Members of NAWSA advantageously utilized the social context of America to favor their protests. Because the Wilson Administration was campaigning to intervene in World War I, NAWSA strategically attached themselves to the war-cause, claiming that “failure to extend the vote to

women might impede their participation in the war effort just when they were most needed to play a greater role as workers and volunteers outside the home” while the men were off at war (“The Women’s Rights Movement: 1848-1920” 1).

After seventy years of protests, in 1920, women were finally granted the right to vote on the national level. The success of the first wave can be attributed first to Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s utilization of powerful rhetoric during the Seneca Falls Convention. Though the convention did not result in women gaining the right to vote, it took the determination of Stanton, as well as other powerful members of the NAWSA, to utilize social context to their advantage and engage in continuous efforts and protests for decades to achieve the success that ended the first wave movement.

### **Second Wave Feminism**

While advocates of first wave feminism were predominately middle class, white women, the second wave embodied a much more racially and culturally diverse group; a result of the social context taking place in the 1960s. “The wave unfolded in the context of the anti-war and civil rights movements and the growing self consciousness of a variety of minority groups around the world” (Rampton 1). In addition to this, the New Left was on the rise; thus, the communication and rhetoric encompassing the second wave was significantly radical. “In this phase, sexuality and reproductive rights were dominant issues, and much of the movement's energy was focused on passing the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution” guaranteeing social equality regardless of sex, most specifically centered around the workplace (Rampton 2).

Despite being increasingly radical, in order to acquire support toward women’s equality in society, activists concentrated on establishing a theme of unification of all women; appealing to the idea of a universal sisterhood. In order to create a political change in which women were granted

social equality, the idea was to bring all women, of various cultural, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds, together as one supportive community; a community that shared the same goals and values. In fact, radical second wave feminists even “spoke of women as a social class,” claiming that issues between genders are the “primary site of oppression in society” (Rampton 2, Lotz 3). By strategically speaking of women as a class as opposed to a gender, activists were working to create the impression of an official feminist ideology, one in which all women, regardless of race or socio-economic status, could support and belong to. This idea of establishing a universal sisterhood is commonly referred to as consciousness-raising, a rhetorical strategy used during the second wave where “women learned to ask new questions about themselves, build self-esteem and a sense of entitlement to opportunity, give names to their common experiences and discover that they were not alone” (Renegar, Sowards 535). The process of consciousness-raising was a way to promote the feeling among women that even though they all come from different backgrounds, they were not alone in the fight toward gender equality.

Another example of the second wave theme of promoting unity among all women was the creation of women-only organizations. One of the most prominent organizations established during the second wave was the National Organization of Women (NOW), an organization that continues to prevail today. Originally, NOW was created due to women’s irritation with the sexual discrimination that took place in the workplace and the failure of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to enforce Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which called to terminate this discrimination (Lotz 3). The creation of NOW, as well as other umbrella, all-women organizations, represents a great tactic utilized during the second wave to enhance the idea of sameness among all women; the idea that all women share the same values and wish to gain the same goals and rights in society.

### **Third Wave Feminism**

Third wave feminism arose in the mid 1990s, and some believe it still prevails today. While the second wave sought to propagate feminist activism by creating the trope of feminine unity and spreading the idea of consciousness-raising, the third wave differs greatly and is characterized by acknowledging and embracing the differences among women. In fact, “third-wave activists recognize the racist, heterosexist, classist, and other implications of the erasure of difference” (Lotz 5-6). Third wave feminists believe that over-emphasizing sameness among all women was “downplaying discrepant privileges among women such as whiteness and wealth” and therefore third-wavers wish to “acknowledge disparate positions of power among women and encourage a dialogue about difference” (Lotz 6). Third wave feminism is known for being multi-dimensional and breaking boundaries, thus activists disseminate a less set-in-stone, one-dimensional view of feminism, and instead adopt and spread an ideology of feminism that is much more subjective than the past.

Third-wavers believe that “by identifying the forces constructing each of us, we are better able to understand aspects of subjectivity that position others differently” (Lotz 6). Third wave feminists recognize that every woman is unique and as opposed to attempting to convince women that they are all one, they instead embrace these diversities as an opportunity to view the varying positions of power held by women of different socio-economic class, race, age, etc. Third-wavers wish to “question, reclaim, and redefine the ideas, words, and media that have transmitted ideas about womanhood, gender, beauty, sexuality, femininity, and masculinity among other things” (Brunell 2). In terms of social context, during the emergence of the third wave, society was, and still is, governed by the hegemonic notion that there are certain characteristics reserved for males and others strictly reserved for females. The principal goal for the third wave is to destroy these



misconceptions that adhere to a gender binary, and instead make society aware that they are capable of constructing their own specific gender identity, unique from society's hegemonic gender stereotypes. Third-wavers see "these binaries as artificial constructs created to maintain the power of dominant groups" (Fisher 1). In order to destroy gender stereotypes, much of the communication that takes place among activists lies around challenging sexist images and symbols that exist in society. As a way to oppose stereotypical images, third-wavers look to disseminate a refined image of women to society, an image that adheres to the "girl power" trope. Girl power is an expression of female empowerment, one that promotes the image of women as "assertive, powerful, and in control of their own sexuality" (Brunell 2). The girl power trope directly supports the third-wave central notion of subjectivity because it promotes the idea that women are unique individuals and have the right to sexually express themselves in any way they please, even in ways that do not fit into society's cookie-cutter view of what it means to be a woman.

#### **Fourth Wave Feminism**

As the discussion of the first three waves illustrates, women throughout history have worked endlessly to acquire economic and sociopolitical rights equivalent to men. However even after all of this work, how is it that today gender inequality not only exists, but continues to remain highly prevalent in contemporary society? According to an article from *The Economist*, the employment of women has proven that they are capable of out-producing men in the same positions ("Women in the Workforce: Female Power"). With this being true, why is it that according to the 2016 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the median weekly earnings of men was \$152.00 greater than the median weekly earnings of women? ("Women in the Labor Force"). Although the gap has significantly decreased since the 1970s, there still is much work to do in terms of achieving genuine gender equality.

Although many believe that we are still amidst the subjective, “girl power” third wave, there has been recent discussion of the emergence of a new wave of feminism prevailing in today’s society, known as fourth wave feminism. In terms of goals, the fourth wave does not drastically differ from previous waves. Instead, the intentions of fourth wave feminists are to solve the unfinished problems of the first three waves, utilizing a tool that wasn’t available to activists before: the Internet. In her article, “Is There a Fourth Wave? Does It Matter?” Jennifer Baumgardner claims fourth wave feminism is defined by technology in the sense that “tools are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online” (Baumgardner 3). According to this new wave, modern technology is allowing people everywhere to immensely spread their views and beliefs on feminism. In other words, mass globalization has the ability to cause mass change and recently has been utilized as a powerful tool for spreading awareness on women’s rights and essentially creating worldwide change in an easier and more accessible manner.

Social media has opened up significant opportunities for promoting feminist ideals. The fourth wave has introduced powerful means of opportunities where communication about feminist ideologies and debates can take place, such as through blogs and Twitter. For example, *Feministing* is an example of a blog that demonstrates the power social media can have in terms of spreading feminism. According to their website, “*Feministing* is an online community run by and for young feminists” offering a “diverse collective of writers [who] cover a broad range of intersectional feminist issues- from campus sexual violence to transgender rights to reproductive justice” (Feministing.com). The blog not only offers readers a view of what the author’s have produced, but it is also interactive because it allows readers of the blog to communicate with each other about their opinions and beliefs regarding current feminist issues. In terms of success, *Feministing* is the most highly viewed feminist

publication (both online and offline) that exists with over 600,000 readers per month (Solomon 1). That being said, this extremely mass viewership exemplifies the success fourth wave feminism communication strategies have when it comes to garnering public attention. Never before did feminists of the past have the opportunity to disseminate feminist messages this quickly to such a large amount of people worldwide, but due to the Internet and society's prevalent use of it on a daily basis, feminists today now have the opportunity to facilitate activism on a global scale.

This mass communicated version of new wave feminism has not only enhanced feminist awareness as a whole, but it has also seeped its way into the commercial world. Many companies have taken advantage of this new wave and have created an alignment with the feminist movement in order to not only market their brand, but also showcase to society that by supporting their products, they are also supporting feminism. One of the most prominent examples of a company doing so is *Always*. *Always* is a leading provider of feminine products, such as tampons and maxi pads, and recently affiliated itself with fourth wave feminism by creating a powerful 2015 Super Bowl commercial. The *Always* #LikeAGirl commercial effectively utilizes juxtaposition and fourth wave feminism to challenge and modify the negative connotations associated with the term "girl". Although it is no secret that the Internet has enabled feminist communication worldwide, there is controversy as to whether or not it has actually resulted in transformative political action. Just as the first, second, and third wave feminist movements have demonstrated, each communicative method and theme utilized to enhance feminist ideals at the time was a product of their societal context. Therefore, I argue that given our primarily media-based society today, the production and success of the *Always* commercial exemplifies how this new wave of feminism is the most beneficial way to spread and accentuate the need for gender equality in today's modern world.

### ***Always #LikeAGirl: More Than Just Tampons***

In order to effectively understand the persuasive appeals made within this commercial, it is important to take the context into consideration. This commercial was originally a YouTube video with “more than fifty million [views]” not to mention the “nearly thirty million [views] on other sites” (Ciambriello, Griner). Due to the commercial’s initial online success, *Always* thought to enhance their viewership even further and arranged for the commercial to be aired during the 2015 Super Bowl. *Always* Global Vice President, Fama Francisco claimed at the time that the company “feel[s] so strongly about this [movement] that [they’re] now taking this message to a bigger stage, the Super Bowl, so even more people can join [them] to champion girls' confidence and change the meaning of 'like a girl' from an insult into something positive and amazing” (Ciambriello, Griner). Strategically, it was a very smart move on their part because the Super Bowl is notorious for attracting an unusually large audience. In fact, the 2015 Super Bowl achieved its “highest-ever overnight rating, which means a record percentage of homes with a TV were tuned in to the game” (Glassman). By choosing to expose their commercial to viewers of the 2015 Super Bowl, *Always* was able to proliferate their message to a staggering percentage of homes and thus chose an effective context that offered great potential to appeal to a wide array of audience members.

Despite purposefully exposing their message to a mass number of audience members, it is important to understand the demographics that make up this audience as well. “Men are [far] more likely to watch the Super Bowl than women” (Glassman). This year an astounding 83.1% of the audience was male (Glassman). Therefore, this fact cannot be ignored for it plays an integral role in understanding the rhetoric behind the commercial. *Always* strategically chose to broadcast their commercial promoting feminism and the changing of negatively

connoted female stereotypes to a predominately male audience in hopes of reshaping how *males* perceive females. This is due to the fact that the negative connotations associated with the phrase “like a girl” originate with males at a very young age. Today, “the phrase is commonly used to motivate young boys to try harder in sporting events” (Stein). For example, a boy throws a baseball with poor performance and the coach immediately yells: *You throw like a girl!* Similar cases occur in various other sporting events. In essence, by a coach (typically male) utilizing this phrase as a reprimand, the boys become conditioned at a very young age to associate this phrase with poor performance and negativity; something they should avoid acting like. Although many people assume utilizing the term “like a girl” is an innocuous form of motivation, this is very far from accurate. Beneath the surface of these three seemingly harmless words symbolizes socially constructed identity features associated with males and females, mirroring the way both males and females are perceived in society. According to these hegemonic gender roles, males represent the dominant gender and are supposed to be tough and strong, therefore leaving females to be the opposite: sensitive and weak. With that being said, in order to effectively create a universal change in the rhetoric of “like a girl,” it is important to begin by tackling the root of the problem. In other words, *Always* initially attempted to elicit change in the audience where the problem originates: males. In fact, their attempts at this were perceived as quite successful. After the commercial was aired two out of three males claimed, “they would think twice before using the phrase as an insult” (Ciambriello, Griner). By strategically choosing to air their commercial during the Super Bowl, *Always* was able to raise awareness among a predominately male audience, thus taking the first step in promoting their overall pro-feminist message.

I believe this artifact is worth significantly analyzing due to the immense amount of

strategic rhetorical elements embedded within. All of the rhetorical strategies effectively compliment one another in expanding the persuasiveness of the feminist message. The commercial is especially interesting because it utilizes a rather provocative approach in challenging societal masculine hierarchy to advertise their feminine products. Although there have been many other companies who have incorporated feminism into the advertising of their products, such as *Dove's True Beauty Campaign*, *Always'* approach is unique in that it examines how the use of certain language marginalizes women. Specifically, the commercial examines the current rhetoric of the word "girl" itself and in doing so exposes socially constructed gender stereotypes.

### **Method: Feminist Criticism**

Feminist criticism is the most effective approach for analyzing the rhetoric behind the commercial. Feminist criticism is a branch of standpoint criticism that focuses on gender identity representations and how these representations influence existing cultural practices and norms. Particularly, it strives to examine the discursive formations of gender identities and the consequences of those discourses. One of the core objectives of feminist criticism is to examine and work to eliminate the oppression of any group, particularly women, considering this approach assumes that males dominate over females in society. Going off of the assumption of a male-dominated society, this approach also assumes that women's perspectives are not incorporated into culture and that women's experiences are both socially and biologically different from men's. Because feminist criticism assumes that women are oppressed by patriarchy, it works to "critique patriarchal language and literature by exposing how these reflect masculine ideology" (Delahoyde). Additionally, a huge part of feminist rhetorical criticism involves "applying a feminist lens or agenda, and analyzing the text.

(Nudd, Whalen). That being said, the feminist criticism approach is appropriate for this commercial because *Always*' sole purpose is to examine the rhetoric behind the phrase "like a girl" and in doing so expose how this sexist language illustrates a masculine dominated society. Beyond exposing the patriarchy that dominates Western culture today, the commercial also wishes to provoke change both in males and females alike to put an end to these stereotypes promoting a gender hierarchy.

A guiding research question associated with feminist criticism asks how the artifact being examined influences our understanding of gender roles. That being said, another reason this approach is a perfect fit for the analysis of *Always*' commercial is because after watching, the audience is suppose to have obtained a greater awareness of the universal submissiveness associated with being a girl. *Always* anticipated that the commercial would leave viewers questioning societal gender norms. Feminist criticism recognizes that while "biology determines our sex (male or female), culture determines our gender (masculine or feminine)" (Boyle, Brizee, Chernouski, Tompkins). *Always* completely supports this notion of feminist criticism because its purpose is to prove that young girls and boys are not born believing that there is a stereotypical binary with characteristics defining what it means to be a girl and what it means to be a boy, but instead expose the truth: that this binary is socially constructed as one grows up in our society.

### **Rhetorical Analysis of #LikeAGirl**

As stated before, the underlying purpose of the commercial is to illustrate the difference in girls in terms of their self-esteem both before and after puberty. In order to accurately portray this fact, the commercial utilizes visual juxtaposition as a main rhetorical

strategy. The commercial begins with the filmmaker asking mid/post-pubescent girls and boys what it means to them to “run like a girl.” In response to this question, all of the kids run with their arms flailing awkwardly, acting in accordance to the negatively connoted female stereotypes. Next, the adolescents are asked what it means to fight like a girl, then what it means to throw like a girl. Both of these questions elicit the same types of responses as the ones prior; all of the participants continue to perform the act in a way that seems inferior to average, regardless of if they are male or female. These participants’ subpar acts are then juxtaposed with a new group of participants: pre-adolescent girls. When the younger girls were asked the same questions, they performed the act in a superior way: they elicited acts of determination and took performing the tasks much more seriously than the previous group had. This contrast between the older boys and girls and the younger girls was rhetorically an extremely powerful way to enforce the overarching message: that a girl’s confidence plummets during puberty. Because the audience can literally see the differences in actions of the younger and older age groups, it provides physical, visual evidence, illustrating that older girls and boys truly do feel inferior to males, especially in terms of physical ability. Visuals play such a powerful role in persuasion. “Visuals are thought to send people along emotive pathways where textual/verbal material leaves them in a more rational, logical and linear pathway of thought” (Joffe 83). It is one thing to read the statistics on the decrease in young girl’s self-esteem as they age, but it provokes a much greater emotive effect when an audience can physically see the differences in attitudes of these two age groups as it is demonstrated in front of them in visual form. In this case, the visual images of these kids acting out the stereotypes really drives the point across that these gender stereotypes are real, engraved in our youth, and must be stopped.



The drastic visual contrast between the younger and older age groups proves two important points. One, because the younger girls do not yet understand the sexism associated with the term “girl,” the commercial proves that girls are not born thinking they are an inferior group. Instead, this concept is something developed over time, a product of society, therefore exemplifying patriarchy as hegemonic. In other words, the idea that in terms of physical ability, boys are the norm whereas girls are not is socially learned, not biologically determined. In contemporary Western societies, “masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting” (Connell, Messerschmidt). To be masculine in Western societies connotes to notions and qualities of strength, dominance, and aggression, whereas being female, because it is not the norm, connotes to the direct opposite: weak, submissive, and passive. Because masculinity is hegemonic, people tend to forget that these distinctions between males and females are not natural but instead are socially constructed. Part of the power of the *Always* commercial is to direct public attention to the fact that ideologies behind gender roles are too often perceived as naturalized when they are really social constructed and thus should be challenged.

The second point the visual juxtaposition between the older and younger age groups proves is that both boys and girls develop negative associations with the term “girl” at a relatively young age. Although it is important to take into account that the age group who exhibited acts of weakness were technically older than the latter, they were still, nonetheless, *adolescents*. It is imperative to understand that an adolescent is typically defined as being between the ages of ten and fifteen, which is still a very young age group. Referring back to the notion of masculine hegemony, the commercial’s juxtaposition demonstrates that a child

will only go approximately ten to fifteen years of his or her life without being corrupted by the socially constructed idea that males are superior to females. Because the identity roles of both males and females are not fixed, through the utilization of visual juxtaposition *Always* is attempting to do all it can to change this masculine hegemony, adopted at such a young age, that seems to put males on a dominant pedestal over females.

Another important juxtaposition to take into account is the overall style and format of the commercial as a contrast between a raw footage, behind-the-scenes style and a regular, seemingly edited commercial style. As opposed to a traditional commercial, this one includes elements that set the scene as though it were raw footage. The commercial starts off with what appears to be an audition scene. A girl is greeted as she walks in front of various cameras and judges. She is not informed of what the purpose of the commercial is, she is only asked to perform the task of acting “like a girl.” The commercial continues in this format throughout. Despite traditional camera angles, the audience also sees studio equipment being exposed in the background of many of the shots as well as the participants acting through the view of various camera screens. All of these different camera shots and angles reinforce the scene the advertisement wants to portray to the audience: average kids rehearsing for an ordinary commercial. The audience even sees the adolescents performing through the screen of the camera (from the perspective of a cameraman) as well as hear the director give the contestants prompts to act out. This realistic format is effective because it gives the audience the feel that this is candid and natural. Along with this, the commercial also includes elements of traditional commercial format with tight shots of the actors as well as routine camera angles and interviews. What is important to take note of is that the commercial expands the elements of a typical commercial and contrasts it with those of a rather atypical style.

Because the producers of this commercial chose to juxtapose a normal commercial style with a rather candid and behind-the-scenes style, they were able to enhance the credibility of their message. The commercial constantly goes back and forth between raw footage and edited footage, giving off the perception that this commercial is not intended to appear as rehearsed and edited. It allows the audience to assume that the children acting are unaware of the true purpose, which eliminates bias, and emphasizes the impression that they are giving genuine responses. When the producers ask the participants to run like a girl, the audience is convinced that the kids are giving them their honest demonstration of what it means to them to be a girl. For example, when someone is rehearsing for the part in a commercial, he or she's sole purpose of being there is to win the part. Therefore, when the audience can physically hear the producer give the candidate an action to act out, it can be assumed that the candidate is going to perform the act in the most realistic way possible in hopes of obtaining the part. In order to perform an act in a realistic manner, one would want to act in a way that many would agree demonstrates the socially agreed upon norm of the assigned role. Because the adolescents demonstrated being a female with subpar actions, it further proves that they believe these weak and clumsy physical abilities are what the majority of society would agree exemplifies the actions of a girl. This, in turn, further provides evidence for the masculine hegemony that has become naturalized and thus prevails in our society.

It is important to take note of the oblivion of the participants, for it is what truly enhances the overall commercial credibility. Because the children are perceived as being oblivious to the commercial's purpose, this allows the audience further validation for the legitimate prevalence of these gender stereotypes. For example, had the contestants been told

this commercial's purpose was to transform negative female stereotypes, when told to perform something "like a girl" the kids would have most likely all performed acts in a superior, strenuous manner, in order to fulfill the wants of the producers, and ultimately win the part. This point can be exemplified by the fact that later on in the commercial, once the kids were told of the commercial's purpose, their responses changed. Once participants who had previously elicited acts of weakness understood the commercial's intention was to change the rhetoric of "girl," they were given a chance to redo their actions. Upon this opportunity, all of them changed their behaviors and performed the acts with strength and determination instead. Because they were not initially told of the commercial's purpose, credibility is greatly enhanced because this means that the kids were initially acting out the perpetuated female stereotypes that they had learned living in a society where patriarchy is hegemonic.

Not only does the commercial style enhance the credibility of the children's responses and thus validation for the existence of gender stereotypes, but it also builds credibility in *Always* as a company. In terms of *Always*' credibility, the audience is able to perceive their motives as genuine, as opposed to ulterior. The behind-the-scenes commercial style gives off the impression that *Always*' top priority was to prove that these stereotypes are very real, that they did not simply make them up. By setting the scene as though *Always* were almost spying on the kids, it gives off the notion that *Always* wishes to expose to the world the subconscious masculine hegemony that prevails among the youth. By building this credibly, *Always* does an effective job in proving their sincere intention is to raise awareness toward language use that privileges males while marginalizing females, in hopes of creating a societal change.

The juxtaposition between musical style in the commercial also plays a very prominent role in building up emotional persuasive appeal in the audience. "Music is used often in

advertising to enrich the key message and may be the single most stimulating component in a commercial” (Morris 518). Just as juxtaposition was utilized to differentiate between the older and younger age group’s drastically different perceptions on feminine stereotypes, the audience also witnesses a radical contrast in music. At the beginning of the commercial, lighthearted, rather slow music effectively compliments the older boys and girls as they demonstrate their perceptions that girls perform most athletic acts in an extremely subpar manner. Because the music background is so relaxed, it gives the audience a sense of a tranquil atmosphere: the commercial seems to be teasing and good-humored. However, this atmosphere shifts drastically when the younger girls are interviewed. The music effectively compliments this shift as the beat speeds up, symbolizing a much more theatrical, motivating environment. Different beats in music provoke different types of arousal and emotive responses within the audience. “Present research contends that the emotions expressed by musical stimuli are associated with their pleasing and arousing qualities” (Hargreaves, North). In this case, as the music shifts so does the audience’s focus; the music’s increase in speed causes arousal. Before the commercial seemed playful; however, as the music becomes more inspiring and increases in volume, the audience becomes more aroused and thus attentive to the message, realizing that this commercial is in no way meant to be lighthearted. The increase in focus, caused by the music choice, primes the audience to pay close attention to the remainder of the commercial: the part where the overarching message, demonstrating the need for a change in this male-dominated society, strategically unfolds.

In order to fully grasp this strategic shift in music, it is necessary understand how the juxtaposition in voiceovers and sound bytes work together with the music to create the vital shift in audience focus. For instance, when the music is lighthearted, the interviews and

voiceovers are teasing and unserious. The audience hears one of the girls exclaiming, “Oh, my hair!” as she is performing an extremely subpar act of running “like a girl.” Another adolescent boy is asked to throw like a girl, in which he throws a ball poorly as the audience hears a sound bite of him moaning “Awwwww...” as a symbol of his disappointment. Both of these actions are expressed in a dramatic manner, indicating the humor both the young boy and girl find in making fun of the subpar, physical ability of girls. Juxtaposed with this, the inspiring music occurring later in the commercial is accompanied with serious, powerful voiceovers that help to define the climax of the commercial. This refers back to the earlier claim made about how the shift in music compliments a shift in commercial theme. Once the music begins to speed up, the first pre-pubescent girl declares her name and age, marking a turning point in the commercial. The attention shifts here as she, along with all of the young girls who follow her, demonstrate acts of strength and power. Once this shift in music and thus increase in audience focus has occurred, the music is accompanied with powerful voiceovers for the remainder of the film, serving as one of the most powerful persuasive strategies. All of these combined elements effectively draw in the attention of the audience due to their emotive appeals. The fact that the audience’s attention is drawn in due to the arousal caused by the inspiring music and visuals provides a perfect place for *Always* to place the most inspiring interview of them all, thus underscoring the overarching theme of the commercial. An older girl is asked what advice she would give to younger girls who are told they “run, swim, throw, act like a girl.” She then responds with a powerful voiceover encouraging girls to “keep doing it because it is working.” She goes on to declare that being a girl is not something anyone should feel ashamed of and that society should instead associate positive connotations with the phrase. Complimenting her powerful, motivating words, the audience simultaneously sees girls vigorously performing various athletic acts ranging from golfing, kicking, throwing, etc. and

hears the sound of inspiring music in the background. The words, and thus the overarching message of the commercial, are heard much clearer than they would have been had there not been a strategic shift in music and juxtaposition of different performances, which coincided to draw in the viewer's attention.

### **Discussion: What Does This Tell Us About Society and the Fourth Wave?**

In terms of evaluation, the gender roles that are portrayed in this commercial are extremely accurate in the way they reflect society's views on females. It is a proven fact that a girl's confidence is at an all-time low as she is going through her adolescent years. "By middle school, forty to seventy percent of girls are dissatisfied with two or more parts of their body, and body satisfaction hits rock bottom between the ages of twelve and fifteen" (Andrist). The commercial effectively demonstrates this disheartening fact through its use of visual juxtaposition between the two different age groups; it is clearly exemplified before the audience that the older girls embody attitudes associated with a low self-image. By representing these gender stereotypes exist at such young age, the commercial implies that we live in a gender hierarchical society: males at the top and females at the bottom. Feminist criticism aims to challenge these hegemonic gender roles and instead offer new, more positive gender constructions.

I believe that this commercial is more than just an advertisement intended to increase *Always*' product consumption. By choosing to associate their product with this powerful feminist campaign, *Always* is raising necessary awareness of a very important societal issue. The statistics speak for themselves. The fact that adolescent girls experience a plummet in self-esteem is not something that society should passively submit as acceptable. Too often, people

tend to go about their lives blinded by the realization that we live in a male-dominated world. Both males and females alike accept the hegemonic ideology that perceives males as superior to females on the social hierarchy. As mentioned earlier, one of the main purposes of feminist criticism is to offer alternative constructions of gender roles and this is exactly what *Always*' main intention is behind the production of this commercial. Many have criticized that *Always* does not truly care about the feminist movement and only attached itself to the #LikeAGirl movement to enhance their public image and achieve higher profits. However, I would argue that this is a completely inaccurate assumption. While I do understand that many companies tend to do this, *Always* is different because their product is one hundred percent relevant to their movement. A girl typically begins using feminine products at the start of her adolescence. Because the statistics show that girls at this age are experiencing a decrease in self-esteem, it can be inferred that this is correlated to the way many feel embarrassed or uncomfortable buying and using these products. Therefore, by promoting a movement that encourages girls to be proud of their femininity, *Always* is also implicitly telling girls that it is okay to use their products, and that it is nothing to feel ashamed of. The message is much deeper than telling girls to use tampons, for using tampons symbolizes the act of girls embracing their womanhood as opposed to hiding it.

Regarding the utilization of fourth wave feminism, *Always*' commercial is a perfect exemplification of the success fourth wave feminism has in today's media-based society. The success of this commercial's use of the fourth wave exemplifies that regardless of the particular "wave" taking place, advocating for, and essentially, spreading feminist ideals, is not about having a different agenda, but rather a different means of accomplishing it. In this case, the different means fourth-wavers utilize to spread feminism lies in technology, and it is



this new factor of technology that is able to amplify feminist messages in a way that was never before accomplishable in past waves.

Comparing and contrasting the Seneca Falls Convention to the *Always* campaign further demonstrates how and why the fourth wave embodies more successful communicative strategies to spread feminist ideals than were available in past waves. Before protesting to a more expansive American population, Seneca Falls activists first held intimate meetings with like-minded, committed feminists to discuss current feminist issues and strategies to go about later campaigning these messages to more mainstream audience. Likewise, in the case of *Always*, the commercial had to gain its initial receptiveness to a smaller scale audience before it was ready to be transformed into a more mainstream setting. As mentioned before, the commercial was originally a YouTube video. The original audience that made up the YouTube viewers was people who actively searched YouTube for feminist related messages. These were mainly feminists who were already committed to the cause of spreading positive connotations of womanhood, which relates to the initial audience of the Seneca Falls Convention being made up of feminists already committed to the cause of obtaining women's suffrage. Due to the receptiveness *Always*' message had for this smaller, more limited audience, the message was then able to take on the Super Bowl television viewers that made up the mainstream discourse.

Although there are similarities in the goals between past and modern waves of feminism, the differences lie in the success rates. Technology has the ability to amplify significant feminist messages due to its ability to reach a mass amount of viewers at the same time, regardless of geographic location. While in the past, campaigning and protesting to a decently large amount of American citizens served its purpose to spread feminist messages as

extensively as possible given the limitations of the time period, today we are now privileged with technology: a tool that enables the mass publication of messages in a much more efficient manner. As exemplified by the utter success of the *Always* commercial, the fourth wave's utilization of technology allow for feminists to achieve the same goals of the past in a much more fluid manner, demonstrating the ideal of what fourth wave feminism did and will continue to accomplish in our current media-based society.

Through the effective utilization of various juxtaposition strategies, *Always'* #LikeAGirl commercial successfully voiced their feminist cause: to encourage society to destroy the socially constructed negative connotations associated with being a girl and to instead adopt new positive views on femininity. By expanding beyond the Internet scope and choosing to further expose this message during the Super Bowl to a predominately male-audience, *Always* did its job to begin raising awareness among the group they wish to elicit the greatest change in. Creating powerful juxtapositions in terms of visuals, commercial format, and music, the producers effectively grabbed the audience's attention and thus enforced the overarching feminist message in hopes of destroying hegemonic masculinity. Because feminist criticism assumes that gender roles are flexible as opposed to fluid, *Always* utilizes this commercial to encourage society to refine these socially constructed gender roles. Instead of continuing to live in a society where patriarchy oppresses femininity, the #LikeAGirl Movement wishes to eliminate this male-coerced way of life and instead encourage the construction of a society where males and females can coexist on equal social grounds.

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