



## Development of a Self-Sexualization Scale

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**Significance:** There is nothing inherently wrong with highlighting one's sexual features. However, some presentations of one's sexuality seem controversial, such as flashing of breasts on a camera for the "Girls Gone Wild" show. Dress often plays a central role in many self-sexualization activities and such flashing behavior is a type of spontaneous alteration of one's clothing. Even when the activity is not dressing the body per se or appearing in a sexualized manner, such as sexting and pole dancing, the body and dress are often featured.

Although an increasing number of researchers have looked into behaviors that emphasize ones' sexual appeal, empirical evidence on the topic of self-sexualization still needs exploration. One of the reasons for limited empirical study is that researchers have not yet come to a consensus on a definition of self-sexualization. Accordingly, standardized operationalization of the concept is also not yet in agreement.

The purpose of the study was to develop a scale to measure self-sexualization, responding to the need for a new scale development based upon the lack of consistency in defining and operationalizing the concept, issues of validity inherent in the existing scales, and shortcomings in measuring the possible dimensions underlying the concept.

**Application of literature:** Only a few researchers have focused on the development of measures of self-sexualization. Some scales directly measure self-sexualizing behaviors whereas others measure beliefs or attitudes toward self-sexualization. These scales are: Sexualizing Behavior Scale, Internalized Sexualization Scale for adolescent girls, Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale, Sex Is Power Scale, and Self-Sexualization Behavior Questionnaire for Women. Each scale has its own focus, in operationalizing the concept. Some defined self-sexualization as behaviors while others did not directly define the concept but implied a definition through citing APA's definition of sexualization (APA, 2007). In addition, the scope varied from including self-sexualizing that is a part of soft-core pornographic sexuality (e.g., pole dancing), to the day-to-day presentation to look attractive (e.g., wearing cologne).

We operationalize the self-sexualization as voluntary imposition of sexualization to oneself, with four dimensions adapted from APA's sexualization (APA, 2007). The scope includes sexual objectification of oneself, sexual attractiveness, sexual desirability, and sexual permissiveness. Although self-sexualization can occur at any point during the lifespan from childhood through adulthood, this study focuses on development of a scale intended to assess self-sexualization with young adult women between 21 and 29 years old, living in the U.S, and who were familiar with a hyper-sexualized society.

**Method:** A mixed-methods research design with ten steps was used in the process of scale development : 1) development of a test blueprint from the literature review, 2) evaluation of the test blueprint by experts, 3) development of the test specification with initial pool of items, 4) the first interview for developing the initial items, 5) evaluation of the test specification with the items by experts, 6) the second interview for evaluating the items, 7) a pre-test of the developed scale, 8) pilot tests, and 9) a main data collection for item analyses followed by 10) cross-validation of the final scale.

Experts who reviewed the test blueprint and the test specifications with items were recruited based on their expertise and research interests. Their expertise was in dress and the body (e.g., sexualized culture, self-presentation through dress and body). Interview participants were recruited through the use of fliers at several locations across the campus of the two universities in the Midwest region of the U.S. A \$10 gift card was offered as an incentive for participation in the one hour interview. The scale was created as an on-line survey format and participants were recruited among the members of Amazon Mechanical Turk. From the main data collection, 601 eligible responses were collected and split randomly into two groups. With the first set of 301, a series of classical test theory, confirmatory factor analysis, and item response theory analyses were conducted to select items for the final scale. The structure of the final scale was verified using data from the remaining 300 participants.

**Results:** The four scales assessing the four dimensions of self-sexualization resulted and produced empirical evidence for the scales. The first scale comprised of six items assessed the degree to which a woman has favorable attitudes toward sexual objectification of herself (Favoring sexual objectification of oneself). The second scale comprised of five items assessed the degree to which a woman relates her sexual desirability to her self-esteem (Relating sexual desirability to self-esteem). The third scale comprised of six items assessed the degree to which a woman equates her physical attractiveness with being sexy (Equating physical attractiveness with being sexy). The fourth scale comprised of nine items assessed the degree to which a woman contextualizes her sexual boundaries at bars, clubs, or parties (Contextualizing sexual boundaries).

**Implications:** The four scales holistically assess self-sexualization. However, researchers choose a scale to focus on a particular dimension of self-sexualization that is better suited for their research interests and for easier interpretation of findings. Certain components of self-sexualization might be better at explaining a particular behavior or attitude. When researchers use all four scales to measure the degree of self-sexualization, the correlation model should be used to accurately reflect the structure of the four dimensions. Treating all dimensions self-sexualization as one is not desirable, as evidenced by non-satisfactory confirmatory factor analysis fit indices.

#### References

American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. (2007). *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*. Retrieved from [www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html](http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html)