Advertisements' Perpetuation of Rape Culture: A look at how images containing objectification and victimization impact consumers

The Honors Program

Senior Capstone Project

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Table of Contents

Abstract

The research I have conducted explores connections between images shown in advertisements and the perpetuation of rape culture and gendered stereotypes in society. It was guided by the Cultivation Theory which looks at how media, such as advertisements, can shape our reality. After an extensive literature review, data was gathered via an experimental design utilizing surveys. Within these surveys, respondents were randomly shown an advertisement I created containing the variables to be tested (i.e. images with objectification and victimization). After viewing the ad, they answered questions regarding their attitude toward the brand/product depicted, purchase intentions, a rape myth acceptance scale (Burt, 1980), and a sex role stereotyping scale (Burt, 1980). Both of these scales are widely accepted and were previously tested. Data was then analyzed to uncover any statistically significant interactions between the variables in order to gain a better understanding of how the images viewed in advertisements impact consumers' beliefs and perceptions. Analysis revealed that while there is a model effect, meaning advertisers should use models in their ads, there isn't any statistically significant positive difference for using images containing objectification or victimization. Using images with these variables can actually have a negative impact on the viewer's attitude toward the ad and the brand. Additionally, analysis showed that viewing images with these variables increased the viewer's acceptance of rape myths.

Introduction

My research looks into the connection between images shown in advertisements and the perpetuation of rape culture in our society. Rape culture has many definitions and people have varying ideas of what it means, so for the purpose of my study, I identify rape culture as the "trivialization and normalization of sexual aggression and violence toward women"[1], as this appears to be the widely accepted definition and meaning of the term within this field of research.

This piece of research is incredibly important, especially in the current political climate, as it has been theorized that advertisements help create and maintain our values, beliefs, and perceptions about the world around us, and their power in these matters appears to be increasing (MacKay & Covell, 1997). Media we consume, including advertisements, quite literally help construct our reality (Rubie-Davies, Liu, & Lee, 2013). Therefore, it is important to analyze and understand what exactly the story the advertisements we are consuming is and how it is impacting our beliefs, which turn into actions. Research looking into the normalization and trivialization of sexual violence against women is exceedingly important considering as of 2012 1 in 5 women have reported being raped and about 19% of women were sexually assaulted during their time in college (CDC). These numbers seemed to increase in the past five

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[1] I chose this definition for my research as it was the best explanation of the term that was succinct and stayed true to the root cause of the issue I am trying to study. It also was similar to any of the other definitions that I came across in my research, but was simply more digestible and less convoluted, making it easier for a reader to comprehend

years, with reports as high as 25% of women being sexually assaulted during their time in

college (National Institute of Justice, 2016). Rape culture in our society plays a major role in

these extremely high statistics, and past research suggests that advertisements play a role in

perpetuating this culture. Therefore, if we are to ever change our society to minimize or

completely rid these all too common occurrences of sexual violence and aggression towards

women, then we must better understand the role advertisements have in it.

While this is a much discussed topic, this field of research calls for more

experimentation in the area of the connection between rape culture and ads. It doesn't appear

that any prior research has been done using the combination of variables I intend on

manipulating and analyzing, but there is research supporting the importance of each of the

variables. An experimental research methodology will determine if advertisements depicting

the objectification and victimization of the model play a role in perpetuating rape culture and if

this perpetuation grows or diminishes when presented ads without these variables or images

with no central character (i.e. no people present). This will determine if the images perpetuate

rape culture via the measurement of rape myth acceptance, along with the connections

between these dependent variables using scales that have already been created, tested, and

are widely accepted.

Literature Review

Introduction

Discussions and debates regarding rape culture, and the actual assaults that come with it, are increasingly common in both our political and social climates. Within the past year, politics in the US have made sexual aggression towards women a hot topic as varying messages and policies have been brought to the table, from former Vice President Joe Biden's "It's On Us" campaign which asks people to pledge to not be a bystander to or take part in sexual assault (It's On Us, 2016) all the way to Donald Trump's "locker room talk" response to the leaked video of him suggesting he has and would grab women inappropriately without their consent (Blau, 2016). The heightened media in this time has forced various debates around rape culture to come to the forefront of most people's minds, making it heavily thought about and discussed.

Recent statistics have shown a quarter of women suffer one of the consequences of rape culture, sexual assault, during their time in college (National Institute of Justice, 2016). The heightened discussion around this topic, along with the clear prevalence of the assaults it causes, makes it important, now more than ever, to understand the facets which perpetuate and add to this rape culture, normalizing and trivializing violence against women. Many researchers and scholars believe that advertisements play an increasingly important role in establishing beliefs, values, and perceptions that can perpetuate rape culture, such as the

acceptance of rape myths or gender stereotypes (MacKay & Covell, 1997). Therefore, it is pertinent that we explore the connections between the images in advertisements and the beliefs and values which continue rape culture.

To examine this topic, I used a combination of Social Learning theory and Cultivation theory, as they appear to be the two which make the most sense and the two most commonly used and discussed by researchers in this field. Cultivation theory started as a theory that looked into how television effected viewers' beliefs and attitudes (Gerbner, 1958), but has since been expanded to look at other forms of media other than just television, such as advertisements (Rubie-Davies, et al, 2013). Social Learning theory postulates that people learn behaviors over a period of time in which the behaviors are repeatedly modeled to them in some way, including by the media (Capella, Hill, Rapp, & Kees, 2010). These combined allow a look at advertisements from the viewpoint that they have the ability to effect the beliefs and attitudes of the consumers and that people learn these beliefs and attitudes from viewing ads which model these behaviors over a period of time.

Background/History

The history of this topic is interdisciplinary as rape, sexual assault, rape culture and marketing initiatives have been highly discussed and researched, especially since the 1970s and 1980s, pre and post the "Sexual Revolution" (Soley & Kurzhard, 1986).

Martha Burt was one of the first studies to look into rape myth acceptance and its connection to demographics, in 1980. Other studies, such as Walker, Rowe, and Quincey's in 1993 which explored authoritarianism and sexual aggression, continued to look into high level characteristics which could lead to violence against women. While some studies began looking at implications of media on varying aspects of rape culture, it wasn't until the 1990s that the biggest strides were made in examining the topic through advertising specifically. A pivotal piece of research was conducted by Mackay and Covell in 1997. They conducted an experiment to see how the objectification of women in advertisements impacted people's beliefs and perceptions of things such as rape myths and interpersonal violence, which help create rape culture. Even as recent as 2008, researchers have explained that the effects of sexual violence in advertising hadn't been fully researched or explained to a satisfactory extent (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008). Therefore, while the findings suggest that there is a connection, no research that I have found has experimented with the same combination of variables or in the same manner as this study, especially with the new focus on victimization as a variable.

Review

Overview of Main Themes

Three major themes that stand out in the research: media we consume play a role in creating our realities and impacting our beliefs, sexual aggression is a major aspect of rape culture, and characteristics which add to rape culture are thoroughly present within advertisements currently.

Synthesis and Analysis of Ideas

In 1986 Soley and Kurzhard conducted a content analysis of ads from 1964 and 1984 to see if there were increases or differences in ads which had sexual images between the two decades. Their work revealed that even though the percent of ads with sexual images remained constant, general-interest magazines showed an increase in sexual ads and female models were more likely to be presented as a sex object with scantily clad clothing, if any clothing at all. Supporting part of this notion, in 2007 Reichert, LaTour, and Jooyoung found that the proportion of sexualized women in magazine advertising in 1964 was one-third compared to one-half in 2003. The percent of sexualized advertisements are by no means decreasing and yet the amount of ads featuring sexualized women clearly is on the rise. This lays the fundamental framework and importance for further research into this topic, as many have realized.

In 1980 Martha Burt tested prior derived hypotheses regarding the prediction of acceptance of rape myths based on attitudes. Her study looked at personality characteristics, demographic characteristics, and any personal interactions the person had with rape or knowing someone who had been raped in connection with how people responded to scales recording acceptance of rape myths, sex role stereotyping, and violence against women. It is from this study that researchers on this topic gained scales to measure these dependent variables. Her study found that many Americans do believe in rape myths, with over 50% of her respondents agreeing with statements such as "A woman who goes to the home or apartment

of a man on the first date implies she is willing to have sex", "50% or more of all reported rapes are made up", and "In the majority of rapes, the victim was promiscuous or had a bad reputation". It is imperative to continue this line of research as if there is a connection between viewing ads with objectification and/or victimization and accepting rape myths. This could reveal a major breakthrough in addressing rape culture at a societal level.

MacKay and Covell's 1997 study mainly supported this idea as they expanded the area of study and looked specifically into the link between advertisements with women and the resulting impacts on feeling towards women. Using a more complex experimental method than Burt, they looked into ads' impacts on many similar variables. Importantly, they also used Burt's scales, making them even more widely accepted and utilized. They also discovered rape myth acceptance increased after participants viewed ads which objectified women and decreased when they viewed progressive ads.

Further, they found that while gender had an impact as men were more likely to be accepting, no matter which ad they viewed, after viewing the objectified ad women's acceptance of rape myths and interpersonal violence also increased (MacKay & Covell, 1997). There's a suggested connection between lowered levels of self-esteem and women being more accepting of violence against their own gender. This means that not only do objectifying images potentially negatively impact both men and women's perception of women, they actually may play a role in women accepting and trivializing aggression toward their sex, also stemming from diminished self-esteem.

With significant impact on self-esteem research, it was proved that people compare themselves to other people, including people in ads, spontaneously and without being told to do so (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). People are continuously comparing themselves to those they see around them and in advertisements, so it is not far-fetched to postulate that women comparing themselves to objectified and victimized women in ads could impact their self-esteem, and therefore the treatment they accept. It furthers the point that an image has an effect on the viewer's self-esteem. Sub-sets of self-knowledge a person uses to compare themselves to what is represented changes depending on if they are comparing to a moderate or extreme model (Smeester & Mandel, 2007). This supports that the extreme images of objectification (and victimization) impact levels of self-esteem as they may spontaneously and innately compare themselves to the people in the ads without being told to complete this task. Therefore, if they see women being objectified and they compare themselves to that person, it may lower their self-esteem and make them generally more accepting of interpersonal violence, trivializing and normalizing it.

Tying into this idea of lower confidence levels in women connecting to their higher likelihood of acceptance of sexual aggression and rape myths, is the idea of shame. The level of shame a woman may feel after an encounter with sexual assault depends on her "shame schema", or what she deems shameful as developed through her perception of the world which is, in part, learned from the media she intakes (Vidal & Petrak, 2007). This could explain why the majority of women choose not to report their assaults or rapes. It further highlights the

necessity of my research including a look into how images of objectification and victimization can impact women's likelihood to accept or hide sexual violence committed against them.

Less than 5% of rapes are reported and there is evidence this could be due to the trivialization and normalization of sexual violence against women (the basis of rape culture), which makes them afraid to report as they are worried they won't be taken seriously or they weren't hurt enough (Stankiewics & Rosselli, 2008). Yet it isn't just seeing women objectified that may trivialize and normalize it. There is often images of victimization which play into this phenomenon.

Victimization includes images in which women are posed so they appear lifeless, are in bondage, or the targets of sexual aggression, manipulation, or violence (Stankiewics & Rosselli, 2008). Stankiewics and Rosselli found that one in every two ads showed women as sex objects (2008). In fashion magazines just over 15% of all ads portrayed women as victims and 70% of the time when women appeared as sex objects they also appeared as victims, leading to hypothesize that society may be conditioned to associate violence with sex on some level (Stankiewics & Rosselli, 2008). This new variable of victimization in an image appears to have a significant presence and strong impact on the perpetuation of rape culture. It vastly expands the conversation past the commonly discussed objectifying images. With the potential for such an impact on this societal problem, it must be further investigated.

This idea of violence and sex being associated has been researched in a few studies that look into sexual aggression. Men's aggressive behavior towards women, especially those that

cause some sort of masculine humiliation such as rejection, can actually be predicted based on their levels of acceptance of interpersonal violence and rape myths (Malamuth, 1983). This finding further validates the scales utilized in my research and the idea that the predicted behaviors actually match the actionable behavior. If ads are affecting the acceptance level of rape myths, they're also affecting the viewers' actions, which could lead to sexual or physical violence against women.

There is evidence that society is being conditioned to associate sex with violence on some level, possibly through media such as advertisements. While most men and women are more sexually aroused by depictions of consensual sexual acts, sexual arousal levels towards depiction of rape significantly increases when it also depicts the woman victim have an accidental orgasm, and, for men it further increases when the victim had an accidental orgasm *and was in pain* (Malamuth, et al., 1980). This directly plays into the false rape myth that rape victims experience some sort of pleasure. The 1980 study that discovered this suggested that these negative societal ideologies and sexual arousal responses may be due to the intake of imagery which has combined both sexual and violent aspects, making us associate sex and violence in our minds (Malamouth, et al., 1980). If this is the case, it is even more important and prevalent that I continue researching in this area of advertisements many impacts, specifically focusing on this newer idea of victimized women in imagery.

Capella, Hill, Rapp, and Kees in 2010 conducted research which further supported this theory, specifically looking into the impacts of advertisements which depict violence against

women. They wanted to examine if increased exposure to images of this kind within ads would make men more likely to accept rape myths that the images may be supporting, such as that women are sexually pleased by physical abuse. After conducting their research, they discovered that there was in fact a connection between a viewing of ads with sexual violence towards women and increased sexual aggression dimensions, such as acceptance of interpersonal violence against women.

This connection of gender stereotyping and the perpetuation of rape culture was inspected from a larger societal view via a legal perspective. Courtney Fraser further puts forth the idea that the media depicts scenarios of men knowing what women want, even when women object to it, and therefore takes away the woman's capability for consent and agency, while playing a role in reducing sex to nothing more than a display of masculinity (2015). These basic beliefs clearly underlie many of our social interactions and are reinforced in the advertisements we consume, yet again proving how intertwined this topic is and the necessity for further research that can hopefully move closer to actions that could help right this situation.

Of course, there are studies which are in favor of continuing to objectify women in advertisements. Namely, these studies support the continuance of this marketing method as they claim it yields more profits for businesses.

King, McClelland, and Furnham suggest that "sex really does sell" after their study into the recall of sexual versus non-sexual television advertisements in 2015. According to their

research, advertisements of a sexual nature had a higher rate of recall than those not of a

sexual nature. Therefore, they support the use of sex appeal in advertisements saying it can

potentially lead to higher sales. However, it is important to note that a number of other similar

studies, including ones which they reference, have actually found that the opposite is true, with

sexual ads having lower recall (Steadman, 1969; Leka, McClelland, & Furnham, 2013).

Clearly, this is a topic which has strong debates on both sides, but it is important to

consider if the negative impact of these ads outweighs the profit potential. In order to more

conclusively weigh these benefits and impacts, they need to be further investigated and

understood.

Analysis of Methodology

As I detailed and explained in my above analysis and synthesis of the ideas, this topic is

widely discussed in research across varying fields including law, marketing research,

communication, and sexual studies. For this reason, the methodology that has been used to

explore these ideas and theories which make up rape culture, such as rape myth acceptance,

has widely varied depending on the research team. A large portion of the research that has

focused on looking at advertising has traditionally been conducted in a qualitative manner,

often focusing on a content analysis, coding various advertisements (Rubie-Davies et al, 2013;

Stankiewics et al, 2008; Soley, et al, 1986; Furnham et al, 1997). Some have evolved to code the

images and record participants' reactions or purchase intentions on a Likert scale to get

qualitative data, and are turning this to be more experimental. The researchers of this topic

often call for more experimental and empirical studies to be conducted to further explore the connections and impacts discussed (Stankiewics et. al, 2008).

What can be agreed upon is the validity and importance of the following scales as they are widely accepted and used across the varying fields and were utilized in the majority of studies I have read: the Burt, 1980, Sexual Attitude Survey Subscales of Rape Myth Acceptance, Adversarial Sexual Beliefs, Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence, and Sex-Role Stereotyping, along with Check, Malamuth, Elias, and Barton's 1985 Hostility Towards Women scale, and Kalin and Tilby's 1978 Sex Role Ideology scale. These scales, among some others, have been widely accepted, used, and validated. This is extremely important as many of the things I plan to measure fall within these scales and it is significantly helpful that they already exist and have been previously tested. Seeing as the research is moving in the direction of conducting more experimental studies, and is consistently calling for more of these, it reinforces my decision to conduct such a study.

Conclusion

From my exploration of the literature, there is clearly strong links that have been theorized between media, and advertisements specifically, and characteristics of rape culture, including but not limited to, rape myth acceptance and acceptance of violence against women. Even research which does not specifically focus on advertisements and looks at society and media with a more general lens supports these same ideas, explaining and showing repeatedly how the media we consume helps to form our realities, therefore impacting our beliefs and

actions. There is also no shortage of research in showing how extreme and common the negative impacts of rape culture are in our society, again reinforcing the importance of understanding and researching this topic further. While some of the variables I plan on researching have been considered before, many of them have not yet been combined as this study does. Therefore, the research has supported my claims of this topic's necessity, importance, and my methodology, while also proving that my experiment is uniquely adding to the field of research.

Research Questions

1) Are attitudes toward the ad impacted by images with objectification and/or victimization?

2) Are attitudes toward the brand impacted by images with objectification and/or victimization?

3) Are viewers of ads with images of objectification and/or victimization more likely to accept rape myths?

Ethical Consideration

Considering this is an experimental study and the nature of my subject is rather sensitive, I have ensured that the sensitive questions I am using come from actual scales that have been widely tested and accepted, as outlined and explained in my literature review. Also, the surveys start out with an explanation of what the study is looking to discover, a trigger warning explaining that there are images of a sexual nature and questions regarding rape and

assault, a list of resources at Bryant that are available to those that need help or need to speak to someone, an agreement to consent box before being able to complete the survey, an explanation that all responses are confidential and anonymous, and an explanation that they can skip any question they are uncomfortable with answering, as well as being able to quit taking the survey at any point without penalty.

As I have human subjects, IRB approval was applied for and granted. For further details, please see Appendix A where I have attached the IRB proposal form. This answers all ethical questions in a very detailed manner.

Procedure

The process began by coding images to use as the advertisements in the experiment. The images selected were coded to represent the individual variable (objectification, objectification and victimization, no objectification or victimization) as well as for a control group (no model present in the image). Once the images with the models containing the necessary variables were coded and selected, additions were made to keep the false advertisements consistent. Via a Microsoft tool any brand names already shown in the ad were discreetly covered and the images of the two versions of the fragrance product (a perfume bottle representing the female product and distinct cologne bottles representing the male product) were added with the same name of the product appearing "Blaze". This was written in the same font to keep it consistent as well.

These were then uploaded into Qualtrics, a survey creation tool, and placed with the survey questions. The survey asked questions about purchase intentions, perception of the ad and brand, as well as questions taken from Burt's Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (1980).

Participants were invited to partake in the research by their professors, usually of introductory level marketing courses, for extra credit. All testing took place in the monitored behavioral lab at Bryant University. On their screen, the title of the survey was "Ad Imagery Response Study" and they were guided through a screen of trigger warnings, explaining there were questions about rape and sexual assault, that also gave them resources for help with these situations on campus as well as the contact information for the researchers (Leedberg and Yoon). This page also informed them they would be able to skip a question or stop the survey at any time and had them confirm they were eighteen or older, and accept these conditions before moving on.

Once continuing, students were randomly assigned one of the created advertisements to view. After viewing, they were served a series of questions (on either a five or seven-point scale) on the topics mentioned above.

Analysis

Responses were downloaded from Qualtrics and initially analyzed in Excel. The data was cleaned so that any responses from participants who did not complete the study were removed. The final sample size was 163 respondents.

The experiment was categorized as a two by four (chart below). The numbers one through eight refer to which advertisement was viewed (i.e. for which product and then with which independent variables represented).

	Objectified and Victimized	Objectified	Yes Model	No Model
Female Product	1	2	3	4
Male Product	5	6	7	8

Means were found for each survey answer which were then compared to identify large effects, trends, and potential interactions. This data was further analyzed using IBM SPSS to identify statistically significant main effects and interactions between the variables.

Results

A 2 (product/model gender: male versus female product) × 4 (ad type: objectification/victimization versus objectification versus no objectification/victimization versus no model) ANOVA revealed significant main effects for attitudes toward the ad (F (1, 154) = 4.59, $p < .05$) and ad type (F (3, 154) = 3.67, $p < .05$). Additionally, a significant two-way
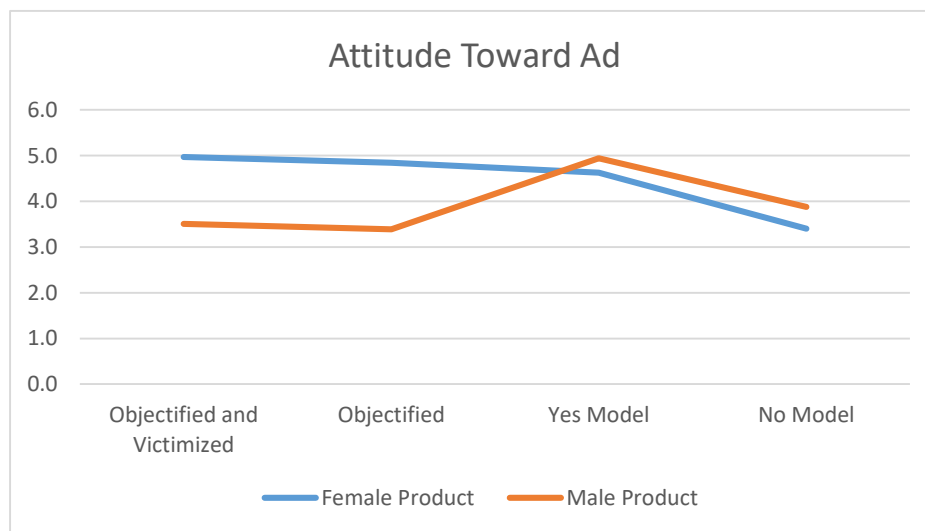
interaction effect emerged for attitude toward the ad (F (3, 154) = 4.69, p < .01). As shown in

Figure 1, when participants viewed a male product, an objectified/victimized model ($M_{objectified-victimized}$ = 3.51) and objectified model ($M_{objectified}$ = 3.39) produced lower attitudes than non-objectified/victimized model ($M_{non-objectified-victimized}$ = 4.94), which turns out to be higher than

non-model ($M_{no-model}$ = 3.88). Analysis did not reveal any significant interaction effects when

participants viewed a female product with an objectified/victimized model ($M_{objectified-victimized}$ = 4.97), an objectified model ($M_{objectified}$ = 4.84), or a non-objectified/victimized model ($M_{non-objectified-victimized}$ = 4.63).

Figure 1

Further, a 2 (product/model gender: male versus female product) × 4 (ad type:

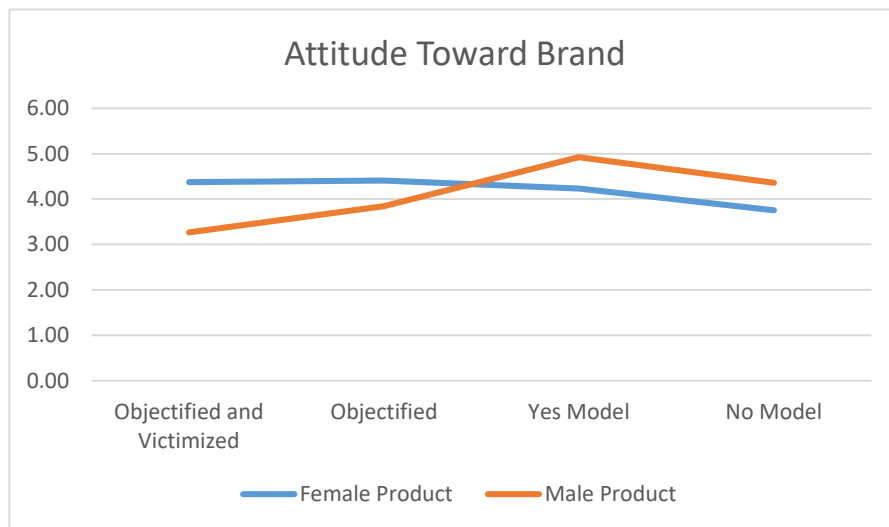objectification/victimization versus objectification versus no objectification/victimization versus

no model) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for attitude toward the brand (F (2, 155) = 2.69, p < .05). In addition, a significant two-way interaction effect emerged for attitude toward the brand (F (2, 155) = 3.96, p < .05). As shown in Figure 2, when participants viewed a male product, an objectified/victimized model ($M_{objectified-victimized}$ = 3.23) and objectified model ($M_{objectified}$ = 3.84) produced lower attitudes than non-objectified/victimized model ($M_{non-objectified-victimized}$ = 4.92). Analysis did not reveal any significant interaction effects when participants viewed a female product with an objectified/victimized model ($M_{objectified-victimized}$ = 4.37), an objectified model ($M_{objectified}$ = 4.41), or a non-objectified/victimized model ($M_{non-objectified-victimized}$ = 4.23).

Figure 2

While a 2 (product/model gender: male versus female product) × 4 (ad type: objectification/victimization versus objectification versus no objectification/victimization versus no model) ANOVA did not reveal a significant main effect or two-way interaction effect for rape
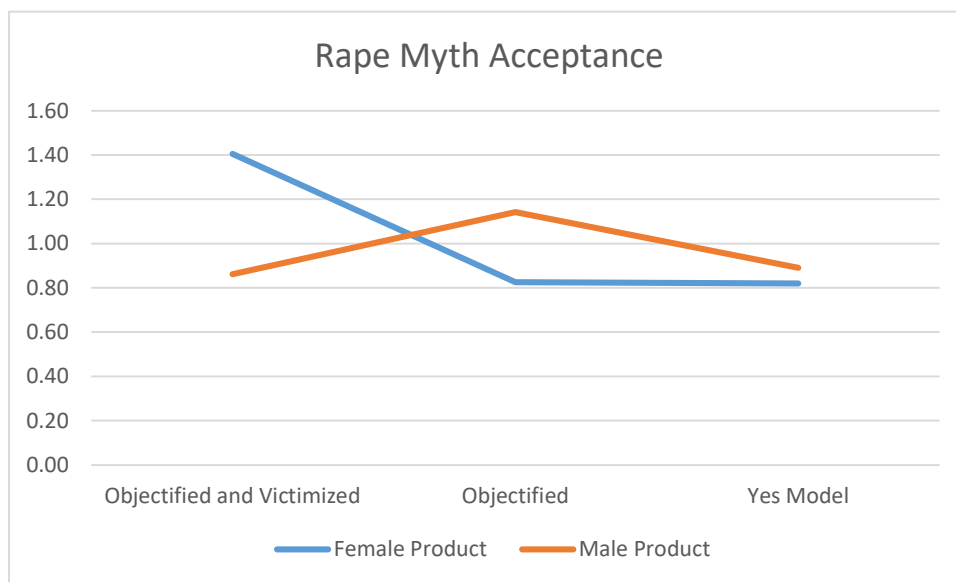
myth acceptance, the data did reveal trends. As shown in Figure 3, when participants viewed a

male product, an objectified model produced a trend of higher rape myth acceptance

compared to a non-objectified/victimized model. When participants viewed a female product,

an objectified and victimized model produced a trend of higher rape myth acceptance.

Figure 3

Discussion

These results have several extremely important implications. First, is the confirmation

that marketers should be using models in their advertisements to sell their products or services

as having no model present resulted in less positive attitude toward both the ad than the brand

than ads that had a model present. The trend this suggests is quite clear: if marketers want

consumers to develop positive feelings toward the ad and brand, potentially leading to

increased sales, they should utilize models to sell. For advertisers which already do this, it is simply a confirmation, but for those who stray from using models, they should consider changing that or at least increasing their images with models.

The second important implication from this data is that while it does have a positive impact to have a model present in an ad, ads which objectify and/or victimize their models do not see better results. Advertisements for the male product (cologne) which objectified and/or victimized the model present in the imagery saw more negative attitudes toward the brand and ad. Their most positive scoring on these two dimensions occurred when they had a model present who was not objectified and/or victimized in any way. The presence of the independent variables of objectification and victimization related to less positive attitudes in participants.

Furthermore, for the female product (perfume), while having objectification and/or victimization in the imagery did not make the attitudes toward the ad and represented brand, they also did not make them more positive. There wasn't any major trend, effect or difference in attitude between the ad which had a model but no other variable present and the ads which contained objectification and/or victimization. Having these images of a sexual nature did not result in more positive attitudes by viewers, which means it may not have any connection to increasing sales or the bottom line.

These two findings together could help disprove the long debated notion that "sex sells" considering for male products. The more negative attitudes which resulted from viewers of the ads for the male product with objectification and/or victimization actually could result in a loss

of profit or perception, as consumers don't feel as positive about the ad or brand. In fact, this product could potentially increase their sales and brand perception just by having a non-objectified or victimized model present. In the best case scenario for ads with these independent variables, their presence made no difference on the attitude toward the ad or brand. This means, again, that this sexualization is not having a more positive impact on perception, and therefore, potentially not sales either. Based on this data, they could perform just as well using a non-objectified and/or victimized model.

Additionally, the data revealed that using these variables of objectification and victimization in advertising images can have a negative impact on society by increasing the acceptance of rape myths. For the male product ads, participants who viewed the one containing objectification more strongly accepted rape myths. For the female product it was the ads that contained both objectification and victimization that had the effect of increasing the acceptance of these myths.

With these results there's also the question of why objectification and victimization for the female product and objectification for the male product did not have the same trend of increasing rape myth acceptance. This can potentially be explained for several reasons. While a significant number of ads do show female models objectified and victimized, it is still not as many, nor as common, as female models being just objectified (no victimization). This could have potentially resulted in less of an effect, due to the less shocking imagery. In addition, these images were coded but not pre-tested (as will be discussed in the limitation section), and

so comparatively the chosen image to represent the female objectification may not have actually been seen as very objectifying to participants considering the female model did have a blazer on, even if it did show her chest and stomach (versus the male version of objectification who was only wearing boxers).

As for the male product not increasing acceptance with the image of objectification and victimization, this may stem from the rarity of such an image. It is extraordinarily uncommon to see an ad or image of a man both objectified and victimized, as they are mostly shown as dominant, even when objectified. Therefore, this image may have been more shocking and striking to viewers, not used to seeing men in this position, especially for an ad, and therefore actually made them less comfortable with the imagery and more aware of the unsettling victimization of the model. This then could have resulted in less of an acceptance of rape myths, due to their increased discomfort with the image of a man victimized.

Even though objectification and/or victimization did not increase the acceptance in every case, it did show it does have the power to impact acceptance in half of the cases, which still calls for necessary change. As mentioned earlier, these rape myths include ideas and themes such as victim blaming and that women secretly enjoy being raped. A higher acceptance of these rape myths absolutely perpetuates rape culture as it plays a major role in trivializing and normalizing rape, sexual assault, and sexual aggression against women. Additionally, as already discussed in the literature review, research has found that the level of acceptance of rape myths can predict actionable male aggression toward women (Malamuth,

1983) . With acceptance increasing after viewing ads with objectification or both objectification and victimization present, it can actually be argued that ads with these variables potentially have a related effect on not just the trivialization and normalization of rape culture, but also the actual acts of rape and assault.

If using objectification and/or victimization in advertisements does not actually lead to more positive attitudes and, therefore increased sales, (and in some cases actually makes attitudes less positive), but they do have the power to increase rape myth acceptance, perpetuating rape culture, why are they still being used? This data may refute the classic "sex sells" argument and also change the discussion of making changes in the marketing and advertising industry. Based on this research, there no longer needs to be a choice between successful business and ethics. While the negative effects of perpetuating rape culture are clear, there does not appear to be any positive business benefits to objectifying and/or victimizing models in ads, leaving no reason to argue for continuing this practice.

Limitations

This study had several limitations which must be taken into account when looking at the findings and discussion of this exploratory research.

Primarily, as mentioned before, this was a convenience sample. It consisted solely of Bryant University students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. This means that as of

now, and as is normal for exploratory research, it cannot be accurately used to predict the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the wider population.

Also, the images in the experiment were not pretested with an audience. Instead, as mentioned before, they were coded to contain the independent variables. This means that some of the viewers could potentially not see each of the images as containing the intended variables.

Future Research

Seeing as this is an exploratory study, further research should be done to replicate this study. This experiment should also be run on a sample that has a larger and more diverse range of characteristics, including age, education level, and geographic location. In doing so, future research could determine if they can replicate these findings and potentially apply them to the wider population.

Additionally, to improve upon this study, researchers should pretest the images coded to have the independent variables necessary (objectification and/or victimization). By doing this, they can ensure the images being viewed are accepted to contain and represent the independent variables, making the findings more concrete, minimizing any chance the images are interpreted differently than intended.

Future studies should also expand beyond still images and into video advertisements which are becoming increasingly common on social media networking sites and other places

online. It's important to understand if these findings apply to video advertising as well seeing as this is a major trend in the marketing industry. If discovered now, it could help reshape the future of video advertising online as it grows in popularity.

Overall, this study must be replicated and expanded on as it reveals important findings which are extremely timely with the momentum from the various movements, such as "Me Too" and "Time's Up". If proven on a wider scale, they could be used to make a change in the way marketers use and present models in their advertisements, potentially helping decreases rape myth acceptance, and playing a role in minimizing or stopping the perpetuation of rape culture.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Below is a copy of the IRB proposal form I submitted on 9/21:

VII. Proposal to IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects

Name(s) of Investigators: <u>Lauren Leedberg & Professor Sukki Yoon</u>

Title of Research Project<u>   Advertisements' Perpetuation of Rape Culture and Gender Stereotypes:</u>

<u>A look at how images containing objectification and stereotypes impact consumers   (working title)</u>

<u>   </u>

Anticipated Start and End Dates of Experiments<u> September 2017-February 2018 </u>

<u>Basic Level Review</u>
To be considered at the **Basic Level**, the study must not involve children or adults unable to give consent, must not place subjects at more than minimal risk, and must fit one of the following categories (check all that apply). See Section V for description of each category.

___Normal educational practices

___Educational testing

__x Survey/interview procedures

___Observation of behavior without intervention

___Use of archival data

___Evaluation of Federal research and programs

___Consumer acceptance studies

Risk Assessment
Indicate with a check if any of the following risks are involved:

	Deception as part of the experimental procedure? If yes, the proposal must include a description of the deception and the method of "debriefing" after the experiment.
x	Any probing of information which a subject might consider to be personal or sensitive?
x	The presentation to the subject of any materials they might find to be offensive, threatening, or degrading?
	Possible compromise of privacy of participant or family, including use of personal information and records?
	The administration of physical stimuli other than auditory or visual stimuli associated with normal activities?
	Deprivation of physiological requirements such as nutrition or sleep?
	Manipulation of psychological and/or social variables such as sensory deprivation, social isolation, psychological stress?
	Physical exertion beyond a level that is moderate for the participant?
	Exposure to drugs, chemicals, or hazardous agents?

Any other situations likely to pose risk? Please identify below:

There are not any other situations likely to pose risk to the participant.

Explain the need for any risks for the participants, that is, how they are required for successful completion of the study:

My entire research is founded in exploring the connection between imagery in ads that can be defined

as objectifying/victimizing and/or stereotypical sex roles and if it impacts the consumers' attitude

towards the brand, purchase intention, and acceptance of rape myths and traditional sex role

stereotypes. Therefore, it is entirely necessary for the participants to potentially view in advertisement

that could be considered degrading as it may need to have elements of objectification and/or

victimization (which ad they view is chosen at random so some may view ads that have none of these

elements). Also, it is necessary to ask questions regarding their beliefs/responses to rape myths and sex

role stereotypes as it is the only way to measure if the images play a role in their acceptance of these

things. However, for these delicate questions I am using two scales that have already been tested and

widely accepted in research.

Project Description
Clearly state the purpose of the study and the area of knowledge it contributes to (or attach document):

The introduction that of my Research Proposal, which is submitted to the Honors Council, is attached at

the end of this form. If necessary, I can provide the entire proposal, which includes a detailed literature

review.

Briefly explain the nature of the experimental procedures and the information to be obtained (or attach
document). If students are performing the research, indicate that and describe their activities.

The experiment will be entirely conducted via a Qualtrics survey which will be distributed via the

marketing research lab time that certain students attend at Bryant. The survey opens with detailed

information on the experiment, a trigger warning letting them understand the nature of the questions

and that they can skip any questions that make them uncomfortable or terminate the survey at any

point. Also, it lists various resources on campus for anyone needing to talk to someone about assault or

anything related. After agreeing to the consent form they are then asked to view an ad and answer the

questions that follow. After this, they are randomly assigned one of the ads I created that test variables

of male/female poses/models, objectification/victimization, and traditional sex role stereotypes. There

are also ads which show models with no objectification/victimization and ads which do not even have models in them. After viewing the ad for any length of time they then will be served 4 blocks of questions in a multiple choice/matrix form related to the following: feelings towards brand/feelings toward ad/purchase intention, rape myth acceptance scale, sex role stereotyping scale, and basic demographic questions.

Explain measures taken to assure anonymity and confidentiality of the information:

At no point does the survey ask for the name of the student and any information given is not kept connected to their login.

Participant Description
Describe the approximate number and range of ages of participants in this study:

The age range of participants is between 18 and 23 and there will be approximately three or four lab sessions it will be run during, each with around 20 participants each time.

Describe the criteria for selecting participants:

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and agree to the consent form in order to participate. For the first few sessions it will merely be students in Marketing 201 at Bryant University who voluntarily participate as part of class in the behavioral lab testing.

Describe any inducements for subjects to participate (check all that apply):

	Extra credit in a course	
	Money. If yes, give approximate value:	
	Raffle or other type of contest.	
x	Other (please specify): There may be extra credit offered in a course but that is up to the specific professor they have and I have nothing to do with it	

Informed Consent

How and when is informed consent obtained from the participants? Indicate any forms used.

The participants are informed and consent is obtained at the very beginning of the survey. It states the following:

"Welcome to the research titled "Ad Imagery Response Study" conducted by Lauren Leedberg and Sukki Yoon at Bryant University. The purpose of this study is to examine people's responses to imagery within advertisements. Please note that as a potential participant you must be 18 years of age or older to take part in the study.

Trigger Warning: There are images of a sexual nature and questions regarding rape and assault. You can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your participation is voluntary. No discomforts, stresses or risks are expected from participating in this study. Furthermore, if you do ever feel the need to speak to a counselor or someone regarding any nature of assault or rape, please know the following services are available to you:

Counseling Services: 401-232-6045

Hochberg Women's Center- Contact: Kelly Boutin

401-232-6855

Your participation may earn you an extra credit for the course in which you sign up for the study, at the discretion of the instructor. If your instructor decides to provide an extra

credit to the participants, please understand that there will be alternative methods of obtaining the equivalent credit. Therefore your grades and class standing will not be affected whether you choose to participate or not to participate. While you may not benefit directly from participation, your participation in this research project may contribute to advancing knowledge that will be helpful in understanding how the ads we consume impact our beliefs. Through participation, you will have a great experience with respect to academic stand point and learn the protocol of social science research. The completed script of this study will be given to the participants who want to receive it.

If you do not feel comfortable with a question, skip it and go on to the next question. You have the right to discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Closing the survey window will erase your answers without submitting them. You will be given a choice of submitting or discarding your responses at the end of the survey. Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about this study, please contact us:

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After this they must click they agree to everything above and give consent before they can continue with

the survey.

If deception is part of the procedure, explain the deception and describe when and how debriefing is conducted.

Deception is not part of the procedure

Any other concerns or further comments?

Not at this time

Appendix B

Below are the advertisements that were coded and created for this experiment.

Female Product: No model	Male Product: No model

Female Product: Model, no objectification or victimization	Male Product: Model, no objectification or victimization

Female Product: Model, objectification

Male Product: Model, objectification

Female Product: Model, objectification and victimization

Male Product: Model, objectification and victimization