



Objectification of Women in Sportswear Brands' Instagram Accounts

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Introduction. Recently, technology has changed the online environment dramatically and the use of social media has proliferated. While social media advances people's lives, it also creates problems. For example, in western cultures like the U.S., women and girls are commonly sexualized (Graff, Murnen, & Krause, 2013) and sexually objectifying images spread through social media. This increases the likelihood that people (especially women and girls) will compare to others and self-objectify (Aubrey, 2006; Hanna et al., 2017), with potentially negative effects. One industry known for its sexually objectifying images in advertising is the women's apparel industry and sportswear brands advertise heavily social media. For example, Nike ranks first in number of followers on Instagram ("Leading fashion brands," 2017). With the growth of the women's athletic industry (Chitrakorn, 2017), there may be an increased presence of women in ads for sportswear brands, including social media targeting women. However, an increased presence of women in social media ads means an increased likelihood for female consumers to encounter images that evoke self-objectification (Prichard & Tiggeman, 2008).

Related Literature. Women make up 40% of the sports population in the U.S., but less than 2% of television media coverage has featured women, such as televised sporting events and commercials (Kane, 2013) and the proportion of coverage of women's sports on televised news has declined in the past 25 years (Cooky, Messner, & Hextrum, 2013). The lack of presence of female athletes delivers a misleading message that women are not capable of sports participation and therefore are excluded from the sports culture (Kane, 2013). Media presentations of women in sports are closely associated with sexual appearance (Reichart Smith, 2016). Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) states that women in sexually saturated cultures such as western culture are treated as objects and evaluated through the gaze of others. According to the theory, women can be objectified in media depictions. Objectification of women athletes occurs when more emphasis is placed on the physical appearance and attractiveness of the athlete rather than her athletic performance (Reichart Smith, 2016). The purpose of this research was to describe how women are depicted in sportswear ads on one social media platform, Instagram. Two research questions guided the research: (1) To what extent are women, as compared to men, featured in sportswear brands on Instagram? and (2) What is the extent of objectification of women in sportswear brands on Instagram?

Method. A content analysis was conducted of ads from sportswear brands' Instagram accounts. Ads featuring only women or only men from the top 5 sportswear brands were selected for coding ("Top 10 sports brands," 2017). From the primary official Instagram accounts of Nike, Adidas, Dick's Sporting Goods, Under Armour, and Puma 1,000 ads were selected, with 200 ads from each of the brands. Ads dated from October 1, 2017. These 1,000 ads were

analyzed to answer Research Question 1. Research Question 2 was assessed using 500 women-only ads (100 ads from each brand dated from October 1, 2017). A coding sheet was developed to code women's images in the ads based on previous research (Goodin, Denburg, Murnen & Smolak, 2011; Webb, Vinoski, Warren-Findlow, Burrell & Putz, 2017). Aspects coded included body visibility, body shape and size, revealing clothing, active pose, and the extent to which the image in the ad emphasized breasts and hips. These aspects were previously used to assess sexualizing characteristics in clothing and objectifying images on yoga magazine covers. Two coders were trained to assess women's objectification in the sportswear ads and achieved a 90% agreement rate. The coders negotiated the disagreements and evaluated every coding result.

Results and Discussion. Out of 1,000 ads, some featured only women ($f = 298$), only men ($f = 411$), both men and women ($f = 25$), or no people ($f = 266$). To compare percentages of women-only ads to the men-only ads, we considered the subset of ads with only one person ($f = 709$); women were featured in 42% of those ads and men were featured in 58%. Thus, on average women are featured in these ads at a rate consistent with their sports participation (about 40%), answering Research Question 1. Examination of frequencies by brand revealed that Adidas ($f_w = 90, f_M = 81$) and Dick's Sporting Goods ($f_w = 68, f_M = 49$) had more women-only ads than men-only ads. However, Nike ($f_w = 57, f_M = 90$), Under Armour ($f_w = 35, f_M = 139$), and Puma ($f_w = 48, f_M = 52$) had fewer women-only ads only men-only ads. To address Research Question 2, the number of women-only ads that were objectifying was compared to the total of ads featuring only one person. There were 167 objectifying images of women (33.4% of all ads featuring one person), with Nike as the brand with the most ($f = 195, 39%$) objectifying images and Dick's Sporting Goods as the brand with the least ($f = 115, 23%$). Thus, more than a third of the women-only ads in the top five sportswear brands on average were objectifying.

Conclusions, Implications, and Significance. On average, the top 5 sportswear brands are using women in their ads consistent with the percentage of women who participate in sports, but the individual brands are inconsistent in their use of women and men in their ads. We encourage sportswear brands to consider ways of promoting access to sports participation for all women with emphasis on their athletic ability. Nike, Adidas and Under Armour as leading sportswear brands should take responsibility to promote to both men and women with a healthy fitness image, especially since these companies want to market to women. The fact that over a third of all ads featured an objectified image could lead female viewers to self-objectify. Self-objectification has many negative effects, one of which is that objectification focuses women on what their bodies look like, instead of on what their bodies can do (i.e., athletic feats). This could discourage sport participation by women and girls. Thus, objectifying sportswear ads could hamper female athletes' abilities because the athletes could be concerned about their appearances to the detriment of their concentration in their sport. We encourage sportswear brands to focus on women's athletic abilities when they are featured in ads and refrain from using objectifying images. In so doing, sportswear brands may help female athletes improve their athletic performance, encourage more women and girls to participate in sports, and educate the public not to view female athletes through an objectifying lens.

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