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SELECTIVE HUMANITY:

The Role of Race and Sexualization in the Dehumanization and Objectification of Women



ABSTRACT

The present study focused on the intersection between sexualization and race. We conducted a 2 (Sexualization: sexualized vs. non-sexualized) x 2 (Race: White vs. Black) between-groups factorial design. Black models were dehumanized more than White models, and participants expressed more avoidant and exclusionary behaviors towards White women. Additionally, results indicated that non-sexualized models were objectified and dehumanized to a greater degree than sexualized models. We did not find a significant interaction between race and sexualization. Our results suggest that Black women are deprived of human qualities compared to White women, while sexualization influences how women are objectified and dehumanized.

INTRODUCTION

- Objectification is defined by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) as a phenomenon in which women may be seen as an object or a body rather than a human being. Objectified women are at a higher risk for a variety of adverse outcomes, such as negative mental health, habitual body surveillance, eating disorders, and decreased performance (Szymanski et al., 2011). Additionally, objectified women are viewed as less competent, less worthy of moral treatment, more responsible for being raped, and less deserving of help when being mistreated (Holland & Haslam, 2016).
- Dehumanization refers to the cognitive processes which deny uniquely human traits to others, as well as denying them human nature (Haslam et al., 2005). Dehumanization has been linked to a vast amount of disturbing consequences (Loughnan et al., 2013; Viki et al., 2013). Women wearing sexualized clothing are subjected to increased objectification (Anderson et al., 2018), as well as more likely to be equated to objects and dehumanized by others (Bernard et al., 2020).
- Historically Black people in the United States have been denied humanness, which sustains targeted racial violence into the modern day (Owusu-Bempah, 2017). Today, Black women are objectified and hypersexualized in modern media to a far greater extent than White women (Turner, 2011), as well as being subjected to increased sexualization and dehumanization compared to White women on an individual level (Anderson et al., 2018).
- The present study examines the intersection of sexualization and race, analyzing both of these concepts in regard to their possible main effect on objectification and dehumanization.

METHOD

Materials: Images of 4 models (two Black women and two White women, with a model of each race wearing non-sexualized or sexualized clothing); Objectification Scale; Perceived Human Qualities Scale, Perceived Morality Scale, Behavioral Intentions Measure, Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI).

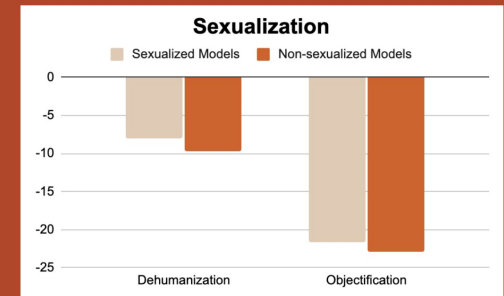
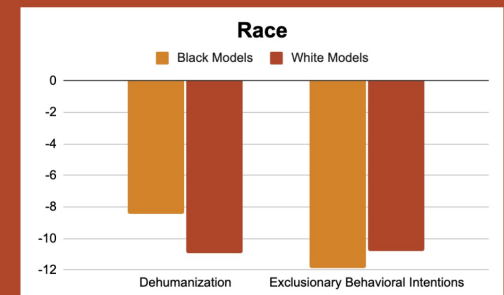
Procedure: Participants (N = 110) were randomly assigned to view either a "non-sexualized" Black model, "non-sexualized" White model, a "sexualized" Black model, or a "sexualized" White model. Participants were recruited from the department participant pool and received research credit.

Participants dehumanized Black women to a greater degree than White women. Additionally, women wearing revealing clothing were more objectified and dehumanized in comparison to their business casual counterparts.



RESULTS

- Analyses indicated a main effect of race $F(4, 99) = 7.58, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.234$, on dehumanization, with participants dehumanizing Black models to a greater extent than White models ($M = 10.95$). A main effect of race was also found regarding behavioral intentions $F(3, 100) = 7.93, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.192$, with participants expressing more avoidant and exclusionary behaviors towards White women.
- A main effect of sexualization $F(4, 99) = 5.40, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.179$, on objectification and dehumanization was found. Sexualized models were more objectified compared to non-sexualized models, and dehumanized to a greater degree compared to non-sexualized models. Hostile sexism was a significant covariate.



DISCUSSION

- In focusing on the influence of both race and sexualized clothing, our study demonstrated how both factors can influence the way that women are objectified and dehumanized by others. Participant inclination to dehumanize Black models more than White models is another demonstration of the modern racism that Black women face today. Moreover, harmful biases towards women on the basis of their attire were also evident. With hostile sexism presenting as a significant covariate, it is possible that such attitudes could be a contributing factor to our results.
- Limitations included our confined variety of models, and our largely young, White female sample size. Future research should address such concerns.