“Objectified and Dehumanized: Do Objectifying Images of Women Affect Political Attitudes?”

Pre-analysis Plan

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Research in psychology has demonstrated that the female body is objectified far more than the male body (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997; Rudman and Borgida 1995). Sandra Bartky (1990) defines sexual objectification as occurring when people’s bodies or body parts are separated from their identity. In other words, an individual becomes merely instrumental and stripped of their personhood when objectified. The extant research teaches us that the consumption of objectifying images of women is associated with rape myth beliefs, sex-role stereotypes, and increased acceptance of interpersonal violence (Lanis and Covell 1995). Across two studies, Galdi et al. (2014) found that exposure to television in which women are portrayed as sexual objects increased men’s proclivity to engage in sexual coercion and gender-harassing behavior, as well as conformity to masculine gender role norms. We propose to build upon this literature and apply it to questions relevant to political science. In particular, we examine how exposure to objectifying images of women affects attitudes regarding reproductive rights, women’s rights issues, and the acceptance of rape myths.

Hypotheses

The assumption underlying all of our hypotheses is that objectifying images of women are a form of dehumanization. Often these images show women’s body parts as interchangeable with objects, or disembodied entirely (Schooler 2015). Objectifying women can result in lower perceived competence and dehumanization of women (Heflick and Goldenberg 2009; Heflick et al. 2011; Vaes et al. 2011). Some research suggests that viewing sexually objectifying images of women activates cognitive processes associated with objects opposed to the cognitive processes
typically reserved for thinking about humans (Bernard et al. 2012; Cikara et al. 2010). In other words, objectifying images can prime people to literally think of women as “things.”

Our general hypothesis is that exposure to objectifying images of women will lead to dehumanization of women generally. We are interested in establishing if this has any effect on political attitudes. We posit that presenting these images leads not only to dehumanization, but also primes the notion of social hierarchies that place women in a subjugated position and hostile sexist attitudes. Below is the hypothesized model and the hypotheses we seek to test:

**Fig. 1: Proposed Model**

![Proposed Model Diagram]

**H1:** Exposure to objectifying images of women will lead to lower levels of support for sex-related social policies.
H1a: Exposure to objectifying images of women will lead to lower support of sex-related social policies among men, but not women.

H1b: Exposure to objectifying images of women will lead to lower support of sex-related social policies among those who possess traditional gender role attitudes.

H1c: Exposure to objectifying images of women will lead to lower support of sex-related social policies among those high in social dominance orientation.

H2: Exposure to objectifying images of women will lead to higher levels of rape acceptance myth.

H2a: Exposure to objectifying images of women lead to higher levels of rape myth acceptance for men, but not women.

H2b: Exposure to objectifying images of women will lead to higher levels of rape myth acceptance among those who possess traditional gender role attitudes.

H2c: Exposure to objectifying images of women will lead to higher levels of rape myth acceptance among those high in social dominance orientation.

H3: Exposure to objectifying images of women will lead to higher levels of hostile sexism.

H3a: Exposure to objectifying images of women will lead to higher levels of hostile sexism for men, but not women.

H3b: Exposure to objectifying images of women will lead to higher levels of hostile among those who possess traditional gender role attitudes.

To test our hypotheses, we will first conduct a pilot study on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. We will recruit 500 male and female participants. Participants will begin by answering demographic questions, questions tapping social dominance orientation, risk-acceptance, gender
attitudes, and personality. Participants will then be randomly assigned to either the objectification treatment group or the control group. They will be told that they are taking part in a separate and unrelated study on marketing and advertisements. In both groups participants will view a series of 12 advertisements. After viewing each photo advertisement, participants will be asked on a scale of 1-10, how would they rate the ad. Embedded in the images in the treatment group will be 6 objectifying advertisements of women. These photos have been pre-tested in a previous study to ensure that they portray the objectification of women and depict female cultural appearance ideals. We also used the Sex Object Test (SOT) test developed by Caroline Heldman to ensure the presence of sexual objectification. The other 6 ads will be neutral advertisements. In the control group, participants will be exposed to 12 neutral advertisements.

**Study Measures and Materials**

**Demographic Items**

1) What was the last level of schooling you completed?

   Less than high school graduate  
   High School graduate  
   Some college  
   Currently a college student  
   College graduate  
   Post college graduate  

2) Do you consider yourself:

   Very liberal  
   Liberal  
   Somewhat liberal  
   Somewhat conservative  
   Conservative  
   Very Conservative  

3) Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a:

   Democratic  
   Republican
Independent
Other (Please Indicate)

4) In what year were you born?

5) What general racial or ethnic category do you consider yourself (select all that apply)?

Black
White
Native American
Latino/a or Hispanic
Asian
Other

6) What is your gender?

Male
Female
Other (Please Indicate)

7) Please indicate the category that corresponds to your family’s yearly income. (This information is entirely confidential)

Under $15,000
Between $15,000 and $34,999
Between $35,000 and $64,999
Between $65,000 and $149,999
Over $150,000

8) What is your sexual orientation?

Straight/Heterosexual
Gay or Lesbian
Bisexual
Prefer to self-describe (Please Indicate)
Prefer not to say

**Social Dominance Orientation**

*Items are on a scale from 1 to 7 (strongly oppose, somewhat oppose, slightly oppose, neutral, slightly favor, somewhat favor, strongly favor)*

Pro-trait dominance
1. An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom.
2. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.
Con-trait dominance
3. No one group should dominate in society.
4. Groups at the bottom are just as deserving as groups at the top.

Pro-trait anti-egalitarianism
5. Group equality should not be our primary goal.
6. It is unjust to try to make groups equal.

Con-trait anti-egalitarianism
7. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.
8. We should work to give all groups an equal chance to succeed.

**Big Five Personality**

The next several questions have phrases describing people's behaviors. Please use the rating scale below to describe how accurately each statement describes you. Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you honestly see yourself, in relation to other people you know of the same sex as you are, and roughly your same age. So that you can describe yourself in an honest manner, your responses will be kept in absolute confidence. Please read each statement carefully, and then select the response that corresponds to your answer.

1. I make a mess of things.
2. I insult people.
3. I sympathize with others’ feelings.
4. I am the life of the party.
5. I have a rich vocabulary.
6. I leave my belongings laying around.
7. I have difficulty understanding abstract ideas.
8. I am relaxed most of the time.
9. I get stressed out easily.
10. I am always prepared.
11. I don’t talk a lot.
12. I have a vivid imagination.
13. I keep in the background.
14. I am not really interested in others.
15. I feel comfortable around people.
16. I am interested in people.
17. I worry about things.
18. I pay attention to details.
19. I seldom feel blue.
20. I am not interested in abstract ideas.

* Response categories are “very accurate,” “moderately accurate,” “neither accurate or inaccurate,” “moderately inaccurate,” and “very inaccurate”
**Hostile Sexism**

1) Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking “equality.”
2) Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.
3) Women are too easily offended.
4) Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men.
5) Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.
6) Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.
7) Women exaggerate problems they have at work.
8) Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash.
9) When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.
10) There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing.
11) Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men.

**Benevolent Sexism**

1) Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.
2) Women should be cherished and protected by men.
3) Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.
4) Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.
5) Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste.

**Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale**

1) When a woman gets raped, it’s often because the way they said “no” was unclear.
2) Rape happens when a man’s sex drive goes out of control.
3) If a woman doesn’t say “no” she can’t claim rape.
4) Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men.
5) If a woman is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.
6) If a woman doesn’t physically fight back, you can’t really say it was rape.
7) When men rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.

**Sex-Related Social Policies**

1) 1. Is abortion never justified, always justified, or somewhere in between? Please place yourself on this continuum (0 being abortion is never justified and 10 being abortion is always justified).

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.
*All question responses are on a 5-point scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree

2) Employers should have to cover contraception as part of the insurance plans they offer employees.
3) The federal government should cut off funding to Planned Parenthood.

4) Because of past discrimination, employers should make special efforts to hire and promote qualified women.

5) Would you say that most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women, that men and women are equally suited, or that women are better suited than men in this area?

**Risk Acceptance Scale**

**Directions:** Each of the items below contains two choices, A and B. Please circle the letter of the choice which most describes your likes or the way you feel. In some cases you may find items in which both choices describe your likes or feelings. Please choose the one which better describes your likes or feelings. In some cases you may find items in which you do not like either choice. In these cases mark the choice you dislike least. Do not leave any items blank. It is important you respond to all items with only one choice, A or B. We are interested only in your likes or feelings, not in how others feel about these things or how one is supposed to feel. There are not right or wrong answers as in other kinds of tests. Be frank and give your honest appraisal of yourself.

1. A I like “wild” uninhibited parties.  
   B I prefer quiet parties with good conversation.

2. A There are some movies I enjoy seeing a second or even a third time.  
   B I can’t stand watching a movie I’ve seen before.

3. A I often wish I could be a mountain climber.  
   B I can’t understand people who risk their necks climbing mountains.

4. A I dislike all body odors.  
   B I like some of the earthy body smells.

5. A I get bored seeing the same old faces.  
   B I like the comfortable familiarity of everyday friends.

6. A I like to explore a strange city or section of town by myself, even if it means getting lost.  
   B I prefer a guide when I am in a place I don’t know well.

7. A I dislike people who do or say things just to shock or upset other people.  
   B When you can predict almost everything a person will do and say he or she must be a bore.

8. A I usually don’t enjoy a movie or a play where I can predict what will happen
in advance.
B I don’t mind watching a movie or play where I can predict what will happen
in advance.

9. A I have tried marijuana or would like to.
   B I would never smoke marijuana.

10. A I would not like to try any drug which might produce strange and dangerous effects
    on me.
    B I would like to try some of the new drugs that produce hallucinations.

11. A A sensible person avoids activities that are dangerous.
    B I sometimes like to do things that are a little frightening.

12. A I dislike “swingers” (people who are uninhibited and free about sex).
    B I enjoy the company of real “swingers.”

13. A I find that stimulants make me uncomfortable.
    B I often like to get high (drinking liquor or smoking marijuana).

14. A I like to try new foods that I have never tasted before.
    B I order the dishes with which I am familiar, so as to avoid disappointment and
    unpleasantness.

15. A I enjoy looking at home movies, travel slides, or home videos.
    B Looking at someone’s home movies, travel slides, or home videos bores me
    tremendously.

16. A I would like to take up the sport of water-skiing.
    B I would not like to take up water-skiing.

17. A I would like to try surf-board riding.
    B I would not like to try surf-board riding.

18. A I would like to take off on a trip with no pre-planned or definite routes, or
    timetable.
    B When I go on a trip I like to plan my route and timetable fairly carefully.

19. A I prefer the “down-to-earth” kinds of people as friends.
    B I would like to make friends in some of the “far-out” groups like artists or “punks.”

20. A I would not like to learn to fly an airplane.
    B I would like to learn to fly an airplane.

21. A I prefer the surface of the water to the depths.
    B I would like to go scuba diving.
22. A I would like to meet some persons who are homosexual (men or women).
   B I stay away from anyone I suspect of being “gay” or “lesbian.”

23. A I would like to try parachute jumping.
   B I would never want to try jumping out of a plane with or without a parachute.

24. A I prefer friends who are excitingly unpredictable.
   B I prefer friends who are reliable and predictable.

25. A I am not interested in experience for its own sake.
   B I like to have new and exciting experiences and sensations even if they are a little frightening, unconventional, or illegal.

26. A The essence of good art is in its clarity, symmetry of form and harmony of colors.
   B I often find beauty in the “clashing” colors and irregular forms of modern paintings.

27. A I enjoy spending time in the familiar surroundings of home.
   B I get very restless if I have to stay around home for any length of time.

28. A I like to dive off the high board.
   B I don’t like the feeling I get standing on the high board (or I don’t go near it at all).

29. A I like to date members of the opposite sex who are physically exciting.
   B I like to date members of the opposite sex who share my values.

30. A Heavy drinking usually ruins a party because some people get loud and boisterous.
   B Keeping the drinks full is the key to a good party.

31. A The worst social sin is to be rude.
   B The worst social sin is to be a bore.

32. A A person should have considerable sexual experience before marriage.
   B It’s better if two married persons begin their sexual experience with each other.

33. A Even if I had the money I would not care to associate with flighty rich persons in the ‘jet set.’
   B I could conceive of myself seeking pleasures around the world with the “jet set.”

34. A I like people who are sharp and witty even if they do sometimes insult others.
   B I dislike people who have their fun at the expense of hurting the feelings of others.

35. A There is altogether too much portrayal of sex in movies.
   B I enjoy watching many of the “sexy” scenes in the movies.

36. A I feel best after taking a couple of drinks.
B Something is wrong with people who need liquor to feel good.

37. A People should dress according to some standards of taste, neatness, and style.
B People should dress in individual ways even if the effects are sometimes strange.

38. A Sailing long distances in small sailing crafts is foolhardy.
B I would like to sail a long distance in a small but seaworthy sailing craft.

39. A I have no patience with dull or boring persons.
B I find something interesting in almost every person I talk with.

40. A Skiing fast down a high mountain slope is a good way to end up on crutches.
B I think I would enjoy the sensations of skiing very fast down a high mountain slope.

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Analysis Plan

We will test H1 using a standard multiplicative regression model:

\[ SRSP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Object_i + \gamma X + e_i \]

where \( RRA_i \) refers to reproductive rights attitudes for subject \( i \), \( Object_i \) is an indicator of the objectification prime treatment (0= no prime, 1=prime), and \( X \) refers to a matrix of covariates. We will condition on age, gender, race, income, education, party identification, and religious beliefs. H1 predicts that \( \beta_1 \) will be negative.

We will investigate H1a by interacting the objectification treatment indicator with an indicator for identifying as male:

\[ SRSP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Object \times male_i + \gamma X + e_i \]

To test H1b, we will interact the objectification treatment indicator with gender attitudes:

\[ SRSP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Object \times IAT_i + \gamma X + e_i \]

Finally, to test H1c, we will interact the objectification treatment indicator with social dominance orientation:

\[ SRSP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Object \times SDO_i \times male_i + \gamma X + e_i \]

We will also subset this model by gender.

To test the rest of the hypotheses, we will use the same model specifications:

\[ RMA_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Object + \gamma X + e_i \]
\[ RMA = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Object \times male_i + \gamma X + e_i \]
\[ RMA_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Object \times IAT_i + \gamma X + e_i \]
\[ RMA_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Object \times SDO_i \times male_i + \gamma X + e_i \]
\[ HS_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Object + \gamma X + e_i \]
\[ HS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Object \times male_i + \gamma X + e_i \]
\[ HS_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Object} \times \text{IAT}_i + \gamma \text{X} + e_i \]

\[ HS_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Object} \times \text{SDO}_i \times \text{male}_i + \gamma \text{X} + e_i \]

**Power Analysis**

An a priori power analysis calculated for a relatively small effect size (.33), \( \alpha = .05 \), and \( \beta = 0.95 \) renders a suggested total sample size of 480. To maximize our power, we will round up to a sample size of 500.

**Statistical Significance**

For this study we will use the \( \alpha = .05 \) as the value for statistical significance.

**Missing Data**

Incomplete responses will be excluded from the data analysis. Missing values in the sexual objectification responses and covariates will be handled in the following way: (A) If 10 percent or less of the values on the covariates are missing, these missing values will be recoded to their mean. (B) If greater than 11% or more values are missing these values are re-coded to a constant. A dummy variable is also included in the data to signify that the data is missing or not (Gerber and Green 2012).


References


