

## Sexualization of Halloween Costumed Women

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*Introduction.* Women and girls are depicted in revealing dress in the media and the depictions and their consequences have been studied (e.g., Graff, Murnen, & Krause, 2013). According to the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (APA, 2007), one consequence is sexualization. One way sexualization occurs is if someone's value is based on her sexual appeal, to the exclusion of other aspects. In U.S. culture women and girls are commonly sexualized (e.g., Graff et al., 2013). Objectification theory (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997) offers a way to understand the relationship between revealing dress and sexualization and was developed to outline the consequences of being female in cultures that sexually objectify women and girls. The authors explain that women in such cultures are gazed at, evaluated, and potentially sexualized.

*Related Literature.* A consequence of sexualization is self-objectification, with effects such as habitual body and appearance monitoring and cognitive effort that hinders task performance (Hebl, King, & Lin, 2004). Hebl et al. found that when men and women wear revealing dress they self-objectify. Likewise, Gurung and Chrouser (2007) found that people objectify others who wear revealing dress. Both types of objectification have negative effects. Men who objectify others experience more acceptance of interpersonal violence, hostility, anxiety, adversarial sexual beliefs, and less sexual satisfaction (e.g., Johnson, McCreary, & Mills, 2007). Both women and men who objectify others also self-objectify (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005). Hence, revealing dress is implicated in self- and other-objectification, both of which lead to negative outcomes for the objectifier.

In the U.S. people wear revealing dress at swimming pools and beaches, at health clubs and gyms, and on Halloween. As a special type of dress (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992), costume may contribute to the sexualization of girls and women. The research purpose was to determine if women wearing revealing Halloween costumes are sexualized by men and women. Two research questions guided the research: (1) Will women wearing revealing Halloween costumes be sexually objectified? (2) Will men and women differ in the extent to which they sexually objectify Halloween costumed women?

*Procedure.* U.S. citizens age 18 or older were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT). Participants were provided a web link through AMT to an online experiment developed using Qualtrics survey software. Experimental stimuli, selected in a pilot study, depicted women wearing revealing or non-revealing Halloween costumes. After exposure to costumed images, participants completed a set of dependent variables and manipulation check items. Seven-point Likert scales were used for all ratings. Sexualization was operationally defined as higher ratings on the sexualizing traits variable. Demographic information was also collected.

*Results and Discussion.* The sample was 162 men and 133 women, primarily Caucasian American (84.8%), in their mid-30s ( $\bar{x} = 34.59$ ), who had not completed college (91.9%). All variables had high reliability. The manipulation check revealed that it was successful. Data were entered into a 2 (Dress) by 2 (Sex of participant) between subjects MANCOVA with age as the covariate. The overall multivariate main effects for dress [ $F(8,283) = 55.42, p < .0005$ ] and sex [ $F(8,283) = 3.61, p < .001$ ] were the only significant effects. ANCOVAs showed that Dress significantly affected (all  $ps < .001$ ) all ratings except competency. Cell means showed as compared to women in non-revealing costumes, women in revealing costumes were rated less considerate, faithful, moral, self-respecting, and sincere and were rated higher on femininity and sexualizing traits. Sex of respondent affected judgments of sexualizing traits [ $F(1,290) = 20.12, p < .0005$ ]. Review of the cell means showed that men rated stimulus persons as more sexualized ( $\bar{x} = 5.22$ ) than women ( $\bar{x} = 4.87$ ), but both sexualized women wearing the revealing costumes.

*Limitations and Conclusions.* Competency was not affected by the revealing dress manipulation; hence, judgments of people wearing ordinary dress may not always generalize to special dress like Halloween costumes. Future researchers should determine the extent to which academic research on dress extends to costume. Since most objectification research has centered on women, these results for men extend that research. In addition, most objectification research has studied self-objectification, so these results contribute to building knowledge related to other-objectification. Furthermore, future dress researchers may wish to revisit revealing dress research from the perspective of objectification theory.

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