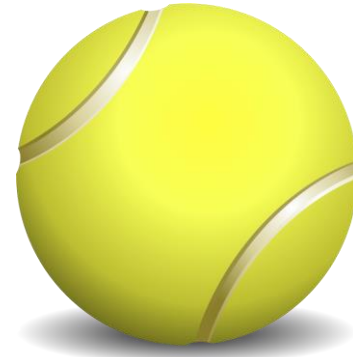# Selfie-Objectification: Adolescents, Instagram and Objectification


Beth T. Bell

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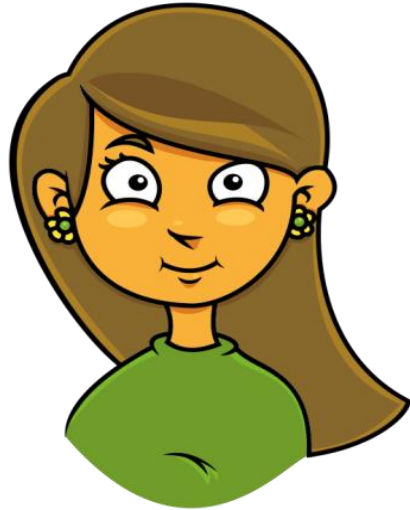
Objectification

- Objectification = depriving an individual of their personhood to the extent that they are perceived as or behave in a more object-like way relative to a human.

- Sexual objectification occurs when individuals are reduced to, and valued for, their body parts or sexual function over their internal attributes and human worth.

Objectification Theory
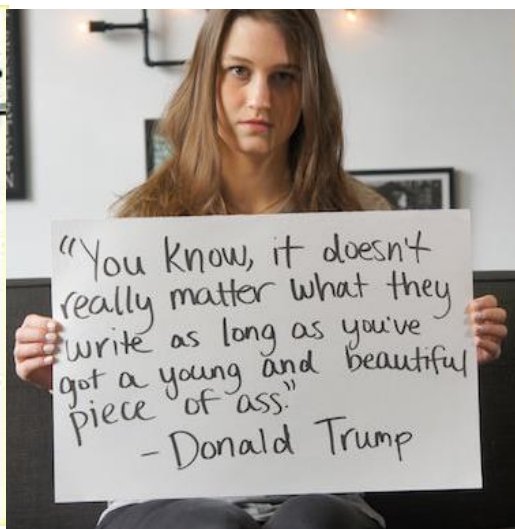
Fredrickson & Roberts (1997)

Objectification Theory
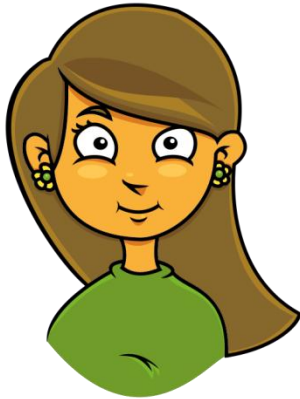
SELF-OBJECTIFICATION

- Body Shame
- Disordered Eating
- Reduced math and sport performance
- Less talkative
- Less likely to speak up for equal rights

OBJECTIFIED OTHERS

- Less socially attractive
- Less agency (fewer thoughts, perceptions and morality)
- Less positive traits (warmth, intelligence, competence)
- Increased pain threshold
- Increased acceptance of sexual violence

See Heflick & Goldenberg (2014) for review

Image-Sharing and Social Media

- 68% EU adolescents use some form of social media
  (EU Kids Online, 2014)

- **1.8 BILLION** images shared on social media daily
  (Meeker, 2015)

- Instagram now boasts 300 million users globally
  (Instagram, 2016)

- Content analyses have found a high volumes of objectified images on social media

- Studies have focused on content posted using various hashtags (e.g. *#fitspiration #thinspiration*) rather than on the personal profiles of individuals.
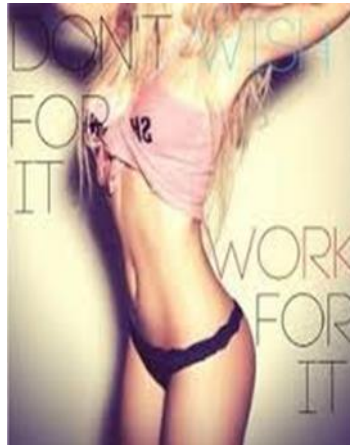
(e.g. Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017; Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015)

Study 1

Deighton-Smith & Bell (2017)

- Content and thematic analysis of 1000 Instagram posts labelled #fitspiration

- 52% images featured bodies:
  - 90% thin & 55% muscular

- Majority of images were objectified (showing/focusing on body parts, static rather than active, etc).

Fit is Sexy

A fit physique requires commitment and self-regulation

Your choices define you

Pleasure and perseverance through pain

Battle of the selves: you vs. you

Here's to us! A celebration of community

Study 2

- 35 adolescents (*Age M* = 14.75, *SD* = 1.39, *Range* = 13-17; *Female N* = 21, *Male N* = 14)
- 7 focus groups (3-6 participants per group).
- Asked to select card from deck containing different types of images shared on social media and discuss.
- Analysed using thematic analysis

Presenting and Viewing Physically and Socially Attractive Selves

Maintaining Offline Relationships

The Importance of Visible and Quantifiable Feedback

Bell (2019)

Study 2

"I think a lot of the time like the type of the peop-type of girls that put like revealing photos on and like you know what kind of person they are so I don't think it's really surprising. Like I don't think like average people like ever do that so."

"It's really annoying when people take pictures of their legs when they're in the bath and go bathtime!!! That's kinda weird… when it's taken so close that you can start to see up the body and it's like… can you not!"

"There's always that photo when they're like laid back on the sundecks and take a photo of their legs."

Bell (2019)

Study 2

- Two research questions:

  1. To what extent do adolescent girls / young women objectify themselves on their personal Instagram account?
  2. To what extent can this be predicted by self-perceptions and positive feedback from peers (in the form of likes)?

- 86 young women (Age M = 19.88; SD = 1.34, $Range$ = 18-24)
  - 20 most recent Instagram posts downloaded (N = 1720)
  - Completed measures of self-objectification and Instagram use

Content Analysis

Self-images: **N = 1013; M = 12.10; SD = 4.53; Mn = 13.00**

Face Obstructed or Omitted	**Body Part Main Focus**	**Sexually Suggestive Pose**	**3 or More Body Parts Exposed**
N = 71	**N =24**	**N = 432**	**N = 58**
M = 0.83; Mn = 0.83; SD = 1.18; $Range$ = 0-6	M = 0.28; Mn = 0.00; SD = 0.55; Range = 0-2	M = 5.49; Mn = 4.00; SD = 4.10; $Range$ = 0-17	M = 0.67; Mn = 0.00; SD = 1.34; $Range$ = 0-7

Objectified Self-images: **N = 512; M = 5.95; SD = 3.97; Mn = 5.50**

Mean likes on objectified self-images: M = 25.39; SD = 31.08 ; Mn = 16.75

Predictors of Objectified Self-Images

Hierarchical Regression Analysis / Outcome = Number of objectified self-images

Step 1: Self-objectification
Step 2: Mean likes on non-objectified self-images
Step 3: Mean likes on objectified self-images
Step 4: Self-objectification * Mean likes on objectified self-images

$r^2 = .16$; F (3,82) = 5.26, p<.01

Self-objectification - β =.27; p<.05;
*Non-objectified Mean Likes - β =.-68; p<.05*
Objectified Mean Likes- β =.81; p<.01

- Both self-objectification and mean likes received on objectified self-images (while controlling for mean likes on other self-images) significantly predicted frequency of posting objectified self-mages

Discussion

- Self-objectifying content is common in the personal Instagram feeds of young women:
  - Over ¼ posts contain one or more self-objectifying feature
  - Sexually suggestive images are most frequent form of objectifying content
  - Extends previous research highlighting prevalence of objectifying content on social media (e.g. Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017; Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015)

- Significantly more positive feedback "likes" were received on posts containing objectified content than without.

- Frequency of posting objectifying content is associated with:
  - Extent to which girls have internalised societal messages that women should be objectified to the extent that they objectify themselves
  - Typically receiving more likes for posts containing objectifying self-images while controlling for mean likes
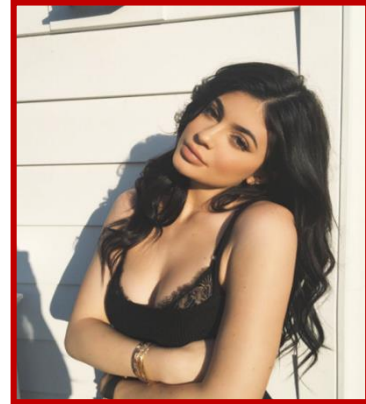
Discussion

- However, further research is needed:
  - What is the effect of exposure to self-objectifying images of peers on perception of self and peers?
  - How do these relationships emerge over time?

  Self-objectification → Objectifying self-images → Likes → Further self-objectification

- Extends growing body of research (e.g. Fox & Rooney, 2015) aiming to understand self-presentational strategies on social media:
  - Suggest type of self-image posted is important
  - Need to consider alternative methods for understanding image-sharing behaviour that is not reliant on self-report

- Possible implications for education
  - Media & social media literacy / positive body image programmes
  - More likes is not necessarily positive

BODY IMAGE
in the
DIGITAL AGE

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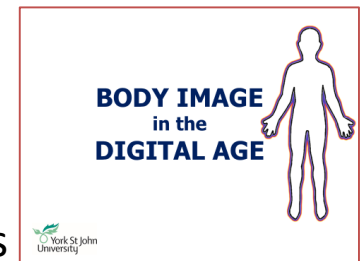
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