

# Body Image: the influence that the media has on self-objectification across women of different ages.

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## Abstract

The aim of this research was to investigate the influence that the media has on self-objectification across women of different ages. This study also explored the effects that this self-objectification can have on these women's self-esteem. 202 participants were used; 153 women aged between 18-30 and 49 women between 31-65. The participants completed three questionnaires namely; The Revised Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (Quinn & Lewis, 2005), The Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and The Media Influence Scale (Stice et al, 1996) which was adapted from the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale.

## Introduction

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), propose the idea of the objectification theory. They state that self-objectification refers to the feeling of women as being treated or viewed as a body instead of a being. As a result of this objectification many women begin to internalise these feelings and therefore view themselves in a similar manner. They comment further that this internalisation often results in many negative psychological effects including; depression, anxiety and ultimately eating disorders.

McKinley and Hyde (1996) report that the media depict men and women in a different way which often adds to this sexual objectification of women. They report that the media is one of the most powerful external sources which is responsible for the pressure on women to conform to the ideal body shape.



## Method

For the purpose of this study quantitative research was chosen. The present study used a non-experimental correlation design. The predictor variables within the research were media exposure and age. The criterion variables include self-objectification and self-esteem. The research required information obtained from 202 women; 153 women aged between 18-30 and 49 women aged between 31-65. Data was collected through a mix of snowball sampling and the questionnaire booklet was also inputted to google docs which was then uploaded onto Facebook.

A number of ethical considerations were taken into account and enforced throughout this research. The researcher ensured that all participants were above the legal age of 18 so that consent did not need to be sought from legal guardians. Confidentiality was also very important. To maintain anonymity participants were asked not to put their names on any questionnaire and all paperwork was kept safe until needed.

## Results

Results from this research have established that contrary to what was predicted older women have higher body surveillance than younger women. An independent t-test was conducted which showed that there was a highly significant difference. Contrary to the proposed hypothesis older women also obtained higher mean scores for body shame. However similar to what was predicted older women did score higher for control levels, although it was not significant. The present research also indicated that there was no significant negative correlation between body surveillance and self-esteem. In addition it also revealed that there was a moderate negative significant correlation between body surveillance and media influence.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the influence that the media has on self-objectification across women of different ages. The study focused on the pressure that the media places on women to attain the unrealistic size zero, which is commonly portrayed to be the ideal shape and size that women should strive towards.

However, contrary to previous research, the present study has shown that older women obtained higher mean scores in body surveillance and body shame than younger women. Therefore older women are more concerned with their body image than younger women. It also revealed that contrary to much of the previous research there was no relationship between body surveillance and media or between body surveillance and self-esteem. This may suggest that these women are confident and content in themselves and their bodies despite media influence.

## References

- Fredrickson, B.L. & Roberts, T.A. (1997). Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experience and Mental Health Risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. 21, pp. 173-206.
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