

Abstract

This dissertation examines the representations of youth identity in print advertisements found in Y Magazine and SL Magazine. The researcher uses Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse the identities that are constructed in four fashion brands. The print advertisements are also interpreted by young people from Grade 11 classes in two Johannesburg high schools. Learners completed survey questionnaires and participated in focus group discussions. My interpretation of the advertisements reveals three over sexualized identities in the Soviet, Guess and Diesel advertisements. Soviet depicts an image of a male penetrative sexual fantasy; Guess depicts feminine self-centred sexual pleasure and Diesel communicates a message of funky, sexy, heterosexual male-female desire. It is proposed that advertisers base their strategies on assumptions that sex sells to the youth. The Levi's advertisement differs from the rest by constructing a Hip Hop brand identity that appeals to a majority of the respondents. The learners' responses are varied; some identify with the brands and accept the subject positions that are offered by the advertisements and others critique the sexuality that pervades the majority of the advertisements. Learners' interpretations also reflect different reading positions, as well as unclear gendered target audiences. I conclude that media representations provide a range of powerful resources, which young people draw on in constructing their identities. I argue that print advertisements can be used productively in the language classroom as part of the body of literature that is studied in the English syllabus, especially because of their contemporary value and role in shaping post-modern subjects.