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St. Vincent’s “Equal-Opportunity” Guitar

Lexi Foldenauer

Western Washington University

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St. Vincent’s “equal-opportunity” guitar

To add to her dynamic career, St. Vincent (Annie Clark) released a customized signature guitar in 2016, in collaboration with legendary California-based instrument manufacturer Ernie Ball Music Man. Clark is the first female musician to release her own customized signature electric guitar that she had a lead role in designing and engineering. She recently released 4 additional colors, complementing the color scheme of her latest album, MassEducation.


Inquiry Question:
In what ways did Ernie Ball music man use a third-wave feminist framework in its media materials surrounding the release of St. Vincent’s guitar?

Main Claim: Ernie Ball Music Man’s Signature St. Vincent guitar filled a need for an inclusive guitar in the music industry and their promotional materials reflected this.

Methods

Qualitative content analysis is coded by inferred and explicit communication.

Main Claim: Ernie Ball Music Man’s Signature St. Vincent guitar filled a need for an inclusive guitar in the music industry and their promotional materials reflected this.

Population of content: 18 promotional videos/text on Ernie Ball Music Man’s website. Only 5 of the videos could be coded for content analysis. The other 13 videos only demos and talked about the design and technical features of the guitar.

Coding Strategy: How did the videos meet the third-wave feminist criteria through both inferred and explicit communication?

Third-Wave feminist criteria in advertising:
1.) Promotes positive representations of women and femininity
2.) Embraces multiplicity and contradiction
3.) Advocates a pro-feminist stance
4.) Embraces multiple femininities

Finding:
Factors meeting third-wave feminist criteria:
1.) Positive representation

Overall Implication: St. Vincent was in charge of disseminating the desired message around her intent for inclusivity with the guitar. Her musical talent and expert technical knowledge was placed at the forefront of the campaign. Less focus on her sex appeal and performative persona & more focus on connection with the instrument and creative sound.

2.) Embraces multiplicity and contradictions

Overall Implication: The predominance of male idols mentioned and used in the inspiration for design/making of the various guitar models signifies the ways in which St. Vincent applies masculine influence with her own feminine/queer influence to create a unique instrument. This is an example of multiplicity.

3.) Advocates a pro-feminist and sex-positive stance

Overall Implication: Rejests stereotype of female guitarists using sexuality to market themselves. St. Vincent asserts her sexuality in the Guitar World Interview in a way that signals asserting the collective power for the female (or non-binary) musician.

4.) Embraces multiple femininities

Overall Implication - The discussion of femininity in the interviews presents the heteronormative cultural ideology surrounding what a “woman’s guitar” is perceived as, and the way in which the design features are implemented and discussed creates space for femininity to co-exist in a male-dominated landscape. St. Vincent “debunked” the myth,

Content analysis (inferred/explicit)

Sub-categories:
- mention/use of term ‘women in music’
- mention/use of term ‘guitar hero’ (How does that reflect the ‘othered’ category)
- mention/use of term ‘women in music’ or smaller physical frames.

Content analysis
- Non-verbal through gesture/ performance/ visual/ written/ other communication

Main theme in advertising:
Adverts are no longer to reflect the influence of feminism on mainstream culture (political, artistic, and cinematic)
- A woman was given incredibly easy, with being removed by evangelical beauty standards and sexist stereotypes
- Third-wave feminism (sex/identity) representation of women
- Embracing feminine and masculine aspects of personality

Findings:

In the interviews presents the heteronormative cultural ideology surrounding what a “woman’s guitar” is perceived as, and the way in which the design features are implemented and discussed creates space for femininity to co-exist in a male-dominated landscape. St. Vincent “debunked” the myth.

Lit Review

Semiotics & feminist theory in advertising

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