

Alcohol ads can influence men and women to sexually coerce partners

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An experimental study revealed that alcohol advertising featuring objectified women encouraged not just some male but also female college students to manipulate others for sex.

The study, led by Washington State University researchers, found that both young men and [women](#) who expressed strong beliefs in [gender stereotypes](#) were more likely to sexually coerce. This connection was particularly strong with young men viewing [alcohol](#) ads featuring highly objectified female models.

The researchers also found that women who wanted to be like the female models in the ads were more likely to report intentions to sexually coerce without even using alcohol.

"Alcohol advertisements have effects beyond encouraging people to consume alcohol," said lead author Stacey Hust, professor in WSU's Murrow College of Communication. "For women, there was this interesting connection about wishful identification and coercion without alcohol."

The study, published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, tested different alcohol ads on about 1,200 college students. One set of participants saw real advertisements featuring highly objectified women such as models wearing little or no clothing. Another set viewed ads that were changed to lessen the objectification, such as adding a dress to a model who appeared in the original ad in a bikini.

The participants answered questions about their perceptions of the ads, their beliefs in [gender](#) stereotypes, sex-related alcohol expectancies and their own sexual coercion intentions with or without alcohol.

Sexual coercion covers a range of negative and illegal behaviors from lying and verbally pressuring someone to plying [potential partners](#) with alcohol to have sex. For instance, some of the questions on the study asked participants whether they would pretend to like someone just to have sex with them or if they would have sex with someone even if they felt their partner would feel used afterwards.

Interestingly, the researchers found that the alcohol ads did not have an effect on all the participants' sexual coercion intentions. Rather, they only had a [negative influence](#) when the participants had certain perceptions, such as belief in gender stereotypes or women's wishful identification with the depicted models.

The study adds evidence to previous research linking gender stereotypes, such as seeing men as sexually aggressive and women as submissive, to sexual coercion and other sexually violent behaviors.

"Most programs that talk about sexual violence focus on consent or bystander intervention, which is good, but there's a wealth of studies out there that also show a tie to gender stereotypical beliefs," said Hust. "If we start [prevention programs](#) that debunk gender stereotypes when kids are young, then hopefully over time we can impact these negative behaviors."

Starting earlier with media literacy education would help too, Hust added, noting that ads for non-alcoholic beverages often use similar appeals and strategies to those used by [alcohol ads](#).

"We don't have to wait until young people are of drinking age to help them be more critically aware of advertisements," she said. "If we start in the elementary years, then it's a natural transition for them to apply those tools to products that are more dangerous."

More information: Stacey J. T. Hust et al, Perceived Realism and Wishful Identification: College Students' Perceptions of Alcohol Ads and Their Intentions to Sexually Coerce with or Without Using Alcohol, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/08862605211057270](#)

Provided by Washington State University

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