“Girl Power in Advertising”

A qualitative study of how postfeminism and intersectionality are appropriated in two advertising campaigns

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Abstract

Advertising is increasingly, and has become one of the most powerful forms of global communication. It is one of the most influential tools in spreading ideas about gender, ethnicity and sexuality that create perceptions. Advertising has becoming increasingly global due to the globalization of the Western society and culture. This creates a need for intersectional awareness in advertising in order to avoid communicating inequalities. This bachelor thesis examines and analyze how femininities are articulated in advertising that exists within the contemporary context of popular feminism. Specifically, it offers an analysis of how postfeminism as a contemporary formation of feminism informs these advertising campaigns. The study examines two visual commercials, one from Adidas Originals and one from H&M. A multimodal semiotic analysis was used to analyze the empirical material in order to find out its meanings. The result indicates that the two advertising campaigns from H&M and Adidas Originals presents various and diverse forms of femininitiès by showcasing women with different looks, bodies and ethnicities. H&M’s commercial showcase women who are seen as empowered, confident and who acts out in different environments. Adidas Originals rather puts emphasis on showcasing women and men who speaks about issues concerning gender, body image and ethnicity. Both campaigns, it is argued, articulate and negotiate a discourse of postfeminism.

Keywords: advertising, femininity, gender, intersectionality, postfeminism, media
1. Introduction

Advertising is one of the most influential forms of global communication. Researchers point to the role of advertising in the social construction of reality and whether and how it can enhance or change meaning in the lives of consumers (Grau & Zotos 2016). As society evolves, advertising also reflects the change in society. For instance, advertising offers us ideas what it is like to be a man or woman in our society and culture (Gauntlett 2008:1-2; Grau & Zotos 2016). Current research shows that advertisers have updated their representation of women towards what can be understood as postfeminist representations. This means that women are presented as confident, independent and sexually assertive who express their freedom through consumption (Gill 2007:74; Banet-Weiser 2015, Lazar 2014; Grau & Zotos, 2016).

Advertising is becoming increasingly global due to the globalization of the Western society and culture. And this is something advertisers need to take into consideration when creating advertising campaigns. An understanding for intersectionality becomes relevant and essential in order to avoid communicating inequalities (Gill 2009; Banet-Weiser 2015). Recently, more and more companies have embraced the concept of gender equality and diversity as they wish to incorporate these values in their advertising campaigns (Lazar 2014; Gill 2007:88). Major global brands have launched advertising campaigns that addresses feminism to some extent. For instance, in 2016 Procter and Gamble launched a campaign called #LikeAGirl for Always, and in 2014 the cosmetic brand Cover Girl launched a campaign with the hashtag #GirlsCan (Forbes 2017).

Scholars within the field of media underscores how feminism has become a common expression in advertisements and campaigns (Gill 2007:95-96; Banet-Weiser 2015, McRobbie 2004). Advertisers assemble signs which connote independence, freedom and bodily autonomy and link them to purchase commodities. In this way, feminist goals like independence and control over own bodies are emptied of their political significance and sold back to us as choices about what to consume (Gill 2007:95-96; Lazar 2014; Banet-Weiser 2015; Goldman 1992).

Gender portrayals in advertising have been examined extensively in the last five decades and still remain an important topic. When a literature review was performed, it turned out that a lot
is written about how women has been represented in advertising from a historical perspective, but less were written about the newer representation of women. Whereas more critical analysis is needed of how contemporary advertising negotiates gender in an intersectional frame.

In this bachelor thesis I will examine and analyze two advertising campaigns, one from H&M and one from Adidas Originals. This bachelor thesis offers a critical examination of how femininities are articulated in the contemporary context of popular feminism. More specifically, it offers an analysis of how postfeminism as a contemporary formation of feminism informs these advertising campaigns.

1.2 Background

H&M

H&M is a multinational clothing-retail company known for its fast-fashion clothing for men, women, teenagers and children, currently operating on more than 69 markets internationally. The H&M brand has more than 4700 stores, and has a significant online presence with online shopping available in 33 countries. In addition to the H&M brand, the company consists of five individual brands with separate concept such as & Other Stories, Weekday, COS and Monki. It is currently the second-largest global clothing retailer, just behind Inditex group (H&M 2018). H&M is one of the leading fashion brands on Instagram with over 25 million followers (Statista, 2017). The visual commercial She’s a lady was produced 2016 by the Swedish advertising agency Forsman & Bodenfors. The advertising agency has produced other commercials for H&M such as For every victory starring transgender and reality star Caitlyn Jenner, and A magical Christmas starring rapper Nicki Minaj. Forsman & Bodenfors describes that their aim with She’s a lady was to redefine what it means to be a lady by showing women who challenge prevailing stereotypes and ideas about femininity.

Since basically forever, girls and women have been told to look and behave “like a lady”. Well isn’t it about time we – everyone together – redefined what it means to be a lady today? This
A campaign aims to do just that – featuring some seriously bad-ass women who are all equally ladylike in their own right. - Forsman & Bodenfors (2016)

The one minute long commercial presents more than twenty women dressed in clothes and accessories from the fashion brand. They are seen in both private and public environments. They are seen at bars, restaurants, bathroom, hotel rooms, the subway and at work.

**Adidas Originals**

Adidas is a multinational sports brand with presence on more than 180 markets worldwide. Adidas is the second biggest sports manufacturer in the world after Nike. Adidas Originals is specializing in sneakers and have launched well-known shoe models such as Stan Smith, Superstars, Gazelle and Yeezy. Adidas Originals have a strong presence on social media with more than 25 million followers on Instagram. This makes them one of the most followed fashion brands on Instagram (Statista 2017). The brand have recently teamed up with brand ambassadors such as Kendall Jenner, Dua Lipa, Angel Haze and Pharrell (Adidas, 2018).

The visual commercial *Superstars* was produced 2017, and is part of the Fall and Winter shoes collection from the same year. In this campaign Adidas presents brand ambassadors they wish embodies the idea of “the icons of tomorrow” (Adidas, 2018). The campaign consists of six shorter video each about 15 seconds long. The videos have the same format. It begins with one person entering a room with a grey background. The person sits down in the middle of the room, and begins talking about a subject they are especially passionate about such as gender, body image or ethnicity. The campaign presents body positivity activist, Barbie Ferreira, artist and photographer Arvida Byström, musician and activist Kiran Gandhi, skateboarder Rachelle Vinberg, rapper Khalif Diouf and environmental activist Xiuhtezcatl Martinez.
1.3 Research aim & questions
The aim of the study is to examine how femininities are articulated in advertising that exists within the contemporary context of popular feminism. Furthermore, the aim is to problematize and analyze the use of feminism in advertising by examining how postfeminism and intersectionality are appropriated in two advertising campaigns.

To meet the aim of the study I intend to answer the following research questions:

- *How are femininities articulated in the selected commercials?*

- *How are postfeminism and intersectionality appropriated in the selected commercials?*

1.4 Limitations of the study
This bachelor thesis is written within the field of media and communication studies. The study is conducted using multimodal semiotics. Other methods, such as rhetoric analysis would have focused on different aspects of the commercials. The study focus on how femininities are articulated in contemporary advertising. More specifically, how postfeminism and intersectionality are appropriated in two advertising campaigns. The material is limited to a few advertising campaigns, which means that it only represents a small part of the brands marketing content. If I would have chosen other brands the results would might have been different. In this thesis I have chosen to examine, gender, femininity, ethnicity and sexuality through a feminist and intersectional perspective. Analysis of other intersectional categories such as religion or age would have given me a different result.

1.5 Disposition
The first part of this bachelor thesis deals with previous research conducted on women in advertising and on intersectionality in advertising. Thereafter, it presents the theoretical framework, and in particular theories such as gender and femininity and intersectionality. This part also includes a discussion of postfeminism in advertising and the commodification of
feminism. Thereafter is the method part which presents multimodal semiotics, the practical applications of it and the investigation process in detail. The next part presents the analysis where I examine the commercials She’s a lady from H&M and Superstars from Adidas Originals in relation to my research questions. The first part of the analysis focus on how femininities are articulated in the two advertising campaigns. This part deals with how femininity is articulated in relation to both physical appearance and conduct. Here, I will also discuss the notion of intersectionalitity and how the two campaigns relate to this. The second part of the analysis deals with how postfeminism is appropriated in the selected commercials. The last part of the bachelor thesis presents the discussion/conclusion part where I discuss the research questions in relation to the findings.

2. Previous research

2.1 Women in Advertising

Gender portrayals in advertising have been examined extensively in the last decades and still remain an important topic. In the history of advertising, gender stereotypes has been used as a way of attracting the audiences. Advertising messages are created through the portrayal of idealized, stereotypical individuals. Advertisements have been criticized for showing woman as a stereotype for years and as a result creating difficulty in understanding the changing role of women in society (Grau & Zotos 2016; Gauntlett 2008:1-2). Previous research has shown that women in advertising are often being portrayed in a distinct and predictable manner, often presented as passive sexual objects dependent on men financially and for affirmation on their self-worth (Grau & Zotos 2016). Women were often being described in terms such as devoted, emotional, unpredictable, mainly viewed for their beauty and bodies. Women were often presented as visually attractive and in more decorative roles for their beauty or body, in more family oriented roles and in fewer professional role. Some would argue that the ideal woman were presented as conventionally beautiful with a slim and toned body. In contrast to men, women were rarely presented as strong, assertive and leader-like (Grau & Zotos 2016; Gill 2007:95-96).
However, current research shows that, since the past decade, that the representation of women is changing slowly (Grau & Zotos 2016; Gill 2017). Nowadays, women are being portrayed as what might be understood as postfeminist representations where women are seen as confident, independent and sexually assertive. Women are being presented as being in control over the construction of their own sexualities, free to express their own kind of femininity (Gill 2007:95-96; Banet-Weiser 2015).

2.2 Intersectionality in Advertising

Intersectionality in advertising has been examined throughout the years. One can find studies with an intersectional perspective focusing on representations of sexuality, ethnicity or gender in advertising (Gill 2009, Gill 2017; Butler 2013; Springer 2007). Media researcher Rosalind Gill has done extensive research on postfeminism and intersectionality in popular culture. In her book *Media and Gender* from 2007 she argues that advertisers lack intersectional awareness and that some groups of women and men are excluded from advertising. She argues, for instance, that women of color and non-heterosexual women are underrepresented in contemporary advertising (Gill 2007:28).

Media researcher Jess Butler argues that just as postfeminist discourses commodify feminism, they also construct racial and ethnic differences as commodities within the global marketplace (Butler 2013). Kimberly Springer have done research on African American women’s presence and absence in postfeminist manifestations in popular culture. She argues that one weakness with postfeminism is the call for equality without including racial analysis. Liberal feminism and postfeminism exclude revolutionary visions of feminism that continue to ask the question: equal to what? Springer continues with arguing that postfeminism seems to be about the right to consume and display oneself to best effect, and not about empowerment in the worlds of politics. Women are often thought to be universalized under the assumption that all women can “have it all” without taking race into account (Springer 2007:250-260).

Nevertheless, current research from Rosalind Gill (2017) and Jess Butler (2013) challenge this idea. Butler claims that women of color are thought to be excluded from postfeminist discourses
and representations. The idealized postfeminist subject is often seen as a white, Western, heterosexual woman. Butler argues that the argument that postfeminism excludes women of color, or that women of color do not appear in postfeminist popular culture, seems both overly simplistic and empirically unfounded. In popular culture we see artists like Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj and Cardi B who dominate the music scene. The women of color featured in the above representations clearly embody and enact postfeminism. They embrace femininity and the consumption of feminine goods, they espouse a vocabulary of independence, choice, empowerment, and sexual freedom, and they construct themselves as heterosexual subjects (Butler 2013; Gill 2017). Another central aspect of intersectionality is sexuality. Research argues that the subject of postfeminism is often presumed heterosexual (Gill 2017). Recent research challenge this idea, arguing that non-heterosexual women are included in postfeminist representations. One example of this is the growing visibility of non-heterosexual women in mainstream media (Gill 2017; Butler 2013; Dobson 2015).

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Gender and Femininity

Connell and Pearse claims that gender is no longer seen as something one is, but rather something one creates. This means that being a man or a woman is not a predetermined condition. It is rather a state under constant construction; people construct themselves as masculine and feminine (Connell & Pearse 2015:25-27). Gender researcher Judith Butler is critical of the traditional division of sex and gender. She claims that gender is performative which means that one creates themselves as either man, woman or non-binary by maintaining and reproducing discursive gender norms that are already established in society and culture. An individual’s actions are an effect of the discourses that exist in society. Thus, it is through the discourses that individuals are formed along with others, even if these "others" are not active in the interaction. Performativity refers to the idea that gender is created through action, attribute, and through language when we challenge or reproduce existing discourses. One
creates his or her gender according to the prevailing norms that exists in the society, in order to be understood as normal and tangible (Butler 2006:53).

In *Formations of class and gender: becoming respectable* sociologist Beverley Skeggs explains femininity in relation to class. She is critical of the theoretical framework created by feminist, cultural theorists and sociologist to understand how women live and produce themselves through social and cultural relations. Skeggs main point is that we need to understand the notion of femininity on a deeper level. Femininity is something which women must relate to in order to considered as respectable and tangible in the society. Being feminine is a choice that each woman makes, as a way for her to create self-worth, and as a way for her to appear as respectable (Skeggs 1997:81). Skeggs argue that femininity is usually discussed in relation to appearance yet physical appearance may be less of a sign of femininity than wider practices such as caring. Investments in caring practice may be more productive of what it is to be feminine than investments in feminine appearance. Both, however, are necessary to the construction of the respectable woman. To become respectable means displaying femininity through appearance and conduct. The body, as a social product is the only tangible manifestation of the person. The body is sign bearing and is a producer of signs which are physically marked by the relationship to the body, such as differences in bearing, posture, movement and use of space. Skeggs argue that femininity is a public performance dependent upon validation by others.Appearances are more than just surfaces. They are intimately linked to valuations of oneself, to knowing oneself and to being an accepted part of a group. They do not recognize themselves by the category of femininity but their appearance (amongst other practices) is central to how they know themselves. This suggests that women are not feminine by default but that femininity is a carefully constructed appearance and or form of conduct that can be displayed. It is a knowing construction, publicly performed (Skeggs 1997:105-108).

Gender scholar Ulrika Dahl puts emphasis on how femininity have been rejected as something superficial. She argues that we need to understand femininity and how it is articulated and expressed in the society. The notion of femininity can be seen an expression of the female body and everything that one associate that with. Femininity is often seen in relation to the physical appearance which means that femininity is often associated with a preoccupation with looks.
The notion of femininity is affected by the ever changing society, consumption trends, politics and collective pressure. This also includes the belief that women are more interested in fashion, makeup and beauty. However, Dahl claims that one needs to stop rejecting femininity as something shallow and superficial in order to fully understand it (Dahl 2011:8-10).

3.2 Intersectionality

The globalization of Western society has brought forth the need for intersectional awareness since a larger group of different people interact. In order to avoid communicating inequalities in advertising the need to recognize the interactions of different groups has increased, an understanding for intersectionality becomes relevant (Gill 2009; Butler 2013; Springer 2007).

Intersectionality is an integrated approach that identifies and examines the multiple forms of inequality and power. Intersectionality is used to analyze the interactions of inequalities as well as the connections and the co-construction of various aspects of identity, such as gender, race and sexuality. Intersectionality calls for a different, more complex reading of signs and symbolic orders. The theory of intersectionality is therefore relevant when one aims to do a broader analysis of how race, age, class and sexuality is being portrayed in advertising (Collins & Bilge 2016:4; Gill 2009).

The notion of intersectionality, was first coined in 1989 by American civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, who articulated a set of ideas that have informed feminist work for decades. She specifically discussed black feminism, and argued that women of color for instance, are discriminated against not only for the color of their skin but also for their gender. In this case, representation of ethnicity and gender intersect and form new dimensions of discrimination against women of color (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people and, in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can rarely be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being aped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class but by many axes that work tighter and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world.
and of themselves. Through an intersectional perspective people’s experiences, identities and opportunities are determined by how society represents them (Collins & Bilge 2016:4).

### 3.3 Postfeminism in Advertising

Feminism underscores the importance of the social, political and economic structures that shape human societies. Feminism, defined as beliefs supportive of gender equality, especially in the political, economic, cultural, personal, and social rights arenas has long been an important movement and ideology that influences people’s judgments and attitudes. Feminism notion refuses the negative discrimination against women. Historically, the feminist movements have three significant waves: first-wave feminism, second-wave feminism and third-wave feminism ranging from the late twentieth century today. While first-wave feminism mainly focused on women’s equal property and voting rights, second-wave extended the equality issue to sexuality, family, work, among other things. Third-wave feminism celebrates individualism and diversity (McRobbie 2004).

Angela McRobbie examines the notion of postfeminism in her article *Postfeminism and Popular Culture*. She claims that the new post-feminist era is a backlash of the second wave’s achievements. The “undoing” of feminism is most present in popular culture. Traditional socialist feminism critiques the way capitalism oppressed women as a group. Consumer culture uses feminist language by celebrating female power through the participation in consumerism. McRobbie explains this as a “double entanglement” where feminism is taken as common sense, but at the same time detested. Third-wave feminists position culture and sexual politics as central to gender justice and use disconnects between media representations and feminist knowledge to galvanize women toward greater activism. Therefore, third-wave feminists seek out positive media representations of women and feminism. Third-wave also contains elements of second-wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of structures (McRobbie 2004).
In *Gender and the Media* Rosalind Gill examine the way advertisers have responded to feminist anger at always being addressed in terms of idealized, perfect images of unattainable femininity, and developed new advertising strategies that partly appropriated the cultural power of feminism, while often emptying it of its radical critique. She highlights the key shifts in representation away from portrayals of women as sex objects, towards what might be understood as postfeminist representations in which confident, independent and sexually assertive women dominate who express their freedom through consumption. Gill claims that advertising simultaneously uses, incorporates, revises, attacks and depoliticized feminist ideas and themes. There are many different ways in which the cultural power of feminism is appropriate in adverts (Gill 2007:74).

### 3.4 Commodification of Feminism

Robert Goldman argues that just as traditional femininity is portrayed through a narrow range of signifiers, so now is feminism conjured up through an increasingly predictable lexicon which includes showing women in professional environments. Advertisers assemble signs which connote independence, freedom and bodily autonomy and link them to purchase commodities. In this way, feminist goals like independence and control over own bodies are emptied of their political significance and sold back to us as choices about what to consume. This is what Goldman define as commodity feminism which means that we are invited to become liberated and to take control of our own lives by acts of individual consumption - rather than collective struggle for social and political change (Goldman 1992:130).

Rosalind Gill argues in the same way that many advertisers directly draw on feminist ideas through the use of feminist discourse in their adverts. Advertisers use visual signifiers of female success such as briefcase, business suit, car, own home, etc., and connect it to signifiers of traditional femininity such as long hair, makeup and conventional attractiveness, so as to imply that there is no tension between being successful and a powerful woman who is taken seriously, and being sexually attractive to men. Some women are being portrayed as a kind of superwoman that is powerful, respected, successful as well as effortlessly beautiful (Gill 2007:95-96).
Communications researcher Sara Banet-Weiser agrees with the two scholars mentioned above. She argues that by attaching politicized rhetoric to their brand they create commodity feminism. Customer can easily make a statement by purchasing a certain brand or sharing content on social media, since the value of empowering women is attached to the brand as a selling point. Banet-Weiser problematizes profit-driven companies’ involvement in social issues in the light of the historical progress of our contemporary capitalist system. She claims that the positioning of girls “in crisis” and in need of empowerment, and simultaneously, as important consumers, has helped to create a market for empowerment. As girls have been increasingly recognized as an important consumers demographic, the power in “girl power” has become an increasingly formable concept, lending itself to commodification and marketization. The neoliberal feminism encourage a feminist subject who is aware of gender inequality, but whose feminism is so individuated that it has been completely unmoored from any notion of social inequality and consequently cannot offer any sustained analytic of the structures of male dominance, power, or privilege. This crisis is connected to the rising numbers of white, middle-class girls with eating disorders and body-image issues, and reports of general low self-confidence from media representations of hyper-sexuality (Banet-Weiser 2015).

4. Method

A qualitative research process initially starts with collecting empirical material, and later by formulating the research question. This bachelor is based on qualitative research approach. This thesis is based on the ontological position of constructionism, which means viewing social reality as something produced through social interactions (Bryman 2012).

4.1 Multimodal Semiotics

Jewitt, Bezemer and O’Halloran (2016) discusses social semiotics in their book *Introducing Multimodality*. A social semiotic theory of communication sees systems of meaning as fluid, contingent and changing in relation to context, history and culture. Social semiotics differs from traditional semiotics primarily on its perception of signs. Within traditional semiotics one sees signs as arbitrary, built upon agreed conventions, while social semiotics consider signs as
semiotic resources motivated by the sender and therefore never arbitrary. In social semiotics the semiotic resources are chosen intentionally to communicate a certain message, and the meaning of a semiotic resource differs depending on the intention of the sender and how they use the resource. The aim of social semiotics is to understand the social dimensions of meaning, its production, interpretation and circulation, and its implications. It sets out to reveal how processes of meaning making shape individuals and societies. Its basic assumption is that meanings derive from social action and interaction using semiotic resources as tools. It stresses the agency of sign makers, focusing on modes and their affordances, as well as the social uses and needs they serve (Jewitt, Bezemer & O’Halloran 2016:58).

Most of digital communication and advertisement involves more than one mode. Multimodality is one approach to communication, interaction and representation which do not only take languages into account such as speech and text. Within the perspective, other types of semiotics are also included such as gestures, sounds, images and looks. A multimodal approach is a fitting method when one aims to study how something is represented in advertising. The multimodal analysis is inspired by semiotics, and is common in media and communication studies, and has developed from the field of social semiotics. A wide range of materials can be analyzed using multimodality as approach, such as advertisement, social media content and newspaper articles (Rose 2016:16; Jewitt, Bezemer & O’Halloran 2016:80).

According to Jewitt Bezemer and O’Halloran (2016) a multimodal analysis refers to how different forms of communication are created, how the messages interact and what they convey to the society as a whole. Multimodality means recognition of the differences among different semiotic resources and of the ways in which they are combined in actual instances of meaning making. This analysis method can be used when one aims to expose patterns in communication efforts and develop an understanding for common characteristics of different communication forms, and how they work within a social and cultural context. A key concept in multimodal analysis is the assumption that communication uses multiple resources and that the resources have equal potential to create meaning; in that sense communication and interactions are multimodal as they are expressed by different communication forms, such as speech and images (Jewitt, Bezemer & O’Halloran 2016:17).
Theo Van Leeuwen argues that the use of semiotic resources are regulated by discourses of gender, social class, race institutional norms and other forms of power structures in society. The production of specific semiotic resources, and the way that they are interpreted by people are all shaped by social processes. It is formed by a number of conventions in terms of how meaning is organized (Van Leeuwen 2004:198).

4.2 Practical application of a multimodal semiotic analysis
A multimodal analysis examines semiotic resources and their potential meaning. In this bachelor thesis I will focus on semiotic resources such as gestures, postures and artifacts such as clothing and accessories.

Van Leeuwen (2004) discusses the practical implications of social semiotics in his book *Introducing social semiotics*. He argues that body language is one semiotic resource used to communicate meaning, and includes facial expressions, eye contact, a smile and so on. One can also take notice who is shown happy or sad, and what facial expressions are used to convey this. Another semiotic resource is gestures, these reflect what is considered appropriate for the given situation in relation the person age, gender and ethnicity. Posture is a resource for communicating certain characteristics, especially stereotypical representations of gender roles and ideas of femininity and masculinity (Van Leeuwen 2004:198). Artifact is another form of semiotic resource which includes all things made by humans, such as clothing and accessories. For instance, what we wear is used to communicate our identity and to say something about our environment. Clothing signifies identity through unwritten codes. Western society has established certain clothing norms, which are rules of dressing based on unwritten traditions. Through these unwritten traditions, skirts, dresses, bracelets and necklaces are considered feminine artefacts (Van Leeuwen 2004:93).

4.3 Selection of material
I am interested in analyzing how femininities are articulated in the contemporary context of popular feminism. In addition, I am interested in analyzing the use of feminism in advertising,
and in particular how postfeminism and intersectionality is appropriated in advertising. The selection of material is made after how relevant and interesting I found it in relation to aim, research questions and analysis. Altogether, the empirical material is composed of two advertising campaigns that was recently produced. The first commercial that I selected is She’s a lady from H&M from 2016. I found this commercial relevant and suitable since it has received some media attention for showing women in a non-traditional way (Adweek 2016; The Guardian 2016). Editor Kristina Monllos praise the commercial for showing diverse and so-called regular women (Adweek 2016). More than twenty women are presented in the commercial which enables me to analyze many different individuals. The second commercial I choose to analyze is Superstars by Adidas Originals from year 2017. This commercial from Adidas Originals initially caught my attention since one of the ambassadors faced major backlash after displaying her unshaved legs in the campaign (The Guardian 2017). I have chosen two advertising campaigns that was recently published. This was important to me since I am interested in analyzing the newer representation of women. H&M and Adidas Originals are two internationally known brands who operates on a global market. They can also be thought to be influential when it comes to shape our understanding of gender. These two advertising campaigns are different from each other, and this is something I consider to be beneficial for the analysis. It enables me to analyze the notion of femininity, postfeminism and intersectionality through two works that differs a lot from each other when it comes to content, format and production form.

4.5 Method reflection

Alan Bryman argues that a qualitative research is a suitable approach when one aims to get a deeper understanding of a complex topic. This strategy allows one to analyze content and their meanings with an interpretive approach, rather than quantitative numerical calculations which would have limited my ability to do a deeper analysis of the chosen topic. Semiotics can be of great value in feminist media criticism because of its ability to unravel structures of meaning beyond the presence or absence of women in cultural forms. It is therefore considered to be a fitting method when analyzing ads, but also when one aims to examine gender, ethnicity, class, age and sexuality (Bryman 2012:285; Rose 2016:108). Jewitt et. al. argues that a multimodal approach is suitable when examining contemporary advertising. This is based on the
preconception that most communication today consists of different elements, and is multimodal (Jewitt, Bezemer & O’Halloran 2016:4).

Qualitative research often face criticism because it is considered to be subjective in contrast to quantitative research where numbers and statistics can legitimate the study. This criticism is based on the fact that qualitative research often generates results that are largely based on the researcher's own perception of what is important, which in turn makes the study difficult to replicate because it depends on the researcher's own reading (Bryman 2012:283). The multimodal semiotic analysis has been criticized as being determinative because the results are often made of generalizations (Jewitt 2016:82-83). Advertising is in the same way often interpreted in different ways by different people depending on their specific background. This means that there is no correct interpretation of any material. On the other hand, one can argue that it is difficult to perform any analysis being fully objective since every researcher has a background. For instance, I am aware of my own background as a woman living in a Western society. Bryman argues that there are two fundamental criterion for the assessment of qualitative research, that is, trustworthiness and authenticity (Bryman 2012:282). I have aimed to meet these two criteria’s by being as transparent as possible, describing the research process step by step, along with the applied theories and empirical material. In order to be as objective as possible I have adapted a critical standpoint when analyzing the material, and used theories from different authors with diverse backgrounds.

4.6 Description of investigation process

The commercials were examined through a multimodal approach, which means that meaning is created through the use of semiotic resources. To begin with, a semiotic analysis was conducted of the visual content of each commercial. The selected videos was first viewed in order to get a good overview of the material. While watching the material, I took notes of body language, facial expressions, gestures and clothing. In order to get a more detailed understanding of the material, I also analyzed the verbal part, which includes spoken language and music. Since my study is based on a critical feminist and intersectional perspective, special attention was paid to the portrayal of ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Lastly, the results from the analysis of the two commercials were compared and analyzed in a bigger societal context.
5. Analysis

5.1 How are femininities articulated in the commercials *She’s a lady* from H&M and *Superstars* from Adidas Originals?

5.1.2 The representation of bodies

Gill argues that the size and appearance of the body is fundamental to the woman's identity in advertising discourses (Gill 2007:229). The body, as a social product is the only tangible manifestation of the person. It is sign bearing and a producer of signs which are physically marked by the relationship to the body, visible in the differences in posture, movement and use of space (Skeggs 1997:105-108). H&M’s advertising campaign *She’s a lady* presents many women with different bodies. The first scene features plus-size model Paloma Esser, who is standing in front of a mirror only dressed in her underwear. She is filmed from behind which makes her full body in focus. The woman is seen confidently dancing in front on the mirror. Gill claims that plus-size women are often not being represented in advertising at all, and when being presented often portrayed in a stereotypical way (Gill 2007:28). But in the commercial the woman is not presented in a stereotypical way, but rather as a confident woman who is not afraid to show off her body. This goes against the idea that women should be thin in order to be attractive and respectable (Skeggs 1997:105-108). At one point, the camera follows the Thai fighter Fatima Pinto who check herself in the mirror. The woman is dressed in a tight and revealing dress holding a small purse. Van Leeuwen (2004) argues that some clothing can be associated with femininity such as dresses and purses. Fatima Pinto has a so-called athletic body with well-defined arm muscles. In contrast to her feminine clothes is her muscular body. Having a very muscular body is usually something one can associate with masculinity since it is a common ideal for many men. In this way, H&M manage to display bodies that are usually not included in mainstream commercials.

In these two sequences, both Paloma and Fatima are observing themselves in a mirror. The mirror can be seen as a symbol for the preoccupation women have with their physical appearance, but also as a tool for women to judge themselves (Dahl 2011:8-10). The plus-size
model Paloma Esser looks into the mirror with a confident, seductive look, while we hear the text line “she’s a winner”. The fighter Fatima Pinto is also seen as confident while checking herself in the mirror of the elevator. The women are showing signs that they are satisfied with their bodies, which can be seen as an attempt to communicate that women should love their bodies, no matter body figure or type. It also highlights how women should celebrate their own bodies by adapting an accepting attitude.

Another scene features the Swedish model and feminist activist Arvida Byström where she is seen in what appears to be a hotel room. She is dressed in blue denim jeans and a pink top. She is half lying down in a bed, ordering in fries, while unzipping her tight denim jeans. Later, she is seen laying down in a relaxed position with her arms up, showcasing her hairy armpits, as she is smiling, seemingly happy and content. Van Leeuwen (2004) argues that posture is a resource for communicating certain characteristics, especially stereotypical representations of gender roles and ideas of femininity and masculinity. The models posture can be associated with masculinity since she is seen being totally carefree, enjoying her food.

The first video clip of the Adidas Originals campaign presents Arvida Byström. She is seen dressed in a short white lace dress with pink t-shirt underneath along with some accessories such as bracelets, a pearl necklace and earrings. Van Leeuwen argues that Western society has established certain clothing norms, which are rules of dressing based on unwritten traditions. Through these unwritten traditions, skirts, bracelets and necklaces are considered feminine artefacts (Van Leeuwen 2004:93). At one point the camera closely zooms in on her bare legs which appears to hairy. Skeggs claims that femininity is carefully constructed appearance and or form of conduct that can be displayed. This suggest that women are not feminine by default, but that femininity is something women have to create (Skeggs 1997:105-108). According to prevailing beauty norms women should take care of their physical appearance in order to be considered respectable and feminine. This includes actions like shaving one's legs and wearing makeup. The model is at first looking straight into the camera, and later she looks away from the camera with her mouth slightly open giving her a seductive look. She puts her legs onto the other one, displaying her bare legs. In this way, her overall posture can be interpreted as being sexually connoted. The woman has gone from being a sexual object to a sexual subject.
who deliberately plays with her sexual power, and who makes choices about their own sex object status (Gill 2007:89; Dobson 2015; McRobbie, 2009). In this way, she is portrayed as being in control over her own sexuality as she is free to construct it. In the video clip she is also stating that:

“I think femininity usually is created from our culture. So I think that everybody can do feminine things and be feminine. And I feel like in today’s society we’re very scared of that”

Dahl claims that femininity is often regarded as something superficial and shallow (Dahl 2011:8-10). Dobson argues that the within the postfeminist discourse women are represented as strong, confident and capable, in contrast to understandings of femininity as weak and submissive (Dobson 2015:32). This refers to the idea that we have rejected femininity as something less valuable, in contrast to masculinity that is seen as superior. Arvida refers to this idea by saying that femininity is usually something that our society is opposed to.

Another clip in the Adidas Originals campaign shows American plus-size model and body positivity activist Barbie Ferreira. In the video clip she is seen dressed in denim jeans along with a short crop top. At one point she is laying down on one side, facing the camera, while gently leaning back playing with her hair. When doing this pose her full body becomes in focus, as well as her stomach. While she is doing different poses she is also saying:

“What I really wanna do is make young women feel like they don’t have to change themselves to do what they wanna do. Chubby, fat girls, can do whatever the hell they want. Fat girls around the world”

After this statement Barbie laughs out loudly, and walks confidently out of the picture. When speaking she is looking straight into the camera which gives her a confident look. Her words are highly connected to the idea that plus-size women are strong and should not have to correct themselves in order to be considered attractive or beautiful. In this way, her statement goes against the idea that girls should be thin in order to be attractive and respectable (Skeggs 1997:105-108). Skeggs argues that one's appearance is intimately linked to the valuations of oneself, and to the feelings of self-worth (Skeggs 1997:317). However, in this clip the model is
challenging this idea, by saying that “Chubby, fat girls, can do whatever the hell they want”. This means that one's body type do not necessary have to define one's self-worth. Gill emphasizes that the female body is constantly being evaluated, scrutinized and dissected by both women as well as men, and are always at risk of falling. No matter what type of body a woman has, she can always be perceived as too fat or too skinny according to prevailing norms (Gill, 2009).

The Adidas Originals campaign also shows skateboarder Rachelle Vinberg, founding member of Skate Kitchen. In the video clip she is seen dressed in a short skirt and a simple t-shirt, wearing a pair of glasses. She sits down while showing all of her bruises and injuries - all caused by her skateboarding. In the video, she explains that:

“It just comes with the skateboarding. You just get back up. And you laugh it off. Or cry. Either way”

In this way she is portrays as a tough girl who is not afraid to get physically hurt. She is not worried about the fact that she will get bodily imperfections such as bruises and scars from skateboarding. Women are thought to be preoccupied and worried about their looks. This means that there is also a preconception that women should take care of their physical appearance by not hurting themselves physically in order to appear as respectable. However, her physical appearance and statement offers us the idea that a girl do not have to worry about her surface. In this way she offers a different way of thinking about femininity, as it challenge the preconception that women should not get physically injured.

5.1.3 Women who take up space

Skeggs argues that femininity is displayed through appearance and conduct, meaning that the use of space is part of how one constructs femininity (Skeggs 1997:105-108) Throughout the H&M commercial the text of the song She’s a lady is played. The song is was originally written by Tom Jones, but is performed by a woman in the commercial. The lyrics presents the listener the traditional view of what it is like to be a lady, as it challenge our perceptions of what it actually means. The lyrics suggest that lady-like woman is someone who “always knows her place” and who’s “never in the way”. This suggest that a woman should never be too loud,
taking up too much space, or simply be in the way for men. In H&M’s commercial many of the females are shown in scenes were they acting out and in that sense also occupying space. One example of this is the scene where a group of women are seen at an upscale restaurant. The camera follows the women dressed in black paired with high heels, walking down some stairs into a room with chandeliers with people sitting around table with white cloths, giving the feeling they are at a fancy restaurant. They walk up to a table, while only focusing on each other, not noticing that everyone in the restaurants turns their heads and stares at them. One of the them picks her teeth using a fork, while another use her knife to point at someone. This can be interpreted as very bad table manner. Along with this scene is the lyrics “she’s all you’d ever want, she’s the kind you like to flaunt and take to dinner”. It appears like these women do not fit into that description. The women in the scene, on the other hand, are seen having dinner at a fancy restaurant, without the presence of a man, showing bad table manner. This is something that challenge what we hear in the song and therefore the definition of being a lady. They are pictured as having fun together, not really caring what the other guests of the restaurant thinks of them, seemingly taking up the same space as a group of men typically would have done.

The H&M commercial also features transgender model Hari Nef. She is seen sitting low in a seat at the subway while spreading her legs and taking up a lot of space. This is way of sitting can be associated to the way many men sits when traveling with public transportation, so-called “manspreading”. This can be considered to be a sign of power, and a form of master suppression technique, where women in contrast to men should take up as little space as possible in public areas. This challenge our perception of how girls should behave in the public space. Along with this scene is the lyrics “she’s never in the way”. These examples aims to challenge the perception of femininity and what is means to be ladylike. The images shown in relation to the song text become an ironic way of highlighting deep-rooted ideals, then challenging the same and showing that these ideals are not reasonable.

Another sequence follows Pum Lefebure, an Asian woman. The camera follows her, showing her point of view, as she walks into what connotes a boardroom, with men and women in grey suits sitting around a big table. They all look up at her. She stops, throws down a folder and places both hands on the table. In this scene the woman is being portrayed in a traditionally
manly role as the leader of a big corporation. Her position as manager is strongly associated with the notion of power. Gill claims that Asian women in media are often seen in submissive roles (Gill 2007:28). However, in this scene that representation of Asian woman is being challenged.

5.2 How are postfeminism and intersectionality appropriated in the commercials *She’s a lady* from H&M and *Superstars* from Adidas Originals?

Traditional socialist feminism have always criticized the way capitalism oppressed women as a group. Postfeminism highlights the portrayal of women as independent, self-confident and as free to express their own femininity. Some researcher questions whether the act of consumption can ever be seen as a form of empowerment as capitalism itself oppresses women as a group. There is an evident contradiction between the notion of feminism and consumption (Banet-Weiser, 2015; McRobbie 2004; Lazar 2014). One can assume that the commercial She’s a lady from H&M was created to increase the company’s sales and profit margins, as well as the brand equity. This is one of the main reason to why many brands uses feminism as a part of their marketing and communications strategy. One can argue that both of the advertising campaigns was created with the aim of increasing the brand's reputation.

5.2.1 Empowerment by profession and passion

The commercial *She’s a lady* incorporates and draws upon many different feminist ideas through their portrayal of strong and independent women. This is done by displaying different types of women from different backgrounds in environments where they are allowed to act out. For instance, the scene that features Pum Lefebure in what appears to be a boardroom. When she walks into that boardroom, throwing down her folder, she is portrayed as the superwoman who is powerful, successful and beautiful. Gill claims that advertisers show women in professional environments while using visual signifiers of female success such as business suits, and connect it with signifiers of traditional femininity such as conventional attractiveness (Gill 2007:95-96). Another example of this is one scene with Lauren Hutton who is attending a mingle event at a fancy venue. In the scene, she is seen wearing a black suit with a white shirt.
There are two men in suit who is having a conversation, but instead of engaging in the conversation, she rolls her eyes at them. Along with this is the lyrics “always something nice to say”. Her facial expression tells us that she doesn’t have anything nice to say. This challenge the idea that women should always behave and be polite. In the next sequence one sees her leaning on a statue while eating something. This gives the impression that she is uninterested in what these men have to say, or does not agree with them. Banet-Weiser identifies this woman as the “independent” type who is identified by her self-confidence, ambition and a successful career (Banet-Weiser 2015). In this way, H&M shows that women can both be successful and be conventionally beautiful.

Michelle Lazar (2014) argues that there is a shift in the representation of women in advertising towards what can be seen as the new “I-centered” woman, who is doing something for herself and is in that way empowering her own self, expressed through self-confident. This is something that one can take notice of in the Superstars campaign. In the campaign each of the Adidas brand ambassadors speaks about an issue that they are passionate about. For instance, Barbie Ferreira speaks about body positivity and the importance of loving your body, no matter size or figure. On the other hand, Rachelle Vinberg highlights her profession as a skateboarder, and how she gets physically hurt when engaging in her passion. Her statement “it just comes with the skateboarding, either you laugh or cry” can be strongly associated with the idea that she is solely skateboarding for herself. And that skateboarding enables her to feel strong and empowered as a woman. Another example of this is Madame Gandhi who calls herself a feminist musician. In the video she is sitting down with a serious facial expression. In clip she is expressing that:

“My motto for the world is to own your voice and don’t be afraid. So many of us feel like there is injustice in the world, but we don’t feel safe enough to express these ideas. Owning your voice is having the bravery to say what you think”

Scholars of postfeminism argues that the postfeminist girl is empowered and not afraid to follow her or his dreams and passion. This new type of femininities are centered around the idea that women are entrepreneurial and have the ability to create their own business and
careers. Independence and confidence in particular emerge as qualities strongly tied to ideal young femininity in broader social and political discourses that produce girls and young women as the success stories and high-achievers of late modernity. Women are encouraged through media and political discourse to “voice themselves” that is, to express themselves loudly and confidently, and to demonstrate not only economic capacity (Dobson 2015:32). All of the example mentioned above embodies the idea of empowerment through one's profession, hobby or passion.

5.2.2 Selling the idea of self-love and self-confidence

Gill examine the way advertisers have responded to feminist anger at always being addressed in terms of idealized, perfect images of unattainable femininity by presenting women who do not represent an unattainable ideal (Gill 2007:74). H&M embody this idea to some extent by including bodies that challenge prevailing norms. This by including curve model Paloma Esser who is a few sizes bigger than the rest of the models, and Thai fighter Fatima Pinto who has an athletic body. The representation of these two highlights the idea that each woman should love their body, regardless of size and figure. Nevertheless, the commercial features more than twenty women, but only one or two are not conventionally thin. In this way the representation of different bodies still remain very limited since the majority of the women are thin. So it seems like even though H&M manage to represents different body types in their commercial one still needs to be critical of the overall representation which appears to reinforce the thin-ideal.

Throughout the whole commercial H&M sells the idea of empowerment through consumption. This is what Goldman refers to as commodity feminism which means that we are invited to becomes liberated and our true self and to take control of our own lives by purchasing clothes. David Gauntlett means that advertising makes a profit on individuals insecurities. Advertising promotes the idea that products will help us accent our individuality, and will create a certain feeling (Gauntlett 2008:111). Women are presented as being in charge of the construction of themselves as sexual objects. The women are portrayed in a way which implies that they do not necessarily seek confirmation from men, but from the satisfaction of themselves they will win men's admiration (Gill 2007:91). One example of this is the scene with plus-size model Paloma
Esser who is posing in front of a mirror. In the scene she is presented as confident and sexually assertive wearing underwear from H&M. In this way, H&M offer us the idea of empowerment through purchasing their products.

The Superstars campaign from Adidas Originals presents plus-size model and body activist Barbie Ferreira. She is an active ambassador for the body positivity movement. In short, the body positivity movement stands for adapting a positive body image where self-love and body acceptance is in focus. She is also passionate about issues concerning representation in the media. Barbie Ferreira is a model who do not represents the thin-ideal we are used to see in ads. Instead she is a few sizes bigger than the thin model we are used to see in ads. Gill claims that advertisers have started to present women who do not represents unattainable beauty ideals. This means presenting girls and women that are not necessarily a size zero (Gill 2007:74). By featuring plus-size model Barbie Ferreira who claims that “fat and chubby girls can do what they hell they want” appears as empowering. She manage to highlight how she is confident in her own body even if she is what the society considered as “fat”. This also invites us to think that she has a good self-esteem which is something that many girls are in need of in today's society. Banet-Weiser argues that this is a part of positioning girls as “in crisis” and in need of empowerment. She argues that this has a lot to do with the rising numbers of girls with body-image issues and general low self-confidence (Banet-Weiser 2015). In this way, Adidas Originals sells us the idea of empowerment and self-confidence by stating that all women should love their bodies, regardless of size and figure.
5.2.3 Edginess and uniqueness

As a result of feminist criticism more companies have moved from the perfect beauty of models, to use more authentic, and ordinary looking women with unusual or striking looks. This shift towards “edginess” can be seen in various parts of popular culture such as fashion, music and advertising. What is perhaps surprising is how little “edginess” in popular culture has affected on advertising, and how minutely female models must differ from the idealized image of beauty in order to earn the tag “edgy”. An example of this would be the use of a female model with pink hair, or a woman with armpit hair. This also means that most women and men do not represent the idealized image of beauty that is seen in ads, and would therefore be seen as “edgy” (Gill 2007:87-88). Kimberly Springer claims that part of the genius of postfeminism is to co-opt the language of feminism and then attach it to some kind of consumer behavior that feeds young people's desire for uniqueness (Springer 2007:251). H&M manage to represents some of these “edgy” women. This includes representing models with a physical appearance that differs from what we are used to see in advertising. She’s a lady shows women with pink hair, plus-size models, shaved hair and women with different ethnicities. In the context of advertising these women appears to be somewhat “edgy” due to the fact that they are usually not seen in advertising. It seems by simply using models that do not represent the perfect beauty norms, they are able to be perceived as different among their competitors. Even though H&M presents women that can be perceived as “edgy” they are still some limitations to how “edgy” they can be. For instance, they feature plus-size model Paloma Esser. Even though she has a body that is bigger than what we are used to see in advertising, she still has conventionally beautiful face. H&M would have been even more edgy if they would have presented someone who is not a professional model. Another example of this is Arvida Byström who is eating fries in her bed. In this case it would have been interesting to see someone else in the same scene. Perhaps someone who do not have a conventionally thin body. So it seems like there is some limitations to how edgy the She's a lady commercial can be.

Adidas Originals showcases people with hairy legs and different bodies. As I mentioned earlier, there are however some limitations to how “edgy” the people can be, and how norm-breaking they can appear. For instance, one of the clips shows curve model Barbie Ferreira who is plus-size but still has a conventionally beautiful face and works as a professional model. The one
that appears to be the most different one in the Adidas commercial is Arvida Byström who shows her hairy legs. Having hairy legs as a woman appears to be different, especially in the context of advertising where we are used to see perfect images of femininities. So it seems like by including someone like her in the commercial, Adidas Original is able display “edginess” to some extent. However, one can also argue how edgy or unusual it really is to have hairy legs as a woman. Both campaigns seem to have taken this concept into account since they are both displaying individuals with so-called striking looks.

5.2.4 Intersectionality

Scholars have claimed that the idealized postfeminist subject is often seen as a white, Western, heterosexual woman. This also implies that women of color and women with non-heterosexual sexualities are presumed to be excluded from postfeminist discourses and representations (Butler 2013; Gill 2017). When looking at the commercial from H&M it seems like the preconception that women of color would be excluded from postfeminist representations is not fully accurate or seems oversimplified. H&M manage to display women that are seen as independent, assertive and empowered. The H&M commercial features few women of color. All of the women are portrayed more or less in the same way, and there is no difference in the portrayal between people of different ethnicities. One can argue that all of the women are portrayed in line with postfeminist ideas as they are seen as equally empowered.

As mentioned earlier, the commercial from H&M offers a wide representation of women from different ethnicities and backgrounds. One can argue that the commercial manage to display a wider range of ethnicities in comparison to similar fashion commercials. However, one can also argue that the representation of different ethnicities are still somewhat limited since a majority of the women presented are white. It can therefore be argued that there is an underrepresentation of some ethnicities in the commercial (Gill 2007:28).

The Adidas Originals campaign presents individuals from different ethnicities. For instance, out of the six brand ambassadors the campaigns presents at least three people from different ethnicities. The commercial manage to display different types of individuals with different
looks and backgrounds. When looking at the representation of women one can take notice that most of them are white and from similar backgrounds. So it seems like there is an underrepresentation of women of color in this specific commercial from Adidas. Only by looking at this certain campaign from Adidas it do appear like it reinforce the idea of the idealized postfeminist subject to some extent (Butler 2013; Gill 2017). However, this also seems like an oversimplified conclusion since the commercial only presents four women in total. Nevertheless, one of the video clips presents activist Xiuhtezcatl Martinez who is Mexican and rapper and performer Khalif Diouf who is a man of color. In the video clip Khalif is saying that:

“I’m black and I’m gay. And I’m definitely a musician. I really do live for the freedom of expression. Having the ability to do you, to create, say, and live as you want to”

Kimberle Crenshaw argues that women of color for instance, are discriminated against not only for the color of their skin but also for their gender. In this case, representation of ethnicity and gender intersect and form new dimensions of discrimination against individuals (Crenshaw, 1991). Interestingly, one can argue that the same can be applied to Khalif’s statement and the way he highlights his ethnicity and sexuality. It seems like he is expressing this in order to bring awareness to his position as a black gay rapper. Many would argue that the hip-hop scene in the United States is dominated by heterosexual men, and this might create a new dimension of discrimination. Khalif highlights the importance of “having the ability to live as you want” referring to himself and his position as an artist.

Another essential aspect of intersectionality is sexuality. Gill argues that non-heterosexual women are underrepresented in mainstream advertising. She claims that advertising often fail to present a broader spectrum of gender identities and sexualities (Gill 2007:28).

The commercial from H&M features Hari Nef who is a transgender woman and an outspoken trans activist. The H&M commercial includes one scene where two women are seen kissing. The two women are seen in a scene where they are jumping into a pool while holding hands. It appears to be late at night and it looks like the pool area is empty from people. Later, the two women starts kissing as they are under the water, and the camera zooms in on their kiss. It can
be argued that this scene represents homosexuality or perhaps bisexuality. However, only by looking at this scene it is difficult to decide. It can also be a portrayal of two women who are “experimenting” with their sexualities. Gill (2007) argues that when the media presents lesbians and bisexuals they are usually seen kissing each other. Butler (2013) argues, on the other hand, that there is an increasing visibility of non-heterosexual women in media. She discusses that non-heterosexual women do exist within the postfeminist discourse. The Adidas campaign presents male rapper Khalif Diouf who identifies himself as homosexual. It is hard to decide whether the Adidas campaign presents any non-heterosexual women since it is not explicitly stated. It can be argued that both commercials manage to highlight non-heterosexual sexuality so some extent. Just as Butler argued there seems to be an increasing visibility of non-heterosexual individuals in advertising and this something which both commercials have taken into account.
6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how femininities are articulated in advertising that exists within the contemporary context of popular feminism. Additionally, to problematize and analyze the use of feminism in advertising by examining how postfeminism and intersectionality is appropriated in two advertising campaigns.

Postfeminism in advertising, it is argued, is not a new phenomenon. In 2004 Dove launched their praised campaign Real Beauty which showcased so-called ordinary women. The campaign announced that beauty comes in many shapes and ages and sizes (Gill 2007:88). Fast-forwarding one decade and postfeminism in advertising is a common trend. One can argue that postfeminism have contributed to a more diverse representation of women. Both of the campaigns from H&M and Adidas Originals challenge prevailing ideas about gender, and in particular femininity by presenting it in diverse ways. This is done through the representation of women with different appearances, body figures and styles. In the Adidas Originals campaign Arvida Byström argues that femininity is usually created from our culture, and that everybody can do feminine things and be feminine. This statement seems to summarize something that these two campaigns clearly wants to communicate. That there are many forms of femininities and many ways of interpreting it. One can argue that the two campaigns also moves away from the idealized image of femininity. They move away from the narrow portrayal of women where women are portrayed in a distinct and predictable manner.

Both campaigns presents women with different body types. For instance, they presents so-called plus-size models who are seen confidently showing off their bodies. In the Adidas Originals campaign Barbie Ferreira says that “Chubby, fat girls, can do what the hell they want”. This statement highlights how one’s body type or size should never have to define one’s self-worth. The statement also goes against the idea that women should be thin in order to be attractive and respectable in the society (Skeggs 1997:105-108). Both campaigns manage to display a more diverse range of bodies than most advertisements do by presenting women who do not represent an unattainable body ideal (Gill 2007:74). It can be argued that both campaign challenge some prevailing body norms. However, most of the women presented in both
campaigns are conventionally thin. So in that sense there is still a distinct underrepresentation of plus-size women in advertising.

As a result of feminist criticism more companies have moved from the perfect beauty of models, to use women with unusual or striking looks (Gill 2007:87-88). This is something that both H&M and Adidas Originals is displaying in their commercials by using models with so-called striking looks or unusual appearances. This includes women with pink hair, armpit hair, hairy legs, shaved head and so on.

Both campaigns are also showcasing women and men from diverse backgrounds. It can therefore be argued that both campaigns manage to display intersectional awareness to some extent. Both commercials display individuals from different ethnicities. It also manage to highlight non-heterosexual sexualities by presenting two women kissing and a homosexual man. Springer argues that there might be a form of commodification of “otherness” where intersectionality might be emptied from its radical critique (Springer 2007:250-260). This adds something important to how one can understand intersectionality in advertising.

There is an apparent contradiction between feminism and capitalism, and whether these two really goes hand in hand (Banet-Weiser 2015). Postfeminism in advertising however highlights how women in the Western world can purchase themselves better self-confidence and self-esteem. This is something that both campaigns from H&Ms and Adidas Originals offers the audience or potential consumer. Both of the campaigns communicates that all women should love their bodies and feel empowered no matter who they are or what they look like. It also highlights that women can find empowerment through their profession, passion or hobby. These two campaigns exists within a well-established postfeminist media culture. That is why both campaigns do not appear to be very revolutionary in the context of contemporary advertising.

Regarding further research it would be interesting to conduct a qualitative or quantitative study on the effectiveness of these two advertising campaigns from H&M and Adidas Originals in terms of reaching their strategic marketing goals. Is advertising with feminist messages more effective than others? Is there a better financial success? Does advertising campaigns with
feminist messages receive more positive attention in the media? Another interesting aspect of this would be to explore how feminism in advertising is interpreted by the audience by conducting qualitative interviews with young women who are the target audience. It would be interesting to conduct interviews with women that has different backgrounds and find out what they think of this type of advertising. Is there any difference between women of different race, class or sexuality?
7. Literature


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**Digital sources**


**The advertising campaigns**