Can Pretty Pictures Be Harmful?: Depression, Body Esteem, and Career Aspirations

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Abstract
Objectification of women has been linked to depression, poor body esteem, and limited work aspirations. Results indicated that non-sexualized attractive images of women influence future career aspirations.

Method
Participants
Participants were 125 men (40%) and women (60%) undergraduates ranging in age from 18 to 54 years (M = 19.74, SD = 4.22). The majority (62%) of participants endorsed a Christian faith and the ethnic classification was as follows: African American/black (41%), European American (31%), Native American (15.2%), Hispanic/Latino (4.9%), and Biracial (7.2%). The average GPA was 2.97 (SD = .47).

Measures and Procedure
Participants were randomly assigned to view advertisements that were sexualized, non-sexualized, or neutral in content. They then completed questionnaires that asked about perceptions of women’s achievements, aspirations for their own lives (Future work selves; Strauss, Griffin & Parker, 2012), body esteem (Mendelson & White, 1982), and depression (CES-D; Radoff, 1977). Participants also completed a demographic measure which included Likert scale questions on media usage (0 = never, 7 = frequently).

Results
Media Exposure
Scores on media exposure ranged from 0-7. Participants media exposure was as follows: internet (M = 6.01, SD = 1.26), television (M = 4.84, SD = 1.56), music videos (M = 3.56, SD = .93), and magazines (M = 3.06, SD = 1.96).

Career Aspirations
Whether or not participants viewed sexualized advertisements did influence the salience of future work self (F(2, 119) = 3.138, p < .05). Participants in the non-sexualized condition scored higher (M = 4.00, SD = .69) than those in the sexualized (M = 3.77, SD = .75) and neutral conditions (M = 3.63, SD = .72).

Career identity commitment was also influenced by participant sex. (F(1, 119) = 4.69, p < .05). Females scored higher (M = 4.21, SD = .85) than males (M = 3.93, SD = .62).

Depression
Participants scored on the CES-D ranged from 20-62 (M = 41.89, SD = 8.80), indicating a moderately depressed sample. No significant differences were found for gender or sexualization group.

Body Esteem
Scores on the BES can range from 1-5. Participants had medium to high body esteem (M = 3.59, SD = .70). No significant differences were found by gender or sexualized condition. An effect for ethnic-differences approached significance.

Discussion
Results suggest that viewing non-sexualized images of attractive women influenced both men and women in their career aspirations. Participants in the non-sexualized image condition viewed their future professional identity as more central to themselves than those in the sexualized or neutral conditions. This result was expected for females, as it reflects that the sexualized images may restrict women’s thoughts about other possible identities than a sexual one. For men, however, these results were surprising. It may be that viewing attractive women who are not easily sexually available primes males to follow an evolutionarily ingrained path to seek to provide for a female, and thus think more about their work selves.

The lack of significant results for the body esteem and depression measures was surprising and contrary to previous research. Much previous work, however, has focused largely on Caucasian individuals. Future research will explore whether these results were affected by the diverse ethnicity in our sample.

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Abstract
Objectification of women has been linked to depression, poor body esteem, and limited work aspirations. Recent studies indicated that nonsexualized attractive images of women influenced future career aspirations.

Method
Participants were 125 women aged 18-24 years old. Participants were randomly assigned to view advertisements that were sexualized, neutral, or control. They then completed questionnaires related to perceptions of work. All scores were compared with sexualized conditions.

Introduction
Today's media is saturated with sexualized images of women. Women in recent studies have found that seeing advertisements containing sexualized images has been linked to increased depression, lower self-esteem, and decreased career aspirations. This study aimed to determine the effects of viewing sexualized images on work aspirations.

Results
Scores on the depression scale were significantly higher for those who viewed sexualized images. Participants who viewed non-sexualized images had lower scores on the depression scale. Career aspirations were also significantly higher for those who viewed non-sexualized images.

Discussion
Results suggest that viewing non-sexualized images of women has a positive impact on depression, self-esteem, and career aspirations. Participants in the non-sexualized condition scored higher on the depression scale, indicating lower levels of depression. Career aspirations were also higher in the non-sexualized condition, indicating increased motivation for future career success.

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