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Feminist Counterpublics and Public Feminisms: Advancing a Critique of Racialized Sexualization in London's Public Advertising

In the spring of 2015, public outrage started growing over a controversial advertisement running widely across the Transport for London network. This advertisement for Protein World protein powder featured a blonde, white (but tanned), thin woman in a yellow bikini. The model's rib cage could be seen, a large gap between her thighs looked digitally altered, and her perfectly spherical breasts were prominently fixed in two yellow triangles. Her stare seemed to taunt her viewer, and copy to either side of her slight body read "Are you beach body ready?" More than 370 complaints were made directly to the Advertising Standards Authority, positioning the ad as "socially irresponsible" (Rodgers 2018), and a further seventy thousand people signed a petition on Change.org calling for the removal of the ads, saying the advertisement sought to make people "feel guilty" (Glosswitch 2015).

Commuters took to Twitter, documenting graffiti on the posters, creating the ingenious hashtag #EachBodysReady (fig. 1), making selfie statements (including putting one's middle finger in the ad [fig. 2]), and staging protest shots in which women stand over the image to rewrite the advertisement. These posters explicitly used social media to generate a feminist digital counterpublic (Salter 2013). Using mediums such as graffiti, they created new hashtags to call out sexism in public space (Sills et al. 2016), which in turn appeared in stories that discussed the advertisement as offensive and sexist but more important as body shaming. This discussion of body shaming introduced a new lexicon into public debate and challenged the acceptable terms of feminine embodiment in advertising.

The conflict was amplified when the protein powder company rebutted a tweet about the impact of the diet and weight-loss industries on women's

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Figure 1 "#EachBodysReady" image shared on Twitter in 2015. A color version of this figure is available online.

Figure 2 Women give the middle finger on the ad; image shared on Twitter in 2015. A color version of this figure is available online.

self-esteem with the rejoinder "why make your insecurities our problem?" Their CEO even called the women "terrorists" (in Glosswitch 2015). From here, the outrage grew and spilled out onto streets via a protest in Hyde Park's Speakers Corner. Responding to this controversy, London mayor Sadiq Khan issued a public statement banning "body-shaming" ads (Jackson 2016) from Transport for London, saying, "As the father of two teenage girls, I am extremely concerned about this kind of advertising which can demean people, particularly women, and make them ashamed of their bodies. It is high time it came to an end. Nobody should feel pressurised, while they travel on the tube or bus, into unrealistic expectations surrounding their bodies and I want to send a clear message to the advertising industry about this" (in Jackson 2016). Transport for London then set up a steering group with its corporate advertising partners to "monitor and review compliance and rules." Critically, as noted by Transport for London's commercial development director, Graeme Craig: "Advertising on our network is unlike TV, online and print media. Our customers cannot simply switch off or turn a page if an advertisement offends or upsets them and we have a duty to ensure the copy we carry reflects that unique environment" (in Jackson 2016).

In January of 2017, another controversy erupted over a subsequent advertisement for the same product, which showcased Khloe Kardashian in a retro exercise bodysuit with the statement "Can you keep up with a Kardashian?" (fig. 3).[1] The advertisement is notable in that Khloe Kardashian is turned to the side, placing her buttocks in sharp relief and adding a new idealized body part to the assemblage. Interestingly, this advertisement was reviewed and passed the new regulations, which raises the question tweeted by @CarolineRussell: "[Transport for London] thinks this advert is acceptable?!"[2] Finally, following the public's growing demand for accountable advertising, a Transport for London steering group and affiliates commissioned research into the public perception of gender and media in greater London.

In this article, we explore our experiences of being commissioned to undertake this research as a process of taking account of diverse feminist counterpublics. Eventually titled "The Women We See: Experiences of Gender and Diversity in London's Public Spaces" (Ringrose and Regehr 2018), the research grew to be a multimedia documentary-style study that involved two "talk-back" art projects with schoolgirls, sixteen interviews with women commuters throughout London, and a survey of 2,012 Londoners.

Signs editor Suzanna Danuta Walters (2016, 702) argues that public feminism is about translating "multivocal feminist perspective[s]" in order to

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[1] The advertisement is pictured here as part of a girls' craft-back collaging activity discussed later in the article.

[2] See https://twitter.com/CarolineRussell/status/831841629094961152?s=20.

Figure 3   "Can You Keep Up with a Kardashian?" advertisement collage with girls' responses. A color version of this figure is available online.

shape a public conversation, debate, and politics. According to Sharon Todd, paraphrasing gender scholars such as Michael Warner and Judith Butler, publics are "performative forms of association that transform subjectivity and practices of relationality, [whereas] subversive, alternative and dissident publics (or counter-publics) enact forms of solidarity that are engaged in creating new terms of becoming" (Todd 2017). Nancy Fraser further contends

that what she terms "subaltern counterpublics . . . are discursive arenas that develop in parallel to the official public spheres" and are formed "as a response to the exclusions of the dominant publics"; their existence "better promotes the ideal of participatory parity" (in Kampourakis 2016).

Public feminism, we contend, sits in an ambivalent relationship with various feminist counterpublics. Feminist intellectuals often lack public visibility due to the demonization of feminism and the intensification of current antifeminist sentiments (Banet-Weiser 2018). Through the research process we outline in this article, we were given a unique opportunity to intervene into a live struggle defining the terms of what constitutes sexist advertising and to propose ideas for change. In this article, we outline the complexities of the struggle over frames of reference, methodologies, findings, and dissemination processes we experienced while working with a range of corporate and government stakeholders to inform the public debates and government policies on gender and advertising. First, we outline the academic research on gender and advertising, which informed our approach. We discuss a major shift from a previous mode of advertising that catered to the male gaze and largely depicted female subservience to a new terrain of "femvertising," where women are positioned as empowered consumers (Becker-Herby 2016). We also explore a predominant new form of advertising that represents women as "confident-sexy," as theorized by Kristen Khors and Rosalind Gill (forthcoming). In this mode, confidence is signaled through displays of sexualized feminine embodiment. But we also suggest the need for an intersectional analysis to see how racialization interacts with sexualization in new ways through new trends in "affirmative diversity advertising" (Gill and Kanai 2019).

Next, we outline our research design, which included generating qualitative research with women and girls about their everyday experiences of gender and advertising, and quantitative research about attitudes regarding diversity and representation in London's advertisements. We discuss one of our most significant survey findings, which is the public's dislike of advertisements that sexualize women's bodies. Through our interview data, we qualify these findings to explore diverse women's experiences of sexualization across intersectional dimensions of race, location, and age. We document the nonconsensual and at times assaultive nature of public advertising in order to advocate for greater accountability around advertisements in public space. Overall, we argue that by explicitly adopting an intersectional feminist theoretical and methodological approach (Collins 2008; Lykke 2010) to showcase the multiple axes of diversity and difference that create inequity, we were able to move the public discussion from sexism—articulated as a single-axis, binary construct—to an understanding of the intersections between gender, sexualization, racialization, and other axes of power and identity.

**Advertising in public space: An intersectional analysis
of sexy-confident address**

The global research on women and advertising has shown an industry that is slow to change (Eisend 2010). While some suggest that the well-worn tropes of sexist advertising are lessening, this is predominantly due to changing representations of men (Grau and Zotos 2016). We see the ongoing relevance of sociological critiques of the sexual objectification of women in advertising (Badger, Bronstein, and Lambiase 2018), which stem from Erving Goffman's (1979) groundbreaking research documenting gender-role stereotyping and patterns of female submission in 1960s advertising. As Khors and Gill (forthcoming) note, Goffman's work explored how advertisements frequently depict ritualized versions of the parent-child relationship, in which women are largely accorded childlike status. In the ads he analyzed, "women were typically shown lower or smaller than men and using gestures which 'ritualised their subordination', for example, lying down, using bashful knee bends, canting postures or deferential smiles. Women were also depicted in 'licensed withdrawal'" (dreamy self-absorption), as well as frequently being shown looking into mirrors, which further conveyed a message about female narcissism. Clear differences in gendered touch were also identified.

A large body of feminist research has drawn on Goffman's original semantic analysis to develop tools to analyze how gender stereotypes and sexual objectification are constructed in advertising images through technologies like cropping (to emphasize particular body parts) and adopting particular angles, stances, and gazes (Kilbourne 1999). Recently, for instance, in the United States, Madonna Badger, Carolyn Bronstein, and Jacqueline Lambiase (2018) have argued that despite decades of critique, advertisers continue to reduce women to a series of sexualized parts, or their bodies tend to function as props in the advertising story. In New Zealand, beer ads have been criticized for repeatedly portraying gender stereotypes, like men outside at the barbeque and women in the kitchen (Benton-Greig, Gamage, and Gavey 2017; McDonald 2017). A review of US magazine advertisements conducted over a fifty-year period concluded that while early depictions of women as helpless or located entirely in a domestic setting have lessened over time, representations of women in advertisements have become more sexualized than ever (Mager, Summers-Hoskins, and Helgeson 2015). By "sexualized," they mean women are more likely to appear nude or in revealing outfits and in sexually explicit positions.

Moving beyond representational analysis, social science has sought to demonstrate the negative impact on women and girls by studying the relationship between sexist advertisements and disrespect of women in society at large (Curtis, Arnaud, and Waguespack 2015). Scholars have examined

the relationship between sexualized images and body dissatisfaction, body dysmorphia, and disordered eating habits in women (Marshall 2017). Sabitha Zacharias (2016) argues that sexist advertising leads to an increase in the rate of cosmetic surgeries, eating disorders, and related deaths, demonstrating how mediated images of the ideal woman affect real women's self-image. Lauren Rosewarne's (2007, 2009) Australian research argues that sexist advertising in the public sphere has a direct impact on the relational space surrounding the advertising. She maintains that the sexual objectification of women enforces male dominance and potential male aggression within social environments that are already "charged with a hostile male sexuality" (2009, 16). Rosewarne underlines that the prevalence of sexist and sexualized advertising reinforces the male gaze, subjecting women's bodies to public scrutiny at all times. What is critical here is qualifying that it is not sexualized imagery in general or in the abstract that is problematic but sexualized imagery in the context of a sexualized society, where images exist in relation to wider social norms and contexts (see also Gill 2012). Crucially, Rosewarne's (2007) argument is that sexualized public advertisements are inescapable in public space and are thus a form of harassment. In this view, sexualized advertisements are nonconsensual and potentially assaultive and therefore an issue of public concern connected to safety and public accountability.

Gill (2008, 2012), however, has also identified a key shift in how women are encouraged to embrace sexist sexualization. She and others have discussed a new category of "femvertising" that specifically constructs women as empowered consumers (Becker-Herby 2016). Dee Amy-Chinn (2006), drawing on Angela McRobbie, calls this "post-feminist . . . advertising," a discourse of women's empowerment to be achieved through product consumption. This form of address folds together earlier tropes of sexualized femininity (Lazar 2006) and newer technologies of sexiness, which celebrate ideals of independence, self-love, bravery, and so on to promote baring one's body as the model of confidence (Evans and Riley 2014; Ringrose, Tolman, and Ragonese 2018). These neoliberal discourses of individual DIY improvement encourage women to work hard on their bodies through practices of aesthetic labor (and investment in beauty industry products) as a route to becoming successful, confident, and happy (Gill 2008; Murray 2013; Elias, Gill, and Scharff 2017). While the old trope of women as passive props has not disappeared, Khors and Gill (forthcoming) point to the dominance of a new visual trope—"confident-appearing" women. These women are "depicted with their heads held high, looking directly at the viewer, with a neutral expression, or pictured striding purposefully forward, or holding themselves in controlled movement . . . underpinned by written texts that exhort confidence, self-belief and empowerment." This is certainly the type of "sexy-confident"

address signaled in the Protein World advertisement, as well as others we will explore, where the protagonist challenges other women to be like her and to live up to her standard, which will presumably be a route to success and happiness via improving her bodily capital (Evans and Riley 2014; Elias, Gill, and Scharff 2017). As Khors and Gill (forthcoming) also stress, this new visual language is "being developed to address (particularly, though not exclusively) middle- and upper-class female subjects. These women are being hailed through a composite of signifiers of assertiveness, boldness and power that together comprise a kind of confident appear[ance]." Indeed, the "Beach Body Ready" ad promotes a form of body confidence capital: size, shape, and skin tone represent a form of worked-on white femininity through classed practices like consuming protein powder to achieve bodily perfection. Here, an intersectional analysis becomes paramount in understanding that gender does not act as a single axis in representational dynamics. Rather, it works through layers of race, class, sexuality, ability, age, and more (Gill 2008).

Rosalind Gill and Akane Kanai (2019) have argued that what they call "affirmative advertising" appears to be a new trend "responding to activisms and social justice movements around race (and also class, sexuality and disability)" by promising visibility and inclusion in the consumer marketplace, but it is highly problematic (143). The way that affirmative advertising includes diversity tends to be hollow and superficial, and differences of race, body shape, age, and ability are often "homogenized through a combination of aesthetic means (make-up, clothes, stylization) and affective means (an upbeat emphasis upon self-worth and confidence) that renders everyone the same" (144). We will further explore this trend of homogenizing difference in advertisements (such as those that were intended to improve the "Beach Body Ready" campaign and those that include plus-size models and women of color). We explore how these ads attempt to signify difference while also homogenizing difference. Further, we argue that this homogeneity is exacted through a repeated and compulsory sexualization of women's bodies. We will demonstrate how participants experience these various modes of postfeminist consumer address and how the processes of sexualization and racialization work together in many advertisements. We examine ads that foreground the sexy-confident address of thin white women as well as a new "diverse" plus-sized yet idealized, racialized, sexualized body type, which participants refer to as "thick-slim," as well as and how these two limited typologies are becoming increasingly prevalent in advertising.

Socially engaged mixed-methods research

In the wake of several years of public controversy over advertising in London, we began working with the mayor of London in 2017 to undertake

independent academic research on gender and advertising in London's public spaces. Several stakeholders were involved, including the mayor's office, a public relations firm handling the research production, and corporate entities that sponsored a competition responding to our research findings granting free advertising space to a brand that would develop an improved advertising campaign based on the recommendations of the report. From the beginning, we were constantly aware of the process of negotiating and working with a range of stakeholders to produce ethically sound and independent research findings. We were acutely conscious of the limitations of advertising as a commercially driven entity but were also aiming to shape policies to reduce sexism and promote more diversity in advertising.

Public feminism demands socially engaged research practices that are grounded in an engagement with multiple stakeholders and complex webs of accountability from the outset (Wang et al. 2017; Ringrose, Warfield, and Zarabadi 2018). We are inspired by feminist methodologies that encourage hybrid approaches, participatory practices, and response-ability to the many players involved in such research processes (Barad 2007; Haraway 2016). The original research brief asked us to "look at the perception of women in media and investigate: 'In what way are women portrayed in media in comparison to men? What are the outstanding gender-based generalizations/sexism/stereotypes?'" We insisted that we move from a single-axis perspective to consider diverse girls' and women's intersecting identities and the ways this shaped their experiences of advertising (Collins 2008; Lykke 2010). We set out to explore how a range of advertising content in London is experienced. Our research questions included: What messages are diverse women and girls receiving from advertising in London? How do these advertisements make a diverse sample of girls and women feel? And, if gender bias is experienced, what are the range of views from participants about what should change?

We developed a mixed-methods approach that involved interviews, focus groups, the arts-based practice of collaging (Mayaba and Wood 2015), and a survey. Using mixed methods joins together numerical evidence, which is persuasive to a range of stakeholders, with qualitative stories that enable depth and nuance (Cresswell 2014).

First, we recruited sixteen diverse women through a firm specializing in qualitative methodologies. The sampling rationale was based on a desire to find women from sixteen different postal codes in London with a range of ages, races, religions, physical abilities, numbers of children, and socioeconomic statuses. The final selection of participants was determined through short telephone interviews to explore the women's daily movements, commutes, and use of public space. Locations for the interviews were selected on the basis of their common travel in London. We went on journeys with

the women on their commute or daily routine to explore their embodied encounters with advertising in real time and local spaces. Participants were also asked to comment on a standardized selection of currently running advertising content we had sourced across London in the months leading up the research. These prompts included thirty advertisements we had selected because they featured women (selling products ranging from insurance to weight-loss products). The encounters employed narrative inquiry to draw out stories (Pinnegar and Daynes 2007). This dialogue was captured through voice recordings, images, and videos. In this article, we include a range of stories and images to explore diverse women's experiences of sexualized advertising.

The second strand of our qualitative methodology was conducting focus group interviews with twenty-two teen girls aged fourteen to sixteen at two London schools. These schools were selected based on postal codes (one in inner and one in outer London) and our ability to gain research access. Due to challenges in organizing trips outside school, we asked girls to bring in examples of advertising they found problematic and that they liked, and we explored the advertising prompts we had collected with them in focus groups. Subsequently, the girls worked in groups (two per school) using advertising content to create "talk-back" art collages. Through this arts-based, participatory research process (Wang et al. 2017), they cut-and-pasted the advertising content we discussed. The collages created by the girls are featured throughout this article and show both the ads themselves and the "craft-backs" or alterations the girls made to the images. These alterations included drawing, cutting, pasting, and messages written to advertisers about what they thought was problematic and what they would like to see done differently. As we will go on to argue, the girls' collages show the potential of arts-based research as part of enacting resistances that form a feminist counterpublic. The identities of the schools and young people have all been anonymized in line with child-protection and ethical standards and the University College London ethics board.

Finally, building on the qualitative findings, we worked with a market research firm to design and conduct a survey of London adults (2,012 respondents aged eighteen and over who live in London and who comprise a representative sample by gender, age, religion, ethnicity, income bracket, and housing tenure). The survey measured attitudes toward advertising by asking if respondents felt represented by advertising in London (by gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality); which elements of advertising they felt were problematic and which they liked; and how they rated eight specific advertisements chosen because they had generated strong responses (negative and positive) in the qualitative findings. The survey data was profoundly important in extending and supporting some of the key qualitative findings and

highlighted a main public concern: namely, that sexualization was the main reason people did not like advertisements.

London advertising: Failing to represent diversity and the harmful sexualization of women and girls

Although methodologically the survey marked the culmination of our study, we want to begin our account with the survey findings as a way of communicating some of the broad trends and most significant findings of our study. First, the survey laid bare just how poorly London's advertising was regarded. Fewer than one in three Londoners (27 percent) felt that ads were relevant to them. Second, the survey showed how powerfully gender differences shaped experiences of representation in advertising, given that the group who felt the best represented were men aged eighteen to thirty-four, with two-thirds (69 percent) saying they felt "very well" or "fairly well" represented), while those who felt least represented were women over the age of fifty-five, with fifty-five percent saying they felt "fairly badly" or "very badly" represented. Third, the survey found that fewer than half (48 percent) felt that advertisements adequately reflected the diversity of London, although three in four (75 percent) thought advertisements in London *should* reflect the diversity of the city's population. Further, 71 percent of black Londoners said black people are not well represented in London's advertising, and 61 percent of Asian Londoners felt there was an underrepresentation of Asian communities. Additionally, 43 percent of women and 37 percent of men felt that their religion was not well represented in London's advertising. Only 21 percent of respondents could remember ever seeing an ad with a woman wearing a hijab. We also found that only 18 percent of survey participants could ever recall having seen an advertisement with a disabled person, and only 35 percent of LGBT Londoners felt represented in London advertising.

This statistical backdrop shows an overwhelming sense that diversity is lacking in London's advertising landscape. We then drilled down in the survey to explore respondents' views about content that they found problematic. One of the most significant survey findings was that sexualization of women was the top answer given as to why respondents disliked ads, with women in revealing clothing (36 percent) and then men in revealing clothes (34 percent) found as the least acceptable advertising content, even higher than respondents' dislike of fast food products (28 percent). In addition, 68 percent of Londoners said that women are often shown in revealing clothes when it's not relevant. For instance, almost half of participants (45 percent) could remember seeing ads featuring women in swimwear versus fewer than one in three (28 percent) remembering men in swimwear. As Amy-Chinn (2006)

has argued, moral outrage over revealing clothing in advertising could indicate social conservativism. While this is a salient point, we complicate a one-dimensional reading through our discussion of the qualitative findings of how women and girls felt about and experienced sexualized and racialized advertising.

By further differentiating the findings by gender, we found that women had a more critical view of advertising than men. For instance, women were significantly more likely to say we see too many slim people (50 percent of women vs. 36 percent of men) and too many white people (36 percent of women vs. 28 percent of men) in ads. Women were also significantly more likely to say they do not see enough disabled people (65 percent of women vs. 51 percent of men), plus-size people (59 percent of women vs. 44 percent of men), and older people (58 percent of women vs. 50 percent of men) in ads. In addition, over half (51 percent) of women surveyed stated that their body shape is not represented in London advertisements compared to only 37 percent of men. Overall, participants felt that women suffered significantly more misrepresentation than men through being sexualized and photoshopped (96 percent of respondents thought the ads in the survey were photoshopped, and 69 percent said companies should acknowledge photoshopping). As we will go on to show, most of the eight advertisements rated in the survey were seen as not diverse, unrealistic, sexist, and sexualized in ways that made them unhealthy and unacceptable.

Advertising as assaultive: An intersectional analysis of sexualization

In April of 2018, we met Sierra at the Kennington tube station. Sierra is a single mother of two who identifies as black British; she uses two sticks to support her walking due to limited mobility, and on this rather windy day, she wore a black down jacket that rustled as she walked. We researchers were to accompany Sierra as she took a bus from the station to her local library. As we moved slowly toward the bus stop, we were immediately confronted with a large clothing advertisement that featured a prominent image of a white woman in Caucasian flesh-colored underwear and black over-the-thigh socks (fig. 4). The advertisement demonstrates the sexy-confident mode of address discussed by Khors and Gill, but our interest is in how different women experience the ad. To understand this, we need to employ an intersectional lens. Sierra stopped in front of the ad, stating that she was quite "shocked" and adding, "I thought they really couldn't be so bold to put something like that on an advert for children to see, for adults to see, and I find sometimes that adverts can be quite sexual, and . . . they seem to be advertising more for sex than actually for the actual product."

Figure 4   Researchers with Sierra in front of white flesh-tone underwear advertisement on the bus stop (Ringrose et al. 2019). A color version of this figure is available online.

In the survey, this advertisement stood out as second-least-liked of eight ads rated. Only 29 percent liked it. It was also rated the most highly sexualized of all the advertisements by 63 percent, and 26 percent found it sexist. In her discussion of the advertisement, Sierra clarified several times that it wasn't herself that she was concerned about, but she worried about the impact on her seven-year-old daughter and twelve-year-old son. This was an interesting tactic—deflecting the cause of concern toward young people in danger of sexualization (see also Amy-Chinn 2006)—but we also sensed Sierra's deep discomfort with the advertisement as a disabled, middle-aged black woman who is not invited to participate in the advertisement as a consumer. What she articulated, however, was that it was "very hard" to show "young girls . . . the right way," and she directly implicated advertisements in this struggle. In fact, she has instituted a rule in her household: when a targeted advertisement pops up on her daughter's tablet, they "turn it over." They slowly count to five before seeing if the ad has passed. This is to mitigate the number of advertisements her daughter sees in a day, though it pertained only to advertisements appearing on personal media, which are consumed in personal/private space. We researchers wondered how this instinct to "turn it over" functioned, or malfunctioned, in public space and how it might relate to the bus stop. We asked Sierra. "I can't flip it over," she stated

frankly. "If it's something I can walk away from, then I will, but . . . when I was walking towards the bus stop, there is no way. I cannot avoid it really."

Sierra's experience with the white flesh-tone underwear advertisement exemplifies Craig's comments about the inability to "turn a page" if something offends (Jackson 2016) and Rosewarne's view of unwanted sexist advertisements as sexualizing the space around them in ways that are experienced as harassing (2007). Sierra cannot turn off or flip over the ad, nor is she able to remove her seven-year-old daughter from an environment that she deems hostile. This example illustrates in vivid detail how advertising in public space is dissimilar to advertising in private space, given that turning ads off isn't an option. Such advertising is therefore experienced as nonconsensual and as something that is imposed on people as they travel around the city.

Sierra's encounter was not the only instance of unwanted contact with this same form of sexy-confident advertisements in this study. When we arrived at a girls' school in a South West London suburb, we stepped off the closest tube station only to be met with a billboard for women's clothing (fig. 5a). This advertisement, which appeared in two iterations, showcased a thin, racially ambiguous woman wearing a tasseled bodysuit that resembled a swimming costume, sunglasses, and thigh-high, high-heeled boots (figs. 5a and 5b).

Once inside the school, we asked the girls to discuss the advertisements they encountered on their journey to and from school. The conversation

Figure 5a   Bodysuit billboard at train station near the first research school. A color version of this figure is available online.
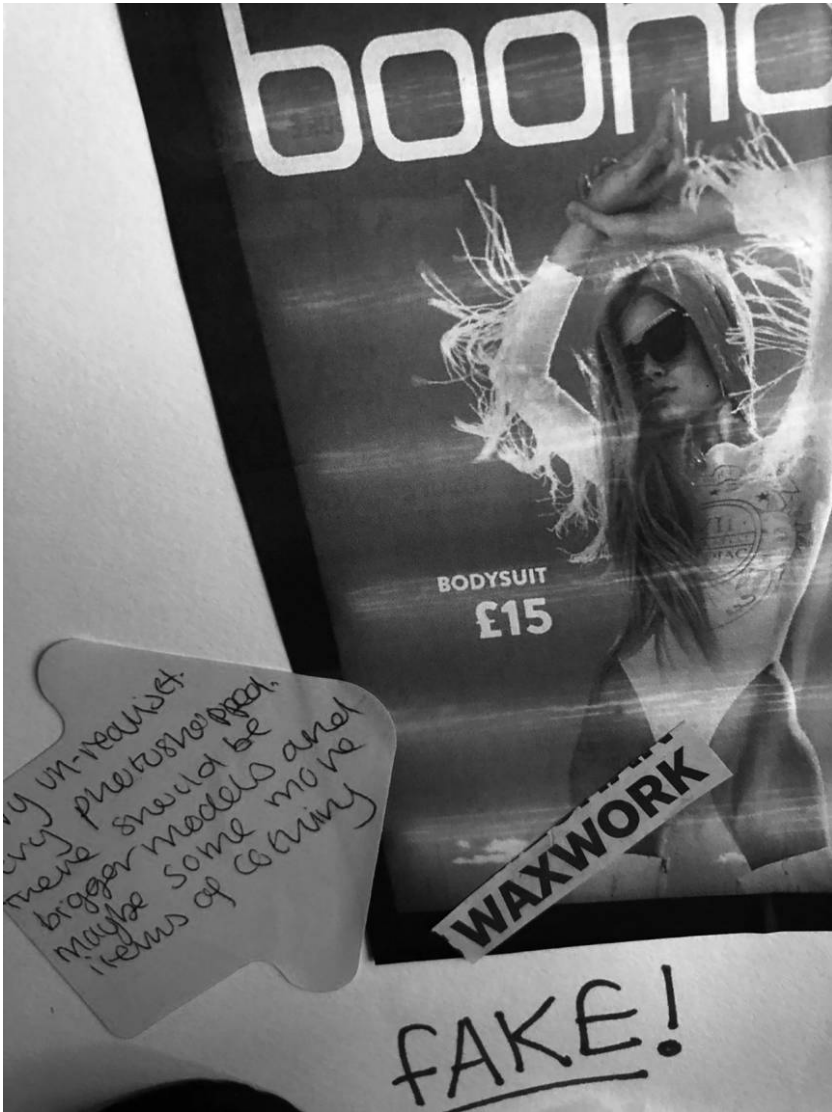
Figure 5b   Bodysuit advertisement collage with girls' responses. A color version of this figure is available online.

turned quickly to the bodysuit ad, and one schoolgirl, Jen, responded with the following: "I don't really like adverts that like have loads of really showy-off clothes, because I'm the sort of person that's very conscious about body and stuff and I also really hate wearing revealing stuff, seeing everything out, the clothes being revealing stuff. . . . They [the models] are really skinny, con-fident models who look, whose skin is amazing, their hair is amazing and

everything, then you see them in these revealing, really beautiful outfits, and it makes like everyone else feel worse about themselves." The girls responded to this advertisement in their collaging, as seen in figures 5a and 5b, which labels the ad "fake."

This advertisement was rated the second-most-sexualized ad in the survey, with 55 percent of respondents finding it to be sexualizing; 22 percent finding it sexist, and 20 percent describing it as unrealistic. Jen's narrative sheds light on how teen girls experience such advertisements, as she articulates the relationship between sexualized images and body dissatisfaction. This experience is consistent with work by Amy Marshall (2017) and Sabitha Zacharias (2016), which found that mediated images project an ideal that in turn can impact self-image. Further, Jen's comment that the advertisement—positioned in front of the school's local train station—"makes everyone feel worse about themselves" is notable in that she is implicating not just her own experience but a wider peer group. That is, as she and her friends travel to school, past the bodysuit ad, the group of schoolgirls all feel worse. The ad does not simply exist in isolation but in fact affects the entire space around it: the journey to school, the group's feeling about their bodies. For those who, as Jen suggests, feel "very conscious" about their bodies, this is significant.

Jen's friend Ashley then chimed in: "Yeah . . . I can't remember how many years ago, but it was a yellow, like, poster that was put up outside train stations and like billboards, and it was of a really, like, slim woman, and they tried to promote that, if you're 'beach body ready' you should be this slim. I didn't like it . . . that's the only way you can go to the beach and feel acceptable and comfortable." Ashley links the clothing ad to the "Beach Body Ready" ad and the online feminist public activism advocating against it. Both ads share the same confident-appearing aspirational forms. Similar to the woman in the "Beach Body Ready" ad, the bodysuit model takes on the same power stance, with her thin legs spread apart. In one poster her hand is on her hips; in the other, her groin is thrust toward the viewer. Similar to Sierra's experience with the flesh-tone underwear advertisement, there is a nonconsensual quality to Ashley's account: she is bombarded with this type of advertising; it is on public transport, at the mall, and outside the train station near her school.

We asked Ashley if she was aware of the follow-up ad featuring Khloe Kardashian (fig. 3 and fig. 9). She replied, "They clearly didn't listen. Like [the earlier version], it's so artificial, the body stereotype that they're putting out, saying 'can you keep up with a Kardashian?' No! Like . . . no." This desire to respond "no" to the questions proposed by "Beach Body Ready" was echoed by many women in this project. These answers, "No, I can't [keep up with a Kardashian]" or "No, I'm not [beach body ready]" were often expressed in a tone of frustration or exhaustion. Perhaps one of the most salient

examples was a discussion we had with Saffron, a slight twenty-two-year-old dance student of Iranian descent from a western suburb of London. Saffron responded to the "Beach Body Ready" advertisement saying, "It just makes you feel really bad, 'cause, like, so many of us don't have that body, so it's like I can't go out to the beach without like a beach body. [It] would actually, like, prevent me from going to a beach in my bikini, if I don't have that body."

Saffron had an even stronger reaction to another advertisement for protein supplements. The copy on this ad read, "Think Small" in bold letters (fig. 6), which demonstrated the same sort of hyperthin, confident white woman:

> It's saying that everyone should be small, like . . . that's the ideal body. . . . That's what causes people to be so self-obsessed and negative and lose their self-esteem and become depressed and anxious. . . . I've been so shocked since coming to uni at the amount of depression and anxiety. . . . Like in my dance course girls are like doing literally everything, they are taking pills instead of food, so they, like, swap it for like a meal. And then they weigh themselves and they get operations and stuff, like, and it's really horrible. . . . Boob operations to make it smaller and stuff. . . . So if you're curvy it's not . . . but even if you're normal, it's not, like, okay.

The "Think Small" ad was the least liked in the survey, with fewer than one-third of people liking it (28 percent). In addition, 29 percent found it unrealistic, 27 percent unhealthy, and 20 percent problematic. Saffron's narrative shows us the continuous burden this type of advertisement places on her and her friends and the fear and upset they experience; she refers to a "heavy[ness]" caused by such pressures, which apparently take her classmates to great extremes, such as swapping meals for slimming products (such as protein supplements) and undertaking cosmetic surgery to alter their bodies. Additionally, there is a repetitive quality as she is "always comparing and always being told to be like skinny and small." This is what Rosewarne (2007) refers to as harassment due to the constant bombardment and potentially inescapable nature of public media.

Racialized sexualization: New impossible body ideals

Further examples of fatigue and frustration at this assaultive advertising emerged from our interview with thirty-five-year-old Alexandra, who wore a floral top and dark eye shadow. She traveled with us on the night train home in the early hours of the morning after a night out with friends in Soho. Without prompting, Alexandra brought up the "Beach Body Ready" advertisement fairly early in the interview, and she also mentioned feeling upset that women were constantly being sexualized in ways irrelevant to the product, which corresponded to our survey data, where 68 percent, or two in
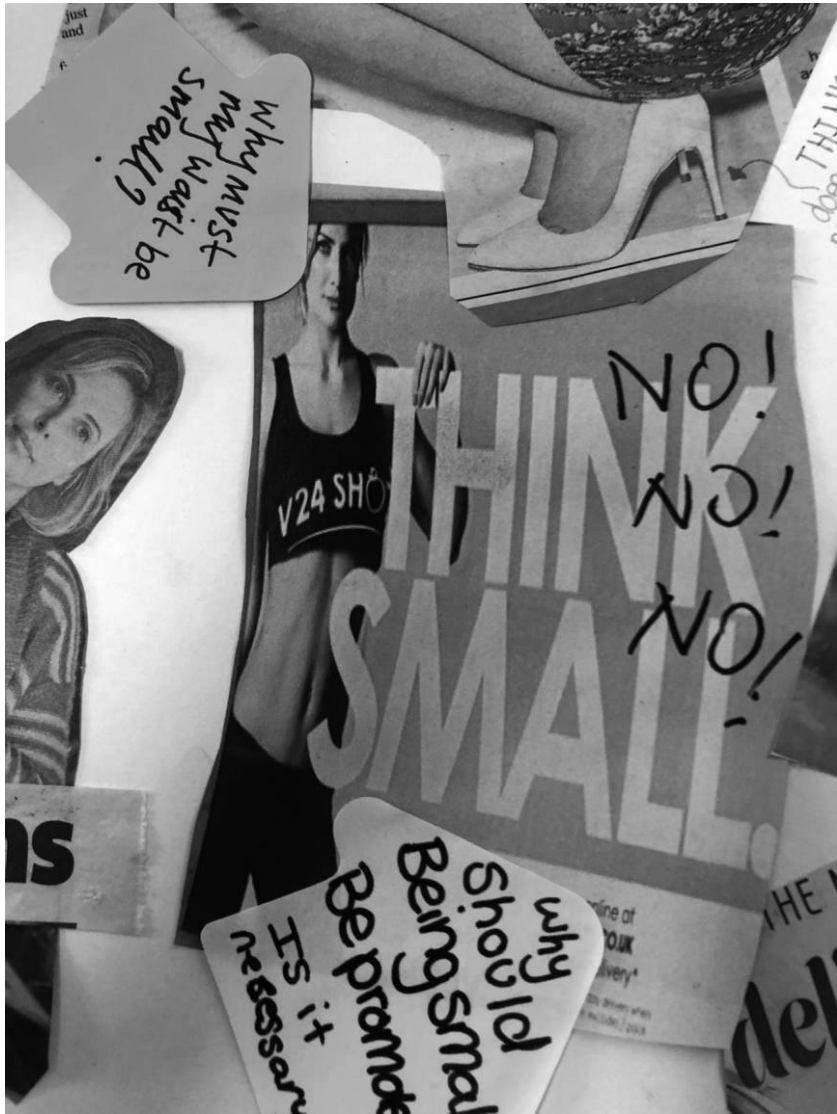
Figure 6   "Think Small" protein shot advertisement. A color version of this figure is available online.

three, felt that showing models in revealing clothes when it is not relevant was problematic: "Why is it women who look like they have either just had sex or want to have sex, and they are selling furniture? . . . That is so offensive. Because she is nothing to do with this. I'm sick of seeing these beautiful women just postcoital. Like, you are trying to send me a chair, what the fuck has she got to do with a chair? I'm sorry I'm swearing, it really, really

gets me, the way women are portrayed in adverts." Alexandra continued: "Did you remember that one, the 'Are You Beach Body Ready?' . . . Just what chance does a young girl have, like in just growing up normally and learning her own way of being herself and being sexy? . . . They are always looking for, 'Oh, well have you got a stick-thin waist but a massive arse, like a Kardashian?' No! Because I'm just a normal person, I don't have access to the surgery, the diet, the personal chef, or the workout thing. It's just exhausting being a woman, honestly."

Alexandra vacillates here between fatigue at the hyperthin white women, often depicted fearlessly staring the viewer down, and the Kardashian ideal, which is also a form of confident woman but is sexualized in a new way, with racialized body parts in different proportion ("stick-thin waist but a massive arse"). These two limited types of "acceptable" women are indicative of a narrow spectrum of idealized femininity (Sastre 2014). Many participants discussed the damaging impacts of these limited options throughout the study. The clothing company that created the bodysuit ad exploited this second body type in several editions of their advertisements, which featured so-called plus-size models, typically in form-fitting attire, alongside a thinner body to highlight the contrast between the body types. One ad had three differently shaped women's bodies leaning over the back of a pickup truck; another featured an image of female rap artist Stefflon Don in a spandex suit with her buttocks in profile (fig. 7). However, rather than seeing these types of advertisements as inclusive or evidence of diversity, many of the girls and adult women we interviewed found these ads sexualized in ways that made them feel uncomfortable. For instance, Naomi met us at Wood Green station in North London and took us to her local music venue, Green Rooms. Naomi is black British and lesbian, and on this day she wore a black tam, overalls, and a white T-shirt with "Book a Beat"—her music booking company—printed across the front. Naomi explicitly discussed finding the darker-skinned plus-size models "unrealistic," and she thought the ad's use of the hashtag #ShestheDon "racist": "Right, so I mean, one, you are stereotyping how all black people speak and look. Also, you've got a black chick and she is oversized in the areas which used to be, you know if you go back to colonization what the white men, European people, were fascinated by about the Africans, the large bust, the large buttocks, large butts. You know."

An intersectional lens allows us to recognize multiplicity in the construction of sexy femininity and the expansion of the acceptable body to include forms of objectification that operate through an emphasis on exoticized body parts and exaggerated proportions used to capture the gaze and sell the product. The illusion here is a widening scope of racial diversity and body types in advertising, but this "expansion" is itself very narrowly defined, as our

Figure 7   #ShesTheDon advertisement captured during fieldwork, featuring the image of Stefflon Don. A color version of this figure is available online.

participants discussed. Rather than an example of racial diversity and inclusion, these ads are experienced as, on the one hand, stereotyping and, on the other, as an even more exclusionary regime of impossible ideals to fulfil. The girls at the South West school described the Kardashians as at the forefront of promoting a new ideal "slim-thick" body type, as Ashley noted: "This is an artificial ideal body type. They have created this thing known as slim-thick, where you've got a really tiny waist but at the same time you've got a big bum and big boobs and that's not scientifically possible to have that sort of waist, so young girls seeing that it's completely unrealistic without the money and surgery to produce that body." The research literature has also referred to the Kardashians as employing blackened racial mobility as ethnically white women; Kim, for instance, "strategically embodies both the trope of the heavily regulated 'white' body and the trope of the curvaceous, exoticised, non-white (implicitly black) body," primarily through promotion of her "Armenian ass" (Sastre 2014, 130).

At the second school we visited in South East London, the girls also discussed the hybrid body type showcased by the Kardashians without any

prompting from us. They explicitly linked the pressure around the Kardashian body type to the family's use of Instagram and social media to influence their followers by promoting diet and exercise products. Nimisha articulates the Kardashian archetype: "These women, their body looks like, like . . . their waist is like itsy-wincey, their hips go out, and their bums are really big and they've got a flat stomach, so it's like Bodycon, right? So these people promote it, and they've got insane bodies, and they are trying to say like if you want to look this good, buy fashion-label jeans. But it's like . . . just because her body looks nice in it, it doesn't mean my body would look nice in it." Nimisha clearly calls out the resources and techniques needed to work a "bodycon" look—extremely tight-fitting clothing accentuating the attainment of an "insane" (that is, unattainable), exaggerated body type. She goes on to critique advertisements that are "lying" about the product through the use of idealized bodies, such as the Khloe Kardashian ad:

Shanaza: [Khloe Kardashian is] showing the [protein] shake [in the ad], when obviously she goes to the gym every morning and she works hard to get her body like that. . . . Don't, like, trick people.

Nimisha: Yeah, it has nothing to do with the [product,] but it sort of wears you down, when you've seen it over and over again. It isn't real, it is lies, but it just wears you down so often.

With references to duplicity and fatigue, the girls discuss a process of being worn down by the repetition of the ads. Despite knowing that the bodies are not a result of the product, the pressure makes them feel that they may want to buy and try the products, even if they can't afford them, as many girls mentioned not having the resources to achieve these looks, signaling important classed elements embedded in this beauty labor (Elias, Gill, and Scharff 2017). In their responses, the girls make an explicit appeal for a different form of advertising, one that will not create a sense of shame, lack, and inferiority for girls and young women. Their collaging images seized upon their anger at this shaming and asked powerful questions by repeatedly challenging the mode of address in the advertisements.

For instance, a collage of Khloe Kardashian (fig. 3) says the Kardashians have had plastic surgery and that this ad promotes practices that are "hurting and harming" people. The collage-back against the bodysuit ad says it's "unrealistic" and "Photoshopped" (fig. 5a). The comments on "Think Small" (fig. 6) have an emphatic "No! No! No!" scribbled over a thin midriff, with an arrow pointing to the model, saying, "Why should being small be promoted?" A collage created with the "Beach Body Ready" ad (fig. 8)

Figure 8   "Not One Body Type" collage (Ringrose et al. 2019). A color version of this figure is available online.

shows the words "living doll" scrawled across the flattened tummy of the bikinied model. A pink arrow points directly to the advertisement's question mark, stating, "so unrealistic." The collage then answers the "Beach Body Ready" question with the factual statement, "You can go to the beach with any body. You do not need to be skinny to wear a swimsuit." It also boldly proclaims "NOT ONE BODY TYPE" in defiance of the advertisement's imperative. The creators even challenge the foundational norms that make it unremarkable for a woman to be displayed in a bikini by contrasting this with representations of men who get to wear "normal" clothes. Another snapshot (fig. 9) shows both ads from this company: the "Beach Body Ready" ad has a pink strip with "thigh gap again" over the thigh and crotch. The Khloe Kardashian ad has multiple arrows tagged to the figure with "clearly photoshopped" pointing to the waist; "possible plastic" pointing to the buttocks; and "unnatural, most if not all have hair" pointing to the hairless upper thigh/groin area. A large pink arrow points to directly to the slogan "Can you keep up with a Kardashian?" stating, "Hair . . . known to be fake and perfected." The sarcastic statement "probably never tried one lollll" points directly to the bottle of protein capsules. In these ways, the girls clearly undermine the truth claims that attempt to link buying the product to achieving the body depicted, a direct rejoinder to the trickery discussed at length in the interviews. In response to both ads' questions, the girls repeatedly ask back: "Why do I need to have this body?" "Is this what my body has to look like?"
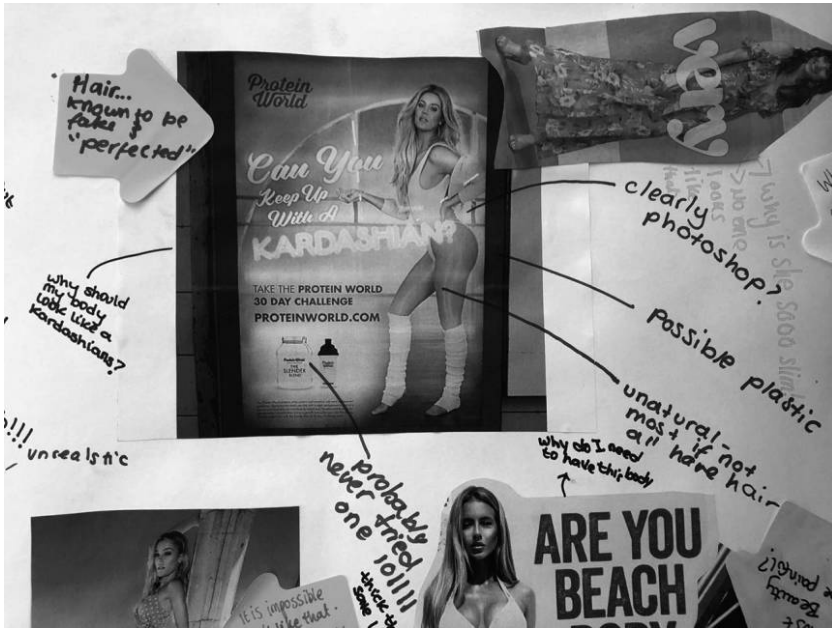
Figure 9 "Clearly Photoshopped" collage (Ringrose et al. 2019). A color version of this figure is available online.

Though the girls remained anonymous throughout the project, by way of the collages they could talk back or "craft back" their views to the public, as their images appear in our public report and were displayed prominently at the research launch at the London Transport Museum in July 2018. These collages generate a critical feminist discourse of disbelief and sarcasm (Rentschler and Thrift 2015) but also statements of defiance—all integral aspects of articulating a feminist counterpublic via a critical vocabulary or set of discourses that refuse normative exclusions and call for something different to be valued.

Conclusion: Staying with the trouble in feminist research

Responding to negative feedback, not only about the hyperthin white bikini body but also about the hypersexualized and racialized Kardashian figure, the company behind "Beach Body Ready" released a new advertisement in 2018, "Everybody Works," which featured a diverse collection of mixed-gendered individuals in various exercise routines on the London waterfront. The campaign had multiple ads showcasing people saying "everybody starts"; "everybody struggles"; "everybody juggles," as a new mother attempts to

do yoga with a newborn strapped to her chest; and finally, the affirmative statement "everybody works." The survey showed that "Everybody Works" was the most liked advertisement, rated favorably by 66 percent. Moreover, 48 percent thought this advertisement was "healthy" compared to only 24 percent for "Think Small." In addition, 38 percent found the ad "cool," 33 percent "inspiring," 33 percent "diverse," and 27 percent "empowering." Among the interview participants, many also found it to be a dramatic improvement from the yellow bikini and the Khloe Kardashian ads. Laura, a twenty-eight-year-old disabled nurse from Park Royal who was shocked by the lack of representation of disability in the advertising industry, said she was glad to see representations of what she deemed to be "real" people: "There is just, you know, it looks like a group of people going out doing like a run or training or something, which you do see." Further, Naomi from Wood Green found the new Protein World advertisement to be a positive step forward in an attempt to diversify representations in advertisements: "Yes. Yes. I mean you've got a normal-sized female, they haven't gone all-out with, you know, putting someone that's X+ or anything, it's multicultural, he's not pumped up, she's not slim, they're not all naked, they are wearing normal sportswear gear, as opposed to oversexualizing."

However, not all interview participants (or survey respondents) saw the new advertisement as evidence of more diversity and inclusion. Alexandra, for example, felt that this advertisement could not repair the damage previously done by the company: "To be honest I can't believe they are still going as a company, I think that they should've been boycotted and shut down." Further, in the final collage we've selected, the girls critique this image as showing too little difference among the bodies, raising the same questions about how substantive diversity-driven, "affirmative" advertising actually is. Gill and Kanai (2019) warn that advertisements may add one aspect of difference, such as skin color, but they often do not fundamentally challenge idealized bodies and postfeminist aspirational ideals. In this new advertisement there appeared to be no differently abled bodies and no age diversity, and the body-size diversity was minimal. Gill and Kanai's critique of postfeminist and "affirmative" advertising as unable to effect "material, political, cultural or economic changes" or respond adequately to "racism or classism or Islamophobia" (2019, 141) is important, but we do not think that the conversation can usefully end there, in the dead-end sentiment that advertising can never change substantively or quickly enough.

Indeed, in taking on this research project, our aim was to enter into public debates about gender and advertising and to perhaps create small shifts in understanding through our intersectional findings about how diverse women experience London advertising. Making their voices visible is part of granular

and micro forms of change making that "stay with the trouble" (Haraway 2016). We felt an ethical "response-ability" (Barad 2007) to work with the troublesome range of stakeholders we were faced with as part of a multi-faceted and complex process of intervening into public debates. Through the process of commissioning the research, carrying it out, writing it up, and de-livering "acceptable" findings for government-commissioned but corporate-sponsored research on gender, diversity, and public advertising, we engaged in many levels of negotiation and compromise. For example, at one point we were asked to revise our prominent findings on sexualization in the report, as we were told that the "angle" had been overplayed in media coverage of the controversy over "Beach Body Ready." We pushed back strongly on this, as our research opens up sexualization as a complex and inter-sectional phenomenon experienced in different ways by diverse girls and women.

Our aim, then, was not some utopian transformation of advertising, which is after all aimed at selling products to an ever-widening consumer base. Rather, our goal as feminist researchers was to engage with the govern-ment and commercial entities to reshape their understandings of what was problematic and what could be done better—what could be more just and less discriminatory—based on our empirical research findings. Returning to Warner's performative publics discussed in our introduction, publics are forms of relational association and meaning making. Counterpublics rise up to in-tervene into dominant normative understandings, and they can create new forms of solidarity that respond to "exclusions" (Fraser 2007, 26) and pro-mote better forms of "recognition" (24), leading to further "participatory parity" (27). We believe our research has contributed to this process of rec-ognition by highlighting the voices of girls and women and isolating what makes them feel shamed, depressed, anxious, and excluded. We also think we opened up spaces for participation: for example, the arts-based collaging in-troduced a novel mode of listening and looking at girls' creative expressions of what they would like to see done differently. We insisted that the collages be prominently displayed in the research report and at the public launch of our research and that the messages they held not be spun or altered. Their messages, instead, became a central point of discussion of what was wrong in the contemporary London advertising landscape.

We would further argue that our unique contribution as feminist aca-demic researchers was to push the conceptual envelope. We were able to pierce through a discussion of sexism in advertising to show the intersectional complexity of how sexualized and racialized advertising is experienced by di-verse women. Further, we have shown that even affirmative advertising that includes racialized women often replicates compulsory sexualization. Ads like

#ShesTheDon (fig. 7) still reduce women to their body parts, albeit in new, seemingly more inclusive ways (bigger body parts, different skin shades; see also Ringrose, Tolman, and Ragonese 2018).

The headlines generated from the launch of our research, such as "London Women Feel Sexualised and Ignored by Brands" (Stewart 2018) discussed how new idealized bodies were creating pressures for some and exclusions for others, highlighting the intersectional nuances of how advertisements are experienced in widely divergent ways in a diverse metropolis like London. We were also able to discuss the nonconsensual element of public advertising with a range of stakeholders, as well as the concept of women's inability to "turn the page," which showed the varied and harmful effects of advertisements and highlighted the need for greater government and corporate accountability (Stewart 2018). Our intersectional research on gender and advertising is therefore part of an ongoing feminist struggle around redefining what is harmful, unacceptable, sexist, racist, and exclusionary about the representation of women and girls in contemporary societies. It involves asking questions about how it may be possible to change these discriminatory forces in our specific contexts, spaces, and places.

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