Introduction & Aims

- Women are too often valued for their beauty and have shifted their focus from character to body improvement (Brumburg, 1998).
- Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) posits that sexual objectification socializes females to evaluate themselves based on looks.
- Self-objectification is the attempt to control this external perception by monitoring one’s physical appearance. Women are more likely to think “How do I look?” than “What am I capable of?”
- Research suggests body-objectifying situations (i.e., trying on a swimsuit) and words can prime self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008).
- Despite recent attempts of all campaigns to challenge the thin ideal by featuring “real” women, the effects of positive messaging are unclear (Cagle et al., 2006; Herbosa & Thompson, 2006).

Method

- This two-part study examines the priming effects of positive and negative body-focused video makeup ads on women’s levels of self-objectification (SO).

Research Question 1:
- Will priming of SO statements, state-related positive and negative emotions, and self-reported body-surveillance vary as a function of media exposure?
  - 1. Negative body-focused media will prime more SO statements than positive media.
  - 2. Those in the negative body-focused media condition report fewer positive emotions and more negative emotions in comparison to participants in the positive condition.
  - 3. Participants exposed to self-focused negative ads will report higher levels of body surveillance relative to those viewing positive advertisements (Study 2 only).

Research Question 2:
- Will these effects be moderated by trait self-objectification (TSo)—the extent to which appearance-based attributes dominate physical self-concepts?
  - 1. The priming effects will be stronger for those with high levels of TSo.

Results

- Study 1
  - Positive PANAS (P) = .79, 19.51 (1.63), p < .05, Post hoc analyses revealed that high self-objectifiers reported significantly fewer TA statements when primed by self-objectifying media relative to those who viewed positive or neutral ads.
  - Trait self-objectification (TSo) (soldiers, Roberts, 1997) was manipulated and measured with high and low conditions, with significant main effects for those high on TSo only, F(3, 40) = 3.38, p < .06.

- Study 2
  - Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson et al., 1988b) on 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) to prime the higher levels of body surveillance relative to those viewing positive advertisements (Study 2 only).

Conclusions

- Aligned with prior findings that objectifying situations can prime for SSo (Fredrickson et al., 1998), brief exposure to objectifying makeup ads shifted participants’ focus from a broader concept of self (e.g., traits/abilities, physical competence) to a more body-objectified view. Women with a tendency to self-objectify were especially vulnerable to the negative effects of such exposure. In contrast to past research (Roberts & Gettman, 2004), no effects were found for levels of negative emotions. Possibly, participants’ regular interactions with objectifying media dampened this effect.
- Moderated multiple regressions were used to determine whether TSo moderated the priming effects of makeup ads. TSo significantly influenced the relationship between negative body-focused media and its priming effects for body shape statements, χ2(1) = 13.17, p = .000, suggesting that TSo was a significant moderator of priming effects for shape and appearance. Inspection of these interactions revealed that negative body-focused ads primed self-objectifying statements only for those high on TSo (see Figures 2 and 3).
- Unexpectedly, there were no significant differences across conditions for positive or negative affect or for body-surveillance scores.