

Sexually Objectifying Pop Music Videos, Young Women's Self-Objectification, and Selective Exposure: A Moderated Mediation Model

Communication Research
1–23

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DOI: 10.1177/0093650216661434

crx.sagepub.com



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Abstract

There is intense discussion among experts about the potential negative impact of sexually objectifying media content on young women. This article presents an experimental study in which young women were either exposed to pop music videos high in sexual objectification or to pop music videos low in sexual objectification. Women's self-objectification and their subsequent media selection behavior were measured. The results indicate that exposure to sexually objectifying media increased self-objectification, which in turn increased the preference for objectifying media content. Self-esteem, the internalization of appearance ideals, and body mass index (BMI) did not influence these relationships. Implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords

sexual objectification, self-objectification, selective exposure, media choice

Introduction

Sexually objectifying depictions of women are commonly presented in Western media. Empirical studies have shown that TV programs (Vandenbosch, Vervloessem, & Eggermont, 2013), video games (Downs & Smith, 2010), music videos (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012), and print advertisements (Graff, Murnen, & Krause, 2013; Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008) often present women in sexually

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objectifying ways. The potential negative consequences of these depictions for society are intensively discussed in the scientific community and among the public (e.g., American Psychological Association [APA], Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2010).

Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) asserts that experienced or observed *sexual objectification* may cultivate self-objectification among women. Self-objectification stands for the internalization of an observer's perspective, where one's own body is valued from a third perspective along current standards of sexual desirability (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Empirical evidence exists showing that the use of sexually objectifying media content influences women's state self-objectification and body dissatisfaction (Jongenelis, Byrne, & Pettigrew, 2014; Moradi & Huang, 2008). However, it is unclear whether self-objectification also affects media selection. Results from one panel study indicate that self-objectification negatively predicts exposure to sexually objectifying media content (Aubrey, 2006a). That is, self-objectification, as a result of exposure to sexually objectifying media content, may lead to an avoidance of such content.

This first evidence, however, was based on correlational survey data that require experimental validation. Moreover, there are theoretical grounds to assume that exposure to sexually objectifying content may have different consequences for women with different predispositions, such as self-esteem, the internalization of appearance ideals, or women's body mass index (BMI). Against this background, we designed an experiment that tested the effects of sexually objectifying music videos on self-objectification and subsequent media choice behavior. In addition, we treated women's self-esteem, their internalization of appearance ideals, and their BMI as moderators in a moderated mediation model.

Effects of Sexually Objectifying Media Content

Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) delivers a theoretical framework in order to understand the consequences of sexual objectification among women. The authors postulate that we are living in a cultural environment wherein sexual objectification, most notably of women and girls, is omnipresent: "In sum, the sexual objectification of the female body has clearly permeated our cultural milieu; it is likely to affect most girls and women to some degree, no matter who their actual social contacts may be" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 177). *Sexual objectification* is defined as the cultural practice of regarding individuals exclusively as sexual bodies and ignoring their characters. A person is merely perceived as the sum of his or her body parts existing for the sexual pleasure of others. This reduction of appearance is subsequently becoming the basis for assessing the person (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This kind of objectifying presentation is considered particularly problematic from an ethical point of view, as it leads to partial dehumanization (Heflick, Goldenberg, Cooper, & Puvia, 2011; Loughnan et al., 2010; Nussbaum, 1995).

Objectification theory further posits that such cultural environment may socialize individuals to self-objectify. The experiences and observation of objectification may

be internalized and individuals may begin to view their own bodies from a third person's perspective. Self-objectification is defined as the internalization of an observer's perspective in which one's own body is valued primarily by societal standards of sexual desirability. One's own appearance is prioritized over one's personality or competences (Calogero, 2011; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The construct is conceptualized as an acculturated *trait*, but can also be elicited momentarily, for example, through media exposure. That is, situational experiences of sexual objectification may cause individuals to draw their attention toward their bodies and inducing a *state* of self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Many studies addressed the potential negative consequences of self-objectification and have directly or indirectly linked self-objectification to a number of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. There is evidence that self-objectification reduces cognitive performance (Aubrey & Gerding, 2015) and leads to fewer flow experiences (Quinn, Chaudoir, & Kallen, 2011). Besides, self-objectification is related to lower self-esteem and lower levels of satisfaction in life, together with increased body shame and appearance anxiety (Choma et al., 2010; Mercurio & Landry, 2008; Tylka & Sabik, 2010). Several health risks are associated with self-objectification, such as self-harm and dissociation (Erchull, Liss, & Lichiello, 2013), substance use (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011), eating disorders, depression, and sexual dysfunction (Tiggemann, 2011).

Objectification theory is not conceptualized as a media effects theory, but it has well served as a theoretical framework and received considerable attention throughout the years in media effects research. It has been shown that the use of sexually objectifying media influences the perception of women, gender role beliefs, sexual attitudes, and sexual behavior among adolescents and young adults (e.g., Kistler & Lee, 2010; Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005). More germane to the purposes of this article, cross-sectional survey-based research revealed a positive correlation between the use of sexually objectifying media content and self-objectification (Aubrey, 2007; Morry & Staska, 2001, Nowatzki & Morry, 2009; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012, 2013; Vandenbosch, Muise, Eggermont, & Impett, 2015; Ward, Seabrook, Manago, & Reed, 2016). Experimental studies further demonstrated the causal nature of this relationship. More specifically, after exposure to pictures or videos of sexually objectified women, self-objectification was documented as a direct and indirect outcome in numerous studies (Aubrey & Gerding, 2015; Aubrey, Henson, Hopper, & Smith, 2009; Daniels, 2009; de Vries & Peter, 2013; Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003; Mischner, van Schie, Wigboldus, van Baaren, & Engels, 2013). Besides, the causal relationship was also analyzed in several longitudinal survey studies (Aubrey, 2006a, 2006b; Aubrey & Taylor, 2009; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2014, 2015).

Drawing from the rich theoretical and empirical literature, it is expected that exposure to sexually objectifying music videos affects the state of self-objectification. This can be explained by priming theory. That is, a high degree of body display can activate semantically related thoughts about women's appearance (for many others, see Aubrey et al., 2009). When women then evaluate their own self, these

thoughts are more accessible and thus gain more weight. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Exposure to sexually objectifying pop music videos leads to a higher level of young women's state self-objectification in comparison with young women who were exposed to non-sexually objectifying pop music videos.

Furthermore, objectification theory suggests that not all women are equally affected by objectifying experiences (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Thus, we believe it is important to further analyze moderating factors in order to extend our knowledge of media exposure on self-objectification. In this regard, previous studies have identified appearance schematicity (Veldhuis, Konijn, & Seidell, 2014) or physical exercise (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2012) as a possible moderator. Based on empirical evidence from body image research and in order to conceptually replicate Aubrey's (2006b) study with an experimental design, we decided to include three possible moderators. Self-esteem, which can be described as a protective factor, and the two moderators internalization of appearance ideals and BMI are construed as potentiating factors. Protective factors are variables that attenuate adverse effects of a risk factor, whereas potentiating factors amplify adverse effects of a risk factor (Stice, 2002).

To begin with, self-esteem is frequently considered as an important moderator that links media use and body dissatisfaction, indicating that women low in self-esteem are especially vulnerable to negative media effects as they tend to engage more in social comparison processes (López-Guimerà, Levine, Sánchez-carracedo, & Fauquet, 2010; Tiggemann, 2003). In the context of self-objectification, Choma et al. (2010) reported that self-objectification—measured by body surveillance—predicted lower self-esteem among women and men. Similar results are reported by Mercurio and Landry (2008) or Tylka and Sabik (2010), who linked self-esteem and self-objectification in direct and indirect ways to each other, indicating that there are negative relations between self-objectification and self-worth among women.

More germane to the purposes of this study, high self-esteem can serve as a buffering mechanism in the relationship between self-objectification and a range of mood and body satisfaction states (Thøgersen-Ntoumani, Ntoumanis, Cumming, Bartholomew, & Pearce, 2011). These results are in line with the findings by Breines, Crocker, and Garcia (2008) stating that, for women with high appearance-contingent self-worth, self-objectification leads to a decreased well-being when they are low in self-esteem, whereas those women with high self-esteem experience a boost in well-being. Likewise, Aubrey (2006b) found that self-esteem moderates the impact of sexualized media on self-objectification. That is, higher self-esteem possibly preserves the self-image by more consciously rejecting the media standards of attractiveness (Aubrey, 2006b). Rephrased, when thoughts about sexual appearance are activated after exposure to sexualizing media, women with high self-esteem may not change the standards with which they evaluate and judge themselves. Women with low self-esteem, by contrast, are more insecure about the standards with which they evaluate themselves, and thus, this might lead to self-objectification. They are more likely to be

primed with societal standards of sexual desirability after exposure to sexualized media. Based on this theorizing, and the findings by Aubrey (2006b), the following hypothesis was tested:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The effect of exposure to sexually objectifying pop music videos on self-objectification will be negatively moderated by young women's self-esteem.

We included an additional potentiating factor (Stice, 2002) to our study, which may moderate the outcome effect, that is, the internalization of appearance ideals. Like in Aubrey's (2006b) study, we treated appearance-ideal internalization as a body-related predisposition that influences the relation between media exposure and state self-objectification. There is empirical evidence from correlational studies that the internalization of appearance ideals is positively related to self-objectification (e.g., Knauss, Paxton, & Alsaker, 2008; Morry & Staska, 2001; Nowatzki & Morry, 2009; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012, 2015). Thus, internalization of appearance ideals appears to be an important aspect in relation to research on self-objectification. Women who compare their body with media persons, and who strive to look like models and/or women in the media, might be more susceptible to sexually objectifying media images. This is, due to the fact that music videos depict a strong visual focus on (sexual) body parts and commonly present naked sexual body parts such as cleavage and stomach or pelvis. The internalization of appearance ideals in combination with the additional body-related information presented in objectifying music videos may increase women's self-objectification. We formulated following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The effect of exposure to sexually objectifying pop music videos on self-objectification will be positively moderated by the internalization of appearance ideals.

Within the scope of body image research, the BMI has been shown to be an essential predictive factor. Women and girls with a higher BMI tend to have greater body dissatisfaction compared with women with a moderate or low BMI (e.g., Frederick, Peplau, & Lever, 2006; Furnham, Badmin, & Sneade, 2002; Kabir, Zafar, & Waslien, 2013, Stice, 2002). There is also some evidence that BMI moderates the relationship between media exposure and body dissatisfaction (e.g., Tiggemann, 2003). As Aubrey (2006b) puts it, "the rationale is that the media's attention to bodies would be most detrimental to women whose bodies do not match the ideal" (p. 161). Hence, it was expected that females who do not correspond to the sexual beauty ideal presented in the media would reflect more about their body and mention more body-related statements about the self after exposure to objectifying media. Therefore, the following hypothesis was tested:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): The effect of exposure to sexually objectifying pop music videos on self-objectification will be positively moderated by young women's BMI.

Self-Objectification and Selective Exposure

So far, considerable research exists on the effects of sexually objectifying media use on self-objectification (e.g., Aubrey, 2006a; Aubrey & Gerding, 2015, Morry & Staska, 2001; Vandebosch & Eggermont 2012, 2015) and self-objectification itself has been intensely examined. However, hardly any research has explored the consequences of self-objectification on subsequent media use preferences. There are two different sets of predictions. According to the premise of selective exposure theory (Festinger, 1957; Hart et al., 2009; Zillman & Bryant, 1985), increased self-objectification would imply that participants prefer media content that is *in line* with their beliefs, and avoid media content that challenges these values and beliefs.

Within the selective exposure paradigm, the Selective Exposure Self- and Affect-Management (SESAM) model by Knobloch-Westerwick (2015) relies on dynamic-transactional processes in media use, as does the reinforcing spiral model (Slater, 2007) or the differential susceptibility to media effects model (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Furthermore, the self-concept is not stable, but understood as a dynamic process that regulates subsequent behavior. In short, the SESAM model postulates that self-related motivational factors, which stem from the current self-concept, influence selective exposure. The combination of the current self-concept and the motivational factors affects how the media messages are interpreted. Exposure and responses to the messages, in turn, influence the self (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). The SESAM model focuses on situationally relevant motives, which guide media selection behavior. Thus, selective exposure is considered as a useful mean to intentionally activate a desired self-concept. However, selective exposure can also occur habitually in order to keep an existing self-concept salient.

According to the aforementioned theoretical prospects, it can be assumed that women with a higher level of self-objectification prefer sexually objectifying media content, in order to achieve a desired self-concept. Given the fact that sexually objectifying media, especially music videos, commonly put a strong focus on women's physical appearance linked to sexual attractiveness (APA, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2010; Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Vandebosch et al., 2013), self-objectifying women may want to improve their outward appearance in order to attain the desired self-concept of being sexually attractive. Self-consistency could also serve as a motive for preference of sexually objectifying media content. Selective media exposure is then driven by the need to align with media messages, which are consistent to the own self-objectified disposition (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015).

By contrast, it can be postulated that self-objectification may lead to selective avoidance of sexually objectifying media content (Aubrey, 2006a). One can argue that self-objectification is a rather negative view of the self, evidenced by the myriad studies linking self-objectification to negative outcomes (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Hence, exposure to objectifying media content might be an unpleasant experience, which is avoided. A first hint on this relationship can be drawn from Aubrey's (2006a) study. A two-wave panel study was conducted in which the data for trait self-objectification and media use were acquired by a paper-pencil survey. The results indicate that trait

self-objectification at Time 1 negatively predicted Time 2 exposure to sexually objectifying television (Aubrey, 2006a).

These two possible outcomes, preference and avoidance of media content, have been also tested in a study by Knobloch-Westerwick and Romero (2011) on body dissatisfaction and selective advertisement exposure. Body-dissatisfied individuals tended to avoid advertisements depicting “ideal body shapes” in comparison with women who were satisfied with their bodies. However, when the advertisements contained aspects of attainability with references to dieting and exercising, body-dissatisfied women tended to expose themselves longer to these advertisements in comparison with advertisements that included no cues of attainability. Although self-objectification is positively related to body dissatisfaction (Moradi & Huang, 2008), we cannot definitely rule out the possibility of preference or avoidance for sexually objectifying media content. In order to obtain a solid conclusion on causality, experimental studies are in order.

Further complicating this, there are grounds to assume that the effect of self-objectification on the selection of sexually objectifying media content may also depend on self-esteem, appearance internalization, or BMI. For instance, if exposure to sexually objectifying media content is experienced as unpleasant, as Aubrey (2006b) argued, then this feeling of unpleasantness may be stronger for women with low self-esteem, and as a consequence, these women are even less likely to further expose themselves to sexually objectifying media. In her panel study, Aubrey (2006b) found a moderating effect of internalization of appearance ideals on self-objectification, as women with a low internalization avoided sexualizing media content. Also, self-esteem was identified as a moderator. Self-objectification at Time 1 negatively predicted exposure to sexually objectifying media at Time 2 for those women with high self-esteem (Aubrey, 2006b). The BMI did not moderate the effects (Aubrey, 2006b).

Or alternatively, following the SESAM model, the motivation to learn more about how one can improve one’s appearance (as a result of self-objectification) may be stronger for those who are high in self-esteem compared with those low in self-esteem. The reason is that those high in self-esteem will be more confident that they can reach their motivational goals. A similar argument can be made about thin body ideals and the BMI. Yet, scholarship on self-objectification has not tested these assumptions.

Given these competing assumptions and the fact that we have no prior research on this, we choose to refrain from formulating hypotheses and, thus, suggest the following two research questions instead:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Does self-objectification have a positive or negative effect on subsequent exposure to sexually objectifying media content?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Is the effect of self-objectification on subsequent exposure to sexually objectifying media content moderated by young women’s self-esteem, their appearance internalization, and their BMI?

To clarify these pressing issues, we designed a study to demonstrate that exposure to sexually objectifying media content fosters self-objectification. Self-objectification, in turn, was then theorized to impact the subsequent selection of media content. The

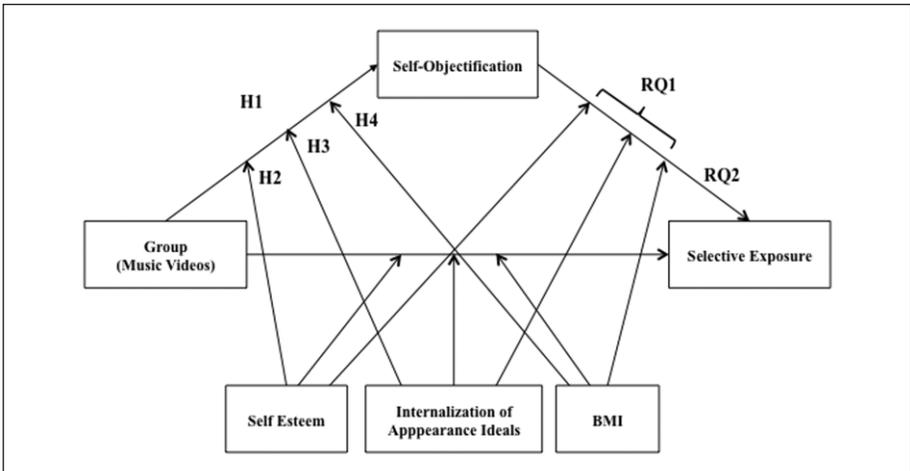


Figure 1. Moderated mediation model.

Note. Control variables, measurement errors, and correlations between all exogenous variables were omitted from depiction for clarity reasons. H = hypothesis; RQ = research question; BMI = body mass index.

model tested in this study is depicted in Figure 1. We also modeled the direct effect of exposure on selection. We also included the interaction effects of exposure and the moderating variables on all three outcomes.

Method

Following the footsteps of Aubrey and Gerding (2015), we primed young women with sexually objectifying music video content followed by a task measuring the induced state of self-objectification. Music videos were chosen because content analyses have repeatedly unveiled its sexually objectifying nature (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; Vandenbosch et al., 2013; Wallis, 2011) and above that the need for further research on music videos and self-objectification has been stressed (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 2011). To assess subsequent exposure to objectifying media, the participants could choose between different sexually objectifying and non-sexually objectifying media offers.

Further drawing on Aubrey and Gerding (2015), participants were presented with pop music videos in a controlled between-subjects lab experiment with two conditions. Every person was randomly allocated either to the experimental condition or the control condition. In the experimental condition, participants saw three pop music videos that were high in sexual objectification; participants from the control group were shown three pop music videos (by the same artists) low in sexual objectification. After exposure, all participants answered a questionnaire in order to assess their individual level of state self-objectification. To measure selective media exposure,

participants were then shown different media genres and asked to indicate their preferred media offer within every genre.

Participants

A total of 200 male and female undergraduate students of a large university in Austria participated in the study in return for course credit. For the final analysis, only heterosexual female participants who completed the whole experiment were included, $n = 151$. Thus, we excluded 43 males, three non-heterosexual females and three females due to lacking data. Findings are the same when the three non-heterosexual females are included. The mean age of the final sample was 23.98 years ($SD = 2.65$). Although we did not specifically ask participants to indicate their ethnicity, the overwhelming majority was Caucasian.

Experimental Manipulation

For the experimental group, three sexually objectifying music videos of female pop singers were selected. According to Aubrey and Frisby (2011), visual sexual objectification is defined by three aspects: (a) a high degree of body exposure, (b) multiple close-up shots of sexual body parts, and (c) dance moves in sexually suggestive manners in the explicit presence of a male audience. In line with Aubrey and Gerding (2015), current music videos of female pop singers that best fit these criteria were browsed and finally three videos were selected (Beyoncé's "Partition," Iggy Azalea's "Work," Rihanna's "Pour it up"). In order to contrast this group, three videos from the same artist were chosen that presented less or no aspects of sexual objectification (Beyoncé's "XO," Iggy Azalea's "Bounce," Rihanna's "Diamonds"). A pretest was conducted with 22 students who were not part of the main study. These participants were $M = 22.91$ ($SD = 2.81$) years old on average, consisting of 17 female students (77.3%) and five male students (22.7%). Ten participants were in the group with music videos high in sexual objectification, 12 participants were in the group with videos low in sexual objectification. The pretest was carried out with an online survey tool. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two groups and rated every video. Drawing from the definition of sexual objectification (Bartky, 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), participants indicated their agreement to three statements on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*): "The artist serves mainly as an object of sexual desire," "The artist is presented as a mere sum of body parts," "The artist is mainly presented as a sexual body" ($\alpha = .95$). In order to conceal the intention of the pretest, participants in both groups were asked to rate additional aspects concerning the presentation of the singer. In sum, music videos that were high in sexual objectification ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.59$) were perceived to be more sexually objectifying than those low in sexual objectification ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.96$), $t(14.18) = -4.03$, $p = .001$. This result was controlled for liking of the music video, liking the music, and knowing the video before. The effect was also statistically significant ($t(8.56) = -3.62$, $p = .006$) when running the analysis only with female participants.

The three videos high in sexual objectification served as the stimulus for the experimental group, the other three videos were chosen for the control group. The music videos appeared in both groups in random order. Eighty-eight participants were exposed to the experimental condition, and 70 participants took part in the control condition of the main study.

Measures

Self-objectification. State self-objectification was measured with the Twenty Statements Task (see Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998). Participants were instructed to describe themselves by completing 20 sentences beginning with “I am _____.” The instruction read,

Please describe yourself by complementing the statement “I am _____.” Complete the statements as if you were describing yourself to you, not to someone else. You can write up to 20 statements about yourself. Please make as many statements as possible.

The purpose of this method was to assess how many statements of the self-description related to bodily aspects or to physical appearance in comparison with other aspects of the self. For the analysis, every statement was categorized into one of six groups: (a) body shape and size; (b) other physical appearance; (c) physical competence; (d) traits and abilities, not-body related; (e) states or emotions; and (f) miscellaneous. Following Fredrickson et al. (1998) and Aubrey and Gerding (2015), the individual level of self-objectification was computed by summing up statements that were in categories (a) and (b). A reliability test was undertaken by two independent coders who coded a subsample of 20% randomly chosen surveys. The reliability was measured with Krippendorff’s alpha, which was satisfactorily, $\alpha = .89$ (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Participants completed an average of 12.06 ($SD = 5.62$) sentences to describe themselves. Of these, $M = 0.60$ ($SD = 0.98$) statements were appearance related, ranging from 0 statements related to appearance to 5. Thus, in comparison with previous experimental studies including a Twenty Statements Task (Aubrey & Gerding, 2015: $M = 1.45$, $SD = 1.65$; Aubrey & Taylor, 2009: $M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.62$), we garnered a lower number of appearance-related statements.

Media selection. In order to tap selective exposure, three different media choice situations were presented to the participants; afterwards, the participants could choose their preferred media content by clicking on the image. First, three different articles were presented in precisely the same way they can be found on start pages of online news websites. Participants were asked to imagine that they were on the start page of an online news website and then indicated the article they would like to click on in order to read the full article. Every article included a picture, a header, and a lead. Headers and leads consisted of 25 to 33 words. One article depicted a woman in an objectifying way and included a topic related to body appearance (“No-gos for a beautiful chest”; see Appendix A). Two filler articles included non-body-related topics whereof one

article dealt with a career topic (“Boreout: When boredom makes you sick”) and the other article addressed a political issue (“The lost generation”).

Second, three different print advertisements for perfume were shown to the participants. The sexually objectifying advertisement depicted a suggestively clad woman in a provocative body posture (see Appendix B). The other two advertisements depicted a female model with no objectifying clues. By clicking on the respective advertisement, participants indicated which perfume they would prefer based on the ad. The idea is that the ad makes a product promise that is related to the feeling of sexual objectification.

Third, participants could choose between three different print magazine covers. One of the magazine covers depicted a woman in a sexually objectifying way (see Appendix C). The two alternative magazine covers also depicted women, but contained no indicators for sexual objectification. Participants were then asked to imagine that they were sitting in a doctor’s waiting room and they could choose one magazine for reading. Selection is a formative construct, so we computed an index based on the selection of the news article, the advertisement, and the magazine cover. For each respondent, we summated the number of sources with sexually objectifying content, which could range from 0 to 3 ($M = 0.83$, $SD = 0.81$).

Moderators and controls. To assess global self-esteem, Rosenberg’s (1965) Self-Esteem Scale was used. Participants indicated their level of agreement with nine items (e.g., “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself”) on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$). The internalization of the media body ideals was measured with the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire internalization subscale (SATAQ-3; Thompson, Van den Berg, Roehrig, Guarda, & Heinberg, 2003). The acceptance of societal standards of appearance due to media exposure was assessed with seven items (e.g., “I would like my body to look like the models who appear in magazines”). Participants indicated their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). In addition, women’s height and weight was measured in order to calculate BMI.

Furthermore, as a control variable, eight items of the Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale by Liss, Erchull, and Ramsey (2011) were included. The scale captures to what extent women seek sexualization and enjoy it. Participants indicated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). Example items included, “It is important to me that men are attracted to me” and “I like showing off my body.” We expected that individuals who seek for sexualization in interpersonal encounters, may also seek for depicted sexualization in media messages. Furthermore, enjoyment of sexualization was found to be correlated with body surveillance and body shame (Liss et al., 2011; Manago, Ward, Lemm, Reed, & Seabrook, 2015). As we were specifically interested in the effects of self-objectification on selective exposure, we controlled for enjoyment of sexualization.

The self-esteem scale, the SATAQ-3 scale, and the enjoyment of sexualization were submitted to a principal components analysis with Oblimin factor rotation using the eigenvalue criterion. In the case of the SATAQ-3, one factor referred to the wish to have

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

	Minimum	Maximum	M (SD)	Experimental condition M (SD)	Control condition M (SD)	t
Selective exposure	0	3	0.83 (0.80)	0.81 (0.82)	0.85 (0.78)	-.30
Self-objectification	0	5	0.59 (0.98)	0.72 (1.10)	0.43 (0.78)	1.79
Self-esteem	1.7	5	4.03 (0.69)	3.99 (0.74)	4.07 (0.63)	-0.75
SATAQ a	0.75	5	2.41 (0.96)	2.29 (0.93)	2.56 (0.98)	-1.74
SATAQ b	1	5	2.75 (1.06)	2.61 (1.13)	2.94 (0.95)	-1.90
BMI	14.30	31.25	20.96 (2.73)	20.85 (2.89)	21.10 (2.53)	-0.56
External enjoyment of sexualization	1.25	5	3.41 (0.88)	3.37 (0.87)	3.46 (0.89)	-0.66
Internal enjoyment of sexualization	0.75	5	3.40 (0.80)	3.34 (0.86)	3.47 (0.73)	-1.03

Note. *T* statistic based on independent-sample *t* test. BMI = body mass index; SATAQ = Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire.

* $p < .05$.

a body such as the persons depicted in the media (SATAQ a; four items; $\alpha = .84$), the second factor aimed at the comparison with bodies of persons depicted in the media (SATAQ b; five items; $\alpha = .87$). For the final analysis, only SATAQ a was included because it can be assumed that SATAQ a is arguably more closely related to the selection of sexually objectified content than SATAQ b. In addition, all models were run using SATAQ b as a moderator in order to rule out that deviating findings may be retrieved with the second factor. Findings were identical to the model with SATAQ a. The enjoyment of sexualization was split into two factors based on factor analysis, which was the external enjoyment of sexualization (four items; $\alpha = .81$) and the internal enjoyment of sexualization (four items; $\alpha = .80$). Demographic information (age, formal education, sexual orientation, and marital status) was also included. Summary statistics for the dependent variable and the moderator variables are shown in Table 1.

Procedure. Participants in groups of up to eight were welcomed in a waiting room. The female experimenter took them to the laboratory, where each participant sat down in front of a computer in individual research cubicles. After finishing the experiment, participants were debriefed and dismissed.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations

The descriptive statistics by experimental condition are also presented in Table 1. Zero-order correlations can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlations.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Self-objectification	1						
2. Self-esteem	-.04	1					
3. SATAQ a	.08	-.42**	1				
4. SATAQ b	.06	-.28**	.66**	1			
5. BMI	.07	.01	.21*	.14	1		
6. External enjoyment of sexualization	.09	-.08	.30**	.23**	.07	1	
7. Internal enjoyment of sexualization	.09	.16*	.15	.11	-.12	.55**	1

Note. SATAQ = Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire; BMI = body mass index.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Testing the Hypothesized Model

We specified a moderated mediation model with the tool PROCESS (Hayes, 2013). PROCESS only allows to model two moderating variables at a time. We, therefore, ran a separate model with self-esteem and BMI as moderators and used the results for SATAQ a in Table 3. Findings did not depend on the combination of moderators. None of the moderators was significant in all models.¹

In our first hypothesis, we asked whether exposure to sexually objectifying media content can lead to an increase in young women's self-objectification. As Table 3 reveals, we found a significant effect of the experimental group on self-objectification ($b = .33, p = .046$). Participants from the experimental group reported more body-related statements ($M = .72, SD = 1.10$) than participants from the control group ($M = .43, SD = .78$). Therefore, H1 can be supported.

In the next step, we checked whether the effects of the experimental group on self-objectification were moderated by young women's self-esteem, their appearance ideal, and their BMI. We found that neither self-esteem ($b = -.03, ns$) nor appearance-ideal internalization ($b = .07, ns$) and BMI ($b = .02, ns$) moderated the effects of the experimental group on self-objectification. Thus, H2, H3, and H4 must be rejected.

We then looked at the consequences of self-objectification on subsequent media choice. Self-objectification was significantly related to sexually objectifying media choice ($b = .16, p = .02$). The positive coefficient suggests that self-objectification increased subsequent exposure to sexually objectifying media images. This answers Research Question 1. Furthermore, we observed no direct effect of experimental group on media choice, indicating that selection behavior was affected only via state self-objectification and not by a mere activation of video-related thoughts.

In order to answer Research Question 2, we analyzed whether self-esteem, appearance-ideal internalization, and young women's BMI moderated the relationship between self-objectification and media choice. As Table 3 shows, this was not the

Table 3. Unstandardized Path Coefficients for Main Effects and Interaction Effects Predicting Self-Objectification and Media Selection.

Independent variables	Dependent variables			
	Self-objectification		Selective exposure	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Group	.33*	.16	.00	.13
Self-esteem	-.03	.14	.03	.10
SATAQ a	.07	.10	.14	.08
BMI	.02	.03	.05	.02
Group × Self-Esteem	.05	.24	.06	.19
Group × SATAQ a	-.15	.18	.06	.19
Group × BMI	.05	.06	-.02	.05
Self-objectification	—	—	.16*	.07
Self-Objectification × Self-esteem	—	—	.05	.11
Self-Objectification × SATAQ a	—	—	.26	.14
Self-Objectification × BMI	—	—	-.01	.02
External enjoyment of sexualization	.04	.11	.06	.09
Internal enjoyment of sexualization	.11	.13	.22	.10
Explained variance	.23		.44	

Note. BMI = body mass index; SATAQ = Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire.
* $p < .05$.

case. There was no interaction of self-objectification with BMI ($b = -.01$, *ns*), with self-esteem ($b = .05$, *ns*), and SATAQ a ($b = .26$, *ns*).

It follows that we observed an effect of experimental group on media selection via self-objectification without any moderating effect. In an additional analysis, we modeled this mediation using 1,000 bootstrapping samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence interval. The indirect effect of experimental group on media selection, mediated by self-objectification, was statistically significant from zero ($b = .05$, lower CI = .0039, upper CI = .1397). We can conclude that exposure to sexually objectifying music videos increases subsequent exposure to sexually objectifying stimuli by fostering self-objectification.

Finally, the enjoyment of sexualization also did not significantly predict any of the outcomes. It is important to note that a large share of variance of both outcome variables could be explained (23% and 44%). In additional analyses, we checked whether the enjoyment of sexualization moderated the effects of experimental group on self-objectification or the effects of self-objectification in media selection. This was not the case.

Discussion

This study showed that the use of sexually objectifying pop music videos increases young women's state of self-objectification. In other words, women who saw this kind of objectifying content tended to describe themselves with more body-related statements

in comparison with women who did not see these videos. This finding is in line with existing theoretical and empirical research (Aubrey et al., 2009; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In contrast to prior research by Aubrey (2006b), however, we did not find that women's self-esteem, appearance internalization, or their BMI moderated this relationship. A key difference between our study and the Aubrey (2006a, 2006b) study is the operationalization of self-objectification. Whereas Aubrey (2006b) measured trait self-objectification, we used a state measure, due to the experimental design (Calogero, 2011). One may speculate that traits may only be changed depending on moderating variables whereas states are more easily affected by sexualized stimuli. More specifically, the effects of sexually objectifying media on self-objectification can be explained by priming theory (see Aubrey et al., 2009). Media priming effects, although not contingent on moderators, may dissolve quickly after exposure. When women are repeatedly exposed to sexualized stimuli, however, moderators may determine whether or not there is a lasting effect on trait self-objectification. Our findings may, therefore, not contradict the Aubrey (2006a) study, but rather complement it. Of course, there are many differences between our study and Aubrey's study, such as an experimental versus a survey design, student participants from Europe versus the United States, or different media exposure. Clearly, more research is needed to study the effects of sexualizing media on young women's self-objectification, both in the laboratory and in the field. In any case, this study makes an important contribution by not replicating the moderation effects found in Aubrey (2006b).

More importantly, our study is the first to demonstrate that self-objectification increased the preference for subsequent sexualizing media. When in the mode of self-objectification, women actively seek such stimuli because they are relevant and useful to them. The reason is that self-objectification is a motivational trigger to define oneself based on body traits rather than non-body traits. Therefore, any information related to body traits is potentially important to young women because it helps them to achieve body characteristics in line with their needs. The findings are in accordance with selective exposure theory (Zillman & Bryant, 1985), and thereof derived theoretical concepts such as the idea of reinforcing spirals (Slater, 2007) as well as with SESAM model (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015).

Interestingly, further demonstrating the robustness and strength of this relationship, the effect of self-objectification on media selection is independent from young women's self-esteem, appearance internalization, and BMI. This indicates that personal characteristics cannot protect young women from turning to sexually objectifying media content in the state of self-objectification. As a consequence, young women may fall victim to a spiral in which exposure to sexually objectifying content increases self-objectification, which, in turn, further increases subsequent exposure to such content (see for the theory of spirals in media effects research, Slater, 2007). It is important to stress that this effect is robust when tested with bootstrapping.

Furthermore, the cultural context of the conducted study has to be considered in the interpretation of the results. In Germanic countries, such as Austria, and in several continental European countries physical nudity and sexuality are more normalized compared with other countries (e.g., Joshi, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2011; Nelson & Paek,

2008). The fact that we still find these self-objectification effects in a less modest cultural context compared with other cultures makes them even more alarming.

Alternative Explanations

It is important to consider and rule out four alternative explanations. First, in explaining our findings, one could speculate that experimental groups differed in aspects not related to sexual objectification. However, we took the same artists in both conditions. Also, the pop singers in our music video sample equated to current ideals for beauty and body shape. Therefore, it was not the presented body ideal that increased self-objectification, but the sexually objectifying aspect of the videos. Our pretest also confirmed this.

Second, one could argue that the assumed causal order of self-objectification and exposure to subsequent media exposure should be reversed. However, selection was measured after self-objectification, and therefore, selection cannot impact self-objectification.

Third, there are grounds to assume that exposure to our experimental stimuli primed sexually objectifying content, which may explain the effects on media selection. In our study, we observed no direct effect of the experimental group on media selection. Thus, selection behavior was affected only by shaping self-objectification and cannot be explained by a direct priming process. Rephrased, one cannot argue that women who watch the sexualizing videos are more attracted to similar content because the videos simply activated related content. It only works via self-objectification. Likewise, one cannot argue that the young women simply liked the sexually objectifying music videos, so they were subsequently choosing related content. Again, because no direct effect of the experimental group on selection was found, this explanation can be ruled out.

Fourth and finally, we used appearance internalization as a moderator, although there is some evidence that the internalization of appearance ideals can serve as mediator between media use and self-objectification (Moradi & Huang, 2008; Vandenberg & Eggermont, 2012). Thus, we tested alternative models, where internalization was entered as a mediator rather than a moderator. The effect of the group condition on internalization was not significant, which supports our theoretical model.

Some Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Several caveats should be noted. First, the observed effect sizes in our study are rather small. Although small effect sizes are not uncommon in this kind of research (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013) and are generated using bootstrapping, the effects are in need of replication. Also, we only sampled young women, which may be a threat to population validity. A replication with a bigger and more diverse sample is therefore in order. It is also worthwhile to take this research out of the laboratory using survey panel designs such as in Aubrey's (2006a) study. This may help to further clarify the role of moderators when explaining the consequences of exposure to sexually objectifying media.

Related to that, future experimental research should test not only short-term effects but also long-term effects. In the present study, selective exposure was measured over the course of a few minutes. However, as priming research suggests, if several short-term effects accumulate, concepts can become chronically assessable and lead to stable exposure patterns.

Based on our results, we cannot state whether the selective exposure of sexually objectifying media content was intentional or habitual, as both pathways are possible. Intentional selection would have been preceded by the motivation of self-improvement. In this case, self-objectification may have lead women to choose sexualizing media images in order to achieve a desired self-concept. In regard to the content of the music videos, the desired self-concept was most probably linked to (sexual) attractiveness. For women who prioritize their physical outward appearance, objectifying images may exhibit relevant information to achieve the desired self-concept. On the other hand, it is possible that self-consistency, as habitual selective exposure, was the motive for the preference of sexually objectifying media content. In this case, self-objectifying women chose media content, which was driven by the need to align with their current self-concept (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). Thus, future research might further examine whether selective exposure effects occurred intentionally or habitually.

We tested three possible moderators in the present study. Future research might include other moderating factors, such as descriptive and normative peer norms (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013), which have been related in the context of body image research (e.g., Carey, Donaghue, & Broderick, 2013; Krmar, Gilles, & Helme, 2008; Lin, McCormack, Kruczkowski, & Berg, 2015; Veldhuis et al., 2014).

For our study, we used music videos of different artists, as we were interested in the general effects of sexually objectifying music videos as opposed to single message effects (Thorson, Wicks, & Leshner, 2012). However, future research could also focus on message-related effects. For example, it might be possible that artists who are more liked trigger more pronounced effects than artists who are less liked. There is some first evidence that perceived similarity or identification with a media person is related to body image concerns (Greenwood, 2009). Future research might consider these aspects.

Conclusion

These caveats notwithstanding, our findings have some important implications for society. Given the omnipresence of sexualized media in general and sexually objectifying pop music videos in particular, our results seem alarming. According to our study, the use of sexually objectifying music videos may result in a spiraling effect: Exposure to those videos leads to intensified self-objectification among young women, which in turn leads to an additional preference for sexually objectifying media content. We believe this is an important contribution to scholarship on self-objectification. These effects were independent from women's traits or characteristics. Prevention programs may consider these findings in protecting young women against the potentially harmful effects of such sexually objectifying video content.

Appendix A

Selective Exposure: Online News Article

Sexually objectifying media content:

Non-sexually objectifying media contents:

Appendix B

Selective Exposure: Print Advertisement

Sexually objectifying media content:

Non-sexually objectifying media contents:

Appendix C

Selective Exposure: Print Magazine

Sexually objectifying media content:

Non-sexually objectifying media contents:

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Note

1. We also tested a model without any controls treating self-objectification as the independent and selective exposure as the dependent variable. The indirect effect of experimental group on selective exposure, mediated by self-objectification is statistically significant with 1,000 bootstrapping samples ($b = .06$, lower confidence interval (LLCI) = .0068, upper level confidence interval (ULCI) = .1433).

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