

Alcohol advertisements influence intentions to intervene in sexual assault situations

June 18 2019, by Corrie Wilder



Credit: WSU

College students who viewed alcohol advertisements that included objectified images of women were less likely than others to report intentions to intervene in alcohol-facilitated sexual assault situations in a

study published in the *Journal of Health Communication*.

The role of alcohol in [sexual assault](#) has long been an interest among health communication scholars, but few have examined whether [alcohol advertising](#) may contribute to beliefs associated with alcohol-facilitated sexual assault.

Professors at The Edward R. Murrow College of Communication and College of Agriculture, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences at Washington State University analyzed the influence of alcohol advertisements on [college students'](#) intentions to intervene in sexual assault situations. The authors conclude that individuals' perceptions of alcohol advertisements moderate the relationship between exposure to objectifying alcohol advertisements and intentions to intervene in sexual assault situations.

"This study estimates some of the ways alcohol advertising and the objectification of women in alcohol ads could affect college students' intentions to intervene in sexual assaults linked to alcohol," said Stacey Hust, associate professor in the college of communication and the study's principal investigator. "Understanding the real-life consequences of exposure to and perceptions of this type of advertising can help mitigate risk of sexual assault among college students, female college students in particular."

The authors found that while most of the 1208 [college](#) students at a northwestern university that participated in the study reported that they intended to intervene in an alcohol-facilitated sexual assault, women reported significantly greater intentions to intervene than men. Further, exposure to alcohol ads and perceptions of the women in the ads made a difference as to whether individuals expressed intentions to intervene in a sexual assault situation.

"We know that a majority of alcohol advertisements use women's sex appeal to sell their product, and many of these ads objectify women or include sexual connotations," Hust said. "Our results suggest that exposure to this type of advertising coupled with use of [alcohol](#) in settings where bystanders are present has an effect on whether those bystanders intend to take steps to prevent or interrupt a sexual [assault](#) situation when it occurs."

The results of the study largely support objectification theory, which suggests that perceptions of women as powerless objects result in individuals' negative treatment of women.

Kathleen Boyce Rodgers, associate professor in WSU's Department of Human Development and the second author of the study, explains that we need to help emerging adults make sense of media portrayals of women.

"Media professionals need to be conscientious of the portrayals of [women](#) in their messages," she said. "Understanding viewers' perception of female models in advertising and using this knowledge to advocate for media literacy is a step in the right direction."

More information: Stacey J.T. Hust et al, Viewers' Perceptions of Objectified Images of Women in Alcohol Advertisements and Their Intentions to Intervene in Alcohol-Facilitated Sexual Assault Situations, *Journal of Health Communication* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/10810730.2019.1604911](#)

Provided by Washington State University

Citation: Alcohol advertisements influence intentions to intervene in sexual assault situations

(2019, June 18) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-06-alcohol-advertisements-intentions-intervene-sexual.html>

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