The woman in the (rearview) mirror: Viewers' attitudes toward objectified car selfies of Black and White women

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Openness and Transparency

Availability of data and material: Participants were not informed in the consent process that aggregated data would be shared. Therefore, data are not available to interested researchers except for verification purposes. Similarly, permissions to use photos for experimental stimuli were granted for the present study only. Therefore, photos are not available to interested researchers.

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Abstract

Using an experimental methodology, the present study investigated the effect of objectified versus non-objectified social media photos of Black and White young women on young Black and White people's attitudes. An aim of the study was to examine whether Black women are penalized for an objectified self-presentation on social media in similar ways as White women. Another aim of the study was to investigate whether the race of the viewer affects attitudes toward targets. Young adults in the U.S. ($n = 402$) viewed mock Facebook profiles belonging to Black and White women with either an objectified or non-objectified profile photo. They then rated the women's morality, warmth, competence, and sexual attractiveness. They also reported how much they liked the profiles. Findings indicate that Black women were not penalized significantly more than White women for an objectified self-presentation on social media. The race of the viewer did not affect perceptions. These results contribute to the small body of research documenting the impact of objectification on Black women.

Keywords: objectification, sexualization, social media, media, race, gender

Public significance statement

- Young Black and White women are evaluated less positively by other young people for an objectified as compared to a non-objectified self-presentation on social media. The Black woman was not penalized more than the White woman for an objectified self-presentation.

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Black and White women

A growing body of research has found that sexually objectifying media portrayals of women affect viewers' attributions of objectified individuals (for review, see Ward, 2016). Objectified women are typically perceived more negatively (e.g., less competent, less warm) compared to non-objectified women. However, the majority of the existing research has been conducted with primarily White samples of college students and has used White targets as experimental stimuli. As a result, far less is known about the attributions toward objectified targets that are made of and by people of color (Gervais et al., 2013; Ward, 2016). Black women, specifically, have been historically hypersexualized by the larger culture (e.g., the "Jezebel" stereotype), as part of violence justification and systemic racism (Collins, 2000; Townsend et al., 2010); thus, attitudes toward objectified Black women may be more severe than attitudes toward objectified White women. The present study sought to investigate this possibility and address gaps in the literature by employing a sample of Black and White adults and by using images of Black and White women as objectified targets. Furthermore, few studies have used social media posts as experimental stimuli (exceptions include Biefeld et al., 2021; Daniels, 2016, 2020; Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016a), despite the widespread use of social media by young people (Pew, 2019). Accordingly, the current study extends the limited existing work by testing the study's research questions within the context of social media profiles.

Theoretical Framing

The present study is guided by objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), which states that women's bodies are regarded as objects for the sexual pleasure of men in many Western contexts. When women internalize an objectified view of the self (termed self-objectification), they are vulnerable to several negative psychological outcomes, including

depressive symptoms, anxiety, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorders (for reviews, see Calogero et al., 2011; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2014; Loughnan & Pacilli, 2014; Roberts et al., 2018). However, the negative effects of objectification extend beyond self-objectification. Specifically, when a woman is reduced to her appearance through objectification (i.e., treated as an object), her personhood (e.g., capacities, thoughts, feelings) is diminished and she loses some of her humanity. In this way, others' perceptions of an objectified woman are affected (i.e., others' attitudes toward her), and typically negatively (Gervais et al., 2013; Heflick et al., 2011). It is this aspect of objectification that the present study addresses. Specifically, how does objectification affect racially diverse viewers' attributions toward objectified Black and White women? Does the race of an objectified target affect viewers' attributions? Note, this study does not address women's motivations for their self-presentation choices or their own body attitudes. Instead, we examine how *others* perceive women based on their self-presentation on social media. Furthermore, in research on viewers' perceptions of objectified targets, the terms *sexually objectified*, *objectified*, and *sexualized* are used interchangeably (see Ward, 2016). In keeping with objectification theory, we use the terms *sexually objectified* or *objectified*; in referring to specific studies, however, we use the terms used by the study's authors.

The stereotype content model (SCM) is also useful in examining our research questions because of its basis in social cognition, specifically its theorizing concerning how people make judgements about others in social situations (Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). SCM examines people's reactions to others based on perceptions of warmth and competence, two dimensions of social cognition. Warmth is theorized to indicate one's intentions toward others, whereas competence is thought to represent one's ability. People are dehumanized when they are considered to be low in competence and warmth by others (Heflick et al., 2011).

Drawing on objectification theory, the stereotype content model, and work on depersonalization (Loughnan et al., 2010), scholars have investigated viewers' attributions toward women depicted in sexually objectified or sexualized ways. In the typical paradigm, participants are presented with still images of objectified or non-objectified women and are asked to evaluate the women across a range of characteristics; the majority of this work has included White women as targets. Results indicate that objectified women are consistently perceived more negatively than non-objectified women. Specifically, objectified women are thought to have less self-respect, to be more sexually experienced, and to be less competent, determined, intelligent, agentic, fully human, warm, and moral (e.g., Daniels et al., 2020; Graff et al., 2012; Heflick et al., 2011; Holland & Haslam, 2016; Loughnan et al., 2010; Schooler, 2015; Vaes et al., 2011). For example, Fasoli et al. (2018; Study 1) examined Italian adults' attitudes toward female models portrayed in varying degrees of objectification including sexualized revealing (e.g., in underwear and in a sexually provocative pose), merely revealing (e.g., in swimsuit/underwear), and non-revealing (e.g., in jeans and t-shirt). They found that women depicted in a sexualized revealing or a merely revealing manner were perceived to be less competent than women depicted in a non-revealing manner, suggesting that body exposure itself is enough to elicit objectified attitudes toward women. Collectively, findings from the extant literature demonstrate that objectified women are perceived to be less competent and are attributed less personhood, including reduced mental states (e.g., emotions, thoughts, and intentions) and moral status (Ward, 2016). Note, operationalizations of objectified/sexualized female targets vary across studies. Many studies have relied on images of women in bikini bathing suits, underwear, or nude (e.g., Daniels et al., 2020), whereas other studies have used or

adapted Hatton and Trautner's (2011) sexualization scheme comprised of 11 dimensions (e.g., clothing/nudity, self-touch, pose) (e.g., Ruckel & Hill, 2017).

The majority of existing studies found that viewer gender largely does not impact attitudes toward targets; that is, men and women evaluate targets similarly (e.g., Fasoli et al., 2018; Graff et al., 2012; Heflick et al., 2011; Holland & Haslam, 2015; Loughnan et al., 2010; Vaes et al., 2011). However, there is some evidence that the viewer gender affects at least some attitudes toward objectified targets (Daniels et al., 2020; Schooler, 2015). For example, in an experimental study, Schooler (2015) exposed college student participants either to real content from a university newspaper in which a statement from a new female president of the university ran alongside a sexually objectifying advertisement or to the president's statement paired with a neutral ad. Men (but not women) who viewed the objectifying advertisement evaluated the university president as less competent than men in other experimental conditions. Taken together, existing studies demonstrate that women are perceived more negatively when they are portrayed in a sexually objectifying manner. Furthermore, viewer gender appears to be largely inconsequential for most attitudes, although there is some evidence for gender differences in attitudes (e.g., Daniels et al., 2020; Schooler, 2015). Accordingly, in the present study, we predicted that the objectified targets (both Black and White) would be evaluated more negatively than the non-objectified targets (see Hypothesis 1) by both women and men.

Objectification on Social Media

Visual images of women are prevalent on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, and 90% of U.S. emerging adults aged 18-29 report using some form of social media (Pew, 2019). Photographs of the self ("selfies") appear frequently on social media, as does sexually objectifying content. For example, Sarabia and Estevez (2016) analyzed 100 Facebook

profiles of youth aged 14-21 (65% girls) in Spain and found that 60% of profiles contained images considered erotic and sexualized (e.g., photo of two girls wearing red lipstick with their tongues grazing each other). Similarly, Ruckel and Hill (2017) found a high degree of sexualization present in U.S. college women's (90% White) Facebook profile photos (e.g., revealing clothing, cleavage exposure, seductive look in the eye). Other analyses have examined the prevalence of a sexualized appearance on body-focused social media posts, such as those marked #thinspiration or #fitspiration. Analyses of such posts indicate that 75% of images were coded as sexually suggestive in one study (Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015), and 85% as sexually objectifying in another (Boepple et al., 2016). Moreover, there is evidence that this content is rewarded, with social endorsements ("likes/favorites") increasing as sexual suggestiveness increases (Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015; Ramsey & Horan, 2018).

Despite these patterns, surprisingly few studies have examined viewers' attributions toward women depicted in sexually objectified ways on *social* media. Because social media are user-created and are venues for self-expression (Manago, 2015), it is possible that viewers may judge women who present themselves in an objectified manner on social media especially harshly because they are perceived to have control over their own self-presentation. Social media images stand in contrast to traditional media images, such as magazine ads, which viewers may perceive objectified targets as having less editorial control over. To our knowledge, only a handful of studies have examined attitudes toward women on social media (Biefeld et al., 2021; Daniels, 2016; Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016a, 2016b; Manago et al., 2008; Moreno et al., 2011). For example, in an experimental study with U.S. teen girls and young women, Daniels and Zurbriggen (2016a) manipulated the profile photo of a young White woman on Facebook to be either sexualized or non-sexualized. In the sexualized condition, the young woman was wearing

a low-cut red dress with a slit up the leg and a garter belt; in contrast, the same young woman was wearing jeans and short-sleeved shirt with a scarf covering her chest in the non-sexualized condition. The primarily White participants rated the sexualized profile owner as less competent, less socially attractive, and less physically attractive compared to the non-sexualized profile owner. In a follow-up study using the same experimental stimuli, similar evaluations were made by a primarily White sample of U.S. college men (Daniels, 2016).

Collectively, these media studies reveal that viewers make a range of negative attributions toward women if they are portrayed in a sexually objectified manner in visual media, including social media. Given the popularity of social media, it is useful to investigate perceptions of common objectified portrayals encountered on these media, e.g., the car selfie, in which a person takes a photo of herself in a car. There were approximately 2.1 million posts to #carselfie on Instagram as of April 2020. Contextualizing experimental stimuli within this popular format may add further authenticity to this paradigm.

The Role of Target and Viewer Race

To what extent might race affect how an objectified woman is perceived? To date, most studies examining perceptions of sexually objectified women have sampled White college students and have used images of White women as experimental stimuli, images that conform to Western standards of beauty (i.e., thin, scantily-clad; Gervais et al., 2013; Ward, 2016). Yet objectification may not affect all women in the same way, as it is theorized that women's experiences of sexual objectification intersect with their multiple social locations, including race and socioeconomic status (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Moreover, in examining the objectification of Black women, additional consideration is needed of their specific sociohistorical context, mainly how their sexuality has been stigmatized by the "Jezebel"

stereotype that depicts them as hypersexual, promiscuous, and manipulative (Collins, 2000; Townsend et al., 2010). The Jezebel stereotype was historically used to justify the widespread rape of enslaved Black women by White men, and there is evidence that the stereotype continues to influence the way that White people appraise Black women, marking all Black women as hypersexual. Indeed, in an experimental paradigm, White participants viewing sexualized Black women focused more and longer on their sexualized body parts (e.g., breasts, hips) than they did when viewing sexualized White women (Anderson et al., 2018). In a second experiment, Black women were more likely to be *implicitly* associated with animal and object words in comparison to human words than were White women, indicating that Black women are more likely to be dehumanized and objectified than are White women.

However, although theoretical assumptions and cultural stereotypes suggest that sexualized Black women may be perceived especially harshly by comparison, empirical data to support this notion has been slow to accumulate. We drew insights from two relevant studies. In one study, Heflick and colleagues (2011) presented a largely female sample of U.S. college students (no racial demographic information provided) with a photo of Michele Obama and instructed them to focus on either her appearance or her as a person for a writing task. After the writing task, participants rated Obama's competence. Participants instructed to focus on her appearance rated Obama as lower in competence compared to participants instructed to focus on Obama as a person. This study provides important evidence about how others make appearance-focused evaluations of Black women. In a second study, Biefeld and colleagues (2021) exposed a sample of college students (66% White, 22% African-American/Black), to two images of women that varied on sexualization, body size, and race (Black or White). The images were edited to look as if they were from the social media platform, Instagram. Participants rated the women on

four attributes: popular, nice, athletic, and intelligent. Among female participants, Black sexualized targets were rated as ***more*** popular than Black non-sexualized targets; conversely, White sexualized targets were rated as ***less*** popular than the White non-sexualized targets. In terms of niceness, White sexualized targets were rated as less nice than White non-sexualized targets; there were no differences in niceness ratings for the sexualized and non-sexualized Black targets. These patterns demonstrate differences in how Black and White sexualized women are evaluated. In the present study, we built on this work by testing differences in evaluations by target race (i.e., comparing attitudes toward Black and White targets within-participants), as well (see Hypothesis 2).

Though there is very limited research on explicit trait perceptions of sexually objectified Black women, there is evidence that Black women's sexuality, in general, is subject to stigmatization, which may shape the way that others evaluate them. For example, in two studies, individuals (87% White in both studies) primed with the Jezebel image were more likely to quickly associate Black female interviewees with sexual adjectives (Brown Givens & Monahan, 2005; Monahan et al., 2005). Similarly, White participants primed with the "promiscuous Black female" stereotype of Black women through exposure to rap music were more likely to evaluate a Black pregnant woman's sexual history as promiscuous compared to a White pregnant woman (Johnson et al., 2008). Another experimental study used vignettes to examine perceptions of sexually active women by participants (50% White, 50% Black). Quantitative analyses revealed no differences in evaluations of Black and White targets' competence or warmth; however, qualitative analyses demonstrated that the Black sexually active target was evaluated more harshly than the White target by both Black and White participants (Bay-Cheng et al., 2020). For example, the Black target was more likely than the White target to be described with degrading

language, including racist and classist slurs. Thus, although displays of sexuality are stigmatized for all women, Black women are uniquely appraised, based on negative, sexual stereotypes specific to the intersection of their racial and gender identities.

Finally, there is evidence that viewer race may shape these perceptions, and that Black viewers may be especially sensitive to sexually objectified portrayals of their own people. As argued by stereotype threat theory (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, 1997), Black people may fear confirming a negative group stereotype (i.e., the Jezebel) and might therefore be especially sensitive to or critical of content that appears to confirm it. Additionally, Black people may be guided by the politics of respectability (Higginbotham, 1993), a set of cultural norms within the Black community that outline rules that Black people should follow in order to gain respect from mainstream society. The politics of respectability would caution against public, overt displays of sexuality among Black women to avoid behavior in line with the Jezebel stereotype. Hine (1995) also proposed that Black women have created a "culture of dissemblance" to conceal and suppress their sexuality in response to stigmatizing cultural narratives about their sexuality. Thus, if Black women are aware of the stereotypes of their group members as sexually promiscuous and aggressive, they may feel more concerned about looking too sexual, for fear of reinforcing the stereotype. Accordingly, Black participants may be harsh in their judgments of objectified Black women. At the same time, it is also possible that Black participants will demonstrate an in-group preference (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and evaluate a Black target more favorably across all attitudes regardless of an objectified self-presentation. Thus, this study examines potential racialized differences in perceptions of objectified Black and White women (see Hypothesis 3).

The Present Study

This study extends prior research by examining the effect of objectified social media photos of Black and White young women on Black and White people's attitudes using a within-participants design. Participants viewed four social media profiles of women who had either an objectified or non-objectified profile photo. We examined three hypotheses. First, we investigated the effects of objectified images on viewers' attitudes toward White and Black targets separately. We expected a main effect of experimental condition (objectified v. non-objectified) such that objectified targets (both Black and White) would be evaluated as less moral (H1a), less warm (H1b), less competent (H1c), and more sexually attractive than non-objectified targets (H1d). In addition, we expected the profile of the objectified targets (both Black and White) would be liked less than the profile of the non-objectified targets (H1e). We also expected that ratings could be affected by an interaction between the experimental condition and the race of the viewer. However, we investigated this possibility in an exploratory fashion given the lack of prior research with diverse samples.

Second, we compared viewers' attitudes toward the Black and White targets within-participants to examine whether participants' attitudes differed for the Black as compared to White target. We expected that the objectified Black target would be perceived as less moral (H2a), less warm (H2b), less competent (H2c), and less sexually attractive (H2d) than the objectified White target. In addition, we expected the profile of the objectified Black target would be liked less than the objectified White target (H2e).

Third, in the within-participants analyses, we expected interactions between experimental condition and participants' race. However, we were not sure whether White *or* Black participants would perceive the objectified Black target as less moral (H3a), less warm (H3b), less competent (H3c), and less sexually attractive (H3d). In addition, we were not sure whether White or Black

participants would like the profile of the objectified Black target less (H3e). Therefore, we investigated this hypothesis in an exploratory fashion.

Method

Participants

A sample of 402 young adults ($n = 209$; 52.0% women and $n = 193$; 48.0% men), aged 18-25 ($M = 23$, $SD = 1.65$), was collected through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The study was open only to young Black/African-American or White/European-American young adults living in the United States. Thus, the study included Black/African-American ($n = 187$; 46.5%) and White/European-American ($n = 215$; 53.5%) participants who were paid $0.60 for completing a 15-minute survey. Most participants reported having attended some college ($n = 172$; 42.8%) or graduated from a 4-year college ($n = 167$; 41.5%), with fewer having graduated from high school ($n = 48$; 11.9%), engaged in post-graduate study or completed a post-graduate degree ($n = 14$; 3.5%), or completed some high school or less ($n = 1$; < 1.0%). Participants were from across the United States including the South ($n = 187$; 46.5%), Midwest ($n = 88$; 21.9%), Northeast ($n = 69$; 17.2%), and West ($n = 58$; 14.4%). This distribution varied somewhat by race, with a higher percentage of Black (56.7%) versus White participants (37.7%) from the South.

Additional participants/surveys ($n = 256$) were removed from the study for the following reasons: taking too little (< 5 minutes) or too much time (> 60 minutes) to complete the survey ($n = 59$); falling outside of our inclusion criteria ($n = 141$); missing data ($n = 3$); or deducing the true purpose of the study as assessed through a manipulation check ($n = 35$). Finally, an additional group of participants ($n = 18$ surveys) was dropped because of identical IP addresses. It is not possible to know whether different people within a household completed the study using the same device or if the same person took the study multiple times.

Materials

Four mock Facebook profiles were created for this study. Two profiles depicted young

women, one Black and one White, and are the focus of the study; the other two profiles depicted

middle-aged women, one White and one Black, and were distractors. The young women were

given the names Jackie Wilkins (Black) and Ashley Cook (White). They both had retails jobs

(Forever 21 and Costco, respectively) and studied at a university in their home state (Arizona

State University and Colorado State University Pueblo, respectively). Their cover and profile

photos depicted nature (sky, mountains) and themselves in the car (i.e., car selfie). Each profile

contained five thumbnail photos that are typical of young women (e.g., an inspirational quote,

artisanal coffee, food). Number of friends was similar across profiles (n = 334-348).

Only profile photos were manipulated between experimental conditions. Photos were car

selfies, which are relatively close up by nature and capture the face and torso of a seated person.

For the young women in the non-objectified condition, the profile photo depicted the women

smiling, with teeth showing, and their long hair styled nicely. The White woman was wearing a

decorative scarf, arranged loosely around her neck, over a long-sleeved jacket. The Black woman

was wearing a shirt with a neckline just below her collarbone under a long-sleeved jacket. For

the objectified condition, we included photos that incorporated sexualized cues, as outlined by

Hatton and Trautner (2011), including revealing clothing, self-touch, and a focus on sexualized

body parts such as breasts. In the objectified condition, the same young White woman as in the

non-objectified condition was wearing a tight-fitting black tank top with a deep V-cut, revealing

a lacy bra and showing the top of her breasts. She was also wearing a thin, tight black ribbon

around neck and black nail polish. She was twirling her long blonde hair and smiling. The same

young Black woman as in the non-objectified condition was wearing a tight-fitting very low-cut

denim tank top, showing her breasts. She was touching her long dark hair and smiling.

To enhance the ecological validity of the study, public Facebook profiles were reviewed by a young adult female research assistant and the first author to determine the content of the profiles. A similar approach for creating a mock social networking profile was used by Daniels and Zurbriggen (2016a). Finally, the photos of the Black woman were not staged for the study, but were actual photos a young woman, known to the research team who volunteered their use for the present study, posted on social media. The photos of the White woman were staged to resemble the Black woman's photo.

Procedure

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the first author's university, and informed consent was obtained from all participants included in this online experiment. After completing prescreening questions to establish that they met the inclusion criteria and after completing the consent process, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions ($n = 196$ objectified; $n = 206$ non-objectified). In both conditions, participants were instructed to view four profiles of four different women and answer questions about their opinions of the profile owner. They were told that two of the women were young adults and two were middle-aged adults. The researchers specifically drew participants' attention to the age of the women in the profiles to minimize the possibility that they would realize the study's focus on target and participant race. However, only attitudes toward the young women are analyzed here. Due to an error in building the experiment online, participants viewed the two young women first and then the two middle-aged women rather than viewing the four women in a random order.

Measures

Prescreening

Participants were asked if they were between 18-25 years of age; if they identify as Black/African-American or White/European-American; and if they lived in the United States. Only participants who answered 'yes' to these questions were admitted into the study.

Attitudes toward Target

Attitudes toward the targets were measured by level of agreement with 16 statements (e.g., "This woman is moral") derived from past studies (e.g., Graff et al., 2012; Gurung & Chrouser, 2007). Responses were provided on a 7-point scale that ranged from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*). Based on prior studies (e.g., Glick et al., 2005; Graff et al., 2012; Gurung & Chrouser, 2007), we created four composite variables from the individual characteristics: moral ($\alpha = .91$ White target, $\alpha = .92$ Black target; moral, trust-worthy, honest, self-respecting), warmth ($\alpha = .90$ White target, $\alpha = .91$ Black target; caring, warm, kind), competence ($\alpha = .89$ White target, $\alpha = .92$ Black target; capable, intelligent, competent, determined), and sexual attractiveness ($\alpha = .61$ White target, $\alpha = .56$ Black target; attractive, desirable, seductive, manipulative). Because the alphas were unacceptably low for the sexual attractiveness composite, after inspecting the item statistics, we dropped 'manipulative,' which improved the alphas and brought them into the acceptable range ($\alpha = .73$ White target, $\alpha = .76$ Black target). We also dropped 'feminine' because participants' interpretation of the word may vary, perhaps referring to female-typed characteristics, such as kind, or to female appearance.

Attitude toward the Profile

Participants were asked their level of agreement with the statement "I like this profile." Responses were provided on a 7-point scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*).

Data Transparency

Participants were not informed in the consent process that aggregated data would be shared. Therefore, data are not available to interested researchers except for verification purposes.

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Results

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Preliminary Analyses

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether there were participant racial group differences in attitudes toward the Black and White targets, regardless of whether targets were objectified or non-objectified (see Table 1). Black participants rated the Black target as higher in morality, warmth, competence, and sexual attractiveness than did White participants, and liked the Black target's profile more. Black participants also rated the White target as higher in competence than did White participants and liked the White target's profile more.

Independent samples t-tests were also conducted to examine whether there were gender differences in attitudes toward the Black and White targets regardless of whether the targets were objectified or non-objectified (see Table 2). The only gender difference was that men rated the White target as more sexually attractive than women did, confirming some past findings (e.g., Fasoli et al., 2018; Graff et al., 2012). Accordingly, we chose not to focus on participant gender in our analyses except for analyses of the sexual attractiveness variable. However, we ran 2 (condition: objectified, non-objectified) x 2 (participant gender: male, female) x 2 (participant race: Black, White) ANOVA tests on all dependent variables. The findings demonstrated no main effects of gender and no gender by condition interactions except the expected one for perceptions of physical attractiveness (described below). Therefore, gender was not included as a factor in the other analyses below.

Hypothesis-testing

The first hypothesis was tested using 2 (condition: objectified, non-objectified) x 2 (participant race: Black, White) between-participants ANOVAs for the White and Black target separately. The four dependent variables were perceptions of morality, warmth, competence, and sexual attractiveness. Perceptions of sexual attractiveness, however, were expected to vary by gender of the participant; thus, 2 (condition: objectified, non-objectified) x 2 (participant gender: male, female) x 2 (participant race: Black, White) ANOVAs were tested.

The second and third hypotheses were analyzed using mixed-factorial ANOVA tests with the four attitudes toward the Black and White targets as the repeated measures dependent variables. Specifically, the second hypothesis tested the effect of the experimental condition (objectified, non-objectified) on attitudes toward the Black as compared to White target. The third hypothesis tested the interaction of experimental condition (objectified, non-objectified) x participant race (Black, White) on attitudes toward the Black as compared to White target. For the four attitudes toward the targets (i.e., moral, warmth, competence, and sexual attractiveness), we applied a Bonferroni correction to account for multiple comparisons (Shaffer, 1995). The resulting alpha to determine significance was .0125.

Attributions by Experimental Condition

See Table 3 for means and standard deviations.

Moral. As expected, there were significant main effects of condition on moral ratings for both the White, $F(1, 398) = 55.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .122$, and Black, $F(1, 398) = 56.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .125$, targets such that the objectified targets were perceived to be less moral than the non-objectified targets. A condition by participant race interaction on moral ratings was not significant for the White, $F(1, 398) = 2.14$, $p = .144$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$, or Black, $F(1, 398) = .75$, $p = .388$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$, target.

Warmth. As expected, there were significant main effects of condition on warmth ratings for both the White, $F(1, 398) = 27.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .066$, and Black, $F(1, 398) = 23.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .056$, targets such that the objectified targets were perceived to be less warm than the non-objectified targets. After applying the Bonferroni correction, a condition by participant race interaction on warmth ratings was not significant for the White, $F(1, 398) = 4.49$, $p = .035$, $\eta_p^2 = .011$, or the Black, $F(1, 398) = 2.41$, $p = .122$, $\eta_p^2 = .006$, target.

Competence. As expected, there were significant main effects of condition on competence ratings for both the White, $F(1, 398) = 20.26$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .048$, and Black, $F(1, 398) = 26.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .062$, targets such that the objectified targets were perceived to be less competent than the non-objectified targets. A condition by participant race interaction on competence ratings was not significant for the White, $F(1, 398) = 3.01$, $p = .084$, $\eta_p^2 = .008$, or Black, $F(1, 398) = 1.15$, $p = .285$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$, target.

Sexual attractiveness. Because gender was expected to affect perceptions of sexual attractiveness, a 2 (condition: objectified, non-objectified) x 2 (participant gender: male, female) x 2 (participant race: Black, White) ANOVA was tested.

For the White target, as expected, there was a significant main effect of participant gender on sexual attractiveness ratings, $F(1, 394) = 7.48$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .019$, such that men ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.07$) rated the White target as more sexually attractive than women did ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.02$). As expected, there was also significant main effect of condition on sexual attractiveness ratings, $F(1, 394) = 15.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .038$, such that the objectified White target was perceived to be more sexually attractive than the non-objectified White target. However, there was a significant condition by participant race interaction on sexual attractiveness ratings, $F(1, 394) = 9.77$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .024$. White participants rated the

objectified ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.17$) and the non-objectified ($M = 5.40$, $SD = .92$) White target

similarly in sexual attractiveness. In contrast, Black participants rated the objectified White

target ($M = 5.93$, $SD = .96$) as higher in sexual attractiveness than the non-objectified White

target ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.04$). The condition by participant gender interaction was not significant,

$F(1, 394) = .83$, $p = .362$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$. Similarly, the condition by participant gender by participant

race interaction was not significant, $F(1, 394) = .75$, $p = .387$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$.

Unexpectedly, for the Black target, there was not a significant main effect of participant

gender on sexual attractiveness ratings, $F(1, 394) = .73$, $p = .395$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$, meaning men ($M =$

5.71, $SD = 1.14$) and women ($M = 5.62$, $SD = .97$) perceived the Black target to be similar in

sexual attractiveness. There was also not a significant main effect of condition on sexual

attractiveness ratings, $F(1, 394) = .02$, $p = .893$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$, meaning that the objectified and non-

objectified Black targets were perceived to be similar in sexual attractiveness. After applying the

Bonferroni correction, a condition by participant race interaction on sexual attractiveness ratings

was not significant for the Black target, $F(1, 394) = 4.94$, $p = .027$, $\eta_p^2 = .012$. Similarly, the

condition by participant gender interaction was not significant for the Black target, $F(1, 394) =$

$.003$, $p = .957$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. In addition, the condition by participant gender by participant race

interaction was not significant, $F(1, 394) = .79$, $p = .376$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$.

Liking of the profile. As expected, there was a significant main effect of condition on

likability of the profile ratings for both the White, $F(1, 398) = 19.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .046$, and

Black, $F(1, 398) = 33.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .077$, targets such that the profiles of the objectified

targets were liked less than the profiles of the non-objectified targets. After applying the

Bonferroni correction, a condition by participant race interaction on likability ratings was not

significant for the White, $F(1, 398) = 4.38$, $p = .037$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .011$, or Black, $F(1, 398) = .83$, $p = .364$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .002$, target.

Comparative Attributions by Experimental Condition

Contrary to Hypothesis 2, the objectified Black target was not viewed as less moral, $F(1, 398) = .22$, $p = .643$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .001$, warm, $F(1, 398) = .04$, $p = .847$, $\eta_p{}^2 < .001$, or competent, $F(1, 398) = 1.14$, $p = .287$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .003$, than the objectified White target. However, the interaction between condition and target's race was significant for sexual attractiveness, $F(1, 398) = 19.57$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .047$. The White objectified target ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.09$) was viewed as more sexually attractive than the White non-objectified target ($M = 5.33$, $SD = .98$), whereas the Black objectified ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.16$) and non-objectified ($M = 5.68$, $SD = .95$) targets were perceived to be similarly attractive. Finally, unexpectedly, the profile of the objectified Black target was not liked less than the profile of the objectified White target, $F(1, 398) = 2.39$, $p = .123$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .006$.

Comparative Attributions by Experimental Condition and Participants' Race

Contrary to Hypothesis 3, 3-way interactions were not significant for morality, $F(1, 398) = .47$, $p = .494$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .001$, warmth, $F(1, 398) = .36$, $p = .548$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .001$, competence, $F(1, 398) = .66$, $p = .416$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .002$, and sexual attractiveness attitudes, $F(1, 398) = .60$, $p = .440$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .001$. Similarly, the 3-way interaction for profile likability was not significant, $F(1, 398) = 1.44$, $p = .232$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .004$.

Discussion

The present study examined Black and White young people's attitudes toward objectified versus non-objectified Black and White female targets. As expected, objectified targets of either race were evaluated less positively than non-objectified targets. Unexpectedly, in comparing

attitudes toward the (non)objectified Black target as compared to the (non)objectified White target within-participants, there were no differences in participants' attitudes, and participants' race did not affect attitudes toward the targets. These findings make a unique and important contribution to the objectification research literature in four ways: (1) using Black targets as experimental stimuli; (2) using a within-participants design to compare attitudes toward Black and White targets; (3) engaging a sample of Black and White participants; (4) and making use of a highly popular media form and representational format (i.e., car selfies on social media).

Objectification theory proposed that women are affected by objectification in varying ways depending on their social identities, including race (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The present findings demonstrate that Black women, similar to White women, are evaluated less positively when they are objectified (i.e., considered less moral, less warm, less competent; profile liked less). Unexpectedly, in the present study, the objectified and non-objectified Black targets were perceived to be similar in sexual attractiveness by both women and men. Perhaps, because of cultural narratives stigmatizing their sexuality (Collins, 2002; Townsend et al., 2010), Black women may be consistently objectified regardless of their dress. This perception may result in similar ratings of sexual attractiveness regardless of an objectified appearance. In contrast, the objectified White target was considered to be more sexually attractive compared to the non-objectified White target, similar to prior findings (e.g., Gurung & Chrouser, 2007). It may be that individuals have more experience judging the appearance of White women and as a result, there are more formalized rules for evaluating them, including a standard that dictates a sexy self-presentation as more attractive. Taken together, these patterns indicate Black women are subject to similar penalties levied at White women for being depicted in an objectified

manner in media (e.g., Ward, 2016). Furthermore, attitudes did not differ by participants' race (see below for discussion of these null patterns).

A notable strength of the current study is the comparative analyses examining attitudes toward Black and White targets by the same participants. Unexpectedly, we did not find differences in attitudes toward the Black as compared to White targets. This null result is surprising given that Black women's sexuality has historically been stigmatized in the U.S. (Collins, 2002; Townsend et al., 2010). As such, we expected more negative attitudes toward the objectified Black target as compared to the objectified White target. It is possible that the amount of objectification in the photos (i.e., low-cut top and self-touch) was too mild to elicit harsher evaluations toward the objectified Black target. Alternatively, it is possible that women are penalized similarly for an objectified self-presentation, regardless of race. More research using diverse targets is necessary to establish whether women of different races/ethnicities are evaluated differentially based on objectification.

In the comparative analyses, we also found that the evaluations toward the (non)objectified targets did not vary by participants' race. This outcome was unexpected. Although we were unsure of whether White or Black participants would be harsher in their evaluations of the objectified targets, we expected a race effect. Perhaps the objectification of women's bodies has become so normalized in U.S. culture that different racial groups have a shared understanding of the cultural meaning of objectification. For example, women's bodies are routinely objectified and sexualized in media (Ward, 2016), in advertising (Wirtz et al., 2018), and in consumer products (APA, 2007; Zurbriggen & Roberts, 2013). As a result, people may evaluate objectified women less positively regardless of their own racial background or the racial background of the target.

Limitations and Future Directions

Like all studies, the present investigation has limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the stimuli were limited to Black and White women. Therefore, we cannot claim that the findings are relevant to women of other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Further research with women of diverse backgrounds is necessary to examine whether the same or different patterns pertain to women of other races/ethnicities. Second, the sample was restricted to young adults because social media are highly popular among this age group. It is possible that young people are more tolerant of an objectified self-presentation on social media than older adults would be. Further research is needed to examine this possibility. Third, both the Black and White targets were attractive women with slim body sizes. Biefeld and colleagues (2021) recently demonstrated that body size affects attitudes toward sexualized targets. It is possible the impacts of objectification vary across a range of target characteristics including perceived attractiveness, body size, and skin tone (e.g., lighter-skinned versus darker-skinned Black women). Future research should investigate whether attitudes toward objectification are impacted by these factors. Fourth, we did not pre-test images to ensure that the targets were perceived to be similar in terms of attractiveness. However, attractiveness was one of the 16 characteristics participants rated targets on. There was a significant difference in ratings, $t(402) = -3.22$, $p = .001$, such that the Black woman was perceived to be more attractive ($M = 5.66$, $SD = 1.06$) than the White women ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.05$); however, the effect size is exceedingly small (Cohen's d = .15). Accordingly, it is reasonable to state that level of attractiveness was very similar between the two women. Fifth, although Black and White participants in our study evaluated the targets similarly, the processes used to rate the images and the meaning participants assigned to their ratings may not be identical between the two racial groups (e.g., Bay-Cheng et al., 2020). Future research should

consider using qualitative techniques to better understand evaluation and meaning-making processes. Finally, the profiles used in the present study were not of women known to the participants, which is not typical of one's social network use, thereby limiting the external validity of the experimental stimuli.

Implications

The present study contributes to the objectification literature by examining attitudes toward an objectified Black target and by including Black participants. Existing objectification research has been limited by utilizing White targets typically and including primarily White samples (see Biefeld et al., 2021 for an exception). We hope this study encourages a greater focus on the inclusion of diverse targets and diverse samples in future research to improve our understanding of the effects of objectification in media on viewers' attitudes. In addition, the present research findings could usefully inform media literacy programs aimed at young people in terms of specifically addressing social pressures on girls and young women to present a sexy self on social media (see Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016a and 2016b for discussions of this issue).

More research on the effects of the sexual objectification of Black women specifically is also needed given that negative appraisals of hypersexualized Black women have numerous psychological, social, economic, and policy implications for Black women. For example, qualitative research suggests that notions of Black women— especially impoverished Black women— as hypersexual places them at greater risk for sexual harassment and assault (Windsor et al., 2011). The Jezebel image also has consequences for Black women's romantic relationships. Endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype by Black women and men contributes to lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Fisher & Coleman, 2017) and increased justification of violence against women (Cheeseborough et al., 2020). Finally, exposure to media portrayals of

Black women as sexual objects is related to Black adolescent girls valuing appearance as important, which has implications for their development (Gordon, 2008). Thus, the objectification of Black women by society has far-reaching consequences for Black women's lives.

Conclusion

Overall, the present findings demonstrate that Black women are indeed penalized for an objectified self-presentation on social media; however, they are not penalized significantly more than White women are. These findings are consistent with objectification theory by illustrating that a woman's personhood is diminished when she is depicted as a sexual object; but, contrary to objectification theory, attitudes toward objectified women were not affected by the target's race.

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Table 1

Mean Attitudes toward Black and White Targets by Participant Race

	Black target			White target		
	Black participants	White participants		Black participants	White participants	
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)		*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	
Moral	5.19 (1.18)	4.85 (1.22)	*t*(400) = 2.77, *p* = .006	4.99 (1.12)	4.81 (1.20)	*t*(400) = 1.59, *p* = .114
Warmth	5.48 (1.03)	5.11 (1.21)	*t*(400) = 3.27, *p* = .001	5.27 (.99)	5.06 (1.15)	*t*(400) = 1.94, *p* = .053
Competence	5.55 (1.03)	5.14 (1.16)	*t*(400) = 3.77, *p* < .001	5.26 (.97)	5.02 (1.13)	*t*(400) = 2.29, *p* = .023
Sexual Attractiveness	5.84 (.99)	5.51 (1.09)	*t*(400) = 3.17, *p* = .002	5.57 (1.06)	5.45 (1.05)	*t*(400) = 1.15, *p* = .250
Like Profile	5.60 (1.37)	5.05 (1.47)	*t*(400) = 3.89, *p* < .001	5.37 (1.30)	5.00 (1.44)	*t*(400) = 2.65, *p* = .008

Note. Possible scores range from 1 to 7.

Table 2

Mean Attitudes toward Black and White Targets by Participant Gender

	Black target			White target		
	Women	Men		Women	Men	
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)		*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	
Moral	5.02 (1.16)	5.00 (1.26)	*t*(400) = -.15, *p* = .882	4.83 (1.12)	4.97 (1.20)	*t*(400) = 1.23, *p* = .220
Warmth	5.28 (1.14)	5.28 (1.15)	*t*(400) = -.04, *p* = .970	5.14 (1.05)	5.17 (1.12)	*t*(400) = .28, *p* = .778
Competence	5.34 (1.06)	5.32 (1.18)	*t*(400) = -.13, *p* = .894	5.08 (1.00)	5.18 (1.13)	*t*(384.06) = .93, *p* = .353
Sexual Attractiveness	5.62 (.97)	5.71 (1.14)	*t*(400) = .80, *p* = .424	5.39 (1.02)	5.64 (1.07)	*t*(400) = 2.39, *p* = .017
Like Profile	5.30 (1.39)	5.31 (1.51)	*t*(400) = .10, *p* = .922	5.09 (1.27)	5.26 (1.50)	*t*(400) = 1.25, *p* = .211

Note. Possible scores range from 1 to 7.

Table 3

Mean Attitudes toward Black and White Targets by Condition

	Black target		White target	
	Objectified	Non-objectified	Objectified	Non-objectified
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Moral	4.57 (1.29)$_a$	5.43 (.96)$_b$	4.47 (1.25)$_x$	5.29 (.90)$_y$
Warmth	5.00 (1.26)$_a$	5.55 (.94)$_b$	4.86 (1.16)$_x$	5.43 (.93)$_y$
Competence	5.04 (1.18)$_a$	5.60 (.98)$_b$	4.89 (1.10)$_x$	5.37 (.98)$_y$
Sexual Attractiveness	5.64 (1.16)$_a$	5.68 (.95)$_a$	5.70 (1.09)$_x$	5.33 (.98)$_y$
Like Profile	4.89 (1.66)$_a$	5.69 (1.07)$_b$	4.86 (1.53)$_x$	5.47 (1.17)$_y$

Note. Within race of the target, means with different subscripts in each row differed significantly, *p* < .05. Possible

scores range from 1 to 7