



# Self Perception among Young Jewish Women Relative to Exposure to Sexualizing Visual Media

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## Abstract

Popular American media often contains messages that objectify, sexualize, and degrade women. In contrast, Orthodox Jewish women often refrain from watching popular media and are taught to value modesty over physical appearance. The current study of Orthodox Jewish young women (N = 155), analyzed the effects of media exposure on self-perception. First, a bivariate regression analysis yielded a significant correlation between global self worth and media consumption,  $r(147) = -.253, p < .005$ . Two Spearman's correlations were significant, one between decreased religiosity and increased media consumption,  $rs[150] = -.440, p < .001$ , and the second between increased religiosity and increased global self worth,  $rs[147] = .268, p = .001$ . Last, a significant relationship was found between increased media exposure and decreased scores on self-perception of physical appearance,  $r(147) = -.374, p < .001$ . These results represent the first known formal analysis of Orthodox Jewish women and popular media.

## Introduction

Residents of the United States, along with those in modernized nations throughout the world, often choose to watch popular media through the mediums of television, movies, and music. Many studies have identified the portrayal of women through those mediums as sexualized objects who are most valuable when they meet specific physical criteria (Grabe & Hyde, 2009; Harper & Tiggeman, 2008). The image of the 'ideal woman' presented in magazine advertisements, TV, and movies, is often that of a woman with a specific set of external characteristics (tall, slim, clear-skinned, young). Those physical criteria often represent an unrealistic physical ideal in the form of edited and air-brushed images that rival the flawlessness of actual models (APA, 2010; Aubrey, 2010; Tyka & Calogero, 2011). Since the inception of the landmark objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), the majority of published studies regarding media culture and young women have used quantitative methods to explore the many negative outcomes of female sexualization ( Calogero, Pina, Park, & Rahemtulla, 2010; Markey & Markey, 2012).

Practitioners of Orthodox Judaism often see their religiosity as a guiding force for how they choose to live. Orthodox Jews, often express their religiosity through actions such as keeping Sabbath, dressing modestly, and keeping a kosher diet (Andrews, 2011). Despite the many ways in which Orthodox Jews distinguish themselves, there have been few empirical studies of the population due the complex history of the culture's integration to American society (Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, & Siev, 2010; Schnall, Pelcovitz, & Fox, 2013).

The current study addresses the sexualization of women in popular media as related to the historically under-researched population (of American Orthodox Jewish young women).

## Methodology

### DESIGN

Quantitative ex post facto design.

Bivariate regression analysis to assess for correlations among the variables in accord with the hypotheses.

### Independent Variables

- Sexualizing visual media exposure
- Self-perception of intellectual ability

Sexualizing Visual Media Exposure was (assessed with the Lifetime Media Exposure Scale (LMES), a modified version of the Lifetime Television Exposure Scale (Riddle, 2010). The LMES measures lifetime consumption of TV, movies, and music videos.

Religiosity was measured with the Student Religiosity Questionnaire (SRQ) (Katz & Schmida, 1992). The SRQ includes 10 questions about religious Jewish practice such as keeping kosher dietary restrictions and observing the Sabbath, and an additional 10 questions about religious beliefs such as faith in God and belief in ultimate redemption.

### Dependent variables

- Self-perception of physical appearance
- Self-perception of intellectual ability
- Self-perception of global self worth

The Self Perception Profile- College Students (Neemann & Harter, 2012) was used to investigate variables related to self-perception. For the purposes of the current study, the Appearance subscale, the Intellectual Ability subscale, and the Global Self Worth subscale were used.

### PARTICIPANTS

Of the 215 participants who presented for this study, 155 met all inclusion criteria.

Those criteria were measured by self-report of being an Orthodox Jew, female, between the ages of 18-24, never married, never pregnant, and having attended all-girls' schools since the first grade.

Table 1

Summary of Research Questions and Analysis Results

Research Question	Statistical Procedure	Results	Research Answer
Among young Jewish women who diverge in their religiosity, does self-perception of global self worth vary relative to consumption of sexualizing visual media?	Bivariate regression Multiple regression; Religiosity as covariate	$r(147) = -.253, p < .005, R^2 = .064$ $r(145), p = .000, R^2 = .085$	Media consumption is a significant predictor of self-perception
Is religiosity associated with reported level of sexualizing visual media consumption?	Spearman's rho	$r_s[150] = -.440, p < .001$	Significant correlation between scoring lower on religiosity level and reporting higher levels of lifetime media exposure
Is religiosity associated with self-perception?	Spearman's rho	$r_s[147] = -.268, p = .001$	Significant correlation between scoring higher on religiosity and increased scores on self-perception of global self worth.
Is self-perception of intellectual ability associated with level of sexualizing visual media consumption?	Pearson correlation	$r(144) = -.145, p = .08$	No significant correlation
Is self-perception of physical appearance associated with level of sexualizing visual media consumption?	Pearson correlation	$r(147) = -.374, p < .001$	Significant correlation between increased media exposure and decreased scores on self-perception of physical appearance.

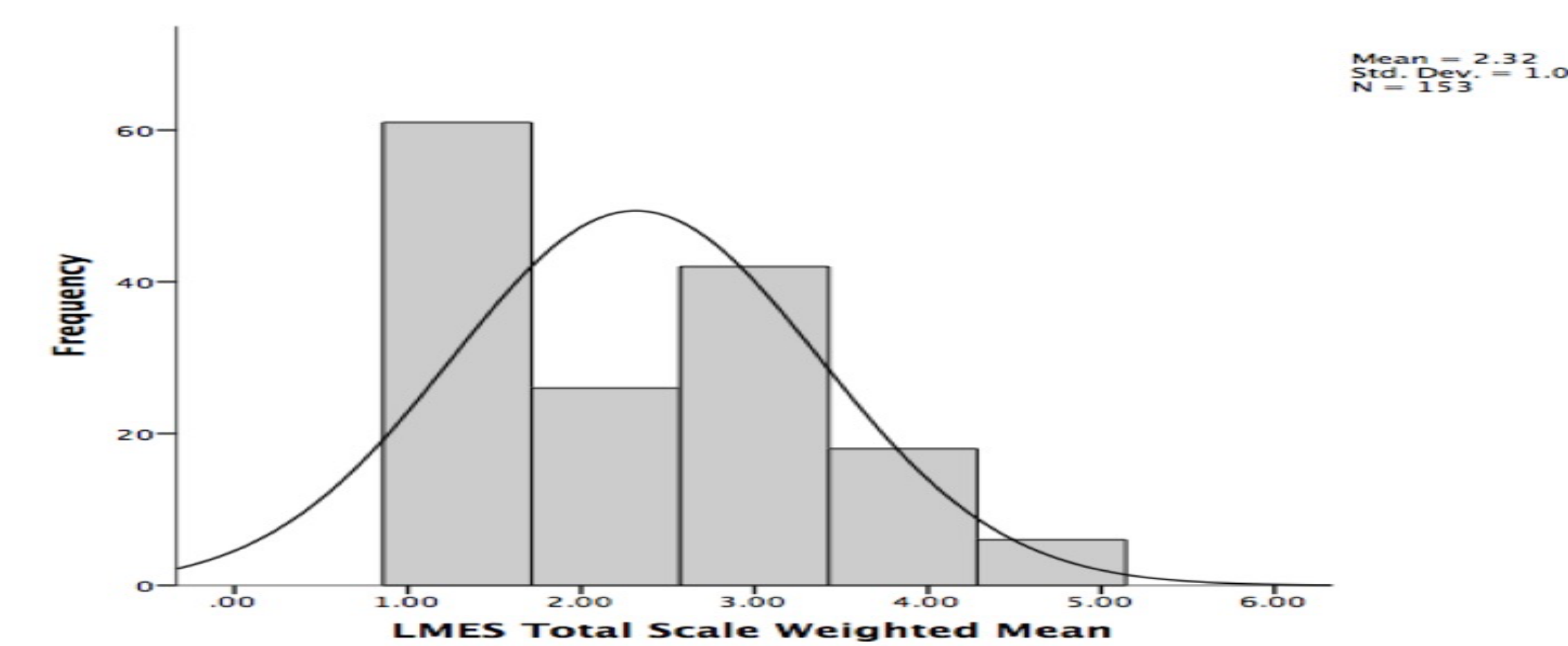


Figure 1 Mean Lifetime Media Exposure (weighted score 1 [low] to 7 [high]) was 3.35 (SD = .97). Participants (n=13) reported "never watched TV, movies, or music videos in their lives"; while others (n=57) had means between 1.1 and 1.9, indicating very seldom exposure to popular media over the course of the lifespan.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- Self-perception of global self worth (as measured by the SPP-CS as a continuous score) is predicted by sexualizing visual media consumption (as measured by the Lifetime Media Exposure Scale as a continuous score) when controlling for religiosity (as measured by the Student Religiosity Questionnaire, subscale B).
- Religiosity level (as measured by the Student Religiosity Questionnaire, subscale B) will be associated with reported sexualizing visual media consumption (as measured by the Lifetime Media Exposure Scale as a continuous score).
- Religiosity (as measured by the Student Religiosity Scale as a continuous score) will be associated with self-perception of global self worth (as measured by the SPP-CS as a continuous score).
- Self-perception of intellectual ability (as measured by the SPP-CS as a continuous score) will be associated with sexualizing visual media consumption (as measured by the Lifetime Media Exposure Scale as a continuous score).
- Self-perception of physical appearance (as measured by the SPP-CS as a continuous score) will be associated with sexualizing visual media consumption (as measured by the Lifetime Media Exposure Scale as a continuous score).

## Conclusions

The sample of participants in the current study engaged in the consumption of popular media at various levels, ranging from none or little exposure, to frequent exposure over the course of their lifespans. The current results suggest that Orthodox Jewish young women are affected by the objectification of women in popular media. Regardless of their identification with religious beliefs, those who reported exposure to media were more likely to report decreases in global self worth and in their self-perception of physical appearance. However, the results did suggest that women who reported higher levels of religiosity were also less likely to consume popular media, and were more likely to report positive global self worth. This may be viewed as a reflection of the complex reality of American Jewish women. Those who strongly value their Judaism are less likely to watch popular media. However, even the most religious women, when they do choose to watch American media, report significant negative impacts on their self-perception.

While Judaic culture often aims to empower and de-objectify women (Psalm, 45:15), the vivid on-screen content that is widely available in America may be a stronger influence. While some sects within Judaism have attempted to prohibit their members from using the Internet and watching the media (Grynbaum, 2012), the current results suggest that there are many Orthodox Jewish young women who do not follow those restrictions. Therefore, there may be a strong need for culturally sensitive media literacy education in Orthodox Jewish schools, so that girls may learn how to critically evaluate the various influences to which they may be exposed.

Most importantly, the current study represents an initial examination of media and Orthodox Jews. The psychological literature would be much enriched by future research designed to elucidate and expand on these results. The conclusion of this study may comprise the beginning of many new conversations, interventions, and academic studies among Orthodox Jewish community members and psychological researchers.

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