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Public Feminism and Feminist Counter Publics: Challenging Exclusionary Racialised Sexualisation in London's Public Advertising

Abstract

Following public outcry over a body shaming advertisement in the London transport network in 2015, the Mayor of London commissioned a multimedia documentary-style study that involved 16 commuting travelling interviews with women throughout London, two "talk back" art projects with school girls, and a survey of 2000 Londoners. This paper explores our experience of undertaking this project as a process of generating public intersectional feminist research. We start by discussing the boundaries of feminist counter-publics and public feminisms and negotiating a process of working with a range of stakeholders to reshape public debates over gender and advertising. We consider the non- consensual and assaultive nature of public advertising and various forms of postfeminist modes of sexy-confident address which women must navigate in public space. We argue that by explicitly adopting a feminist intersectional lens, we can foreground the racialized and sexualized force of adverts and their impact on a range of diverse women and girls and therefore, the need for public accountability. Finally, we explore how small radical interventions demonstrate the possibility of feminist counter public challenges to harmful and exclusionary public representations.

Introduction: Are you beach body ready? Feminist Counter Publics respond to body shaming

In the spring of 2015 public outrage started growing over a controversial advertisement running widely in the Transport for London (TFL) network. The advertisement for Protein World protein powder featured a blond, white (but tanned), thin woman in a yellow bikini. The model's rib cage could be seen, a large gap between her thighs looked digitally altered, and her perfectly spherical breasts were prominently fixed in two yellow triangles. Her stare seemed to taunt her viewer and copy to either side of her slight body read: 'Are you beach body ready'? More than than 370 complaints were made to the Advertising Standards Authority positioning the add as 'socially irresponsible' (Rodgers, 2018) and a further, 70,000 people signed a petition on change.org, calling for the removal of the adverts, saying the advertisement sought to make people "feel guilty" (Glosswitch, 2015).

Commuters took to Twitter documenting graffiti on the posters, such as creating the ingenious #EachBodysReady (Figure A) or making selfie statements including one's middle finger on the advert (Figure B), or staging tube bikini shots where women stood over the image to re-write the advertisement. These posters were explicitly using social media connectivity to generate a specifically feminist digital counter-public (Salter, 2013). Using modalities of response such as

graffiti as a mode of resignication, they created new hashtags as part of calling out sexism in public space (Sills et al., 2016) in stories that discussed the advertisement as 'offensive' and 'sexist', but more importantly 'body shaming'. This discussion of body shaming introduced a new lexicon into public debate that demonstrated the affective implications of how the image and semantics constructed the acceptable terms of feminine embodiment via a public audience (Author 1; see also Gill and Kanai, 2019).

The conflict amplified, however, when Protein World responded by rebutting a Tweet (Figure C) discussing the impact of diet and slimming industry on women's self-esteem with the rejoinder "why make your insecurities our problem (winky face emoji)"; with Protein World's CEO even calling the women "terrorists" (Glosswhich, 2015). From here, the outrage grew into a street protest in Hyde Park Speakers Corner where women and girls of all ages and some men gathered to protest. The teen activism brought particular interest with the New Statesman interviewing one group who was quoted as saying

> Because we're all thirteen and fourteen, there's a lot of pressure on our bodies at the moment...We belong to a feminist group at school, and when we talked about body image it really struck us how upset everyone is with their bodies. We want everyone to accept that they're beautiful, and this event is a step forward. (Glosswhich, 2015).

In 2015 Author 1 and colleagues (removed for blind review) interviewed a group of girls' who attended the march, which was their first encounter with a public protest and public feminism, finding out just how important this collective action was for strengthening their resolve to challenge other forms of sexism within their school.

Responding to the Protein World controversy the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan issued a public statement that he was banning "body shaming" adverts (The Guardian, 2016) from TFL saying:

> As the father of two teenage girls, I am extremely concerned about this kind of advertising which can demean people, particularly women, and make them ashamed of their bodies. It is high time it came to an end. Nobody should feel pressurised, while they travel on the tube or bus, into unrealistic expectations surrounding their bodies and I want to send a clear message to the advertising industry about this.

TfL then set up a steering group with its corporate advertising partners, to "monitor and review compliance and rules". Critically, as noted by TfL's commercial development director, Graeme Craig: "Advertising on our network is unlike TV, online and print media. Our customers cannot simply switch off or turn a page if an advertisement offends or upsets them and we have a duty to ensure the copy we carry reflects that unique environment" (Ibid).

In January of 2017, another controversy erupted over a subsequent Protein World advertisement, which showcased Khloe Kardashian in retro exercise gear bodysuit with the statement "Can you keep up with a Kardashian". Interestingly, this advertisement had been reviewed and passed by the new regulations begging the question as tweeted by

@CarolineRussell "TfL thinks this advert is acceptable?! Mayor's advertising steering group meeting this week. Hope they'll listen". In relation to the confident-sexy address, the Kardashian advertisement is notable in that the body-suited image is turned to the side to place her buttocks in relief; adding a new idealized body part to the assemblage; whereas the cleavage is hidden under her hair. Finally, following the public's growing demand for accountable advertising a TFL steering group and affiliates commissioned research into the public perception of gender and media in greater London.

In this paper, we explore our experiences of being commissioned to undertake this research as a process of generating research attempting to take account of diverse feminist counter-publics in order to inform public feminism authorised by the government. Eventually titled "Women we see: Diverse girls and women's experiences of gender and advertising in London's public spaces", the research grew to be a multimedia documentary-style study that involved two "talk back" art projects with school girls, 16 commuting travelling interviews with women throughout London and a survey of 2000 Londoners.

Signs editor Suzanna Danuta Walters (2016) argues public feminism is about translating "multivocal feminist perspective[s]" in order to shape a public conversation, debate, and politics. Publics, according to gender scholars such as Michael Warner and Judith Butler are "performative forms of association that transform subjectivity and practices of relationality... [whereas] subversive, alternative and dissident publics (or counter-publics) enact forms of solidarity that are engaged in creating new terms of becoming." (in Todd, 2017). Nancy Fraser, contends further that what she terms "subaltern counterpublics...are discursive arenas that develop in parallel to the official public spheres", which are formed "as a response to the exclusions of the dominant publics" and that their existence "better promotes the ideal of participatory parity" (Fraser in Kampourakis, 2016).

Public feminism, we contend, sits in an ambivalent relationship with various differentiated 'feminist counter-publics'. Indeed, the call for papers for this special asks contributors to consider which feminisms are taken into account and come to matter in which ways and how do race, nation, religion, class, sexuality, and caste limit which feminisms tend to gain public visibility and legibility, and how this can be challenged? It also asks how feminist interventions in society might change the nature of publicness itself and whether claiming public space may be part of this process of public feminisms; and also how new conceptual languages or vocabularies are forged in order to create new terms of public feminist debate? Our article responds directly to these questions about what public feminism and feminist counter-publics can look like and do, and how academics can engage with and contribute meaningfully to feminist change making. Walters (2016) also discusses the problematic context facing feminist intellectuals who lack public visibility, due to both the demonization of feminism and polarizations of current anti-feminist sentiments (Banet-Weiser, 2018) in the public sphere; but also to a lack of forums and venues to practice public feminism and to thereby contribute to social change and transformation.

Through the research process we outline in this paper, we were given a unique opportunity to intervene into a live struggle defining the terms of what constituted sexist advertising and propose ideas for change. We outline the complexities of struggling over the frames of reference, methodologies, findings and dissemination processes, whilst working with a range of corporate and government stakeholders to inform the public debates and government policies on gender and advertising. First, we outline the academic research on gender and advertising, which informed our approach. We discuss a major shift in understanding advertising as catering to the male gaze and largely characterized by female subservience to a new terrain of 'femvertising' where women are positioned as empowered consumers (Becker-Herby, 2016). We discuss new forms of "postfeminist" confident-sexy address, that promote women as empowered consumers that predominate in contemporary representations of femininity (Khors and Gill, 2018). Next, we outline our research design, which included generating qualitative research with women and girls about their everyday experiences of gender and advertising and quantitative research about attitudes to diversity and representation in London's advertisements. We discuss one of our most significant survey finding, which is the public's dislike of advertisements that sexualise women's bodies. Through our interview data, we qualify these findings to explore diverse women's *experiences* of sexualisation across intersectional dimensions of race, location and age. We document the non-consensual, and at times assaultive, nature of public advertising in order to advocate for and impress the need for greater accountability for advertisements in public space. Overall, we argue that by explicitly adopting an intersectional feminist theoretical and methodological approach (Collins, 2008; Munro, 2013; Lykke, 2010) to showcase multiple axes of diversity and difference creating inequity, we were able to push the possibilities of the research. Additionally, this research moved the public discussion from feminism, articulated as a single axis, gender binary construct - to an understanding of the intersections between gender, sexualisation and racism (and other axes power and identity).

Advertising in Public Space: An Intersectional Analysis of sexy-confident address

The global research on women and advertising has shown a complex and contradictory picture (Eisend, 2010). While some suggest that the well-worn tropes of sexist advertising are slowly changing and improving, others have pointed to the ongoing salience of sociological critiques of sexual objectification, such as Goffman's 'seminal' research documenting gender role stereotyping and patterns of female submission in the 1960s advertising scape. As noted by Korhs and Gill (2018) Goffman's work explored how:

> ...adverts frequently depict ritualized versions of the parent-child relationship, in which women are largely accorded childlike status. In the adverts he analysed, women were typically shown lower or smaller than men and using gestures that 'ritualised their subordination', for example lying down, using bashful knee bends, and deferential postures and smiles. Women were also often depicted in licensed withdrawal (dreamy self-absorption), as well as frequently being shown looking into mirrors, which further conveyed a message about female narcissism. Clear differences in gendered touch were also identified. (P. 6)

A large body of feminist research has drawn upon Goffman's original semantic analysis to develop tools to analyze how gender stereotypes and sexual objectification are constructed in adverting images through technologies like cropping to emphasize body parts, and adopting particular types of angles, stances and gazes (Kilborune, 1999). Recently, for instance, in America, Badger, Bronstein and Lambiase (2018) have argued despite decades of critique advertisers continue to frequently reduce women to a series of sexualized parts or their bodies function as props in the advertising story. In New Zealand, beer adverts have been criticised for repeatedly portraying gender stereotypes like men outside at the BBQ and women in the kitchen (McDonald, 2014; Benton-Greig et. al, 2017). Tsichla and Zotos (2013) found that in Cypriot advertisements women are mostly used as decorative props and still relegated to a domestic or caring role. Further, a review of US magazine advertisements conducted over a fifty year period concluded that whilst early depictions of women as helpless or located entirely in a domestic setting have improved over time, representations of women in advertisements have become more sexualized than ever (Mager & Helgeson, 2011). By sexualized they mean women are more likely to appear nude or in revealing outfits, and in sexually explicit positions (Mager & Helgeson, 2011).

Moving beyond representational analysis, social science has sought to demonstrate the negative impact on women and girls by studying the relationship between sexist advertisements and disrespect of women in society at large (Curtis, Arnaud and Waguespack, 2015). The relationship between sexualized images and body dissatisfaction, body dysmorphia and 'disordered' eating habits in women has also been examined (Marshall, 2017). Zacharias (2016) argued that sexist advertising leads to an increase in the rate of cosmetic surgeries, eating disorders, and related deaths seeking to demonstrate how mediated images of the ideal woman effect real women's 'self-image.' Rosewarne's Australian research on public advertising (2004) argued that sexist advertising in the public sphere has a direct impact on the relational space surrounding the advertising. She argues that sexual objectification of women enforces male dominance and potential male aggression within social environments that are already "charged with a hostile male sexuality' (p. 31). Rosewarne underlines the prevalence of *sexist and sexualized* advertising as serving to reinforce the male gaze and reminds women that their bodies are subject to public scrutiny at all times. What is critical here is qualifying that it is not sexualised imagery in general or in the abstract that is problematic but sexualised imagery in the context of a sexualised society, where images are related to in relation to wider social norms and contexts that are already deeply sexist (Coy, 2018). Crucially, Rosewarne's (2007) argument that sexualized public advertisements are therefore a form of harassment due to the social context of sexism, and that in public space these images are inescapable, helps to develop a view of sexualised advertisements in public spaces as non- consensual and potentially assaultive, which becomes an issue of public concern around advertising harms and raises issues of safety and public accountability.

Gill (2008, 2012) however, has also identified a key shift in how women are encouraged to embrace sexist sexualisation. She and others have discussed a new category of 'femvertising' which specifically caters to women as empowered consumers (Becker-Herby, 2016). Amy-Chinn (2006) drawing on McRobbie called this "postfeminist advertising" where a discourse of

women's empowerment through consumption predominates. This form of address folds together earlier tropes of sexualised femininity (Lazar, 2006) and newer "technologies" of sexiness, which celebrate ideals of independence, self-love, bravery (etc.) to bare one's body as the model of confidence, shaped through these tropes of consumer-based feminine empowerment in advertising (Evans and Riley, 2014; Author et al, 2018). These neoliberal discourses of individual DIY improvement encourage women to work hard on their bodies through practices of aesthetic labour (and beauty industry product investment) as a route to becoming successful, confident and happy (Gill, 2008; Halston et al., 2010; Elias et al., 2017). Whilst the old trope of hailing women via the male gaze as a passive prop has not disappeared, Khors and Gill (2018) point to the dominance of a new visual trope of 'confident appearing' women. This trope is "depicted with their heads held high, looking directly at the viewer, with a neutral expression, or pictured striding purposefully forward, or holding themselves in controlled movement.... underpinned by written texts that exhort confidence, self- belief and empowerment". This is certainly the type of 'sexy confident' aspirational address signalled in the Protein World advertisement, and others we will explore through our analysis. Here the protagonist challenges other women to be like her and to live up to her standard, which will presumably be a route to success and happiness, via improving her bodily capitals (Evans and Riley, 2014; Elias et al., 2017;). As Khors and Gill (2018) also stress this new visual language is "being developed to address (particularly, though not exclusively) middle and upper-class female subjects. These women are being hailed through a composite of signifiers of assertiveness, boldness and power that together comprise a kind of confident appearing." (emphasis in original). Indeed, the "Are you Beach Body Ready?" advert promotes a form of body confidence capital - size, shape, skin tone represent a form of worked upon white femininity through classed practices like consuming protein powder to achieve bodily perfection. Here, an intersectional analysis becomes paramount in understanding that gender does not act as a single axis through representational dynamics, rather it works through layers of race, class, sexuality, ability, age and more (Gill, 2009).

Gill and Kanai (2019) have argued further that what they call the latest trend of "affirmative advertising" or advertising that appears to "respond to social justice activism based on unequal identities by promising visibility and inclusion in the consumer marketplace" is highly problematic. They argue that way that affirmative advertising includes diversity tends to be hollow, superficial and differences of race, body shape, age and ability tend to be "homogenized through a combination of aesthetic means (make-up, clothes, stylization) and affective means (an upbeat emphasis upon self-worth and confidence) that renders everyone the same". We will explore this same trend to homogenize difference in advertisements (such as those that were intended to improve the Protein World campaign and advertisements that include plus-size models and women of colour). We explore how these advertisements attempt to signify difference, whilst also homogenizing difference. Further, we argue the mode through homogeneity is exacted is through a repeated and compulsory sexualisation of women's bodies. We will demonstrate how participants experience these various modes of postfeminist consumer address and the process of sexualisation and racialization work together in many advertisements. We additionally examine adverts that foreground the 'sexy, confident address' of white thin women as well as a new ''diverse' plus size yet idealized, racialized, sexualized

body type of thick-slim, and how these two limited typologies are becoming increasingly apparent and solidified in advertising.

Socially Engaged Mixed Methods Research

In the wake of several years of public controversy over advertising in London, we began with the Mayor of London in 2017 to undertake independent academic of gender and advertising in London's public spaces. Several stakeholders were involved including the Mayor's office, a PR firm handling the research production as well as corporate stakeholders who were 'sponsoring' the research in the form of a competition for free advertising space for a winning brand that would compete to come up with an improved advertising campaign based on the recommendations of the research report. From the beginning, we were constantly aware of the process of negotiating and working with a range of stakeholders to produce ethically sound and independent research findings. We were acutely aware of the limitations of advertising as a commercially driven entity but were also aiming to shape policies to regulate sexism and promote more diversity in advertising.

Public feminism demands socially engaged feminist research practices that are grounded in an engagement with multiple stakeholders and complex webs of accountability from the outset (Leavey and Harris, 2018; Wang et al.; Author 1 et al, 2018). We are inspired by feminist methodologies that encourage hybrid approaches and participatory practices and response-ability to the many players involved in such research processes (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016). The original research brief asked us to "look at the perception of women in media and investigate: 'In what way are women portrayed in media in comparison to men? What are the outstanding gender-based generalizations / sexism / stereotypes?" We insisted that we move from a single axis perspective to consider diverse girls and women's complex intersecting identities and the ways this shaped their experiences of advertising in-depth (Yuval-Davis, 2006). We set out to explore how a range of advertising content in local London settings *is experienced* by a diverse group of women and girls? Our research questions included:

- What messages are diverse women and girls receiving from advertising in London?
- How do these advertisements make a diverse qualitative sample of girls and women feel?
- If gender bias is experienced, what are the range of views from participants about what should change?

We developed a mixed method approach involved interviewing, focus groups, arts based practices, and a survey. Mixed methods are recognized as joining together numerical evidence persuasive to a range of stakeholders with qualitative stories that enable depth and nuance (Cresswell, 2014).

First, we recruited 16 diverse women through a firm specializing in qualitative methodologies, the sampling rationale was based on a mixture of finding women from 16 different postcode

regions in London and having a spread of, age, race, religion, physical ability, number of children, and socioeconomic status. Final selection of participants was determined through short telephone interviews to explore their daily movements and commutes and use of public space, and a location for the interview encounter that was indicative of their common use of London was selected. We went on journeys with the women on their commute or daily routine to explore their embodied encounters with advertising in real time and local spaces.

Participants were also asked to comment upon a standardized selection of currently running advertising content we had sourced across London in the months leading up the research. These prompts included 30 advertisements we had selected because they featuring women (selling products as wide as insurance to slimming products). The encounters employed narrative inquiry as a methodological approach to draw out stories, narratives, or descriptions of a series of events (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This dialogue was recorded through film ethnography and digital storytelling methodologies including voice, image and film recording practices. In this paper, we will include a range of stories and images to explore diverse women's experiences of sexualised advertising.

The second strand of our qualitative methodology was conducting focus group interviews with 22 teen girls aged 14-16 in two London Schools. These schools were selected on the basis of postcodes (one inner and one outer London) and gaining research access. Due to challenges in organizing outside school trips, we asked girls to bring in examples of advertising they found problematic and that they liked and we explored the advertising prompts we had collected with them in focus groups. Subsequently, the girls worked in groups using advertising content creating "talk back" art collages (2 per school). Through this arts-based, participatory research (Wang et al., 2018) they cut and pasted the advertising content we discussed, and wrote messages to advertisers about what they thought was problematic and what they would like to see done differently. The identities of the schools and young people have all been anonymized in line with child protection and ethical standards. We will include several snapshots of their collages to show the potential of arts-based research as part of enacting resistances that signifying a feminist counter public.

Finally, building on the qualitative findings, we worked with a market research firm to design and conduct a representative survey of London adults (2,012 respondents aged 18+ men and women who live in London, a representative sample by gender, age, religion, ethnicity, income brackets, and housing tenure). The survey measured attitudes and behaviours about advertising asking if respondents felt represented by advertising in London or not (according to gender, age, ethnicity, religion and sexuality); which elements of advertising they felt were problematic and those that they liked; and how they rated specific advertisements that had generated strong responses (negative and positive) in the qualitative findings. The survey data was incredibly important in being able to extend and support some of the key qualitative findings as we will show below, and to highlighted a main finding, which was sexualisation was the main reason people did not like advertisements.

We would like to note that through our process of carrying out, writing up and delivering 'acceptable' findings for government commissioned but corporate-sponsored research on gender, diversity and public advertising we engaged in many levels of negotiation and compromise. At times, we needed to fight our corner as feminist researchers for the voice of participants to be accurately represented. For example, at one point, we were asked to omit our findings on sexualisation in the report as we were told that that 'angle' had been overplayed in media coverage of the advertising controversy over Beach Body Ready. We pushed back strongly on this as our research opens up sexualisation as a complex intersectional phenomena experienced in different ways by diverse girls and women. Indeed, one of our main findings is that racialized sexualisation was experienced as problematic by women rather than evidence of 'diversity' (see Gill and Kanai, 2019) and inclusion in ways that was not yet foregrounded in the public discourse about sexism in advertising, and became one of our most important findings.

London Advertising: Failing to represent diversity and harmful sexualisation of women and girls

Although methodologically we completed the study with the survey we want to begin with the survey findings, as a way of communicating some of the broad trends and most significant findings in our study. First, the survey laid bare just how poorly London's advertising was regarded. Only one in three (27%) Londoners felt that adverts are relevant to them. Secondly, the survey showed how powerfully gender differences shaped experiences of representation in advertising, given the group that felt the best represented were men aged 18-34, with two thirds (69%) saying they felt 'very well' or 'fairly well' represented) whilst those that were feeling least represented were women over the age of 55, with 55% of women over 55 saying that they felt 'fairly badly' or 'very badly' represented. Third, the survey found less than half (48%) felt that advertisements adequately reflected the diversity of London, although three in four (75%) respondents thought that advertisements in London *should* reflect the diversity of the city's population. Further, 71% of Black Londoners said Black people are not well represented in London's advertising; and 61% of British Asian/Asian Londoners felt there was an under-representation Asian communities. Additionally, 43% of women and 37% of men felt that their religion was not well represented in London's advertising. Less than 1 in 4 respondents (21%) could remember ever seeing an advert of women wearing a hijab. We also found only 18% of survey participants could ever recall having seen an advertisement with a disabled person and only just over 1/3 (35%) of LGBT Londoners felt represented in London advertising.

This statistical backdrop shows an overwhelming sense of diversity lacking in London's advertising landscape. We then drilled down in the survey to explore respondent's views on content that they found problematic. One of the most significant survey findings, was that 'Sexualisation of women' was the top answer given as to why respondents disliked ads, with women in revealing clothing (36%) and then men in revealing clothes (34%) found as the least acceptable advertising content, even higher than respondents dislike of fast food products

(28%). In addition, 68% of Londoners said that women are often shown in revealing clothes when it's not relevant and almost half of participants (45%) could remember seeing adverts of women in swimwear in London vs less than one in three (28%) for men in swimwear. As Amy-Chinn (2006) has argued moral outrage over 'revealing clothing' could indicate social conservativism, but we complicate that perspective through our discussion of the qualitative findings on sexualisation with women and girls.

By further differentiating the findings by gender, we found that women had a more critical view of advertising than men. For instance, women are significantly more likely to say we see too many slim people (50% vs 36% men) and too many white people (36% vs 28% men) in adverts. Women are also significantly more likely to say they do not see enough disabled (65% vs 51% men), plus size people (59% vs 44% men) and older people (58% vs 50% men) in adverts. In addition, over half 51 % of women surveyed stated that their body shape is not represented in London advertisements compared to only 37% of men. Overall participants felt women suffered significantly more misrepresentation than men through being sexualised and photoshopped (96% of respondents thought the ads in the survey were photoshopped and 69% said companies should declare photoshopping). As we will go on to show as we proceed, many advertisements rated in the survey were seen as not diverse, unrealistic, sexist and sexualised in ways that made them unhealthy and unacceptable.

Advertising as Assaultative: An Intersectional Analysis of sexualisation

In April of 2018, we met Sierra at Kennington tube station. Sierra is a single mother of two, who identifies as Black British, she uses two sticks to support her walking, due to limited mobility, and on this rather windy day, she wore a black down jacket that rustled as she walked. We researchers were to accompany Sierra as she took a bus from the station to her local library. As we moved slowly towards the bus stop, we were immediately confronted with a large advertisement for American Apparel, which featured a large-scale image of a woman in Caucasian flesh-coloured underwear and black over the thigh socks, with the caption: "We're Back. To basics." (Figure D)

The advertisement fits the typology of sexualized confident gaze of the model addressing audience but what gaze would be invoked back? To understand this we need to employ an intersectional lens. Sierra stopped in front of the advert stating she was quite "shocked" and further:

> I thought they [American Apparel] really couldn't be so bold to put something like that on an advert for children to see, for adults to see, and I find sometimes that adverts can be quite sexual and it seems like they seem to be advertising more for sex than actually for the actual product...

In the survey, this advertisement stood out as second least liked of 8 advertisements rated. Only 29% liked it. It was also rated the most highly sexualised of all the advertisements by 63%

and 26% found it sexist. In her discussion of the advertisement, Sierra clarified several times that it wasn't herself that she was concerned about but she worried about the impact on her seven-year-old daughter and twelve-year-old son. This is an interesting tactic to deflect the cause of concern towards young people in danger of sexualisation (see also Amy-Chinn, 2006); but we also sensed Sierra's deep discomfort with the advertisement as a disabled, middle- aged Black woman who is not invoked to participate in the advertisement as a consumer. What she articulated, however, was that it was "very hard" to show "young girls...the right way" and she directly implicates advertisements and this struggle. In fact, she has instituted a rule in her household. When a targeted advertisement pops up on her daughter's tablet, they "turn it over". They slowly count to five and wait, before seeing if the add has passed. This is to mitigate the number of advertisements her daughter sees in a day. But, of course, this technique is utilized to limit advertisements appearing on personal media, presumably being consumed in personal/private space. We researchers wondered how this instinct to "turn it over" functioned, or (mal)functioned in public space, and how this technique might relate to the bus stop. We asked Sierra. "I can't flip it over", she stated frankly, "If it's something I can walk away from then I will, but ...when I was walking towards the bus stop, there is no way. I cannot avoid it really".

Sierra's experience with the American Apparel advertisement exemplifies Craig's comments about an inability to "turn a page" if something offends and Rosewarne's positioning of unwanted sexist advertisements as sexualizing the space around it in ways that are experienced as harassing. It is an advertisement that Sierra has cannot turn off or flip over, nor is she able to remove her seven-year-old daughter from an environment that she deems hostile (Rosewarne, 2007). The example illustrates in vivid detail just how public space is dissimilar to advertising in private space given turning adverts off isn't an option. Conceptually, we need to understand that public advertising holds a great deal of agentic force, and is experienced therefore as non-consensual and something that is imposed on people as they travel around the city.

Sierra's encounter was not the only instance of unwanted contact with this same type of sexualized-confident advertisements in this study. When we arrived at a girls' school in a South West London Suburb, we stepped off the closest tube station only to be met with a billboard advertisement for the clothing brand Boohoo. This advertisement, which appeared in two iterations showcased a thin, racially ambiguous woman, wearing a tasselled body suit that resembled a swimming costume, sunglasses and thigh-high high-heeled boots (Figure E).

Once inside the school, we asked the girls to discuss advertisements that they encountered on their journey to and from school. The conversation turned quickly to the Boohoo advert and one schoolgirl, Jen responded with the following:

> I don't really like adverts that like have loads of really showy off clothes, because I'm the sort of person that's very conscious about body and stuff and I also really hate wearing revealing stuff, seeing everything out, the clothes being revealing stuff...they [the Boohoo models] are really skinny, confident, models, who look, whose skin is amazing,

their hair is amazing and everything, then you see them in these revealing, really beautiful outfits, and it makes like everyone else feel worse about themselves.

This advertisement was the rated the second highest sexualised by 55% of respondents, and as sexist by 22% and unrealistic by 20%. Jen's narrative sheds light on how such advertisements are experienced by teen girls, as she articulates this relationship between sexualized images and body dissatisfaction. This experience is consistent with Marshall's (2017) and Zacharias (2016) work, which found that mediated images project an "ideal" that in turn can impact self-image. Further, her comment that the advertisement – positioned out front of the school's local train station – "makes everyone feel worse about themselves" is notable in that she is implicating not just her own experience but a wider peer group. That is, as she and her friends travel to school, past the Boohoo advertisement, the group of schoolgirls all feel "worse". In this way, the advert does not simply exist in isolation, but in fact impacts the entire space around it; the journey to school; the group's feeling about their bodies – and for those who, as Jen suggests feel "very conscious" about their bodies, this is significant.
Jen's friend Ashley then chimed in:

> Yah... I can't remember how many years ago, but it was a yellow like poster that was put up outside train stations and like billboards, and it was of a really like slim woman and they tried to promote that, if you're "beach body ready" you should be this slim, I didn't like it...that's the only way you can go to the beach and feel acceptable and comfortable.

Ashley links the Boohoo advert directly to the Protein World advert controversy and counter-feminist public activism. Both adverts, share the same 'confident appearing' aspirational typologies. Similar to the "Beach Body Ready" advert, the model in the Boohoo posters takes on the same power stance, with her thin legs spread apart. In one her hand is on her hips, in the other her groin thrust towards the viewer. Similar to Sierra's experience with the American Apparel advertisement, there is a non-consensual quality to Ashley's account, as she is bombarded with this type of advertising, it is on public transport, at the mall and outside the train station near to her school.

We asked Ashley if she was aware of the follow-up Protein World advertisement featuring Khloe Kardashian? She replied stating, "They clearly didn't listen", she stated. "like [the earlier version], it's so artificial, the body stereotype that they're putting out, saying Can You Keep Up With A Kardashian? No! Like...No."

This want to respond "no," to the questions proposed by Protein World was echoed by many women in this project. These answers, "No, I can't [keep up with a Kardashian]" or "No, I'm not [beach body ready]" were often met with a sense of frustration of exhaustion. Perhaps one of the most salient examples of this was a discussion we had with Saffron, a 22-year-old dance

student of Iranian descent, from Kingston. Below, Saffron responded to the initial protein world advertisement saying

> it just makes you feel really bad, 'cos like so many of us don't have that body, so it's like I can't go out to the beach without like a beach body ...[it]would actually like prevent me from going to a beach in my bikini, if I don't have that body

Saffron had an even stronger reaction another advertisement for protein supplements 'Think Small' (Figure F) which demonstrated the hyper, thin, confident white women typology:

> ...... it's saying that everyone should be small, like... that's the ideal body... that's what causes people to be so self-obsessed and negative and lose their self-esteem and become depressed and anxious... I've been so shocked since coming to uni at the amount of depression and anxiety... like in my dance course girls are like doing literally everything, they are taking pills instead of food, so they like swap it for like a meal. And then they weigh themselves and they get operations and stuff, like, and it's, really horrible...boob operations to make it smaller and stuff...so if you're curvy it's not...but even if you're normal, it's not like OK.

The "Think Small" advert was the least liked advertisement rated, with less than 1/3 of people liking the ad (28%). In addition, 29% found it unrealistic, 27% unhealthy, and 20% problematic. Saffron's narrative shows us the continuous burden this type of advertisement places on her and the fear and upset she and her friends experience in not being able to conform to 'think small'. When Saffron notes what influences her friends are models that are small and flat chested, and she in comparison is "not ready" for the beach, she is noting the impact of such images on her life actions and choice. She also refers to a "heavy [ness]" caused by such pressures. Pressures that apparently take her classmates to great extremes, such as swapping meals for slimming products (such as protein supplements) and undertaking cosmetic surgery to alter their bodies. Additionally, there is a repetitive quality to Saffron's experience. She mentions that she is "always comparing and always being told to be like skinny and small". This is what Rosewarne (2007) refers to as harassment due to the constant bombardment and potentially inescapable nature of public media. Unwanted advertising in public space can be unavoidable, oppressive and constant.

Racialized Sexualization – New impossible body ideals

Further examples of fatigue and frustration at this assaultive advertising emerged from 35-year-old Alexandra, who travelled with us on the night train home from Soho. During her encounter, she brought up the Protein World advertisement without prompting fairly early in the interview, and she also mentioned feeling upset that women were constantly being sexualised in ways irrelevant to the product, which corresponded to our survey data where 68% or 1 in 3 feel felt that showing in revealing clothes when it's not relevant was problematic.

Why is it women who look like they have either just had sex or want to have sex, and they are selling furniture…That is so offensive. Because she is nothing to do with this, I'm sick of seeing these beautiful women just post-coital, like you are trying to send me a chair, what the fuck has she got to do with a chair? I'm sorry, I'm swearing. It really, really gets me, the way women are portrayed in adverts

Alexandra continued:

Did you remember that one, the "Are You Beach Body Ready?" …Just what chance does a young girl have, like in just growing up normally, and learning her own way of being herself and being sexy... They are always looking for, "oh well have you got a stick thin waist but a massive arse, like a Kardashian?" No! Because I'm just a normal person, I don't have access to the surgery, the diet, the personal chef, or the workout thing. It's just exhausting being a woman, honestly.

Alexandra vacillates her between the 1) hyper-thin, white women, often fearlessly staring you down and a slightly different formation; and the 2) Kardashian ideal, which is also a form of confident woman but it is sexualized in a new way in the racialized body parts are in different proportion and composition ("stick thin waist but a massive arse") tend to be emphasized in the advertisements. These limited two types of acceptable displays of women are indicative of a narrow spectrum of representations of idealized femininity (Sastre, 2014). The damaging impacts of these limited options of acceptability were discussed by many participants throughout this study. Boohoo, discussed above, exploited this second body type through several editions of their advertisements which featured so-called 'plus- size models' typically in form-fitting attire. Another similar campaign from Pretty Little Things (Figure G) typically included one or more plus-size woman in an image together with a thinner body to highlight the contrast between the body-types. In each case racialized body parts breast and buttocks are hypersexualized alongside the confident gaze to the viewer, indeed in both cases, the models are looking down upon their audience. Interestingly, in the survey 48% of respondents liked this advertisement, which is significantly higher than the American Apparel or the Boohoo advertisements and it was seen as empowering by 18% and diverse by 17%. A similar Boohoo advertisement featured an image of female rap artist Stefflon Don (Figure H), However, rather than seeing these types of advertisements as inclusive or evidence of diversity, many of the girls and adult women we interviewed discussed finding these advertisements sexualised in ways that made them feel uncomfortable. For instance, we met Naomi at Wood Green station in North London to meet us and take us to her local music venue, "Green Rooms". Naomi is black British and lesbian and on this day she wore a black tam, black overalls and a white t-shirt with "Book a Beat" - her music booking company printed across the front. Naomi explicitly

discussed finding the darker skinned plus-size models as 'unrealistic' and specifically, she said of Boohoo advertisement's use of the hashtag #ShetheDon as 'racist':

> Right, so I mean one, you are stereotyping how all black people speak and look. Also, you've got a black chick and she is oversized in the areas which used to be, you know if you go back to colonization what the white men, European people were fascinated by about the Africans, the large bust, the large buttocks, large butts. You know.

An intersectional lens allows us to recognize multiplicity in the construction of sexy femininity and the expansion of the acceptable body to include forms of objectification operating through emphasis on the exoticized parts and exaggerated proportions used to capture the gaze and sell the product. The illusion here is a widening scope of racial diversity and body types in advertising, but this typology is itself very narrowly defined as our participants discussed. Rather than an example of racial diversity and inclusion, these are experienced as on the one hand stereotyping, and on the other as even more exclusionary new regime of impossible ideals to fulfil. The girls in the South West School said in relation to the Kardashians they were at the forefront of promoting a new ideal body type "slim- thick" profiled in the advertisements, as Ashley noted:

> This is an artificial ideal body type. They have created this thing known as slim thick where you've got a really tiny waist but at the same time you've got a big bum and big boobs and that's not scientifically possible to have that sort of waist so young girls seeing that its completely unrealistic without the money and surgery to produce that body.

The research literature has referred to Kardashian as employing a type of blackened 'racial mobility' as an ethnically white woman who "strategically embodies both the trope of the heavily regulated 'white' body and the trope of the curvaceous, exoticised, non-white (implicitly black) body" primarily through promotion of her "Armenian ass" as central asset (Sastre, 2014: 130).

At the second school, we visited in South East London, the girls also discussed this hybrid body type showcased by the Kardashians without any prompting from us. They explicitly linked the pressure around the Kardashian body type to the family's use of Instagram and social media to influence their followers by promoting diet and exercise products (Abdin, 2016). Nimisha articulates Kardashian archetype below:

> These women, their body looks like, like...Their waist is like itsy wincey, their hips go out, and their bums are really big and they've got a flat stomach, so it's like bodycon, right? So these people promote it, and they've got insane bodies, and they are trying to say like if you want to look this good buy fashion label jeans. But it's like...just because her body looks nice in it it doesn't mean my body would look nice in it.

Nimisha clearly calls out the resources and techniques needed to obtain this body and went on critique advertisements like the Protein World as misrepresenting and 'lying' about the product. The use of a Kardashian in a paid product advertisement sits in the wider frame of reference of the family's celebrity influencing through social media product placement (Abdin, 2016), which girls felt was deceitful because they often conceal that the celebrity is being paid:

>Ashley: I think like fashion has become not even about the clothes, but like the body that's wearing it... and then we get the wrong idea about what a body should look like.

>Nimisha: Yah, it has nothing to do with the jeans...but it sort of wears you down, when you've seen it over and over again, it isn't real, it is lies but it just wears you down so often.

>Shanaza:...she's showing the shake when obviously she goes to the gym every morning and she works hard to get her body like that...don't like trick people ...

With the same reference to duplicity and fatigue, the girls discuss a process of 'being worn down' by the repetition of the adverts, (for fashion, beauty, and slimming products) and the feeling that what is being sold to them is a body trend. Despite knowing the bodies are not real, the pressure makes you feel you may want to buy and try the products, even if you can't afford them as many girls mentioned not being able to afford the products and not having the resources to achieve these 'looks', signalling important class processes embedded in this beauty labour (Elias et al., 2017). Responding, the girls make an explicit appeal for a different form of advertising, one that will not create a sense of shame, lack and inferiority for girls and young women. Indeed, their collaging images seized upon their anger against this shaming asking powerful questions. We asked the girls to alter the images in any way they chose. The collage showcases these alterations by repeatedly challenging the mode of address in the advertisements.

This first collage (Figure 1) snapshot shows 'living doll' scrolled across the flattened tummy of the beach body ready model, and a pink arrow points directly to the advertisements' questioni mark stating "so unrealistic." And answers the question with the factual statement: "you can go to the beach with anybody. You do not need to be skinny to wear a swimsuit." The colleague also boldly proclaims 'NOT ONE BODY TYPE" in defiance of the advertisements imperative. They even challenge the foundational norms that make it unremarkable for a woman to be displayed in a bikini by contrasting this with representations of men who get to wear "normal clothes".

Another collage (Figure 2) worked upon the two Protein World advertisements side by side. Beach body ready has a pink strip with "thigh gap again" over the thigh/crotch. The Kardashian advert has multiple arrows tagged to the figure with "clearly photoshopped" pointing to the waist, "Possible plastic" pointing to the buttocks; and "unnatural, most if not all have hair" pointing to the hairless upper thigh/groin area. A large Pink Arrow points to directly to the slogan "Can you keep up with a Kardashian"stating:"Hair...knowntobefakeandperfected". The sarcastic statement "probably never tried one lollll" points directly to the bottle of protein

capsules. In these ways, the girls clearly undermine the truth claims generated in the advertisement between buying the product and achieving the body, a direct rejoinder to the advertising trickery discussed at length in the interviews. In response to both the advertisements' questions, the girls repeatedly ask-back the foundational de-normalising questions: "why do I need to have this body?" "Is this what my body has to look like?"

Though the girls remained anonymous throughout the project, by way of the collages, they were able to talk back or 'craft back' their views to the public as their images appear in our public report and the collages were displayed prominently at the research launch. These collages generate a critical feminist discourse of disbelief and sarcasm (Rentschlar and Thrift, 2015), but also statements of defiance – all integral aspects of articulating a feminist counter public via a critical feminist vocabulary or set of discourses that refuse normative exclusions and call for something different to be valued.

Conclusion: Staying with the trouble in feminist research

Responding to negative feedback about not only the super-thin white yellow bikini body, but the hypersexualized and racialized Kardashian figure*, Protein World* released a new advertisement in 2018, which featured a diverse collection of mixed gendered individuals in various exercise routines on the London waterfront. This was particularly clear on their Instagram videos, which showcase a collective of people saying "everybody starts", and then, "everybody struggles"; and further, "everybody juggles" as a new mother attempts to do yoga with a newborn strapped to her chest; and finally, the affirmative statement, "everybody works". The success of this shift was seen in the survey results, which showed this was the most liked advertisement rated 66%, moreover the ad garnered dramatically improved results with double (48%) thinking this advertisement was 'healthy' compared to only 24% for 'think small' In addition 38% found the ad cool, 33% inspiring, 33% diverse and 27% empowering. Amongst the interview participants, many also found it was a dramatic improvement from the yellow bikini and the Chloe Kardashian body suit adverts. Laura, a 28- year-old disabled nurse from Park Royal who was shocked by the lack of representation of disability in the advertising industry, said she, was glad to see representations of what she deemed to be "real" people. "...There is just, you know, it looks like a group of people going out doing like a run or training or something, which you do see." Further, Naomi from Wood Green found the new Protein World advertisement to be a positive step forward in an attempt to diversify representations in advertisements.

> Yes. Yes. I mean you've got a normal sized female, they haven't gone all-out with, you know, putting someone that's X+ or anything, it's multicultural, he's not pumped up, she's not slim, they're not all naked, they are wearing normal sportswear gear, as opposed to over-sexualising.

However, not all participants (or survey respondent) saw the new advertisement as evidence of more diversity and inclusion. Alexandra, for example, felt that this advertisement could not

repair the damage done previously by the company: "...to be honest I can't believe they are still going as a company, I think that they should've been boycotted and shut down". Alexandra's comments highlight how damaging sexist campaigns can be to a brand and also raise questions about how substantive Protein Word's "affirmative advertising" (Gill and Kanai, 2019) transformation actually was. As Gill and Kanai warn advertisements may offer one aspect of difference, such as skin colour, but do not fundamentally challenge idealised bodies and postfeminist aspirational ideals. In this new advert there appeared to be no differently abled bodies, no age diversity and the body size diversity was minimal. Academic critiques of ''postfemininist' and affirmative advertising' that cannot make radical "material, political, cultural or economic changes" or respond adequately to "racism or classism or Islamophobia" therefore remain salient, but we do not think that the conversation can usefully end there.

We are concluding our paper in the midst of a competition which has been called to create more positive and inclusive campaigns. We do not yet know the outcome of this intervention and in some ways, this final outcome is irrelevant. Indeed, the point of our taking on a project like this was to enter into debate to perhaps create small shifts in understanding through our conceptual interventions, granular and microforms of change-making that 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016). We felt an ethical response-ability (Barad) to work with the troublesome range of stakeholders we were faced with as part of a multifaceted and complex process of intervening into public debates. We have outlined our process of becoming involved in this wider terrain of struggle, and we would argue that our unique contribution as feminist academic researchers was to bring an intersectional lens to our findings. By communicating the complexity of how sexualised and racialised advertising is experienced by diverse women, we were able to pierce through a discussion of sexism and sexualisation, *in general*, to show its varied specific effects, particularly for women of colour. We were also able to empirically support the critique of affirmative diversity advertising to show that homogenization of women works through compulsory sexualisation, still reducing women to their body parts, albeit in new seemingly more inclusive ways (bigger body parts, different skin shades) (see also Authors et al., 2018). The headlines generated from the research launch such as "London women feel sexualized and ignored by brands" discussed how new idealized bodies were creating pressures for some and exclusions for others, highlighted the intersectional nuances of how advertisements are experienced in widely divergent ways in a super diverse metropolis like London (Stewart, 2018). We were also able to discuss the non-consensual element of public advertising with a range of stakeholders, and this concept of women's inability to "turn the page", which showed the diverse, harmful effects of advertisements in space and time and highlighted the need for greater government and corporate accountability (Ibid).

The overall aim of our involvement was not then some utopic transformation of advertising, which is after all aimed at selling products to an ever-widening consumer base. Rather our goal as feminist researchers was to engage with the government and commercial entities in order to contribute to the debate with what we think could be done better, be more just and less discriminatory, based on our empirical research findings. Returning to Butler's performative publics discussed in our introduction, publics are forms of relational association. Counter publics rise up to intervene into dominant normative understandings, and they can create new

forms of solidarity that respond to 'exclusions' and promote better forms of 'participatory parity' (Fraser, 2007). Thus, challenging the norms of advertising, holding corporate brands and commercial entities accountable is part of an ongoing feminist struggle over what is harmful and unacceptable about the representation of and experiences of women and girls in contemporary societies and what is possible for us to change in our specific context, space and place.

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