Selfie-objectification: Does Taking One's Own Picture Increase Levels of State Self-Objectification Among College Females?

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Introduction & Aims

- Objectification theory posits that women who are objectified perceive themselves from a third-person perspective, as an object to be evaluated based on external, rather than internal, traits
- This tendency, called self-objectification (SO), is associated with decreased cognitive fluency, increased disordered eating and body monitoring, and lower well-being (Fredrickson et al., 1998)
- Body-objectifying situations can increase self-objectification (SO) (Daniels, 2009; Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; Gay & Castano, 2010; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008)
- With the invention of smartphones, selfie taking has increased, which poses the risk that a person may come to adopt an externalized view of him or herself
- Although research has found that posting photos (including selfies) on social media is associated with SO (Meier & Gray, 2013), it is unclear whether the act of taking a selfie is objectifying

Question: Does taking a selfie, especially if one is allowed to take an unlimited number of selfies, lead to higher levels of self-objectification than either having a photo taken or no photo taken?

Method (Participants)

107 female college students:

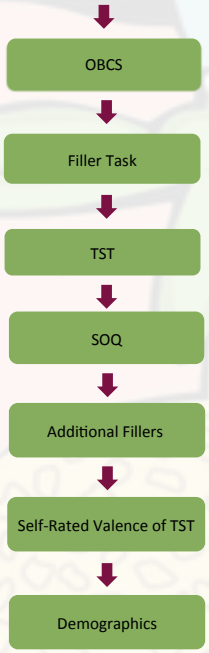
- Mean age: 19.21 (*SD*= 1.07)
- Primarily White/Caucasian (63.8%), Multiple Races (14.3%), Asian (9.5%), Latino or Hispanic (8.6%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (2.9%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (1%)

http://tinyurl.com/APS2017selfie

Method (Procedure)

A cover story was used to lead participants to believe that they were participating in a study about impression formation. At the beginning of the study, they were asked to rate a photo of a fictitious participant and, if they were randomly assigned to one of the selfie or photo conditions, they were told to choose a photo that they believed would be viewed by a subsequent participant as part of an impression formation task

Selfie Limited (N=27)	Selfie Unlimited (N=25)	Photo Taken (N=22)	No Photo (N=30)
• Takes 5 selfies • Chooses one to "show to next participant"	• Takes unlimited number of selfies (*M*=5.28, *SD*= 4.27) • Chooses one to "show to next participant"	• Experimenter takes 5 photos of participant • Participant chooses one to "show to next participant"	• No photos taken



Method (Measures)

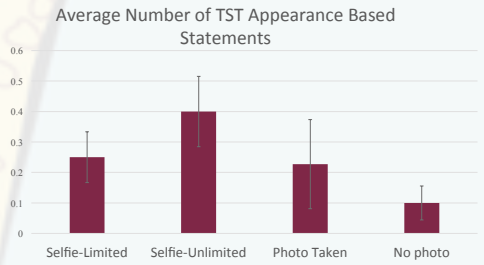
Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS; McKinley & Hyde, 1996): This is a self-report measure of body consciousness with 24 items rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) yielding three subscales, where higher scores reflect greater body consciousness:

- Body surveillance (e.g., "during the day, I think about how I look many times")
- Body shame (e.g., "when I am not the size I think I should be, I feel ashamed")
- Appearance control beliefs (e.g., "I can weigh what I'm supposed to when I try hard enough")

Ten Statement Test (TST; Kuhn & McPartland, 1954): This measure is a modified version of the Twenty Statement Test, in which participants complete 10 "I am..._____" statements. Each statement was independently coded (kappa = .73) by three raters, who were blind to condition and study hypotheses, into one of 6 categories: 1) body shape/size, 2) other physical appearance, 3) physical competence, 4) traits/abilities, 5) states/emotions, and 6) uncodable. Additionally, each statement was also coded for valence (positive, negative or neutral). Participants were also asked to rate each of the 10 statements they produced on valence

Self-Objectification Questionnaire (SOQ; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998): This was a modified version of the SOQ, that asked participants to rank 10 attributes of their physical self-concept *in that moment*, in terms of importance on a 9-point scale (*0=least to 9=most*). The difference between 5 appearance-based (e.g., attractiveness) responses and 5 competence-based (e.g., strength) responses were computed with higher scores reflecting higher levels of trait self-objectification

Results



Results

- No differences across conditions in trait self-objectification or demographics were found, suggesting that random assignment was successful
- Overall self-objectification levels were low, but a marginal effect of condition on appearance-based statements was found, $F(3, 100)= 1.61$, $p=.192$
- Planned comparisons revealed that women in the selfie unlimited condition made significantly more appearance-based statements than those in the no photo condition, $t(100)= 2.18$ $p=.03$
  - None of the other planned comparisons were significant
- No significant differences were found across conditions for number of body-shape statements or for valence (coded or self-report) of either other physical appearance or body shape/size statements
- Interestingly, there was only moderate agreement in self-reported valence ratings and consensus valence ratings made by coders (average kappa = .6)

Conclusion

- This study represents one of the first attempts to understand the effects of taking a selfie on levels of self-objectification
- The results are in accordance with past research showing that greater amounts of time spent specifically on photo activity is associated with self-objectifying thoughts (Meier & Gray, 2013)
- Given the finding of higher appearance-based statements in the unlimited selfie condition, there may be a relationship between the number of selfies taken and levels of self-objectification

Future Research

- Future research should extend this work to evaluate conditions that amplify objectification, especially in the real-world context of selfies posted in social media
- The moderate level of agreement between participants' self-ratings of valence and those made by blind coders suggests that additional research focusing on the validity of the TST (specifically for ratings of valence) would be beneficial
- Future research should extend this work to evaluate the use of filters and picture-editing tools