At least they have their clothes on…

Putting the Clutter Syndrome to the test: an investigation of women's reactions and thoughts towards sexist advertising

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Sincerely,
Irina Balog

ABSTRACT

Title: At least they have their clothes on… Putting the Clutter Syndrome to the test: an investigation of women's reactions and thoughts towards sexist advertising.
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The subject explored in this thesis is sexist advertisement and the aim was to investigate whether the theory of Clutter Syndrome, coined in my previous study (Balog, 2014), is relevant in this field of research. Even though sexism in ads has been studied for a long time, the amount of sexism and the type of overtly sexualized portrayals has not lessened. By putting the Clutter Syndrome to the test and investigating its possible merit in this field, another step towards understanding the intricacies and consequences of sexist ads was made. By describing the concepts of the Clutter Syndrome: desensitization, comparisons and bargaining, I intended to discover whether women surveyed were affected by it or not.

This study was conducted using two surveys consisting of 32 ads in total, one survey depicting ads in a certain order (from "least" sexist to "worst"), and the other in the opposite order. There were in total 52 participants ranging between the ages of 20-35. 26 of them participated in the first survey (from "least" sexist to "worst") named Group 1, and 26 in the second: Group 2. The questions used for each ad were both on scales from 1-10, and also in the form of comments, all reflecting the participants own thoughts and feelings on the matter, thus the method was hermeneutical with both qualitative and quantitative features.

The theoretical framework included some background information regarding the field of sexist ads, and then went on to present and develop the theory of Clutter Syndrome. Previous theories regarding desensitization (Kilbourne 1999; Crase-Moritz 2002; Giffon Brooke 2003; Forde 2014; Tehseem & Riaz 2015) were included and further developed in the section regarding Clutter Syndrome.

After analysing the empirics and assessing them against the theories presented, the research questions could be answered and the Clutter Syndrome confirmed. What I found were many instances of Clutter Syndrome in action: comments and ratings that reflected desensitization, comparisons and bargaining. It could also be concluded that the participants in Group 2 were even more affected and responded in somewhat different ways than Group 1.

Keywords: Sexist advertising, Sexism, Offensive, Objectification, Clutter Syndrome, Desensitization, Comparison, Bargaining, Clutter, Sex, Nudity, Communication.

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INTRODUCTION

In my previous study at Handelshögskolan in Gothenburg (2014), I researched the intricacies of sexy vs. sexist ads by studying how women collectively decided what was acceptable to portray and what crossed the sexist-line. In my findings I discovered a phenomenon that I named the "Clutter Syndrome", which could explain how women, due to all the clutter and overtly sexual ads, could come to accept some sexist ads over others. The idea behind this concept was: the more we are fed with sexual images, the further our line gets stretched and due to the Clutter Syndrome, what would be deemed sexist just a couple of years ago, is today more or less acceptable. The Clutter Syndrome was a new concept, or elusively formulated theory in my last thesis, but this time I aim to explore it further; developing the Clutter Syndrome into a recognized theory in the field of sexist advertising. Again, this thesis has a gender perspective, exploring the thoughts and feelings women have towards sexist, objectifying and/or offensive ads.

Background

In one of her articles, Jhally[1] poses the assumption that advertising is "a very powerful form of social communication in modern society. It offers the most sustained and most concentrated set of images anywhere in the media system." Indeed, advertising is a part of our culture, communicating our values, norms and beliefs with stylized imagery and catchy slogans. "Commercialism has no borders. There is barely any line left between advertising and the rest of the culture." (Kilbourne 1999, p. 59). We are led to believe that ads sell the products they are created for, but more often than not, they also sell different values and concepts, they sell us the image of what is "normal", of what and who we should be. As Lysonsky & Pollay (1990) point out, ads communicate already defined concepts in our culture that are connected to success, love, sexuality and so forth, by using imagery and displaying different life-styles that we are led to believe, are meant to be followed. Similarly, Kilbourne (1999) claims:

> "Although some people, especially advertisers, continue to argue that advertising simply reflects the society, advertising does a great deal more than simply reflect cultural attitudes and values."…"Far from being a passive mirror of society, advertising is an effective and pervasive medium of influence and persuasion, and its influence is cumulative, often subtle, and primarily unconscious." (1999, p.67)

We as consumers have certainly changed our attitudes towards ads, and they have certainly changed; from the simple signs in medieval villages, to the early 19th

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[1] Jhally, S. article: http://www.mediaed.org/sutjhally/pdfs/Objectification.pdf

century informational ads to the images we have today; "Since the 1920's, advertising has provided less information about the product and focused more on the lives, especially emotional lives, of the prospective consumers." (Kilbourne 1999, p.71). This shift in the 1920's co-occurred with the "discovery" of the body, more accurately, the female body, and advertisers then put in a great deal of effort to make sure that women knew about all the potential body-related problems they were facing. "Other representations of the female body in advertising reinforced the idealization of the hipless, breastless female. In drawings, women's bodies were stretched to achieve this "look"." (Hawkins & Nakayama 1992, p.66).

Since the late 1970's Jean Kilbourne has lectured and produced documentaries concerning the advertising industries systemic objectification of women, which clearly shows the vast difference in the portrayals of the genders. While some studies have shown that men receive sexually themed ads positively, women on the other hand have negative reactions (Sengupta & Dahl, 2008). This could be due to the fact that ads are being more and more controversial with their use of female sexuality (Miller, 2005). "The frequent use of sexual stimuli in advertising testifies to a widespread belief in its effectiveness. However, little research has been directed at justifying this faith or delineating the nature of the presumed benefits." (Wilson & Moore 1979, p.57).

When it comes to women and men, we are still striving for equality, still trying to figure out what sets us apart from each other and what makes us alike. Advertising, however, seems to hold on to the traditional view of men and women being completely different types of beings, seeing as how men and women are depicted in such different ways, environments, positions etc. "Advertising is one of the most important areas of public life in which gender is displayed in images as well as in language." (Romaine 1999, p.251). If advertising has such power and is free to depict gender and sexuality, how can we not raise an eyebrow, or even a fist, at the contorted images we see everyday? "If an ad is irritating, insulting, or abrasive enough to cut through the clutter and make an impact on the consumer, psychological sensitivity is irrelevant. Sales spell success." (Moog 1990, p.16). Truly, there is a clutter problem in todays marketing world, which poses more than one dilemma. When advertisers get to stretch and cross the moral and sexist line in order to make an impact and cut through the clutter, what then happens to our own lines as audience? According to the Clutter Syndrome, our lines get stretched, further and further out, we become not only desensitized but also more accepting of the sexual, objectifying and offensive displays we are fed day in and day out. But can this phenomenon really have such an impact of our own thoughts and feelings without us even reflecting over it? Or does it perhaps matter more what ads we see first, when we decide where we draw the line?

Research objectives and questions

This study will investigate the Clutter Syndrome and put it to the test by seeking insight about how women feel, think and react to a series of sexually loaded ads, ranging from sexy to overtly sexist ads. The theory of the Clutter Syndrome will here be developed and described in detail in order to find out if any of the signs pointing towards the Clutter Syndrome, are active in the participants responses.

It will also explore the possibly different reactions women might have when viewing the same ads, but in reverse orders, by dividing them into two groups and deducing if any differences can be related to the Clutter Syndrome.

The aim of this research project is to explore the Clutter Syndrome as a new theory in the field of sexist advertising in order to deduce its relevance. Even though sexism in ads has been studied for decades, the problem persists and seems to be getting worse (Kilbourne, 1999), therefore it is important to keep researching this vast area and fill in missing gaps in existing research. One such gap has been the connection between the problem of advertising clutter and desensitization; only arguing that clutter leads to desensitization might not be enough to understand the intricacies and processes that occur in the viewer. Therefore, I strive to demonstrate that the Clutter Syndrome is the missing link that can provide more accurate answers to why clutter is such a problem, what happens to several viewers that leads to desensitization, and why sexist ads are not only accepted, but are also getting worse.

The main research question for the study is:

- Can the Clutter Syndrome be considered as a valid theory in the field of sexist advertising, i.e. does the Clutter Syndrome actually affect any of the women surveyed?

And the second question is a two-part question as such:

- Is there a difference in responses from women who see sexually loaded ads that in time become more and more overt and sexist, compared to those that are exposed to overtly sexist ads from the start? And if so, can these differences be explained by the Clutter Syndrome?

THEORY

Communication & Ads

> "Central to understanding communication is recognizing it as a highly dynamic process. This means that it constantly changes, evolves, and moves ever onward. Because communication is a process, there are no definite beginnings, or endings of communicative interactions."…"all communication occurs in particular situations, or systems, that influence what and how we communicate and especially what meanings we attach to messages." (Wood 1999, p.32)

Advertising is probably one of the most powerful modes of communication that we have in our society, no matter how much we may be inclined to deny it, there is no escaping ads.

> "Advertisers like to tell parents that they can always turn off the TV to protect their kids from any of the negative impact of advertising. This is like telling us that we can protect our children from air pollution by making sure they never breathe. Advertising is our *environment*." (Kilbourne 1999, p.57).

Advertising is not just about selling products and services; it is connected to our culture, societal norms, values, and not to mention, our sex and gender: "As hyperritualistic images, commercials offer an extremely concentrated form of communication about sex and gender. The essence of gender is represented in advertisements." (Jhally 1990, p.136). The abstract representation of gender is also discussed by Leiss, Kline & Jhally (1986) who use Goffman's previous work regarding gendered features to explain why ads play on old gender stereotypes;

> "Ads have to communicate quickly, at a glance (as in the world of strangers), and they require the participation of the audience to construct meaning. Therefore, advertisers are predisposed to rely on the repertoires of daily life for their materials. What better source to draw upon, than an area of social behaviour in which ritual gestures are instantly recognizable, and which touches the very core of our definition as human beings?" (1986, p.168)

They then go on presenting the typical gendered features Goffman put forward, like women being more alike children than adults, women's hands never being as strong and in control as men's hands and also how women more often than men are posed lying down; a lower position that also expresses sexual availability. Women are more portrayed as drifting, in need of male protection, and not to mention the finger-to-mouth pose so often used for women, that again suggests childishness. All these portrayals are by no means accidental, they are deliberate and they draw from the same resources, the same environments that we all live in, that is one of the

reasons that ads do not look weird to us; they are not creating a whole new reality, but draw their ideas from an already existing one (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1986).

Through their realistic but posed imagery, ads have the power to practically tell us who we are, or who we are supposed to be. What has become obvious and is very problematic though, is the fact that the representation of women in ads is constantly filled with stereotypes (Lazier-Smith, 1989):

> "A central gender concern is that advertising is a shorthand form of communication that must make contact with the consumer immediately, establishing a shared experience or identification. Perhaps the best-known way advertising does this is by using stereotypical imagery." (1989, p.248).

Lazier-Smith (1989) discusses the communication of advertisements in connection to our culture and exemplifies with Dervin and Clarks (1988) theory of communication being thought of in three ways: as content, structure and procedure. The content being the "what" of a culture, the structure being the "keepers" of the "what" and the procedure as the norms or "how to do" the keeping. While advertisements do reflect our culture, Lazier-Smith (1989) argues that what they actually reflect is the traditional balance of power:

> "They reflect critical components of our culture – its stereotypes, its bigotries, its biases – its dominant values, a tendency toward the status quo, and ongoingness of the traditional. But even more, they reflect its chauvinism and its sexism." (1989, p. 257).

Thus, the ads reflect the myths more than the reality. Leiss, Kline & Jhally (1986) also state that while ads draw their ideas from the audience, they reformulate them for their own purpose and thus reconstitute the meanings: "Looking at advertisements today is a bit like walking through a carnival hall of mirrors, where the elements of our ordinary lives are magnified and exaggerated but are still recognizable." (1986, p.152). As a potent communications tool, advertisements have the power to distort and reshape both reality and meaning.

> "Although they draw their materials from every day life, they select them carefully: much is included, but also much is omitted. By choosing only some things and reintegrating them into the meaning system of advertising, ads create *new meanings*." (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1986, p.169)

Furthermore, ads work through referent systems, which gives them two levels of meaning; what the ad explicitly says and what it implies (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1986, p.169), this makes it possible for ads to communicate different things simultaneously, and like the old saying goes "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" in this case, the subtle meaning and message of the ad can be in the eyes of the audience. Leiss, Kline & Jhally (1986) exemplify this with an ad for sunglasses portraying "The Hulk" Lou Ferrigno, and as they view and interpret the ad they find implications that are not said out loud:

"At the connotative level, then, the ad implies that the use of "Sferoflex" glasses may make the wearer sexually attractive to women. Nowhere in the ad is this stated; we interpret it this way through internal and external transfers of significance. Moreover, this is not the only interpretation we could have made. If the same ad were viewed from a female rather than a male perspective, the eyewear could be connected to the beauty of the female model rather than the strength of the male." (1986, p.159).

This subtle level of connotation has been vigorously used in propaganda for decades but had to be introduced to advertisements since they did not always use this kind of "hidden" messages before the Second World War:

"Advertising had to teach an evolving customer culture not just to enjoy visual stimuli, but to integrate visual and textual material, using goods as the linking mechanism to achieve an internal transfer of significance. From about 1925 to 1945 the text duplicated the visual and told the audience that what they saw resulted from using the product. In contemporary advertising this ability to transfer is assumed because the audience is "advertising educated"." (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1986, p.160).

Thus, the ads we see today do not always communicate their message using direct statements, but rather they use our own built-in system of referents, hopes, dreams and values, to create meaning. Furthermore, the contemporary ads we see everywhere are more about the image, than the information, and as Dee (1999) puts it, advertisers are the artists that have nothing to say. Nonetheless, the imagery that ads have says a great deal about our society. "Advertising's imagery and symbolism replaces "real" people with artificial "types" and situations, and thus turns people into things, purchasable and exchangeable in the marketplace." (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1986, p.24).

Sex & Clutter

Advertisements can be seen and found everywhere, this constant exposure poses a dilemma; how are advertisers supposed to cut through all the clutter and catch the attention of their audience? For many advertisers, this problem has been solved with a certain type of strategy: Sexual imagery.

"In an effort to cut through the tremendous clutter that exists in today's advertising space, marketers have resorted to increasingly radical tactics to capture consumer attention. One such popular tactic uses explicit sexual images in advertising, even when the sexual image has little relevance to the advertised product. (Dahl, Sengupta & Vohs 2009, p.215)

Sex has been used in ads since the 60's and has only increased in addition to becoming more and more overt in an attempt to break through the clutter (LaTour

& Henthorne, 1994; Söderlund, 2003; Reichert, 2003). Today, sex is used to sell everything from clothes to accessories to perfumes and miscellaneous products that have nothing to do with sex itself. "But this sexuality is never free in itself; it is a symbol for something presumed to be larger than it: the good life in which you can buy whatever you want." (Berger 2008, p.138). The sex used in ads has little to do with the real deal and is more connected to the sex found in pornography than reality thus it is a kind of sex that degrades, objectifies and distorts (Kilbourne 1999; Merskin 2006; Gill 2008).

"The use of provocative images in advertising has become more common over the last twenty years, possibly as a response to increased advertising clutter." (Pope, Voges & Brown 2004, p 69). Advertisements are competing against each other for our attention, and just like fashion, ads quickly go out of style. The race between advertisers has led to ads cluttering every inch of our lives, as well as being more and more provocative:

> "The more spectacle that we are exposed to, the less spectacle itself affects us. The more technologically sophisticated the images become, the less impressed we are with images that don't push the envelope. Our mediascape fills with advertising at an unprecedented rate, and we are increasingly desensitized to the messages marketed at us." (Giffon Brooke 2003, p.133).

The problem is not that just some solitary ads are portraying these sexually loaded images, but rather, that so many of them have the same type of depictions. Jhally (1990) refers to this as a system of images, the operative word being system, and argues how this system (opposed to individual ads) creates falsity;

> "The falsity arises from the *system of images*, from the advertisements as a totality and from their cumulative effect. All (or at least many) messages are about gender and sexuality. It seems that for women it is the *only* thing that is important about them." (Jhally 1990, p.139)

It is a conundrum why so many ads choose to portray the same imagery while at the same time compete with each other to get noticed. When so many ads use sex and sexual portrayals of women, one would think that the least sexual ad should be the one that stands out, this however, does not seem to have occurred to advertisers:

> "In print advertising, the results of more than a dozen studies, almost all conducted in the 1970s, have shown the messages of advertising to be astonishingly similar: Woman's place is in the home; women are dependent upon men; women do not make independent and important decisions; women are shown in few occupational roles; women view themselves and are viewed by others as sex objects." (Lazier-Smith 1989, p. 249).

In a recent study concerning the sexual portrayal of women in ads, the authors concluded that most ads tend towards negative and stereotypical portrayals of women and that they are more connected to the male gaze i.e. represented from a

male perspective (Mulvey, 1999). This type of misrepresentation can have serious and harmful consequences since "Objectifying women in commercials and advertisements for products has desensitized people towards violence perpetrated against women." (Tehseem & Riaz 2015, p.11). As Kilbourne (1999) argues, by objectifying a person it turns him/her into a thing, creating a disconnection that is usually the first step towards justifying violence towards that same person: "Ads don't directly cause violence, of course. But the violent images contribute to the state of terror. And objectification and disconnection create a climate in which there is widespread and increasing violence." (Kilbourne 1999, p.278).

The Clutter Syndrome

The Clutter Syndrome, based on my previous studies (Balog, 2014), can explain why some of the sexist and offensive ads seen today are accepted by the viewers instead of protested. The Clutter Syndrome is something that we as an audience can get influenced by without even realizing it, and it involves three main concepts: **desensitization/numbness**, **comparisons** and **bargaining**. The definition is: The Clutter Syndrome is a phenomenon that through desensitization, comparison and bargaining can affect viewers perceptions of ads, due to all the clutter and the sexist/offensive imagery used.

The theory of the Clutter Syndrome states; when seeing ad after ad depicting highly sexualized/sexist/offensive imagery, the viewer will:

a) Become desensitized after a while and thus not care (as much) about the sexist/offensive portrayals, thus allowing them to go on.
b) Start comparing the ads with each other, in order to find where to draw the line, which by doing so gets stretch further and further.
c) Begin the bargaining process, which allows the viewer to "lessen" the sexist/offensive impact of some ads when they have some form of "redeeming" factor.

All three of these processes do not have to occur simultaneously or for all viewers, however the last two most often go hand in hand, and eventually, the more one compares and bargains, the more desensitized one gets. All these processes are in some ways linked to our perceptions of morality; of what we feel is "right" and "wrong", and the more affected one is by the Clutter Syndrome, the more distorted the perceptions become.

When naming the phenomenon Clutter Syndrome in my previous studies (Balog, 2014), I had the overwhelming sensation of the whole topic of sexually loaded ads being an unstoppable machine. The women's responses in the focus groups were not, after all, that surprising, but still indescribably frustrating. Having to deal with such imagery day in and day out surely must force one to extreme measures and

coping mechanism after a while. Thus the term "syndrome", even though medical in its roots, seemed like the perfect option. When looking up the word syndrome, I came across these meanings[2]:

1. a group of related or coincident things, events, actions, etc.
2. the pattern of symptoms that characterize or indicate a particular social condition.
3. a predictable, characteristic pattern of behaviour, action, etc., that tends to occur under certain circumstances.

When applying these to the Clutter Syndrome, one may thus get the following definitions:

1. When seeing ad after ad with sexually loaded imagery, people (may) feel desensitized/numb, and start comparing them to each other, bargaining one against the other and concluding that some, which might not be appropriate, are still "ok".
2. The symptoms of the Clutter Syndrome are: desensitization/numbness towards sexually loaded ads, and an active process of comparing and bargaining ads with each other.
3. When influenced by the Clutter Syndrome, one might not scrutinize or critically reflect over some sexually loaded ads, since they are, by comparison, not as "bad" as others.

The key features and concepts of the Clutter Syndrome theory are thus desensitization/numbness, comparisons and bargaining; these are the tell-tale-signs that I hope to find while investigating the gathered empirics.

The statement regarding the desensitization that occurs when viewing offensive ad after offensive ad has been brought up time and time again, Kilbourne (1999) argues that we become numb after such large exposures of sexist portrayals and Forde (2014) exclaims: "We're collectively exhausted with sexual messages intended to persuade us to buy this or that, usually through tired cliché or norm-shocking visuals." (2014, pp.114-115). It was these reasoning's among others, that led me to coin the term Clutter Syndrome in the first place, in an effort to further describe and develop the problematic process of desensitization.

> "Information saturation (and advertising clutter in particular) requires the post-modern consumer to develop coping mechanisms and ad avoidance strategies in order to guard against being overwhelmed. Again, when confronted with too many ad messages, the consumer must filter out the excess stimuli, paying attention only to those messages that pass through his or her internal screening criteria." (Rumbo 2002, p.131).

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[2] http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/syndrome

Being desensitized could be viewed as a form of coping mechanism; instead of feeling overwhelmed and distraught, one gets numb. However, not expressing or dealing with the feelings and thoughts connected to such ads, may have other effects and ramifications. In an interesting Master thesis from 2002, Crase-Moritz performed a study relating to the desensitization of sexually loaded ads. The author found that some, when given the choice, responded that they felt "nothing", regarding various ads. The "nothing" that they felt had to do with the fact that they were so used to such images, it no longer shocked them, they were simply put, no big deal. This response thus lead to the conclusion that the participants had become desensitized towards that type of imagery; since so many ads are like that, how can one eventually not become numb?

> "We as a people have become desensitized to negative images or provocative advertising."…"by responding "nothing" we are giving permission to advertisers to continue to try and shock us with inappropriate images."
> (Crase-Moritz 2002 p.140-141).

We are more and more used to sexually loaded ads, but thinking that they do not mean anything, or even affect us in any way, since we feel "nothing" about them, can have serious consequences, after all: "the most effective kind of propaganda is that which is not recognized as propaganda. Because we think advertising is silly and trivial, we are less on guard, less critical, than we might otherwise be." (Kilbourne 1999, p.27). But what happens when we are "forced" to voice some form of opinions regarding sexually loaded ads, when the "Nothing" option is not available? When I put forward the Clutter Syndrome theory in my previous thesis, I did so as a way to further discuss and explore the concept of desensitization. The Clutter Syndrome not only involves the numbness that one feels after watching ad after ad loaded with sexual and objectifying imagery, but it also has to do with the coping-mechanism, or rather bargaining-process which transpires:

> "When the women had to see ad after ad depicting women as sex objects, the lines got blurred and eventually they were ok with some ads because they were comparing them with others which they thought definitely crossed the line, i.e. applying the "lesser of two evils" principle." (Balog 2014, p.57).

By applying the "lesser of two evils" principle, one can conclude that what the women were in fact doing was bargaining; pit the ads against each other and internally negotiate which one is "less" sexist/objectifying, or just plain awful. It is also important to note that in the study, I did not explicitly ask the women to compare the ads with each other; they did so automatically, instinctively. This practice of comparison thus lead them to start the bargaining-process; when pitting one ad over the other, one of them could almost always be declared "the worst", thus more or less justifying the imagery used in the other ad. This, however, did not mean that the "lesser" of the two was in any way, shape or form an appropriate ad, but in comparison, it could glide under the radar.

"since the audience gets saturated and starts comparing one offensive ad with another deeming one of them "more" ok, they thus allow the advertising industry to keep being provocative." ... "if we were to view all ads for themselves, many of them would indeed not be ok at all at the first glance, but because of the clutter-syndrome, we are forced to look at so many ads and thus comparing them in order to find the line, which simultaneously, gets stretched out even farther every time we find an offensive ad to not be "as" offensive as the next one." (Balog 2014, p.57)

Since the Clutter Syndrome consists of three different concepts; desensitization/ numbness, comparisons and bargaining, it is important to recognize how these concepts may appear when active. As Crase-Moritz (2002) deduced, desensitization is connected to feeling "nothing", and this principle is basically the same concerning the Clutter Syndrome. The concept of desensitization in this theory means that the participant does not have any strong feelings regarding an ad that should, in some sense induce some sort of feelings. Thus, when commenting that you have nothing to say, that you feel nothing in regards to the ad, this is a sign of desensitization. This concept is also closely linked to saturation, meaning that a high exposure of a certain type of imagery in ads may lead to desensitization since the viewer is so "used to" seeing it.

When it comes to comparisons, these are easier to spot since they always include a distinction between two or more ads, for instance; "This is worse than the other", or "compared to the other, this is better." Comparisons can also easily lead and be linked to the last concept of bargaining, which again is fairly easy to spot since it most often involves the phrase: "at least". This simple yet significant phrase means that the viewer has made a conscious deliberation and concluded that the ad in question has some form of redeeming quality, as in: "at least they have their clothes on".

If the answers gathered from this study can be connected to desensitization and numbness, if they reflect the practice of comparison and process of bargaining, then the theory of Clutter Syndrome can truly be recognized.

METHOD

As a researcher, my ontological view is of a hermeneutical nature thus this thesis is based on perceptions and feelings towards sexist ads (Jacobsen, 2002). However, there are different methods that can be used in such a research and in this case I have chosen a deductive methodology based on certain expectations and hypotheses (Jacobsen 2002). This means that I have decided to work from theory to empirics, thus gathering research, forming certain expectations and then collecting the empirical data on which to base my analysis.

There is usually a distinction between qualitative and quantitative data, the former dealing with words and the latter with numbers (Bryman, 2012), however when undertaking this thesis I decided to combine the two by using a survey which in the end allows me to both extract answers in the form of numbers and also words.

This thesis strives to seek more insight about the Clutter Syndrome and also to see if there are any differences among the women's responses depending on what ads they see first, therefore I found it optimal to do two different surveys containing the same ads, but with the ads arranged in opposite orders. Of course, choosing this method can be questionable since the research itself is problematic:

> "Sexism in advertising, although increasingly recognized as a problem, remains an ongoing global issue. How does all this affect us? It is very difficult to do objective research about advertising's influence because there are no comparison groups, almost no people who have not been exposed to massive doses of advertising." (Kilbourne 1999, p. 73).

So as to truly achieve the most objective and accurate answers I would have needed to use both surveys on the same women, who had never before been exposed to such ads, but since one cannot "un-see" an ad, this option was impossible, and there are no such women who have not been exposed, at least not in this society. Therefore I decided to gather answers to both surveys from different women, thus dividing them into two groups; Group 1 and Group 2, and analysing the differences and similarities between these groups.

In my previous study (Balog, 2014) where I first presented the Clutter Syndrome, I used focus groups, and perhaps it was that type of environment, open for discussions, that lead the women to compare the ads and bargain with each other. In order to study the Clutter Syndrome further, this thesis has therefore been conducted under different forms and circumstances. So as to understand and discover the mechanisms of the Clutter Syndrome, the participants who took part in this study filled in online surveys alone, they were not able to discuss the ads with any other participants or myself, they were not asked to compare anything. They only got see ad after ad depicting sexually loaded imagery, and answer a few simple

questions that reflected their opinions. In order to find whether the participants were affected by the Clutter Syndrome at all, I pinpointed some key-words and phrases that illustrate when the signs of the Clutter Syndrome are active: "Desensitized", "numb", "nothing/nothing to say" (+ instances of saturation), "compared to/in comparison", "not as/that (offensive/sexist/bad etc.)", "better than" and "at least". The first four examples are related to **desensitization/ numbness**, the following three to the process of **comparing ads** with each other, and the last phrase "at least", is directly linked to **bargaining**.

The procedure and the surveys are detailed and specified in this chapter; along with other steps and measurements I have taken in order to write this thesis.

Collecting data

Literature search

I used the search engine provided by the University Library of Gothenburg and also Google Scholar to gather relevant articles and books on the subject. Search words used included: ads, adverts, advertisement, marketing, sex, sexist, sexism, objectification, clutter, desensitized, numb, women, communication, method, methodology. I also included literature from my previous study that I was well acquainted with such as Kilbourne (1999), Mulvey (1999) and Berger (2008).

Survey as Method

Surveys are usually a good method for studying people's attitudes and behaviours when they cannot directly be observed (Ekström & Larsson, 2010). Usually demographic questions are placed at the end, but since I only had two of them I decided to put them at the start of the survey to "get them over with" so the participants could focus on the more important questions.

Ideally, questions should be as precise as possible, using words and concepts that people can understand. Asking two questions in one can create some confusion and incorrect answers, therefore the questions should be formulated one at a time (Ekström & Larsson, 2010).

An advantage of using surveys is the "absence of interviewer effect" (Bryman, 2012), which basically means that I could not affect the participants answers since I was not present when they filled in the survey (also, they were not able to affect each other either). Along with that, I could not affect them either by asking the questions in different ways, or in different orders; all the questions were the same for all participants. This type of method is also more convenient for the participants since it allows them to complete it whenever (depending on how long the survey is

"open"), and wherever they wish. Bryman (2012) also exemplifies the advantage of surveys by referring to Tourangeau and Smiths (1996) who claim that participants tend to be more open in their answers when filling out questionnaires, than they are when doing an interview.

Moreover, questions to use in surveys should not be based on previous knowledge, since all the participants will surely not know all the same things. According to Ekström & Larsson (2010) one should also watch out for memory-effects since it could be difficult for some to answer what they did/saw/heard one or several days/weeks/months ago. If you wish to receive personal answers, the questions should also be formulated in such a way, i.e. the question "Do you find this ad sexist?", is better than "Is this ad sexist?". Avoiding double negatives is also preferred, as well as avoiding leading questions such as: "Don't you think this ad is sexist?"

Regarding the "Don't know/No Opinion" option, one can choose to use this, especially for questions where there might not be a "correct" or "valid" answer. However, I decided to not include this option since the questions were about the participants' own attitudes and feelings/thoughts, thus I wanted them to always be "forced" to take a stance and not be able to opt out by saying they did not know.

Material & Procedure

Web surveys are cheaper and easier to administrate (Bryman, 2012), therefore I decided to use Google forms. For the surveys I gathered 32 different ads online using Google and the following search words: ads, adverts, advertisement, sex, sexist, sexy, underwear, offensive, perfume, handbag, jeans, naked, model, objectifying. I also narrowed the search to include images posted between 2005-2015, since I did not want to use ads that were too "out of date". However, even when narrowing, there may still be older images included in the search, so I thus tried to find the ones that at least looked more modern. In some cases I visited the website where the pictures were posted and tried to find out more about them. All in all I believe that the ads I used are fairly recent.

The ads portray different uses of sex/sexiness, from innuendos to blatant pornography, from scantily clad models to violence. After gathering and deciding which 32 ads to use, I then divided them into three different groups: Somewhat offensive and sexist, Very offensive and sexist, and Extremely offensive and sexist, this was done because I wanted to create an order in which to place the ads in the surveys; from the "least" offensive/sexist to the absolute "worst". Dividing them into such groups made it a bit easier for me to rank them, and although this division and the order is highly interpretive and subjective, I did use different tactics. The previous thesis I wrote (Balog, 2014) concerning this same phenomenon of sexist ads lead me to deduce that the ads the women reacted most negatively to were: the ones that used pornography, violence and the use of women as sex objects for no

reason what so ever. Thus these types of ads were placed as some of/the most sexist and offensive. Other ads that "only" used some partial nudity or innuendos were ranked less sexist and offensive. 15 of the ads used in the surveys were also used in the previous study, since I already had some knowledge in regards to how other women react to and feel about them, it thus made it easier for me to place them in the chosen order.

After deciding on the order of the ads I then created a survey using Google Forms, starting off with two basic background questions (Age, occupation) and then moving on to the ads where I asked the participants 4 questions in total for each ad. When using surveys one can choose to include open or closed questions, for my surveys I decided to use both. I focused on the advantages of both open and closed questions and found that open questions allows the participants to answer in their own terms as well as allowing for unusual responses. Closed questions on the other hand are easier to process and enhance the comparability (Bryman, 2012). The questions I used were:

1. Do you find this advert sexy? (in some cases the advert was about being funny, and then I asked if they thought it was clever/humorous, instead of sexy)
2. Do you find this advert sexist or objectifying?
3. Do you find this advert offensive?
4. What are your thoughts/feelings regarding this ad?

Questions 1-3 were made in the form of scales from 1-10, 1 being "No, not at all" and 10 being "Yes, very!". The last question was a textbox allowing the participants to answer freely. This was made because I wanted to allow them to use their own words regarding the ads and thus include a qualitative level to the survey;

> "In order to truly understand social phenomenon we must gather how people interpret the social reality. We cannot do this in other ways than through observing them – what they do and say – and let them speak with their own words." (Jacobsen 2002, p.39. Quote translated from Swedish).

Also, when the survey was finished I added another textbox asking them if they had any comments regarding the survey, allowing them once more to express their own thoughts to this research.

One survey (Group 1) was made using the 32 ads in the order from the "least" sexist/offensive to the "worst" and the other (Group 2) was made using the opposite order, i.e. the "worst" sexist/offensive to the "least". The questions were identical in both surveys; the only difference was the order of the ads. All the ads used in the surveys have been added in the appendix and presented in the order that Group 1 saw them, i.e. the "least" sexist/offensive to the "worst".

Initially, my goal was to gather at least 40 answers in total (20 for each survey), just to have something to strive for, and the answers I wanted were from women between the ages of 20-35, the reason being that all of the ads used for the survey are portraying, and most likely targeting, women in that age group. In order to gather answers I decided to send out the surveys on Facebook to female friends, acquaintances, classmates and other students attending the same faculty/program, thus receiving answers both from people I know and people who are strangers to me. The surveys were supposed to be anonymous and random in order to get unbiased results, thus I always sent out both links and asked them to choose which one to take. Every time I sent it out I switched the order of the two links to make sure no one of them was "promoted" more than the other. Also, in the message I did not mention the topic of sexist ads so as to not influence anyone beforehand or prepare the women for what was to come, the only thing I wrote was that it was a survey about advertising and that they were just going to see some ads and answer questions about them.

One week after sending out the surveys I had reached 43 answers (20 and 23), so I decided to set my goal to 50 and again wrote on Facebook to promote the surveys and ask for just a few more answers. After a couple of days I managed to get 52 answers in total, 26 for each survey.

Since I used Google Forms the answers were easy to access and manage, charts were created automatically for each group concerning questions 1-3. However when presenting the data I decided to create my own charts which combined the answers from both groups for every specific ad. When it came to the 4th question containing the comments, these were all copied from the Google document for each group and pasted into an excel file. This to create a clearer overview and seeing exactly how the participants of Group 1 commented each ad compared to Group 2. I then started searching for my key words and phrases in the excel-file and the most relevant comments have been presented together with the charts in the Empirics chapter.

Participants

For the surveys I used two simple background questions: age and occupation. From the 52 answers gathered, 14 of the participants were between 20-25 years old, 29 were between 25-30, and the remaining 9 between 30-35 years old. The majority of the participants were students, 33 in total, 6 part-time workers and 13 full time workers. None of the participants were unemployed.

Overview of the demographics of Group 1 and Group 2 (see figures 1 &2):

Group 1

Age?
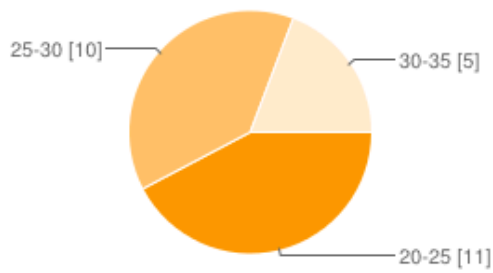
20-25	**11**	42.3%
25-30	**10**	38.5%
30-35	**5**	19.2%

Occupation?
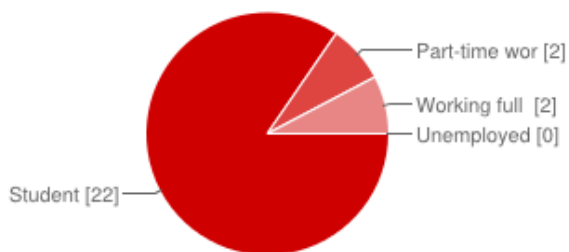
Student	**22**	84.6%
Part-time worker	**2**	7.7%
Working full time	**2**	7.7%
Unemployed	**0**	0%

Figure 1. Demographic of Group 1

Group 2

Age?
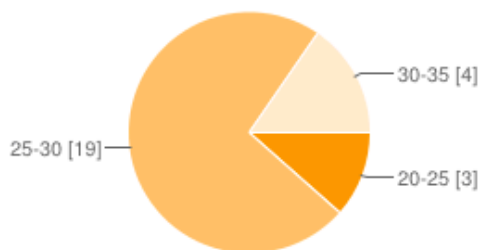
20-25	**3**	11.5%
25-30	**19**	73.1%
30-35	**4**	15.4%

Occupation?
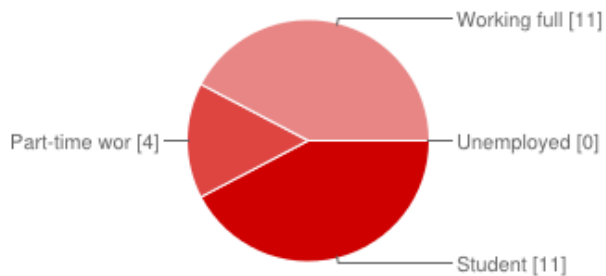
Student	**11**	42.3%
Part-time worker	**4**	15.4%
Working full time	**11**	42.3%
Unemployed	**0**	0%

Figure 2. Demographic of Group 2

Credibility

When discussing the credibility of a research, it is said that the interpretations of the social world must be presented in a study and viewed as credible in order to be accepted, thus basing a research according to good practice and presenting the gathered material correctly provides a credible standpoint (Bryman, 2012).

By presenting the mode of procedure step by step in detail and also including questions and answers from the surveys shows credibility. I have strived to be as transparent as possible and not left out anything that I did when working on this thesis. Going through the answers from the surveys, I did not agree with all of them, however by using Google Forms it allowed me to easily compile all the answers without any possibility of changing or in some way adjusting them; once an answer is registered it is definite and cannot be changed or deleted from the statistics.

Reliability and validity

The concepts of reliability and validity are concerned with consistency and measurement issues. They highlight questions such as: are the results of the study repeatable, and do the measures of concept X really measure concept X? (Bryman, 2012). Reliability is often concerned with replication and quantitative data, but much of the reliability is also connected to how the researcher has presented the gathered material; if the process is not detailed and specific, replication is impossible (Bryman, 2012). Even though using a survey suggests a quantitative method, this thesis is as much based on qualitative data since the material gathered from the surveys is more about personal feelings and attitudes, than sheer statistics and facts. While some women responded in a certain way when doing this survey, they might as well respond in another way, given the opportunity to fill in the same survey again. Since most qualitative studies are not replicable (Bryman, 2012) I have instead focused on making sure that everything is presented in a clear, detailed and truthful manner.

When dealing with the validity, this is dependent on the integrity of the conclusions derived from the research; has the collected data any connection to the research questions and can one draw such conclusions from it? (Holme & Solvang 1997: Bryman 2012). Again, some types of validity have more to do with pure quantitative data, and thus cannot really be applied in this case. However, when it comes to face validity, this can be achieved by asking for instance your supervisor, teachers, professors or other persons with experience and expertise, to judge and determine if the measures used are efficient and connected to the issues/research questions. Before creating my survey, I met with my Supervisor Åsa Fyrberg and presented my ideas to her regarding the method. After explaining exactly how and why I wanted to conduct these surveys, she could then determine whether I was on a "good" path. Since this method resonated with her as well, I thus moved forward with it.

EMPIRICS

The Google form automatically summarized all the answers from the surveys and in this section only the most relevant findings will be presented.

The participants in the surveys had to answer four questions in total for each ad. The first three consisted of scales from 1-10, 1 being "No, not at all" and 10 being "Yes, very!". The questions were:

1. Do you find this advert sexy? (in some cases the advert was about being funny, and then I asked if they thought it was clever/humorous, instead of sexy)
2. Do you find this advert sexist or objectifying?
3. Do you find this advert offensive?
4. What are your thoughts/feelings regarding this ad?

The last three questions were in the end the most relevant ones and therefore these will be the main point in this chapter, the second and third question will hence be referred to as Q2 and Q3.

There were as mentioned 32 different ads and a total of 26 women in each group. This means that in total, the amount of individual rating numbers, 1-10, for one specific question was 832 (32*26=832) i.e. Q2 could in total for all ads receive 832 1's, 2's, 3's and so on, for each survey. By going through all answers and gathering the amount of 1's and 10's for Q2 and Q3 for each group, one finds that Group 1 were more likely, about 10%, to find an ad very sexist and very offensive, rating it a 10, while Group 2 were approximately 3% more likely to not find an ad sexist or offensive at all, rating it a 1:

Table 1. Total amount of 1's and 10's regarding Q2 and Q3 for both groups.

	1's	% of 832	10's	% of 832
Group 1				
- Q2 Sexist	38	5%	373	45%
- Q3 Offensive	84	10%	322	39%
Group 2				
- Q2 Sexist	64	8%	290	35%
- Q3 Offensive	107	13%	229	28%

After going through all the answers for each ad, one could also spot which ads the participants received most negatively. Below are the top worst ads for Q2 and Q3, top worst meaning they got the most 10's in the rating scale. The numbers in

brackets symbolize the order in which they came for that particular group. The most sexist and the most offensive ads according to both groups were thus:

Table 2. Most sexist and most offensive ads according to Group 1 and Group 2

Group 1

Q2 Most sexist	84,6%	Tom Ford (32)
	73,1%	Suit Supply (20), American Apparel (28), Tom Ford (25)
Q3 Most Offensive	80,8%	Tom Ford (32)
	73,1%	American Apparel (28)
	69,2%	Tom Ford (25), Valentino (21)

Group 2

Q2 Most sexist	73,1%	Tom Ford (8)
	69,2%	Tom Ford (1)
	61,5%	Durex (18)
Q3 Most Offensive	73,1%	Tom Ford (8)
	69,2%	Valentino (12)
	57,7%	Durex (18), BMW (27)

These numbers show that Group 1 found the most sexist and offensive ad to be the same one: the Tom Ford ad that was the last ad in their survey, number 32. This ad received around 7-11% more 10's regarding both Q2 and Q3 from Group 1, compared to the ad that Group 2 found to be the worst, which again was a Tom Ford ad, number 8 in the order.

16 of the ads that received the most interesting results when it comes to differences between the groups and also comments will now be presented along with a table displaying the answers for Group 1 and Group 2 regarding Q2 & Q3. The vertical axis shows the amount of answers and the horizontal axis displays the rating numbers, 1-10. The title of each table represents the order of the image along with the brand or type of ad. The first number is the order for Group 1, and the second for Group 2, thus "3/30 Dolce & Gabbana" equals the 3rd ad for Group 1 and the 30th ad for Group 2, and the ad in question is an ad for Dolce & Gabbana. Also some of the comments from the fourth question will be presented with the ads, together with information regarding which group that participant came from and also what she rated the ad regarding the other three questions, example:

"Comment" – Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=9, Q3=5)

This comment was made by a participant from Group 1 who rated the ad a 1 in the first question, 9 in the second and 5 in the third.

This ad (see figure 3) by Dolce & Gabbana was the 3rd in the survey for Group 1 and the 30th for Group 2. Overall it was found somewhat sexist and offensive by both groups (see figure 4).

Some comments regarding this ad:

"The ad looks unnatural, which makes me feel like it is more objectifying and offensive as the one before. The woman looks like a prostitute from some years ago." – Group 1 (Q1=6, Q2=9, Q3=8)

"Although it is a commercial for a lipstick, the product is barely in the picture. Once again it appears as if the only thing that would appeal to the target group is sex and the ability to be sexy for the partner of their choice..." – Group 1 (Q1=2, Q2=9, Q3=8)

Figure 3. Dolce & Gabbana ad

"Nothing" – Group 1 (Q1=5, Q2=6, Q3=2)

"playing on old stereotypes." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=1, Q3=1)

"Skin and boobs..again" – Group 2 (Q1=8, Q2=4, Q3=1)

"Typical ad, passive woman, at least I look at her lipstick" – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=9, Q3=5)

3/30 Dolce & Gabbana

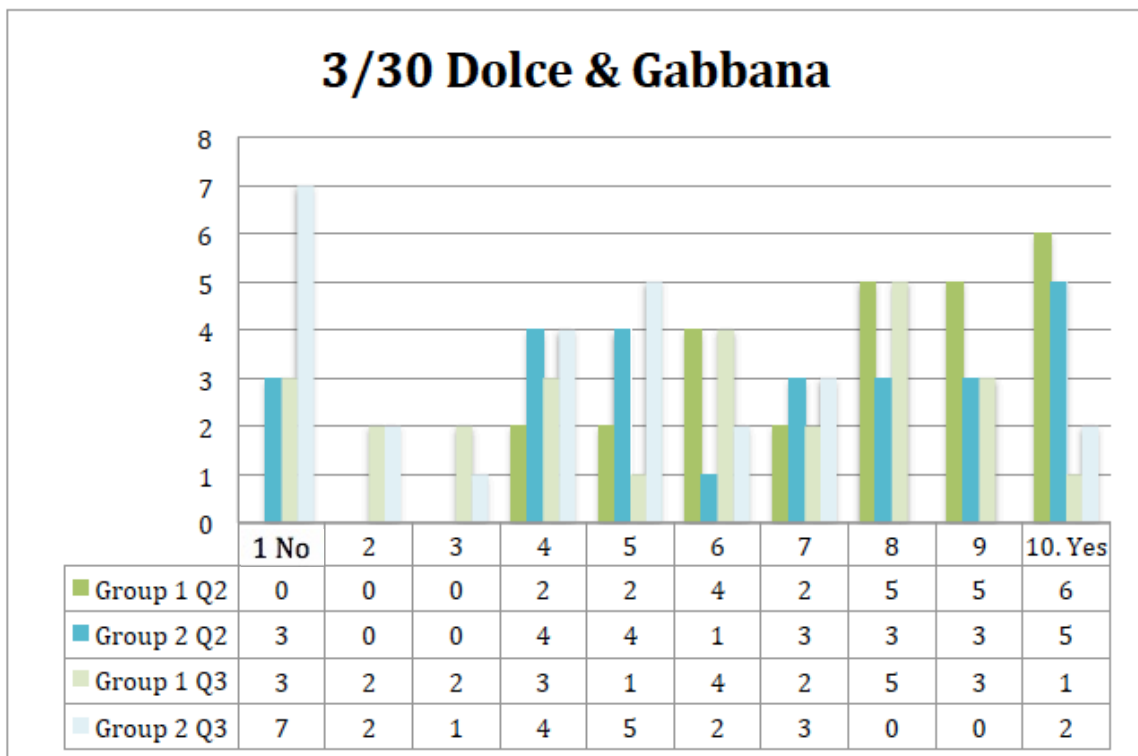|	1 No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. Yes
Group 1 Q2	0	0	0	2	2	4	2	5	5	6
Group 2 Q2	3	0	0	4	4	1	3	3	3	5
Group 1 Q3	3	2	2	3	1	4	2	5	3	1
Group 2 Q3	7	2	1	4	5	2	3	0	0	2

Figure 4. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1
and Group 2 regarding Dolce & Gabbana ad

Figure 5. Perfume ad by Rihanna

This perfume ad (see figure 5) featuring the artist Rihanna got mixed reviews from both groups, while some participants found it sexist and offensive, others did not have any problems with it at all (see figure 6).

Some comments:

"Somehow this ad looks much less sexy to me than the two previous, even if Rihanna is half-naked (nudity doesn't surprise us nowadays)." – Group 1 (Q1=4, Q2=1, Q3=1)

"Nothing" – Group 1 (Q1=5, Q2=2, Q3=1)

"as with the other perfume ads, it works because it is perfume and for women. So it has a purpose to be naked, and it's not for men. So I don't find it offensive. But it is problematic that you no longer can sell a perfume without a naked body." – Group 2 (Q1=7, Q2=7, Q3=4)

"Typical perfume ad, numbed!" – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=8, Q3=5)

"Nothing special" – Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=2, Q3=2)

"This ad doesn't arouse any emotions in me. It's boring." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=4, Q3=4)

4/29 Perfume by Rihanna

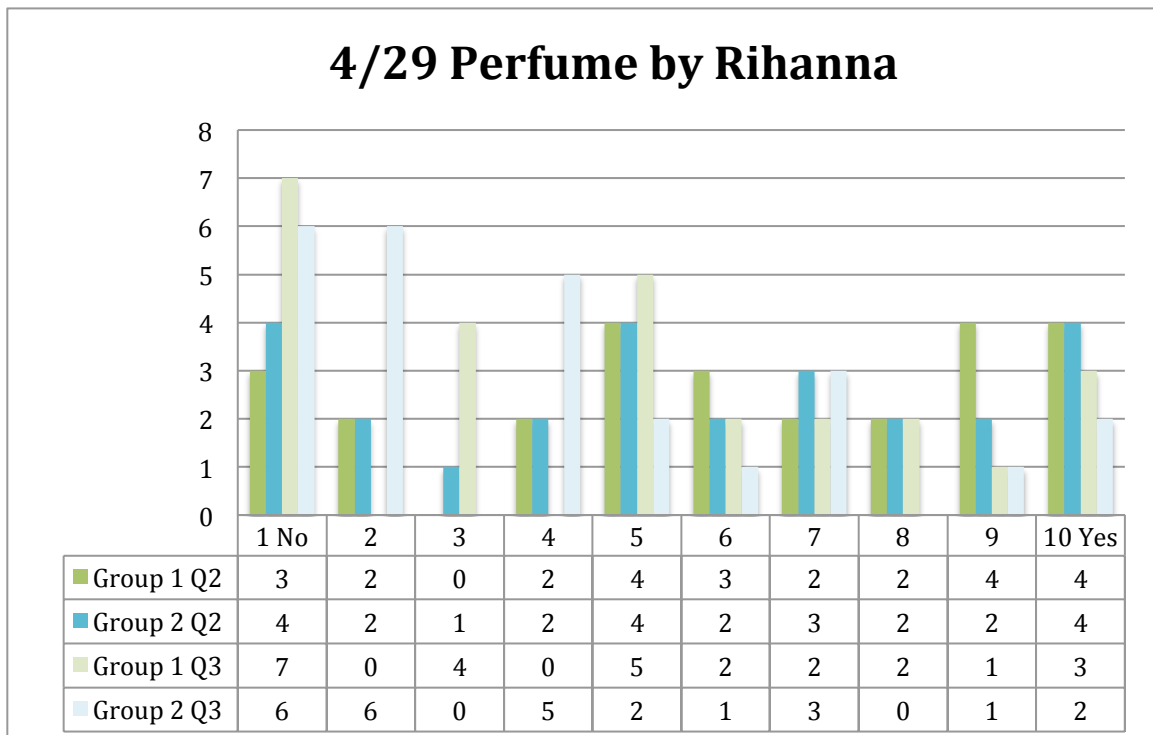|	1 No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Yes
Group 1 Q2	3	2	0	2	4	3	2	2	4	4
Group 2 Q2	4	2	1	2	4	2	3	2	2	4
Group 1 Q3	7	0	4	0	5	2	2	2	1	3
Group 2 Q3	6	6	0	5	2	1	3	0	1	2

Figure 6. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding Perfume by Rihanna ad

Figure 7. Finetti ad

This ad by Finetti (see figure 7) was found confusing by many of the participants, funny and clever by some, and by others it was sexist and offensive due to it's message; that women depend on men to buy them things. Overall both groups gave it rather high ratings (see figure 8).

Some of their comments were:

"At least something a little different" – Group 1 (Q1=5, Q2=3, Q3=5)

"This leaves me wordless. Clever, yes. Annoying, yes." – Group 1 (Q1=5, Q2=5, Q3=5)

"I don't get the joke. The image is not particularly offensive though." – Group 1 (Q1=4, Q2=2, Q3=2)

"It's ok normal, not funny, I've gotten numbed to these types of ads I guess." – Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=4, Q3=3)

"Very clever." – Group 2 (Q1=6, Q2=6, Q3=1)

8/25 Finetti

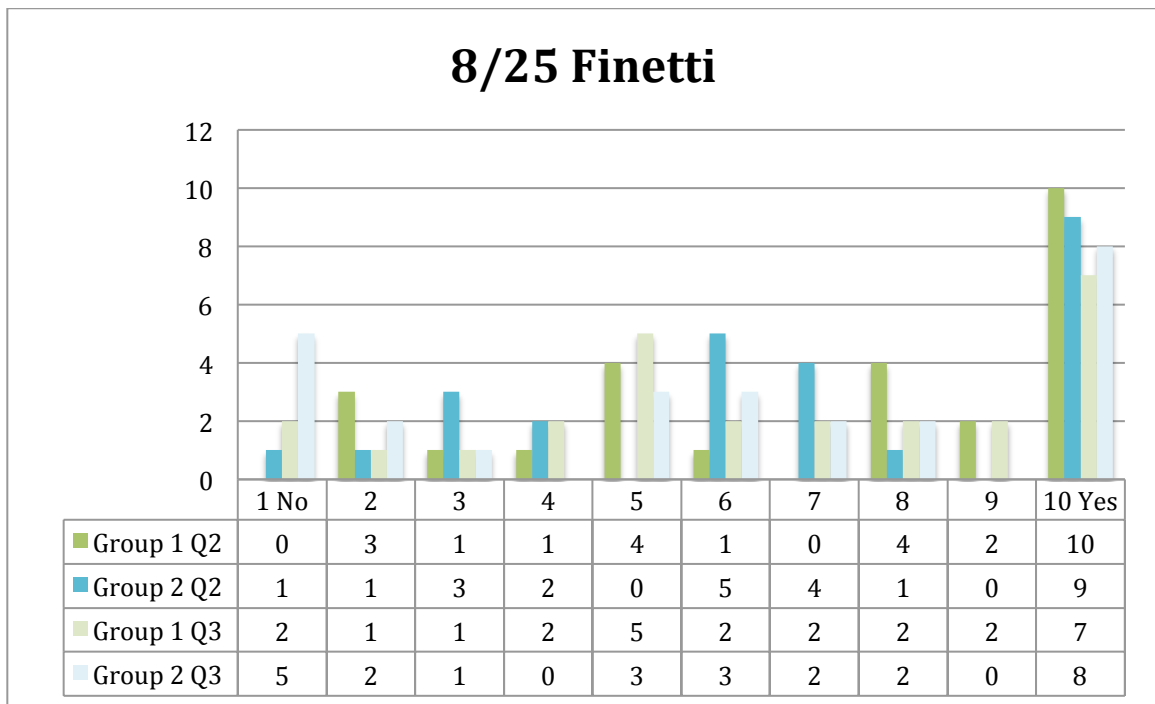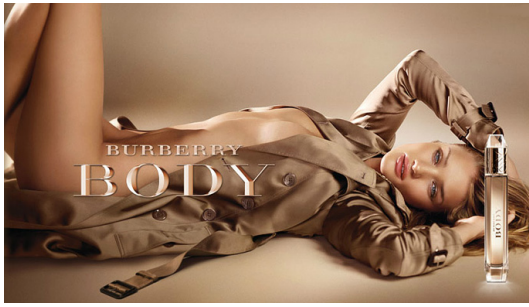|	1 No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Yes
Group 1 Q2	0	3	1	1	4	1	0	4	2	10
Group 2 Q2	1	1	3	2	0	5	4	1	0	9
Group 1 Q3	2	1	1	2	5	2	2	2	2	7
Group 2 Q3	5	2	1	0	3	3	2	2	0	8

Figure 8. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1
and Group 2 regarding Finetti ad

The 9th and 24th ad respectively by Burberry (see figure 9) was found more sexist and offensive overall by Group 1 (see figure 10).

Comments about the ad:

"Of course it's objectifying but I find they do the same with men's perfume so I accept it, and still fine with sexy and nudity as a selling point for perfume when it's done nicely" – Group 1 (Q1=8, Q2=3, Q3=2)

Figure 9. Burberry ad

"Soo I would look like that if I buy the perfume? I call bullshit on that." – Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"I get why they use nakedness for perfume commercial. It feels closer to the skin in a way. But sometimes it seems like it's more aiming to attract men's eyes than women's and that's just odd when it's a perfume for women." – Group 1 (Q1=7, Q2=7, Q3=4)

"once again are u selling her body or the perfume!" – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"Boring.. It is always like this" – Group 2 (Q1=2, Q2=10, Q3=3)

"Not much to say." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=7, Q3=5)

9/24 Burberry

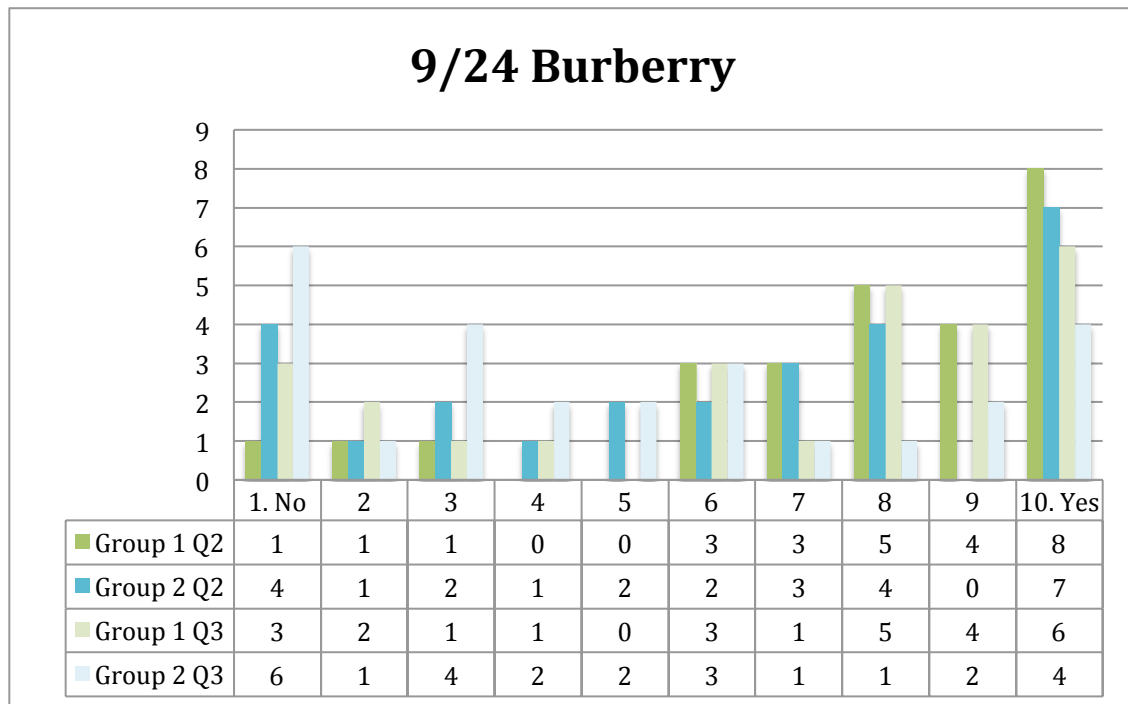|	1. No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. Yes
Group 1 Q2	1	1	1	0	0	3	3	5	4	8
Group 2 Q2	4	1	2	1	2	2	3	4	0	7
Group 1 Q3	3	2	1	1	0	3	1	5	4	6
Group 2 Q3	6	1	4	2	2	3	1	1	2	4

Figure 10. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding Burberry ad

28

This ad from H&M (see figure 11) was not deemed overly sexist or offensive by either group, although Group 1 was more negative towards it (see figure 12).

Figure 11. H&M ad

Comments regarding this ad:

"Almost all pictures connected to fashion are stereotyping how women should look, but in comparison with the others its fine. If you wanna sell underwear its pretty normal to also show the butt." – Group 1 (Q1=4, Q2=2, Q3=1)

"At least its an advert for underwear, which may motivate her wearing just that?" – Group 1 (Q1=3, Q2=5, Q3=5)

"It would be so much more inspiring to see women of different sizes and not in "come take me" poses everytime a company makes lingerie ads." – Group 2 (Q1=4, Q2=6, Q3=4)

"Typical girls trying to be sexy on the floor selling the underwear." – Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=7, Q3=4)

"Not as degrading compared to the other pictures, somewhat more relevant for the subject/advert." – Group 2 (Q1=4, Q2=7, Q3=7)

"I feel desensitised to images like this, they're so common." – Group 2 (Q1=4, Q2=10, Q3=5)

10/23 H&M

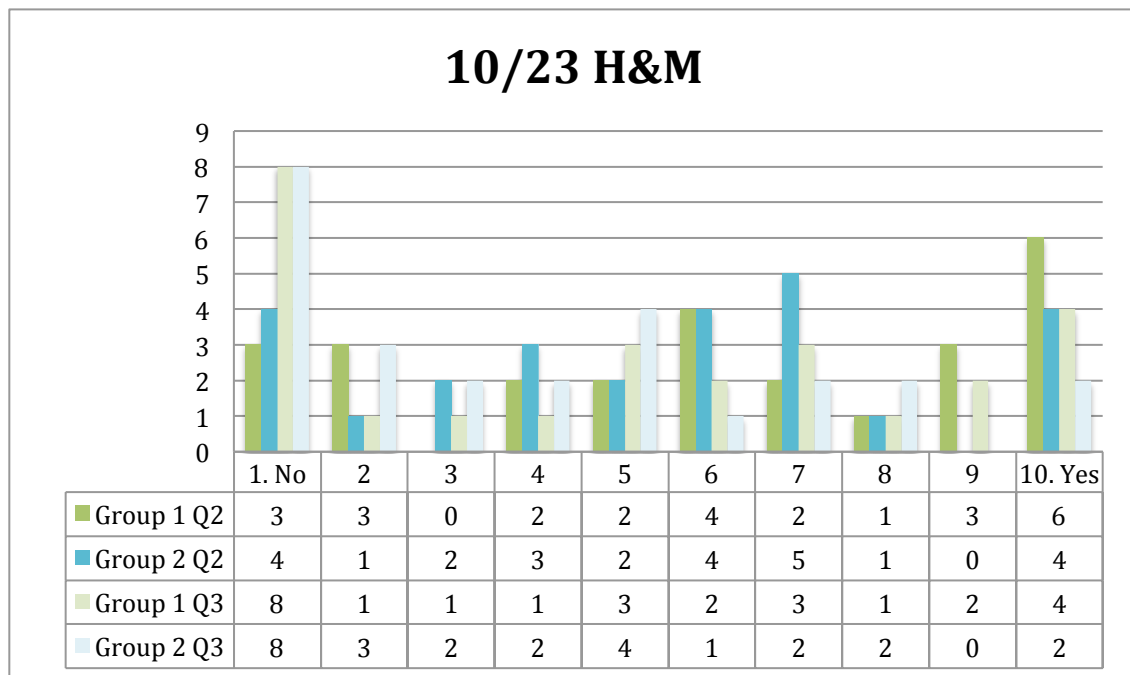|	1. No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. Yes
Group 1 Q2	3	3	0	2	2	4	2	1	3	6
Group 2 Q2	4	1	2	3	2	4	5	1	0	4
Group 1 Q3	8	1	1	1	3	2	3	1	2	4
Group 2 Q3	8	3	2	2	4	1	2	2	0	2

Figure 12. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding H&M ad
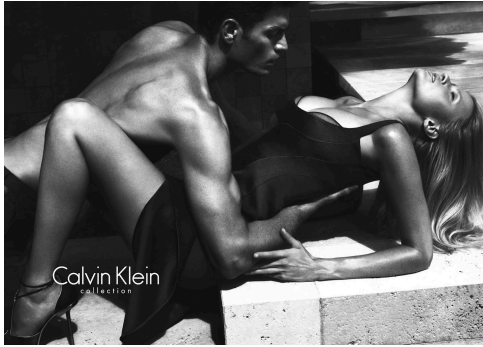
This ad by Calvin Klein (see figure 13) received diverse opinions from both groups. More women in both groups found it not to be offensive at all than really offensive, and the majority placed their opinions somewhere in the middle of the scales (see figure 14).

Some of the comments regarding this ad were:

Figure 13. Calvin Klein ad

"It is sexy but little boring... I think I saw thousands of similar pictures in my life." – Group 1 (Q1=7, Q2=1, Q3=1)

"I appreciate that she still has her clothes on" – Group 1 (Q1=6, Q2=8, Q3=6)

"Not very offensive. Its a classy picture in comparison to the others." – Group 1 (Q1=8, Q2=4, Q3=4)

"More beautiful than the other pictures. Looks respectful" – Group 2 (Q1=6, Q2=3, Q3=3)

"This particular picture is not offensive, but it gets a little bit offensive to se all of the women so passive, turning their head back..." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=4, Q3=1)

"Not as offensive as many of the other adverts, more of an equal presentation of two persons." – Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=8, Q3=7)

13/20 Calvin Klein

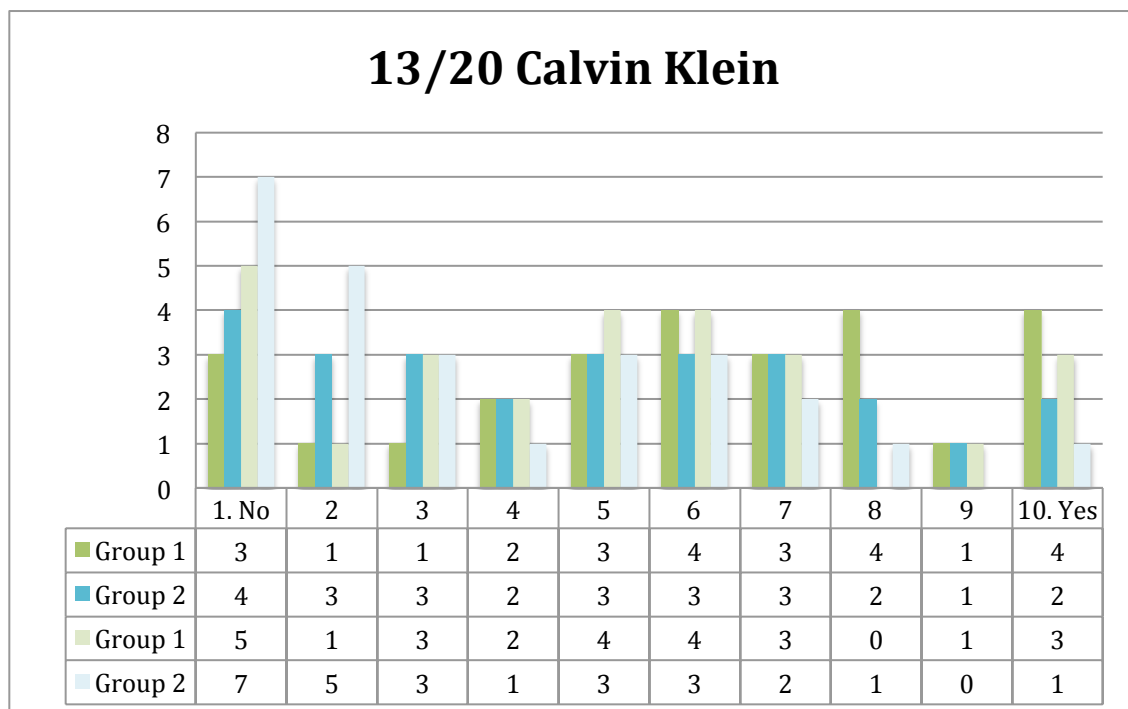|	1. No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. Yes
Group 1	3	1	1	2	3	4	3	4	1	4
Group 2	4	3	3	2	3	3	3	2	1	2
Group 1	5	1	3	2	4	4	3	0	1	3
Group 2	7	5	3	1	3	3	2	1	0	1

Figure 14. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding Calvin Klein ad

Figure 15. Calvin Klein ad

Another ad by Calvin Klein (see figure 15), and while Group 2 had diverse opinions about it, the majority of Group 1 found it to be both sexist and offensive (see figure 16).

Here are some comments about the ad:

"For some reason this ad seems way more offensive to me than the previous one even though they have a similar theme... how odd." – Group 1 (Q1=6, Q2=8, Q3=8)

"Come on, why is the girl always lying down with her legs spread?! Is that all we are useful for?" – Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"Again the woman is powerless and the man got all the power. not nice" – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"Not that bad if you compare with the others" – Group 2 (Q1=2, Q2=5, Q3=3)

"Not as sexist as the other adverts, but they've separate the roles of the two sexes." – Group 2 (Q1=2, Q2=10, Q3=8)

"Sadly very common. At least she looks satisfied." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=5)

"The guy is not even doing anything but of course she is having so much fun. CK is doing good by making their ads black and white, at least that adds a little bit of a classy touch to their ads" – *Group 2* (Q1=7, Q2=7, Q3=6)

14/19 Calvin Klein

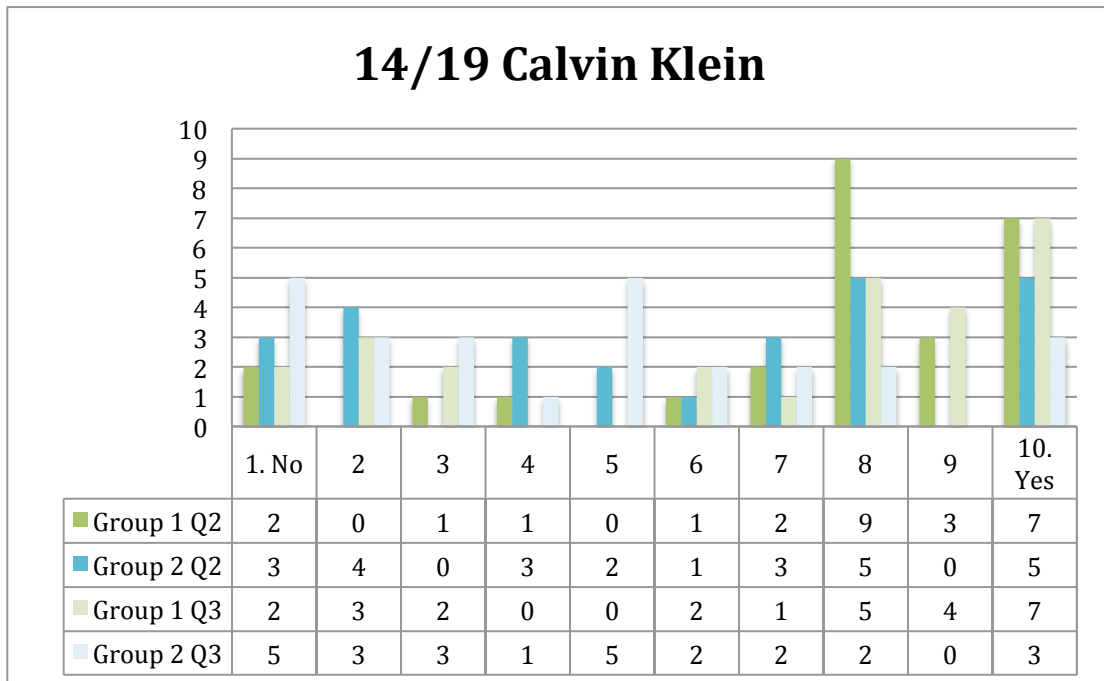|	1. No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. Yes
Group 1 Q2	2	0	1	1	0	1	2	9	3	7
Group 2 Q2	3	4	0	3	2	1	3	5	0	5
Group 1 Q3	2	3	2	0	0	2	1	5	4	7
Group 2 Q3	5	3	3	1	5	2	2	2	0	3

Figure 16. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding Calvin Klein ad

Both groups found this underwear ad by JBS (see figure 17) fairly sexist and offensive. Group 1 gave it overall a bit more 10's and 9's than Group 2, however more of them were also leaning more towards the middle and many gave it 4-6's. The majority of Group 2 gave it 8 or higher (see figure 18). The ad has a tagline at the bottom: "Men don't want to look at naked men."

Figure 17. JBS ad

Some of the comments were:

"If "boys don't want to look at naked men" as it claims, then those boys have serious problems. And if I would be the brand, I don't know if I would like to have cavemen that think like that instead of "normal" clients." – Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"Offensive against women, (we are here on this earth for men to have something to look at) and to homo- and bisexual men, implying they are not real men. WHY is a naked women needed in a mens underwear ad of all ads?" – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"At least they're trying to be clever. Don't like the generalisation which excludes homosexuals from being 'men'." – Group 2 (Q1=5, Q2=2, Q3=5)

18/15 JBS

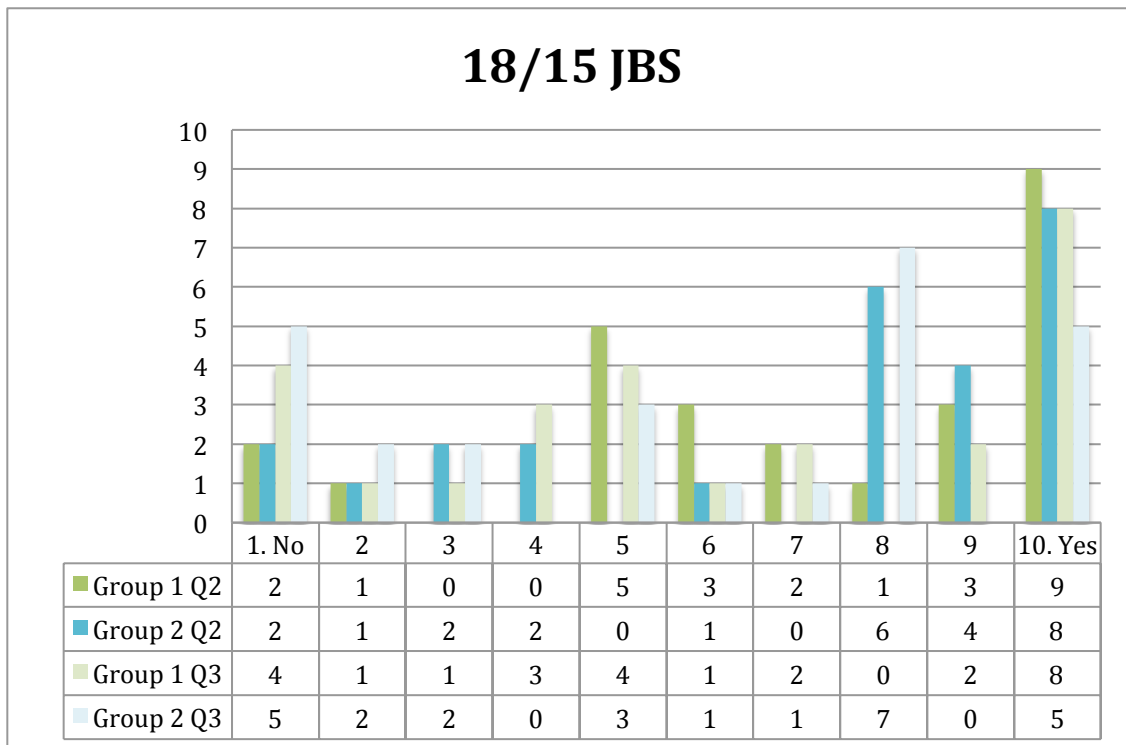|	1. No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. Yes
Group 1 Q2	2	1	0	0	5	3	2	1	3	9
Group 2 Q2	2	1	2	2	0	1	0	6	4	8
Group 1 Q3	4	1	1	3	4	1	2	0	2	8
Group 2 Q3	5	2	2	0	3	1	1	7	0	5

Figure 18. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1
and Group 2 regarding JBS ad

Figure 19. Gucci ad

The majority of the participants from both groups found this ad by Gucci (see figure 19) to be sexist and offensive, Group 1 slightly more so than Group 2 (see figure 20).

Some of their comments were:

"They're making her lay in a degrading position. And why? Most of these seems like they have no reason at all for using sex to sell.. It's disturbing in a way..." – Group 1 (Q1=3, Q2=7, Q3=9)

"Power aspect again. He looks in control of her body with the hand on her butt. Why is this a way of selling clothes? I hate it." – Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"Could be worse, could be better." – Group 2 (Q1=6, Q2=8, Q3=7)

"At least they have their clothes on." – Group 2 (Q1=4, Q2=3, Q3=2)

19/14 Gucci

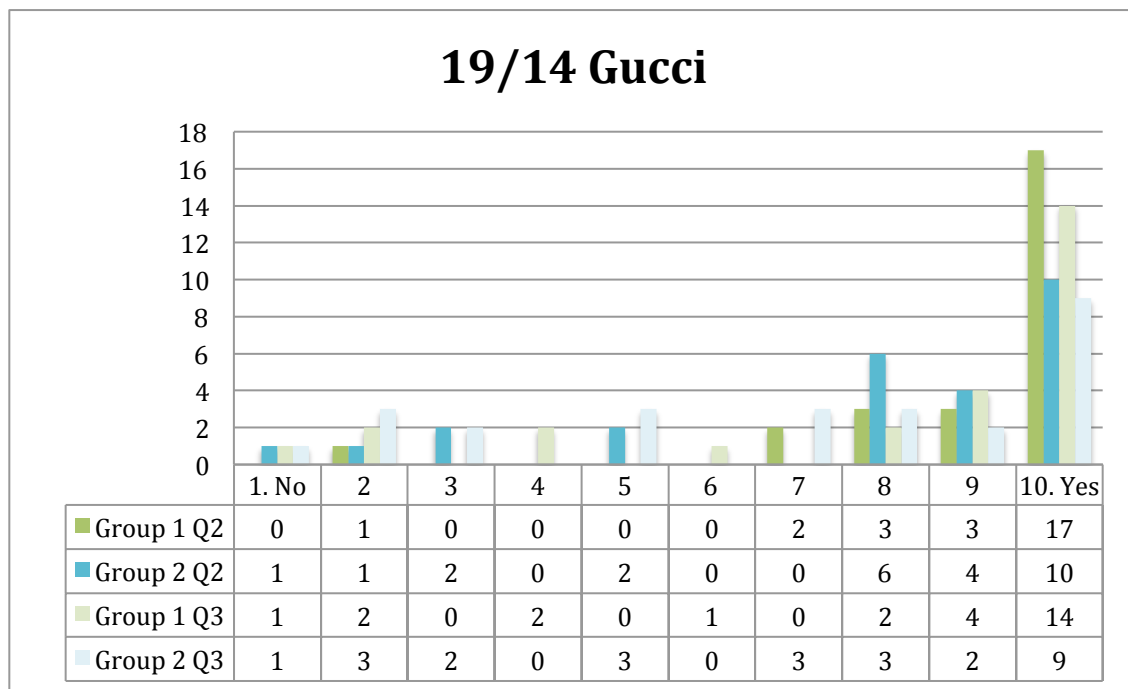|	1. No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. Yes
Group 1 Q2	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	3	3	17
Group 2 Q2	1	1	2	0	2	0	0	6	4	10
Group 1 Q3	1	2	0	2	0	1	0	2	4	14
Group 2 Q3	1	3	2	0	3	0	3	3	2	9

Figure 20. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding Gucci ad

33

Figure 21. Suit Supply ad

The majority of the participants considered this ad from Suit Supply (see figure 21) both sexist and offensive. Group 1 found it overall worse and gave it more 10's for both Q2 and Q3 (see figure 22).

Some of the thoughts and feelings they had regarding this ad were:

"It's like a porn scene just they have cloths on, blah" – Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=3)

"Nothing new to say…" – Group 1 (Q1=4, Q2=9, Q3=6)

"Anything that has a mostly unclothed woman and a mostly or entirely clothed man is probably shit. This also makes me annoyed at how rich they seem to be." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=8, Q3=8)

"Terrible but at least she is active in some way" – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=9, Q3=9)

"Its getting worse" – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=9)

"What's the ad for? At least it looks like she is in control as much as the man, basically just tired of him. But it also sends a message that sex is for guys whenever and wherever they like it, and women just have to agree and wait for it to be over." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

20/13 Suit Supply

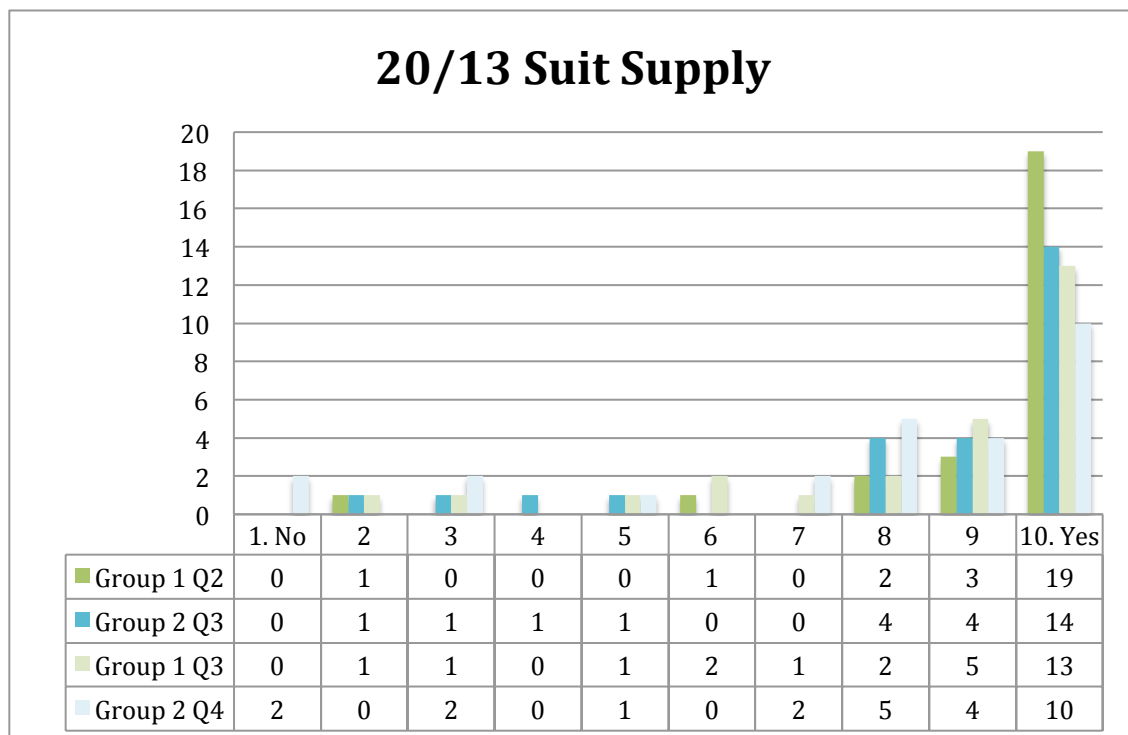|	1. No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. Yes
Group 1 Q2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	3	19
Group 2 Q3	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	4	4	14
Group 1 Q3	0	1	1	0	1	2	1	2	5	13
Group 2 Q4	2	0	2	0	1	0	2	5	4	10

Figure 22. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1
and Group 2 regarding Suit Supply ad

This underwear ad by Björn Borg (see figure 23) got diverse reviews from both groups. The majority of Group 1 found it somewhat sexist, but many did not find it offensive at all. In Group 2, most of the women did not find it especially sexist or offensive (see figure 24).

Some of their thoughts regarding this ad were:

Figure 23. Björn Borg ad

"Underwear and sex on what looks like equal terms, I'm fine with it even though I don't really find it very sexy" – Group 1 (Q1=4, Q2=2, Q3=2)

"Not very offensive. Maybe the fact that the male is licking her face. Otherwise I like that they have the same amount of clothes on. Very rare in commercial situations!" – Group 1 (Q1=2, Q2=2, Q3=2)

"It's just okay, even though I don't like the tongue." - Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=3, Q3=3)

"This one was better, more equal for once" – Group 2 (Q1=7, Q2=5, Q3=5)

"Could have been sexy if not the guy was laying on top of her. It doesn't feel like she likes it. Maybe she does, but she could also be forced. And it's sexist if you have to wonder." – Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=9, Q3=7)

"Since they are selling underwear I think this is ok, mostly since the woman and man seem equal in this photo. Looks disgusting to be licked on the throat like that though, poor lady." – Group 2 (Q1=6, Q2=4, Q3=3)
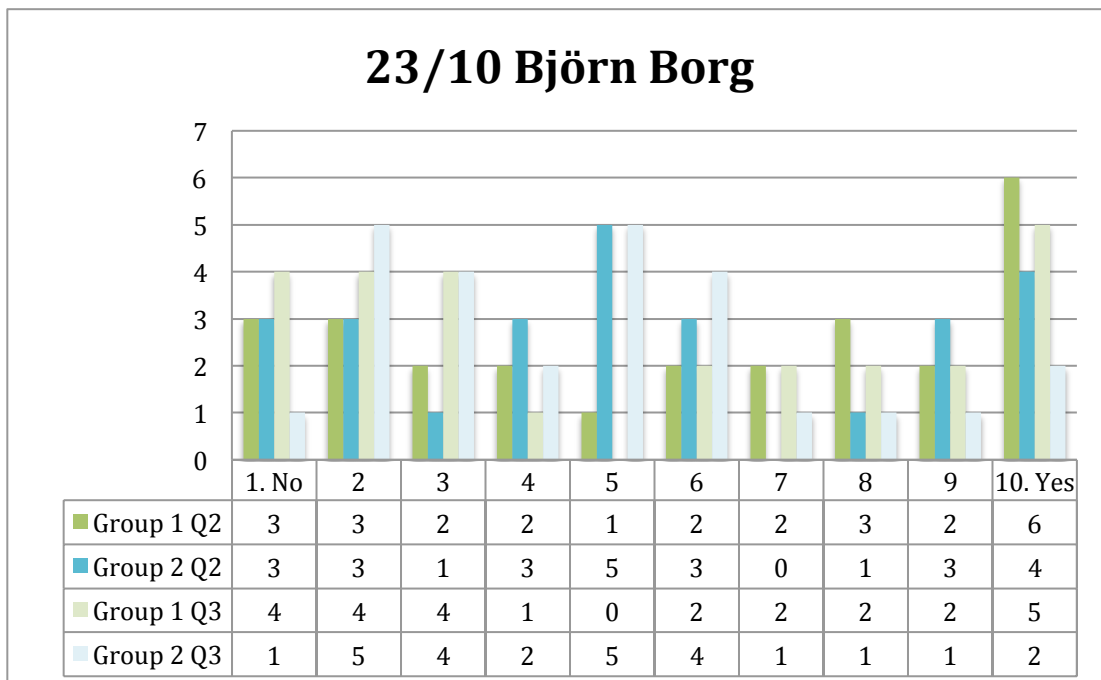
23/10 Björn Borg

	1. No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. Yes
Group 1 Q2	3	3	2	2	1	2	2	3	2	6
Group 2 Q2	3	3	1	3	5	3	0	1	3	4
Group 1 Q3	4	4	4	1	0	2	2	2	2	5
Group 2 Q3	1	5	4	2	5	4	1	1	1	2

Figure 24. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding Björn Borg ad

35

Figure 25. Calvin Klein ad

This ad (see figure 25) received somewhat mixed reviews. Group 1 gave it overall more 10's, but also more 1's, and the majority of Group 2 found it somewhat sexist, but not that offensive (see figure 26).

"Basically the same as the previous, but I guess it can be seen as more offensive since he seems to be holding her down." – Group 1 (Q1=7, Q2=4, Q3=4)

"I really dislike the construction of this pose, as in: the woman's arm being held down. That said, it doesn't look as "assaulty" as some of the others." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=6, Q3=4)

"It is not as bad as many of the previous ads. Apart from the man holding the woman's arm down instead of holding her hand. If he held her hand the picture would be a lot more appealing to me. I still wouldn't be interested in buying the jeans though, or whatever it is that they're selling with this pic." – Group 2 (Q1=5, Q2=6, Q3=5)

"They are more equal here than in previous adds. Still not ok as he seems to be holding her down" – Group 2 (Q1=2, Q2=10, Q3=5)

"At least they're both painted in similar light and positions. Kind of sexy, its two people at least the female is not outnumbered" – Group 2 (Q1=6, Q2=2, Q3=2)

"I find this ad a lot better than the previous ones. The girl is wearing pants and you can't see her breasts, they make her look like she has equally much power in this situation – he is holding her arm down but she is "holding" him with her leg. There is no aggression in this picture and it just looks like they both enjoy the situation. The colors/layout is nice and I feel like I could look at this ad for a while. I'm not feeling offended." – Group 2 (Q1=6, Q2=6, Q3=6)

24/9 Calvin Klein

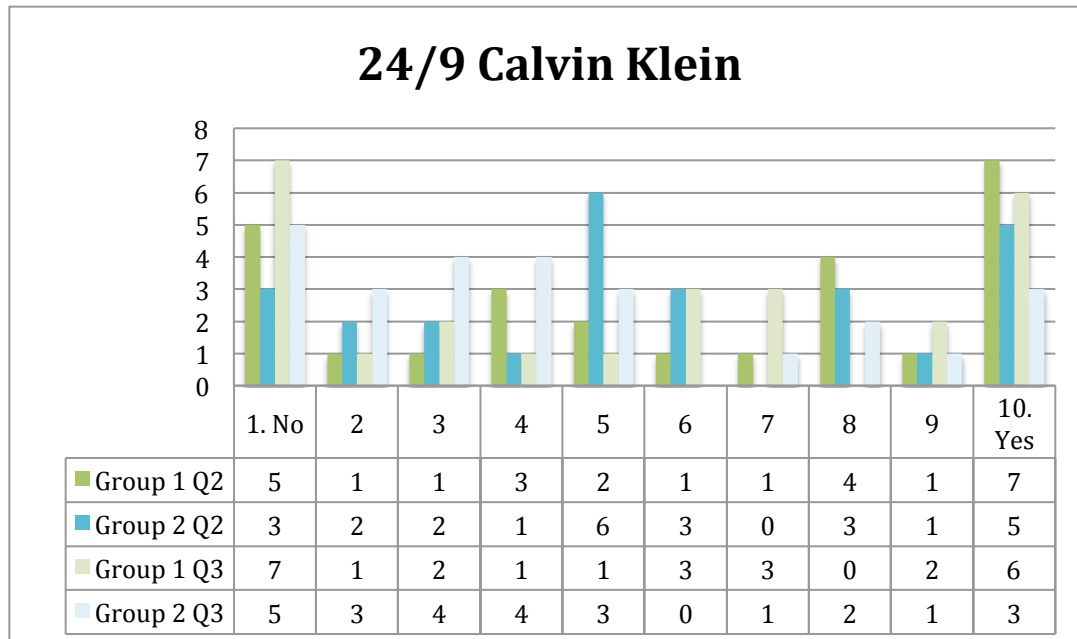|	1. No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. Yes
Group 1 Q2	5	1	1	3	2	1	1	4	1	7
Group 2 Q2	3	2	2	1	6	3	0	3	1	5
Group 1 Q3	7	1	2	1	1	3	3	0	2	6
Group 2 Q3	5	3	4	4	3	0	1	2	1	3

Figure 26. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding Calvin Klein ad

Figure 29. American Apparel ad

Both groups also considered this American Apparel ad (see figure 29) very sexist and offensive. However, Group 1 deemed it more sexist and offensive than Group 2 (see figure 30).

Some comments regarding this ad were:

"They're just getting worse and worse!!!" – Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"Somehow feel almost uncomfortable from this picture. Girl doesn't look as typical supermodel from the ad, so it seems like I am watching someone private album" – Group 1 (Q1=9, Q2=2, Q3=2)

"Seriously?? "Now open" to anyone who wants to come in or what. No this is a joke isn't it? That's a fake ad I'm sure?! I hope so." – Group 2 (Q1=4, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"At least the woman seems natural and not too photoshopped. I think that's a big plus for the advertisement." – Group 2 (Q1=5, Q2=4, Q3=2)

American Apparel 28/5

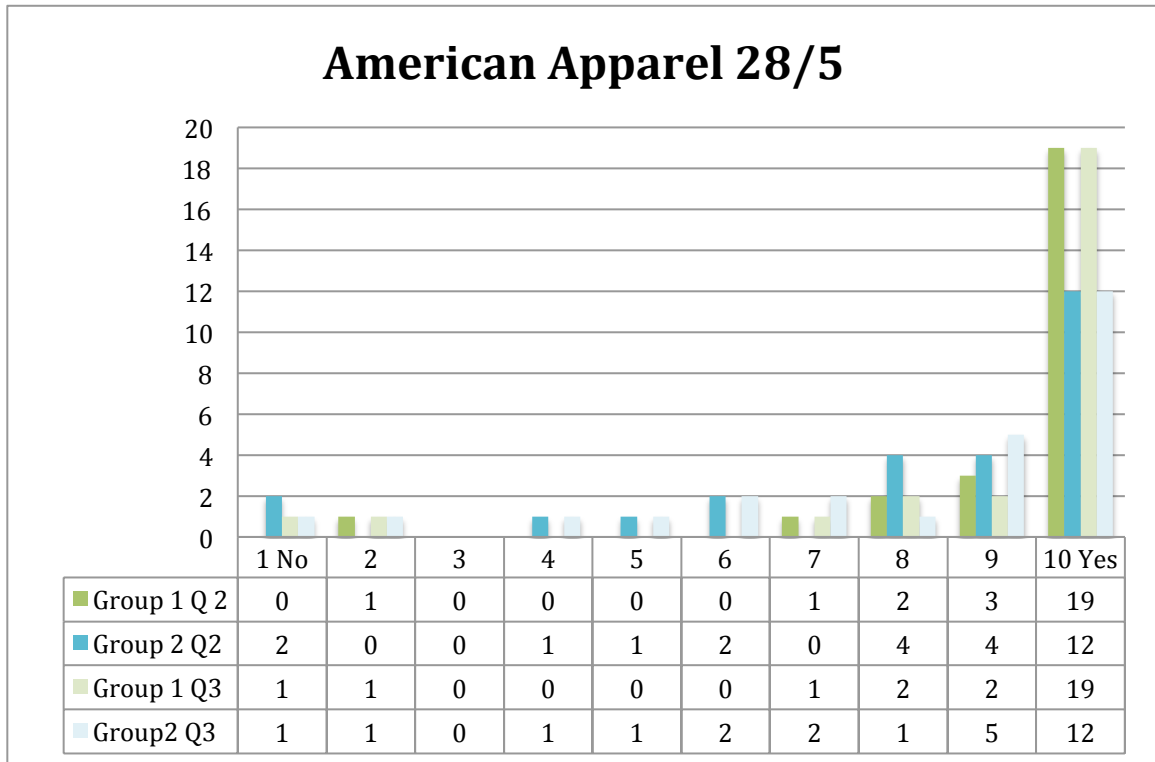|	1 No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Yes
Group 1 Q 2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	19
Group 2 Q2	2	0	0	1	1	2	0	4	4	12
Group 1 Q3	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	19
Group2 Q3	1	1	0	1	1	2	2	1	5	12

Figure 30. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding American Apparel ad

Figure 33. Dolce & Gabbana ad

This ad by Dolce & Gabbana (see figure 33) was not well received by either group since the majority of participants rated it very sexist and offensive, however Group 1 gave it more 10's than Group 2 (see figure 34).

Overall they thought:

"Group rape, very sad that women keep buying stuff from these brands..." – Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"Using abuse to sell seems to be a trend. Terrible." – Group 1 (Q1=2, Q2=9, Q3=9)

"terrible. If the CK one had some redeeming aspects in form of ambiguity and artistic merit, this one on the other hand comes across as crude and way over the line." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"Once again- it looks like rape and not sexy at all. Disgusting." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

Dolce & Gabbana 30/3

	1 No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Yes
Group 1 Q 2	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	3	18
Group 2 Q2	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	4	6	12
Group 1 Q3	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	21
Group2 Q3	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	3	5	13
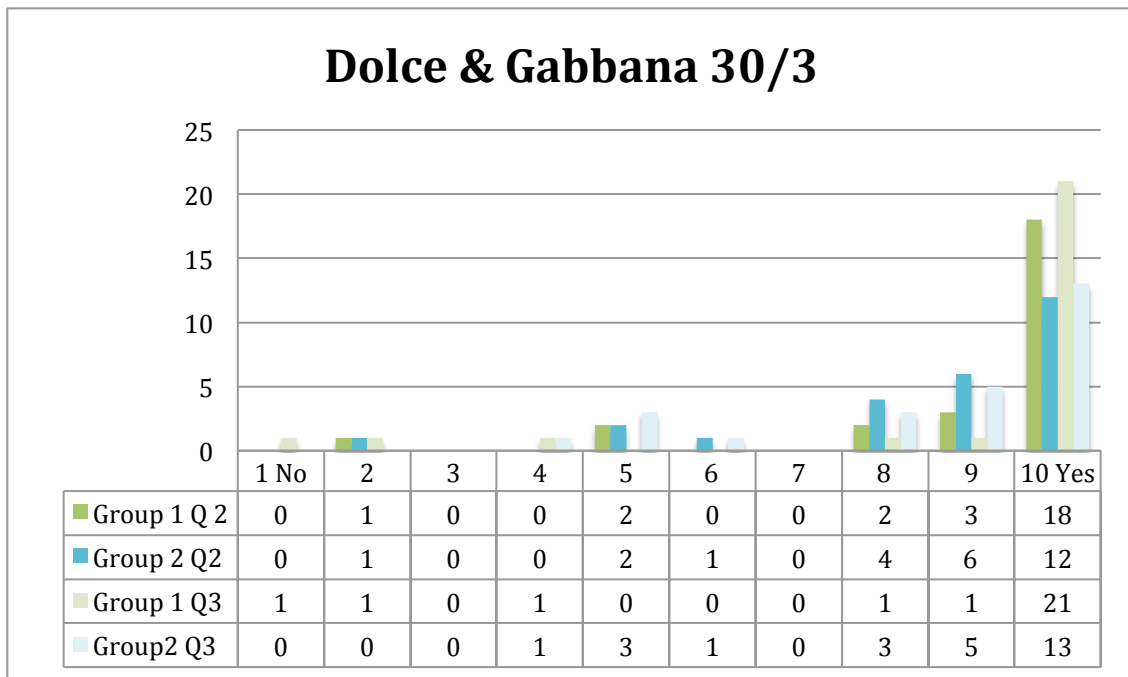
Figure 34. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding Dolce & Gabbana ad

Another ad by Calvin Klein (see figure 35), which was deemed very sexist and offensive by both groups, even more so by Group 1 (see figure 36).

Some of the women's thoughts and feelings regarding this ad were:

"Like the picture before. Gangbang hello!?" – Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=9, Q3=9)

"Again a rapey feeling, with a model who looks like she would rather be anywhere else" – Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

Figure 35. Calvin Klein ad

"Its just typical that the woman is the victim.... Being passive in the arms of the men. But somehow, she doesn't feel very stereotypical "feminine" in her expression, and that's why - I don't get very offended. It is something interesting and unusual about her face. Maybe her expression of control. And maybe it is a little bit sexy, after all." – Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=8, Q3=2)

"The first impression is that I don´t understand where is the lower part of the women, and how are the models sustaining themselves... It feels uncomfortable all those bodies strangely posing. I find it less offensive because it´s another typical advertisement and I suppose I am used to see them..." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=9, Q3=8)

"Better than the first One but still rather disrespectful for the woman" – Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=8, Q3=5)

Calvin Klein 31/2

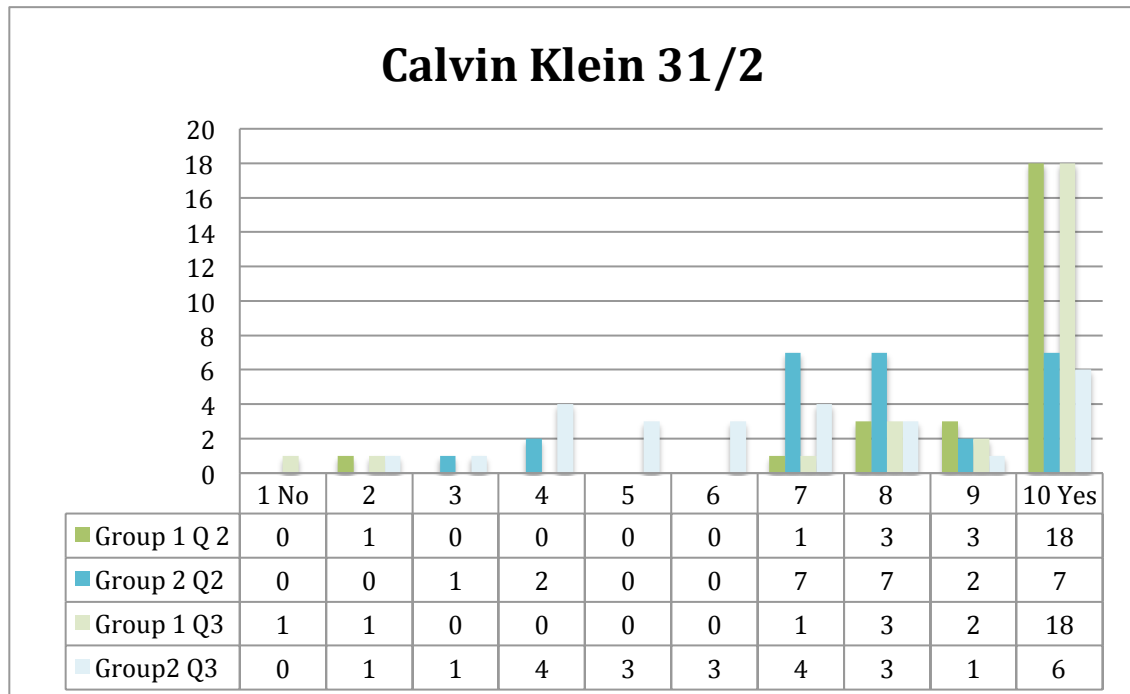|	1 No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Yes
Group 1 Q 2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	3	18
Group 2 Q2	0	0	1	2	0	0	7	7	2	7
Group 1 Q3	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	2	18
Group2 Q3	0	1	1	4	3	3	4	3	1	6

Figure 36. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding Calvin Klein ad

Figure 37. Tom Ford ad

This was the first ad for Group 2 and the last for Group 1 (see figure 37). It was deemed very sexist and offensive by both groups, however Group 1 had more objections to it in general (see figure 38).

Some comments:

"One of the worst so far" – Group 1 (Q1=1,Q2=10, Q3=10)

"This is when nudity and perfumes do not work at all, looks like porn" – Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"For real? Could be pictures from a porn side... Compared to all the previous perfume advertisements is this the most disgusting one so far!!!" Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=9, Q3=10)

"Why do they have to be this sexist? it's getting insane" – Group 1 (Q1=2, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"My first thought is that the ad doesn't speak to me. Its fake, not real and then it is also not interesting. It is just not a real person. And therefore, I can't see the ad as sexist or objectifying. I can't feel anything for the "person"." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=1, Q3=1)

"Is this for real?? Is this a real ad?? I feel a little disgusted." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

"Not sure if I should laugh because it's so ridiculous or feel really offended by this ad" – Group 2 (Q1=4, Q2=10, Q3=8)

Tom Ford 32/1

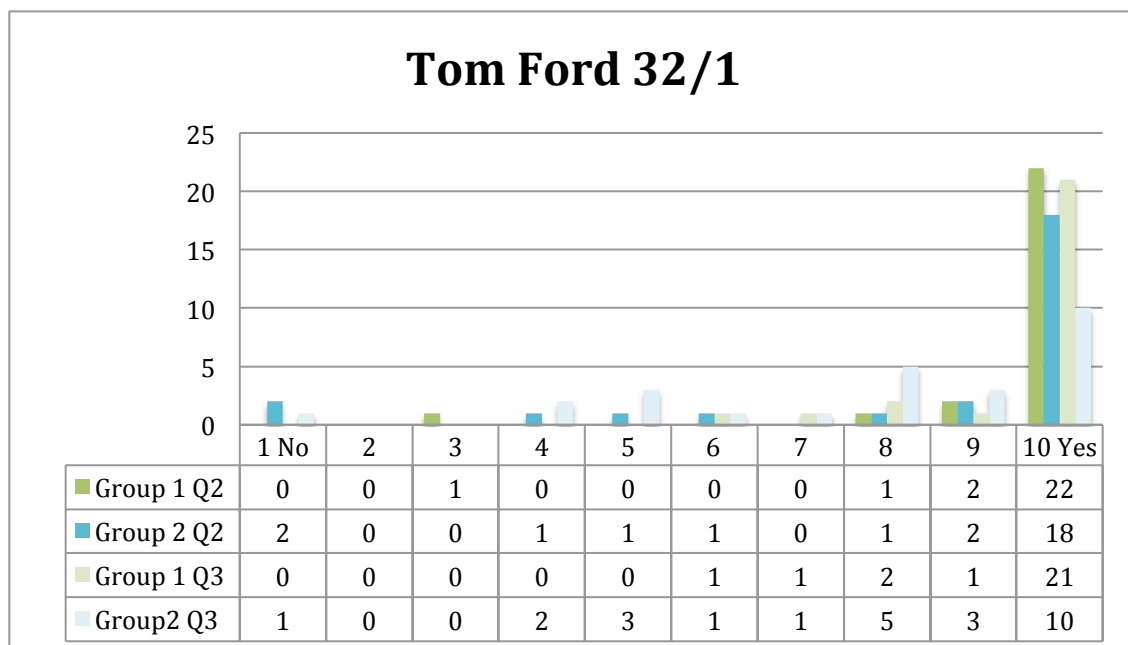|	1 No	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Yes
Group 1 Q2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	22
Group 2 Q2	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	18
Group 1 Q3	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	21
Group2 Q3	1	0	0	2	3	1	1	5	3	10

Figure 38. Q2 and Q3 responses by Group 1 and Group 2 regarding Tom Ford ad

The rating average for each ad and group regarding Q2 and Q3 is presented below (see figures 39 & 40), one can thus clearly see that Group 1 in most cases has rated the ads slightly higher than Group 2.
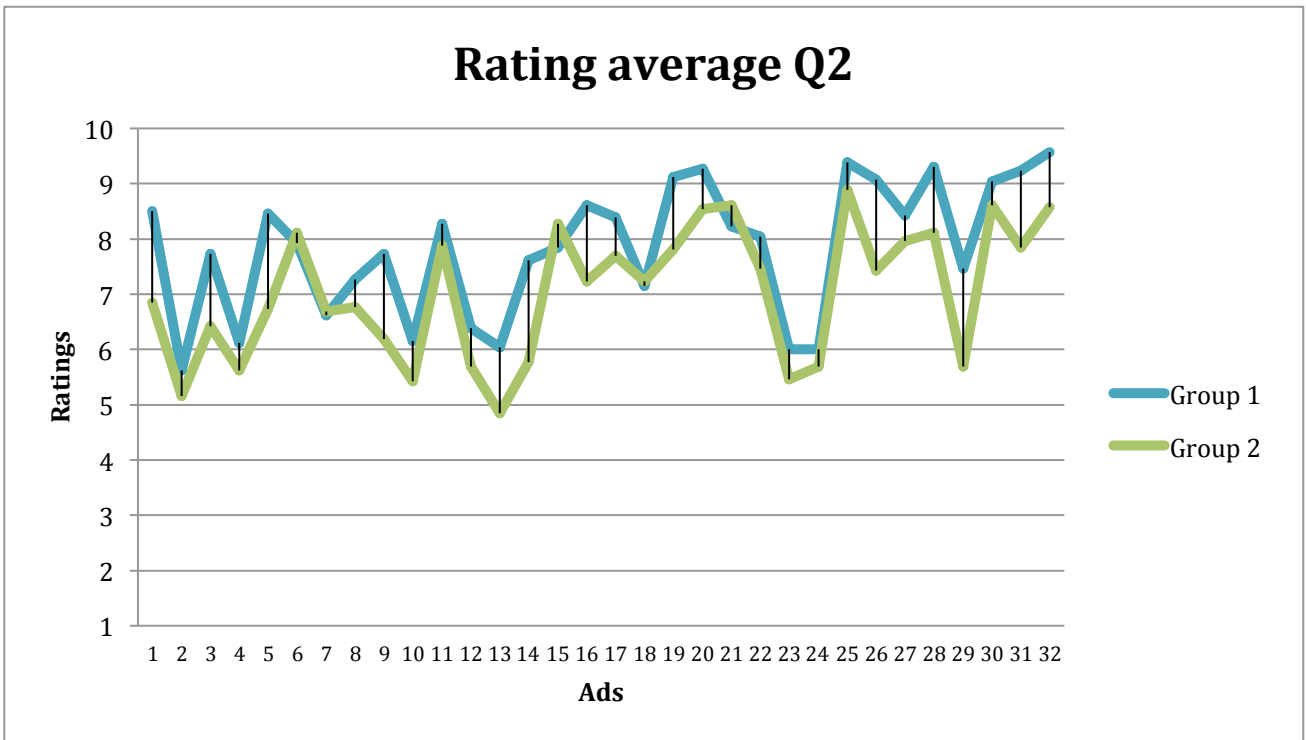

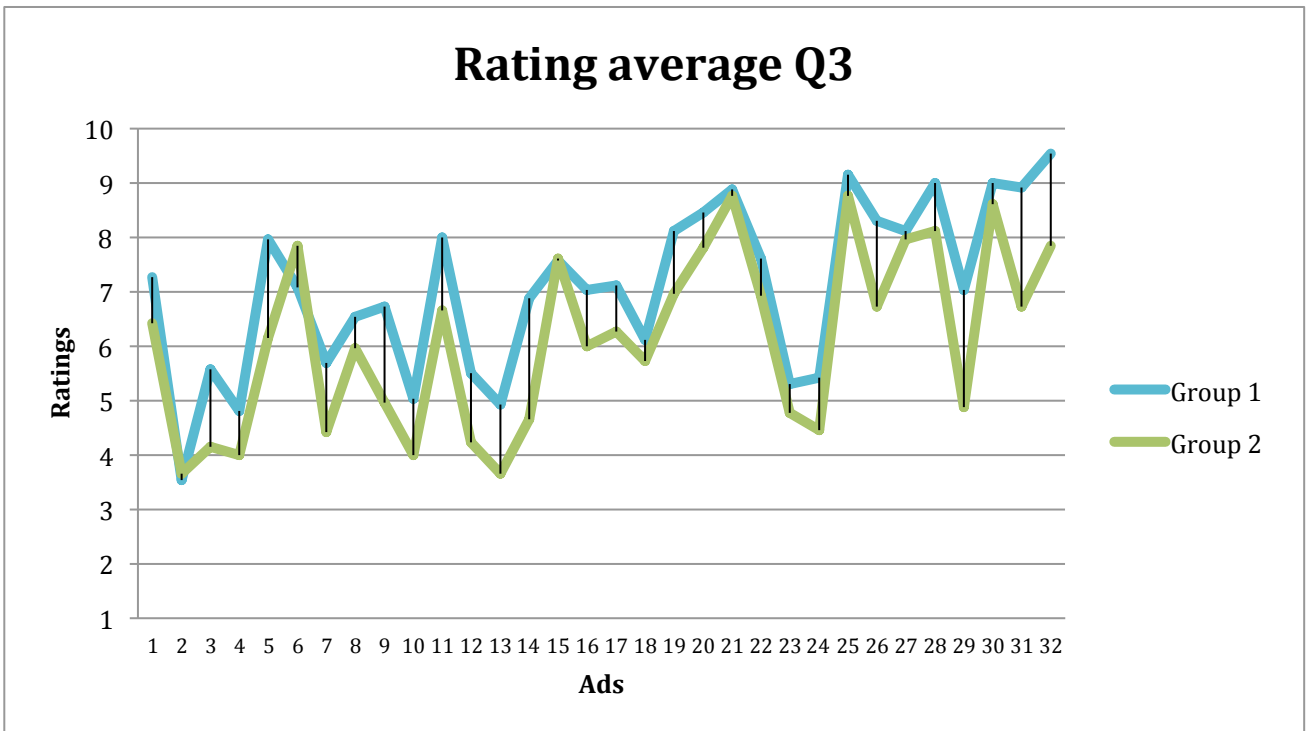Figure 39. Rating average for both Groups regarding Q2

Figure 40. Rating average for both Groups regarding Q3

ANALYSIS

Communication, Gender & Sex

In all of the ads used for the survey, women were featured in various poses and displays. Thus there were a lot of comments from the participants in the surveys regarding the gendered features of the female models.

"Almost all pictures connected to fashion are stereotyping how women should look" (H&M 10th ad, Participant from Group 1)

As Lazier-Smith (1989) argued, using stereotypes is perhaps the best way to instantly show the viewer what the ad is about and creating an identifying experience. However, the use of stereotypes was not always well received:

"It would be so much more inspiring to see women of different sizes and not in "come take me" poses everytime a company makes lingerie ads." (H&M 23rd ad, Participant from Group 2)

"Boring.. It is always like this" (Burberry 24th ad, Participant from Group 2)

On the flipside, when ads were not using the same tried and old stereotypes, some other reactions could be found:

"But somehow, she doesn't feel very stereotypical "feminine" in her expression, and that's why - I don't get very offended." (Calvin Klein 2nd ad, Participant from Group 2).

Even though both groups found the ad by Calvin Klein (see figure 35) very sexist and offensive, this particular participant felt that since the female model was not stereotypically portrayed, the ad was thus not as offensive as it could have been. Such changes in imagery and display can thus have some consequences for how we view ads.

Another ad that was not as stereotypical was one by American Apparel (see figure 29). However, this display got mixed reviews:

"Somehow feel almost uncomfortable from this picture. Girl doesn't look as typical supermodel from the ad, so it seems like I am watching someone private album" (Participant from Group 1).

"At least the woman seems natural and not too photoshopped. I think that's a big plus for the advertisement." (Participant from Group 2).

Furthermore, some of the typical gendered displays could be found among the ads, such as women being more passive and not in control, women laying down etc. these portrayals were also more obvious when male models were featured in the ads, and they did not go unnoticed:

"Come on, why is the girl always lying down with her legs spread?! Is that all we are useful for?" (Calvin Klein 19th ad, Participant *from Group 2).*

"I guess it can be seen as more offensive since he seems to be holding her down." (Calvin Klein 24th, Participant *from Group 1).*

"Still not ok as he seems to be holding her down" (Calvin Klein 9th ad, Participant *from Group 2).*

"Could have been sexy if not the guy was laying on top of her. It doesn't feel like she likes it. Maybe she does, but she could also be forced. And it's sexist if you have to wonder." (Björn Borg 10th, Participant *from Group 2).*

When viewing all the comments regarding the portrayals of the female models, it becomes more and more evident that the system Jhally (1990) spoke about two and a half decades ago still exists, and is still in the business of creating falsity:

"Soo I would look like that if I buy the perfume? I call bullshit on that." (Burberry 9th ad, Participant *from Group 1).*

"I get why they use nakedness for perfume commercial. It feels closer to the skin in a way. But sometimes it seems like it's more aiming to attract men's eyes than women's and that's just odd when it's a perfume for women." (Burberry 9th ad, Participant *from Group 1).*

"Typical girls trying to be sexy on the floor selling the underwear." (H&M 23rd ad, Participant from Group 2).

"Its just typical that the woman is the victim...." (Calvin Klein 2nd ad, Participant *from Group 2).*

All these ads combined communicate a clear image of what a woman should be, how she should look and what she should do, or in most cases, not do since femininity today is still wrapped up inside a blanket of passivity, much as it always has.

The Clutter Syndrome

After going through and summarizing all the responses, the effects of the Clutter Syndrome could be found among many of the participants. These displayed the tell tale signs which included desensitization/numbness, the process of comparison and bargaining their way through the ads.

Desensitization & Numbness

Starting off with the concepts of desensitization/numbness, in order to find signs pointing to this I looked for the previous mentioned words/phrases such as: "Desensitized", "numb", "nothing/nothing to say", and also instances where the viewers seemed saturated, and found comments in both Groups displaying these:

Dolce & Gabbana, 3rd ad: *"Nothing"* – Group 1 (Q1=5, Q2=6, Q3=2)

Rihanna 4th ad: *"Nothing"* – Group 1 (Q1=5, Q2=2, Q3=1)

Rihanna 29th ad: *"Nothing special"* – Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=2, Q3=2)

Burberry 24th ad: *"Not much to say."* – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=7, Q3=5)

All these comments can be linked to the concept of desensitization, which means that these participants are so saturated of seeing these types of ads, they do no longer respond to them. As Crase-Moritz (2002) pointed out, the "nothing" the participants feel and respond, has to do with the fact that they are so used to such ads; they have become numb.

> "We as a people have become desensitized to negative images or provocative advertising."…"by responding "nothing" we are giving permission to advertisers to continue to try and shock us with inappropriate images." (Crase-Moritz 2002 p.140-141).

There were also other comments linked to desensitization where the participants wrote more than "nothing", these comments instead featured saturation:

Calvin Klein 13th ad: *"It is sexy but little boring... I think I saw thousands of similar pictures in my life."* – Group 1 (Q1=7, Q2=1, Q3=1)

Dolce & Gabbana 30th ad: *"Skin and boobs..again"* – Group 2 (Q1=8, Q2=4, Q3=1)

Being so used to seeing such imagery does eventually get "boring" and one might thus get desensitized since getting affected by such ads over and over again takes it's toll. Therefore, these participants gave the ads in question rather low ratings, not finding them that sexist or offensive since they were so used to them.

Comparing the two groups, it seems that Group 2 is even more desensitized than Group 1, since more such comments could be found among those participants, and also, they themselves expressed the desensitization and numbness they felt clearly:

Finetti 25th ad: *"It's ok normal, not funny, I've gotten numbed to these types of ads I guess."* – Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=4, Q3=3)

H&M 23rd ad: *"I feel desensitised to images like this, they're so common."* – Group 2 (Q1=4, Q2=10, Q3=5)

Rihanna 29th ad: *"Typical perfume ad, numbed!"* – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=8, Q3=5)

As seen from these ratings, the participants did not find the ads in question that offensive, even though some still found them sexist. Being desensitized does not mean that one does not find an ad sexist or "wrong" in any way, but the part that is "lacking", has more to do with ones own feelings towards it; the feeling of being offended in any way, of getting upset, of caring. Finding an ad sexist, but not caring about it, means that you are desensitized and affected by the Clutter Syndrome.

> "Information saturation (and advertising clutter in particular) requires the post-modern consumer to develop coping mechanisms and ad avoidance strategies in order to guard against being overwhelmed." (Rumbo 2002, p.131).

Instead of feeling overwhelmed, some participants thus use the coping mechanism of desensitization in order to not care as much about the sexist imagery they see in ads. However, as Crase-Moritz (2002) pointed out, this only makes things "worse", since our lack of caring means we give the sexist and offensive ads permission to go on and become even more shocking.

Although these participants did not use the key-words/phrases, their comments regarding the Rihanna ad (see figure 5) still play a big part when it comes to desensitisation:

"Somehow this ad looks much less sexy to me than the two previous, even if Rihanna is half-naked (nudity doesn't surprise us nowadays)." – Group 1 (Q1=4, Q2=1, Q3=1)

"This ad doesn't arouse any emotions in me. It's boring." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=4, Q3=4)

As the participant from Group 1 acknowledges, nudity really does not surprise us anymore, seeing as how we have gotten so used to it, so numbed, as the participant from Group 2 confirms; it just does not make us feel much of anything.

Comparisons

When looking for comparisons, I searched for the key-words/phrases: "compared to/in comparison", "not as/that (offensive/sexist/bad etc.)" and "better than", finding comments featuring these in both groups. Overall, Group 2 were slightly more inclined to compare ads with each other, commenting accordingly:

Calvin Klein, 2nd ad: *"Better than the first One but still rather disrespectful for the woman"* – Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=8, Q3=5)

Calvin Klein 9th ad: *"It is not as bad as many of the previous ads. Apart from the man holding the woman's arm down instead of holding her hand. If he held her hand the picture would be a lot more appealing to me."* – Group 2 (Q1=5, Q2=6, Q3=5)

Calvin Klein, 19th ad: *"Not that bad if you compare with the others"* – Group 2 (Q1=2, Q2=5, Q3=3)

Calvin Klein, 20th ad: *"Not as offensive as many of the other adverts, more of an equal presentation of two persons."* – Group 2 (Q1=3, Q2=8, Q3=7)

H&M, 23rd ad: *"Not as degrading compared to the other pictures, somewhat more relevant for the subject/advert."* – Group 2 (Q1=4, Q2=7, Q3=7)

As seen from the ratings, most of these participants did not really find any of these ads very sexist or offensive when comparing them with others, this seems to perhaps have "lessened" their ratings. In Group 1 on the other hand, only two participants used the tactic of comparison and scoring the ads with fairly low ratings, meaning not very sexist or offensive:

H&M, 10th ad: *"Almost all pictures connected to fashion are stereotyping how women should look, but in comparison with the others its fine. If you wanna sell underwear its pretty normal to also show the butt."* – Group 1 (Q1=4, Q2=2, Q3=1)

Calvin Klein, 13th ad: *"Not very offensive. Its a classy picture in comparison to the others."* – Group 1 (Q1=8, Q2=4, Q3=4)

Comparing ads this way can thus, in some respects, make ads more acceptable:

> "eventually they were ok with some ads because they were comparing them with others which they thought definitely crossed the line, i.e. applying the "lesser of two evils" principle." (Balog 2014, p.57).

Nevertheless, comparing an ad with others does not always mean that the ad will fair well:

Tom Ford, 32nd ad: *"For real? Could be pictures from a porn side... Compared to all the previous perfume advertisements is this the most disgusting one so far!!!"* Group 1 (Q1=1, Q2=9, Q3=10)

As this participant concluded when comparing the Tom Ford ad with others, this was not the "less evil" of the two, but the worst. Therefore, the process of comparison not only works in order to "lessen" the offensiveness or sexism of ads, but it can also make it clearer for the viewer, where to draw the line. The problem with this process however, is that it seems mostly to work in favour of sexist and objectifying ads, since it is used in almost all instances as a way to stretch the line and accept some things that maybe should not be accepted.

> "since the audience gets saturated and starts comparing one offensive ad with another deeming one of them "more" ok, they thus allow the advertising industry to keep being provocative." (Balog 2014, p.57)

Bargaining

When it comes to bargaining, this concept crucial to the Clutter Syndrome could again be found in both groups, even in a higher degree than the process of comparison. The key-word/phrase here being: "at least". Again, this strategy was mostly used by the participants in Group 2:

Gucci, 14th ad: *"At least they have their clothes on."* – Group 2 (Q1=4, Q2=3, Q3=2)

This ad by Gucci (see figure 19) was seen as offensive and sexist by both groups, however this participant, while using the bargaining strategy, found a "silver lining", seeing as how both the models involved were "at least" not naked. After seeing so much nudity in ads, one might find it refreshing when they are not exposed to so much skin. Yet, does this make the ad any better or redeeming? According to the majority of the participants, it does not, however, by being affected by the Clutter Syndrome, comparing and bargaining, this is a perfect example of how ones own line of acceptability can get stretched.

American Apparel, 5th ad: *"At least the woman seems natural and not too photoshopped. I think that's a big plus for the advertisement."* – Group 2 (Q1=5, Q2=4, Q3=2

Again, the majority of participants in both groups found the ad by American Apparel (see figure 29) very sexist and offensive. Nonetheless, when applying the bargaining principle, this participant found it to be less so, giving it lower ratings than average.

JBS, 15th ad: *"At least they're trying to be clever."* – Group 2 (Q1=5, Q2=2, Q3=5)

This ad by JBS (see figure 17) is for men's underwear, but by using a half naked woman wearing the underpants, they were according to this participant "at least trying to be clever", which gave the ad a fairly low rating. This type of comment was however not among the majority since most participants did find the ad sexist and offensive, and they instead asked themselves: "*WHY is a naked women needed in a mens underwear ad of all ads?*" But seeing as how bargaining is so useful for these types of ads, some people can thus find the ad less sexist and offensive, just because it has a layer of "cleverness". That cleverness is still nonetheless, sexist and offensive since it still is portraying a sexualized image of a woman, when there indeed was no real "need" for it, and this is what the majority of the participants who were not affected by the Clutter syndrome saw.

Similar to this was the comment:

Finetti 8th ad: "At least something a little different" – Group 1 (Q1=5, Q2=3, Q3=5)

Again, this ad by Finetti (see figure 7) was found sexist and offensive by the majority of both groups due to it's sexist message of women being dependable of men, however, seeing as how the ad was being "clever", this participant found it a bit different than the usual sexist ads, and thus, giving it rather low ratings. According to the principle of bargaining, if one can find a redeeming factor in the ad, they thus find a silver lining that may lessen the negative reactions and feelings towards it. And as seen in the last two instances, if an ad is a bit clever or different in its sexism, some can thus consider it less offensive.

Calvin Klein, 9th ad: *"At least they're both painted in similar light and positions. Kind of sexy, its two people at least the female is not outnumbered"* – Group 2 (Q1=6, Q2=2, Q3=2)

Again, this process of bargaining can seem a bit frightening since this participant from Group 2 has compared this ad (see figure 25) with the previous ads, some portraying a "group rape" type of imagery. So in this sense, a woman on her back and a man on top of her, holding down her arm, seems better since she at least does not have three or four other men holding her down. Apparently, if there is only one man holding down a woman, they are in "similar light and positions". This particular ad received many ambiguous comments, the participants on one hand thought it was "better" than other ads because they seemed more equal, but on the other hand they did also comment the fact that the man is holding down the woman:

"Basically the same as the previous, but I guess it can be seen as more offensive since he seems to be holding her down." – Group 1 (Q1=7, Q2=4, Q3=4)

"I really dislike the construction of this pose, as in: the woman's arm being held down. That said, it doesn't look as "assaulty" as some of the others." – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=6, Q3=4)

"It is not as bad as many of the previous ads. Apart from the man holding the woman's arm down instead of holding her hand. Group 2 (Q1=5, Q2=6, Q3=5)

What is interesting though, is that most of these participants still gave the ad rather low ratings, not finding it that offensive or sexist overall. When comparing and bargaining like this, one can almost always find redeeming excuses for the ad in question.

Lastly, there were two interesting comments regarding bargaining for the Suit Supply ad (see figure 21):

Suit Supply, 13th ad:
"Terrible but at least she is active in some way" – Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=9, Q3=9)

"What's the ad for? At least it looks like she is in control as much as the man, basically just tired of him. But it also sends a message that sex is for guys whenever and wherever they like it, and women just have to agree and wait for it to be over." Group 2 (Q1=1, Q2=10, Q3=10)

Both these participants from Group 2 used bargaining in their criticism of this ad, however, they still gave it very high ratings. Even in the cases where viewers do find ads both sexist and feel offended by them, they may still make up some excuses for them, almost saying that it could have been much worse.

Group 1 vs. Group 2

As presented in the empirics, Group 1 was more likely to deem an ad very sexist and offensive and the ad they found most sexist received 11,5% more 10's, meaning very sexist, compared to the most sexist ad for Group 2; 84,6% vs. 73,1% (see table 2). Another fairly big difference was found for the most offensive ad, which was deemed very offensive (10's) by 80,8% of Group 1, and 73,1% of Group 2, a 7,7% difference (see table 2).

For most of the ads, Group 1 found them overall to be more sexist and/or offensive, although there were some cases where Group 2 were a bit more critical. What is interesting though, is analysing these differences in responses. One could of course start off by saying that the majority of women in Group 1 were just more inclined to deem the ads sexist and offensive due to their own personal views. However, it might not be that simple and obvious.

When looking at the two Groups, one finds that in Group 1 the average age is somewhere between 20-30, and the majority are students. In Group 2 however, the average age is between 25-30, and most of them were working either part or full time. This means that Group 1 consisted of a slightly younger demographic than Group 2. But why would younger women overall feel more critical towards such

ads? Perhaps it could be due to the fact that they have not yet been exposed to the same amount of ads as the slightly older women in Group 2. Or perhaps it is due to the order in which the women saw the ads.

If we propose that these differences are because of the lesser exposure, the Clutter Syndrome can be an interesting part, or reason, for the differences in responses. Because Group 2 has been more exposed to such ads, they are more inclined to have already "suffered" from the Clutter Syndrome, and thus they do not always find the ads as sexist and offensive, since they are using their bargaining skills and have already become numb towards such imagery:

"I feel desensitised to images like this, they're so common." (H&M ad 23nd, Woman from Group 2).

As discussed in the previous section regarding desensitization, according to the comments found in both groups, the participants of Group 2 seem to be more desensitized towards such imagery, not caring or feeling offended by the ads even when they find them to be sexist.

If we instead propose that these differences are due to the order of the images, we can again find effects of the Clutter Syndrome. Since the participants in Group 2 were already exposed from the start to "the worst of the worst", they did not have anywhere else to go. While as for Group 1, the ads got worse and worse, and so did their ratings. An interesting fact here is that Group 1 actually found the last ad by Tom Ford to be the most sexist and the most offensive one, while Group 2 found the 8th ad, also by Tom Ford, to be the worst of all in all senses. When starting off with the first Tom Ford ad, Group 2 almost did not know what to make of it:

"Is this for real?? Is this a real ad?? I feel a little disgusted."

"My first thoughts is that the ad doesn't speak to me. Its fake, not real and then it is also not interesting. It is just not a real person. And therefore, I can't see the ad as sexist or objectifying. I can't feel anything for the "person"."

"Not sure if I should laugh because it's so ridiculous or feel really offended by this ad"

Starting the survey with such an overtly sexualized and pornographic image not only shocks the viewers, but can also immobilize and make them unable to react the way they would in other circumstances. For the participants of Group 1, this ad may have been less shocking since they were already exposed to 31 other before it with different portrayals of sexual imagery and nakedness. Their responses were thus:

"For real? Could be pictures from a porn side… Compared to all the previous perfume advertisements is this the most disgusting one so far!!!"

"Why do they have to be this sexist? it's getting insane"

"One of the worst so far"

Here we can see subtle hints of the Clutter Syndrome in action, however, this particular ad by Tom Ford was obviously not the "lesser of two evils" in this case, since the participants in Group 1 who made the comparisons and bargaining, deemed it to be the worst of all in their ratings.

For Group 2 however, the survey started off with overtly sexualized ads, and even though the first one may have shocked them, the others that followed lead them to make many comparisons and use their bargaining skills in ways that Group 1 did not:

Kind of sexy, its two people at least the female is not outnumbered" – Group 2 (Q1=6, Q2=2, Q3=2)

After seeing ads that were inspired by "gang rape", of course it seems "better" when it is only one man holding down one woman. Compared to Group 1, only Group 2 made such distinctions between the ads, thus deeming some of the worst ads to be more or less OK, due to the circumstances of them being presented in the reversed order. Therefore, the order of the images also point towards there being differences in the answers, and these differences can be linked to the fact that Group 2, under the influence of the Clutter Syndrome, have made certain comparisons, have bargained in certain ways, and become desensitized earlier on in the survey, because they were exposed to the "worst" ads from the start. Therefore, it seems that the order of the ads may have had a greater importance than the average age, since this not only explains the higher desensitization rate, but also the comparisons and bargaining.

Additionally, another interesting aspect to note is the difference in overall ratings for each group, especially when it comes to the 1's and 10's. Group 1 were more inclined to rate an ad a 10 regarding Q2 and Q3, while Group 2 were rather a bit more inclined to rate it a 1 (see table 1). Group 1 was therefore overall more critical, or less desensitized towards the ads, while Group 2 seemed more influenced by the Clutter Syndrome, in that they made more comparisons, bargained more and were more desensitised than Group 1, thus not findings as many "problems" with some of the ads.

Conclusion

The ads used in this study are a part of the system of images Jhally (1990) put forward, which all combined create a falsity when it comes to views of gender and sexuality. As she argued, some participants in this study also agreed and questioned why the female models in the ads were always so sexualized, as if that is the only aspect of a woman's worth. They also objected in some instances when it came to the gendered features between the male and female models, noticing the female's passivity and the men's power. Several times when viewing the ads, the participants made comparisons between the male and female models, discussing their similarities and differences; sometimes opposing them and sometimes accepting when they were on fairly equal terms. This then lead them to rate the images more or less sexist and/or offensive, which means that for most of the participants in the study, equality is an important issue. Nonetheless, most of the portrayals in the ads used stereotypical displays of the female models, which again received mixed reviews by the participants. Even though the male gaze (Mulvey, 1999) was used in most ads, in some cases where the portrayals were less stereotypical some participants regarded them as less sexist/offensive because of this.

All in all, the participants of this study responded in both different and similar ways regarding the ads; while some did not find many of the ads sexist or offensive, others objected and got angry, frustrated and upset about them. The average ratings of each ad concerning both groups showed that they did find the ads somewhat to very sexist, while at the same time finding them a bit less offensive. Analysing the concept of desensitization shows both groups being affected by it, seeing as how they have become saturated and numb towards such sexist portrayals, Group 2 even more so than Group 1 (see figures 39 & 40). This explains why participants can find ads sexist and still not feel as offended by them. When it comes to the processes of comparison and bargaining, again both groups displayed the active signs pointing towards them, and again Group 2 even more so than Group 1.

In conclusion, all three concepts of the Clutter Syndrome: **desensitization**, **comparison** and **bargaining**, could be found. Hence, by using this theory in the field of sexist advertising, one might understand why we as a society have come to accept some sexist and offensive ads, and why they then can, and most likely will, get worse. Thus the answer to the first research question is: yes, the Clutter Syndrome did affect many of the participants and it can be considered a valid theory in the field of sexist advertising. Furthermore, as revealed by the analysis, there were also differences in the responses of both groups, and these can be explained by the order of the ads in the survey connected to the Clutter Syndrome. Since Group 2 was exposed to the "worst" ads from the start they were thus more desensitized to overtly sexualized and violent ads. This lead them to make certain comparisons and bargain in certain ways that Group 1 did not, more or less accepting some of the most sexist ads because the previous ones had been much worse.

Discussion

Sexism in advertising is alive and kicking. Even though many, if not all, of us have become used to them, the amount of overt nudity, violence, sex and pornography displayed in ads is both concerning and disheartening. What do all these portrayals say about our view of women and men? What do they say about the way we see each other, or the way we act and react towards each other? To think that ads and what they explicitly and implicitly communicate do not play any importance what so ever when it comes to our culture, gender and values is truly foolish. Instead, more light should be shed on ads and their subtle, unconscious, almost brainwashing power. In an effort to do just this, I wrote my last thesis (Balog, 2014) regarding sexy vs. sexist ads, and this time around I have focused even more energy in order to fill in some missing gaps in the research field of sexist advertisement. This topic is not just important to me, but I believe it should be important to all of us who live in a society where such ads can be found. This thesis is not meant to point fingers at advertisers and their creations, it is not meant to put the blame on the consumers who keep buying the products displayed in the ads, but rather, it is meant to spread some awareness, to get people talking, thinking and becoming conscious of the problem we are all faced with. Otherwise, how will we ever reach some form of equality between women and men, if not even the ads and images we see every day can let go of the patriarchal point of view, and stop being sexist and offensive?

There have been many before me that have mentioned, discussed and problematized the concept of desensitization (Kilbourne 1999; Crase-Moritz 2002; Giffon Brooke 2003; Forde 2014; Tehseem & Riaz 2015), however, this was in my opinion not enough in order to really understand the problems with too many sexist ads. Being desensitized because of all the advertising clutter is just one problematic process that many of us have gone through, and still experience. However, as I have presented by describing the theory of Clutter Syndrome, there are two more processes to take into account and understand: comparison and bargaining. It seems to be engraved in our nature to compare things; we not only compare ourselves with the women and men in the ads, but we also compare the ads with each other, especially when there are so many cluttering our view. The same seems to be true for bargaining, since we have a tendency to sometimes not be critical enough. I believe this may be because we want so badly to see the best of everyone and everything, we sometimes get too caught up in making excuses for others that we should not be making at all. Thus, when under the influence of the Clutter Syndrome, these three processes work almost exclusively in favour of sexist ads, allowing them to get worse and worse.

Some interesting and discuss-worthy comments did arise in the surveys, one of which concerned the stereotypical portrayals of the female models. Regarding the Calvin Klein ad (see figure 35), one participant said she did not feel as offended since the woman in the ad was not stereotypically portrayed. One might thus ask: is

it better to create a sexist and offensive ad using stereotypical women, or non-stereotypical women? Aren't they just two sides of the same coin? Displaying a single woman lying down in the middle of a gang of men, one of which is pulling her hair, another one bending over her facing her chest, sounds like a rather sexist portrayal, however this participant found the ad acceptable since the female model was not looking as a usual helpless "feminine" woman. When making such conclusions and distinctions, it could lead to even worse depictions seeing as how the violence displayed is OK, just because the woman looks a bit more "rough". Being a woman with more roughness and less typical "femininity" however does not mean that you can handle being attacked by three men on your own, it does not mean that you are less sexualized, it is only another sexist portrayal, with a twist.

Another ad, this one by Finetti (see figure 7) received an interesting comment involving bargaining: *"At least something a little different"*. Again, one must ask: is it better to try and cover up the sexism with cleverness and non-stereotypical imagery, does that alone make an ad less sexist and more acceptable? Also, thinking that an ad displaying a woman in a dress with a message that communicates women's dependency of men is something different is questionable. How exactly is it different? Have women not been portrayed this way for the last decades or so? Maybe the difference that participant commented on was not the overall message of the ad, but just the fact that they were trying to be a bit clever and not just show a half naked woman, as so many other do. However, hiding sexism under cleverness does not make it right, as seen by the overall ratings of the other participants (see figure 8).

Regarding the two bargaining comments for the Suit Supply ad (see figure 21), what is fascinating is that the participants gave the ad very high ratings (9's and 10's) both concerning the sexism of the ad, and the offensiveness of it, but even so, they still felt the need to in some ways find small redeeming aspects in the ad, making excuses for the sexist imagery. Even in instances where we do find ads very sexist and feel very offended by them, we still go on trying to find a silver lining. Although we may want to see some good in everything, some cases might just be lost causes. Even if we can find some form of redeeming factors in just about any ad, we might want to consider not doing so, since the process of bargaining works in order to lessen the sexism and offensiveness of an ad, it works in order to make excuses for sexism and accepting it, not putting a stop to it. So next time we see an ad with one "rough" looking woman getting assaulted by four men, instead of thinking: *"At least she looks like she can handle it"*, or *"at least it is only four men and not five"*, we might instead say: Enough already! This is not acceptable in any way shape or form.
This needs to

STOP.

Reflections & Future research

The aim of this study was to explore the Clutter Syndrome, finding out if any of the participants in the study were affected by it in some way. At the same time, it was also seeking insight to whether the order of ads may cause different responses and reactions, and deducing if they may be connected to the Clutter Syndrome. In both regards, the study has achieved its goal and provided answers to both research questions. However, seeing as how the study consisted of 52 women in total, it is of course not reasonable to generalize the results and claim that the Clutter Syndrome affects all women. However, it would not be that far fetched arguing that most or some women are affected by it, in some way or another, at some point or another, seeing as how the concepts of the Clutter Syndrome are so common in our society, and in our ways as being human; we can get tired and numb of over-exposures, we sometimes compare things to each other, and we do at times make excuses and bargain our way through some instances of life. All of these concepts are not something strictly linked to sexist ads, but processes that most of us have probably experienced; therefore, it would not be that surprising if similar results and comments were made even if the study involved 1000 or more women. These are my reflections after conducting this study, but of course I cannot prove this would be the case, I can only amuse the thought and delight in the fact that it can also not be concluded otherwise, not until more research has been done.

In the end, what is important is keeping up this type of research and filling in the missing gaps since the topic of sexism in ads is a very big and problematic issue, and it does concern all of us who see such portrayals, day in and day out. What would also be very interesting when it comes to the Clutter Syndrome is conducting a study with male participants in order to see if their reactions and comments use the same form and/or amount of desensitization, comparisons and bargaining. Are perhaps women more inclined to be under the spell of the Clutter Syndrome, or are men just as persuaded by it? Furthermore, studying the influences and consequences the Clutter Syndrome can have regarding our gender, values and sexuality, would be a very fascinating, challenging and more or less unexplored field, and perhaps also a fruitful step towards enlightenment and equality between the sexes.

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Tom ford
https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/d4/80/97/d48097614cc903fd6ac66eabbf4acca8.jpg
2015-03-15 13.44

Calvin Klein
http://s3-ec.buzzfed.com/static/enhanced/webdr05/2013/6/27/8/enhanced-buzz-wide-25676-1372337516-14.jpg
2015-03-15 13.46

Sex sells jeans
https://lh6.googleusercontent.com/-qJAB3ouooSY/TlpHM1aYbeI/AAAAAAAAAOY/I8PAit33Cco/w800-h800/Sexy-Ads-1.jpg
2015-03-15 13.56

JBS
https://melpinto.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/sexy-ads-jbs-mens-underwear.jpg
2015-03-15 14.00

Durex
http://cdn.creativeguerrillamarketing.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Creative-Durex-Condom-Ads-3.jpeg
2015-03-15 14.02

Eva Mendez lingerie
http://i79.photobucket.com/albums/j155/motownnat/eva-mendes-sexy-lingerie-Calvin-Kle.jpg
2015-03-15 14.05

Björn Borg
http://cdn.trendhunterstatic.com/thumbs/bjorn-borg-ss-2012.jpeg
2015-03-22 22.15

Calvin Klein
https://redcardin.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/ckcollection-homotography-2.jpg
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Calvin Klein
http://images1.fanpop.com/images/photos/1900000/Calvin-Klein-Jeans-Fall-Winter-2004-HQ-jamie-dornan-1948343-1400-940.jpg
2015-03-22 22.21

Calvin Klein
https://nothingcomesbetweenmeandmycalvins.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/eva-mendes-jamie-dornan-calvin-klein-jeans-ad-spring-2010.jpeg
2015-03-22 22.49

DLV BBDO Milan
http://files2.coloribus.com/files/adsarchive/part_365/3653205/file/handbag-things-iv-small-14284.jpg
2015-03-22 22-24

H&M
https://fashionscansremastered.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/fashion_scans_remastered-laetitia_casta-h__m-winter_2012-scanned_by_vampirehorde-hq-1.jpg
2015-03-22 22.34

Burberry
http://threefifty.ca/sites/default/files/images/blog/sexy-women-advertising-and-marketing-does-it-work/Burberry-Ad-Sexy-Model.jpg
2015-03-22 22.40

Carl's Jr.
http://adsoftheworld.com/sites/default/files/styles/media_retina/public/sexy_4.jpg?itok=2ITyGVq5
2015-03-22 22.44

FOC Jeans
http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_NuQ1asHchXU/S452Rjvf8hI/AAAAAAAADXc/bGoI3syZz2s/s640/freedomofchoice.jpg
2015-03-22 22.50

Alexander Wang Jeans
http://i.huffpost.com/gen/2349092/thumbs/o-WANG-2-570.jpg?19
2015-03-22 22.52

Alexander Wang Jeans
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/03/alexander-wang-denim-ads_n_6262924.html
2015-03-22 22.54

Chanel
http://www.marketingalchemist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/keira-knightley-coco-chanel-09.jpg
2015-03-22 23.05

Dolce & Gabbana
http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_-GNY4ecJUMo/TSJ7W9UDAjI/AAAAAAAAABM/fpf-WAe620M/s1600/article-1228053-0719F289000005DC-523_468x636-353x480.jpg
2015-03-22 23.10

Valentino
http://www.businessinsider.com/these-modern-ads-are-even-more-sexist-than-their-mad-men-era-counterparts-2012-4?op=1&IR=T
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http://www.businessinsider.com/these-modern-ads-are-even-more-sexist-than-their-mad-men-era-counterparts-2012-4?op=1&IR=T
2015-03-22 22.14

Tom Ford
http://www.businessinsider.com/these-modern-ads-are-even-more-sexist-than-their-mad-men-era-counterparts-2012-4?op=1&IR=T
2015-03-22 22.15

American Apparel
https://timedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/06.jpg?w=550
2015-03-22 23.30

Appendix

Presented here are all the 32 ads used in both surveys, they have been numbered and placed in the order that Group 1 saw them, i.e. from "least" sexist/offensive to "worst".
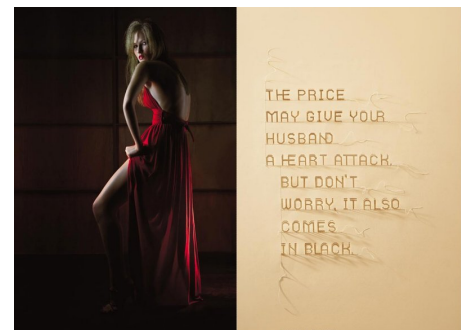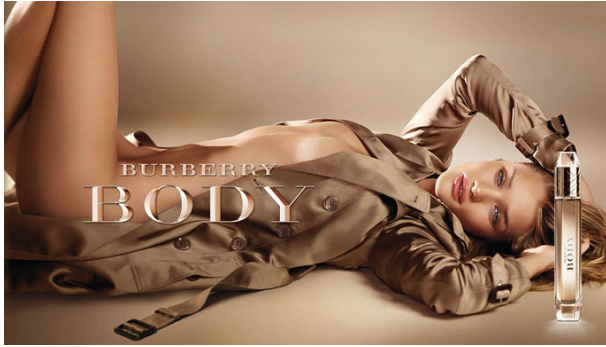
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2/31

3/30

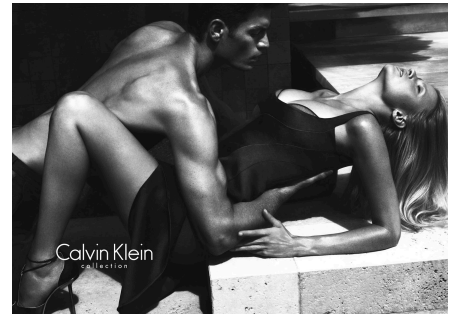4/29

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6/27

7/26

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11/22

12/21

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16/17

17/16

18/15

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