

The Sexual Objectification of Women in Advertising: A Contemporary Cultural Perspective

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This study measures attitudes of young women to sexually objectified advertising. A survey combining elements of two previous studies (Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom, 1991; Mittal and Lassar, 2000) was administered to 94 female undergraduates. Results show significant ($p < 0.001$) changes in attitudes of young, educated women. Respondents agreed females were portrayed as sex objects in advertisements, but were less offended by these portrayals than female respondents in 1991. Results also show females' attitudes toward the advertisement have little effect on purchase intention, a highly significant change from attitudes of women in 1991.

SINCE THE REBIRTH of the women's movement in the 1960s, critics consistently have raged against the way advertising treats women. Scantly clad, suggestively portrayed women sell every different type of product on television, in magazines, and now on personal computer screens, in increasing numbers, since the 1980s. In the past, young, educated women were the strongest critics of advertisements. Many of the changes in the advertising industry occurred because these women raised their voices in protest. This study examines how today's generation of young, educated females feels about the portrayal of women in advertisements and the consequences of those attitudes.

For women born in the early 1980s, sex in the media has been a constant companion. Sex is everywhere, on prime time television programs, movies, and music videos. It is rare to view an hour of television and not see a suggestively dressed or undressed female, whether in a program or a commercial. Sexual imagery appears in magazine articles and advertisements. A recent issue of *Cosmopolitan* might contain hundreds of half-naked women, stories of sexual mishaps, and even instructions for the ancient art of Kama Sutra.

The Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonprofit national health organization, found that sexual con-

tent had increased over a two-year period (*Media Report to Women*, 2001). It examined shows on ABC, CBS, Fox, HBO, Lifetime, NBC, TNT, PBS, USA, and KTLA, the Los Angeles affiliate of the WB (Keveney, 2001). The study's definition of sexual activity was very broad, ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse (Waxman, 2001). Approximately two-thirds, or 68 percent, of television programs examined between October 1999 and March 2000 contained sexual content, compared to 56 percent in the 1997-1998 season (Keveney, 2001). Specifically, 89 percent of movies, 84 percent of sitcoms, and 80 percent of soap operas had sexual content. Sexual content in situation comedies leaped to 84 percent from 56 percent two years prior (*Media Report to Women*, 2001). During prime time, when the highest numbers of people watch television, three-quarters of the programs had sexual content (Keveney, 2001). Other research reported that 60 percent of music videos deal with sexual feelings or impulses (Gruber and Grube, 2000).

Over the past several decades, numerous studies have examined the portrayal of women in advertising. Interest in the subject was ignited by the women's movement in the 1960s. Studies of advertisements in a variety of men's, women's, and general interest magazines have categorized

women in various roles: *housewife, decorative element, sex object, and dependent on men* (Ferguson, Kreshel, and Tinkham, 1990); *housewife, concerned with physical attractiveness, sex object, career oriented, and neutral* (Lysonski, 1983); *alluring objects of sexual gratification* (Mayne, 2000); and *erotic and suggestive stimuli* (Henthorne and LaTour, 1995). Physical contact has been described as *simple or intimate*, and dress came under four categories: *demure, seductive, partially clad, or nude* (Soley and Kurzbard, 1986). Sex has become more explicit; more models have appeared in the nude and more images of couples have suggested intercourse. From the mid 1960s through the early and mid 1990s, there were significantly more overt portrayals of women as sex objects (Henthorne and LaTour, 1995; Mayne, 2000; Reichert et al., 1999; Soley and Kurzbard, 1986).

Ferguson, Kreshel, and Tinkham (1990) examined advertisements in *Ms.* magazine spanning from 1973 to 1987, measuring *content* (what the relationship of the woman was to the product, if her appearance was alluring/decorative, and whether she was pictured in a traditional or non-traditional way) and measuring *sexism* (if the woman was portrayed as a sex object and the focus was on her body). This study found that, during this period, certain categories decreased, such as the use of women as decorative elements from the content scale and the depiction of them in traditional roles, also referred to as "keep her in her place" advertisements. In contrast, there was an increase in advertisements that sexually objectified women. The number of advertisements with alluring images of women, measured on the content scale, also increased. This category saw an even greater increase than the number of advertisements that contained sexual objectification (Ferguson, Kreshel, and Tinkham, 1990).

EFFECTS ON ATTITUDES

With this steady increase in advertisements that portray women as sex objects, we must ask, what has been its effect on attitudes? During this same period, attitudinal surveys studied reactions that people have toward advertisements, especially those dealing with women. Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) measured the attitudes that women had toward female role portrayals in advertising. They based their survey on one done in 1977 by Lundstrom and Scigliampaglia that measured women's general perceptions of their portrayals in advertisements. There it was reported that younger, wealthier, more educated women were those that were the most critical. Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) chose to target this particular group for their study rather than using a completely random sample. Their sample consisted of members of the League of Women Voters and the YWCA, two groups believed to have characteristics similar to those of their desired sample. All participants were adult women residing in the Mid-Atlantic region (Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom, 1991).

Using this sample, Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) replicated the 1977 study. It contained 17 different statements that reflected attitudes on sex role portrayals, companies using traditional images in their advertisements, and purchase intention. In addition to this instrument, the researchers also used Arnott's Female Autonomy Inventory scale, which measured the participants' views of women's roles in society to determine if they were traditional or modern (Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom, 1991).

The results of the 1991 study showed that women were still critical of the way in which they were portrayed in advertising. Women still thought that advertisements treated them mainly as sex objects, showed them as fundamentally depen-

dent on men and found the portrayal of women in advertising to be offensive. According to this sample of women, an offensive advertising campaign would have a negative effect on company image and purchase intention (Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom, 1991).

Attitudes of today's women toward advertising can be directly correlated with the changes that have occurred in feminism. This new feminism, often referred to as the third wave, most definitely affects the thoughts and actions of today's college females.

Third wave feminists now stress a new feminism; one that is not stiff and old-fashioned, but bold, fun, and in line with popular culture. This feminism embraces sexuality. It views sex as power. It separates women from men and sees women as the dominant sex (Paglia, 1992). Paglia claims one of the reasons men continue to represent women as sex objects is because they are desperately trying to regain power from the *femme fatale* who has controlled them throughout history (Booth, 1999). She criticizes second wave feminists and those in academic circles for constantly playing the victim (Bellafante, 1998). This new feminism embodies a kind of "girlish offensive" (Labi, 1998, p. 61), a "sassy, don't-mess-with-me adolescent spirit" (Bellafante, 1998, p. 58), that tells females they can be strong and powerful, they can be anything they want to be, and they can look hot doing it.

Even feminists from academic circles, such as Naomi Wolf, have embraced the girl power trend, and favor women using their bodies as works of art. She has adopted third wave feminism, claiming that it is okay for woman to use their glamour, as long as they are doing it of their own free will (Hill, 1993). There is no doubt that feminism has changed, and the new face, or perhaps we should say breast, leg, or midriff, has arrived.

Sexually objectified portrayals of women in advertisements can also affect views of sex and sexual behavior. Sex becomes commercial, recreational, and exploitative (Kuczynski, 2002). Girls exposed to these images become more sexually aggressive, and sexual experimentation is beginning earlier (English, 2003). The pregnancy rate for adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 17 is higher in the United States than in any other industrialized nation, and around 25 percent of new cases of sexually transmitted diseases occur between ages 13 and 19 (Gruber and Grube, 2000).

Based on the preponderance of sexual content in the media, its effect on attitudes of young women, and the influence of third wave feminism, the authors explored the impact of advertising on attitudes. Some of the survey questions found in Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) were used to examine if:

H1: Young, educated women will agree that the specific advertisement viewed in this study uses sex, but they will find it culturally acceptable (i.e., not perceive it as offensive or negative).

Mittal and Lassar (2000) studied the effect of sexual content in advertisements on perceptions of both male and female undergraduate and graduate business students. Respondents judged the extent to which a certain advertisement was just or offensive, and then asked them for their attitudes toward the brand and their intentions to purchase the featured product. One of the advertisements was considered to be mildly sexual while the other had highly sexual content. In addition to measurements of attitudes toward a specific advertisement, the researchers collected data on respondents' attitudes toward the use of sex in advertising and

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the media in general. This was labeled "sexual liberalism" (Mittal and Lassar, 2000).

Mittal and Lassar (2000) found that sexual liberalism did have an effect on their respondents' perception of the advertisements they were shown. The majority of participants judged the advertisement of higher sexual content to be more ethically unjust than the advertisement with mild sexual content, but they did not always like the mildly sexual advertisement better. It depended on their like or dislike of the use of sex in advertising and the media in general. With this in mind, this study used parts of Mittal and Lassar (2000) in order to examine if:

H2: Young, educated women of today will be less offended by the portrayal of women in advertising than women in Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991).

Because of the influence of third wave feminism, contemporary women may be unfazed by the sexual objectification found in today's advertising. They may choose to exercise their "girl power" and make their decisions independently of how women in advertisements may be portrayed. Therefore,

H3: Contemporary females will be more likely to maintain an existing positive view of a brand and

will be inclined to purchase and use it, regardless of any sexual portrayal of women in that brand's advertising.

METHODOLOGY

Following Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991), this study sampled "women who had higher incomes, were younger, better educated, less tradition-oriented, and from higher status households" (p. 18). This sample used female students from a co-educational private college in the Mid-Atlantic region.

The survey for this study recreates some of the research done by Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) and Mittal and Lassar (2000). Statements taken from Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) measured women's attitudes toward advertising in general. This study compared attitudes of contemporary college women with the attitudes of women in the 1991 survey. All statements were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, and probed attitudes toward role portrayals of women in advertisements, as well as the effect those attitudes had on company image and purchase intention. A *t*-test was used to compare the means from this study to those from Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991).

While it is important to find the attitudes that women have toward advertising in general, it was decided that it was beneficial also to test participants'

attitudes toward one specific advertisement. Respondents were shown a sexually explicit advertisement that used a woman primarily as a sex object, based on categories from earlier research. Statements and questions based on the specific advertisement were taken from Mittal and Lassar (2000).

The first section taken from this study measured the "ethical justness" of the advertisement (Mittal and Lassar, 2000, p. 115). Here, scales were used to measure attitude toward the specific advertisement, attitude toward the brand that paid for the advertisement, purchase intention, attitudes toward the use of sex in the media and in advertising in general, and sexual liberalism. This study also included a manipulation check used in Mittal and Lassar (2000) that asked participants to rate how much sex was used in the advertisement and if sex was used tastefully or not.

The specific advertisement chosen was for a product specifically targeted to women. Ferguson, Kreshel, and Tinkham (1990) developed a "Scale of Sexism" and used five different levels to determine how sexist an advertisement was. An advertisement on Level One, the most sexist, focused on a woman's body and portrayed her as a sex object (Ferguson, Kreshel, and Tinkham, 1990). According to the "Scale of Sexism," advertisements that contained a nude model were considered to be the most sexually explicit (Ferguson, Kreshel, and Tinkham, 1990; Reichert et al., 1999). The advertisement used in this survey was highly sexually explicit and showed a woman used mainly as a sex object. An advertisement for a branded shave gel, made specifically for women, featured a completely nude model on a bed of green tea leaves. Her arms were squeezing her bare breasts together and grabbing her legs, which were curled in a fetal position. Her head was thrown

back, her eyes closed, and she was smiling. The leaves covered any parts a viewer might find too revealing. The woman was not using the product as intended and was therefore deemed decorative. The focus was obviously on her body, making her a sex object and allowing us to categorize the advertisement at the highest level (Level One) on the "Scale of Sexism."

Using a small convenience sample of female college students, the advertisement and survey instrument were pilot-tested to confirm that it contained high levels of sexual explicitness. Based on responses, categories were reworded slightly for clarity. The participants were asked to determine if the advertisement was "not offensive at all" or "very offensive." The final survey instrument was administered in several undergraduate classes in a variety of departments. After viewing the

advertisement, a total of 101 surveys were completed; seven of them had to be discarded for various reasons, such as age outside the sample norm and incomplete surveys. This left a sample of $N = 94$, sufficient to gather predictive results.

RESULTS

Regarding the specific advertisement, participants found the advertisement contained a great deal of sex ($M = 5.681$). This was used as a manipulation check and confirmed that respondents agreed that the advertisement used sex. Respondents had a neutral response to the question of whether sex was used tastefully in the advertisement ($M = 3.894$) (see Table 1).

The majority of the statements produced neutral answers. Items that leaned neutral toward slightly positive were: *acceptable to me and my family* ($M = 3.798$),

TABLE 1
Attitudes toward the Specific Advertisement

Statement	Mean
Ethical/Unethical	4.074
Acceptable to me and my family/Unacceptable to me and my family	3.798
Morally right/Morally wrong	4.096
Culturally acceptable/Culturally unacceptable	2.713
Traditionally acceptable/Traditionally unacceptable	4.564
Interesting/Boring	3.394
Good/Bad	3.957
Not offensive at all/Very offensive	3.734
Pleasing/Irritating	4.468
Very Likable/Very Unlikable	4.184
<i>To what extent did this advertisement have sex in it?</i>	
Not at all/A lot	5.681
<i>In this advertisement, sex was used</i>	
Tastefully/In poor taste	3.894

Note: 1st item = 1; 2nd item = 7, i.e., ethical = 1 and unethical = 7.

interesting ($M = 3.394$), good ($M = 3.957$), and not offensive at all ($M = 3.734$). The rest of the items skewed neutral to slightly negative. These items were: *unethical* ($M = 4.074$), *morally wrong* ($M = 4.096$), *traditionally unacceptable* ($M = 4.564$), *irritating* ($M = 4.468$), and *very unlikable* ($M = 4.184$).

A most interesting category was *culturally acceptable* ($M = 2.713$). It had the lowest mean, showing that the majority of the respondents, whether or not they found the advertisement to be *unethical* or *irritating*, did find the advertisement to be *culturally acceptable*. Also notable was the fact that while they did not necessarily like the advertisement and found it *irritating*, they were neutral on the scale from *not offensive* to *very offensive*. Based on these data, we were able to accept Hypothesis H1: young, educated women agreed that the specific advertisement viewed in this study uses sex, but they viewed it as culturally acceptable (i.e., did not perceive it as offensive or negative) (see Table 2).

Moving on to the attitudinal section, young, educated women were neutral to slightly agreed that there was too much sex on television programs ($M = 3.787$) and that there was too much degradation of women and men as sex objects in the media ($M = 4.277$). They disagreed that they liked or accepted the use of sex in advertising ($M = 2.564$).

This study showed that young women today are more forgiving of companies that portray females offensively in their advertisements than young women were a decade ago.

The means of the statements taken from this study were compared with those of Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) through use of a *t*-test. Both samples were not accepting of the sexual objectification of women. There were, however, significant differences in the means of several of attitudinal questions within the two studies, proving that today's young, educated women's attitudes toward advertising are significantly more accepting of sexual objectification over the past decade (see Table 3).

This study showed that college females today do not think that the portrayal of females in advertising is realistic. They disagreed that advertisements show women as they really are ($M = 2.723$, $SD = 1.562$) and that advertisements portray women in most of their daily activities ($M = 2.840$, $SD = 1.346$). Means for these two items also skewed negatively in Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991), but since that time young women have

found it less likely that advertisements will portray them in most of their daily activities ($t = -3.827$, $p < 0.001$).

College females agreed that advertisements treat them mainly as sex objects ($M = 5.149$, $SD = 1.565$), but their feelings were more neutral about the statement, "I find the portrayal of women in advertising to be offensive" ($M = 4.032$, $SD = 1.506$). Extremely relevant to this study are the changes that have occurred in these items since Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991). Young women today agreed, more than those in 1991, that advertisements treat women as sex objects ($t = 2.417$, $p = < 0.01$), which confirms the reported increase of these images found in the literature. Despite an increase in sexual objectification in advertising, young women have become less offended by their portrayal ($t = -3.465$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, we were able to accept Hypothesis H2: young, educated women of today were less offended by the portrayal of women in advertising than women in Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991).

This study showed that young women today are more forgiving of companies that portray females offensively in their advertisements than young women were a decade ago. The items that asked if these companies were more likely to discriminate against women ($M = 4.053$, $SD = 1.379$) and if their advertisements reflected their general attitude toward women's place in society ($M = 3.862$, $SD = 1.478$) both got generally neutral answers

TABLE 2
Attitudes toward Sex in the Media

Statement	Mean
In my opinion, there is too much sex on television programs.	3.787
There is too much degradation of women and men as sex objects in the media today.	4.277
In general, do you like the use of sex in advertising?	2.564

Note: Strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 7.

TABLE 3
Women's Attitudes toward Advertising

Statement			Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991)		t	Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Women as they really are	2.723	1.562	2.62	1.360	0.707	NS
Women treated as sex objects	5.149	1.565	4.79	1.605	2.417	**
Women shown in their daily activities	2.840	1.346	3.37	1.438	-3.827	***
Find portrayal of women offensive	4.032	1.506	4.54	1.618	-3.465	***
Companies more likely to discriminate	4.053	1.379	4.94	1.435	-6.349	***
Advertisements reflect company's view of women	3.862	1.478	4.70	1.462	-5.820	***
Might still buy new product	5.043	1.586	3.50	1.598	10.340	***
Would discontinue using product	2.936	1.709	4.91	1.638	-12.819	***
Would continue buying other products	5.426	1.372	3.96	1.820	10.179	***

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note: Strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 7. Degrees of freedom were 295 for Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) and 93 for this study.

from respondents. Their answers differed significantly from those of women in Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) who were much more likely to agree that companies with offensive advertisements would discriminate against women ($t = -6.349, p < 0.001$) and that those advertisements reflected the companies' general attitude toward women ($t = -5.820, p < 0.001$).

There were similar changes in the items dealing with purchase intent. The respondents in this study were unlikely to let an offensive advertisement affect their buying habits, which was significantly different from the attitude of those in Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991). Today's college females would still buy a new product with an offensive advertisement if it offered them benefits they found attractive ($M = 5.043, SD = 1.586$), would continue to buy other products from a company if there was an offensive advertisement for other products made by that same company ($M = 5.426, SD = 1.372$), and would not stop using a product be-

cause an offensive advertisement was created for it ($M = 2.936, SD = 1.709$). These means differed dramatically from Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) and were the most significant. Women in 1991 would not buy a new product with an offensive advertisement ($t = 10.340, p < 0.001$) or other products from the same company ($t = 10.179, p < 0.001$). If they saw an offensive advertisement for a product they already used, they would stop using it ($t = -12.819, p < 0.001$). These results led us to accept Hypothesis H3: contemporary females will be more likely to maintain an existing positive view of a brand and will be inclined to purchase and use it, regardless of any sexual portrayal of women in that brand's advertising.

DISCUSSION

Respondents agreed the displayed advertisement was highly sexualized, yet they did not think it was offensive, extremely irritating, or unethical. Overall, they thought the advertisement was interest-

ing and a good one, even though this advertisement contained high levels of sexual objectification of women. As predicted, the means showed college females' indifference toward women's portrayal in advertising.

An explanation for this may be that the participants felt the advertisement was done tastefully. The results might have been more negative if they thought that sex had not been used in a tasteful manner. They thought an advertisement that used its model as a sex object was tasteful, proving that images must be graphic for college women to be offended. They see so many of these images every day that it did not negatively affect them. Also, if they see sexuality as power, it may not occur to them that the model was being objectified. Chances are if the respondents were to see this advertisement while casually flipping through a magazine, they may not have even looked twice at it. The fact that the respondents found the advertisement to be culturally acceptable proves

If college women realize that advertisements do not reflect reality, they may not be as offended by them. They may represent more sophisticated consumers and may understand that advertisements are simply creative art attempting to make a sale, not depictions of real life.

this point even further. It does not matter whether the advertisement is ethical or morally right because they accept sex as part of their culture, consistent with the attitude of today's third wave feminists.

As far as purchase intention, there were highly significant changes between this study and Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991). Even if today's young women are offended or do not like advertisements for a product, they will still purchase them and will continue using the ones they already have. Their attitude toward the brand (A_b) is much more important than their attitude toward the advertisement (A_{ad}). This drastic change in purchase intention reflects the indifference created by the society in which they live. Closely related are the respondents' attitudes toward companies using advertisements that objectify women. Because these offensive advertisements are an accepted part of their culture, they do not think negatively about the companies that use them.

This study found a significant negative change in advertising's ability to accurately depict women in their daily activities. If college women realize that advertisements do not reflect reality, they may not be as offended by them. They may represent more sophisticated consumers and may understand that advertisements are simply creative art attempting to make a sale, not depictions of real life. This may also help explain the results of this study

that show that an offensive advertisement does little to affect college females' purchase intentions and attitudes toward the company.

Most important to this study are the changes that occurred between 1991 and today on the items "Advertisements treat women mainly as sex objects" and "I find the portrayal of women in advertising to be offensive." College females today thought that women were treated as sex objects more so than women in Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) reflecting the evidence of the increase in sexual objectification in advertisements found in previous literature. Interestingly, they reported being less offended by the portrayal of women in advertising than the sample in Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991). This study indicates that as the portrayal of women as sex objects in advertisements became more common, young, educated women were less offended by these portrayals. This is a product of the culture in which these women were raised.

CONCLUSION

Today's college females were raised in a very sexualized world. Sexual content dominates the media, and new feminists see female sexuality as power. It would only naturally follow that advertisements portray women as sex objects. These portrayals apparently do not offend young, educated women because of this culture.

They were and are constantly surrounded by sexual images of females, and many have adopted views of third wave feminists, which interpret these formerly negative and sometimes harmful images as acceptable ones. It is important to note that while respondents in Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) took the survey without any point of reference, this sample took the survey immediately after viewing an advertisement that portrayed its model as a sex object. One might assume that this stimulus would orient this sample of respondents toward the negative end of the scale. Young women in this study, however, indicated that advertising was less offensive than the 1991 sample. We speculate that if these female undergraduates were given the second survey without an objectified reference, the gap between means might be even greater. Young, educated women today appear far less offended by the portrayal of women as sex objects in advertisements than women in past generations, and it seems largely due to our culture.

One might wonder how an older female sample might respond to this same image. The Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) study targeted younger, more affluent and educated women. Projecting forward, these women may now range in their late 30s and early 40s. Assuming that these women carried forward consistent cultural values, they may still find this objectified image offensive and be disinclined to purchase the advertised brand. One could speculate, however, that the preponderance of years of objectified imagery might have dulled their criticism of this tactic. Responses may depend on whether this group had maintained a more traditional second wave feminist approach or because of a cultural evolution, adopted a third wave feminist viewpoint. It was not within the scope of this study to measure trends in attitudes of older

As the portrayal of women as sex objects in advertisements became more common, young, educated women were less offended by these portrayals.

generations of women. But it is certainly interesting to ponder the possible cultural effects of sustained sexual objectification of older women on society. Cultivation and effects researchers (Brand and Greenberg, 1994; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorelli, 1986; Potter, 1991) or social learning theorists (Bandura, 1977; Ryan and David, 2003) might well argue that the context of consistent exposure to sexualized imagery might gradually teach or condition society to find it less offensive and more acceptable, regardless of the demographic. This raises a larger ethical issue about advertising's ability to shift cultural and moral values. A future study with an older female demographic might help explain the longer-term effects of sexual objectification on both attitudes toward advertising imagery and broader cultural attitudes toward women in society. It may begin to answer the question about how much overt sexual objectification is too much.

This also begs us to question if advertisers and media should assume some moral responsibility as they create and disseminate images and messages to the consuming public. While this study has shown that women will purchase and use products despite offensive advertisements, advertisers should proceed with caution. Some may argue that this particular image did not show any more of this woman's body than a contemporary bathing suit. She was not shown using the product, however, and served only as a decorative attentional cue. We know, from countless studies, that sex does capture

attention. As sexual objectification becomes culturally acceptable, arguably routine, does and should the advertising industry necessarily push that boundary and reveal more in order to grab our divided attention? What would be accomplished, beyond brand recognition? If there are no negative brand implications, then these methods may result in a purchase. Constant portrayal of women as sex objects in advertisements, however, seems to have subconscious effects on the American population. It remains to be argued and studied whether society should find it surprising, alarming, or empowering that young, educated women, formerly the group most critical of sexualized advertising, now casually accept the sexual objectification of their gender. **JAR**

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