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Introduction - 1,000 words

The representation of female identifying individuals within the creative industries has been largely discussed within media studies and academic research particularly concerning the themes of objectification, sexualisation and empowerment. Among all sectors, specifically dance, film and music, women have consistently been given narratives which mean that their appearance and sexuality is highlighted within the product. A large debate is whether these representations reflect the expectations of the audience, societal standards and industry practice. Even though the creative industries are evolving, there are still questions remaining about whether the way women are portrayed is heading into larger self expression and control over decisions or whether the representation patterns are still existing and reproducing.

The representation of women plays a large role in how the audience interprets the woman as well as the meaning of the role within the performance and visual based sectors. A women's body within dance, music and film is sometimes the main element for expression, which can lead to the appearance, presentation and movement gaining more attention. Some individuals debate and argue that the focus of the body can contribute to women being sexualised, specifically when the emphasis is on the sexual appeal and the attractiveness within the creative decisions. Others do suggest that these representations can be interpreted differently which depends on individual perceptions.

Within the history of the creative industries, women's roles have regularly been shaped by the power structures between genders. The research into early stages of the industries such as ballet, music and film has shown that female identifying performers were constantly given roles and narratives with the ideals of femininity, emotional dependence and their visual appeal, whilst the male identifying performers were commonly given roles and narratives that showed them more masculine and strong and also suggesting that they had control and authority. These patterns suggest that the reason why different gender roles are written like this, is because the industries were and continue to be heavily led by male creatives. The patterns which are recognised from the historical context surrounding the creative industries, show that the industry now functions with larger diversity and the social environment than history shows.

Recently, there has been a large rise of empowerment narratives including confidence and self expression. Female identifying creatives and performers are gaining more leading roles, which has begun a large shift in the performers' consent being taken into consideration concerning how they are presented visually and has become more of known to the public. Some discussions view that the development happening currently is evidence that progress is being made for how women are represented, suggesting that female creatives have gained more control over the portrayal of themselves.

However, some other questions are being asked in contrast, about whether these developments are presenting a substantial change or whether they coincide with the beauty, appeal and marketability pressures. These questions have been leading the continued debate in regards to the sexualisation and empowerment relationship with the creative industries.

The notion of choice and consent are the key issues within this debate. This discussion question is to what extent are the choices and decisions in a professional environment freely made by the creative, whilst empowerment is usually associated with the control over decisions as the female identifying performer and creative. The decision making process may be influenced by the structure of institutional and commercial in which the creative industries operate within. It can be difficult to fully determine the representations of the sexualised visual, narratives and choices are made by the individual, the expectations of the industry or whether it is a combination of the two. Due to this, there has been ongoing interest in identifying where the self expression choices and industry driven representations distinctions lay within the creative industries.

Some researchers have raised concerns of the impact on young people of the exposure to the creative industries from an early age, including sexualised imagery which can appear through the media or even training environments and competitions, as it may affect their development. The evaluation of sexualisation within the creative industries, highlights that there needs to be more caution and a larger need for a context analysis over conclusions.

As there is a variety of perspectives concerning this topic, this dissertation aims to explore further on how empowerment, objectification and sexualisation is experienced and understood within the creative industries. This study examines how each of these concepts are discussed in literature, rather than using just a single interpretation and experience. This study not only uses discussions within academic work but also how individuals that are connected to the creative industries have experienced and perceived these concepts.

To help support this exploration, the dissertation connects with established theoretical works, including Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory (1975), Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1972) and the Objectification Theory written by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). The study focuses on only three sectors of the creative industries which are dance, music and film, and examines how performance, costuming, choreography and marketing has shaped representation. The role of social media is also examined, specifically in relation to the circulation and creation of representations.

In addition to the literature review, this dissertation includes primary research which was collected through an online survey which involved participants that are connected to the creative industries. The use of both qualitative and quantitative data are used to allow the examination of the observations, experiences and opinions which regard the sexualisation within their own professional sectors. This approach allowed for common themes to be identified whilst acknowledging the variety of perspectives among different roles.

Overall, this study looks to contribute to the current discussion concerning the representation of women within the creative industries by providing an unbiased examination of empowerment and sexualisation. Combining theoretical analysis and primary research, an insight is made into how these issues are understood without assuming a definitive answer. In doing so, it highlights how important the use of context, agency and influence is when analysing how women are represented within creative work.

Main body 8,000 words

Literature Review

Introduction

The representation of women has historically been shaped by gendered power dynamics, visual culture, and expectations from society which surround sexuality and femininity. Across various sectors within the creative industries such as music, film and dance industries there is a common pattern of female roles and narratives being positioned as an object for visual pleasure which contributes to the unrealistic beauty standards for the creatives and viewers.

Ongoing debates on whether the industries are promoting the empowerment and self-expression narratives are just a way for the industries to use a different format of objectifying that is disguised by the positive narratives.

Historically, the dynamics and narrative of female roles within creative practice often have been created to showcase the male roles dominance, as female characters tend to be created with the characteristics of passivity and weakness but still being viewed as the beauty object for the male characters.

This narrative can be traced from the 19th century ballet industry to early cinema and music videos, where women's bodies have been controlled to be the visual pleasure whilst they have little control over decisions and what they feel comfortable with. The pattern which has been developed suggests that this is still influencing how the modern creative industry world is continuing to work. Even though there are more leading roles being given to women that appear to show power, there is still research which indicates that sexualisation has become normalised across various sectors.

This literature review investigates theories and research which explore sexualisation, objectification and empowerment within the creative industries, including the Male Gaze Theory (Mulvey, 1975) Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1972) and the Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) as these studies show the foundations for these issues and this topic in particular.

The review investigates 3 sectors within the creative industries, dance, music and film, researching how sexualisation might be manifesting through performative areas, choreography, costuming, marketing etc, and also considers how social media potentially is impacting how empowerment and objectification is seen.

Further into this review there is extensive research into the effects in which sexualisation and objectification can have for a female creative working within the industry, for example, self objectification, internalising sexualisation, body image issues and mental health concerns.

By using this review to analyse literature which already exists, it aims to bring more context to the issue of empowerment and sexualisation within the creative industries, the support of secondary research gives the ability to highlight gaps within the creative practice.

Historical Context

Storylines for ballet performances during the 19th century depicted women as only being used to being in relation to a man, their whole character narrative was to

ensure that the man could save the female character and reinforces the idea that men are constantly in power and are stronger than the women in these narratives. Many iconic ballet pieces meant that the ballerina would wear seductive and stylised clothing to conform to the unrealistic beauty standards to gain attention from the male ballet dancers. Even with a female led performance, the female leads narrative is there to be pretty and attractive for a man.

In some cases, empowerment for women can be found in movement and expression but due to history, choreographical choices have been shaped to still be perceived to please the male audience which contributes to the objectification of women.

As many pieces of choreography were choreographed by men, most female characters were portrayed to be physically and emotionally weak, which pleased the male gaze due to men enjoying a man put in a role that is stronger than a woman, which reinforces Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory (Mulvey, 1975) (Kondakindi & McDowell, 2023).

During the twentieth century, the rise of women becoming 'sex symbols' emerged with a new generation of actresses gaining stardom whilst being heavily sexualised within their work due to their appearance aligning with the male gaze, an actress who is prominent as an example is Marilyn Monroe.

From the beginning of Monroe's career she was sexualised because of her having platinum blonde hair, an hourglass figure, red lips and the distinctive sound of her voice, during her first ever screen test it is reported that the cinematographer said that she was "sex on a piece of film" (Shamron, 1946). However, even though she was highly sexualised for her appearance, her persona was also interpreted as empowering for women to showcase their sexuality with confidence and not shy away from expressing it (Bogutskaya, 2022).

The music industry has historically been dominated by men, with many songs and music videos being centred around the male perspectives on desire and sexuality. The rise of the rap style during the 1980s began to intensify major issues with misogyny, as women within the music videos being depicted as submissive or available, which reinforces the dominance of male artists; this has had a lasting effect on the rap genre with male artists.

In the 1970s, there was a revolutionary time within the music industry where artists began to incorporate sexuality into mainstream music and music videos expressing the desires, this happened due to the discussion sexuality becoming more socially accepted, this then contributed the rise of female artists during the 90s to becoming more playful and empowering with the use of sexuality in their music.

The 2000s within pop culture was a significant turning point, as female artists using their sexuality became on the major rise for visibility, artists such as Britney Spears and Miley Cyrus, however when record labels began to realise that music with a sexually explicit narrative would gain more success, artists were increasingly encouraged to reproduce this narrative and image of music due to it selling records, meaning young artists within the industry were being given a vulnerable position within the industry to be sexualised heavily and were labeled as "the girls gone bad" (Lisi, 2014).

The Male Gaze Theory

In 1975, the theory of the Male Gaze was introduced by Laura Mulvey in her essay, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', the theory argues that the portrayals and narratives of women on screen are objectified in a sexual way which satisfy the male desire, which positions women primarily objects for visual pleasure.

The Male Gaze is evident in various media formats, where women are commonly depicted as seductive or attractive and positioned to have a sexual agenda with male characters in the storylines and narratives. Many women are seen in films, advertisements and music videos dressed in revealing clothing whereas male identifying performers tend to wear loose fitting and modest clothing and limit their body exposure (Mulvey, 1975).

However, Kevin Goddard (2000) suggests that the male gaze can also be used as agency, arguing that it is used to allow women to hold power over men and themselves, due to submitting to the male gaze as it is not thought as submitting as a weaker female to a stronger male but believe that those feel more empowered to be displayed and using their body and appearance as art for the viewers (Goddard, 2000).

Sexualisation Within The Industries

Sexualisation Within The Dance Industry

The theory Habitus by Pierre Bourdieu, demonstrates how individuals normalize and internalise the nature of an individual self-consciously through their class, family and culture, which shapes behaviour, choices and taste which leads to the creation of patterns that reinforce the structure of society (Bourdieu, 1972).

When applying this theory to the dance industry, it suggests that the sexualisation is not just an external pressure which dancers face but it has become internalised, within the training process individuals learn to conform to the rules and standards within dance, including striving for a socially acceptable body aesthetic which is often sexualised by others and the individual themselves (Pickard, 2013).

Female dancers are heavily positioned to enhance the visual presentation for male artists, their roles tend to have an underlying sexual motive attached, expressed through provocative choreography, clothing choices, or different creative decisions (Kangas, 2021).

This results in a lot of pressure being put on female dancers to conform to the appearance standards within the industry, particularly when it comes to working as back up dancers for male artists, as they are hired to amplify the male artists' masculinity as well as their sexual desire. For female back up dancers, appearance and clothing are highlighted as of great importance to securing employment, therefore there is a lot of self-imposed pressure to meet these standards (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011).

Within the commercial dance industry, the sexualised aesthetic has shifted from being creative choices to now being a professional requirement, it has now become a standard practice within the industry with the use of revealing costumes, being objectified for jobs with the use of a sexual narrative and provocative choreography, it has become difficult for female creatives to not risk unemployment by voicing their opinions about what they are and aren't comfortable with (Cohen, 2009).

Sexualisation Within The Dance Competition Culture

Dance competition culture has evolved significantly over the years, with the increase of choreography being influenced by what is currently being produced in the industry. However as the industry is evolving into more sensual stylistic choices, it has caused some concern due to provocative movements and inappropriate music choices being assigned to young children for competitive performances.

This raises a highly important question, are such provocative movements choreographed with a sexualised motive for children or do the audience over sexualise the dancers due to these movements?

In 2010, a major controversy emerged within the dance competition world, when young girls aged 8-10 years of age walked out on a dance competition stage wearing red lingerie whilst executing very provocative and sensual choreography to the song "Single Ladies" (Jessop, 2019).

Many dance teachers attempt to stay relevant with the constantly evolving dance and music industries with their choreography, however as the industry is becoming more female empowerment and sexual confidence, the use of these themes within choreography which involve young female dancers create concern surrounding development and ethical issues, particularly when provocative movements and keeping up with the trends are associated with winning competitions.

According to research by Mary Bawden, children should not be required to dance movements including, use the pelvis, hips but also included any Brazilian, Afro Beat or Caribbean dance styles (Bawden, 2025), this position causes concern as it implies that children should not be allowed to express their culture on stage due to them potentially being oversexualised by an audience.

Sexualisation Within The Film Industry

Several studies suggest that the film industry remains to be heavily male dominated, for example in a study by Dr. Martha M. Lauzen which is carried out annually, indicates that in 2016 only 17% of women were a part of the creation of the top 250 films, the figure increased to 25% during the year 2021 but in the year of 2024 it had decreased by 2% to only 23% of women working behind the scenes as directors, writers or producers. Consequently the percentage of male involvement within the film creations were 83% in 2016, 75% in 2021 and in 2024 it was 77% (Dr. Martha M. Lauzen, 2024). Although the data suggests growth of women working in the industry, it does not suggest a large or stable growth as there is no consistency within the numbers. This data raises the question of whether the male led industry structure affects the way that actresses are portrayed in film.

It is argued that films created by male led creative teams, may contribute to actresses being objected to more sexualisation due to a subconsciously applying the male gaze while developing the characters and narratives. Historically, the majority of audience members at movie theatres were male, films were constructed to attract the male viewing by having women portray stereotypical and overtly sexualised roles. As more women began to go to the movie theatres, that's when the male characters and narratives began to be used to attract the female audience (Guevara, 2019).

Within the film industry, the themes of objectification and sexualisation is seen throughout all genres, there are certain genres in which the objectification of women is more prominent than others, in particular the superhero genre of films.

In a research journal, Elvira M. Gransden (2024), argues that “The rise of female superheroes in contemporary cinema reflects a significant cultural shift toward gender equity and representation” (Gransden, 2024) highlights the visibility of female characters taking lead roles within films with resilience and strength which was heavily empowering for women. However, the journal then further begins to note “this progress is complicated by persistent patterns of objectification” (Gransden, 2024), suggesting that even though the characteristics of the female character is framed as strong and powerful that it is difficult to understand whether the character is created to be empowering for women or created to please the male gaze due to other aspects, such as the costuming being very revealing and tight fit and the use of advertising projecting the appearance of the character rather than the power.

Sexualisation within Film Marketing and Advertising

In a research study conducted by Ana L Navarro and Terestia Adriano (2024), utilized the use of multimodal discourse analysis and were able to explore movie posters to analyse how different elements of the posters contributed to the potential stereotyping and objectification of women. Their examination of these film posters revealed that women were often framed as decorative, passive and even sexually available whilst male characters were positioned as powerful and dominant. The findings further highlighted that within advertisements they often prioritised the appearance of the female character over the narrative of the film, even when a woman played a small role within the film they were often positioned in the centre for imagery. This reinforces the argument that the use of posters was not used to communicate the narrative of the film but to use women’s bodies as a visual tool which increased the marketing. Navarro and Adriano argue that such representations maintain the patriarchal norms within the film industry by using and positioning women to attract viewers as well as normalising the objectification. Despite the ongoing discussions within the creative industries surrounding equality, progressive representation and empowerment, Navarro and Adriano conclude that the marketing of films still and will continue to rely on objectifying and sexualising imagery on posters. Their research suggests that the advertising companies are resistant to the change, even as the film narratives are evolving the marketing won’t, they continue to prioritise profit over the respectful portrayal of women. This highlights a persistent contradiction within the industry, objectification is embedded within the promotional areas whilst the term empowerment is being heavily publicly promoted within the film industry (Navarro & Adriano, 2024).

Sexualisation Within The Music Industry

In the 1980s, Madonna emerged as a female artist who was an advocate for female empowerment, she challenged the standards of female sexuality and independence through her music, performances and visual identity. Madonna inspired women to control their own bodies and creative choices. Throughout her career she resisted allowing external individuals to have control of her work and her body, she fought against sexism that was embedded within the music industry throughout her entire career.

Within the Music Industry, there is a significant difference between female artists employing a sexually charged narrative within their music and music videos to those which are pressured to adopt this narrative. During the 1990s, there was a visible rise of female artists adopting to be playful with the use of sexuality within their music, including groups and performers such as Spice Girls, Janet Jackson and TLC, which led to the start of the 'Girl Power' era of pop.

However, as the charge of empowerment being associated with the sexual aesthetic, it led to many female artists in the 2000s feeling pressure to change their persona within their brand to accommodate with the popularity and sales which is seen when music has a sexual narrative attached to the work, whether that is within the clothing, lyrics or choreography, a prime example of an artist who experienced a lot of pressure for professional change and objectification in their work from a very young age is Britney Spears (Horan, 2023).

During the 2000s, Britney Spears was labeled as the 'Good Girl Gone Bad' reflecting the change to her brand which she reportedly had limited power over. At the age of 16, she released one of her most famous and successful songs accompanied by the music video, 'Hit Me Baby...One More Time', this production was the trigger for her public image being hypersexualised, in the music video she was dressed in a highly sexualised school uniform with pig tails, it was interpreted that this production was catered to meet the male audience, which raised the question of the marketing for the young female artist.

Spears was the subject of sexualisation from the media, male interviewers of very well known late night talk shows being very inappropriate by asking questions about her virginity, and her sex life at a very young age. Her image was constantly sexualised within her work as prioritising selling records over her own well being. Due to the prolonged scrutiny she faced throughout her career, she has suffered with a lot of mental health issues meaning a conservatorship was established under her father, this led to key personal and professional decisions being made without her consent about her work and how she is to be portrayed within the media (Smith, 2023).

Costumes and Clothing

Clothing as dancers is very specific to each genre of dance within rehearsals, ballet and jazz with leotards and tights, hip hop with baggy clothing, commercials tend to be expressing the personality of the dancer. However, on stage there are different expectations. Costumes across all styles tend to be exaggerated more or stylised, particularly within competitions and theatre as the costumes must be relevant for the narrative of the performance. This raises a large question: what is the boundary between clothing suitable for the performance and clothing purposely being worn to sexualise the female dancers on stage? (Jessop, 2019)

Performance pieces are typically linked to a narrative, and the use of costumes is a significant way to communicate this. Consequently, in many dance genres and styles of dance, there are highly established costume choices to honour the practitioners' choreographical and costuming choices. For example, Bob Fosse's choreographical style is associated with women dancing in leotards and fishnets and attire inspired by the cabaret aesthetic. As a result, to respect his aesthetic most choreography which replicates this uses these traditional stylistic costumes to maintain recognisability and authenticity (Dara, 2020).

However, Yuan Peng (2025) argues that the traditional and stylistic costuming choice can reinforce the stereotyping between genders and the objectification of young girls.

Male Sexualisation

Historically the beauty standards and expectations for women have always been particular, this pattern has been proven with substantial evidence by many studies. Traditionally men have not had to face as many pressurised beauty standards as women. However within recent years, men have increasingly begun to be subjected to forms of beauty standards and objectification within both society and the creative industries.

Lili Hakimi (2023), argues that society allows men to express their sexuality without being scrutinized for their appearance or moral judgement. In contrast, women are unable to do this due to extra pressure which they experience from a young age, particularly regarding body exposure and modesty, often resulting in receiving sexually promiscuous comments (Hakimi, 2023).

In contrast, Angelika Etherington-Smith (2024) observes that male actors have received a rise of becoming more sexualised in the public eye has begun being normalised within society (Etherington-Smith, 2024).

Social media has begun to considerably intensify sexualisation than in the past, more platforms where the public now have free reign of editing videos and photos, commenting on the looks of male actors more publicly.

Although we are seeing a rise of male creative artists continuingly to be objectified alongside women within the industry and media, however there is still a large difference with how men are portrayed compared to women in the industry when it comes to film advertising, music videos and professional backing dancers.

The Effects Of Sexualisation and Objectification

Female industry professionals within the creative industries, face a lot of pressure to constantly subject themselves to potential issues to meet the beauty standards, as employment within the industry being heavily about how an individual looks and even sometimes are only being casted or not based on their appearance over their talent. The unrealistic beauty standards when it comes to body image within the industry has led to dietary practices which have developed strict diets and been the causes of eating disorders among female industry professionals. A documented example of this is Judy Garland, at the age of 14, she was reportedly described as a “fat little pig with pigtails” by the executives of the movie production studio Metro Goldwyn Mayer. She was placed on a highly restricted diet which was heavily monitored, consisting of chicken soup and black coffee, alongside cigarettes and appetite suppressant pills to make sure that she maintained her weight (Bertram, 2024). Garland spent most of her life with a reliance on pills and strict diets, which led to long term health issues which sadly took her life (Bertram, 2024).

Within the dance industry, eating disorders and body image issues are prevalent, particularly in certain genres where there is a narrow aesthetic ideal. Classical ballet, for instance, is a highly aesthetically led genre of dance where dancers are stereotypically tall, skinny with minimal curves, it subjects ballet dancers to a lot of pressure to meet the stereotypical standards of being perfect all of the time.

The training environments for dancers can contribute to these issues, exposure from mirrors constantly from a young age can be very damaging on mental health, since it promotes self surveillance which is linked to negative body image and mental distress (Ohashi et al., 2022). Additionally wearing tight fitted attire, such as leotards, for long lengths of time can be heavily damaging and can cause body dysphoria (Ohashi et al., 2022).

The effects of sexualisation extends beyond female professionals within the industry, the constant exposure of sexualised media imagery which is being published within social media, marketing, products from the music, film and dance industries can also affect the female audience.

Emma Rooney (2025), suggests that with repeated exposure to these sexualised and objectified images of women within the media it contributes to self-objectification, which is internalised by the female audience by comparing body types or body parts to those which are in mainstream media, therefore it contributes to mental health issues indirectly (Rooney, 2025). This argument supports The Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) which suggests that persistent exposure to sexualised representations causes women to internalise an observer's perspective of their own bodies, leading to self-surveillance, body shame, and anxiety.

Research published by the American Psychology Association, shows the repeated exposure to these sexually motive driven imagery, especially for young women, has been heavily linked to the increased issues of lower self-esteem, and body image issues, and depressive symptoms specifically among young girls (APA, 2007)(Roberts et al., 2007).

Methodology - 1,000 words

Research Approach and Design

This study adopted a mixed research method with a strong combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to explore how different individuals who are connected to creative industries experience and perceive the topic of sexualisation of women within the industry. This approach was used to explore the personal experiences of all participants as well as identifying different patterns within each response.

The study used an online survey over the course of two months, from November 2025 to January 2026, in which all participants only completed the questionnaire once through an online Google Form survey. This survey used open ended questions which allowed participants to answer in depth about their experiences and views as well as closed ended questions, which gave the opportunity to collect data for structured analysis about specific issues. This approach of combining qualitative and quantitative methods provided insight into each participant's experiences and perspectives.

The target number of participants from this survey is 25, however this study concluded with 26 by the closing date of the survey. Each participant which was a part of this study are currently or had been connected to the creative industries in some sort of way, with every participant completing this survey once. This survey was designed to ask a large range of different ages, genders and backgrounds whilst

focusing on one industry, which allowed participants to share their point of views and experiences freely.

Data Collection Methods

To collect data for this study, an online Google Form survey was used as it was considered the most appropriate and efficient way to collect data and research throughout this process, since it allowed the study to use qualitative and quantitative methods for participants to answer in detail and in depth about their own views and experiences, as well as respond to structured and specific closed answer questions in relation to the sexualisation of women within the creative industries.

Individuals who were asked to answer this Google Form survey, had to have a connection to the creative industries, whether they are still currently working or had previously retired. Each participant answered the survey once over the time period of 2 months, starting from November 2025 to January 2026 to allow a specific amount of time to reach a target number of 25 participants, however in January 2026, a total of 26 individuals had taken part in this survey.

Participants were recruited through social media, with a post containing the survey being shared on multiple platforms and groups specific to the creative industries, to allow a large range of backgrounds, ages, genders and perspectives to be included.

Data selection

Through this study, the participants who were targeted were working or retired professionals within the creative industries, including performing arts, tv and film, music artists. This survey was not targeted to a specific age group or gender as the research required a range of different points of views and experiences.

The use of data of all 26 participants who completed the survey will be used in the results and findings, as all participants provided consent for the use of all of their answers for this research opportunity. All participants completed the survey anonymously for their own piece of mind when sharing their experiences.

By using social media to recruit participants for this research, it allowed for a larger audience of different backgrounds and ages and individuals from various sectors of the creative industries to be reached and invited to participate.

Data analysis

The closed ended questions from the quantitative method were analysed through a summary of statistics with the use of percentages and frequencies, which helped to identify patterns within the responses. This approach of collecting data allowed the study to gain a summary of the participants' perspectives on specific concerns and issues within this topic and provided an overview of the common opinions and views regarding the sexualisation of women in the creative industries.

Open ended questions allowed the study to collect qualitative data and organise the responses into key themes, with each response being analysed several times to ensure it was placed into the correct and relevant theme. Each theme category which was used aimed to capture each participants' experiences and opinions on the sexualisation of women within the creative industries. The use of qualitative data allowed the study to not only focus on participants' thoughts but also their own personal experiences and the context in which it occurred.

By using both qualitative and quantitative data, the study was able to conduct a combined analysis, meaning that it allowed for the comparison of all responses with both types of data, which provided a fuller understanding of the topic, demonstrating common themes throughout the findings as well as having personal experiences backing up the statistics.

Ethical considerations

There were several ethical considerations taken into account when conducting this survey. Before starting the survey, participants were informed within the caption of the social media post as well as in the survey introduction itself that all information which they provided would be used for research purposes only, and this included a consent option for the use of their information at the beginning and end of the survey. Participation was voluntary for all individuals that took part in this study, they were allowed to withdraw their responses at any time without having to provide a reason why.

To protect the privacy of all participants, all individuals remained anonymous when completing this survey. All questions within the survey were designed to minimise any potential distress for participants, and they were able to skip any questions which they found uncomfortable.

Limitations

Within this study there were multiple limitations which occurred, such as ensuring the number of participants was large enough to provide a full rounded range of responses from different backgrounds and careers. Secondly, the use of a survey limited the extent to which a participant could answer the questions, meaning potential responses were not as in depth compared to other ways such as interviews. Lastly, there were time frame limitations, as there was a limited period of time available to collect data from participants, and the schedule did not allow any additional time for more potential participants to take part.

Results - 1,000 words

Within this section, the data and findings collected from the Google Form survey, in which multiple individuals connected to the creative industries to some extent participated, are presented. The results present both quantitative and qualitative responses, as quantitative data has been converted into percentages and qualitative responses have been organised into different categories based on the themes of each question.

The aim of this section is to assess the participants' experiences and views regarding the sexualisation, pressure, objectification and empowerment for women within the industry. Recurring patterns and personal experiences highlighted within this section allows the results to demonstrate how women and other genders perceive and experience the sexualisation and objectification of women within the creative industry spaces.

Participant Demographic

During this survey, 26 participants answered the first 6 questions however after the 6th question the male participant did not answer any further questions but consented to the use of their answers for this research.

Of those who participated, 92.3% identified as female, 3.85% identified as non binary and 3.85% were male identifying, 53.85% were from the dance industry, 26.92% were from the performing arts industry, 7.96% were from the music industry, 7.69% from the creative writing industry and 3.85% from the TV and film industry.

Perceptions of Sexualisation within the Creative Industries

88.46% said yes and 11.54% said maybe, to the question "Do you think that women are still sexualised in the industry?". For the question "which area do you think women are sexualised the most?" 46.15% said Dance, 11.54% said Film and Television and 42.31% said Music and Music Videos. 57.69% of participants said that they have experienced themselves or another being sexualised within their profession whereas 42.31% said they have not.

When asked about their opinion on how women were portrayed within the creative industries in the past, 47.37% mentioned the male gaze, 36.84% mentioned the female appearance and 15.79% said about how women were presented to be weaker, as a follow up to that question the participants were asked whether they think there has been positive progress with how women are presented, the majority said yes (61.54%) where as 11.54% said no and 26.92% were conflicted with a full answer.

Experiences of Sexualisation and Pressure from the Industry

From this point of data collection, only 25 participants answered the remaining questions.

All 25 participants answered yes to whether they have noticed any pressure put on women to present themselves a certain way.

57.69% of participants said that they have experienced themselves or another being sexualised within their profession whereas 42.31% said they have not. The participants were asked to give an example of an experience they have either been through or witness, 30.77% said that they have received or witnessed inappropriate comments or questions asked to the female identifying creative, 30.77% mentioned about women being forced to wear sexualised clothing and costumes, 15.38% of the answers emphasise about the creatives physical appearance and 15.38% outlined that choreography has been given purposely to sexualise and individual, the male participant on the question answered that he no longer wanted to take part in this survey due to the questions potentially being directed towards women.

Empowerment and Objectification

20% answered yes, 60% answered maybe and 20% answered no to the question "Do you think sexualisation in the creative industries can be empowering or is it always objectifying?", which then followed with an open ended question asking what their reason for the answer was, the majority of 50% agreed that as long as the female identifying creative is in control then it is empowering, 20% emphasised that inappropriate comments can make empowerment into objectification due to it potentially being a cause of self consciousness, 15% said that all feminism is empowering and another 15% said that due to not being able to control how people view art it is very difficult to separate empowerment and objectification. To the question "have you ever been asked or encouraged to present yourself in a sexual way?" 56% said yes and 44% said no. 20% answered yes and 80% said no to whether they think that the line between empowerment and objectification is clear in the performance world.

The final question which was asked in this Google Form survey was “What would make a creative space feel more respectful and empowering for women?”, the majority of answers had the same theme of as long as the female identifying creative had control (33.33%), multiple participants answered with having more of a female creative team behind the scenes (22.22%), another theme which was highlighted was that dance teachers need to be more aware of comments they might be saying (11.11%) and then multiple participants were unsure on what could be done to make the creative space feel more empowering and respectful (27.78%).

Discussion - 2,000 words

The aim of this study was to collect and explore individual experiences and perceptions of sexualisation, empowerment and objectification of women within the creative industries from people who are connected to these industries. Findings from this study indicate that the music and dance industry are perceived as the most prevalent sectors in relation to sexualisation and the objectification of women, however these issues are still evident across other sectors within the creative industries. Many participants disclosed that they had experienced the feeling of pressure to present themselves in a hypersexual manner or meet specific beauty standards. However, the results also demonstrate that when women are in charge of creative choices then it can be empowering rather than objectifying.

Ongoing Sexualisation and Historical Continuity

A large majority of participants believe that women are still being sexualised within all areas of creative industries, with 23 participants in agreement, particularly in the dance and music sectors, due to how women are presented through clothing and choreographical choices. This observation aligns with the theory by Laura Mulvey (1975) “The Male Gaze Theory”, which argues that women are still perceived as objects and due to the majority agreeing that women still are.

Many responses to the question, “In your opinion, how were women portrayed in the creative industries in the past?” included the same views and opinions which are highlighted within “The Male Gaze Theory (Mulvey, 1975). Participants expressed their views that women were historically always portrayed as an object to please the view of a man or portrayed as weaker than the male identifying characters across various sectors of the industries which has led to women being portrayed and depicted in an overly sexual and submissive way, this coincides with the theory. However it is needed to be acknowledged that the “Male Gaze Theory” (Mulvey, 1975) has received a lot of criticism due to having little consideration for a wider diverse audience interpretations.

When participants were asked whether they believe that there has been positive progress for the representation of women within the creative industries, many agreed that some progression has been made. However, some noted that while women are increasingly getting casted into roles which depict strong characters, they are still being sexualised through clothing decisions for that character. Therefore, this highlights the perspective in which there appears to have been both progress and persistent limitations for the representation of women.

Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that the male gaze remains present throughout the creative industries, but is not as obvious to the naked eye. Objectification is becoming more subtle, rather than women being assigned weak roles in sexualised costumes, they are now seen more that women are given 'empowering roles' whilst still wearing objectifying costumes.

Pressure, Appearance and Internallisation

When asked whether the participants have noticed any pressure on women to present themselves in a certain way, all participants were in agreement that they have. This demonstrates that women within the creative industries are still being held to high standards regarding presenting themselves in a sexual way or held to unrealistic beauty standards still within the industries.

15 of the individuals who answered this survey reported that they had been encouraged to present themselves in a more sexualised manner while working within the industry. When the participants were asked "whether they have experienced themselves or another individual being sexualised within their profession?", the majority of participants answered that they had. Most responses mentioned the theme of clothing and costumes within their profession, with multiple answers concerning that they have to change their clothing or costume to make it sexier and one participant experiencing that the individual "won't make it in the industry" due to the individual refusing to wear sexualised clothing. These findings indicate that women have and still are being pressured to present themselves in a certain way to achieve a successful career within the industry. Consequently, some women may begin to internalise sexualisation themselves as they believe it is the only way to be successful.

The results suggest that women being repeatedly exposed to these expectations of being sexualised for professional success, may lead to women working within the creative industries beginning to internalise sexualisation. This is reflected in the responses from the survey, especially when the individuals responses referred to feeling pressured to wear certain clothing choices as it will be linked to the success of a photoshoot and how refusing to conform to the pressure meant that the individual would not have any professional success.

This establishes an unequal power dynamic between performer and production, meaning that women may feel that they have to comply to these creative decisions, and this potential pressure can contribute to the normalisation of sexualisation within the creative industries, which has made it difficult for those to differentiate between the choice of performer or the obligation being given for success.

Empowerment Versus Objectification

Participants were asked whether the sexualisation within the creative industries is always objectifying or can it be empowering, the results show that only 20% answered yes, whilst 60% answered maybe, indicating that there is no definite consensus for this question. This suggests that there is not a definite difference between objectification and empowerment as a viewer or creative within the industry.

Additionally, the participants were asked whether they believe that the line between empowerment and objectification is clear within the creative industry. A majority of 80% answered that in their opinion, that the line is not clear. This suggests that there still needs to be further work done within the industry to make the line more clear for the creatives and performers and for the viewers to differentiate the two.

As there is a lack of consensus with participants about whether sexualisation can be empowering or if it is just objectifying, it truly highlights the complexity of the debate within the creative industries. Some participants believe that there can be examples where sexualisation is empowering as it is used for sexual expression as long as it is self directed. Others argue that the history of the creative industry is rooted with objectification therefore there is no room for empowerment within the system. This also reflects the tension of debates around choice feminism, which frames that empowerment is the individual's choice and with little consideration for power inequalities.

Due to the uncertainty of the participant's responses, indicate that the line between objectification and empowerment is a large grey area. When the creative decisions are being imposed upon an individual rather than being negotiated, there is a greater chance that sexualisation will happen. In contrast, when individuals maintain control over creative choices regarding their appearance and how their bodies are represented, it may be seen as more empowering. This strengthens the need and critical importance of consent and respect within the creative industries.

Creating Respectful and Empowering Practice

To explore this further, participants were asked about how the industry could create a more respectful and empowering creative space for women within the industry; several themes emerged, forming a clear pattern within the responses. 33.33% of participants highlighted that the female identifying creatives should have more control over decisions regarding their appearance and clothing. These responses indicate that giving women more control over decisions will create a better environment and workplace for those due to feeling more comfortable and more a part of the decisions about themselves.

Another recurring pattern which was shown within the results, is the responses concerning having more female identifying creatives working within the productions, this indicates that the participants believe that the more women working behind the scenes being more in control of decisions meaning being more respectful towards female performers and creatives when it comes to decisions about their characters, clothing, appearance, for those projects.

Even though many participants answered this question with ideas and opinions on how to make the industry more empowering and respectful, 27.78% did respond and expressed that they felt unsure about what can be done to help with the issue, therefore suggesting that potentially nothing can be done to help female identifying creatives to feel more safe and respected and in control within these industry practices.

These findings highlight how women's bodies are valued within creative spaces, there is a strong pressure and expectations for women to conform to these sexualised standards when creative decisions are made. This not only affects an individual's mental health and well being but also contributes to the rise of appearance over talent within the industry. The normalisation of these standards within working practice creates exclusion for those that do not meet those standards.

The industry needs to address these issues and reflect on the responsibility that it has to protect women of all ages from any discriminatory measures due to appearance, and can therefore prevent any mental health issues that may arise. By the industry prioritising an increase of a female workforce and representation, it may start to challenge the norms which have been created over decades that contribute to the inequality and objectification of female identifying creatives, however the biggest question is, does the industry want to be challenged?

Limitations of Discussion

Limitations of this study arose due to the study relying on qualitative data, meaning many of the findings were the individual's opinions which may have been biased due to their own experiences or other external perspectives, rather than purely objective responses. This may have made the study more biased to one particular outcome. Another factor of this which potentially caused limitations, was the number of participants and areas of the creative industries represented, therefore will not have had a full rounded data analysis that has the equal information received from all genders, all ages, all industries and jobs.

As the majority of the participants which took part in this study were women, this may suggest that the responses are biased due to women being the focus of this study, and with a larger demographic of another gender, there might have been a large difference within the results which were collected.

Therefore future research could explore a larger demographic of participants and roles that they play within the creative industry, to allow future studies to have a wider span of responses and thoughts rather than a limited amount, as well as widening the participant search to various different locations rather than just one area, as this will give a larger chance to achieve getting different opinions and responses which will potentially give a less bias response to certain questions.

Additionally, by using an online survey format, it limited the chance for follow-up questions or to clarify responses, which may have affected how in depth the participants answered the questions. Potentially more qualitative methods which are interactive may have allowed the research to be more in depth and detailed responses with the use of interviews or focus groups. Despite the limitations which this study faced, it still provides insight into personal experiences within the creative industries and creates a foundation for future research into this topic.

Conclusion - 1,000 words

This dissertation explored how female identifying creatives are represented within the creative industries, with a strong focus on the sectors of dance, film and music. By exploring and analysing themes of objectification, sexualisation and

empowerment through academic theories and literature as well as primary research, the aim of this study was to understand how each concept is experienced, negotiated and interpreted. Rather than just focusing on one interpretation, this research looked to highlight the circumstantial nature in how identities and bodies of women are portrayed.

The literature review provided that historically women within the creative industries have been shaped by the power structures between genders. In theories such as Mulvey's Male Gaze (1975) it demonstrates that women frequently are positioned as objects for the visual pleasure, whilst men gain narratives of strength and authority. This pattern occurred frequently across the dance, music and film sectors of historical development, where a woman's sexuality and appearance were priority for a production rather than the autonomy. For further context, theories such as Objectification Theory (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997) and Bourdieu's Habitus Theory (1972), suggest how women are represented can become internalised, which influences both personal identity and industry practice.

Also highlighted within the literature review is how empowering narratives have emerged largely within the industries. The visibility of female identifying performers in larger and leading roles is increasing, as well as the increasing discussion from the public about the consent of the artists, which suggests that the positive evolution of representation is happening. However, some remaining research raises concerns that empowerment may just coexist rather than replacing the patterns of sexualisation and objectification already in place. This contradiction formed a large area for inquiry within the dissertation.

The primary research findings support multiple themes which are identified within the literature review. A large majority of participants believed that women have and continue to be sexualised within the industries, specifically within the music and dance sectors. Participants frequently discussed the pressures women face surrounding appearance, performance and costuming, suggesting that the sexualised representation expectations are continued to be embedded within creative environments. The findings suggest that sexualisation is still presented and interpreted as normal rather than an exception within the creative industries.

However, the results also disclosed that the views of participants were not definite, as many participants showed that they felt uncertainty when it came to being asked whether sexualisation can be empowering or if it is just objectification. The uncertain responses reflect the academic debate and reinforces how this topic cannot be understood through definitions. Instead the findings suggest that there is no definitive line between empowerment and objectification and are often intertwined, and are dependent on factors such as interpretation and intention.

One of the themes that was significant that emerged from this research was the importance of creative consent and agency. There was a large frequency of responses from participants about how women felt more empowered when the representation is involved within the decision making process especially when it comes to decisions about the narrative and appearance. In contrast, many suggested that when those of higher authority such as directors, producers and choreographers make the creative choices without consulting the individual involved,

then sexualisation was more likely to be experienced as objectifying or uncomfortable. This supports the existing critiques about choice based narratives, this argues that there can be no separation from the economic and institutional structure in which individual decisions are made.

Internalisation within the sexualisation norms were highlighted within this study. Bourdieu's study of habitus (1972) suggests that the repeated exposure to the expectations of the industry can potentially lead individuals to begin normalising these standards as well as reproducing them. This was evident in the responses given through the online survey, where from an early age, body aesthetics, visual presentation and appearance within training environments are heavily emphasised. The line between professional obligation and personal choice can be blurred in certain practices, which makes it difficult to identify whether creative decisions are self-directed or are long standing industry norms.

Participants were able to acknowledge signs of progression within the creative industries despite the ongoing difficulties and challenges. There is an increase of consent and continuing conversations about representation, and there is a rise of female identifying creatives working behind the scenes. However there is still uncertainty around the progression and whether it is uneven. This aligns with the contradictions of literature surrounding the progressive narratives and the constant reliance on sexualised visuals.

Multiple limitations must be acknowledged. The dominance of female participants may have limited the generalisability of the findings. By using an online survey, it restricted the opportunities to explore individual experiences further. Future research could benefit from expanding participants demographics and widening the discussion to interviews and focus groups. This would allow for further insight into representation and authority cross over.

In conclusion, this study suggests that the representation of women within the creative industries cannot be put into categories as either empowering or objectifying. Instead, the representation exists within the historical framework, structures of the industry and personal agency, as well as the audience's interpretation. Whilst there are evolving narratives and attention towards empowerment, sexualisation still rests as the prominent aspect of the creative industries. By combining perspectives of theoretical and lived experiences, this study contributes to the discussions and debates surrounding representation and highlights how important consent, context and power is when analysing the way women within the creative industries are portrayed.

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