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## Howard Journal of Communications

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uhjc20>

### Race and Genre in the Use of Sexual Objectification in Female Artists' Music Videos

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Available online: 10 Feb 2012

To cite this article: Cynthia M. Frisby & Jennifer Stevens Aubrey (2012): Race and Genre in the Use of Sexual Objectification in Female Artists' Music Videos, Howard Journal of Communications, 23:1, 66-87

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2012.641880>

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## **Race and Genre in the Use of Sexual Objectification in Female Artists' Music Videos**

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*The present study examines the use of sexual objectification by popular female music artists in their music videos. To obtain a current assessment of sexual objectification within pop, country, and hip hop music videos, a content analysis was performed. Our primary purposes were to examine (a) differences by race (in particular, differences between White and Black artists) and (b) by genre (i.e., pop, hip hop/R&B, and country). Results revealed only 1 race difference. In that case, Black artists were nearly twice as likely to wear sexually provocative attire. The results yielded consistent genre differences in which country artists were less likely to engage in sexual objectification, probably because of the socially conservative nature of the genre. However, in the main, there were few differences in sexual objectification between pop and R&B/hip artists. Findings are discussed in relation to objectification theory (B. L. Fredrickson & T. A. Roberts, 1998) and the framework of post-feminism (e.g., Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004).*

**KEYTERMS** *gaze, gender, popular music, provocative dress, race and ethnic differences in music videos, sexual objectification, sexualization, sexualized dance, skin exposure*

Music videos have long been critiqued as having misogynistic messages and images. Scholars have pointed out the dominant discourse in music videos reproduces distorted ideologies of women's sexuality (Jhally, 2007),

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particularly Black women's<sup>1</sup> sexuality (hooks, 1992; Morgan 1999). Seemingly at odds with this critique is an increase in highly visible and successful female artists in recent years (Dowd, 2004; Peters, 2008). Although female artists are not on par with the frequency of male artists (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011), research suggests that female artists have certainly pushed the boundaries of acceptable norms with regard to gender and sexuality in popular culture (Peters, 2008).

Even as female music artists have become visible and successful "brands" in the music industry (e.g., Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, Taylor Swift), recent content analyses suggest that the sexualization of women has not diminished (Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang, 2009). It stands to reason, then, that much of the sexual objectification of women comes from female artists objectifying their own bodies. At the same time, economics of the music industry necessitate the reliance on cookie-cutter formulaic artists (Strum, 2002; Brown & Campbell, 1986). In fact, content analytic studies of music videos consistently find instances of gender roles and stereotyping, particularly in terms of female artists who are often underrepresented and sexually objectified (Baxter, DeRiemer, Landini, Leslie, & Singletary, 1985; Brown & Campbell, 1986; Gow, 1996; Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan, & Davis, 1993; Vincent, Davis, & Boruszkowski, 1987). Thus, when it is perceived that a female artist achieves success in part based on the sexual objectification of her body, other artists quickly follow suit.

## RESEARCH GOALS AND PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE

In the present study, we investigate the extent to which female artists participate in the sexual objectification of their bodies. Thus, instead of examining women being sexually dominated and objectified by men in male artists' videos, we examine the extent to which female artists sexually objectify themselves in their own music videos. Our rationale is based on recent research that has suggested that female artists are more likely to sexually objectify themselves in their own music videos than male artists are to feature the sexual objectification of female characters in their music videos (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). Further, we have two specific goals in the current research. First, we examine differences in sexual objectification by race, comparing how White and Black women artists depict themselves in music videos. Second, we examine differences in sexual objectification by genre, comparing pop, hip hop/R&B, and country music videos.

We attempted to fill two gaps in the existing literature on sexuality in music videos. First, although studies have concluded that women are portrayed as sex objects in music videos (e.g., Sommers-Flanagan et al., 1993; Vincent et al., 1987), sexual objectification in these studies has been measured on a

global level. That is, the music video, as a whole, was rated on a scale of sexual objectification. In contrast, we sought to gauge specifically how sexual objectification is employed in music videos, using objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) as a framework to guide our measurement.

Second, attention has not been paid to the matter of whether the artists in particular are sexually objectified. Instead, most content analyses have coded for gender stereotypical behaviors on a character level (e.g., King, Laake, & Bernard, 2006; Sommers-Flanagan et al., 1993), coding any person who appears in the music video. We argue that a focus on the artist is important because music videos allow viewers a glimpse of the musicians, not only augmenting the potential of adoration and idolization of the performers, but also increasing the meaning viewers attach to their actions (Brown & Schulze, 1990; Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Ben-Horin, 1996; Sun & Lull, 1986).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Research on Sexuality and Sexual Objectification in Music Videos

Early content analyses showed that anywhere from 40% to 75% of music videos contained sexual imagery (Arnett, 2002; Baxter et al., 1985; Brown & Campbell, 1986; Gow, 1996; Kaloff, 1993; McKee & Pardun, 1996). Furthermore, both dated and more recent content-analytic work has supported the idea that permissive sexual attitudes, exploitation, objectification, and degradation are prominent in music videos (Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang, 2009; Gow, 1996; Sommers-Flanagan et al., 1993). Thus far, research has documented sexual objectification of female characters in two major ways. First, in a recent content analysis of rap music videos, Conrad et al. discovered that female characters often were in positions of submission when compared to male characters. This finding was similar to earlier research showing that women in music videos often appeared to be placed in positions of sexual submission to their male counterparts (Baxter et al., 1985). Second, content analyses have suggested that women are also portrayed as sex objects by the use of revealing clothing; female characters' skimpy dress typically reveals a high degree of skin exposure (Conrad et al., 2009; Frisby & Aubrey, 2009; King et al., 2006; Seidman, 1999).

### Sexuality-Related Messages Between Musical Genres

Research on music videos has also suggested that the three different genres under investigation hold different norms and expectations about women's sexuality. Hip hop music videos have been criticized for being particularly demeaning to women. Hip hop scholars have argued that the sexual stereotypes of African American women found in hip hop music videos—such as the Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, and Baby Mama—inform and reflect broader

beliefs about Black women's sexuality (Stephens, 2007). In male artists' music videos, female characters are often used as props, there for decoration but otherwise ignored (Arnett, 2002). Yet, even when women are the featured artists, they still put themselves in sexually submissive positions in their own videos (Dixon & Brooks, 2002, 2007; hooks, 1992).

In contrast to hip hop, the country genre is known for its socially conservative themes (Andsager & Roe, 1999; Wilson, 2000), which corresponds to less emphasis on sexuality and physical appearance for women than other genres of music. Perhaps a middle ground is pop music. Although previous research has suggested that pop music is rife with sexual stereotypes (Arnett, 2002; Council on Communications and Media, 2009; Seidman, 1999; ter Bogt, Rutger, Engels, Bogers, & Kloosterman, 2010), it is less likely to have other antisocial themes, such as violence and drug use (Hansen & Hansen, 2000), than hip hop music. Taken together, evidence has shown that it would be reasonable to expect differences in sexuality-related images and messages between musical genres.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: OBJECTIFICATION THEORY

To guide our examination of sexual objectification in female artists' music videos, we used objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) as the theoretical framework. Objectification theory proposes that sexual objectification of women's bodies teaches women to internalize an outsiders' perspective on the self such that they come to see themselves as objects to be evaluated by others, a tendency called *self-objectification*.

Although the focus of objectification theory is on self-objectification and its consequences for women's physical and mental health, the theory provided a useful framework for the present study because a first step in determining how women may be socialized to see themselves is through the portrayals of their bodies in the media. Objectification theory researchers have demonstrated that the media likely provide not only an important socializing function for the development of a trait level of self-objectification (Aubrey, 2006), but also a key eliciting condition in temporarily activating a state level of self-objectification (Aubrey, Henson, Hopper, & Smith, 2009; Harper & Tiggemann, 2009; Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003). The media do this by sexually objectifying bodies, which "occurs whenever a person's body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from his or her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing him or her" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 175). Further, "the common thread running through all forms of sexual objectification is the experience of being treated as a body (or collection of body parts) valued predominantly for its use to (or consumption by) others" (p. 174). This definition was instrumental to the way we defined sexual objectification.

Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) assumes that women's primary value is seen as coming from their bodies and their physical appearance. Extending this argument, in music videos, previous content analyses suggest that women are valued for their ability to use their bodies to be sexually alluring (Andsager & Roe, 1999; Seidman, 1992; Vincent, 1989). For example, Sommers-Flanagan et al. (1993) found that female characters in music videos were more likely than male characters to exhibit behaviors meant to elicit sexual arousal (e.g., lip licking, stroking one's body, pelvic thrusting). Another way that women in music videos attempt to be sexually alluring is through seductive dancing, typically for male observers (Arnett, 2002). Also, Seidman (1992) found that female characters in music videos were more likely than male characters to wear sexually provocative attire in music videos.

### Defining Sexual Objectification

First, an obvious way in which sexual objectification can be conveyed is through body exposure, as in the case of a person who is not wearing much clothing (Aubrey et al., 2009). In essence, this operationalization reflects the amount of skin revealed by the artists. Indeed, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) specifically mentioned that sexual objectification entails the representation of a woman as a "collection of body parts" (p. 174), which might be contrasted with a visual portrayal of a woman as a total person. Thus, one indicator of sexual objectification was the extent to which artists were segmented into different body parts (i.e., cleavage/chest, butt, legs, stomach, and back). We coded this by noting whether the artist had a fully (e.g., abdomen not at all covered by clothing) or partially exposed (e.g., cleavage and breast tissue exposed but nipples covered) body part and whether the body part took up the majority of the frame in at least one close-up shot. It was coded even if the close-up was rather quick or even if the close-up lingered on the body part for several seconds. This operationalization conforms to content analyses that have defined sexual objectification as instances in which the focus is on isolated body parts, such as a bare stomach, buttocks, cleavage, or a bare chest, in the absence of a focus on the rest of the person (Seidman, 1999, 1992; Sommers-Flanagan et al., 1993). Our first research question focused on the frequency that the artists in the music videos included close-ups of unclothed body parts, comparing between race and genre.

RQ1a: Will the amount of body parts revealed by artists differ by race?

RQ1b: Will the amount of body parts revealed by artists differ by genre?

Second, the conceptual definition of sexual objectification stressed that a woman's body is "valued predominantly for its use to (or consumption by) others" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 174). Thus, to actually show that a

body is vulnerable to “consumption” by others, another operationalization of sexual objectification was to measure the extent to which female artists were shown being “checked out” (i.e., looked at or touched) by male spectators in the video. This definition shared conceptual ground with Mulvey’s (1975) notion of the gaze, which is invoked when visual media linger on bodies or body parts, instead of focusing on the face or the total subject. The gaze expresses an asymmetric power relationship between the one gazing and the one being gazed at, i.e., one imposes an unwanted gaze upon the other (Jhally, 2007). The emphasis on the body denies the subject human agency and instead relegates him or her to the status of objects. Thus, we investigated the extent to which both female artists gazed at others, as well as the extent to which they received the gaze from others. Our second set of research questions investigated the presence of the gaze by race and by genre.

RQ2a: Will the presence of the gaze differ between the music videos of White artists versus Black artists?

RQ2b: Will the presence of the gaze differ by genre?

Related to the gaze, one way the female artists attract male attention and thus the gaze is through sexualized dancing (Arnett, 2002). We defined *sexualized dancing* as movement meant to accentuate sexual body parts (e.g., shimmying breasts), to imply simulation sexual acts (e.g., pelvic thrusts), or to self-touch in sexually inviting ways. Thus, we saw each of these types of sexualized dance as a way for female artists to portray their bodies in a way that is for the sexual use of others.

RQ3a: Will sexualized dance by female artists differ by race?

RQ3b: Will the use of sexualized dance by female artists differ by genre?

Based on the idea that sexual objectification occurs when women are valued only for their bodies, one way that this is accentuated is when women wear clothing that is meant to be sexually alluring. The clothing could either draw on specific sexual stereotypes, such as the sexy school girl’s uniform or a bikini with whip cream cans attached to the breasts, or it could be meant to put the artist directly into a sexual role, such as a dominatrix outfit. In each case, the women’s sexual functions are meant to represent her. Indeed, content analyses have shown that female characters in music videos were more likely than male characters to wear sexually provocative attire in music videos (King et al., 2006; Seidman, 1999, 1992). Thus, in our final set of research questions, we examined whether female artists’ provocative dress differed by race and by genre.

RQ4a: Will the presence of provocative dress differ by race?

RQ4b: Will the presence of provocative dress differ by genre?

We argue that each of the variables under investigation here—body exposure, gaze, dance, and dress—measures a dimension of sexual objectification. Although examining each variable separately allows for precise tests of how much of each of sexual objectification occurs in female artists' music videos (comparing between race of artist and genre), none of these variables alone allows for an overall claim about the prevalence of sexual objectification in female artists' music videos. Thus, our final research question collapses all four of these variables into a composite variable of sexual objectification to allow for an investigation of how much sexual objectification occurs in popular female artists' music videos.

- RQ5a: How much sexual objectification is in female artists' music videos?
- RQ5b: Will the composite level of sexual objectification differ by race of the artist?
- RQ5c: Will the composite level of sexual objectification differ by genre?

## METHOD

### Sampling Procedures

In an effort to select popular music videos, we drew the sample from the Top 10 songs on the lists of "Hot 100" Billboard songs from July 1, 2006 through July 3, 2010, choosing this timeframe to ensure our ability to access the videos from an online video hosting site. (Music videos that pre-dated 2006 were less consistently available on YouTube.) Finally, in order to ensure representation of all three genres under investigation, we chose every song that was by a female artist on each of the three separate charts: pop, Hip hop/R&B,<sup>2</sup> and country. In a few cases, artists had a Top 10 song with no music video and thus that song was eliminated from the sample (e.g., Faith Hill's "Sunshine and Summertime"). But in the majority of cases, there was a music video available. After the songs were selected, the music videos were either viewed on an online video sharing website such as YouTube or MTV.com, or they were downloaded from iTunes. This sampling strategy resulted in a total of 166 music videos. Eighty one (48.8%) of the videos were pop, 48 (28.9%) were hip hop/R&B, and the remaining 37 (22.3%) were country music videos.

### Coder Training and Reliability

Two female undergraduate students and the second author served as coders. Training took place over five weeks; each weekly session lasted between one and two hours. During these sessions, the coders practiced on several videos so that they and the investigators could identify and resolve problems with

the coding scheme. After the coding scheme was modified on the basis of these practice rounds, coding was independent.

Intercoder reliability was based on the coding of the two undergraduate coders plus the two authors. Both authors participated in the coding to establish intercoder reliability, but only the second author participated in the coding of the final sample. Reliabilities were computed based on the coding of 18 additional music videos (not included in the final sample; six videos from each genre represented). Intercoder reliability was computed based on the four coders' coding of all 18 videos in the reliability sample. After reliability on each of the variables was achieved, coding the final sample was done by the two undergraduate coders and the second author. Each coder was responsible for coding roughly one-third of the final sample.

Krippendorff's alpha was used to assess reliability. Coefficients ranged from .68 to 1.0 with an average of .89 ( $SD = .13$ ). Each coefficient is reported in the coding section. According to Krippendorff (2004), an alpha of .80 or higher is considered good. Any coefficient that is between .667 and .80 can only be considered reaching tentative consistency.

### Units of Analysis

The music videos were coded on the artist level per music video. In the cases of the solo artist, the artist was straightforwardly coded (e.g., Beyoncé, Britney Spears, Fergie). The presence of sexual objectification of the main artist during the narrative of the entire music video was coded. In the case of musical groups or bands, the most visible person representing the band or group was coded (e.g., Danity Kane, Pussycat Dolls), which was typically the lead singer. We did not include music videos from groups comprised of both male and female artists (e.g., Lady Antebellum).

Because of the sampling strategy used in the present study, most artists had more than one music video represented.<sup>3</sup> Because all of the variables coded here were contextual to the video, all videos were coded separately for artists. The 166 videos represented in the sample were by a total of 65 artists.

### Operationalization of Coding Categories

#### GENRE

Genre of the music video was determined on the video level by which charts the song appeared on. In cases where a song appeared on more than one chart, as would happen with songs that "crossed over" from hip hop/R&B, for example, to pop, or from country to pop (no songs ever crossed over from country to hip hop/R&B or vice versa), we coded the video in whichever genre that song originally charted. For example, if it was on the hip hop/R&B chart, and later appeared on the pop chart, we coded the video

as hip hop/R&B. Thus, a small number of artists had some music videos that were coded in one genre, and others in another. Taylor Swift and Beyoncé are examples of such crossover artists. Some of Beyoncé's videos were coded as pop, and others were coded as hip hop/R&B. Likewise, for Swift, some of her videos were classified as pop and others as country. Perfect agreement was reached on this variable ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ).

#### RACE

Race was coded either as White/Caucasian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latina, Asian/Pacific-Islander, or biracial. The artists' names, skin tone, and biography (available on most artists' websites or the Billboard website) were used to code artists' race. Thus, perfect agreement was reached on this variable ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ).

#### EXPOSURE OF BODY PARTS

The artist's skin exposure was coded for whether the artist was naked/unclothed on each of the following with at least one corresponding close-up shot any time during the video: cleavage ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ), butt cracks and/or cheeks ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ), stomach/navel with belly button exposed ( $\alpha = .70$ ), legs from knees to upper thighs ( $\alpha = .74$ ), the back fully exposed (not just shoulders) ( $\alpha = .84$ ), and the shoulders ( $\alpha = .88$ ). The number of body parts exposed for each artist was summed, with the possible range being from 0 (no body parts exposed) to 6 (all coded body parts exposed). It is important to note that this variable measured the occurrence of the body part exposure, not the frequency or length of body part exposure.

#### GAZE

*Gaze* was defined as an explicit instance of "checking out" another's body with a sense of sexual longing or lust. We coded for both the artist being the target of the gaze (being checked out by someone else) or being the perpetrator of the gaze (checking out someone else). The coders simply indicated whether the gaze was present or absent for both the target variable ( $\alpha = .69$ ) and the perpetrator variable ( $\alpha = .68$ ). According to Krippendorff (2004), these coefficients suggest that the intercoder reliability on the gaze variables only reached a tentative level of reliability; however, given the implicit nature of the gaze, we deemed this level adequate for these variables.

#### PROVOCATIVE DRESS

We coded the dress of the artist, judging the provocative nature of the artist's attire. Provocative dress was coded as clothing that is meant to be sexually

alluring. The clothing could either draw on specific sexual stereotypes, such as a sexy school girl's uniform, or it could be meant to put the artist directly into a sexual role, such as a dominatrix outfit. If the artist was wearing sexually suggestive clothing, he or she was coded in the "provocatively dressed" category. All others were coded as not provocatively dressed. Coders reached perfect agreement on this variable ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ).

#### SEXUALIZED DANCE

We measured whether the artist danced in a sexually suggestive way consistently throughout the video (either yes or no). We defined sexualized dancing as movement meant to accentuate sexual body parts (e.g., shimmying breasts), to imply simulation sexual acts (e.g., pelvic thrusts), or to self-touch in sexually inviting ways. At least one of these movements needed to be present in order to be coded as sexualized dance. The intercoder reliability was acceptable ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

#### COMPOSITE SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION

To garner an overall estimate of the prevalence of sexual objectification in the sample of female artists' music videos, we summed the four indicators of sexual objectification to represent a composite of overall sexual objectification in the music videos. For exposure to body parts, we defined any music video that exhibited the close-up of four out of six body parts as sexually objectifying. For gaze, we defined any music videos that exhibited the female artist as the target of the gaze as sexually objectifying. For dance and for dress, we defined those videos that showed sexualized dance or dress as sexually objectifying. Thus, in total, the composite sexual objectification variable ranged from 0 (*no indicators of sexual objectification present*) to 4 (*all four indicators of sexual objectification present*).

#### Data Analysis

To investigate differences in the continuous variable (skin exposure and composite sexual objectification), we conducted an independent-samples *t*-test (for race) and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) (for genre) with post-hoc tests between genres by the Scheffé procedure.<sup>4</sup> For the remaining RQs examining categorical data, the first step was to conduct two-way chi-square goodness-of-fit tests to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between race or genre and the sexual objectification variable (gaze, dance, dress). Second, if a statistically significant relationship between the variables emerged ( $p < .05$ ), we followed up the analysis with pairwise comparisons conducted via the Marascuilo procedure (Glass & Hopkins, 1996).

## RESULTS

Because we sampled all female videos that were in the Top 10 during a five-year span, we did not yield equal numbers by race or by genre. The sample yielded 96 White artists (57.8% of the sample), 58 Black/African American artists (34.9%), four Hispanic/Latina artists (2.4%), and eight biracial artists (4.8%). Unfortunately, given the racial background of the sampled female artists, we could only meaningfully explore differences between White and Black female artists because of low statistical power associated with the subsample of Hispanic/Latina and biracial artists. In addition, none of the female artists sampled were coded as Asian/Asian American. Thus, for all subsequent analyses examining race, only differences between Black and White artists were conducted, yielding a total of 154 artists for the racial comparisons. In addition, as already reported, female artists were more frequently represented in the pop genre (48.8%,  $n=81$ ) than the hip hop/R&B (28.9%,  $n=48$ ) or country genre (22.3%,  $n=37$ ).

Certainly, we should be cognizant of the relationship between race and genre as we proceed with the analyses. After omitting the Hispanic/Latina and biracial artists, there was a statistically significant relationship between race and genre,  $\chi^2(2, N=154) = 111.53, p < .001, V = .75$ . Indeed, all of the remaining hip hop/R&B music videos ( $n=46$ ) were by Black artists, and all of the country videos ( $n=37$ ) were by White artists. However, there was some variance in the pop genre. Of the remaining 71 pop videos, 74.6% ( $n=53$ ) were by White artists, and the remaining 25.4% ( $n=18$ ) were by Black artists. Thus, although race and genre are clearly connected, we proceeded with the analyses of race and genre separately for two reasons: (a) there was variance in race in the pop genre that would imply that the comparisons of race would not necessarily yield the same results as the comparisons of genre, and (b) an examination of genre allows an examination of all sampled videos, whereas the race analyses necessarily require the omission of 12 music videos.

### Research Questions

In general, female artists exposed an average of 2.96 ( $SD=1.66$ ) body parts per music video; the maximum possible was six. Research Question 1a examined whether the extent to which specific body parts was revealed by artists varied by race of the artist. The results of an independent-samples  $t$ -test showed the average number of body parts exposed did not statistically significantly differ by race,  $t(152) = .80, p = .43$ . That is, the average number of body parts shown by White artists ( $M=2.81, SD=1.70$ ) did not significantly differ from the average number of body parts shown by Black artists

( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ). It should be noted that this was not a measure of how frequently body parts were shown but rather whether they were shown at all in a video.

Research Question 1b examined the number of body parts exposed by female artists by genre. The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant main effect of genre,  $F(2, 163) = 9.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\mu^2 = .11$ . Post-hoc tests revealed statistically significant pairwise differences. The pop genre featured more skin exposure ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ) than the country genre ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ) (mean difference = 1.42,  $SE = .32$ , 95% CI = .62–2.22). Also, hip hop/R&B music videos ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) had significantly more skin exposure than country music videos (mean difference = 1.01,  $SE = .30$ , 95% CI = .13–1.89). The difference between hip hop/R&B and pop music videos was not statistically significant (mean difference = .43,  $SE = .30$ , 95% CI =  $-.32$ –1.15).

Research Question 2 examined the presence of the gaze in female artists' music videos. We coded for both the artists being the target of the gaze as well as the perpetrator of the gaze. Female artists being the target of the gaze was found in 15.1% ( $n = 25$ ) of the music videos, whereas the female artists being the perpetrator of the gaze was found in 9.0% ( $n = 15$ ). To further contextualize the findings, it is helpful to note that in the 40 music videos in which the gaze was coded, 61.5% ( $n = 25$ ) of the time the female artists received the gaze by a male onlooker without reciprocation. In only one case did the female artists give the gaze without receiving it in return by male character(s). In the remaining 35.9% ( $n = 15$ ) of the videos in which gaze was coded, the female artist both received the gaze and reciprocated it.

Research Question 2a examined race differences in the presence of the gaze. In examining female artists as a target of the male gaze, the results of a  $2$  (race)  $\times$   $2$  (gaze)  $\chi^2$  analysis demonstrated that there was not a statistically significant relationship between race and target of gaze,  $\chi^2(1, N = 154) = .19$ ,  $p = .67$ . Similar results were found for female artists as the perpetrator of the gaze. The  $\chi^2$  analysis revealed that the relationship between race and the perpetration of the gaze was not statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 154) = .03$ ,  $p = .88$  (Table 1).

Research Question 2b examined the two types of gaze by genre (Table 2). For female artists being the targets of male gaze, the results of a  $3$  (genre)  $\times$   $2$  (gaze)  $\chi^2$  analysis demonstrated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the two variables,  $\chi^2(2, N = 166) = 11.88$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $V = .27$ . The pairwise comparisons showed that pop artists were more frequently shown as the targets of gaze than country artists. The hip hop/R&B artists' frequency in the target of gaze category fell in between the pop and country artists and did not significantly differ from either genre. Genre differences were not evidenced in the  $\chi^2$  analysis for female artists

**TABLE 1** Race Differences in All Categorical Variables.

Variable	White artists (%) ( <i>n</i> = 96)	Black artists (%) ( <i>n</i> = 58)	Total ( <i>n</i> ) ( <i>N</i> = 154)
Target of gaze			
Present	21.8	19.0	32
Absent	78.2	81.0	122
	$\chi^2(1, N = 154) = 0.19, p = .67, V = .04$		
Perpetrator of gaze			
Present	9.4	8.6	14
Absent	90.6	91.4	140
	$\chi^2(1, N = 154) = 0.03, p = .88, V = .01$		
Sexually suggestive dance by artist			
Present	32.3	36.2	52
Absent	67.7	63.8	102
	$\chi^2(1, N = 154) = 0.25, p = .62, V = .04$		
Provocative dress			
Provocative	34.4 <sub>a</sub>	60.3 <sub>b</sub>	68
Not provocative	65.6 <sub>a</sub>	39.7 <sub>b</sub>	86
	$\chi^2(2, N = 154) = 9.89, p = .002, V = .25$		

*Note.* Subscripts differing in the same row differed at  $p < .05$ . Pairwise comparisons were conducted via Marascuilo contrasts. Pairwise comparisons were not conducted on models in which the omnibus  $\chi^2$  test was not statistically significant.

**TABLE 2** Genre Differences in All Categorical Variables.

Variable	Hip hop/R&B (%) ( <i>n</i> = 48)	Pop (%) ( <i>n</i> = 81)	Country (%) ( <i>n</i> = 37)	Total ( <i>N</i> = 166)
Target of gaze				
Present	18.8 <sub>a,b</sub>	33.3 <sub>b</sub>	5.4 <sub>a</sub>	38
Absent	81.2 <sub>a</sub>	66.7 <sub>b</sub>	94.6 <sub>c</sub>	128
	$\chi^2(2, N = 166) = 11.88, p = .003, V = .27$			
Perpetrator of gaze				
Present	8.3	13.6	0	15
Absent	91.7	86.4	100.0	151
	$\chi^2(2, N = 166) = 5.74, p = .06, V = .19$			
Sexually suggestive dance by artist				
Present	33.3 <sub>a,b</sub>	46.9 <sub>b</sub>	16.2 <sub>a</sub>	60
Absent	66.7 <sub>a</sub>	53.1 <sub>b</sub>	83.8 <sub>c</sub>	106
	$\chi^2(2, N = 166) = 10.60, p = .005, V = .25$			
Provocative dress				
Provocative	60.4 <sub>a</sub>	51.2 <sub>a</sub>	13.5 <sub>b</sub>	76
Not provocative	29.6 <sub>a</sub>	48.8 <sub>b</sub>	86.5 <sub>c</sub>	90
	$\chi^2(2, N = 166) = 20.87, p < .001, V = .36$			

*Notes.* Subscripts differing in the same row differed at  $p < .05$ . Pairwise comparisons were conducted via Marascuilo contrasts. Pairwise comparisons were not conducted on models in which the omnibus  $\chi^2$  test was not statistically significant.

being the perpetrator of the gaze,  $\chi^2(2, N=166)=5.74, p=.06, V=.19$  (Table 2). Although the  $\chi^2$  statistic approached statistical significance, we did not proceed with pairwise comparisons because the relationship did not meet the  $p < .05$  convention and because there was a very small sample size of videos, across genres, that featured the female artists perpetrating the gaze ( $n=15$ ).

Research Questions 3a and 3b examined the use of sexualized dance of female artists. For the entire sample, 36.1% ( $n=60$ ) of the female artists were coded as engaging in sexualized dance. RQ3a examined sexualized dance by race. We ran a 2 (race)  $\times$  2 (artists' dance)  $\chi^2$  analysis, and the results showed a lack of a statistically significant relationship between race of the artist and use of sexualized dance by the artist,  $\chi^2(1, N=154)=0.25, p=.62$ . Thus, Black and White artists did not differ in the frequency of their sexualized dance (Table 1).

In contrast, sexualized dance did show a statistically significant relationship with genre,  $\chi^2(2, N=166)=10.60, p=.005, V=.25$ . Pairwise comparisons demonstrated that pop artists were significantly more likely to engage in sexualized dance in their music videos than the country artists, whereas hip hop/R&B fell in between these two genres and consequently did not significantly differ from either genre (Table 2).

Research Question 4a examined race difference in artists wearing sexually provocative clothing. In general, female artists were coded as being provocatively dressed in 45.8% ( $n=76$ ) of the music videos. The 2 (race)  $\times$  2 (dress)  $\chi^2$  analysis demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between the two variables,  $\chi^2(1, N=154)=9.89, p=.003, V=.27$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that Black artists were almost twice as likely to wear provocative clothing as White artists (Table 1).

Research Question 4b examined the relationship between provocative dress and genre. The results of the  $\chi^2$  analysis demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between the two variables,  $\chi^2(2, N=166)=20.87, p < .001, V=.36$ . The pairwise comparisons demonstrated that hip hop/R&B and pop artists were significantly more likely to wear provocative clothing than country artists. However, the hip hop/R&B artists did not significantly differ from pop artists on provocative dress (Table 2).

Research Question 5a examined the prevalence of sexual objectification in the music videos. In total, 71.7% ( $n=119$ ) of the music videos in the sample contained at least one of the indicators of sexual objectification. The remaining 28.3% ( $n=47$ ) of the music videos did not contain any sexual objectification. Of the 119 music videos that contained sexual objectification as we have defined it, 28.6% ( $n=34$ ) contained only one indicator of sexual objectification, 30.3% ( $n=36$ ) contained two indicators, 26.1% ( $n=31$ ) contained three indicators, and 15.1% ( $n=18$ ) featured all four indicators of sexual objectification. In total, the entire sample's mean score on the

**TABLE 3** A Review of the Statistically Significant Differences in Sexual Objectification Based on Race and Gender.

Sexual objectification variable	Race	Genre
Exposure of body parts	No	Yes Pop and hip hop/R&B artists exhibited more skin exposure than country No difference between pop and hip hop/R&B
Target of gaze	No	Yes Pop artists more likely to be the target of the gaze than country and hip hop/R&B artists. No difference between hip hop/R&B and country
Sexualized dance	No	Yes Pop artists more likely to engage in sexualized dance than country artists No difference between hip hop/R&B and pop
Provocative dress	Yes Black artists more likely to be provocatively dressed.	Yes Hip hop/R&B and pop artists more likely to be provocatively dressed than country artists No difference between hip hop/R&B and pop
Composite sexual objectification	No	Yes Pop artists more likely to engage in sexualized dance than country artists

composite sexual objectification variable was 1.63 ( $SD = 1.34$ ) on the 4-point scale.

Research Question 5b examined race differences in the composite sexual objectification variable. The results revealed that the composite level of sexual objectification did not statistically significant differ between White artists ( $M = 1.44$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) and Black artists ( $M = 1.78$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ),  $t(152) = 1.56$ ,  $p = .12$ .

Finally, Research Question 5c examined genre differences in composite sexual objectification. The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant main effect of genre,  $F(2, 163) = 12.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\mu^2 = .13$ . Post-hoc tests revealed that the pop genre featured statistically significantly more sexual objectification ( $M = 1.99$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ) than the country genre ( $M = .76$ ,  $SD = .98$ ) (mean difference = 1.23,  $SE = .25$ , 95%  $CI = .61-1.85$ ). Also, hip hop/R&B music videos ( $M = 1.99$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ) featured significantly more sexual objectification than country music videos (mean difference = .95,  $SE = .28$ , 95%  $CI = .26-1.64$ ). The difference between hip hop/R&B and pop music videos was not statistically significant (mean difference = .28,  $SE = .23$ , 95%  $CI = -.85-.29$ ).

## DISCUSSION

### Summary of Key Findings

Perhaps the most important finding of the present study was the pervasiveness of sexual objectification in popular female artists' music videos. The majority of music videos in the present sample—71.7% ( $n = 119$ )—contained at least one of four the indicators of sexual objectification. There were no statistically significant differences by race of the artists, but there were differences by genre such that country female artists exhibited less sexual objectification than female artists in the pop or rap/hip hop genres. These results suggest that in the world of music videos, female artists' roles are constrained to their sexuality.

In general, results indicated only one race difference in one sexual objectification variable (provocative dress), and many genre differences, especially between country music videos versus pop and hip hop/R&B music videos. Table 3 reviews the major findings of the present study.

### RACE DIFFERENCES

One of our primary goals in the current study was to measure racial differences in sexual objectification. Surprisingly, despite research that suggests that Black women are subjected to myriad sexual stereotypes (e.g., Stephens, 2007), by the measures of sexual objectification used in the present study, the findings suggested that Black and White artists did not differ from each other on any of the variables except for sexually provocative dress. Still, if we think of clothing to be a fundamental styling decision, the difference on sexually provocative dress might be telling. If the clothing of Black artists is already provocative, perhaps sexualized body movement, close-ups on body parts, or invitation of the explicit gaze are not needed because the artist already occupies a sexualized role by virtue of her clothing. Thus, the portrayal of Black music video artists as dressed more sexually provocatively than White music video artists might still feed into stereotyped notions of Black female sexuality.

Notwithstanding the race difference on sexually provocative dress, the big picture of the results suggests that sexual objectification in female artists' music videos is normative, and in the main, the sexual objectification does not vary by race. Of course, it is important to note that this does not mean that sexual stereotypes of Black women do not exist. Rather, music videos have become an incredibly sexualized medium, so it is possible that White artists are expected to engage in the same level of sexual objectification that has been traditionally expected of Black female artists. Additionally, it is important to remember that this sample pinpointed the videos of female artists in particular. For example, recent research suggests that women in male artists' music videos are more likely to be used as props, there for

decoration but otherwise ignored, more than male characters (Arnett 2002; Aubrey & Frisby, 2011).

#### GENRE DIFFERENCES

Of the three genres, country music videos of female artists were the least likely to portray sexual objectification, which is in keeping with the conservative nature of country music. Thus, many of the differences between genres here might really be interpreted as the differences between sexually conservative country music versus sexually permissive hip hop/R&B and pop. Only one of the genre analyses demonstrated statistically significant differences between pop and hip hop/R&B music videos. The results revealed that pop music videos were more likely to contain the female artist as the target of the gaze; thus, pop artists were more likely to be in the clear view of a male audience than the hip hop/R&B artists. Otherwise, the main genre finding was that compared to country artists, hip hop/R&B, and pop artists used similar types and amounts of sexual objectification in their music videos.

#### THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

In line with objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), we found that contemporary music videos served to reinforce the cultural notion that both Black and White female artists, representing both the pop and hip hop/R&B musical genres, are valued for their bodies and their appearance. In essence, women's bodies exist for the consumption and pleasure of the viewers. Both longitudinal research (Aubrey, 2006) and experimental research (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003) have shown the exposure to sexually objectifying television can increase viewers' definitions of their physical selves in terms of externally perceivable traits rather than internal traits (i.e., self-objectification). Given the findings of this study, this conclusion might extend to music videos.

It is important to note that the artists' record label and the larger media company that owns that label assert a great deal of control over the public image of contemporary music artists (Fitts, 2008). Still, many music video viewers, especially young ones, might mistakenly believe that music videos provide a way for artists to demonstrate their creative expression by making stylistic choices related to their own self-presentation. Thus, we argue that the implications for music videos for how viewers might form impressions about sexuality ultimately boil down to an impression of the artists' agency. For example, the politics of post-feminism, which assume that the women's liberation movement is over and no longer necessary, embrace a rhetoric of choice (Gill, 2007; Shugart, Waggoner, & Hallstein, 2001). According to this thinking, women's decisions to portray themselves in sexualized ways

convey a sense of owning and loving one's sexuality, and being empowered in this sense is about having the power to make choices, no matter what the choices are. Thus, the female artists who sexually objectify themselves might be interpreted by some audiences as empowering because they are making the choice to embrace their own sexuality. On the other hand, feminist scholars have argued that female artists' portraying themselves as sex objects serves to undermine and disempower their agency (Oware, 2009). In other words, the use of sexual objectification of female artists' own bodies might convey the message that for women sexual objectification is the path for success and social value. The primary way they can succeed in the music industry is to sexually objectify themselves.

Certainly, the results of our content analysis cannot definitively resolve this debate; however, if post-feminism encourages women to make choices unrestrained by socially imposed gender role expectations, then we might expect to see greater variability in women's roles in music videos. The majority of female artists engaged in at least some objectification, implying that it is less of a choice as to whether artists will participate in the sexual objectification of their bodies, but rather, they might only choose how much of it there will be.

### Limitations and Future Directions

The current research is not without limitations. First, as we have already acknowledged, it is evident that genre and race are related. Still, we argued that it was important to proceed with both the race and the genre analyses because although there is a great deal of overlap, they are not the same variables. The considerably different findings for the two sets of comparisons support this argument. Other limitations related to the sampling technique. We only included the most recent four years of music videos; thus, our results only speak to popular music videos of the contemporary time period. Certainly, our study cannot address shifts over time. Also, by relying on the naturalistic census technique of including all videos of female artists that were in the Top 10 of each genre's Billboard charts, we obtained unequal frequencies of both race and genre. Finally, in relation to measurement, the intercoder reliability on the gaze variables only reached a level of reliability that Krippendorff calls "tentative" (Krippendorff, 2004). At its crux, the present study measures the presence or occurrence of the four indicators of sexual objectification. It does not measure the frequency of sexual objectification in each music video, nor does it measure the length of the sexual objectification in each music video. Future research could examine the amount of times artists engage in each of these objectifying behaviors/appearances to better understand the prevalence of sexual objectification in music videos. It is also important to note that only the artist was coded in our study, not any other female characters in the music videos. Therefore,

other women could be sexually objectified in a music video, but our analysis only focuses on the artists. For example, the present analysis does not adequately address the music videos in which the artist is not sexually objectified but other female characters are.

Additionally, our choice to undertake a quantitative content analysis meant that a more nuanced, critical analysis of sexual objectification could not be accomplished. Instead, our measurement of gaze was manifest and thus might have underestimated the more nuanced instances of the sexual objectification present in the sample.

A next step in this research program would be to compare the amount of sexual objectification contained in popular music videos with the degree found in less popular music videos by female artists (i.e., those not on the Top 10 of the Billboard charts). In this way, we would be able to examine whether norms of expectations of women's sexuality contribute to the popularity of the music video.

Additionally, the findings here beg for future effects-based work, investigating how the use of sexual objectification of female artists might affect the self-perceptions of young people, particularly women. Both longitudinal research (Aubrey, 2006) and experimental research (Aubrey et al., 2009; Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003) have shown the exposure to sexually objectifying television can increase viewers' definitions of their physical selves in terms of externally perceivable traits rather than internal traits. In addition, future research might explore the role that the agency of the female artists plays in these effects. That is, for women, it is possible that seeing female artists sexually objectify themselves might have a different effect on their self-perceptions than female characters who are sexually objectified in the videos of male artists.

The representations of women in music videos deserve further research attention because music videos provide fertile grounds to observe our cultural values about femininity and masculinity (Jhally, 2007). Analyzing popular images of sexuality within the music video context contributes to an understanding of contemporary media messages, which may, ultimately contribute to how young people, especially girls and women, are socialized to see themselves.

## NOTES

1. Throughout the article, we deliberately use the racial designation of *Black* and *White* artists because, particularly for Black women, there were many cases in which the ethnic designation of African American versus African versus Caribbean did not apply. For example, Rihanna, who is from Barbados, was coded as Black but could not appropriately be called African American.

2. The Billboard charts measure the popularity of rap as a separate genre. We chose to sample the more broadly defined hip hop/R&B genre because of its greater representation of female artists.

3. It is important to note that the sampling unit was the music video, not the artist. Because each of our main variables could vary by video and was not inherent to the artist, we did allow for repeated artists

in the sample. For example, Beyoncé, Carrie Underwood, and Taylor Swift all tied for the most number of videos represented in the sample (nine each).

4. An independent-samples *t*-test was appropriate for examining race differences in body part exposure because there were only two groups to compare. An analysis of variance with post-hoc tests was appropriate for the genre differences in body part exposure because we were making comparisons among three groups.

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