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Enjoyment of Sexualization is Associated with Alcohol Use, Self-Objectification is Not

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis
Submitted in Partial fulfillment of
University Honors Program Requirements
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

by
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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to determine how the enjoyment of sexualization impacts the relationship between self-objectification and alcohol use. Alcohol use is prevalent within college communities and may lead to damaging experiences. Participants were 892 undergraduate women who completed an online questionnaire including measurements of self-objectification, enjoyment of sexualization, as well as an alcohol survey. A general linear model was used to analyze these relationships and interactions. Data analysis showed that while enjoyment of sexualization was associated positively with alcohol use, self-objectification was not, and there was no significant interaction between the two variables. This provides evidence that enjoyment of sexualization is a more significant potential risk factor for drinking behavior than self-objectification. This understanding may lead to the reduction of alcohol consumption risk factors in women through therapies aimed at decreasing enjoyment of sexualization.

Key Words: Psychology, alcohol use, self-objectification, enjoyment of sexualization

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Enjoyment of Sexualization is Associated with Alcohol Use, Self-Objectification is Not

Alcohol use is particularly prevalent within college communities (Grant et al, 2015). Student drinking remains a serious problem in these communities, with 20% of college students meeting criteria for an alcohol use disorder (Blanco et al., 2008). Alcohol use among students can lead to high rates of damaging alcohol related experiences (Johnston, O'Malley, Miech, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2016). These experiences can include health problems such as contraction of sexually transmitted infections, physical and sexual violence, as well as vehicular accidents. Negative drinking experiences can specifically influence women severely, particularly regarding sexual violence. Approximately half of all sexual assaults on college age women involve alcohol consumption (Abbey, 2002). Considering these negative effects, it is important to examine the motives of alcohol consumption, particularly in underrepresented research groups such as women (Tuchman, 2010).

One considered factor of alcohol consumption in women is of self-objectification, which is defined as the internalization of a sexualized view of oneself (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003). Objectification theory states that culture is saturated with overt sexualization of the female body and systematically forces women to internalize sexually objectifying experiences (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Prior research has confirmed this association, showing that increased sexual objectification is associated with increased self-objectification (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Moradi, Dirks, & Matteson, 2005). A study has determined a relationship between sexual objectification and substance use in women (Carr & Szymanski, 2011). In this study, the researchers evaluated 289 undergraduate women for sexual objectification, self-objectification, depression, and substance abuse including alcohol abuse, nicotine abuse, and

drug abuse. Main findings of this study suggest that substance abuse may be both directly and indirectly related to sexual objectification. The direct link established suggests sexual objectification experiences has an extremely negative impact on substance abuse in women. Other findings of the same and similar studies report an indirect link between sexual objectification and substance abuse through body shame, such that more sexual objectification experiences lead to greater body shame which then leads to depression and further substance abuse (Carr & Szymanski, 2011; Tschann et al., 1994; Muehlenkamp, Swanson, & Brausch, 2005). Forms of sexual objectification such as gender discrimination and workplace harassment have also been shown to contribute to smoking quantity, binge drinking (Zucker & Landry, 2007) and overall substance use (Davis & Wood, 1999; Rospenda, 2002).

While there is evidence that self-objectification may relate to alcohol use, the enjoyment of sexualization may moderate this relationship. Self-sexualization is specifically different than self-objectification, as self-objectification focuses on the internalization of an outside objectifying perspective. The Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale (ESS), which determines attitudes and behaviors regarding feeling “sexy” and acting on these feelings through actions such as wearing makeup or flirting (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2010), is a relevant measure of self-sexualization. This exploratory analysis of the scale was conducted by studying the possible positive and negative effects of enjoying sexualization, particularly focusing on its effects on eating problems. While they did not have specific hypotheses regarding this relationship, they found that ESS scores moderated the relationship between self-objectification and eating problems. The scale used to evaluate self-objectification is the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS), which found a significant relationship between self-sexualization and eating problems (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Because eating problems and alcohol use can be

considered health risks, this study may suggest that self-sexualization may lead to increased risky health behaviors.

While self-sexualization and alcohol use has not been thoroughly studied, the consideration of other risk behaviors may indicate a relationship between alcohol use and self-sexualization. While few studies have attempted to determine a direct negative link between self-objectifying and sexualizing behaviors, indirect relationships have been established. For example, studies have determined a relationship between body dissatisfaction and the onset of cigarette smoking in adolescent girls (Stice & Shaw, 2003), suggesting a theory that smoking will enable them to control their weight in order to appear more desirable (Camp, Klesges, & Relyea, 1993). These effects continued into college-aged women as those with self-sexualized views of their appearance being more likely to be smokers (Harrell, 2002). Studies discussing health risk behaviors have provided rationale for a hypothesized relationship between alcohol use and self-sexualizing and objectifying behaviors.

This study is designed to help fill a large gap within the research literature surrounding the topics of enjoyment of sexualization and its possible relationship with alcohol use. The majority of studies discuss only these effects in reference to eating problems (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011) self-objectification, and negative affect among women (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Halliwell, Malson, & Tischner, 2011). Several studies have found a significant relationship between self-objectification and alcohol use such that greater self-objectification contributes to greater alcohol consumption, little is known about the moderating role of self-sexualization on this relationship. This study hypothesizes that the enjoyment of sexualization will increase the effects of self-objectification and lead to higher alcohol use.

Method

Participants

Our sample of 892 undergraduate students was recruited from a large Midwestern university. Participation was limited to those who identified as female. The participants self-identified as 84.9% Caucasian, 6.8% Asian, 4.3% mixed and 3.7% black. The participants ranged from 18 to 47 years old, with a mean age of 20.4 and a standard deviation of 2.32.

Materials

Five items recommended by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism to measure alcohol use were used as separate outcomes. These items included alcohol consumption frequency, binge drinking frequency, maximum drinks in a 24-hour period, and amount of alcohol consumption. Questions included, “During the last 12 months, how often did you usually have any kind of drink containing alcohol?” and “During the last twelve months, how many alcoholic drinks did you have on a typical day when you drank alcohol?” Questions included in the analysis focused on alcohol consumption frequency, amount, and age of onset.

The 16 question Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996) was used to assess self-reported objectification in participants. Items are rated on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). A higher score on this scale indicates a higher self-report of self-objectification.

The Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale was used to assess self-sexualization (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2010). The eight-item questionnaire is rated on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 6 (agree strongly). Examples of questions included in this scale are “*I love to feel sexy*”, and “*I want men to look at me*”.

Procedures

The participants were recruited through the Psychology Department subject pool. Students were offered research course credit for their participation. The study was hosted online through a program named Qualtrics. Participants gave electronic consent and completed several questionnaires.

Data Analysis

A general linear model was performed to test prediction of alcohol use by Objectified Body Consciousness scores, Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale scores, and the interaction between the two. Bivariate correlations among these variables were also investigated, including ESS scores, OBCS scores, quantity of alcohol consumed, frequency of alcohol consumption, binge drinking, and maximum amount of drinks within a drinking period. The general linear model with interaction analysis was centered at the mean of the variables. A total score of both Objectified Body Consciousness subscales were used to represent one total sum of self-objectification. SPSS was used to complete these analyses.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the alcohol survey, Objectified Body Consciousness scores, and Enjoyment of Sexualization scores. Bivariate correlations between all variables are reported in Table 2. Figure 1 shows the hypothesized moderation model.

Average Amount of Alcohol Consumed in a Drinking Period

Bivariate correlations and a general linear model including an interaction effect were used to examine the relationship between average amount of alcohol consumed within a drinking period, Objectified Body Consciousness (OBCS) total scores, and Enjoyment of Sexualization (ESS) scores. Pearson's correlation revealed that OBCS scores are not significantly correlated

with amount of alcohol consumed, $r = .018$, $p = .681$. ESS scores were significantly correlated with alcohol consumed, $r = .097$, $p = .030$, suggesting that increased ESS scores are associated with increased alcohol consumption. OBCS and ESS scores were also moderately correlated, $r = .303$, $p < .001$.

The general linear model with interaction effects models are depicted in Table 2. The interaction model produced $R^2 = .098$, $F(3, 497) = 1.603$, $p = .188$. OBCS scores were not significant when controlling for ESS scores. ESS scores were significant when controlling for OBCS scores. Consideration of both the bivariate and multivariate relationships suggests that only self-sexualization may influence quantity of alcohol consumed. The interaction was insignificant, producing $p = .824$, suggesting that ESS does not moderate the relationship between OBCS scores and age of amount of alcohol consumed within a drinking period.

Frequency of Alcohol Consumption within the Last 12 Months

Bivariate correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between frequency of alcohol consumption within the last 12 months, Objectified Body Consciousness Scale total scores, and the Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale scores. These scales were then examined with a general linear model which included the interaction. Pearson's correlation analyses revealed that OBCS scores were not significantly correlated with alcohol consumption frequency, $r = .049$, $p = .159$. ESS scores were positively significant, $r = .169$, $p < .001$, suggesting that increased enjoyment of sexualization is associated with increased alcohol consumption frequency.

The general linear model with the interaction produced $R^2 = .031$, $F(3, 840) = 8.886$, $p < .001$. OBCS scores did not significantly contribute to the model after controlling for ESS scores. ESS scores did significantly contribute to the model after controlling for OBCS scores.

Considering both bivariate and multivariate results, OBCS scores does not contribute to alcohol consumption frequency while ESS scores are associated with increased frequency. The interaction between these scales was also insignificant suggesting that self-sexualization did not moderate the relationship between self-objectification and alcohol consumption frequency.

Maximum Drinks within a Consumption Period

Bivariate correlations between OBCS scores, ESS scores, and maximum drinks within a consumption period were analyzed. The correlation between maximum drinks and OBCS scores were determined to be significant, $r = .092, p = .008$, suggesting that self-objectification is associated with an increase in maximum amount of drinks consumed within a 24-hour period. The correlation between maximum drinks and ESS scores were also shown to be significant, $r = .164, p < .001$, suggesting enjoyment of sexualization is correlated with increased maximum drinks in a consumption period.

The general linear model including the interaction produced $R^2 = .30, F(3, 833) = 8.605, p < .001$. In this model, Objectified Body Consciousness scores were not significantly associated with maximum drinks consumed after controlling for ESS scores. ESS scores were significant while holding OBCS scores constant within the model. Consideration of both the bivariate and multivariate relationships suggests a level of collinearity. The interaction between the two predictor variables was not significant, suggesting self-sexualization does not moderate the relationship between self-objectification and maximum drinks consumed within a 24-hour period.

Binge Drinking

Bivariate correlation analyses were used to examine the relationship between OBCS scores, ESS scores, and binge drinking, or consuming 5 or more drinks for men and 4 or more

drinks for women in a two-hour period. Pearson's correlation results showed a nonsignificant correlation between OBCS scores and binge drinking, $r = .040, p = .377$. Results showed a significant correlation between ESS scores and binge drinking, $r = .167, p < .001$.

A general linear model including the interaction was also used to examine the relationship between binge drinking, OBCS scores, and ESS scores. A model including the three variables produced $R^2 = .028, F(2, 492) = 7.099, p = .001$. OBCS scores did not significantly contribute to the model while controlling for other variables. ESS scores did significantly contribute to the model while controlling for other variables. In consideration of both the bivariate and multivariate results, these analyses suggest a level of collinearity between OBCS scores and ESS scores. The interaction between self-objectification and enjoyment of sexualization was not significant, suggesting that enjoyment of sexualization does not moderate the relationship between self-objectification and binge drinking.

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to better understand how self-objectification and self-sexualization are associated with aspects of alcohol use. Bivariate correlations and a general linear model were used to test these relationships. Self-sexualization was found to be significantly correlated with all measures of alcohol consumption examined. Somewhat surprisingly, self-objectification was found to correlate with only one measure of alcohol consumption, maximum drinks within a drinking period. These results suggest a direct link between self-sexualization and alcohol consumption, while self-objectification may be related to alcohol use via a more complicated mechanism.

This mechanism was further examined within the general linear model analyses between alcohol use, OBCS scores and ESS scores, as well as the interaction between the two. Upon

examination of the bivariate and multivariate correlations of maximum drinks within a 24-hour period and binge drinking, a level of collinearity between self-sexualization and self-objectification is suggested. This is supported by the moderately significant correlation between ESS scores and OBCS scores, which provides evidence that a similar factor considered in both measurements of self-sexualization and self-objectification is significantly related to alcohol use. While this factor may exist in self-objectification, its link to alcohol use may be more thoroughly explained through the relationship between enjoyment of sexualization and alcohol use. Further research is needed to understand the exact nature of this relationship.

This study contributes to the literature surrounding risk factors for substance use, particularly those of young women. While this study does not necessarily support research suggesting an association between self-objectification and alcohol use, it is important to note that much of the literature is focused primarily on sexual-objectification. This may be an important distinction between the present study and much of the existing literature. Prior research indicates that sexual-objectification contributes to substance use both directly and in an indirect mediating pathway including self-objectification (Carr & Szymanski, 2011, Tschann et al., 1994). In Carr & Szymanski's study, self-objectification was included in a mediation pathway in which sexual objectification led to self-objectification, depression, and then to further substance use. In comparison, the present study suggested a more direct association between self-objectification and alcohol use which was not supported. This may suggest that self-objectification contributes to drinking motives only with the inclusion of sexual-objectification or other variables within the model. Self-objectification may primarily be a moderating factor on the relationship between sexual objectification and alcohol use. Further research in this area is needed.

This study also contributes to the literature regarding the enjoyment of sexualization as it provides novel evidence that suggests an association between increased sexualization and increased alcohol consumption. Enjoyment of sexualization was significantly correlated with all measures of alcohol consumption included in this study. This significance suggests increased self-sexualization is associated with increased alcohol use. While prior research examined self-sexualization in relation to other outcomes, this is one of the first considering the direct relationship between enjoyment of sexualization and alcohol use. Further research is needed to determine the exact mechanisms of this relationship and may focus on the use of alcohol as a coping or enhancement mechanism in women with increased enjoyment of sexualization. Other studies have determined that coping with stress is a primary motivator for alcohol consumption in young women (Kuntsche & Labhart, 2013a; Thrul & Kuntsche, 2016), as well as an enhancement tool for risky sexual behavior (Dvorak et al., 2015). Prior research has also proposed the idea of enjoyment of sexualization as a component of a broader understanding of objectification (Manago, Ward, & Lemm, 2014), which suggests that self-sexualization is related to self-objectification conceptually and may be associated with the same outcome variables including substance use.

The present study also contributes to existing literature examining the positive correlation between increased self-sexualization and self-objectification (Liss et al., 2011, Tiggeman et al., 2014) as well as existing research regarding the positive correlation between heightened enjoyment of self-sexualization and positive body image (Pellizzer, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2016). This research suggests that enjoyment of sexualization plays an important role in the relationship young women have with their bodies and alcohol use. In order to understand how enjoyment of sexualization changes the relationship young women have in regard to their bodies, further

research is needed, specifically in the area of substance use. The present study suggested enjoyment of sexualization as a moderating variable on the relationship between self-objectification and alcohol use. While increased self-sexualization has been previously linked to increased self-objectification (Liss et al., 2011, Tiggeman et al., 2014), the mechanism by which self-objectification may lead to further alcohol use requires further study as well.

The strengths of the study include a large sample size and validated measurements. The sample of 843 participants supplied contributed to statistical validity and provides generalizability to the study population of undergraduate women. The sample size is comparable to other studies regarding similar concepts (Hanna et al., 2017; Manago, Ward, & Lemm, 2014; Gervais et al., 2017) The Objectified Body Consciousness scale and Enjoyment of Sexualization scale are well validated scales within this topic. The use of these instruments allows replications of this study to be performed within other populations by other researchers.

This study must be considered in the light of some limitations including a limited age range of participants. While the age range was appropriate in studying the alcohol behaviors of this specific population, results regarding the effects of self-sexualization and self-objectification may change throughout certain age ranges. Lastly, this study was conducted to specifically examine possible drinking motives in women. While women may be particularly at risk for self-objectification and self-sexualization, these variables may affect men's drinking behaviors and motives in some capacity as well.

In conclusion, the present study attempted to further understand the relationship between self-sexualization and self-objectification and their effects on alcohol use in undergraduate women. It appears that enjoyment of sexualization may be associated with an increase in many drinking behaviors, while self-objectification may not contribute significantly. Further research is

needed to more closely determine the relationships between self-objectification, self-sexualization, and alcohol use. Questions regarding the exact mechanisms of the relationship between enjoyment of sexualization and alcohol use persist, as well as determining the exact nature of the relationship between self-sexualization and self-objectification. Research regarding the drinking motives of young women is both important and necessary in order to minimize risks surrounding substance use, and these motives may include self-objectification, self-sexualization and other related concepts.

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Tables

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Enjoyment of Sexualization (ESS), Objectified Body Consciousness (OBCS), and Alcohol Use

Variable	Univariate Statistics		
ESS	$M = 29.71$	$SD = 7.57$	$N = 844$
OBCS	$M = 7.02$	$SD = 1.72$	$N = 844$
Alcohol Frequency	$M = 3.74$	$SD = 2.22$	$N = 845$
Amount of Alcohol Consumed	$M = 3.05$	$SD = 1.54$	$N = 501$
Maximum Drinks	$M = 4.96$	$SD = 2.24$	$N = 838$
Binge Drinking	$M = 2.91$	$SD = 1.75$	$N = 495$

Note: This table depicts descriptive statistics from the Enjoyment of Sexualization scale,

Objectified Body Consciousness scale, Alcohol Frequency (using days of drinking within last 12 months) Amount of Alcohol consumed in a drinking period, Maximum Drinks (within 12 hours), and Binge Drinking scores.

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations for Objectified Body Consciousness Scores, Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale Scores, and Various Alcohol Measures

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. ESS Scores	--					
2. OBCS Scores	.303**	--				
3. Alcohol Consumption Frequency	.169**	.049	--			
4. Alcohol Quantity During Drinking Period	.097*	.018	.375**	--		
5. Maximum Drinks in 24-Hours	.164**	.092**	.690**	.634**	--	
6. Binge Drinking	.167**	.040	.669**	.526**	.481**	--

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: This table depicts results from all bivariate correlation analyses, including Objectified Body Consciousness Scale scores and Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale scores, as well as various alcohol consumption measures.

Table 3

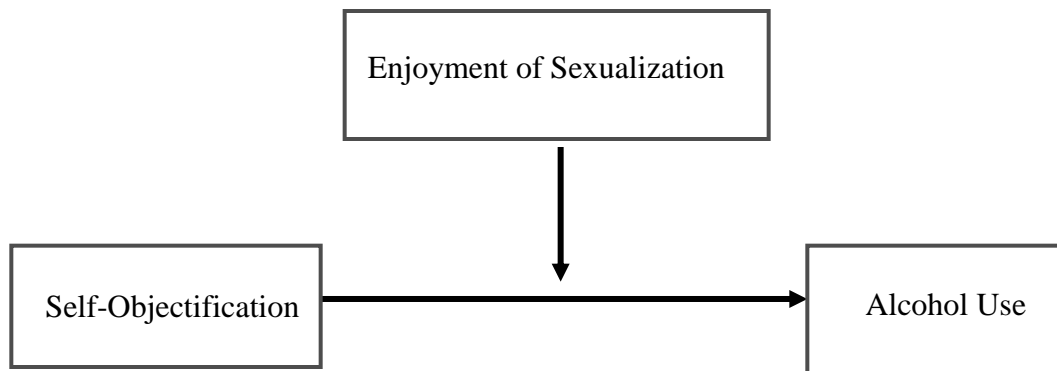
General Linear Model with Interaction Results for Objectified Body Consciousness Scores, Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale Scores, and Various Alcohol Measures

Alcohol Measure	Scale	b	SE	β	<i>t</i>	Sig. (<i>p</i>)
Alcohol Consumption Frequency	OBCS	-.007	.046	-.005	-.147	.883
	ESS	.048	.011	.164	4.581	<.001
	Int.	-.007	.005	-.049	-1.424	.155
Quantity of Alcohol Consumed	OBCS	-.005	.041	-.006	-.133	.894
	ESS	.021	.010	.098	2.116	.035
	Int.	-.001	.005	-.010	-.223	.824
Maximum of Drinks	OBCS	.059	.046	.046	1.279	.201
	ESS	.043	.011	.147	4.085	<.001
	Int.	-.005	.005	-.033	-.971	.332
Binge Drinking	OBCS	-.002	.047	-.001	-.032	.974
	ESS	.041	.011	.168	3.647	<.001
	Int.	.000	.006	.002	.037	.970

Note: This table depicts results from the multiple regression simple effects models analyzed, including Objectified Body Consciousness Scale scores and Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale scores, as well as various alcohol consumption measures.

Figures

Figure 1



Note: Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized moderation model. Objectified Body Consciousness Scale scores will be directly correlated with alcohol consumption behaviors while Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale scores will moderate this relationship and increase alcohol use.