

OLIKA

NOT buying it

A Guide to a New Era of Advertising

CHRISTINA KNIGHT

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Not buying it - A Guide to a New Era of Advertising

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CONTENT

A HERSTORY OF ADVERTISING	7
LEAN OUT	27
CLAIM SPACE	39
MAKE ROOM	61
DAMNED IF YOU DO, DOOMED IF YOU DON'T	71
LOOKING FOR – AND LANDING – THE RIGHT JOB	83
BECAUSE YOU'RE WORTH IT	95
HOW TO DEAL WITH MASTER SUPPRESSION TECHNIQUES	105
SEXUAL HARASSMENT	119
YES, YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL!	135
DIVERSITY IS NOT THE F(L)AVOUR OF THE MONTH	151
THE SELL-BY DATE	159
WHO IS CREATIVE?	175
WHAT DO YOU WANT?	187
THANK YOU. KINDLY.	195

*To Eva,
My Mother and finest role model*



A HERSTORY
OF
ADVERTISING

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You cannot easily
fit women into a
STRUCTURE
that is already
CODED MALE;
you have to change
the structure.

MARY BEARD²⁰

WHEN I SAT down in 2010 to write the prologue to *Mad Women – A Herstory of Advertising*, I did it out of pure frustration. I had no big plan or picture, no idea where it would go. I just felt a need to stand up and shout out about the bewildering fact that there were still so few women, women of all backgrounds, in advertising and how that affected agency cultures as well as the execution and expression of advertising. I wanted to talk about the fact that so many women leave the industry, disappointed, frustrated and angry. I wanted to share what we need to understand and change to make the industry more relevant, interesting and profitable, for everyone. I was painfully aware of working in a conservative, non-diverse industry which had still not succeeded in mirroring the society it was trying to communicate within.

I wrote *Mad Women* as a gift to the younger generation succeeding me. I wanted to tell them that their presence, their experiences, voices and stories are needed in our industry,

to add to the competence and experiences of those already in it – primarily men, primarily and more specifically white men. I wanted young women and men alike to see that we need different perspectives to fully understand our society, our clients and our target groups – and be relevant to them all.

Judging by the reception of the book and the reactions to it, *Mad Women* evidently plugged right into a frustration that was not only mine – but shared by women and men, ad people, clients and brands, all over the world. Since the book came out in March 2013, it has opened doors and enabled me to speak and have a dialogue in as varied places as Bogotá, London, Milan, Båstad, Mexico City, San Francisco, New York and Hanoi. I have had women of all ages, backgrounds and ethnicities contact me, rush up to me after lectures, crying, hugging me and thanking me for finally breaking the silence and telling their story. Each of those moments reinforced my conviction that something needed to be done, urgently, to update and develop the advertising industry of today. And, again, I was reminded of how important it is as a human being not to think you are alone, but to understand that what you feel, fear and experience as an individual is often part of a common experience, shared by many. Instead of imagining that all the faults and shortcomings are within you, instead of wondering if you are not measuring up, alternatively that you are paranoid and going mad, it is comforting and rewarding to realize that you are anything but alone and that your feelings and thoughts are

only sound, shared and relevant. Out of this realization grows a strength to raise one's voice and question the norms and structures, rather than just question oneself.

I will certainly not take credit for the wave of energy, debates and the rise of femvertising that followed in our industry. *Mad Women* was merely one timely contribution, one more log on the fire among many that followed – networks and groups formed, companies like Facebook and Google paid attention to the challenges, primarily of mothers returning to the workplace, and introduced more generous parental leave. Cannes Lions woke up and introduced the Glass Lions Award in 2015. Conferences like The 3% Movement took off and media and the industry came to realize that this was not just a passing trend but a force to be reckoned with.

During the years that followed and in my meetings with women and men in the industry, at advertising schools, in media and with clients, I experienced a tendency to go over the problem again and again, stating it, defining it and showing examples and consequences of the lack of women in the ad industry as well as the lack of strong role models, both in the industry and in advertising as such. I myself have spent a lot of time writing and talking about this. It has been blatantly demonstrated in advertising. Campaigns like Dove's 'Real Beauty' and Always's 'Like a Girl' have reminded us of our erroneous programming of what it means to be a young girl and a woman – to lack in confidence, not to claim space, not to be beautiful or thin enough, to doubt

one's skills and abilities – to be less good at throwing or running, compared to the boys.

Femvertising became a popular trend, winning at big advertising awards, with, or so at least it was explained, the intent of empowering young women. I hope it did, I think it probably did. But I think it did something else too – it kept reminding us of how we are trained to be as girls and women and, at worst, it reinforced that sense of hopelessness against the system and the norm.

Femvertising may have played an important role for a time, drawing attention to the problem and the challenges, but as far as I'm concerned, it's time to move on. We are done with the diagnosis; defining and stating the problem, we know it more than well. Now it's time for tangible tools and strategies so that we can solve the problem and not just talk about it. And that is precisely the 'raison d'être' of this book – to offer specific aid in how to handle anything from negotiating for equal pay and tackling power play and inequality in your everyday life to recruiting and promoting diverse talent. My absolute belief is that it is possible and necessary to reach a more equal, fruitful and interesting working life for everyone in advertising – and at the same time have a life and, for those who choose it, a family. In other words, it must be possible to have it all, a great career and a great life – and still stay sane, as a Mad woman.

As I have never claimed that the advertising industry is unique in its inequality and lack of diversity (only embarrassingly slow in its willingness to change) these tools and strategies may well apply to other industries as well, in which case I urge you to try them out and use them in any context you see fit. The main purpose, as I see it, is to facilitate a more interesting discourse where all available competencies, all perspectives and everyone around the table is invited on equal terms, valued, appreciated, respected and able to contribute.

I genuinely believe it will benefit the agencies greatly, through better agency cultures, healthier brands, more sustainable client relationships, better creative work and more interesting and relevant advertising. Equality and diversity will make it possible for agencies to be no less than true world changers, shaping the future for millions of girls, boys and non-binary children in the world. It's also a known fact that equality and diversity spell profitability, as a bottom line. And for sure more awards at awards shows. For me fame and fortune are never the be-all and end-all, but they will certainly be the consequence of a more inclusive, diverse and equal advertising industry.

It's high time. Let's make it happen.

CHRISTINA KNIGHT,
LIGURIA, 2018

IN THE MIDST of writing this book something extraordinary happened. In fact, I dare say that when we look back at the autumn of 2017 we will say a Revolution took place. The #metoo revolution.

As it happens, I was in Italy at the time when Harry Weinstein was finally exposed and it wasn't until I came back to Stockholm that I fully grasped the gist of its impact, because then the dams opened with full force. #metoo speaks volumes for the many women who had the platforms and courage to break the silence and share their stories of unacceptable, unbelievable violence, sexual harassment and discrimination. I am exhilarated that it happened during my lifetime and I am so excited to see how this will now potentially change everything for women, whether they are at school or in working life; at advertising agencies or in any other industry. Nothing can possibly be the same anymore. What happens in Cannes, will most definitely not stay in Cannes.

A short re-cap in case you missed it ...

In October 2017, the renowned producer Harvey Weinstein

was publicly accused of sexually harassing a number of women who were or had been working with him. The news inspired several female celebrities to break the silence and tell their stories of being harassed by Weinstein as well as by other powerful moguls in Hollywood. Eventually, several male celebrities also spoke up, urging to put an end to sexual violence within their industry.

The hashtag idea was an initiative of the singer and actress Alyssa Milano, posted on Twitter:¹

"If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."

#metoo quickly went viral, spreading like a raging forest fire through social media and across borders, countries and cultures. The online campaign was indeed inspired by Alyssa Milano, but the movement actually started with the community organiser Tarana Burke who founded the me-too movement already in 2006, to spread awareness of sexual assault in underprivileged communities of colour. Today, Tarana's organisation coordinates outreach in local schools and provides educators with resource kits to use in their classrooms.

"Me too was a catchphrase to be used from survivor to survivor to let folks know that they were not alone and that a movement for radical healing was happening and possible," says Tarana Burke.²

Why Sweden took on #metoo so wholeheartedly

In Sweden, #metoo caught on more strongly than in most other countries, which might seem surprising as Sweden is viewed as a beacon of gender equality, ranked as one of the most equal societies in the world.³ The female actors were first to go public with their stories, soon followed by artists, lawyers, teachers, politicians, women in sports, journalists, chefs, medical doctors – and, eventually, also women in advertising. What the ad women in Sweden chose to do was to create an assignment, #sistabriefen, which means ‘the last brief’, aimed at CEOs as well as colleagues at Swedish advertising and communications agencies, advertising/media schools, clients and organisations within the industry, demanding that they publicly answer and publish their response to the brief given to them, including questions on how they planned to contribute to a more gender equal and respectable industry, free of discrimination and sexual harassments.

The brief⁴ ends with the following statement:

“This is the most important brief you will ever receive. It is not the first time your attention is brought to the fact that something is wrong. Let it be the last time. This is #thelast-brief.”

But how come #metoo snowballed in Sweden of all places, becoming, as the Swedish journalist, Maria Schottenius⁵ called it, “the biggest Swedish women’s movement since women secured the right to vote almost a hundred years ago”?

Several reasons have been given for the force and success of the #metoo movement in Sweden, ranging from the strong position feminism has in Sweden, with a government stating that it is feminist. Drude Dahlerup⁶, Professor of Political Science at Stockholm University, claims that the Swedish society is willing and able to listen to and understand the structural problems, something which soon became obvious in the reactions from the government as well as media and the major law firms in Sweden.

Other reasons mentioned for the success of the #metoo movement are that Sweden is a secular society where people value other people’s rational opinions, where quality of life and self-realization are rated high, along with gender equality, all according to the World Value Survey⁷ Sweden has the highest number of working women in the EU (close to 80 percent, compared to 56 percent in the US). We have dealt and are dealing with the rights of being independent and professional; now it is high time to claim professional grounds and respectful relations in working life.

Sweden also has a very strong tradition of organized popular movements in Sweden, a high degree of involvement in trade unions and organizations as well as high online access, presence and high engagement in social media. All of which benefited the rapid spread of and easy access to the #metoo movement.

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It is a social revolution which will alter the relation between men and women much more than any great legislation could do.

It will change what men consider they can do and allow themselves, it will change what women consider they can tolerate.

Every storm must count

I was quoted in Sweden's largest daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*⁹ as saying that the day the Swedish advertising women came together in #sistabriefen (the last brief) was the most important day in my 30+ year-long career, and I really meant it. I have experienced and witnessed so many cases of sexual harassment, discrimination and foul behaviour by men towards women in the ad industry, and I can barely grasp the amount of pain, stress, fear, anger, angst and sadness that so many women have had to endure for so many years. Finally, finally, women feel safe enough to speak up and finally, finally, the world has to listen and change.

Of course, the #metoo movement hasn't been perfect and quite naturally it has been criticized for various reasons, too. We have heard men who have experienced sexual harassment feel excluded. Others have resented the need to constantly recount painful experiences, and last, and in my opinion most importantly, black women and women of colour have not been included in the movement. The author Tierra Johnson has written an excellent article on this crucial fact of exclusion. She notes how Time magazine omitted Tarana Burke from the front cover when covering the #metoo movement.¹⁰ She writes:

"The article wasn't much deeper than the cover. I counted 21 white women and one white man out of 35 images of people featured in the spread. Six of the people featured were black women, including Burke, who was interviewed for Time's story /---/ It is intolerable and reprehensible that

the history and struggle of black women when it comes to sexual violence and harassment was nothing more than a footnote in the 'honoring' of a movement. /---/ #Metoo isn't new, and Tarana Burke's idea and creativity should not be a footnote in this article. /---/ Black women were and still are the most underprotected group in this country. We still have to read the fine print to find ourselves in these stories from powerful publications. The history of our pioneering in the fight against sexual violence in this country is one of the best kept secrets not found in your daughter's history book."

Tierra¹¹ ends her article with the important words on what will happen if we do not share and listen to everyone's experience and story: "This is not about us screaming 'what about us?' This is about observing history in this country holistically so that we may correct a serious problem. Experience teaches us that if we don't know our history we are destined to repeat it."

With a lot of work still to be done, with voices and stories still to be honoured and included, the #metoo movement was revolutionary for me, and I am extremely excited about the power and positive consequences that will follow. However, change does not come about merely by stating and voicing the problem; actual change is brought about through the combination of a greater awareness of systems of oppression as well as understanding privileges, accompanied by actual actions and commitments, engaging both women and men of varied races, ethnicities, socio-economic statuses, abilities, sexualities and ages.

The following chapters is my attempt to inspire you and equip you with actions to bring about this much needed change.

Good things to know before you start reading:

This is not a book that hates men. It is a book that celebrates the potential of women and men alike, and above all a book that celebrates diversity. I have written it because I so clearly see how the advertising industry (and its clients and all consumers!) would benefit from a less homogenous set-up, allowing for more and different perspectives and experiences around the table. It is not a question of one group replacing another, but rather of more groups, different groups coming together to better reflect society as it is today, to be able to communicate in a more respectful and relevant way. It is a book that hopes for change and which truly believes that change will only happen if women and men of all ages and backgrounds work together to bring it about.

Above all, this is a book of inclusion, calling out for everything the advertising industry and advertising as such lacks – more women of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds; people of all ages, sizes and shapes, sexual preferences, religions, ethnicities and backgrounds, differently abled people; in other words, all the people who make up this wonderful world and who are rarely employed at agencies and almost never, ever represented or portrayed in communication and advertising.

The thoughts, ideas and advice in this book are based on my personal experiences and opinions. I am a privileged, white, middle class woman, but fortunately I have also had the privilege of studying with, working with, living with and travelling with people of all kinds with different backgrounds and preferences – no wonder I came to miss that melting pot of people, once I started in the advertising industry!

I will sometimes refer to research and surveys which I have found especially interesting and relevant, but I am not claiming to know the truth. If any of my advice is helpful and applicable to your career, life or work situation, that would make me very happy. If not, pass the book on to someone who might find it useful or simply put it on the fire to keep you warm.

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... what makes this industry so powerful is that we get to tackle gender equality on two fronts. We have the unique privilege not just to treat the women of our industry with complete, utter, uncompromising equality, but to also create messages of equality that reach women

the world over. We hold the microphone more so than any other industry ... We wield millions of messages to women ... We drive repeated, consistent, scalable portrayals, and the hashtags, the campaigns that women rally around, are forcing important conversations, shifting treatment, shaping culture.

KATHLEEN GRIFFITH¹²

LEAN OUT

IN 2013, THE same year *Mad Women* was published, Sheryl Sandberg came out with her book *Lean In*.¹³ I was very happy to see that a company like Facebook with its global reach and influence appointed a strong and successful woman as its COO, and an intelligent and empathetic voice for women and equality. But, in all honesty, I immediately also felt rather uncomfortable with the title. Isn't lean in all we have done, always? Desperately leaning in, trying to fit in, banging our heads against resistance, glass ceilings, closed doors and gated communities. Sheryl¹⁴ writes that women "hold themselves back, literally choosing to watch from the sidelines". I couldn't disagree more. I know that women want to have a seat at the table as much as the next person, and that any lack of interest to do this is individual rather than based on gender.

Sheryl Sandberg encourages women to "sit at the table" and "fake it till you feel it". After three decades in the advertising industry, I'm wondering – which table do we actually want to sit at? And what games are we asked to play, to

become part of a system that we might not even aspire to, believe in or respect?

This is my main problem with the lean in encouragement – it asks us to lean in and be part of an existing norm, as if it was the only and most desirable one to be part of. I choose to differ. I'd rather say 'lean out', because lean in is all we have done, and look where it has got us. Compromising, trying to fit in, trying to adapt and change. Trying to be accepted and liked, judged by a norm that does not even include or define us. Look where it got us – almost nowhere in the sense of changing the world for the better, as far as I'm concerned.

I'd rather say 'lean out' because that is the only way to question an existing system and get a perspective on the current structures, at more of a distance. By questioning the norm and creatively proposing an alternative which is more inclusive, more diverse and heterogeneous, there would be far more interesting tables to sit at and lean in at. Besides, it would enable women who are not in Sheryl's position to find ways to lean in – i.e. women of different backgrounds, ethnicities and perhaps educational status.

In her book, Sheryl Sandberg mentions the Heidi/Howard study,¹⁵ an experiment performed as a Harvard Business School case study, in which two characters, Heidi and Howard, are both described to a group of students as successful, well-connected entrepreneurs and potential

colleagues. The study basically shows that when a man is successful, he is liked by both women and men, whereas when a woman is successful, both women and men like her less. Furthermore, the study then confirms the current system – that we evaluate people on the basis of stereotypes – gender, ethnicity, nationality and so on. This system advocates men as the dominant, strong and driven and women as caregivers, sensitive and communal.

And this is the system Sheryl Sandberg asks us to lean into and embrace?

Thanks, but no thanks.

It's time to move on and offer something more interesting, more inclusive, something more respectful of differences, allowing people, regardless of their gender identity, to be rid of stereotypical expectations.

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*I'm wondering -
which table do
we actually want
to sit at?*

CHRISTINA KNIGHT

As I have observed over the years, this is also one of the reasons why many women have left the ad industry to set up their own businesses, as freelance resources or as part of other constellations. They are quite simply not happy or comfortable with or impressed by the current structures. They want something else, something different, something better. Yet, these women are often scoffed at; they are called losers; described as not having enough stamina to deliver and survive in the current ad industry. I would make the point that these women often leave because they actively and consciously turn their backs on a system that they do not believe in and do not want to be part of. I think it is one of the bravest things you can do in your career and in our industry – to be truthful to your values and not try and fit in where you don't, in fact, even want to be. Not fake it till you make it. Rather, break it so you can make it.

I always make a point of saying that the most valuable colleague you can talk to at an agency is the woman who has just decided to leave. Create an environment where she feels that it is safe to speak her mind honestly and make sure to listen to her input, to her reasons for leaving. You might not agree with her, but it could be the most valuable input you get if you want to create a more inclusive agency culture. This input needs to stay with you – the slightest indication that the information will spread at the agency or in the industry, no woman will feel comfortable to share this valuable information with you.

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*Not fake it till
you make it.
Rather, break it
so you can
make it.*

CHRISTINA KNIGHT

When I mentor young creatives in the industry and meet up for portfolio viewings, I always tell them – “Remember that it’s not only a question of being chosen, but also of choosing. What agency, what group of people, what culture do you actually want to be part of and contribute to?” This can sound like an unrealistic luxury for a young ad student desperately trying to get a job in the industry and perhaps it is. But even if you end up getting a job at an agency where you eventually feel you don’t belong, it’s important to keep in mind – you choose what you want to be part of and you choose what you leave behind. Ending up at the ‘wrong’ kind of agency can in fact help remind you of and define what you believe in and want to be part of.

Don’t lean in if you feel something is fundamentally wrong and does not represent or include you. Move on. GTFO.

How to lean out - in short

- Don’t only question yourself - question the norms and structures.
- Connect with others; discuss your thoughts and observations. You will discover that you are not alone and that your feelings and reactions are relevant and most often shared by others.
- Use the insight above to strengthen your confidence and apply it to drive change for yourself as well as for

others. State your opinion clearly, join networks to discuss and pave a new way together with others who are like-minded.

- Contribute your valuable perspective, thoughts and insights and share them with the leadership of your agency - proposing change and development. Hopefully, they are open-minded and you might well be able to contribute to positive change for everyone. If not, at least you know that you tried. If you are an agency leader, make sure to create an open and inviting climate that encourages transparency and trust.
- If you find that you are in the wrong place, a place that does not include, define, respect or give you fair opportunities, move on. Let the leaders at the agency you are leaving know why you are choosing to move on in a respectful and constructive way. Remember that what goes around, comes around. Your present colleagues may very well become your future colleagues or future clients. The industry is too small and life is too short to misbehave or to create enemies.
- Join an agency culture and a context which is true to your values and beliefs; only then will you be able to utilise your full potential and feel happy and proud of what you do.

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I believe we are done with the diagnosis; defining and stating the problem of the advertising industry, we know it more than well - and we are not buying it. It's time for tangible tools and strategies so that we can solve the problem and not just talk about it. And that is precisely the raison d'être of this book - to offer specific aid on anything from negotiating for equal pay and tackling power play and inequality in your everyday life to recruiting and promoting diverse talent. My absolute belief is that it is possible and necessary to create a more equal, diverse and relevant advertising industry, beneficial to all. It's high time. Let's make it happen.

CHRISTINA KNIGHT

Not Buying It is an independent runner-up to Christina Knight's previous book, Mad Women - A Herstory of Advertising, which inspired a well-needed and worldwide discussion on gender equality and diversity in the advertising industry.

