An Analysis of Sexualisation of Women in Fashion Advertisements Today from an Irish Female Millennials' Perspective

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Abstract

In recent decades, sexualisation within advertising has become the forefront of many research papers discussing its use and effects on both men and women. Women who appear is such advertisements are often portrayed as sexual objects which has led to the decreased internalised sexualisation of young women viewing these advertisements. However, with the rise of post feminism many postfeminist women have learnt to embrace their sexuality and use it to their advantage.

This study aims to explore the sexualisation of women in fashion advertisements today from an Irish Female Millennials' perspective. Specific attention has been given to the participants' attitudes in relation to sexualisation particularly in regards to sexual stimuli, purchase intention and body image. Primary research was conducted using the research method of group interviews, participants were chosen in respective of their working class. This made for an interesting study where findings had the possibility to differentiate based on participant's socio economic backgrounds. Overall, it was found that secondary level educated working class participants were quiet passive when it came to the specified topic, whereas third level educated participants were able to discuss the topic of sexualisation at length.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, who I am ever grateful for her never ending love, support, encouragement and most importantly her patience, especially during my overwhelmingly stressed moments. Where she could see the light at the end of the tunnel even when I could not. I would not have been able to complete this course without her and for that I am forever thankful.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The focus of this dissertation is to analyse the effects that fashion advertisements, which show women in a sexual manner, have on Irish female millennials. Millennial females, for the purpose of this study, will be defined as Irish women aged between twenty and thirty-five. Irish women were chosen for this research due to the availability of information and accessibility to participants that were readily available to the researcher. Participants chosen for the study are carefully decided upon based on their backgrounds, which then placed them into one of two group interviews. The first group is chosen according to their level of education, while the other from their respective working class. The reason being for having differentiating groups is because the researcher hopes to understand if having a third level qualification influences or effects individuals' attitudes towards sex appeals in fashion advertising. Fashion advertisements were chosen as a focal point for this research as many fashion brands turn to sex appeals to further their publicity (Reichert, 2002).

The effects this style of advertising can have on the above-chosen sample can range from body shame and internalized sexualisation to low self-esteem and an altered ideology of the culturally accepted view of beauty. The researcher hopes to gather an understanding of the thoughts and opinions these female millennials have regarding sexualisation in advertising and how they themselves think this topic can affect not only them but their peers. While also learning if they are passive or assertive when being exposed to such a topic. While gaining an insight into these effects is the main aim of this research, it is important to note that the overall intention of this project is to be able to advise the fashion industry, whether the use of sexual content is, in fact, the best course of action for creative executions in the future. Sexualizing women in this manner may seem like it will create positive and relatable recognition for the product or service being advertised but is it worth it if the effects found on millennial females are far greater, which in return can create bad publicity for the business.

The key literature used in this study has identified that the support for the use of sex in advertising has been in a decline in recent years with females having feelings of dissatisfaction in regards to their own appearances (Bower, 2001). But while many authors agree with such statements (Kayoung, 2014; Malik, 2016; Reichert, 2003; Panda, 2005; Mayer and Baek, 2017) others have also argued that a new generation of postfeminists have actually begun to embrace their sexuality and sexualisation in advertising (Levy, 2006; Gill, 2003; Hakim, 200). Throughout the literature review in the next chapter, an understanding of both sides of this argument has been set out. While also the theory of Social Comparison Theory by Festinger (1954), is used to help understand how people have a need to feel accepted by their peers and will often compare themselves to said peers (Wood, 1989). Body image and Social Comparison Theory (SCT) link perfectly together showing how comparisons made based upon appearance against celebrities, models or others can have an effect on an individuals' own thoughts (Gulas and McKeage, 2000).

Gill (2008) suggests that using sex to sell a product or service is as old as advertising itself, but the recent rise of sex being used in advertising has been thought to be due to increased availability and volume of pornography (Sorensen, 2005). Though not all sexual stimuli used in advertising is overt, many advertisements classed as sexual also use subtle stimuli (Reichert and Ramirez, 2000). Both levels of stimuli can generate considerable amounts of publicity, therefore it is up to the advertisers to decide whether they should use either in their creative executions. Hakim's (2011) theory of Erotic Capital has also been used throughout to show how women can exploit their sex appeal to further themselves in life, whether it be for personal reasons or career purposes. This study also examines sexual agency and internalized sexualisation in regards to how it can be harmful to a women's mental health (Gill, 2007).

This area of research was chosen due to the researcher having a personal interest in the chosen topic after having witnessed the physical and mental

effects this style of advertising can have on their contemporaries. The highly subjective nature of this study warranted a post-positivist interpretivist approach utilising in-depth group interviews as the data collection device. The intention of this study is to analyse the effects sexualisation can have on Irish female millennials, while also gaining insight into whether such appeals can affect both personal views of fashion brands and an individual's purchasing habits.

To conduct this research, the researcher intends to adopt a qualitative research method of group interviews for data collection. Participants were chosen using convenience sampling and interview structure was semi-structured in nature allowing for necessary probing and interpretation. The overall research question for conducting primary research was *"what effects does the sexualisation of women within fashion advertisements today have on Irish Female Millennials'?"* To answer this, the research question was then split up into three sub-objectives surrounding the topics of; sexual stimuli, purchase intention, and body image. Each objective was then used to help provide an answer to the overall research question.

With the help of the sub-objectives the primary data findings revealed that participants from the target sample were able to understand and explain the different forms of sexual stimuli, in their own words, while also bringing in other aspects like advertising laws which can influence the level of sexual stimuli used by brands'. Both groups asserted that sexualised advertisements would have very little effect on their purchase intentions, stating that they were mostly passive towards sexualised advertisements. Participants were found to be able to discuss body image and the negative mental health-related effects that correlated with sexualisation within fashion advertisements with ease, even discussing any issue they felt surrounded the topic. With the help of the three sub-objectives, it is felt that the research question was sufficiently answered.

Chapter 2 - Literature review

2.1 Overview of Sex in advertising

The use of sexualisation in advertisements precedes the 1850's (Reichert, 2002) as a means to purvey products such as tobacco, alcohol, and fragrances (Reichert and Lambaise, 2003). Typically, the type of sexual content used to advertise products involves two different types of stimuli that consumers themselves interpret as sexual. The two types of stimuli can be categorised as either overt or subtle (Reichert and Ramirez, 2000). Overt stimuli displayed within adverts usually involve physically attractive models who are dressed in a provocative manner (Reichert and Ramirez, 2000). Subtle stimuli are usually less direct, involving innuendos and suggestive meanings, which then requires the observer to interpret the intended reference themselves (Reichert and Ramirez, 2000). However, advertising can also contain elements of both types of stimuli (Reichert and Ramirez, 2000).

Advertisers seeking to attain a higher level of publicity for their product will often turn to sex appeals (Reichert, 2002). Many brands have used sexual appeals in their advertising to boost publicity such as Calvin Klein, Dolce and Gabbana, Gucci and American Apparel. It should be noted that there are also many well-known brands that use sexual appeals to promote products that typically would not be associated with sex, for example, in 2009 Burger King ran an advertising campaign for their new sub the 'Super Seven Incher' (See appendix 8.1). This included an image of a woman looking provocatively at the sandwich (Time, 2018), which was branded as extremely controversial. Therefore, it must be noted that while a brand may seek publicity through the use of sexualised imagery, the attention that may be gained might not always be taken in the positive manner hoped for (Sherman and Quester, 2005).

Reichert and Lambaise (2003) have outlined three main sexual themes that sexualised advertising can fall into. The first theme is 'sexual attractiveness' where an advert displays a model who is viewed as sexually attractive because of the product they are displayed using. In regards to the fashion industry and

the use of sexualisation to target females, attractive female models wearing stylish clothes are used to create such a 'sexual attractiveness' theme. Which then often creates a certain ideology of if 'you wear these clothes too, you can look this beautiful' (Malik, 2016). The second theme consists of 'sexual behaviour' which implies that the model/models used in the chosen advertisement would be likely to participate in a sexual activity after using the displayed product (Reichert and Lambaise, 2003). For example, Calvin Klein use the theme of 'sexual behaviour' excessively in their advertisement campaign as can be seen in their 2014 '#mycalvins' campaign (See appendix 8.2) with celebrity singer Justin Bieber, displaying their own brand jeans and underwear. The advertisement implies that Justin would be likely to participate in some sexual activity with the female model featured in the advert, after wearing such clothing (Vogue, 2015). The last sexual theme is 'sex esteem' which emphasizes and implies that the model used in the advert has internalized their sexuality according to the product they are using (Reichert and Lambaise, 2003). Hence, if anyone at all were to use such a product they will feel sexier and gain more confidence as a result.

2.2 Women in advertising

It has been demonstrated that women who appear in contemporary advertising, whether print or digital in nature, are presented in a more provocative way compared to their male counterparts (Monllos, 2017). This use of sex appeal in regards to how women are advertised has over the decades become more prominent in the fashion industry (Reichert, 2003). Due to the growth of sexualisation found in advertisements, key authors (Reichert, 2003; Panda, 2005; Mayer & Baek, 2017) have highlighted how this style of advertising can affect how young females compare themselves to such advertisements. The overriding message that is being received from this style of advertising is that women should forever be sexually available, constantly have sex on their minds and expect to be 'gazed' upon as sexual objects not as peers (Merskin, 2004, Mulvey, 1975).

Many decades ago the potent use of sexualisation was limited to pornography, but now can be found in mainstream films, television shows and advertising (Gill,2003). Body positions, facial expressions, sexual power relationships and even the clothes being worn in advertising, has led to women in advertising being publicized as forever sexually available, who's only objective is to present themselves as sexual objects (Stankiewicz and Roselli, 2008). However, with this ideal of 'female empowerment' and feminism becoming more predominant in contemporary young woman's life it is obvious that the effectiveness of this media content is bound to be questioned (Gill, 2003).

Researchers, dating all the way back to 2001 have already noted that the use of highly attractive women is unquestionably favourable when it comes to advertising certain products or services (Bower, 2001). But, the support that justifies just how effective this is has been contested in recent years (Levy, 2005). Concerns around this topic vary from the different effects sexualised portrayals of females can have on young girl's self-esteem to issues of feeling a 'sense of inadequacy' which can lead to mental illness problems (Martin, 1997). These issues have in fact been reported on, with many of the young female respondents expressing that they do in fact compare themselves regularly to clothing models seen in advertisements, which leaves them feeling dissatisfied with their own appearances (Bower, 2001). This idealisation encountered ranged from wanting the same body or facial features as imbued by the model portraying the garments (Martin, 1997). These comparisons have also lead to feelings of anxiety and frustration in relation to why these women don't look the same way as the models they compare themselves too (Stankiewicz and Roselli, 2008).

2.3 Female Empowerment and Post Feminism

Hakim (2000) states that women have 'never had it so good', meaning women have a greater level of empowerment than ever before. With traditional mores of how a woman should be seen or behave being discarded, women are now allowed to make their own informed choices based on their individuality

being re-discovered and used to its full advantage (Lewis and Simpson, 2017). New-wave postfeminists reportedly act on their own individual wants and needs consciously making decisions on life choices that will affect their lives. But now these decisions are being made with their own free will and not being made for them (Hakim, 2000). These postfeminist women are now empowered. If a woman wants to dress a certain way or act in a certain manner, to a certain degree she is free to do so without being told her choices are not her own (Lewis and Simpson, 2017).

In response to the rise of female empowerment, many of these women are now actively seeking out and exploring their sexuality and actively utilising exploitative advertising to their own ends in publicly way (Toolman, 2002). Women are now increasingly being depicted as being in control and liberated regardless of the setting they find themselves in (Gill, 2008). Women are now taking up active roles in such advertisements too, they have since gone from being viewed as sexual objects to becoming active subjects (Goldman, 1992). Women are allowing themselves to become active subjects as it suits their newly liberated interests (Gill, 2008). This change can be noted in the 1994 Wonderbra advert, which hailed the phrase "is that a gun in your pocket? Or are you just pleased to see me?" (Gill, 2008, pp. 42). The mode of depiction used in this advert was that of knowing 'active subject' using their sexual power to 'grab' male attention (Gill, 2008). Empowered new-wave feminists are currently treating this empowerment as a project and testing the parameters of how far it can be exploited to suit their own agenda. Whether it be by dressing in provocative ways or acting in a sexual manner in direct rebellion to traditional patriarchal values (Gill, 2008).

2.4 Feminism

Feminism has experienced three 'waves'; First-wave feminism focused on women asserting equal rights. Second-wave feminism extended much-needed equality rights into sexuality and work (Choi, Yoo, Reichert and LaTour, 2016). Lastly, contemporary or post-feminism has now evolved into third-wave feminism wherein women seek to embrace their sexuality and use it to

their own advantage (Choi, Yoo, Reichert, and LaTour, 2016). Sexuality is now seen as a strong force, where these women see themselves as the dominant sex (Zimmerman and Dahlberg 2008). Booth (1999) claims the reason that men continue to portray women as sexual objects is because they are striving to gain back their dominance that they have since lost. Whereas postfeminist women agree with this claim but all the while believe that women should be allowed to do what they want no matter what others, including men, think of their choices (Booth, 1999). Therefore, a woman could display herself sexually as long as the choice is made using her own free will, otherwise it is not acceptable as said woman has not consented to be displayed in such a manner (Booth,1999) In fact, it has been found that women who consider themselves postfeminists now prefer sexual adverts over non-sexual because they view them as different and fun compared too normal 'boring' advertisements (Choi *et al,* 2016).

While certain postfeminists do realize that women are still being sexually objectified, they also realize that sexuality is to be embraced and enjoyed (Choi *et al, 2016).* Many academic researchers (Cheng and Zucker, 2007; Zimmerman and Dahlberg 2008; Williams and Jovanovic 2015) have even reported that feminists react in a more positive way towards sexual stimuli. The females that had featured in this research had also displayed higher levels of sexual satisfaction than those who did not consider themselves feminists. Though it may seem like the majority of postfeminists are interested and enjoy sexualisation in culture many are still against it. Academic feminists like Levy (2005) has created a strong argument against sexualisation and 'raunch culture'. Levy (2005) claims that the sexualisation of women is being 'repackaged' as empowerment. Principally saying that new-wave feminists have learnt to accommodate and embrace their sexual objectification instead of continuing the fight to be seen as something more than just a sexual representation (Gill, 2009). Often actively seeking to gain further insights into how sexual objectification can be used for their own benefit leading to the concept of Erotic Capital.

2.5 Erotic Capital

Hakim's (2011) theory of 'Erotic Capital' is based on the ideology that women's personal assets such as beauty, interpersonal skills, and sexual attractiveness have the potential to leverage them above others if considerably superior. However, Hakim (2011) also states that the potential power that women possess was in the past inhibited due to cultural stereotypes and stigma which regard men as having an advantage over women. This is due to men being considered as the authoritatively superior gender when it comes to the workplace or bedroom. But with the rise of post-feminism women are using the female resource of sexuality that is erotic capital to uproot patriarchal privilege to overcome gender inequalities (Green, 2012). Stating that in the 21st century a woman's erotic capital is equal to their human capital (Hakim, 2011) allowing them to overcome social and economic issues and assume rightful gender equality (Hakim, 2011).

This theory of erotic capital has been heavily criticised (Boesveld, 2011; Donahue, 2011; Odone, 2011), with many feminist writers (Williams, 2011; MadamJ-Mo, 2011) condemning Hakim's (2011) work. Much of this is mainly due to the theory suggesting that today's patriarchal society is, in fact, run by men, conspicuously overlooking hard-fought feminist tribulations which have long conspired against this ideology and announcing that gender in today's society should be equal (Green, 2012). While Hakim (2011) exclaims that women should have the ability to close this gap with the help of their erotic capital.

In her theory, Hakim (2011) suggests that erotic capital is achievable by all women as long as they invest time and effort into actively playing to patriarchal values. It is stated that the characteristics needed to achieve erotic capital come from both an individual's nature and their nurture, therefore if nature has not been so kind to a woman than they can turn to make-over experts, personal trainers and plastic surgeons to improve their erotic capital (Green, 2012). Overall erotic capital is not just limited too different social and

economic circumstances but rather to a women's own personal initiative and effort (Hakim, 2011).

2.6 Sex Sells

Sex as a tool to sell is not a new method of selling (Gill,2008). By displaying women as objects in 'raunchy' poses or clothing it is said to create a desire in men and women to own the product being advertised (Levey, 2006). In men, it is said to make them feel as like if they own the product they too can attract such women. Whereas in women it will supposedly make them feel as if they themselves are similar to such attractive models.

As outlined in the previous section, women are having their say surrounding the topic of contemporary sexualisation more than ever before (Reichert, 2002). Though these voices have to lead to a rethink of the way certain products are advertised, it has not yet convinced many major corporate brands to undertake this development.

One of the main reasons why sexual appeals and the sexualisation of women is favoured by advertisers is because it catches consumers' attention (Reichert, 2002). It has been suggested that by utilising female sexual appeals in advertisements, consumers' attention will be drawn towards the advert which will in return generate awareness of the brand being advertised (Reichert, 2002). Research conducted over the years around the topic of whether sex actually does sell has resulted in a lot of inconsistencies. For instance, where Reichert (2002) acknowledges sex can sell if applied appropriately, whereas other academics (Bangiorno, Bain, and Haslam, 2013; Horgan, Herzog, Grey, Latrielle and Lindemulder, 2017) criticise this theory. They argue that sex does not sell by suggesting that sexualised imagery of women used in advertising decreases purchase intentions due to consumers viewing the brand being perceived as less credible for using such sexualised images (Bangiorno, Bain, and Haslam, 2013; Horgan, Herzog, Grey, Latrielle and Lindemulder, 2017). However, many large advertising companies still continue to use such tactics (Sherman and Quester, 2005; Lin, 1998; Severn

and Belch, 1990). Overall the rationale behind any advertisement is to try to make the product more attractive to consumers, which in return will generate profit. It has been suggested that sexual imagery and suggestiveness in advertising has been found to be quite effective (Gould, 1994). Though only so, when the product being advertised is related to sex. When the product is not related, the use of sex in the advert can take away from the key message (Severn and Belch, 1990).

Research conducted by Reichert, Heckler, and Jackson (2001) has uncovered that while the use of sexual appeals can increase brand awareness it can also decrease product information processing. While the sexual stimuli used is overt, interesting and engaging the customer does not actually process the product and the brand shown. Therefore, a customer might remember the advert due to the overt sexualised imagery used but not actually remember what is being advertised (Severn, Belch, and Belch, 1990). Hence, there is no real research stating that because sexual imagery is attention-grabbing, messaging processing will increase (Reichert *et al*, 2001). In fact, Reichert, Lambaise, Morgan, Castarphen and Zavoina (1999) have criticised using sex to sell due to the negative effects that can be associated with this technique, including negative attitudes in relation to the advertisements which can affect purchase intention. In contrast to this, advertisers may ignore such warnings and advertise using sexual imagery if they predict it will return a profit (Severn *et al, 1990).*

In recent years the growth of more 'media-savvy' consumers and with the increase of women becoming more financially independent and stable it has led to a re-think in the way advertisers aim to reach their consumers (Gill, 2008). While in the past it may have been acceptable to sell sex in advertising as straight up sexualisation, including nudity and sexual images, with intentions being to make the women look more attractive to their male counterparts. Now advertisers have strategically tried to shift the sexualisation on to females own ideologies of themselves (Gill, 2003). In the fashion industry today many brands will play on women's views of their own body image and as well as their own internalized sexualisation in order to

advertise specific products and clothing. Or in other words emphasizing a women's 'sexual agency', especially towards products targeted at young women (Gill, 2003). This use of sex to sell in this manner can be produced from something as simple as advertising a 'little black dress' that sells not only the product but the ideology that this dress can help a woman improve their sexual self-esteem and confidence (Gill, 2008).

2.7 Sexual Agency

A woman's' sexual agency is said to be a deception of their own self-objectification rather than being sexually objectified by anyone else (Halliwell, Malson and Tischner, 2011). Though, in response to this Gill, (2007) argues that sexual agency can be more harmful to a woman's mental health than passive sexual objectification alone. This is due to the pressure an individual has put upon themselves to actively look for sexual approval (Gill, 2007). If a man were to look at a woman, the woman would internally think that the man is looking at only them (Halliwell *et al,* 2011). Which is called the male gaze phenomenon, where women think that men who look upon them are looking for visual pleasure or as a sexual object (Halliwell *et al,* 2011). The idea of sexual agency has also been deeply critiqued, partially due to this ideology which partners with empowerment. Seabrook, Ward, Cortina, Giaccardi, and Lippman (2017) have argued the idea of sexual agency suggesting that women can feel uncomfortable when having to take control and assert sexual desires as culture has told them to prioritize men's desires first, which therefore can mean sexual agency is easily diminished. In contrast to this Gill (2008) advocates for sexual agency believing that it gives women a welcoming shift away from female stereotyping and objectification (Gill, 2008).

It has been suggested that having high levels of sexual objectification in the media can affect young women's sexual well-being (Tolman, 1999). Which has meant that their sexual agency or sex esteem has lessened (Ward, Seabrook, Grower, Giaccardi and Lippman, 2018). In contrast of this Gill (2008) has said that with the rise of post-feminism women are now seen as

being in control and exploiting their sexual agency to its fullest potential. Tolman (1999) has discussed that there is scientific proof which relates objectification and sexual agency. Stating that young women decide themselves whether they let such objectification affect their sexual agency.

2.8 Sexual Objectification

"Sexual objectification is a ubiquitous phenomenon whereby women are reduced to the status of mere instruments insofar as sexualized evaluations of women" (Calogero and Jost, 2011, p.211). The woman's body, body parts, and sexual functions are seen as separate from her personal identity (Calogero and Jost, 2011). Young females exposed to these images of sexually objectified women have been found to become more sexually aggressive, with sexual experimentation now beginning at a much earlier age (Reichert, 2003). This sexual experimentation can consist of changing the style choices to becoming sexually active earlier on in life (Reichert, 2003). With how women are being portrayed in advertisements playing a larger role in the change in behaviour amongst young females (Reichert, 2003). Though saying that, many postfeminists today have become unfazed by such sexual objectification used today across many types of advertising (Zimmerman and Dahlberg 2008) and have now begun to embrace the ideal of being so open about ones' sexuality.

Academic scholars such as Kayoung (2014), have stated that the objectification and sexualized images of women being portrayed in such advertisements are giving people the wrong impression of what the ideal body should look like and also what the standard level of beauty should be. Which has been expressed as not only unrealistic but as mentioned given woman disheartened views of themselves where they feel as if this level of beauty is unattainable. Fashion advertisements have been noted to show the most imagery with this idea of objectifying women (Merskin, 2004). Many women photographed are shown to be "dressed-down" like young girls and counter-wise young girls are "dressed-up" to give the impression that they are grown women (Merskin, 2004). This form of imagery has often been compared to

that of a toned-down pornography and since the rise of online media, these sexualised images have increased notably in recent years (Kayoung, 2014).

Also in recent years 'lad mags', which are magazines targeted towards men, have been said to normalise extreme sexualisation and objectification of women (Horvath, Hegarty, Tyler and Mansfield, 2012). Women who are often pictured in these magazines are shown in an objectified and dominated in relation to their male counterparts (Merskin, 2004). The often encourage men to drink alcohol, be rowdy and to hunt women in a 'sexual conquest' (Horvath *et al*, 2012). Therefore, the creation of these 'lad mags' have been criticised as being partially to blame for the rise in sexualisation and objectification of women in culture as well as advertising (Harvath *et al*, 2012).

2.9 Female Attitudes Towards Sex in Advertising

Due to the rise of post-feminism and body positivity, new-wave postfeminists are more vocal on matters they feel important to them, as they are no longer happy to sit on the margins and quietly accept while they are being sexually objectified in contemporary advertisements (Dudley, 1999). Certain advertisements found to have been containing high levels of nudity, displaying women in objectified sexualised poses and sexual activities have received the most negative responses. Such responses are claiming that the imagery in question is offensive towards women (Dudley, 1999). Respondents' featured in this study had expressed that the use of sex within advertising was in their own opinions, degrading, immoral and unethical. The responses given varied upon the level of nudity used in each advertisement, respondents reacted with less criticism towards a topless woman compared to a woman who appeared fully nude (Dudley, 1999). Though it must be noted that not all responses towards the sexualisation of women in advertisements have been negative (Choi *et al, 2016)*. Today's new-wave of post-feminists, many who embrace sexuality, have learnt to see a proportion of sex displayed in advertising as fun and not to be taken so seriously (Choi *et al, 2016)* while also having an understanding of when such sexism has been taken too far.

This can also be called 'retro sexism' (Feminist Frequency, 2010). Gill (2007) has argued that while retro sexism suggests that sexism should be taken lightly it has in actual fact allowed for the portrayal of gender inequality to seem appropriate due to its historical nature. Therefore, retro-sexism has been associated with desensitizing consumers from the actual seriousness of specific advertisements.

Hyllegard (2009), states it is not just new-wave feminists who have become quite open to sex being displayed in advertising the younger generation of female millennials tend to respond on a more positive level to advertisements and messages containing sexualisation than older consumers (Hyllegard, 2009). Many authors (Staniewicz and Roselli, 2008; Zimmerman and Dahlberg, 2008; Dudley, 1999) contest Hyllegard's (2009) view, arguing that while they agree that these female millennials are responding more intently towards sexualized advertisement's they are not responding in as positively as hoped. To explain further, this style of sexualised imagery used in advertising can affect young women's self-perceptions and self-esteem, especially in young females who are vulnerable to perceived impressions of what the idealistic body should look like (Martin, 1997). With mental health issues becoming more predominant in the public eye today especially amongst the younger generation it is no wonder why consumers are starting to speak up about the use and style of some advertisements aimed at this impressionable target market (Dudley, 1999). To be exact in the 'Health of Ireland Survey' (2016), it was found that over 29% of women aged between 15-34, measure on the 'Mental Health Index-5' suffer negatively with their mental health.

As mentioned with the rise of feminism over recent decades, a lot of these young women may also choose to utilize their 'female empowerment' by making their own independent thoughts on how and why women are portrayed in certain ways in advertising (Zimmerman and Dahlberg 2008). Meaning that as mentioned new-wave feminists today can be said to be

tolerant of the sexual objectification of women in advertisements than those twenty years ago (Reichert, 2003).

2.10 Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), asserts that people strive to evaluate their own opinions and personal abilities in order to feel accepted, people will compare their lifestyles, looks, and personalities with their peers. These comparisons are crucial to a person's self-evaluation and will usually be more focused on comparing one's self to another (Wood, 1989). Furthermore, social comparisons can also be made against social expectations and norms (Gulas and McKeage, 2000), these comparisons are used when an individual would like to gain an understanding of certain precautions for specific situations (Jones, 2002). Overall it has been said that social comparison theory as a process is directed and controlled by the individual which is used to help them become socially accepted by peers (Gulas and McKeage, 2000).

The linking of social comparison theory and body image is not new, especially amongst women (Faith, Leone and Allison, 1997; Stormer and Thompson, 1996). Research conducted by Faith *et al,* 1997) surrounding this topic has relayed that women who compare themselves, mostly regarding appearance based attributes, are less satisfied with their body image than women who do not. The main reason why body image and social comparison theory has been further explored in recent decades is partly due to the rise of celebrities and models who are displayed throughout media and advertisements (Gulas and McKeage, 2000). Paraphrasing Martin, (1997) females' millennials compare themselves to models in fashion advertisements causing a change in their personal thoughts regarding their attractiveness and body image (Martin, 1997). Representations of women with unrealistic body types who are posed in a sexualised manner have constructed an idealized representation of what is considered to be physical attractiveness (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). The social comparison of idealized images has led to individuals feeling less attractive compared to their associates, which then

leads to the individual having a negative view of themselves (Gulas and McKeage, 2000).

The environment in which an individual finds themselves can cause different social comparisons, which can be split into two dimensions; upward comparisons and downward comparisons (Gulas and McKeage, 2000). Upward comparisons usually consist of comparisons between the individual and others who may be more successful than themselves. This style of social comparison can lead to self-deflating or self-enhancing depending on how the individual compares themselves (Collins, 1996). Downward comparisons exist when the environment reveals a subordinate other whom the individual may create downward comparisons to. Though, downward comparisons are more likely to be self-enhancing, unlike upward comparisons which tend to be more threatening to an individual's self-esteem and well-being (Gulas and McKeage, 2000). In relation to fashion advertisements and these two dimensions of social comparison theory, upwards comparison relates more to the idealised images shown in advertising today and how young females are comparing themselves to such images. Downward Comparison is in regards to images of female models in fashion advertisements who are a more realistic version of the average women. These female models used make it easier for an individual to happily compare themselves as they are a more realistic representation of women today. For example, since 2017 the fashion brand Missguided have opted to become more body positive (See appendix 1.4) and to use a wide variety of models in different sizes, ethnicities and opting to not Photoshop any of their images anymore (Independent, 2017). Since implementing this change Missguided has received strong support across social media with over 122,000 supportive responses (Tan, 2018).

2.11 Pornification and Sexualisation of Culture

The term 'Pornification' refers to the sexualisation of mainstream media and culture (Paul, 2005) which other academics label the 'representation of porn in non-pornographic culture' (McNair, 2002, pp.61) Sorensen (2005) argues that the rise in pornification appearing in media today comes from the

increasing availability and volume of pornography. In fact, a study conducted by the University of Buffalo, discovered that 83% of women in advertising were sexualised, which puts into context how common the use of sexual imagery is in the media (PBS News Hour, 2013).

Hakim (2015) has concluded that there were three main developments in the latter half of the twentieth century that propelled sexuality, including pornography, into the public eye. First, was the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960's which resulted from the 'contraceptive revolution'. Secondly was the AIDs scare of the 1980's which prompted government agencies and foundations to publically educate and inform the population about sex. Lastly, was the growth of the internet, which allowed for sexual markets and pornography to become more predominant and accessible (Hakim, 2015). Each of these three developments has led to today's modern world were sexuality and pornography is talked about more than ever. This has thus led to the question of; whether these sexual developments influenced the sexual imagery which is seen in advertising today. According to literature written by Gill (2012), the answer as it stands is yes, especially within western societies which today have become saturated and highly influenced by sexual representations. In fact, as of 2017, thirty-one percent of millennial women worldwide have been exposed to pornographic material (Conrad, 2017). Pornography has been said to have become more mainstream and even those starring in such films are now classed as celebrities (Gill, 2012), showing just how much people's attitudes towards sex has changed since the start of the sexual revolution in the 1960's (Hakim, 2015). Big brands such as Dolce and Gabbana frequently use sexualisation to promote their clothing, some of their ads even going so far as to 'promote' gang rape, as seen in their 2007 ad campaign (See appendix 8.3) (Vogue, 2012).

With the rise in interest, many brands have and will use exploited sexualised images and products for profit purposes (Gill, 2009). For example, brands like 'Playboy' who branched out from their already porn like magazine and imagery to sell clothing items like t-shirts and tracksuits to women (Gstafson, 2015) (See appendix 8.5). Academic scholars like Paasonen (2016) have

criticised pornification and the mainstreaming of pornography as a social problem that is associated with gender equality and domestic violence, which is similar to Levy's (2006) discussion where she equates pornography with the objectification of women and sexism. Whereas Gill (2009) argues that the media are partially to blame for mainstreaming pornography by becoming 'the biggest source of sexualised media' (Gill, 2009, pp. 140). Pornification used in media has been said to be pushing boundaries of acceptance with the use of different classifications of pornography (Paasonen, 2016). The reason these boundaries have the ability to be pushed is because of the difficulty to keep track of different media forms (Paasonen, 2016) Forms of pornification in culture can range from the celebritism of porn-stars to celebrity sex tapes, while also not being limited to other forms. In culture today communities have arisen who now glorify pornography and sexual imagery used in all forms of media (Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa, 2007).

Contemporary scholars (Reichert, 2003; Gill, 2012; Levy, 2005; Hakim, 2015) have also voiced their criticism in regards to this topic, such as the 'harmful' effects that exposure to sexualised media can have on consumers (Gill, 2012). Reichert, (2003) also explore the idea that there is a 'dark side' to sexualised media where women are viewed with sexual aggression and sex-role stereotyping has become the norm which has stemmed from displays of pornography.

2.12 Body Image

Amongst all women of all ages, body dissatisfaction and body image has always been a source of suffering (Stapleton, Crighton, Carter and Pidgeon, 2017). "Body Image is a merging of one's outer appearance with perceptions derived from personal and cultural factors" (Hogan and Strasburger, 2008, pp. 521). Negative thoughts and feelings towards one's weight and shape are all factors that can influence body image and satisfaction (Cash and Szymanski, 1995). Suffering from body dissatisfaction and negative views of one's own body has been said to lead to a wide range of mental health issues including; low self-esteem, depression, obesity and eating disorders

(Stapleton *et al,* 2017). Unfortunately delving into mental health is outside the realm of this study being undertaken. The media and advertising have had a clear influence on body image perceptions, so much so that the media has been called a 'superpeer' in relation to consumers' body image (Hogan and Strasburger, 2008). This label was earned due to the powerful images and messages used instructing the public on how they need to look and what they need to buy.

Advertising has long been blamed for producing unrealistic representations of the female body, that in return influences young females (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). With the use of photo editing software like Photoshop, where models are edited to look skinnier and having their skin enhanced to give the perception of flawlessness, which make women feel like they are 'ugly' compared to these models (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). These images portrayed in advertisements are unrealistic of what the average women, in fact, looks like (Reike, Fowler, Chang and Valikova, 2016). The ideal woman has been said to be thin, mid-height with a big chest, which is very much so unrealistic, in reality, only a small percentage of the population would fit into that category (Wykes and Gunter, 2005).

Many young females have felt a pressure from their peers to look like the women displayed in these advertisements to fit in with their surroundings but this is not helping these women to have a healthy view of themselves and their body (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). Instead, it is leading to aforementioned mental health issues and disorders (Williams, Schimel, Hayes and Usta, 2014). In order to try fit into such body ideal women have been found to be starving themselves, over exercising and dressing a certain way. All because they want to try to 'fit in' this socially challenged culture better (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). These mental health issues have arisen due to the impressionability of young females, who are also struggling with the daily stress of trying to fit into a beauty ideal which really is unattainable (Williams *et al,* 2014).

Advertisers in the fashion industry are profit orientated and play upon consumer insecurities (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). With products like Spanx which are basically trying to sell confidence where consumers that do not fit this ideal body shape, by wearing Spanx can look similar to the models they see advertised (Reike *et al,* 2016). The advertiser will aim to create an image of the perfect person who would be seen as the user of the product, therefore the potential consumer will try to identify themselves in a certain way with that image portrayed (Bishop, 2000). These advertisers are in fact sending a message, stating that women will never be able to achieve such a perfect unrealistic body themselves, therefore they need this product to do so (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). Which again is not helping these young females to see themselves in a positive light (Wykes and Gunter, 2005).

2.13 Internalized Sexualisation

A study conducted by McKenney and Bigler (2016) in the US found that because of the images portrayed of women in advertisements female millennials have recently gained the notion that sexual attractiveness has to be the main point of their identity, otherwise known as 'Internalized Sexualization' (McKenney and Bigler, 2016). As a result of this exposure, the young millennials tend to experience negative views of themselves when it comes to self-esteem and peer reviews (McKenney and Bibler, 2016). In criticism of this, many believe that these internal views female millennials have of themselves have not just emerged because of a style of advertisements (Gill, 2003). It is believed that internalized sexualisation is taught from an early age, by mothers, family member or friends influencing the child's thoughts. Telling them how they should dress or act in a certain way and that outward beauty is more important than personality (Miriam, 2011). Internalized sexualisation is also said to be interrelated with body shame, meaning that if a woman does not feel that she fits into the 'cultural standards' of beauty she may become unhappy with her own views of herself (McKenney and Bigler, 2016). In regards to the fashion industry and this idea of body shame, it has been found that women who have higher levels of internalized sexualisation are more likely to wear more revealing clothing

than those with lower levels because they feel less body shame towards themselves (Fredrickson, 1997).

Overall, key issues have been found and addressed throughout the above literature that correlates with the main research topic of "*The sexualisation of women in fashion advertisements*". In particular, the majority of academic research has used adolescent females to complete their studies but none has specifically looked at millennials and whether this age category has different views to adolescents. Also, no literature had focused on Irish women at all, therefore, there is a gap here for the research to target Irish female millennials. Additionally, the literature revealed that having sexual content in advertisements, mainly to do with female clothing, has led to the culturally acceptable view of beauty being altered which has put pressure on females to look a certain way to even be considered "beautiful". Therefore, the aim of this research is to test this literature by taking a new direction which will use participants with different socio-economic backgrounds to deeply justify whether women really feel such pressure to look or act a certain way to fit social norms. Reichert (2002) and Gould, (1994) have advocated that the use of sex as selling does influence purchase intentions if perfected but many other academics (Bangiorno, Bain, and Haslam, 2013; Horgan, Herzog, Grey, Latrielle, and Lindemulder, 2017) do not agree. Hence, it is hoped that by completing this study the question of whether sexual imagery has an influence of purchase intentions or not will be answered. Sexual stimuli as described by Reichert and Ramirex (2000) has differentiated the forms of sexual imagery that can be used into two separate categories; overt or subtle, this study hopes to uncover the views and attitudes Irish female millennials have towards both. By completing this research study with the help of the above academic literature and with the use of primary research it is anticipated that any gaps can be closed and research questions answered.

Chapter 3 - Research Questions

3.1 The Research Question

After completing this literature review on sexualisation in fashion advertising, it was clear that the overarching research question for this study is *"what effects does the sexualisation of women within fashion advertisements today have on Irish Female Millennials'?"* What the researcher is referring to as 'effects' is the feelings, attitudes or behaviours these Irish female millennials personally feel when they are exposed to such advertising. This could be in relation to their own body image, internalized sexualisation and thoughts on brands who involve themselves in this topic. The study will be narrowed down to a niche of fashion advertisements which focus on showing women in a sexualised manner only. The forms of sexualisation which will feature in the scope of this study include the two different types of sexual stimuli; overt or subtle, discussed by Reichert and Ramirez (2000).

The research question was constructed in light of as key literature in recent years revealing subtle changes in women's views surrounding the topic of sexualisation in advertising (Reichert, 2002; Gill, 2009; Hakim, 2011; Levey, 2006). The researcher hopes to conduct a study which has the aim of uncovering today's Irish millennial females' thoughts surrounding this topic while also discovering if their purchase intentions are altered when different levels of sexualisation are used.

3.2 Research Sub Objectives

To ensure this research question is answered the researcher will split it down into different sub-objectives.

1. To understand Irish female millennials thoughts and attitudes on sexualised fashion advertisements when using the two different sexual stimuli's; overt and subtle as described by Reichert and Ramirez (2000).

2. To analyse whether using sexualisation in fashion advertising can affect Irish female millennials' purchasing intention.
3. To examine whether having a different socio-economic background would have an influence on the thoughts of Irish female millennials surrounding sexualisation in fashion advertisements.

The target sample for the purpose of this study is Irish female millennials, which will be classed as young women aged between twenty and thirty-five. Irish women were chosen for this research due to the availability of information and accessibility to participants that were readily available to the researcher. More importantly, the reasoning for chosen Irish women was because a study of this nature has never been executed in an Irish context before. Participants chosen for the study were carefully selected based on their backgrounds, which then placed them into one of two group interviews. The first group is chosen on their attainment of higher level (third level) education, while the others were secondary school educated working class candidates. The reason being for having differentiating groups is because the researcher hopes to understand if having a third level qualification or not will influence or affect individuals' attitudes towards sex appeals in fashion advertising. Fashion advertisements were chosen as a focal point for this research as many fashion brands turn sex appeals to further their publicity (Reichert, 2002).

Chapter 4 - Research Methodology

4.1 Methodology Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate whether sexualisation displayed in fashion advertisements have an effect on Irish female millennials', especially in regards to body image, purchasing intention and internalised sexualisation. In order to gain an insight into this information Irish female millennials be used to gather perspectives and attitudes surrounding the topic. The researcher has chosen a qualitative method due to wanting to learn about attitudes and opinions that cause these individuals to have certain perspectives' surrounding this topic. Throughout this chapter, the researcher will be explaining in more detail why qualitative research is better suited to this study over quantitative. The research will also discuss a various amount of different qualitative research methods and why the chosen one was better suited to this study over others.

4.2 The Research Onion

Throughout this chapter, elements from the 'Research Onion' designed by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016) will be used and taken into consideration to help the researcher fully achieve their goal of answering the specified research questions. The 'Research Onion' consists of six different layers (See Figure 1); each layer of Saunders *et al* (2016) model yields a significantly important element in regards to conducting research. The end of the process described by the Saunders *et al* (2016) model is the process of collecting the data and then finally analysing it in relation to both the findings and research sub-objectives specified.
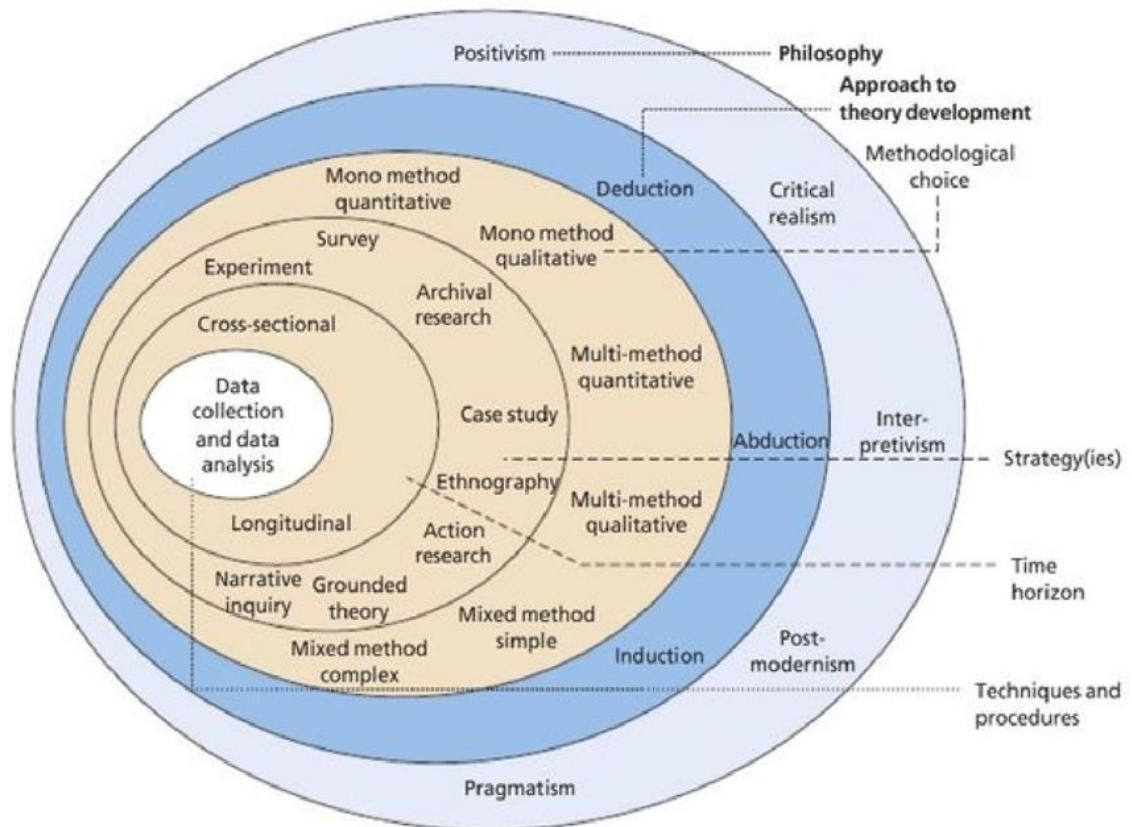
Figure 1: Research Onion Model by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016)

4.3 Research Philosophy

The reasoning behind this study is to analyse the attitudes and feelings that millennial females have towards sexualisation presented in fashion advertisements today, therefore, interpretivism was the chosen approach. Though in order to grasp a further understanding of why the philosophy of interpretivism was chosen it is important to discuss ontology and epistemology. Ontology refers to the question of what is considered reality, whereas epistemology is concerned with assumptions in regards to knowledge but both are connected by one another (Saunders *et al,* 2016). Ontology can be split into two categories; positivism, which deals with hard scientific facts and post-positivism, which understands that peoples' attitudes and behaviours differ between individuals (Quinlan, 2011). Therefore, as this study is seeking to understand both personal attitudes and behaviours, ontology and the theory of post-positivism is best suited, the philosophy of interpretivism also originates from post-positivism and ontology (Saunders *et al,* 2016).

The research philosophy of interpretivism was developed due to the perceived inadequacy of positivism (Collis and Hussey, 2009) as the purpose of the latter is to yield facts and honest data that has not been influenced by individuals own interpretations. Whereas interpretivism is used to understand humans' attitudes and behaviours (Saunders, *et al,* 2016). Research conducted using a positivist philosophy will be quantitative using a deductive manner with the hope of uncovering analytical theories which can be used to understand social phenomenon (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Research questions should then be tested with the use of statistical analysis which allows the research to gather a larger amount of data in a shorter time period it than qualitative data (Cameron and Price, 2009). However, disadvantages of using a positivist philosophy include; using quantitative research approaches the planning process can be very time consuming because questions need to be perfect in order to collect accurate data (Saunders *et al,* 2016) Also the researcher could end up spending too much time focusing on statistics that might not be relevant to the study (Neuman, 2005).

After gathering an understanding of both philosophies and how they link back to ontology and epistemology the researcher has come to the conclusion that an interpretivist philosophy will be the appropriate choice for this study as the aim is to gather personal feelings and attitudes in order to gain understanding of the pertinent issues and build theory rather than test existing theories or beliefs. For the rest of this chapter, the researcher will discuss what sampling techniques, qualitative research methods, and data analysis approaches will be taken all in conjunction with the choice of undertaking an Interpretative philosophical stance.

4.3.1 Grounded Theory

For this type of methodology, elements of "Grounded Theory" (Dawson, C. 2009) was drawn upon. Grounded theory is an analytical approach used in qualitative research but it can also be quite complex, in-depth and detailed. Which means the researcher may have to add more topics to the interview guidelines after each interview, because new issues may have arisen. This

theory will allow the researcher to be flexible in regards to the interviews. With Grounded Theory, the research should be collected until a saturation point is reached. But after some secondary research was conducted the limitation of time in regards to this study was considered an issue. The researcher had only mere months to complete the study; therefore, it was actually a good idea to give a specific sample size. In relation to the research question and how humans can be unpredictable, Grounded Theory allowed for new topics and or questions uncovered from the first group interview to be added into the second group interview also. This flexibility allowed for the uncovering of fresh new data which could be pivotal to this study.

4.4 Method Selection

Forms of qualitative research methods include structured/unstructured or semi-structured interviews as well as telephone or group interviews, observational studies and focus groups (Saunders *et al,* 2016). Sandelowski (2004), said that qualitative research is intended to be used to gather knowledge that is grounded in human experience. Meaning that such research method is typically chosen when the researcher is seeking to identify issues or attitudes surrounding the topic from the interviewees' perspective (Hennick, Hutter and Bailey, 2011). The researcher conducting qualitative research needs to be open-minded, flexible and have the ability to listen to each participant's own views.

Method selection at first was torn between questionnaires or in-depth individual interviews for the chosen research methodology for this study. At one stage even debating on conducting a mixture of both. Which would have meant completing a triangulation (Dawson, C. 2009). Triangulation happens when the research is conducted from at least two different methodological approaches (Flick, Kardorff, and Steinke, 2004). The purpose of triangulation is to ensure that the data is suggesting what you hoped for, which is a deductive methodology (Saunders, *et al,* 2016). But, after the literature review was complete and issues came to light, an inductive qualitative research method became the best suited for the task along with eventually

deciding on a methodology of group Interviews. The reasoning for choosing group interviews was due to the limitations that the study held (See section 4.8) Once the type of methodology was decided upon, the interview style of semi-structured was adopted.

4.4.1 Semi-Structured Interview Style

The reason for semi-structured being the pronounced style for the group interviews, is because it allows the researcher to follow a list of the same specific questions, including topics and themes, for each group while also allowing the group interview to remain flexible. By having the same list of questions for each group interview it enables the interviewer to gather specific information but by being semi-structured the interviewee can also raise other important material that they see fits with the group interview topic. The information then can be compared with other interview material gathered. For consistencies or contradictions.

Gordon (1975) has criticised the style of semi-structured interviews which can be used for both group and individual interviews. Stating that changing the wording and or sequence of an interview question will not create a better understanding of what is being asked upon the interviewee. Instead, Gordon (1975) has said that any differences in answers come from the differences in interviewees not from how the question are being asked. In contrast of this Barriball and While (1994) has said that by using the style of semi-structured interviews and having the opportunity to change the format or wording, but not the meaning, of questions it acknowledges that every interviewee can understand words or meanings if different ways. Also taking into account that individuals may use different vocabulary from one another.

4.5 Sampling and Participant selection

In line with a qualitative research study conducted by Lamb, Farmer, Kosterina, Sarinana, Plocha, and Randazzo (2016) based on sexual appeals and media influence, this study is adopting a purposeful sampling methodology. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling that

is used when samples are small in size and also when the researcher would like to select participants that would be the most informative (Neuman, 2005). Non-probability sampling focuses on the relationship between the purpose and focus of the study and the ideal sampling technique, unlike probability sampling which follows set rules and procedures to get accurate portions of the target population (Saunders *et al,* 2016). This style of sample does not necessarily represent the entire target population but instead represents a cross-section of the population which is based on research questions and objectives (Saunders *et al,* 2016). By using this sampling framework participants are deliberately chosen based on their knowledge levels of the research topic (Neuman, 2005).

The research being carried out is designed to gather the feelings and attitudes that millennial Irish females have towards sexualisation presented in fashion advertisements today. The participants that are chosen all come from Dublin but have different backgrounds. Half of the participants come from educated backgrounds and the other half from working-class dispositions. The reason for choosing such a diverse group of participants is to try to discern an understanding of whether people's opinions on such topic change due to their backgrounds. Millennials were chosen for this study due to research had not yet been conducted using Irish women within this age category, previous studies (Reichert and Lambaise, 2003; Lamb *et al,* 2016) have used adolescent girls, but not Millennials. Also as it has been suggested (Marshall, 2015) that participants within this age category have a greater ability to answer questions around the topic of sex in advertising with a lot more maturity than the younger generation, as well as a wider knowledge of media. In fact, adults today are exposed to an average of 4,000 advertisements a day, whether it be through traditional or digital advertising (Marshall, 2015).

All participants have the ability to be very critical and opinionated when it comes to topics they are interested in. As discussed previously using the chosen sampling framework each participant was chosen due to their accessibility and knowledge on the topic. Out of the six female participants, three of which were recent graduates from the researchers' college and the

other three consist of the researchers work colleagues. The research methodology was chosen as group interviews, in which the researcher then split six participants up into two groups of three based on their backgrounds. Group interviews were chosen as other academic research (Reichert, 2002; Reichert *et al*, 2001; Severn *et al,* 1990) conducted on similar topics have previously never used group interviews; hence, a gap was discovered where this research method could allow for richer data to be collected as participants could bounce opinions of one another. This research method would also allow for future researchers to compare both qualitative and quantitative studies completed around this topic.

All participants used in this study will remain anonymous, with each being described using only demographic information, for instance, their gender and age, throughout this study each participant will only be regarded to by their participant letter. For example; 'Interviewee B had noted that…'. Both group interviews are to be recorded and notes taken after each group interview has concluded the researcher will then listen and transcribe both. The purpose of transcribing is to allow for later analysis where the researcher can interpret the findings and identify themes throughout.

4.6 Data Collection

Data collection for this study was conducted in the form of two semi-structured group interviews which consisted of three interviewees per group. Originally the researcher had planned to conduct six semi-structured individual interviews but in order to elicit a more comprehensive range of view and to prompt more conversation, group interviews rather than individual interviews was undertaken. This approach was chosen as previous academic research of similar topics (Wollast, Puvia, Bernard, Tevichapong, and Klein 2018; Ward, Seabrook, Grower, Giaccardi, and Lippman, 2018; Reichert, Heckler, and Jackson, 2001) has favoured the use of quantitative questionnaires, therefore qualitative research would allow for a different

perspective and a fresh method of data collection which could yield new information surrounding the topic of choice.

By having semi-structured interviews, it allowed the interviewer to have a list of questions covering desired topics and themes, while also allowing them to probe interviewees further by asking other questions if it were necessary. No semi-structured interview is ever delivered the same way. How the interview flows will depend on how the interviewees answer each question (Saunders *et al,* 2016). The role of the interviewer was to ensure that all interviewees were given an equal opportunity to each have their answers voiced, while also recording notes and analysing the data afterwards (Saunders *et al,* 2016).

4.6.1 Group interviews

"A group interview is a data collection method using a single interviewer with more than one research participant" (Cooper and Schindler, 2014 pp. 157). The role of the interviewer when conducting a group interview is to make certain that all interviewees have equal opportunities to voice their opinions and thoughts on specific topics (Saunders *et al,* 2016) while also ensuring that all data is being recorded, whether by note-taking or recording each session. Like individual interviews, group interviews can be either unstructured, semi-structured or structured, though they mostly tend to be more unstructured allowing for the conversation to be free-flowing (Saunders *et al,* 2016). Group interviews can vary in size ranging from two people which are called 'Dyads' up to 'Minigroups' of six (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Smaller groups of two or three participants tend to be used when the topic list needed to be explored is niche in nature but also when the interviewer requires greater intimacy (Cooper and Schindler, 2014).

Group interviews can lead to highly in-depth discussions between both the interviewer and interviewees and also between the interviewees themselves. Though there is also a likelihood that a group effect can appear, where one participant may dominate the group, which can lead to other members feeling as if they are inhibited (Saunders *et al,* 2016). This means that answers given

by the group may not be truthful as participants may verbally agree with the dominant member as to not cause altercations and instead disagree in private (Saunders *et al,* 2016). While another hindrance of group interviews is the difficulty of recruiting participants, arranging time and dates to suit everyone and the coordination of the interview itself (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Though this disadvantage is seen as minor in relation to the rich data that can be collected through the use of group interviews (Cooper and Schindler, 2014).

4.6.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups which are very similar to group interviews but usually consist of larger group sizes, ranging from six to 10 participants, are used to gather qualitative data surrounding feelings and opinions participants may have surrounding a topic (Collis and Hussey, 2009). A focus group incorporates both observation and interviewing, while also allowing for raw data to be unearthed through the interaction between participants (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Time for conducting a focus group can range from one to two hours' dependant on how much conversation and participation there has been (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). The interviewers' role is mainly to be a moderator ensuring that the topic of conversation does not deviate far from the purpose of the study, which differentiates from group interviews where the interviewer has a more central role, directing and asking interviewee's questions (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Focus groups with the research aim of revealing opinions and feelings tend to be more structured following a list of themes or questions to discuss, whereas those which aim to understand interactions tend to be less structured (Saunders *et al,* 2016).

Some researchers like Wimmer and Dominic (1997) have criticised focus groups as not being a reliable research methodology. The reason being due to the ability for one or more interviewees to influence responses from of other members in the focus group. One member may be more dominant in mature than other which overall could negatively have an impact on the groups' outcome (Wimmer and Dominic, 1997). This criticism is again similar to that of group interviews.

4.6.3 Advantages and Critics of Group Interviews

When conducting group interviews there are both advantages and disadvantages to choosing this research method such as the "release of inhibition by participants" (Byers and Wilcox, 1991, pp. 66). Presiding rigorously over group interview allows for honest perceptions of feelings and experiences (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Also, it is important to mention that time is a major advantage here when it comes to group interviews. For studies that are under time constraints such as this one, group interviews allow for the research to be more time effective than conducting individual interviews. 'Subject conformity' can be an issue presented with group interviews, which means Interviewees may conform to group norms and provide an answer which they perceive to be socially acceptable rather than their own honest opinions (Byers and Wilcox, 1991).

Academics like Malhotra and Birks (2002) critique group interviews as not allowing for the generation of different opinions due to the formation of groupthink. Therefore, they state that in-depth individual interviews are a more appropriate choice of qualitative research as it allows for the growth of honest personal views. Malhotra and Birks (2002) also criticise that when conducting group interviews important imputes may be lost due to contamination from other group members.

4.6.4 Group Interview Design and Execution

Interview questions were designed as to not direct participants' answers, therefore, ensuring that each question was neutral in nature (Saunders *et al,* 2016). After the answering of each question, the researcher then preceded to probe each interviewee further as to gather as much data as possible. Each group interview ran for approximately 40 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes long dependant on how much data could be collected from both group interview. All participants had voluntarily agreed to take part in the research and were reminded that they were able to stop participating at any point. Once the group interviews had concluded every participant involved was asked if she would mind being contacted again, whether it be via telephone or email.

The reason being if the researcher had uncovered a question in regards to the data they contributed, further information may need to be sought. Before agreeing to participate in this study all participants were briefed on both the purpose of the study and protocols which would be taken. Which included all measures of confidentiality that would be taken to guarantee their anonymity (Saunders *et al,* 2016).

4.7 Data Analysis and Field Research

4.7.1 Field Research

After each group interview, an "interview summary form" was completed (See appendix 8.6), this form will include practical details about the interview; for example, the time, place and participants involved, along with the duration of the interview too. This form will also contain important details about what content was covered. By completing these forms after each interview it will allow the researcher to be reminded of the interview and can be very helpful when it comes to analysing the data. While the interview is being conducted the researcher will have a sheet of paper with the list of interview questions where any notes or themes will be written write down next to the relevant question. By conducting note-taking in this form it will allow for easier analysis at a later stage as the researcher can see exactly where each theme was discovered. As mentioned voice recording will also be used for further analysis. Majority of the research conducted surrounding the topic of sexualisation in media has been, as mentioned earlier, quantitative in style it is hard to compare this style of data analysis against other academic research.

4.7.2 Thematic Analysis

Thorne (2000), has suggested that even though data analysis is one of the most complex parts of qualitative research it often receives the least amount of thought when it comes to discussion in literature. Completing analysis' of qualitative data requires the researcher to create interpretations and explanations of the research collected (Thorne, 2000), this is done by organising the data to create a piece of literature which represents any themes

and issues that were uncovered in the findings (Neuman, 2006). All data collected first gets divided and categorized dependant on themes and similarities found. This form of data analysis is called a 'Thematic analysis'. A thematic analysis well suited to this type of study as the researcher was seeking to gather attitudes and behaviours uncovered amongst the interviewee's responses (Dawson, C. 2009*)*, which shows whether any of these effects, attitudes or experiences were similar amongst participants.

Thematic analysis has been said to be a fundamental method for qualitative analysis because it provides core skills which can allow for further analysis if need (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Additionally, a thematic analysis is considered to be highly inductive, which means the researcher does not impose their own thoughts on the topic to the participants, instead any findings emerge on their own from the data collected. When using implementing this qualitative data analysis approach, both the data collection analysis usually happens simultaneously, as important themes emerge the researcher will note them down for further use within the findings (Dawson, C. 2009).

A detailed thematic analysis can uncover important and trustworthy findings. However, it has been argued that there has been no one clear method for implementing a detailed thematic analysis, many academics (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006) have designed their own styles for completing such analysis. This form of data analysis holds the ability to be applied to any form of qualitative research, therefore it has been criticised as being too broad, which makes it hard for the technique to give extensive insight into one particular qualitative research method (Laubschagne, 2003). Reicher (2000) seconds this critique by questioning whether the method of thematic analysis is in fact that detailed if it has the ability to be applied across all forms of qualitative research.

 For the chosen topic a thematic analysis proved to the best choice for completing a research analysis over other data analysis types, such as phenomenological analysis and ethnographic analysis. There are many

benefits surrounding conducting a thematic analysis, including; this method is highly flexible in nature which allows for the analysis to be modified as needed, while still providing a detailed and rich account of the data collected (Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules, 2017). Additionally, it has been proposed that the process of completing a thematic analysis is a perfect method for researchers who are unfamiliar with qualitative data analysis, this is because the process can be easily grasped and learnt (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A thematic analysis is a useful process for gathering an understanding of each of the different responses from participants, while also allowing for the discussion of any similarities and contradictions uncovered between the participants (Nowell *et al,* 2017). Though it is important to note that there can also be limitations attached to performing a thematic analysis; while being flexible may be an advantage of a thematic analysis it can also lead to a lack of consistency between the themes derived from the research data and the literature reviewed previously (Holloway and Todres, 2003).

4.8 Limitations

Limitations include actions which may create complications when completing a research study (Hair, Bush, and Ortinau, 2003). It is highly important that the research is aware of all limitations as each can have a dire impact on the study's findings (Hair *et al*, 2003).

The main limitation of this study was the time constraint that the researcher was under. This limitation also influenced and generated other limitations. The researcher was limited to just under four short months with a tight deadline to complete this study. This time frame meant that the researcher was only able to complete two group interviews. Although, if there had been the ability to extend the deadline the researcher may have been able to complete six one-on-one individual interviews instead, which could have allowed for further probing and valuable information to be revealed. While also allowing for further penetration of the chosen target sample and population. The word count was a minor limitation in regards to this study. Due to the word restriction, the researcher under some compelling content

had to be removed if it were found to be not directly associated with the scope of the study. Other limitations arose in relation to acquiring participants for the study, the reason being surrounding time constraints held by both the researcher and promising interviewees.

Limitations also revealed themselves when completing secondary research, which was used to help form the literature review. These limitations mainly surrounded the access the researcher had to certain books and academic journals. The researcher discovered that the college held only a small number of books in relation to the topic of the study. The reason being the college did not focus on sexualisation in any specific courses or modules. Therefore, the researcher had to source certain material themselves.

When completing this study, it was of importance that the researcher did not focus in on specific subject areas when directing questions towards participants but instead tried to balance different topics throughout in a more conversational structure which would allow for the conversation to flow freely. Subsequent of this it was also critical that the researcher did not ask any questions that would result in bias. The researcher had to be conscious that they were not leading the conversation so that it would fulfil their own expectations. Questions should be asked in a non-directive open-ended style. Therefore, any participants should not have felt any compulsion to answer in any particular manner.

Chapter 5 - Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion

5.1 Introduction to Data Analysis

The aim of this chapter is to analyse all data that has been collected from each group interview as specified in the previous Research Methodology chapter. Each group interview uncovered large amounts of data which first of all needed to be reduced. In order to do this, using the technique of thematic analysis, the researcher needed to transcribe each interview and carefully review both to reveal key themes, which appeared to be relayed amongst all participants. To gain an understanding of which themes held the most significance, the researcher first had to create a list specifying any general themes that had a strong link with the data collected (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which allowed for further reduction revealing the final key themes.

Interview Sections	Group Interview One	Group Interview Two
Advertising	Digital, social media, subliminal, age, unrealistic, sexism, objectification, content.	Digital, social media, realistic, content, age
Sex Appeals	Attention-grabbing, similarity, effort, opinionated, vulnerability, individualism, sexism.	Perfection, vulnerability, effort, sexism, passivity, price
Advertisements	Offensive, inappropriate, aggression, acceptance, environment,	Offensive, body shaming, confusion, mental health, welcoming, unappealing, photo-

	similarity, generation, objectification, relatable, peer pressure, unrealistic, pornography, high expectations, price, confusion, body image, vulnerability, unachievable.	shopped, price, pornography, social media, self-esteem, body image.
Feminism	Equalist, postfeminist, erotic capital, unacceptable, society, culture, pornification	Traditionalist, opinionated, passivity, reality, pornification, nurture, peer pressure
Body Image	Individuality, peer pressure, mental health, reality distortion.	Body dysmorphia, cosmetic surgery, hope, unrealistic, body image, role model

Table 1: Initial Theme Discovery Sheet

As the concern for this analysis was to address specific research objectives the data analysed was split into themes that were only considered relevant to each question. This style of thematic analysis is considered inductive but on a theoretical level. As an inductive thematic analysis requires the researcher to analyse every line of each transcript whether relevant to the research objectives or not. Whereas using an inductive but theoretical approach consists of analysing data that is only specific to the research objectives (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The final result consisted of six key themes and Six sub-themes that had been reviewed and altered numerous times that were then used with the collected data to produce explanations to each research sub-objective.

Final Themes
• Sexualisation   ○ Age
• Pornography   ○ Gender Differences

• Purchase Intention
    ○ Effort
    ○ Price

• Feminism
• Body Image   ○ Mental Health
• Content   ○ Offensive Advertisements

Table 2: Key Themes for Data Analysis

5.2 Research Objective One

To understand Irish female millennials thoughts and attitudes on sexualised fashion advertisements when using the two different sexual stimuli's; overt and subtle as described by Reichert and Ramirez (2000).

Key Themes:

- Sexualisation
    - Age
- Pornography
    - Gender Differences

5.2.1 Sexualisation

Sexualisation and more importantly how it manifests in regards to Reichert and Ramirez's (2000) ideology of there being two different types of sexual stimuli; overt or subtle, revealed itself as a key theme from the data analysed. Throughout each group interview, consumers were asked to discuss their thoughts on the styles of sexualisation they had seen used within fashion advertising, including naming any fashion brands they had seen which tends to use sexualisation often. Majority of participants seemed to share the same thoughts surrounding this topic, which was that the amount of sexualisation used within advertising varies and that it was hard to place specific brands into actual categories. especially when it came to clothing. But interviewee A and B both made interesting statements surrounding this theme. Fashion brands such as American Apparel were said to use very overt forms of sexual appeals and sexualisation compared to other brands such as PrettyLittleThing who were felt to be subtler.

> ***Interviewee A:*** "I think they are always held back by advertising laws on sexualisation" (…) "If they were allowed to make them more sexualised they would."

> ***Interviewee B: "****I think because now in Ireland we're becoming a lot more opinionated especially if we don't like something. I think that now businesses particularly here (Ireland) are under a lot of pressure to subtly make the emphasis of sexualisation."

5.2.1.1 Age

While discussing the theme of sexualisation and sub-theme of age revealed itself. Both groups seemed to have mentioned that they felt as if sexualisation was typically used within fashion advertisements when targeting millennials and the younger generation rather than middle-aged women. Discussing that brands like ASOS and Littlewoods, who targeted mothers and older women, would not attempt to use sexualisation in any of their advertisements.

Interviewee A: "I think they kind of aim at 18-25 when using sex appeals."

5.2.1.2 Discussion One

Reichert and Ramirez's (2000) ideology of there being two forms of sexual stimuli within advertising; overt and subtle, was very much so reiterated within the primary research. Participants within in each group could easily identify brands and advertisements that they felt where either overt or subtle. But unlike Reichert and Ramirez (2000) earlier findings, none of the current participants believed that advertisements could have elements of both, they would only contain one form of stimuli. Participants from both groups described overt stimuli as being 'out there' and having some form of 'shock factor', whereas subtle stimuli was said to be more 'subliminal'. Descriptions given were similar with those said by Reichert and Ramirez (2000), though what they fail to mention in the literature surrounding this topic, what instead the primary research uncovered, is how advertising laws can affect what levels of stimuli brands use to advertise. Hence, if laws were more relaxed here in Ireland there could have been a lot more overt advertisements than what there is now.

Reichert (2002) suggests that sexual appeals are used in advertisements when advertisers are seeking to increase their publicity, this suggestion from the literature was in fact reinforced by group one in the primary research, when participants stated that they felt as if sexual appeals where necessary for brands within the fashion industry to sometimes get the attention they crave. Whereas group two expressed that majority of the time they did not recognize sex appeals unless they were either very overt or actually pointed out to them, therefore they felt at times less popular brands need to use sex appeals to gain publicity that they may not have received otherwise.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, past research (Reichert and Lambaise, 2003; Lamb *et al,* 2016) surrounding the topic of sexualisation has mostly used target samples of younger children below the age of 18, whereas the primary research for this study used Millennial women. Though interestingly

enough the findings from this study unearthed that participants felt as if sexual appeals used within advertising was aimed to target millennials and not adolescents or middle-aged women, therefore for any future research it may be important to take these findings into consideration very little has been researched around sexualisation in regards to millennials.

5.2.2 Pornography

While pornography or pornification is not a direct theme of Reichert and Ramirez's (2000) sexual stimuli theory it is still of importance when discussing thoughts and attitudes on sexualised fashion advertisements. Both groups were asked whether they thought pornography influenced the sexualisation of advertising. Each group had conflicting views, group one absolutely felt as if the growth and accessibility of porn encouraged the use of sexual imagery in advertising. Opposite to this view, all interviewees in group two firmly felt that pornography was not at fault for the rise in sexual imagery in advertising. When asked questions in regards to pornography both groups instantly gave responses, but the difference between both was that group two did not seem comfortable talking about pornography, unlike group one who had a lot to say.

*Interviewee B: "*Absolutely, because it is how males, in my opinion, understand what sexualisation is. So they watch this (pornography) and then they look at an advertisement and then they are expecting the women to get dressed and go over and appear in these advertisements. Like that's what they know."

Interviewee E: "No I don't think it has"

5.2.2.1 Gender Differences

While participants had conflicting views on the influence pornography has on fashion advertisements all seemed to share the same perspective that women tend to be more passive towards sexual imagery that's used in advertising due to pornography losing its 'shock factor' as said by interviewee A. This view is conflicting with what has been written already in literature surrounding the

topic with academics like Reichert (2002) who says that women are voicing their opinions on sexualisation more than ever before. Instead, interviewees had felt that pornography and sexual imagery being used in advertising had a greater effect on men than women.

Interviewee D: "It's different between girls and boys" (..) "If it's a male looking at the advert the sexy models used would, I think, be more appealing to them than it would for girls."

5.2.2.2 Discussion Two

Hakim (2015) has suggested that pornography has influenced the sexualisation of advertising, Gill (2012) has also agreed with this suggestion stating that pornography has become more mainstream featuring in main forms of contemporary media. However, primary research has revealed that Irish Millennial women do not agree with such statements from Hakim (2015) and Gill (2012) not. As mentioned above group one had overall agreed that pornography had influenced the sexualisation of advertising but in contrast of this group two contested this view stating that they did not perceive pornography as having any influence. Though when shown sexualised fashion advertisements both groups did recognize that brands like Dolce and Gabbana do tend to use a lot of pornographic 'like' scenes in their advertising campaigns with both groups referring to the 2007 campaign as being somewhat similar to a scene of gang rape. Hence even though group two did not congregate pornography and sexualisation they were able to recognize that pornographic scenes are used within advertising.

Levy (2006) has equated pornification with the objectification of women, this statement was reiterated within the primary research findings. Participants had concluded that majority of women tend to be passive towards sexualisation within advertising as it is has become more mainstream, but they did feel as if men would have a higher level of interest in an advertisement if it were to show women in a sexualised manner. Therefore, reiterating the fact that men like to look at sexualised imagery which does equate with the objectification of said women. However, in contrast to the

findings, Reichert *et al* (2001) has discussed how women, as well as men, can both show a higher level of interest with an advert if overt sexual imagery is used, but will, in fact, struggle to remember the initial brand or message of the advert. Such an interest within these sexualised advertisements is primarily due to the objectified women than the product or service being advertised.

5.3 Research Objective Two

To analyse whether using sexualisation in fashion advertising can affect Irish female millennials' purchasing intention.

<u>*Key Themes:*</u>
• Purchase Intention
    o Effort
    o Price
• Feminism

5.3.1 Purchase Intention

To uncover answers for research objective two all interview participants were asked whether sexualisation being used within fashion advertisements would affect their purchase intention to shop with any fashion brands. Answers here were quite similar across each group. Group one stating that they don't really react to sexualisation in fashion advertisements, that if they were interested in a product they would purchase it whether it had been sexualised or not. Group two were all in agreement that they were passive in relation to their purchase intention being altered by sexualisation, instead the price of the product would sway them more. Therefore, sexualisation within advertising is not a contentious issue especially in regards to purchase intention. Both groups could easily express their views on the matter without hesitation, confirming that sexualisation has no effects on their purchase intentions which therefore answers research objective two.

Interviewee A: "I don't think I wouldn't take an insult to them. I don't go 'oh I'm not buying that because their advert is sexualised.'"

Interviewee D: "I'd be passive; I don't think I would look into it that much."

Interestingly, when shown sexualised advertisements group two strongly reacted towards the advertisement by Victoria's Secret (See appendix 8.7.3), Interviewee D had declared that she would not shop in Victoria's secret not because of their sexualised advertising but due to the models they used and the body image they displayed.

Interviewee D: "I wouldn't go near Victoria's Secret as I'm not stick thin like the models" (…) "they don't approve of different body sizes."

5.3.1.1 Effort

Even though group two had stated that they are passive towards their purchase intention being effected when sexualisation is used within advertising, interviewee E proposed that age and effort can also effect an individual's purchasing intention. Suggesting that the younger an individual is the more likely that they are to be influenced into buying a product, proposing that adolescents are vulnerable individuals which has made it easier for advertisers when it to influence their purchase intentions. Whereas, with millennials', they have now come to the realisation brands will do anything to sell a good, so have now learnt to try not become so influenced by their power of persuasion.

Interviewee F: "Ah I wouldn't mind looking like them (sexualised women in advertising) but then you're like 'meh' effort."

5.3.1.2 Price

Overall after comparing both interviews, it was clear that the prices of products in relation to purchase intention mattered more to the working class in group two than the educated in group one.

Interviewee E: "When you see the price and you're like F***k that."

5.3.1.3 Discussion Three

Many academics have criticised the notion that sex sells (Bangiorno, Bain, and Haslam, 2013; Horgan, Herzog, Grey, Latrielle, and Lindemulder, 2017); stating that, in fact, it decreases consumer purchase intention as well as the credibility of the brand. Though in contrast to this Reichert (2002) has said that sexualised fashion advertisements not only generate awareness but can be used to boost sales and revenue but only if the product has an appropriate link with nudity or sexuality. Therefore, research objective two was used to test the hypothesis of whether sexualised fashion advertisements increased or decreased purchase intention. Data uncovered from the primary research surprisingly contradicted both academic statements on purchase intention; all participants stated that a brand using sexualised adverts would have no effect on their purchase intentions. Overall, expressing that if they were interested in a product they would purchase said product regardless of its advertising being sexualised or not. In the fashion industry advertisers have been said to play on women's' internalised sexualisation and own body image in order to make such women think they need a product to improve either of the latter (Gill, 2008). But from the primary research it has been revealed that this may not work in the brands favour, Interviewee D had expressed that such models used within advertising by Victoria's Secret had, in fact, the opposite effect on her, asserting that the models showed an unrealistic and unattainable body image which led to the participant having negative feelings towards her own body.

Findings from the primary research had revealed intriguing data in regards to an individual's age effecting their purchase intentions, which surprisingly had

previously not been discussed within the literature. Interviewee E had suggested that the younger generation were actually more impressionable and could have their purchasing intentions influenced more than millennials, as millennials have learnt to comprehend how advertisers attempt to utilize the power of persuasion (Reichert, 2002). Again, not mentioned within relevant literature but had been uncovered through the primary research, participants from working-class backgrounds were passive to sexualised fashion advertisements but had mentioned that price was a factor in influencing their purchase intentions. Whereas, participants with greater levels of education had not even perceived to mention price as an indicator of influencing their purchase intentions.

5.3.2 Feminism

Questions were asked around the topic of feminism throughout both group interviews so the researcher could gather knowledge that would allow for an understanding of whether being a feminist or not would have any influence on participant's attitudes towards sexualisation in fashion advertisements. Interestingly enough in group one interviewees A and C did not consider themselves as feminists but did say they were equalists, Interviewee B did however strongly consider herself to be a feminist. All participants of group two did not recognize themselves as feminists but instead traditionalists, in fact, group two did not know what feminism was, they had to ask for an explanation before answering such a question. Whether these contrasting views came from having different socio-economic backgrounds is hard to say as the research can only indicate so far.

Interviewee C: "As there is so much negative press surrounding being a feminist, I just label myself an Equalist."

Interviewee D: "As I come from a traditional family where my mother stays at home and my dad works, I have always kind of seen it as being that way."

After discovering whether each participant referred to themselves as being a feminist or not, both groups were then asked a follow-on question which

was used to understand whether their beliefs had an impact on their view of whether women used their erotic capital to further themselves in life. From this question, both groups shared a unanimous view which they agreed that women can and do especially in regards to careers.

Interviewee F: "Women get cosmetic surgery now and dress certain ways to show off."

*Interviewee B: "*I like to think that women try to use their erotic capital so that we can be seen as equal."

5.3.2.1 Discussion Four

Gill (2009) suggests that new-wave feminists have since learnt to embrace their sexual objectification and have now sought to use it for their own benefit; which has been labelled as 'Erotic Capital' (Hakim, 2011). While only one participant considered themselves to be a feminist all agreed that women do use their sexuality to their advantage. Interviewee B mentioned that she liked to think women use their erotic capital to be viewed as equal, which is in line with Hakim's (2011) theory where she asserts that women have been inhibited in the past due to stereotypes that indicate that men have an advantage over women and now use their erotic capital to overcome such gender inequalities (Green, 2012). Participants also believed that advertisements and society are to blame for women using their erotic capital, suggesting the way products are advertised can encourage women to use their erotic capital. For example, the 'little black dress' which sells the ideology that a woman can enhance their sexual confidence by wearing said dress (Gill, 2008).

Researchers (Cheng and Zucker, 2007; Zimmerman and Dahlberg 2008; Williams and Jovanovic 2015) have proposed that feminists react positively to overt sexual stimuli used within advertisements. But, as the primary research has revealed those who do and also don't consider themselves a feminist have asserted that they are usually passive towards any forms of sexual stimuli. Though when shown sexualised adverts they then preceded to

note how 'shocking' some adverts were but yet mentioned that these ads would still not affect their purchase intentions. Therefore, while the researcher uncovered that many participants did not class themselves as a feminist they did understand when women were being sexually objectified but partially chose to take it half-heartedly and in a passive manner which then allowed for their purchase intention to be un-affected. Thus, agrees with Gill's (2009) view that women have learnt to accommodate sexual objectification or have bought into the theory of retro sexism.

5.4 Research Objective Three

To examine whether having a different socio-economic background would have an influence on the thoughts of Irish female millennials surrounding sexualisation in fashion advertisements.

Key Themes:
 	
• Body Image
    ○ Mental Health
• Content
    ○ Offensive Advertisements

Comparing the two group interviews against one another made it easy to identify contrasting views between each, this technique was used to help answer research objective three. Though the most complicated part was trying to gather an understanding of whether these views manifested from having socio-economic backgrounds or because of personal beliefs and attitudes.

5.4.1 Body Image

Body image was a key theme in both the literature and research conducted, understanding how an individual's body image can be altered and influenced was an important factor in answering the overall research questioned. Interviewees were asked to discuss whether they themselves felt a pressure from media, models or celebrities to look or act a certain way. Interviewee A

and D suggested that age had a factor to play here, in the sense that they perceived the younger generation to be more impressionable. Whereas Interviewee C felt as if it was more peers than advertising that would impose such pressure.

Interviewee D: "When I was younger I think I felt this pressure."

Interviewee C: "It's less advertising but more what your peers and friends are doing."

5.4.1.1 Mental Health

Participants were additionally asked to speak about any negative effects in regards to body image that they thought correlated with sexualised fashion advertising. The effects interviewees from group interview one gave relayed that these advertisements give signals of that women are the less dominant sex, while group two suggested that mental health can be distorted as normal women will never fit into this constructed ideal. Interviewee D felt as if body dysmorphia can arise from sexualised imagery being used so publically. Other effects on mental health that were mentioned included; depression, eating disorders and anxiety.

Interviewee C: "I think mentally it has females thinking they have to be the subordinate partner in the relationship. That men are always dominant and females have to give the man what he wants."

Interviewee E: "With the way things are now in regards to suicide and depression, I would look at those (Sexualised) adverts and say that I'll never look like those models."

5.4.1.2 Discussion Five

Hogan and Strasburger (2008) have labelled the media as a 'superpeer' suggesting that mainstream media and advertising have influenced the perception of the ideal body due to the powerful imagery used to influence

consumers purchase intentions. In line with this, participants were asked to discuss if they personally felt any pressure to succumb to this vision of the ideal body. Though primary research revealed that participants felt more pressure from their peers than the media, celebrities or models. While also participants from both group one and two proposed once again that age was a factor in the level of pressure individuals felt to look or act a certain way, asserting that the older an individual is the more they act on their own individuality than pleasing others by becoming identical to each other in order to fit into social norms. Responses from both groups in regards to body image were quite similar no matter the difference in socio-economic backgrounds but it was noted that group two admitted to completing some level of social comparisons with celebrities. But these comparisons were in relation to the lifestyles of said celebrities rather than their body image or internalised sexualisation. Therefore, although literature has stated that advertising has imposed negative body images on women (Wykes and Gunter, 2005), primary research has revealed that Irish millennial women who participated in this study, regardless of their different socio-economic backgrounds, do not feel this pressure to look or act a certain way as expected.

Advertisers within the fashion industry have been said to play upon consumers' insecurities through the use of sexualised imagery amongst others, in order to create profit (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). Findings from primary research conducted has suggested that this sexual imagery used within fashion advertisements can have negative effects on individuals, such effects can include, but not limited to, mental health issues. Group one and two had similar thoughts on the topic but the difference being that group one felt as if negative consequences also included; making women feel inferior to men and that they were being given a role to play through sexualised objectification. Which is parallel with what Bishop (2000) states; that advertisers assert that women should be portrayed a certain way to fit in with the brands' ideal end user.

5.4.2 Content

To begin with, group interview questions started off broad, participants were asked their views on different aspects of advertising in general and the content they consumed daily. All six interviewees informed the interviewer that they felt as if they were exposed to digital advertising content far more often than traditional, with the majority coming from social media. Interviewees explained the reason for this was because most of their day was spent online.

> *Interviewee B:* **"**I am usually looking at my phone as I'm walking or even waiting on the bus I'm still looking at my phone. I end up seeing all these digital advertisements that I don't even realise I'm consuming but that's all the content I am consuming."

> *Interviewee D:* "Online, digital, definitely the most, like social media."

5.4.2.1 Offensive Advertisements

When discussing different types of content and advertising it was interesting to discover that participants' views differed on whether they found any content used within advertisements offensive or not, dependant on each group. Interestingly interview group two's interviewees D and E said they didn't find any adverts offensive. Interviewee F said the only advertisements she found offensive were political adverts.

> *Interviewee E***:** "Political campaigns do my head in, I don't agree with it all"

In contrast to this interview, group one found quite a large amount of advertisements offensive ranging from Italian fashion billboards to Johnson and Johnson adverts using children to sell products. What revealed itself to be the most fascinating revelation from group interview two is that all participants had mentioned they found content which showed women to be the most offensive when sexual appeals were used. This is because the interviewer had yet to mention sexualisation to them.

> *Interviewee A: "*The advertisements for call centres with only women on them you never see men. It's always a woman half naked on it as well."
>
> *Interviewee B:* "They (advertisers) think it's perfectly fine to depict women as these sexual objects."

5.4.2.2 Discussion Six

Many brands have used sexual content in the past to generate awareness such as Dolce and Gabbana and American Apparel (Reichert, 2002), but the majority of these sexualised campaigns have been for traditional marketing methods, for example, displayed within magazines such a vogue or cosmopolitan. However participant findings have suggested that such traditional marketing efforts can be lost on them, all interviewees shared that the bulk of advertising content they are exposed to is digital due to most of their time being spent on their phones.

Women who are seen as sexual objects within advertising are usually displayed as to suggest that the woman's body and sexual function are a separate entity from her personal identity (Calogero and Jost, 2011). Interviewee B from the findings has asserted a similar statement to that discussed by Calogero and Jost (2011), advertising content which offends the participant the most was those which depict women as being nothing more than sexual objects due to the way they are displayed. Participants have mentioned that sexual objectification is not limited to fashion advertisements they had noted it across all areas of media, including food, perfume, and late night call centre adverts. Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008) have suggested in previous literature that with the rise of post-feminism many women have become unconcerned by sexual objectification, revealing that it should be taken half-heartedly instead of in a serious manner. Though interestingly the primary research had uncovered this as being the opposite of what was actually felt by feminists and non-feminists alike. Those who considered themselves to be non-feminists were actually very passive towards sexual objectification within advertising, whereas interviewee B who strongly

considered herself to be feminist in nature had very strong opinions around the subject matter, asserting that women should not be objectified no matter the circumstance.

5.5 Summary of Key Findings

From the above research findings, it was that clear that the participants in this study who represented Irish millennial women are not overly offended by sexualisation in fashion advertisements. It was revealed that while these women did realise the effects that can be attributed to such sexual appeals such as; body dysmorphia and other mental health-related effects, this did not affect their purchase intentions. Many admitted that they were, in fact, passive when it came to such issues, additionally having felt as if the younger generation are more impressionable and easily affected by such advertising more so than millennials. Such passivity ranged from sexualisation influencing purchase intention to pornography influencing sexualisation of advertisements, but overall group two were a great deal more passive than group one who had plenty to say in relation to many of the themes covered. When it came to sexual appeals data analysis did reveal that all participants were able to understand what was considered sexualisation within advertising. Though interestingly, group one were concerned with how laws effect to what extent businesses can advertise using sexualisation, unlike group two did not express any similar thoughts.

By using participants from different socio-economic backgrounds it allowed the researcher to discover that attitudes and behaviours can vary dependant on the level of education received. While not all responses were different or opposing in nature it was interesting to understand the reasons behind each response. For example, when it came to feminism, while only one participant from group one considered herself a feminist, all participants form group two considered themselves to be traditionalists, where the woman should stay at home and mind the children. Though not all group one interviewees considered themselves a feminist each agreed that there was nothing worse

than having to be a stay at home partner. How each participant felt pressure in regards to looking or acting a certain way also was differentiated, group one had suggested that peers influenced them more than celebrities or models but group two had felt that majority of their upward comparisons were with those who were considered famous. Overall there were some interesting differences but when it came down to the effects they felt that could be had from sexualised fashion advertisements they all concluded that negative mental health issues were a problem.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The principal aim of this study was to gather insight into the effect that's the sexualisation of women in fashion advertisements can have on Irish female millennials. With the help of three research sub-objectives, which focus on sexual stimuli, purchase intention, and body image, it is felt that the main research question has been sufficiently answered. In regards to the study, there was also an underlying aim to understand whether having a different socio-economic background could influence an individual's perspective in relation to the chosen topic.

Although there have been endless research studies exploring the sexualisation of both women and men within fashion advertisements, none have discussed the sexualisation of women in fashion advertisements from an Irish Millennial perspective, especially using contrasting socio-economic backgrounds to interpret findings. Previous Research conducted on the sexualisation of women in advertising has typically used adolescent women for primary research with very little if any, research using millennials at all.

The findings and discussion derived from the primary research in chapter five it was uncovered that all participants were able to differentiate between the two different forms of sexual stimuli, while also mentioning that the felt as if sexualisation had lost its shock factor and is held back by advertising laws in Ireland. Purchase intention in regards to sexualised advertising was revealed to in fact have very little effect on the representatives of the Irish Millennial women. However, all were able to discuss mental effects that sexualisation within fashion advertisements had on both millennials and the younger generation, effects included; internalised sexualisation, negative body image, and feelings of being the inferior gender. Overall, participant's backgrounds had varying amount of influence in responses. Many responses within the findings were similar regardless of background but themes such as feminism,

mental health, price and offensive advertising uncovered contrasting views between participants' groups.

In conclusion, after completing this dissertation it is paramount that fashion brands re-consider the use of sexualisation as a tool for selling. Irish Millennial women have become very opinionated in recent years and this research has unearthed a form of passivity that this target market has when it comes to sexualisation. Therefore, when targeting Irish Millennial women, it may be empirical for brands to research another form of advertising which may reside more appropriately with this target market.

6.2 Recommendations

The study undertaken has allowed for the emergence of a number of key issues which affirm the need for further immersion into the chosen topic. First of all, future research should explore on a more in-depth level Irish female millennials general knowledge of sexualisation in advertising. A more extensive study will allow for a deeper understanding of the complex themes of sexualisation, as described by Reichert and Lambaise (2003), used within advertising as a whole not just in fashion advertisements. By doing this, it can allow for greater revelations surrounding the different themes and to what extent each theme effects Irish female millennials. Though, it is uncertain whether each differentiating theme of sexualisation is indeed the influencing factor when other components such as peer influence or socio-economic background could also contribute to such effects felt.

It is recommended that researchers who look to undertake a study of this nature should utilise visual aids within any qualitative research conducted. Visual aids were a significant help within the primary research as it allowed for participants to be reminded any sexualised advertisements as well as allowing the researcher to gather important understandings of how attitudes differentiated between participants when viewing the same advertisement. Additionally, individual in-depth interviews would be recommended for future research, only if there is little time constraint, as this

research method is time consuming but allows for further probing than group interviews, as well as allowing for quieter participants to voice their opinions without others dominating the interview process.

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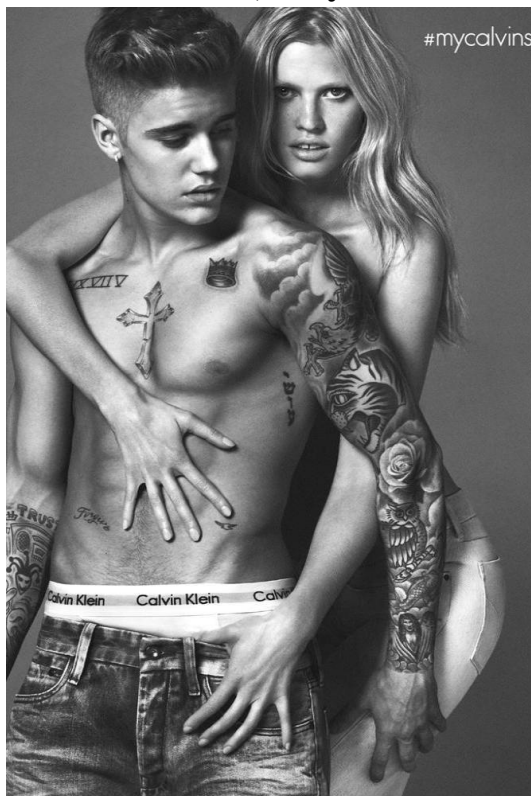
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8. Appendices

8.1 Burger King, 'Super Seven Incher' sub Ad campaign.

8.2 Calvin Klein, #Mycalvins ad with Justin Bieber.

8.3 Dolce and Gabbana, 2007 Ad Campaign.

8.4 Missguided's 2017 Body Positivity Ad Campaign.

8.5 Playboy Rebrand into Clothing.

8.6 Interview Summery Form

8.6.1 Interview Location, Time, Duration and Date

Interview	Location	Time	Date	Duration
Group Interview one	College Library	11am	25/07/2018	1 Hour 14 minutes
Group Interview two	Home of Interviewer	7pm	30/07/2018	43 minutes

8.6.2 Interviewee Profiles

Group Interview One

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Nationality	Occupation	Education Level
A	Female	24	Irish	Business Owner	BA Hons Degree
B	Female	27	Irish	Student	Masters
C	Female	22	Irish	Student	Masters

Group Interview Two

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Nationality	Occupation	Education Level
D	Female	22	Irish	Sales Consultant	Leaving Certificate
E	Female	28	Irish	Sales Consultant	Leaving Certificate
F	Female	20	Irish	Sales Consultant	Leaving Certificate

8.7 Interview Questions

1. What advertisements would you say you see the most? Digital or traditional?

2. What forms of digital and tradition advertising do you see?

3. What type of ads Would you say catch your attention more than others and why?

4. What type of ads would you say you find the most annoying and why?

5. Are there any ads that you find offensive and why?

6. What is your interpretation of sexualisation especially when used in advertising?

7. What do you think the purpose of using sexualisation in advertisements is?

8. Have you seen many ads recently that use sex appeals and Which ones stand out?

9. What brands would you say use sex appeals effectively to sell a product or service?

10. When sexualisation is used in advertising what would you say you see the most? Subtle sexual language and imagery, or overt provocative scenes and language.

11. Have you noticed sex appeals being used in fashion advertisement before?

12. If so can you name any fashion brands or ads that have used sex appeals and to what effect?

13. In your own opinion do you think using sex appeals is effective?

14. Would you say you're aware of brands who like to use sex appeals and is there any brands that you recognize purely because of their sexual nature?

15. And would this make you more or less likely to purchase their products and why?

16. Do you think pornography has a part to play in how sexualisation has been used in advertisements? Explain

17. If products are not related to nudity/bodies should they use sexual appeals? explain

Advertisements (shown to interviewees)

18. When showing you these add in your own opinion what would you say is sexual about each?

19. How does it make you feel?

20. Do you feel like these ads would make you as consumers want to buy the advertised product more or less and why?

21. What do you feel is the difference, if any, between each ad? Question awareness potential/brand recognition/purchase

22. Do you think ads shown in this manner have any effect on how you see yourself as a person and why?

23. In your own opinion would you say the women in these ads are being used as sexual objects or being active participant?

24. Would you say that any or all of these ads are acceptable to be shown?

25. Do you think they should be shown at certain periods or times only or at any points during the day? Explain

27. In your own words how do you think these ads could affect other young women? I.e. How they view themselves?

28. In your own opinion why do you think advertisers create ads of this nature? What is there purpose?

29. As representations of millennial women would you say sex as a culture has become a huge part in females lives today? Explain

30. Would you consider yourself a feminist? Explain

31. In your own opinion would you think women would take being portrayed as a sexual in advertising as offensive or as a bit of fun/ not to be taken seriously?

34. Do you think women use their sexuality to their advantage? I.e. to further their careers or any other aspects of their lives.

35. Are ads that suggest how they do this through products acceptable?

36. in your own opinion do you think women who use sexuality to their advantage are born with this sexual confidence or do you think its instilled in them from a young age?

32. What if any pressure due you feel to look or act a certain way due to how models and celebrities have been portrayed in these advertisements?

33.Through the use of sex in advertising what if any negative consequences would arise? I.e. would you say this effects a person's mental health?

8.8 Images Used in Interviews

8.8.1 Image 1 – Dolce and Gabbana
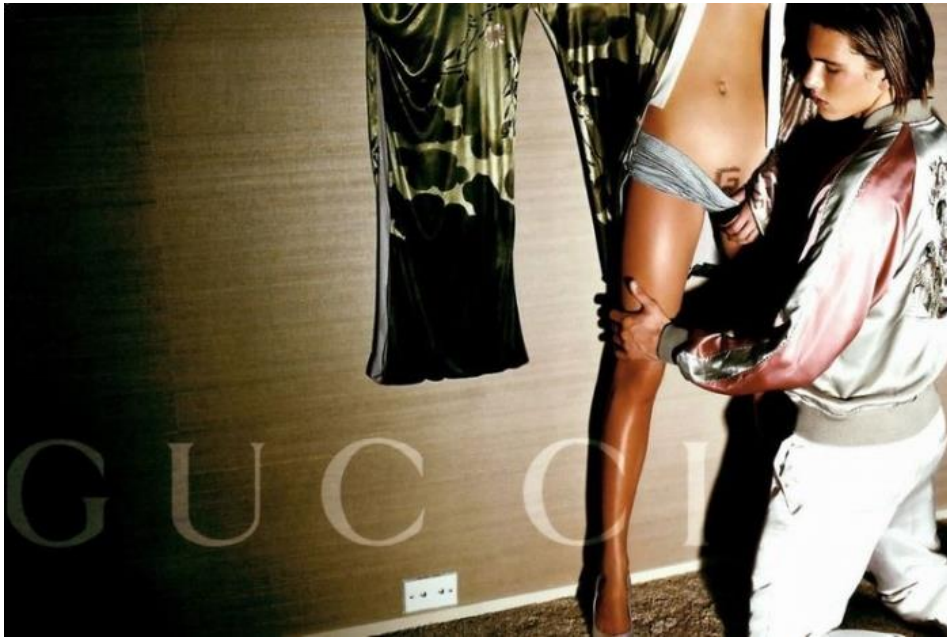

8.8.2 Image 2 – Wonderbra

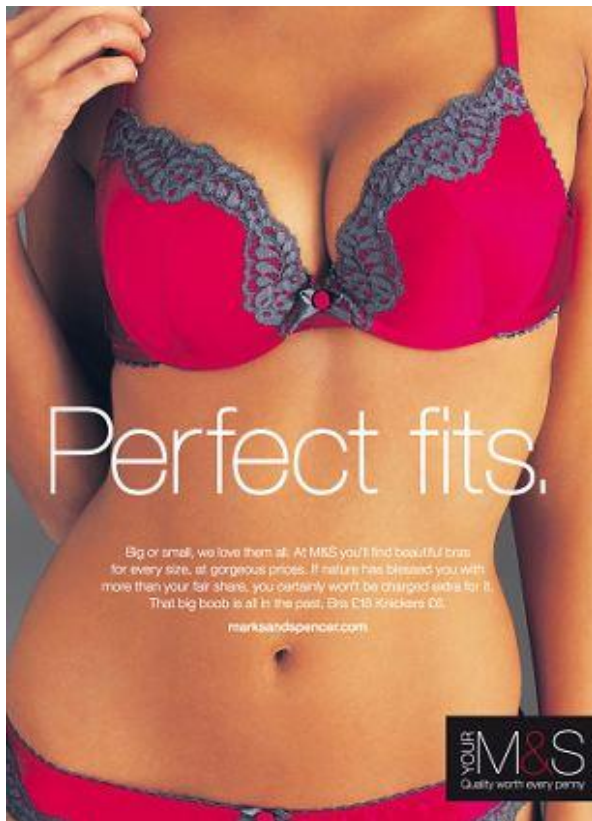### 8.8.3 Image 3 – Victoria's Secret

8.8.4 Image 4 – Diesel

8.8.5 Image 5 – Gucci

8.8.6 Image 6 – Calvin Klein

8.8.7 Image 7 – Marks and Spencer

8.8.8 Image 8 – American Apparel