Women Objectification in Context of Pakistani Advertisements: Role of Personal Variables

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate the role of personal factors on self-objectification that is encouraged by Pakistani advertisements. The objective of the study was to find out the differences in perception of women on Pakistani advertisement based on personal variables i.e. age, family structure, education and employment status. Convenience sampling technique and a sample of 430 unmarried women with the age bracket of 18 to 25 years were included in the study. The self-objectification was measured through the Self-Objectification-Trait Scale (Dahl, 2014). ANOVA analysis and t test were used through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v 21 for analysis. The findings indicated that there was no significant difference in self-objectification of women, under the influence of Pakistani advertisements, based on their ages and education levels. However, there was a significant difference in self-objectification of women, under the influence of Pakistani advertisements, based on their family structures and employment statuses. The study would contribute to further research to reduce the negative impact of self-objectification on young women.

Keywords: Women Objectification, Personal Variables, Pakistani Advertisement

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Introduction

Women objectification plays a vital role in women's mental well-being. It is one of the sociocultural and psychological risk factors that have an impact on women's mental health. With women objectification, comes self-objectification (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Self-objectification sheds light on the concept that when a woman is objectified, she internalizes this objectification until she starts to objectify herself. This is a theory, proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts, and is called the Self-Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The current study aims to apply the Self-Objectification Theory and investigate the impact it has on the self-concept of young unmarried women. For this, objectification that is portrayed in Pakistani media advertisements was used. Women objectification takes place when women are treated as 'bodies' by other people, separating them from the person that they are. Television advertisements use women images (bodies) as selling pitch for their intended audience (Barber, 2011). It becomes so as if their bodies represent who they are. This is how women are sexualized (Strelan et al., 2003). The most subtle way to objectify a woman is through gaze (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Women who experience more objectification have more body related anxieties, body shame, and eating disorders (Fredrickson et al., 1998). A study was conducted on African American girls who were shown images of women that were objectified and defined them by their bodies. The results of this study provided evidence that the message media gives about women leave an impact on girls' attitudes in

paying close attention to physical appearance. The results suggested that girls who were strongly influenced by the objectifying images shown may internalize the message being given about women. The girls' attitudes reflected the influence these images had on them (Gordon, 2008). Women objectification occurs when a woman's body parts are seen as separate from her identity as a person and those body parts are viewed as commodity for the audience to use for sexual purposes. This leaves women's minds and bodies fragmented (Papadak, 2019). Objectification, as defined by Immanuel Kant in 1785, is the narrowing down of one's humanity to the status of an object. Women objectification means narrowing a woman's being to the status of an object (Papadaki, 2010). This fragmentation can leave a negative impact on women's mental health, like eating disorders and sexual dysfunction (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Also related to age, previous research has found that body dissatisfaction remains relatively stable for women across the adult lifespan (Grippo & Hill, 2008; Hetherington & Burnett, 1994; Tiggemann & Kuring, 2004; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). Greater body esteem lead to decreased thin body internalization in Korean adolescents (You & Shin, 2019). Body dissatisfaction in older women has been found to be similar to young women, with sociocultural standards of body image thought to "affect different generations of women in similar ways" (Lewis & Cachelin, 2001). Despite this recognition of the important role that socio-demographics can play in relation to variations in women's self-objectification levels, no study has directly examined the association between social class, and self-objectification and body surveillance (Bretthauer et al., 2007). Part of the reason may be that unlike age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or nationality, identifying individuals' social class is more

methodologically complex (Ostrove et al., 2000).

Reviewing literature, we could not find meaningful and academic research on women objectification through television advertisements in Pakistan. (Ullah & Khan, 2014).

Considering these variables, the aim of the study was to investigate the role of personal variables on women objectification in context of Pakistani advertisements. In an eastern culture, where male dominancy still prevails, women objectification is an issue to be given vital attention to. The significance of working on the current study is to help spread awareness regarding women objectification that is portrayed on media advertisements in Pakistan and prove whether it has a negative impact. This is done in the hope of a positive change at the societal level by conveying this message to advertising agencies and to help reduce psychological distress of young women by reducing self-objectification through psychological workshops and programs.

Method

It is a primary quantitative and a correlational study. To conduct the research, convenience sampling technique was used and a sample of 430 emerging adult women from Karachi with the age bracket of 18 to 25 years was taken to ensure the reliability of the study and to get multicultural data. Emerging adulthood is a time period in between the ages 18 to 25 years where the individual is neither considered an adolescent nor an adult but in between (Nelson, 2004). Unmarried females were considered for the current study using Emmanuel Kant's perspective on objectification. He believes that marriage is what can reduce objectification even when sexual activity is involved. The current study is being done to find the prevalence of self-objectification; hence, unmarried females were considered (Papadaki, 2010). The

questionnaires were given in hard copy and filled by the respondents.

Inclusion Criteria

- Young females who have acquired education till at least Matriculation.
- Unmarried females were included in the study.
- Age bracket of 18 to 25 years was considered as sample.
- Females who have watched T.V. advertisements were included.

Exclusion Criteria

- Females who were older than 25 or younger than 18 years of age were excluded.
- Females who have not acquired education at least till Matriculation were not included.
- Females who were married were excluded.
- Females who have not watched T.V. advertisements were excluded.

Materials

The material consisted of questionnaires including a consent form, demographics form, and Self-Objectification-Trait Scale.

Consent form

A form of consent was the first part of the questionnaire. It was provided in order to take consent of the respondents in the study. It had details regarding nature of the study and the matters of confidentiality.

Demographics form

Demographics form was used to acquire the basic details of the participants like name, date of birth, age, marital status, family structure, and education.

Self-Objectification–Trait Scale

To measure women objectification, Self-Objectification-Trait Scale, created by Sarah Dahl in 2014, was used (Dahl, 2014). It includes a list of 15 items. The scale is a 5 point-Likert type scale which ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha of this scale is r= 0.84. In this research, it was calculated to be r= 0.89.

Procedure

For permission, concerned authorities were approached and contacted through permission letters to seek the approval for data collection. After permission the participants were approached individually and in groups. Participants were briefed about the purpose and objective of the study. Further, they were briefed about risk and benefits involved in this study. They were informed and given details regarding confidentiality, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Firstly, they were given consent form for signature if they agreed to participate in the study. After their agreement to participate in the study, they were required to fill demographic information form and self-report questionnaires which has its own instructions which is written on top of the form. The data collected was put into the software of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v 21 to measure the results.

Results
Table 1
Demographic Information (N=430)

Variables	F	(%)
Age		
18-19	56	13%
20-21	110	25.6%
22-23	124	28.8%
24-25	140	32.6%
Family Structure		
Nuclear	335	77.9%
Joint	95	22.1%
Education		
O levels / Matriculation	4	0.9%
A levels / Intermediate	83	19.3%
Bachelors	272	63.3%
Masters	71	16.5%
Employment Status		
Employed for wage	76	17.7%
Looking for work	30	7%
Homemaker	4	0.9%
Student	265	61.6%
Internee	13	3%
Looking for work, Student, Internee	1	0.2%
Student, Internee	7	1.6%
Employed for wage, Student	17	4%
Looking for work, Student	11	2.6%
Employed for wage, Looking for work	4	0.9%
Homemaker, Student	1	0.2%
Employed for wage, Internee	1	0.2%

The table of demographics depicted the main demographic variables of the study. The distribution of the demographic variables is shown with sub-categories, which is based on the demographic information of the participants in the study (*N*=430).

Table 2

One way ANOVA for the Variables of Self-Objectification based on Age

	Age	N	M	SD	F	P	95%CI LL	UL
Women Objectification	18-19	56	34.68	8.59	1.63	.18	32.38	36.98
	20-21	110	36.45	10.54			34.45	38.44
	22-23	124	38.36	12.09			36.21	40.51
	24-25	140	36.67	12.01			34.14	38.16

Note: N= Number of participants, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, F= F Value, P= Significance (P<.05), LL=lower level, UL= upper level

According to the results in Table 2, there is no significant difference in the self-objectification of women based on age.

Table 3

t-test for the Variable of Self-Objectification between Joint and Nuclear Family Structures

	Family Structure	N	M	SD	t-value	df	p	Cohen's d
Women Objectification	Joint	95	36.28	12.69				
	Nuclear	335	36.78	10.90	-.379	428	.031	0.042

Note: Family Structure= Family Structure, N= Number of participants, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, F= F value, t= t-value, df= degrees of freedom, P= Significance (P<.05), LL=lower level, UL= upper level

According to the results in Table 3, there is a significant difference in the women objectification based on family structure. The women living in nuclear family structures had more objectification as compared to those women living in joint family structure.

Table 4

One way ANOVA for the Variables of Self-Objectification based on Education

	Education	N	M	SD	F	P	95%CI LL	UL
Women Objectification	18-19	4	38.25	4.57	.75	.52	32.00	43.00
	20-21	83	35.01	9.56			17.00	54.00
	22-23	272	37.06	11.92			15.00	78.00
	24-25	71	37.03	10.99			17.00	62.00

Note: Education= Education, N= Number of participants, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, F= F value, P= Significance (P<.05), LL=lower level, UL= upper level

According to the results in Table 4, there is no significant difference in the self-objectification of women based on education.

Table 5

One way ANOVA for the Variable of Self-Objectification based on Employment Status

	Employment Status	N	M	SD	F	P	η²	95% CI	
								LL	UL
Women Objectification	Employed for wage	76	38.1	12.13	1.89	.04	.02	35.39	40.93
	Looking for work	30	36.00	11.97				31.53	40.47
	Homemaker	4	24.25	5.38				15.69	32.81
	Student	265	36.61	11.00				35.28	37.94
	Internee	13	32.15	9.58				26.36	37.94
	Looking for work, Student, Internee	1	36.00	-				-	-
	Student, Internee	7	29.29	6.55				23.23	35.34
	Employed for wage, Student	17	35.00	9.34				30.20	39.80
	Looking for work, Student	11	46.64	11.79				38.71	54.56
	Employed for wage, Looking for work	4	36.75	17.02				9.67	63.83
	Homemaker, Student	1	-	-				-	-
	Employed for wage, Internee	1	-	-				-	-

Note: Employment Status= Employment Status, N= Number of participants, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, F= F value, P= Significance (P<.05), LL=lower level, UL= upper level

According to the results in Table 5, there is a significant difference in the self-objectification of women based on employment status.

Discussion

There was no significant difference in self-objectification of women, under the influence of Pakistani advertisements, based on their ages and education levels. This could be due to other factors that could be possible contributors to self-objectification rather than the participants' ages and education levels alone. Forms of media other than T.V. advertisements, that is, magazines and films, may have a role to play in self-objectification as weight loss messages in magazines are placed next to sex life messages denoting that a thin body will lead to a better sex life (Oz, 2019). On television shows, women are judged to reach the standard of a good life partner if they appear attractive (Aubrey, 2006). How the female body is associated with success only if it fits the "thin ideal" is a main contributing factor in influencing women to think that their bodies are commodities that can determine their life experiences, causing them to objectify themselves (Muehlenkamp & Saris-Baglama, 2002). Societal factors also contribute to self-objectifying behaviors. From a young age, girls are expected to play with thin-figured dolls and toy make-up sets. This sets their focus on bodily appearances

until they learn to value themselves on the basis of their outer appearance (Furlow, 1996). These messages are conveyed through social agents like parents, peers, and teachers. So, these self-objectifying attitudes towards their bodies extend up to the point where women possess feminine or masculine traits (Edmonds & Cahoon, 1984). Women who own more masculine traits are more satisfied with their bodies as compared to those women who own feminine traits (Franzoi, 1995). There was a significant difference in self-objectification of women, under the influence of Pakistani advertisements, based on their family structures and employment statuses. The family is where women's initial phase of socialization starts. Little girls are monitored more for their actions than little boys over the common phrase "boys will be boys". In Asian culture joint families, girls are monitored for their actions more than boys are (Sen, 2019). This intrudes with their independence in making their own choices and focusing more on their physical appearance than their inner self. In nuclear families, experiences are different than the experiences of living in joint family systems. Hence, the differences in both these systems have on self-objectifying behaviors may be different, which is why there is a significant difference in self-objectification based on family structures. When a woman works in an organization, the objectification she perceptually receives from other workers is internalized, which leads to self-objectification (Auzoult & Bernard , 2016). This also supports the Objectification Theory by Fredrickson and Roberts (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The same view can be applied to women who are students, internees, homemakers, and those who are looking for work. The amount of self-objectifying behaviors may be different in these different employment statuses, similarly; there was a significant difference in self-objectification of women participants of this study, based on their various employment statuses.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that personal factors like age and education levels make no significant difference in self-objectification of women under the influence of Pakistani advertisements. However, there was a significant difference in women objectification based on their family structures and employment statuses.

Limitations

Findings of the research cannot be generalized to the overall population of Karachi or to other cities of Pakistan. The findings cannot be generalized to the males. It could be that those responses were based on the short term influence of advertisements on them while they were filling the survey.

Suggestions

- Future researches on objectification can be done on a broad range of ages, married females, and males.
- Participants of lower socio-economic background can be used in future researches.

Implications

- The research would play a role in initiating the idea of spreading awareness against body-shaming, body consciousness, and eating disorder.
- Psychological programs in order to educate people about the negative impacts of objectification.
- Media literacy programs aiming to reduce the pressure on women to conform to body 'ideals'.

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