

Effects of Body Shape on Literal Objectification: When Ideal May be Less Than Ideal

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Introduction

- Objectification, adopting an externalized view of oneself or another, is a ubiquitous process primarily affecting women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997)
- Studies have extensively focused on self-objectification and what is emphasized (i.e., the body), with recent studies exploring objectification of others and what is absent (i.e., personhood; Loughnan & Vaes, 2017)
- Focusing on women's physical appearance predicts literal objectification, including reduced perceptions of human traits such as warmth, competence (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009), and morality (Heflick et al., 2011)
- Whether these effects of other-objectification apply equally to all women is unclear. Holland and Haslam (2013) found that thin vs. overweight women were ascribed less mind, moral agency and patience, and elicited more of the objectifying gaze; Gervais et al. (2012), however, found that women with both average and ideal body types, were seen as fungible (i.e., viewed as interchangeable with similar others), an indicator of literal objectification
- A range of objectifying experiences, including exposure to objectifying words (Roberts & Gettman, 2004; Calogero & Pina, 2011) has been shown to induce a state of self-objectification; whether these priming effects will extend to literal objectification of others is an open question

Research Question: Does priming affect: (1) self-objectification, (2) literal objectification of others and does this vary as a function of body shape?

Method

Participants

- 71 undergraduate women ($M_{age} = 19.23$) from a small liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest
- Primarily White (73.1%), Asian/Pacific Islander (9.9%), Hispanic (8.5%), Multiple Ethnicity (8.5%)
- In an effort to avoid demand effects, participants were told they were engaging in a multi-part study assessing verbal and visual processing, and impressions of self and others

Method

Experimental Manipulation

Scrambled Sentence Test (SST; Roberts & Gettman, 2004)

- Created 20 grammatically correct four-word sentences from five words presented in a scrambled order (e.g., *were horse legs her* _____ ← *target word*)
- Three priming conditions:
 - self-objectification (e.g., target word = *slender*)
 - body competence (e.g., *strong*)
 - control (e.g., *crossed*)

Measures

Ten Statements Test (TST; Kuhn & McPartland, 1954)

- Modified version of the Twenty Statements Test, in which participants completed 10 "I am... _____" statements
- Independently coded ($\kappa = .90$) by three naive coders as either: (1) body shape/size, (2) other physical appearance, (3) physical competence, or (4) uncodable
- Total number of objectifying (category 1 & 2) and physical competence (category 3) statements were used in priming analyses

Literal Objectification Questionnaire (LOQ; Goldenberg et al., 2011; Loughnan et al. (2017)

- 9 items rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all descriptive* to 7 = *extremely descriptive*):
 - 3 items assessed warmth ($\alpha = .78$; e.g., *unlikeable*)
 - 3 items assessed competence ($\alpha = .82$; e.g., *skilled*)
 - 3 items assessed honesty ($\alpha = .78$; *trustworthy*)
- 1 item rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all willing* to 7 = *totally willing*) assessed the desire to collaborate on a group project with the women depicted in the image

Photos

- Participants completed the LOQ in reference to three women, whose photos were selected from 30 previously viewed images (Gervais et al., 2013)

Low-ideal



Average



High-ideal

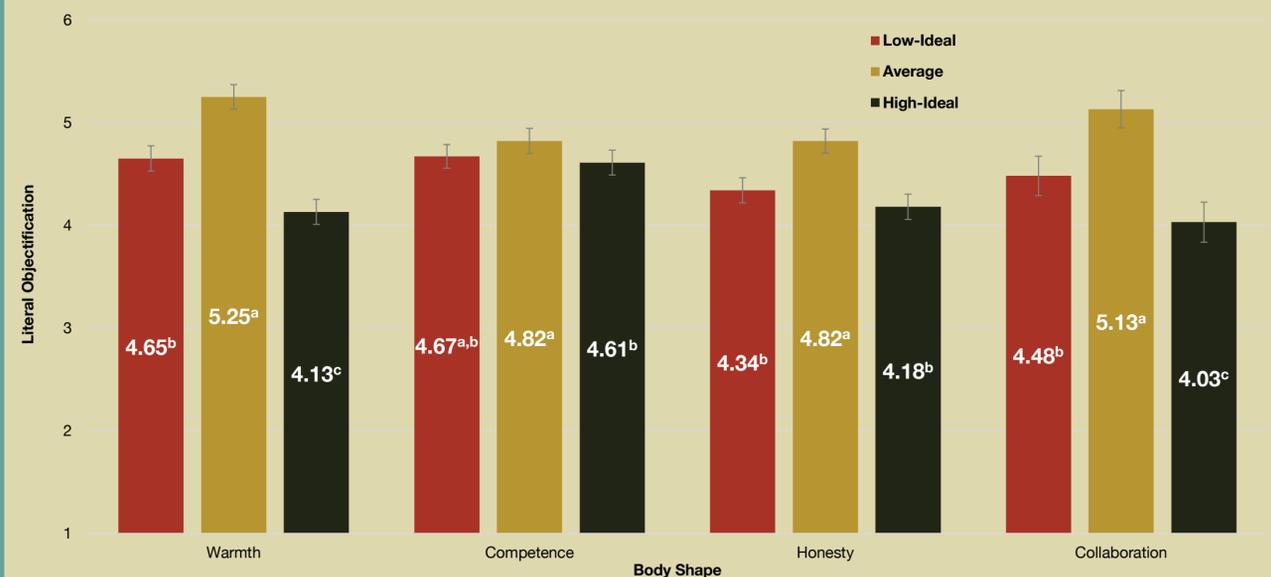


Procedure

- Completed the SST
- Viewed 30 photos of 10 college-aged women via eye-tracking software; images depicted low, average, and high-ideal body shapes (Gervais et al., 2013)
- Completed the TST, LOQ and demographic survey

Results

- There were no differences across priming conditions in either the number of self-objectifying, $F(2,68) = 0.53$, $p = .59$, or body competence, $F(2,68) = 2.06$, $p = .14$ statements
- Two-way (priming \times body type) interactions and priming main effects were not significant
- Across all measures of literal objectification, the high-ideal woman was objectified to a greater extent than the average woman. The low-ideal image was rated similarly to the average body type on competence and higher than the high-ideal image on warmth and collaboration. Honesty ratings did not differ between the low-ideal and high-ideal images



Note. Means with differing superscripts are significantly different ($p < .05$) based on Fisher's LSD post hoc paired comparisons. Significant main effects of body type for warmth, $F(2, 168) = 38.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .31$, honesty, $F(2,168) = 16.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$, and collaboration, $F(2,168) = 21.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$ were found. Marginally significant main effects of body type for competence, $F(2,168) = 2.86$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$ were found.

Conclusion

- Although investigators (Roberts & Gettman, 2004; Calogero & Pina, 2011) previously found that objectifying words can elicit self-objectification, our data did not support this. This failure to replicate was likely due to methodological differences. Measuring gaze behavior while participants viewed 30 photos of women likely interfered with priming effects on both self and literal objectification. We are currently collecting data to explore the roles that delays and viewing images of women might have on priming of self and literal objectification
- Our results were consistent with prior research indicating that body shape (specifically thinness) influences levels of literal objectification (Holland & Haslam, 2013). However, our results were at odds with Gervais et al. (2012) who found that both average and ideal body types were perceived as equally fungible. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that fungibility and objectification may be related, but distinct facets of literal objectification
- Future research should investigate potential behavioral manifestations of literal objectification and factors that may moderate these effects



Poster Available Online

<https://tinyurl.com/APS2018objectification>