

The Price of Sexy: Viewers' Perceptions of a Sexualized Versus Nonsexualized Facebook Profile Photograph

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Using an experimental methodology, the present study assessed adolescent girls' and young adult women's perceptions of a peer who presented herself on Facebook in either a sexualized or nonsexualized manner. Fifty-eight adolescent girls and 60 young adult women viewed a Facebook profile with either a sexualized profile photo or a nonsexualized profile photo and then evaluated the profile owner. Results indicated that the sexualized profile owner was considered less physically attractive, less socially attractive, and less competent to complete tasks. There was a main effect of age in the judgment of social attractiveness, with young adult women giving higher ratings than adolescent girls. There were no other main effects of age or interactions between age and condition. Findings suggest that using a sexualized profile photo on Facebook comes with relational costs for girls and women. Strategies for educating young people about new media use and sexualization are discussed.

Keywords: sexualization, objectification, media, social networking, social media

There is considerable cultural pressure on girls and women in the United States, beginning in childhood, to portray themselves as sexy (American Psychological Association [APA], 2007; Levin & Kilbourne, 2008; Zurbriggen & Roberts, 2013). Indeed, current standards for female beauty include a sexy ideal body (Murnen, 2011; Murnen & Smolak, 2013; Tiggemann, 2013). This standard is highly visible through traditional media such as TV and magazines (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008; Ward, 2003). Evidence suggests that sexualiza-

tion is also apparent in new media (Hall, West, & McIntyre, 2012). Complying with the sexy cultural mandate brings girls and women benefits, such as increased interest from boys and men, as well as costs, such as lower evaluations of competence (Murnen & Smolak, 2013). In the present study, we investigated a possible cost of self-sexualizing for adolescent girls and young adult women: negative evaluations by other girls and women. Specifically, we assessed adolescent girls' and young adult women's perceptions of a peer who self-sexualizes on Facebook. Because social networking is tremendously popular among young people (Boyd, 2007; Lenhart et al., 2011), it is especially important to investigate how sexualization operates through this cultural activity. Furthermore, our study makes a novel contribution to the research literature by examining self-sexualization through user-generated media and by including adolescent girls in addition to young adult women in our sample.

Youth Media Practices

Youth today are growing up in an unprecedented media environment. On average, young people, aged 8 to 18 years, spend 7.5 hr per day engaged with media (Rideout, Foehr, & Rob-

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erts, 2010). Given that they are typically multitasking and engaging with more than one type of media at once, the amount of content they are exposed to is close to 11 hr per day (10 hr, 45 min). In terms of computer use, 70% of U.S. youth go online in a typical day, and they spend almost 90 min per day using a computer outside of schoolwork (Rideout et al., 2010). Youth are on the forefront of engagement with new media such as social networking (Boyd, 2007). Eighty percent of U.S. adolescents use a social networking site, and Facebook is the most commonly used site (Digital Buzz, 2011; Lenhart et al., 2011). Social networking is the most popular computer activity among youth (Rideout et al., 2010). As Boyd (2007) observed, social networking sites “developed significant cultural resonance among American teens in a short period of time” and are “an important part of teen social life” (p. 1). In the present study, we examined sexualization via social networking among adolescent girls and young adult women specifically. As such, it is important to briefly describe the sociocultural pressures on girls and young women related to sexualization, which we turn to next.

Objectification Theory

Objectification theory argues that Western societies routinely sexually objectify the female body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Women’s bodies are scrutinized as objects for the pleasure and evaluation of others, specifically men (and boys). This objectification can occur within interpersonal and social encounters as well as individuals’ experiences with visual media. Women in particular racial/ethnic groups, including African American women, Latinas, and Asian American women, have historically been and are presently subjected to media representation in which they are hypersexualized, suggesting that these women may experience increased objectification (Craig, 2006; Mok, 1998; Rivadeneyra, 2011; Ward, Rivadeneyra, Thomas, Day, & Epstein, 2013). As a result of cultural pressure, many girls and women self-objectify, focusing on how their bodies *appear* rather than what they can *do*. Self-objectification is apparent in some girls as early as grade school. Girls as young as 11 report higher levels of body surveillance, body shame, rumination, and depres-

sion compared with their male peers (Grabe, Hyde, & Lindberg, 2007; Lindberg, Hyde, & McKinley, 2006); moreover, the effect sizes for these gender differences range from moderate to large (Grabe et al., 2007), suggesting that objectification is a gendered phenomenon.

Self-objectification has implications for girls’ and women’s mental health including a heightened risk for disordered eating, negative body esteem, and negative effects on psychological well-being (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Lindberg et al., 2006; McKinley, 1999; Muehlenkamp, Swanson, & Brausch, 2005; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). In addition, heightened self-objectification negatively impacts math performance (Fredrickson et al., 1998) and the availability of cognitive resources (Gay & Castano, 2010) in women. In short, there are a range of serious negative consequences associated with heightened self-objectification in girls and women (for in-depth reviews, see APA, 2007; Moradi & Huang, 2008).

Whereas there is a substantial body of research on the impact of sexual objectification on girls’ and women’s self-perceptions and psychological well-being, only recently has research started to investigate how depicting a girl or women in a sexualized manner in visual media impacts others’ perceptions of her. Existing evidence from primarily college students or adults (exceptions include Daniels, 2012; Daniels & Wartena, 2011) demonstrates that when women are depicted in traditional media, including mainly static photographs, in sexualized ways they are likely to be objectified by viewers and considered less competent, less determined, less intelligent, less agentic, having less self-respect, being less fully human, less moral, and being more sexually experienced (Cikara, Eberhardt, & Fiske, 2011; Daniels, 2012; Daniels & Wartena, 2011; Gurung & Chrouser, 2007; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Loughnan, Haslam, Murnane, Vaes, Reynolds, & Suitner, 2010). These negative perceptions for a sexualized presentation are extended to even young girls. Using an experimental methodology, Graff, Murnen, and Smolak (2012) found that evaluations by college students of photographs of a fifth-grade girl were more negative if she was depicted in an overtly sexualized manner (i.e., wearing a very short dress with a leopard-print cardigan, holding a purse)

compared with images in which the same girl was either portrayed in an ambiguously sexualized or childlike manner. The overtly sexualized girl was evaluated as less capable, less competent, less determined, less intelligent, less moral, and having less self-respect compared with the images in the other two experimental conditions.

To our knowledge, no research has yet experimentally investigated perceptions of women portrayed in a sexualized manner on social media. Because youth are heavy users of social media, it is important to investigate the phenomenon of sexualization within a medium that is highly relevant to their lives and that they, in fact, create themselves. Furthermore, the expansion of research to investigate how sexualized girls and women are perceived by others is especially necessary, as there is a strong cultural press on girls and young women to portray themselves in sexualized ways. Below, we discuss the existing research on sexualized media, both traditional and new media.

Sexualized Media

Sexual content in Western media today is pervasive (Kunkel, Eyal, Finnerty, Biely, & Donnerstein, 2005; Ward, 2003). In addition, there is widespread sexual objectification of women in most media forms including TV, music videos, music lyrics, movies, cartoons and animation, magazines, sports media, video/computer games, Internet, advertising, and commercial products (APA, 2007). Indeed, engagement with virtually any type of media is likely to involve objectified portrayals of women, which send the message to viewers that women are sexual objects (Ward & Harrison, 2005). Here, we discuss how consumption of traditional media is linked to stereotypical attitudes of women as sexual objects. We then discuss research on new media and sexualization.

Many studies have investigated relationships between traditional media, sexualization and objectification, and sexual attitudes among U.S. adolescents and young adults (Aubrey, 2006; Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007; Kistler & Lee, 2010; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006; Zurbriggen, Ramsey, & Jaworski, 2011; see Ward, 2003 for a review of media and sexual socialization). Ward and her colleagues have

been particularly active in this area of research, studying adolescents and college students. They have found that frequent and involved viewing of particular genres of media, for example, music videos, is associated with endorsing sexual stereotypes, and experimental exposure to media containing sexual stereotypes elicits endorsement of stereotyped attitudes (Ward, 2002; Ward, Epstein, Caruthers, & Merriwether, 2011). In a similar line of inquiry with Dutch adolescents (2007, 2009), Peter and Valkenburg found that exposure to sexually explicit material on the Internet (SEIM) is both a cause and an effect of stereotyped attitudes about women. Adolescents who use SEIM frequently are more likely to believe that women are sex objects. At the same time, believing more strongly that women are sex objects increases the use of SEIM.

In general, far less research has investigated the effects of new media, as compared with traditional media, on sexual behavior and attitudes about women (exceptions include Peter & Valkenburg, 2007, 2009). However, it is clear that a minority of young people are using social media for sexual purposes (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (NCPTUP) and Cosmogirl.com, 2008). In a survey of >1,000 young people aged 13 to 26 years, 11% of adolescents and 17% of young adults reported posting a sexually suggestive message to someone's social networking profile. A smaller percentage reported posting a nude or seminude picture/video of themselves on a social networking site or blog (4% adolescents, 7% of young adults). However, 38% of adolescents and 38% of young adults agreed somewhat or strongly that their friends have posted sexy photos/videos online. Further, 43% of adolescents and 38% of young adults agreed somewhat or strongly that there is pressure among people their age to do so. In sum, portraying oneself in a sexualized way through social networking sites is relatively uncommon, yet young people perceive it to be somewhat common among their friends, and they also report feeling pressure to engage in the practice themselves.

Content analyses of social networking profiles have shown similar patterns as self-report survey data in the prevalence of sexual content on adolescents' profiles. In one study, a minority of adolescents (17%) posted inappropriate

images, including nudity and underage drinking, on their social networking pages, and almost half contained sexual content including explicit or graphic language (44%) and explicit references to sexual activity (16%; Williams & Merten, 2008; for somewhat lower rates see Moreno, Parks, Zimmerman, Brito, & Christakis, 2009). However, there is some recent evidence that adolescents are becoming more conservative about their social networking content, for example, less likely to post swimsuit photos in 2009 compared with 2006 (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010).

To date, to our knowledge, there has only been one content analysis specifically investigating self-sexualization on social media. Hall et al. (2012) analyzed 24,000 MySpace.com profile photos belonging to females aged 18 to 49 years. Overall, rates of self-sexualization were fairly low, with revealing clothing being the most common practice (15% of sample). Displaying oneself in lingerie, underwear, or bra (2.25%), nudity (1.36%), and swimwear (1.31%) was fairly infrequent although these percentages represent 1,180 women. Of note, data were collected in the winter, and it is not clear whether time of year impacted the findings. Patterns of self-sexualization varied by age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, education level, and profile owner's body type, suggesting that particular groups of women are more likely than other groups to self-sexualize on social media. For example, patterns generally showed a decrease in self-sexualization with age, demonstrating that self-sexualization was more common among young women.

Only two studies were located that investigated social networking and attitudes about women. Both were focus group studies conducted with college students. In one study (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008), male and female college students reported that young women with sexualized photos on their social networking profiles get rewarded for those photos with a large number of comments complimenting their bodies, such as "you're hot." However, young women reported that these women are also at risk for criticism and judgment about perceived promiscuity from other young women for posting provocative photos. In a separate study (Moreno, Swanson, Royer, & Roberts, 2011), college men reported that sexual reference displays on their female

peers' social networking profiles increase their expectations for sexual activity with the profile owner, but decrease their interest in pursuing a dating relationship with her. Taken together, these studies suggest that sexualized content on young women's social networking profiles have the potential to attract male interest for sexual activity, but may decrease the likelihood of a romantic relationship and result in negative reactions from female peers.

Present Study

An experimental methodology was used in the present study in which a mock Facebook profile had either a sexualized or nonsexualized profile photo. The content of the profile was the same in both conditions. The purpose was to investigate possible costs that adolescent girls and young adult women might face from portraying themselves in a sexualized manner on a social networking site. Specifically, this study investigated adolescent girls' and young adult women's perceptions of a peer who self-sexualizes on Facebook.

It is clear that there is significant sociocultural pressure on girls and young adult women to portray themselves in sexualized ways in the United States. Indeed, the current beauty standard for women dictates a sexy ideal body. Accordingly, we expected participants to report that the young woman with the sexualized profile photo is more physically attractive compared with the young woman with the nonsexualized profile photo (Hypothesis 1). However, when women are depicted in a sexualized manner, their intelligence and competence are evaluated negatively by others. Thus, we expected participants to report that the young woman with the sexualized profile photo is less socially attractive, that is, they would not want to be friends with her, compared with the young woman with the nonsexualized profile (Hypothesis 2). In addition, we expected participants to report that the young woman with the sexualized profile photo is less competent at tasks compared with the young woman with the nonsexualized profile (Hypothesis 3). Finally, we investigated whether girls' evaluations differed from young adult women's evaluations. Whereas there is evidence that girls as young as 11 self-objectify (Grabe et al., 2007; Lindberg et al., 2006), it is not clear if girls would objec-

tify another girl or young woman. Therefore, we investigated a possible interaction between age and profile type (sexualized, nonsexualized) as an exploratory question.

Method

Participants

A convenience sample of 58 adolescent girls in middle or high school (aged 13–18 years, $M = 15.84$, $SD = 1.06$) and 60 young adult women no longer in high school (aged 17–25 years, $M = 21.60$, $SD = 2.17$) was used in the present study, which is part of a larger investigation assessing adolescent girls and young adult women's social networking practices. Sample sizes by age include the following: $n = 6$, 13–14-year-olds; $n = 34$, 15–16-year-olds; $n = 22$, 17–18-year-olds; $n = 16$, 19–20-year-olds; $n = 18$, 21–22-year-olds; $n = 16$, 23–24-year-olds; $n = 6$, 25-year-olds. The term adolescent girls will be used to refer to participants in middle or high school, whereas the term young adult women will be used to refer to participants who are no longer in high school. Level of education varied among the young adult women. Most reported that they attended some college including community college ($n = 42$; $n = 7$ graduated high school; $n = 7$ graduated from a 4-year college; $n = 4$ post-graduate study or degree).

Four additional participants were dropped from the sample. Two did not complete the survey ($n = 1$ in sexualized condition and $n = 1$ in nonsexualized condition) and two expressed suspicion about the authenticity of the profile, that is, asked if the woman depicted was a real person ($n = 1$ in sexualized condition and $n = 1$ in nonsexualized condition). Participants were primarily European American (70.3%), with 5.1% Latina, 1.7% Native American/American Indian, 1.7% African American/Black, 0.8% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 0.8% other ethnicity, and 19.5% reporting multiple ethnicities.

Participants were recruited through announcements at a youth-serving summer program in Central Oregon, in Psychology courses at a high school and two colleges located in Central Oregon, and through a posting on Craigslist.com. After the study procedure was explained to all participants, girls gave assent

and young adult women gave consent to participate. Participants below 18 years of age were required to obtain parental consent in advance of participation in the study. Participants were compensated with a gift certificate to a local movie theater for volunteering their time.

Materials

A mock Facebook profile was used. The fictional name of Amanda Johnson was assigned to the profile owner. Amanda was a 20-year-old European American woman attending a state university in Oregon. All of the information in the profile was the same in the two experimental conditions including the work and education, philosophy, arts and entertainment, interests and activities, and basic information areas of the information section of the profile. Only the profile photograph was manipulated between experimental conditions. In the nonsexualized condition, the profile photograph depicted a young woman dressed in jeans and a short-sleeved shirt with a scarf draped around her neck covering her chest. In the sexualized condition, participants viewed the same young woman in a low-cut red dress with a slit up the leg to the mid thigh and a visible garter belt.

To enhance the ecological validity of the study, public Facebook profiles of adolescent girls and young adult women were reviewed by a young adult female research assistant to determine the content of the profile. A similar approach for creating a mock social networking profile was used by Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel, and Shulman (2009). Popular musicians (e.g., Lady Gaga), books (e.g., *Twilight*), movies (e.g., *The Notebook*), and TV programs (e.g., *Project Runway*) were selected. The same approach was applied to favorite quotations in the philosophy section (e.g., a quote from Gandhi), and the interests and activities section (e.g., music and the outdoors). Finally, the photographs were not staged for the study, but were actual photographs of a young woman, known to a research assistant, who volunteered their use for the present study. The nonsexualized profile photograph was her senior class photograph and the sexualized photograph was her senior prom photograph.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions ($n = 59$ sexualized; $n = 59$ nonsexualized). In both conditions, participants were tested individually in a private room on a college campus. They were seated at a computer screen and shown the information section of Amanda Johnson's Facebook profile that displayed her profile photo in the upper left corner of the screen. They were told, "I'm going to show you someone else's Facebook page and have you respond to some questions. The person is Amanda Johnson . . . You can circle the responses that best match your opinions about this person." The interviewer left the room for the participant to review the profile page and complete a paper survey.

Measures

Perceptions of profile owner. To assess perceptions about the woman depicted in the Facebook profile, participants completed the Interpersonal Attraction Scale (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). There are three subscales including physical attraction ($\alpha = .75$; e.g., "I think she is quite pretty"), social attraction ($\alpha = .71$; e.g., "I think she could be a friend of mine"), and task attraction ($\alpha = .81$; e.g., "I have confidence in her ability to get the job done"). To improve intuitive understanding of the constructs being measured, we will refer to these constructs as physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, and task competence. Each subscale contains five items on a 7-point Likert-type scale from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (7). Subscale items were averaged into a composite score. Higher scores indicate higher perceptions of attractiveness and competence.

Facebook usage. Participants were asked to report their Facebook usage with three items. They were asked about the frequency of their use with the item "how many days during a typical week do you log-on to Facebook?" and the intensity of their use with two items including "how many minutes per day do you spend on Facebook on weekdays" and "how many minutes per day do you spend on Facebook on weekend days." All three items were presented

in an open-ended format so that participants typed in their responses.

Demographics. Participants were asked to report their age, ethnicity, whether they were a high school student or not, and their level of education.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Participants reported logging on to Facebook most days of the week ($M = 5.67$, $SD = 1.83$). During the week, they averaged almost an hour on Facebook per day ($M = 51.35$ min, $SD = 56.37$, range 1–360 min). During the weekend, they averaged slightly more time on Facebook ($M = 58.81$ min, $SD = 62.54$, range 0–300 min). Regular Facebook users spend more time on Facebook than less regular users. Participants who reported logging on to Facebook 6 or 7 days a week ($n = 81$) averaged 62.99 weekday min ($SD = 62.14$) and 71.20 weekend min ($SD = 68.49$) on Facebook compared with participants who reported logging on to Facebook 5 or fewer days a week ($n = 36$) who averaged 25.15 weekday min ($SD = 26.21$) and 30.92 weekend min ($SD = 32.98$) on Facebook.

Adolescent girls ($M = 5.31$ days, $SD = 2.00$) logged onto Facebook less often than young adult women ($M = 6.02$ days, $SD = 1.59$), $t(108.65) = -2.12$, $p = .036$. They did not differ on the number of minutes spent on Facebook, weekday $t(115) = -0.20$, $p = .840$, and weekend $t(115) = .36$, $p = .723$. There were no differences between experimental conditions in the frequency of logging on to Facebook, $t(116) = -0.55$, $p = .582$, or the number of minutes spent on Facebook, weekday $t(115) = 0.36$, $p = .723$, and weekend $t(101.62) = -1.43$, $p = .155$.

Social attractiveness was positively correlated with physical attractiveness, $r(116) = .54$, $p < .001$, and task competence, $r(116) = .62$, $p < .001$. Physical attractiveness was positively correlated with task competence, $r(116) = .54$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis Testing

To test age effects and each of three hypotheses, three two-way ANOVAs were conducted. Age (adolescent girls, young adult women) and

profile type (sexualized, nonsexualized) were the independent variables. See Table 1 for means and standard deviations for the three dependent variables by age and condition. For Hypothesis 1 that the young woman with the sexualized profile photo is more physically attractive compared with the young woman with the nonsexualized profile photo, there was a main effect of profile type, $F(1, 114) = 18.11$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .14. Unexpectedly, participants who viewed the nonsexualized profile ($M = 5.40$, $SD = .69$) rated it higher in physical attractiveness compared with the sexualized profile ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.14$). There was no main effect of age, $F(1, 114) = 3.27$, $p = .073$, partial eta squared = .03. There was not a significant interaction of profile type and age on physical attractiveness, $F(1, 114) = .22$, $p = .638$, partial eta squared < .01.

For Hypothesis 2 that the young woman with the sexualized profile photo is less socially attractive compared with the young woman with the nonsexualized profile, there was a main effect of profile type, $F(1, 114) = 12.75$, $p = .001$, partial eta squared = .10. As expected, participants who viewed the nonsexualized profile ($M = 4.72$, $SD = .93$) rated it higher in social attractiveness compared with the sexualized profile ($M = 4.14$, $SD = .90$). There was also a main effect of age, $F(1, 114) = 5.59$, $p = .020$, partial eta squared = .05. Young adult women ($M = 4.62$, $SD = .84$) reported higher social attractiveness compared with adolescent girls ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.03$). There was not a

significant interaction of profile type and age on social attractiveness, $F(1, 114) = .16$, $p = .689$, partial eta squared < .01.

For Hypothesis 3 that the young woman with the sexualized profile photo is less competent at tasks compared with the young woman with the nonsexualized profile, there was a main effect of profile type, $F(1, 114) = 38.97$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .26. As expected, participants who viewed the nonsexualized profile ($M = 4.90$, $SD = .84$) rated it higher in task competence compared with the sexualized profile ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .74$). There was no main effect of age, $F(1, 114) = .72$, $p = .399$, partial eta squared = .01. There was not a significant interaction of profile type and age on task competence, $F(1, 114) = .07$, $p = .799$, partial eta squared < .01.

Discussion

Past research has found that the sexualization of girls and women negatively affects others' perceptions of their competence, morality, sexual behavior, humanity, and attributions of agency and mental state (Cikara et al., 2011; Daniels, 2012; Daniels & Wartena, 2011; Glick, Larsen, Johnson, & Branstiter, 2005; Graff et al., 2012; Gurung & Chrouser, 2007; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Loughnan et al., 2010). Results of the present study are consistent with existing findings and extend this line of inquiry by examining sexualization in a user-generated new media form. For a young woman, using a sexualized photo in her Facebook profile was related to negative evaluations of her physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, and task competence by female peers. The effect sizes for these findings ranged from moderate for social attractiveness (partial eta squared = .10) and physical attractiveness (partial eta squared = .14) to large for task competence (partial eta squared = .26; Cohen, 1992), indicating that the peer criticism is generally strong and especially pronounced for task competence. Thus, using a sexualized Facebook profile clearly comes with relational costs for girls and women.

We did not find an age by profile type interaction effect. Existing research demonstrates that self-objectification begins as early as 11 for some girls (Grabe et al., 2007; Lindberg et al., 2006). Thus, girls are already monitoring and

Table 1
Means for Physical Attractiveness, Social Attractiveness, and Task Competence by Condition and Age

	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
	Sexualized photo	Nonsexualized photo
Physical attractiveness	4.68 (1.14)	5.40 (0.69)
Social attractiveness	4.14 (0.90)	4.72 (0.93)
Task competence	3.98 (0.74)	4.90 (0.84)
	Adolescent girls	Young adult women
Physical attractiveness	4.89 (0.98)	5.18 (1.01)
Social attractiveness	4.24 (1.03)	4.62 (0.84)
Task competence	4.52 (1.01)	4.36 (0.81)

scrutinizing their own bodies in grade school. It appears that by high school, girls also objectify their peers just as adult women do (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005). Indeed, adolescent girls may be especially attuned to sexualized self-presentations because the body and sexuality are both highly salient during puberty. Further, traditional gender scripts concerning dating dictate that “good girls” constrain their sexuality (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Rose & Frieze, 1993), and there is a clear emphasis in the United States on sexual abstinence for adolescent girls in particular (Valenti, 2010). Accordingly, it is reasonable that adolescent girls would negatively evaluate a female peer with a sexualized self-presentation on Facebook.

Forming negative attitudes about another person based on a sexualized presentation is a form of objectification because the attitudes are based solely on the individual’s body. It is reasonable to expect that this objectification of a sexualized other via negative evaluations could translate into negative behavior directed at her. Jean Kilbourne, media scholar, documentary filmmaker, and social activist, has long linked the objectification of women in advertising and mass media to sexual violence. In a series of films she produced from 1979 through 2010, called *Killing Us Softly*, Kilbourne identified extensive examples of advertisements objectifying women and overtly implying violence against them including, for example, an advertisement for jeans implying gang rape. While acknowledging that causes of violence against women are multifaceted, Kilbourne argues that turning a woman into an object is the first step in dehumanizing her and ultimately committing violence against her (Kilbourne & Jhally, 2010). Laboratory research using the implicit association task supports this contention. Rudman and Mescher (2012) found that automatically objectifying women by associating them with objects, tools, and things was positively correlated with men’s self-reported rape proclivity (attitudinal measure). More recently, Gervais, DiLillo, & McChargue (2014) found that more sexual objectification of women was associated with more self-reported drinking and more self-reported sexual violence (behavioral measure) among college men. In addition, they found that sexual objectification mediated the association between heavy drinking and sexual aggression. These two studies are the only ones

to our knowledge that have examined the relationship between the objectification of women and sexual violence.

The argument that objectification and dehumanization are necessary precursors to violence (including mass violence) has also been made more broadly (Bandura, 1999; Staub, 1989; Zurbriegen, 2013). As the APA Task Force Report (2007) demonstrated, the objectification of girls and women is pervasive in mainstream U.S. media. As a result, consumers of media are regularly exposed to examples of the objectification of girls and women that could be related, in part, to violence against women. We are not suggesting that posting a sexualized profile photo on Facebook would directly prompt an act of violence against a woman. However, we have demonstrated that using a sexualized profile photo prompts viewers to objectify the female profile owner, which may be a precursor to negative behavior directed at her including public indictment of the profile owner’s reputation, social exclusion, and hurtful gossip via online or in-person behavior. In its extreme form, this negative behavior could be violence. Future research should investigate such possible behavioral consequences of objectification.

Despite negative consequences for presenting oneself in a sexualized manner, it is understandable that adolescent girls and young adult women may do so given the significant socio-cultural pressure on girls and women to be sexy. As a result, adolescent girls and young adult women are in a no-win situation. If they enact a sexy presentation, they risk negative evaluations of their competence and a range of other characteristics by both male and female peers. If they do not comply with the sexy mandate, they may lose out on the social rewards associated with sexiness including attention from boys and men. Indeed, given the powerful socialization of sexiness in contemporary girlhood (Levin & Kilbourne, 2008), resisting the press to self-sexualize might require cognitive and neurological development that occurs in later adolescence and young adulthood including the use of both abstract and critical thinking skills (Fischer & Pruyne, 2003; Keating, 2004). Resistance likely entails the ability to critically assess the sociocultural landscape promoting sexualization, gauge the personal costs and long-term consequences of self-sexualizing, and perhaps

understand the costs of sexualization to girls and women as a group.

The development of critical thinking skills, however, requires, in part, an educational environment that emphasizes critical thinking skill development; unfortunately, such an environment is not typical in U.S. secondary schools (Keating, 2004; Marin & Halpern, 2011; Sternberg & Spear-Swerling, 1996). Thus, adolescent girls are not well-positioned cognitively to resist socialization pressure to be sexy because necessary cognitive capabilities are not fully matured until later in early adulthood. In addition, experience in higher education might be required to cultivate these cognitive skills, as they are not generally explicitly taught at the secondary level. Further, exposure to women's or gender studies curriculum, which is typically offered at the postsecondary level, might be necessary to develop critical thinking skills about gender in order to critique gender socialization practices, gender stereotypes, and sexism as well as to promote feminist activism (Stake, 2007; Stake & Hoffman, 2000, 2001); such critical analysis could be essential to resisting pressure to engage in sexual objectification. In the present study, we did not find a difference between high school girls and young adult women in their judgments of the sexualized versus nonsexualized profiles. Of note, however, only 11 out of 60 of the young adult participants had completed college. In addition, we did not ask participants to report their major. It was, therefore, not possible for us to investigate whether exposure to particular college curricula was related to attitudes. Future research should address this limitation.

Despite the fact that youth may not currently gain important higher-level cognitive skills in U.S. secondary schools (American Diploma Project, 2004), high schools as well as colleges and universities could become an ideal venue for discussing new media use, like social networking, and sexual objectification with young people. Using a media form that young people are highly engaged with might be an especially useful entry point into critically discussing issues related to gender. In a study with middle school and college students, Gruber and Boreen (2003) used a popular children's book, Roald Dahl's *The Witches* (1983), as a backdrop to teach critical thinking about gender issues, stereotyping, and the impact of popular culture on

students' lives. Furthermore, Marin and Halpern (2011) studied specifically how educators can cultivate critical thinking skills most effectively through an explicit form of instruction. In addition, many U.S. high schools now offer media literacy curricula (Hobbs, 2005; Kubey, 2004). Incorporating a specific focus on sexualization would be another avenue for equipping girls and young adult women with tools to resist the pressure to self-sexualize and educating both female and male youth about the significant problems with objectifying girls and women (APA, 2007).

As in all studies, there are limitations to our findings. We did not include a manipulation check to assess whether participants believed "Amanda Johnson" was a real person. It is possible that ratings could have been influenced by believing Amanda was a real versus made-up person. However, profile information was created based on actual Facebook profiles of adolescent girls and young adult women, and the photos were real senior class and prom photos posted on Facebook by an adolescent girl. Also, only two participants spontaneously expressed any suspicion about the profile (data from these participants were not included in analyses). Therefore, we believe the majority of participants did not question the authenticity of the mock profiles.

We did not include boys and young adult men in the present study because we were interested in first establishing attitudes of girls and young adult women toward each other in response to behavior that the culture promotes as part of what it means to be female. We recognize, however, the importance of assessing boys' and men's attitudes toward girls and women who portray themselves in a sexualized manner online, and we are conducting research including boys and men. In addition, we recommend that future research assess other self-sexualizing practices on social networking profiles such as sexualized status updates and wall posts.

We recognize the need for future research to include a more diverse sample. Hall et al. (2012) found that patterns of self-sexualization vary by social group membership such as ethnicity/race, suggesting the need for inclusion of a wide range of girls and women in future studies. Indeed, we echo the call of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007) for research to "explore differences in presen-

tation of sexualized images and effects of these images on girls of color; lesbian, bisexual, questioning, and transgendered girls; girls of different cultures and ethnicities; girls of different religions; girls with disabilities; and girls from all socioeconomic groups” (p. 42). Finally, we also suggest that age be examined more thoroughly, for example, including younger preadolescent girls.

Conclusion

In the present study, we found that using a sexualized Facebook profile clearly comes with relational costs for girls and women. Adolescent girls and young adult women who post sexualized profile photos will likely be judged by their female peers as being less physically and socially attractive and as less competent. Given the widespread engagement in social networking among young people in the United States, it is essential that educators, parents, and adults working with youth help young people develop critical and abstract thinking skills to consider carefully how they portray themselves in new media. Further, young people need specific educational curricula about the various social factors, for example, gender stereotypes prioritizing sexiness for girls and women, related to the phenomenon of sexual objectification more broadly. Discussing structural factors related to sexualization with young people is important because it is shortsighted and unfair to simply instruct adolescent girls as individuals to avoid using sexualized profile photos. Such an approach does nothing to address the underlying problematic issue of the widespread sexualization of girls and women in our culture. *That* is the problem that must be corrected.

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