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FROM SCREEN TO SELF: GENDER, RACE, AND THE OBJECTIFICATION OF FEMALE PERFORMERS IN MUSIC VIDEOS ACROSS FOUR GENRES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how objectification operates across music video genres and how those patterns are represented, negotiated by performers, and interpreted by audiences. Drawing on Objectification Theory, Intersectionality, and Constructivist Media Decoding, the project analyzes gendered and racialized portrayals across Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal.

A three-study design was employed. Study 1 used content analysis to identify patterns of objectification, agency, and racialized representation across 104 contemporary music videos. Study 2 used narrative interviews with 20 performers to examine how artists navigate genre expectations, industry pressures, and self-presentation. Study 3 used an experimental design to test how audiences interpret these portrayals and whether a brief media literacy intervention alters those interpretations.

Findings indicate that objectification is genre-structured rather than uniform. Study 1 shows that Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap more often emphasize sexualized and body-centered portrayals, while Country and Rock/Metal rely on alternative constraints such as authenticity, credibility, and norm enforcement. Study 2 demonstrates that performers negotiate these expectations through strategic agency shaped by genre-specific pressures. Study 3 finds that genre strongly influences audience interpretation, while a brief media literacy intervention produces limited effects.

Overall, this dissertation argues that music video objectification is a genre-structured system linking representation, performer negotiation, and audience interpretation.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since the debut of MTV in 1981, music videos have become one of the most influential visual forms in modern popular culture, shaping how artists are perceived and how their music is interpreted. By merging audio with powerful visual storytelling, music videos have become a primary medium through which audiences engage with music and its performers. Over time, music videos have not only reflected but actively shaped public perceptions of gender, race, and cultural identity, contributing to the reinforcement or challenging of societal norms (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Anderson et al., 2003). While all music videos bear this cultural weight, portrayals of female performers vary significantly across genres, often perpetuating gender stereotypes that limit how women are viewed within the music industry and beyond (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011).

Across genres, female artists are depicted in distinct yet overlapping ways that align with each genre's audience expectations and cultural aesthetics. For example, Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop videos frequently emphasize female sexuality, prioritizing physical appeal and attractiveness over musicianship (Arnett, 2002; Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). These genres often use stylized and suggestive imagery that reinforces narrow beauty standards, portraying women as objects of desire and emphasizing their physical attributes over their musical talents. In contrast, Country and Rock/Metal genres are generally less overtly sexualized, but they are still marked by traditional gender roles. Female performers in these genres are often depicted as “authentic” and “grounded,” with an emphasis on personal storytelling or musicianship. Yet, even in these roles, women often find their image shaped by genre-based expectations of femininity, which may limit expressions of strength, assertiveness, or independence in ways that align with the genre’s

cultural ideals (Krenske & McKay, 2000; Rasmussen & Densley, 2017). This study focuses specifically on cisgender female performers, as they constitute the dominant presence in mainstream music video culture and hold the widest cultural influence across popular genres (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Karsay et al., 2018). While the representation of trans-feminine and non-binary artists is a critical area of inquiry, their current visibility remains comparatively limited within mainstream, commercially dominant music video circuits, often appearing more frequently in independent, alternative, or platform-specific contexts rather than high-rotation industry channels, making them less representative of dominant genre norms.

The portrayal of women in music videos is closely aligned with Objectification Theory, which posits that when individuals are depicted primarily in terms of their appearance, they are deprived of full personhood and reduced to mere objects of visual pleasure (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Objectification can be especially detrimental to female performers, as it affects not only how audiences perceive them but also how they perceive themselves (Aubrey, 2006). Studies have demonstrated that self-objectification, wherein individuals internalize this objectifying gaze and view themselves from an outsider's perspective, can lead to harmful psychological outcomes, including body dissatisfaction, self-consciousness, and reduced confidence (Aubrey, 2006; Vandenbosch et al., 2013). In genres such as Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop, where hypersexualized portrayals are common, these issues are especially prevalent, impacting how female artists negotiate their identities and careers (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). Even within Country and Rock, which may emphasize authenticity, women still face objectifying portrayals, albeit more subtly, as they are often cast in traditionally feminine or domestic roles, limiting their agency and individuality (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Andsager & Roe, 1999).

Race and gender intersect to create complex dynamics in music video portrayals, especially for women of color. Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990) provides a lens to understand these compounded experiences, showing that women who hold multiple marginalized identities face unique forms of objectification and stereotyping (Crenshaw, 1989). Women of color, particularly Black, Latina, and Asian performers, experience portrayals that draw upon racialized stereotypes as well as gendered expectations (Grabe et al., 2008). In Hip-Hop/Rap, Black women are often cast in hypersexualized and aggressive roles that reinforce the "Jezebel" stereotype, while Latina women in Pop videos may be portrayed as "fiery" or "exotic," reinforcing cultural assumptions about Latina femininity (Smith, et al., 2019). Asian women, meanwhile, may be depicted as passive or submissive, adhering to stereotypes of exoticism and docility (Grabe et al., 2008). These racialized portrayals not only limit the roles available to women of color but also perpetuate harmful stereotypes, influencing how these women are perceived and treated both in and outside of the music industry (Rich et al., 1998).

In addition to shaping public perception, these portrayals have far-reaching implications for how female artists themselves experience and understand their identities. Studies have shown that persistent exposure to objectifying imagery can lead to self-objectification and pressure to conform to industry expectations, often at the expense of artistic expression or personal autonomy (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Karsay et al., 2018). Female performers in heavily sexualized genres, like Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop, may feel compelled to emphasize their physical appeal to achieve commercial success, while those in Country and Rock may feel pressure to conform to traditional or "authentic" images that limit their full self-expression. These pressures

illustrate how genre-specific portrayals reinforce certain gendered expectations, shaping the professional and personal experiences of women in music.

This research will also incorporate media literacy as a critical tool for understanding and addressing these portrayals. Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in ways that foster critical engagement and enable individuals to recognize the social, cultural, and ideological forces within media (Fastrez & Landry, 2024; Scheibe & Sperry, 2022). By introducing media literacy instruction, this study aims to empower audiences, particularly younger viewers, to critically engage with gendered and racialized portrayals in music videos. Through Constructivist Media Decoding (CMD), a pedagogical framework within media literacy, audiences will learn to critically evaluate the constructed nature of media portrayals. Constructivist Media Decoding (CMD) is used in this study as a media literacy framework for analyzing how audiences interpret and evaluate media content (Sperry & Scheibe, 2022). CMD will allow this study to unpack how media messages reinforce or challenge gender and racial stereotypes in music videos, fostering greater awareness and encouraging more inclusive representations.

RATIONALE

Steeves (2009) argued that more feminist research is necessary to understand how audiences perceive and react to media products, including popular music, and the music industry as a whole. Female artists face not only assessments of their talent, but also judgments based on their appearance, especially when compared to male artists (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). When women perform music, they are often evaluated primarily as women, leading to comments like "You play pretty well, for a girl," (Berkers & Schaap, 2015, p. 305). These trends are significant because research suggests a connection between adolescents' beliefs about women as sexual

objects and their exposure to media portrayals of objectified and sexualized women, as well as sexually explicit content (Turner, 2008). It is important to examine how media consumption contributes to the formation of gender stereotypes and ideologies, which eventually become dominant views on how men and women should be represented.

Gender equality and diversity remain pressing concerns, and contemporary scholarship emphasizes that gender-based inequities persist globally and intersect with race, class, and place to compound disadvantage (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2016; Kayode et al., 2023; UN Women & UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023). Public opinion data likewise indicate that perceptions of gender inequality vary by respondent gender and political ideology, with women and more ideologically liberal respondents generally more likely to identify gender inequality as a serious social problem (Wike et al., 2025). Within popular media environments, these broader dynamics now operate inside a platform-driven attention economy where music videos are continuously circulated, recirculated, and algorithmically amplified. In this setting, visual identity becomes central to commercial legibility, and genre functions as a ready-made interpretive code that shapes which forms of femininity are treated as normal, exceptional, or decorative, and how those portrayals are read in relation to empowerment, authenticity, and respectability.

Treating genre as an organizing structure allows this dissertation to move beyond a simple "more sexualization versus less sexualization" model. Prior research indicates that gendered stereotypes are prevalent across genres, but that genres may employ different representational tactics to communicate those meanings (Moncrief, 2004). Genre-specific credibility tests and authenticity narratives can also function as gatekeeping mechanisms that shape how women's bodies and belonging are evaluated, including in genres frequently assumed

to be merit-based or counter-hegemonic. For example, Scott (2016) critiques earlier portrayals that reduce heavy metal masculinity to a simplistic and monolithic identity (Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991), underscoring how genre myths can obscure the complexity of contemporary participation and reinforce narrow expectations. Accordingly, the central argument advanced here is that objectification in contemporary mainstream music video culture is best understood as a genre-structured representational environment in which sexualization cues, narrative positioning, and legible forms of agency are enabled and constrained in different ways depending on genre conventions and market logics.

The pervasive nature of these media portrayals calls for the integration of media literacy into how audiences engage with music videos and similar content. Media literacy programs can equip individuals with the critical tools needed to decode and deconstruct the gender stereotypes and objectifying messages prevalent in modern media (Levine & Murnen, 2009; Scheibe & Sperry, 2022). By teaching audiences to analyze media content actively, rather than passively absorbing it, media literacy can help individuals challenge the harmful effects of objectification and gender stereotyping. As such, it is essential that media literacy programs are implemented to encourage viewers to recognize how media constructs and perpetuates traditional gender roles, particularly those that contribute to the objectification of women. The inclusion of media literacy education could thus be instrumental in promoting more equitable, inclusive, and diverse representations of gender in popular culture (Levine & Murnen, 2009).

While this study is concerned with improving media literacy and challenging the objectification of women in music video portrayals, its scope is intentionally limited to cisgender female performers. This decision was made to focus on the most prominent and culturally influential figures within mainstream music video culture, where cisgender women continue to

represent the overwhelming majority of visible performers. While the inclusion of trans-feminine and non-binary artists is an important area for future research, their current visibility in mainstream music videos remains limited, often occupying niche or independent spaces. As such, their portrayals, though vital, fall outside the scope of this dissertation, which aims to analyze dominant patterns of representation across widely consumed genres. This framing allows the study to remain focused on prevailing industry norms while acknowledging the importance of intersectional inclusion in ongoing research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

This dissertation examines how objectification operates across music video genres and how those patterns are experienced and interpreted across different contexts. The central research question guiding this project is: how does objectification change across genres, and how do performers and audiences make sense of those differences?

To address this question, the dissertation uses a three-study design that moves from representation to lived experience to audience interpretation.

Study 1 is a content analysis of 104 contemporary music videos across four genres: Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal. This study identifies patterns of objectification, gendered role assignment, and racialized representation within the visual text.

Study 2 consists of narrative interviews with 20 performers across the same four genres. This study examines how artists describe navigating expectations around self-presentation, genre norms, and industry pressures, with particular attention to forms of strategic agency and resistance.

Study 3 is an audience experiment that tests how viewers interpret music video portrayals with and without a brief media literacy intervention. This study evaluates whether genre expectations or media literacy more strongly shape audience perceptions of objectification and agency.

Together, these studies provide a multi-level analysis of objectification as a genre-structured system that operates across representation, performer experience, and audience interpretation.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

As the sole researcher conducting this dissertation, I recognize that my identity, experiences, and cultural background shape the lens through which I engage with all three studies presented herein. I am a male media scholar and musician with deep personal and professional roots in the heavy metal and rock music scenes. I am also an active member of a band with a female lead vocalist, which has given me firsthand experience navigating the creative, performative, and interpersonal dimensions of gender in musical spaces. This experience informs both my academic interest in media representation and my lived understanding of performance as a site of identity negotiation.

Throughout this dissertation, I examine the visual and narrative portrayal of female performers across music genres through content analysis (Study 1), interviews with female artists (Study 2), and a media literacy-informed viewer response study (Study 3). Across all three phases, I have remained critically aware of how my positionality, as a man studying gender, and as someone with strong genre preferences, could influence my analysis, interpretation, or framing.

While I bring a strong affinity for rock and metal to this work, I have less personal connection to Pop, Country, and Hip-Hop/Rap. I acknowledge that musical preference can shape

the way one receives and evaluates media. As such, I took proactive steps to approach each genre with critical openness and a commitment to understanding its unique cultural logic, visual aesthetics, and performative traditions on their own terms. I also engaged in reflexive practices throughout the research process to check for bias, particularly when interpreting themes of sexuality, empowerment, and representation.

This dissertation is grounded in feminist media studies, intersectionality, and critical media literacy frameworks that emphasize the importance of positionality and reflexivity in shaping scholarly inquiry. I do not claim an objective or detached stance; rather, I approach this work as a critically engaged researcher striving for transparency, cultural sensitivity, and methodological rigor. My aim across all three studies is to contribute meaningful insights into how female performers are represented, how they experience and resist those representations, and how audiences respond to them within contemporary visual music culture.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND EVOLUTION OF MUSIC VIDEOS

Since the launch of Music Television (MTV) in 1981, music videos have reshaped the landscape of the music industry, serving as an essential medium for artists to visually express their music, broaden their reach, and bolster their popularity. Early studies of MTV's influence highlighted its impact on adolescent viewers and the ways in which these videos contributed to societal norms, especially concerning gender roles and expectations (McGrath, 1996; Roberts & Christenson, 2001). Researchers soon found that these visual portrayals often perpetuated gender stereotypes, presenting women as passive objects of male desire while casting men in dominant roles (Sherman & Dominick, 1986; Seidman, 1992). These trends were consistent across early studies, which noted that music videos frequently reinforced negative gender norms through sexually objectifying portrayals of women, a pattern that has continued into the digital era (Tapper et al., 1994; Sommers-Flanagan et al., 1993).

As digital media evolved, the platforms through which audiences consume music videos shifted from traditional television networks like MTV to online platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. These platforms, especially popular among younger viewers, have broadened the reach of music videos, making them more accessible and influential (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). This shift in media consumption has not only altered how audiences interact with music but has also magnified the potential for music videos to shape gender perceptions on a global scale (Auxier & Anderson, 2021; Statista, 2023).

OBJECTIFICATION THEORY AND GENDER PORTRAYALS IN MUSIC VIDEOS

The portrayal of women in music videos is a subject of extensive research, particularly concerning sexual objectification. Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) provides a foundational framework for understanding how media portrayals can reduce women to objects of visual evaluation, a concept that is developed in detail in Chapter 3. This framework is useful for analyzing how sexualized portrayals can negatively affect both performers and viewers, particularly young women. Research consistently shows that exposure to objectifying content, such as that found in music videos, contributes to self-objectification, body dissatisfaction, and an internalized pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Vandenbosch et al., 2013), and Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop videos are often highlighted as particularly prone to hypersexualized portrayals of women, frequently presenting them as objects of male desire. Studies reveal that women in these genres are more likely to appear in minimal clothing and suggestive poses, with camera angles that emphasize their bodies over any other traits (Karsay et al., 2018). This emphasis on physical appeal reinforces stereotypical and often unattainable beauty standards, contributing to viewers' objectifying gaze (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Aubrey & Frisby, 2011) and Rock/Metal, while less overtly sexualized, still portray women within restrictive gender roles. In Country music, for instance, women are frequently depicted in traditional, romanticized roles, emphasizing themes of domesticity and relational dependency, while Rock/Metal often casts women as muses or accessories, reinforcing conventional feminine ideals (Andsager & Roe, 1999; Walser, 1993).

GENDER DISPLAY AND NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR

Gender displays are crucial in understanding how masculinity and femininity are constructed and perpetuated in media, particularly in music videos. Goffman (1976) first

introduced the concept of gender displays, defining them as the conventionalized portrayals of the culturally established correlates of sex. These displays are a part of nonverbal behavior and include touch, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and posture. They serve as codes that distinguish the way men and women participate in social situations, often being perceived as natural by both the performer and the recipient.

Nonverbal behaviors, including gender displays, play a significant role in communication and social interaction. These behaviors are generally out of conscious awareness but are powerful in conveying messages about gender roles and expectations. For example, women are often portrayed in media as engaging in behaviors that signal subordination, such as tilting their heads, smiling, or using delicate self-touches, which are interpreted as signs of passivity and receptivity (Henley, 1995; Goffman, 1976). Men, conversely, are more likely to be depicted in dominant poses, with behaviors such as expansive gestures and direct eye contact signaling authority and control (Burgoon & Dillman, 1995).

Research has consistently shown that music videos are a rich source of stereotypical gender displays (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Seidman, 1992; Ward et al., 2005). Studies have found that women in music videos are frequently portrayed as sexual objects, with a strong emphasis on their physical appearance and sexuality. This objectification is often communicated through nonverbal cues such as scanty clothing, suggestive dancing, and sultry looks (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). Such portrayals reinforce traditional gender roles, where women's value is tied to their sexual attractiveness and men's to their power and dominance.

In addition to these traditional roles, recent analyses have also noted the persistence of these gendered behaviors despite broader societal changes advocating gender equality. For instance, Aubrey & Frisby (2011) found that women in music videos are often depicted in roles

that emphasize their sexuality, even in genres where they might be expected to exhibit more agency and authority. This suggests that the medium of music videos continues to propagate gender norms that position women as passive, appearance-centered, and sexually available, even as broader societal discourse increasingly emphasizes agency, autonomy, and diverse representations of femininity.

GENRE-SPECIFIC OBJECTIFICATION

The portrayal of women in music videos varies significantly across different genres, with notable differences in the degree and nature of sexual objectification. Content analyses consistently show that hip hop and pop music videos are more likely to depict women in sexually provocative ways compared to Rock/Metal and country music videos (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Conley & Ramsey, 2011; Ward, Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2015; Arnett, 2002). These genre-specific differences are influenced by the cultural and visual norms associated with each genre, which shape how female performers are depicted and perceived.

Hip Hop and Pop

Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop music videos have been extensively studied for their high levels of sexual objectification, including frequent portrayals of women in revealing clothing, sexually suggestive choreography, body-focused camera framing, and roles that emphasize physical attractiveness and sexual availability (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Karsay et al., 2018; Ward et al., 2005). In these genres, women are frequently portrayed in minimal clothing, engaging in sexually suggestive dances, and positioned in ways that emphasize their physical attractiveness and sexual availability (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). The prevalence of these depictions in hip hop videos is particularly concerning, as they often reinforce stereotypes of women as sexual objects whose primary value lies in their physical appeal (Conley & Ramsey, 2011).

Aubrey and Frisby (2011) found that hip hop videos often present women in decorative roles, where their presence is primarily to enhance the visual appeal for a presumed male audience. This type of portrayal emphasizes the male gaze, where women are depicted in ways that cater to male sexual fantasies. The emphasis on women's bodies over their talents or personalities contributes to a culture of objectification that diminishes women's agency and reinforces gender inequalities.

Pop music videos, while sometimes less overtly sexual than hip hop, still frequently emphasize physical attractiveness and sexual appeal. Women in pop videos are often shown in glamorous settings, wearing fashionable and revealing clothing, and engaging in flirtatious or seductive behavior (Smith, et al., 2019). These portrayals reinforce the notion that a woman's worth is closely tied to her ability to attract and please men. The repetitive nature of these images across pop videos can normalize the objectification of women, making it a pervasive element of the genre.

Rock, Metal, and Country

In contrast, rock, metal, and country music videos tend to present women in less sexually objectifying ways. These genres often highlight women's musical contributions and performance skills rather than focusing solely on their physical appearance (Ward et al., 2013; Galdi & Guizzo, 2021). This difference can be attributed to the cultural norms within these genres, which historically have been more male-dominated and centered around the musical performance itself rather than visual spectacle.

Rock and metal music videos frequently portray female performers as active participants in the music-making process, showcasing their instrumental skills, vocal abilities, and stage

presence. This focus on talent over appearance challenges the more objectifying depictions found in other genres and promotes a more respectful representation of women (Walser, 1993). However, it is important to note that while rock and metal music videos may be less sexually objectifying, they are not entirely free from problematic portrayals. Women in these videos can still be subject to stereotypes and gender norms that marginalize their contributions.

Within metal studies, scholars have also debated what "counts" as authenticity and who is presumed to belong in the scene. Nail Scott (2016) critiques earlier portrayals of heavy metal culture that frame masculinity as a simplistic, monolithic identity (e.g., Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991), arguing that such accounts miss the complexity of contemporary participation and identity. This matters for the present project because genre authenticity narratives operate as gatekeeping mechanisms that shape how women's bodies and credibility are read, even in genres that are often assumed to be inherently merit-based or rebellious.

Country music videos also tend to emphasize storytelling and emotional connection over sexual appeal. Recent work by Leap (2019) reveals a shift in mainstream Country music lyrics from celebrating working-class identities to emphasizing racialized markers of desirability, particularly blond hair and blue eyes. His longitudinal analysis of Billboard-charting Country songs from the 1980s to the 2010s shows that white phenotypic traits increasingly replaced traditional markers of class identity, reinforcing whiteness as a core ideal within the genre's portrayal of masculinity. Leap argues that this transformation reflects a broader restructuring of rural masculinity, wherein economic decline among white men is offset symbolically by aligning masculinity with whiteness and heterosexual virility. This shift, he contends, enables the genre to continue reproducing gendered and racial inequalities even as traditional forms of male economic power erode. Female performers in country videos are often depicted in narratives that

highlight their personal experiences, relationships, and resilience (Andsager & Roe, 1999). These portrayals can provide a more nuanced and respectful representation of women, focusing on their strengths and individuality rather than reducing them to mere objects of desire.

Research on the representation of women in country music videos indicates that while there is a lower degree of sexual objectification compared to hip hop and pop, gender stereotypes still persist. Rasmussen & Densley (2017) analyzed the lyrics of popular country songs and found that women are often depicted in objectifying ways, though not as overtly as in other genres. The portrayal of women tends to emphasize traditional gender roles and stereotypes, often highlighting their domestic and emotional labor while reducing their agency and individuality (Rasmussen & Densley, 2017). Additionally, Andsager and Roe (1999) found that while female artists gained prominence, their representation often still adhered to traditional and sometimes objectifying gender norms. These findings suggest that although there is some progress, the representation of women in country music videos continues to reflect broader societal stereotypes and objectification.

Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis of genre-specific portrayals reveals significant differences in the treatment of female performers. Hip hop and pop videos often perpetuate a culture of sexual objectification, where women's value is linked to their physical attractiveness and ability to conform to sexualized ideals. This objectification is reinforced through visual and lyrical content that prioritizes appearance over talent (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011).

In contrast, rock, metal, and country videos offer a counter-narrative that emphasizes women's musical abilities and personal stories. These genres provide a platform for women to be

seen as multifaceted individuals with talents and experiences that extend beyond their physical appearance (Ward et al., 2005; Walser, 1993). This more respectful representation can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable media landscape, where women are valued for their contributions rather than their conformity to objectifying standards.

INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY AND RACIALIZED SEXUAL STEREOTYPES

Intersectionality theory has been widely applied to examine how various social identities, including gender and race, intersect within systems of power to create distinct experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and representation (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990). In the context of media portrayals, intersectionality helps to explain how the representation of women in music videos is shaped not only by their gender but also by their racial or ethnic identities. Studies have shown that women of color, particularly Black, Latina, and Asian women, are often subject to racialized sexual stereotypes that compound the traditional gendered objectification experienced by all women in media.

In Hip-Hop/Rap, Black women are frequently depicted through the "Jezebel" stereotype, which hypersexualizes them and positions them as overly aggressive or promiscuous (Grabe et al., 2008). This stereotype reinforces harmful and reductive views of Black womanhood, where sexual availability and aggression are often emphasized over other traits such as intelligence or talent. Similarly, in Pop music videos, Latina women are often portrayed as "fiery" or "exotic," reinforcing cultural stereotypes that link their femininity to heightened sexuality (Smith, et al., 2019). These portrayals contribute to the sexualization of Latina women and perpetuate cultural biases that equate their identity with sexual allure and passion.

Asian women, particularly in Western media, are often depicted through the "Lotus Blossom" stereotype, which casts them as passive, submissive, and exotically feminine, while

also idealizing their docility and submissiveness (Grabe et al., 2008). This stereotype contributes to the reduction of Asian women to sexualized objects that are viewed as both mysterious and compliant, reinforcing racialized gender dynamics in media.

The intersection of race and gender in these portrayals leads to compounded forms of objectification, where women of color are not only objectified for their physical appearance but also stereotyped based on their racial and ethnic backgrounds. This intersectional objectification limits the diversity of roles available to women of color in music videos, often confining them to sexually charged, passive, or submissive roles, and reinforcing stereotypical portrayals that affect both their public image and their personal experiences in the music industry.

MEDIA LITERACY

Media literacy has become a crucial tool in helping individuals critically engage with media portrayals, particularly in recognizing and deconstructing harmful gendered and racialized portrayals in music videos. Media literacy is widely recognized as a critical framework for analyzing how media messages shape perceptions of identity, culture, and power (Fastrez & Landry, 2024; Scheibe & Sperry, 2022).

Recent studies highlight the effectiveness of media literacy programs in mitigating the effects of sexual objectification and body dissatisfaction, which are prevalent in music videos. For example, Carpentier, Aubrey, and Wright (2012) emphasize the need for music media literacy to address the sexualization present in popular music videos. Their research points out that music videos across various genres often feature hypersexualized portrayals of women, reinforcing objectifying norms that contribute to body image issues. Media literacy programs can help viewers critically analyze these portrayals, potentially reducing the internalization of harmful beauty standards and promoting healthier perceptions of female bodies.

Moreover, Hobbs and Jensen (2013) argue that music videos can be an effective tool for teaching media literacy in educational settings. Their framework emphasizes the importance of using music videos to engage students in critical thinking about media, especially regarding gender and race. By encouraging students to analyze the ways in which women are portrayed in music videos, these programs help viewers develop a deeper understanding of how commercial and ideological forces shape gendered representations. The study highlights how integrating media literacy into classroom activities allows students to dissect the cultural messages embedded in music videos and become more aware of the pervasive nature of objectification in media.

In a recent study by Wright et al. (2019), the authors highlight the growing need for popular music media literacy in the curriculum, especially for younger audiences. Their research discusses how increased exposure to sexual content in music videos can significantly impact identity development, self-objectification, and the acceptance of sexual and gendered violence. Wright et al. (2019) argue for the inclusion of music media literacy in educational frameworks to combat these negative effects. They recommend that media literacy education address the socialization of gender, sexuality, and self-esteem issues that arise from the sexualized content in popular music, emphasizing the role of media literacy in helping youth navigate these influences and reduce harmful behaviors and attitudes.

GENDER-SPECIFIC PATTERNS OF GENDER REPRESENTATION

Each music genre fosters distinct aesthetic and cultural norms that shape how female performers are portrayed. Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop videos, known for their visual focus on glamour and appeal, often reduce women to their sexualized bodies, reinforcing an image of women as visually pleasing objects (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Ward et al., 2005). These genres are

particularly influential due to their widespread appeal among youth audiences, amplifying the reach of objectifying portrayals. Research indicates that these depictions contribute to a culture that values women primarily for their appearance, impacting both performers' self-conceptions and audiences' perceptions of female worth (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Hansen & Hansen, 2000). In contrast, Country and Rock/Metal genres provide a less overtly sexualized yet still limited portrayal of women. Country music videos often depict women in traditionally feminine roles, emphasizing characteristics like nurturing, gentleness, or romantic idealization (Rasmussen & Densley, 2017). Meanwhile, Rock/Metal, though less conventional in its gender portrayals, often relies on the trope of the "muse" or "object of inspiration" for male performers, suggesting that women's value is relational rather than intrinsic (Walser, 1993). These genre-specific portrayals underscore the diverse ways in which female performers encounter objectification, revealing how each genre's cultural norms shape expectations around gender.

FOCUS ON PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES VS. TALENT

Research by Hatton and Trautner (2011) and Holmstrom (2004) supports the hypothesis that female performers' physical attributes are more emphasized in hip hop and pop music videos compared to Rock/Metal and country music videos. These studies found that women in hip hop and pop videos are more likely to be portrayed in sexually provocative ways, whereas Rock/Metal and country videos highlight their musical abilities and performance skills.

This differentiation in focus aligns with broader findings that women in hip hop and pop videos are often depicted in ways that emphasize their sexual appeal while downplaying their individuality and talents (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011).

PERCEPTION OF INFLUENCE BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND GENRE

The perception that race/ethnicity significantly influences the portrayal of female performers in music videos is supported by research indicating that racial and ethnic stereotypes are prominently featured in hip hop and pop music videos. These genres are known for their strong visual and cultural associations, which influence how performers are depicted and perceived (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Aubrey, 2006).

Studies have shown that the overrepresentation of Black males as aggressors and the hypersexualization of women of color in music videos contribute to the perpetuation of harmful racial and gender stereotypes (Rich et al., 1998; Hooks, 1992; Ward, 2004). These portrayals impact how viewers perceive race relations and their own identities, often leading to internalized racism and sexism (Hooks, 1992; Ward, 2004).

IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The influence of music videos on children and youth has been extensively documented, highlighting significant concerns regarding their impact on young viewers' development and behavior (Brown & L'Engle, 2009). Music videos, often laden with sexualized imagery and explicit content, serve as a powerful medium through which youth internalize societal norms and expectations (Ward, 2003). This exposure can have multiple adverse effects, ranging from the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes to the shaping of attitudes towards gender roles and relationships (Ward et al., 2005).

Research indicates that the frequent portrayal of women as sexual objects in music videos can lead to the internalization of these images by young female viewers, contributing to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and the adoption of unhealthy behaviors aimed at achieving these unrealistic standards of beauty (Grabe et al., 2008). Young women who consume media

with high levels of sexual objectification are more likely to view themselves through an objectifying lens, engaging in self-surveillance and developing body shame (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Moreover, the portrayal of violence and aggression in music videos, particularly those featuring male performers as aggressors and female performers as victims, can desensitize young viewers to violence and normalize aggressive behavior as an acceptable means of conflict resolution (Anderson, et al., 2003). This exposure is particularly concerning for young male viewers, who may come to associate masculinity with dominance and aggression, further entrenching gender stereotypes (Rich et al., 1998).

The consumption of music videos also plays a critical role in shaping adolescents' perceptions of sexual relationships (Ward, 2002). Studies have shown that exposure to sexual content in music videos is linked to earlier initiation of sexual activity, risky sexual behaviors, and distorted views of consensual sex (Brown & L'Engle, 2009). This early sexualization can have long-term implications for young people's emotional and physical well-being, influencing their relationship dynamics and sexual health (Ward, 2003).

Additionally, the intersectionality of race and gender in music videos cannot be overlooked. The overrepresentation of Black males as aggressors and the hypersexualization of women of color contribute to the perpetuation of harmful racial and gender stereotypes (Rich et al., 1998). These portrayals impact how young viewers perceive race relations and their own identities, often leading to internalized racism and sexism (Hooks, 1992; Ward, 2004; Rich et al., 1998).

The impact of music lyrics and videos on children and youth has been a growing concern among researchers. A recent study synthesized findings that link exposure to violent and sexual content in music videos to aggressive behavior, sexual permissiveness, and reinforcement of gender stereotypes among young viewers (COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS, 1996). The media serves as a powerful socializing agent, shaping the attitudes and behaviors of youth, often perpetuating harmful gender norms and influencing interpersonal relationships (Ward, 2003).

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS OF OBJECTIFYING PORTRAYALS

The psychological effects of viewing objectifying portrayals are profound. Numerous studies have linked exposure to sexualized imagery with negative mental health outcomes, including body dissatisfaction, appearance anxiety, and decreased self-esteem (Fredrickson et al., 1998; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004), This is particularly relevant for young women who, in identifying with these portrayals, may internalize unrealistic beauty standards and adopt a self-objectifying gaze. The effects are exacerbated for women of color, who may experience additional pressures due to the racialized stereotypes embedded in these portrayals, contributing to a compounded form of psychological stress (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Calogero, 2004). These portrayals influence social perceptions of gender and race, normalizing the objectification of women and reinforcing gender inequality. Research has demonstrated that frequent exposure to objectifying music videos cultivates acceptance of gender stereotypes, potentially shaping young audiences' beliefs about appropriate gender roles and relationships (Ward, 2004; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). These implications underscore the need for media to provide more equitable and empowering representations of women across all genres.

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON GENDER AND MUSIC VIDEOS

Over the years, music videos have evolved in terms of production quality, themes, and cultural significance (McGrath, 1996; Wallis, 2011). Early content analyses of music videos highlighted the proliferation of stereotypical gender roles and the frequent depiction of women as sexual objects (Baxter et al., 1985; Brown & Campbell, 1986). Studies by Gow (1996) and Hansen and Hansen (2000) revealed that music videos often depict men and women in hierarchical positions, with men showing more dominance and aggression and women being more likely to be objectified. These findings align with Goffman's (1976) framework of gender display, which identifies nonverbal cues that signal subordination or dominance in social interactions. Allan and Coltrane (1996) expanded on Goffman's work by applying these concepts to media representations, finding consistent patterns of gendered behavior in television commercials and music videos. In addition, Tabak (2023) discussed the importance of addressing gender roles in the music industry, emphasizing the need for greater inclusion and representation of women in various facets of the industry. This study calls for a more thorough investigation into the intersection of gender, representation, and the industry's overall structure to foster a more equitable environment for all musicians.

RECENT TRENDS AND META-ANALYSES

In recent years, the consumption of music videos among younger audiences has shifted significantly due to advancements in digital technology and the proliferation of online platforms. Traditional television viewership continues to decline as audiences migrate to digital platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Spotify (Statista, 2023; Nielsen, 2021); consequently, as of December 31, 2025, MTV officially shut down its remaining dedicated global music channels, including MTV Music, MTV 80s, MTV 90s, Club MTV, and MTV Live, shifting its flagship

network's focus entirely to reality television and pop culture programming (Mazza, 2025). YouTube remains the most popular platform for music video consumption among adolescents and young adults, offering a vast library of music videos accessible on-demand (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). The platform's user-friendly interface and integration with social media allow users to easily share and discover new content. According to a 2023 survey by Statista, YouTube was the most used online platform by teenagers in the United States, with 89.4% of respondents reporting using the platform at least once per month.

In addition to YouTube, social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat have become significant venues for music video content. These platforms offer short-form video content that often includes music clips, enabling artists to reach a wider audience and engage with fans through interactive features (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). TikTok, in particular, has revolutionized music video consumption with its algorithm-driven feed and viral trends, making it a critical platform for music discovery and promotion (Whateley, 2024). Streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music have also integrated music videos into their offerings, providing users with a seamless experience for both audio and visual content. These platforms use personalized recommendations to enhance user engagement, further solidifying their role in the music video ecosystem (Spotify, 2021). The shift towards digital platforms has not only changed how music videos are consumed but also how they are produced and distributed. The accessibility and affordability of digital production tools have democratized music video creation, allowing independent artists to produce high-quality videos without the backing of major record labels (Küng, 2017).

Recent research continues to show that despite societal progress towards gender equality, music videos often lag in reflecting these changes. Aubrey and Frisby (2011) found that the

sexual objectification of women remains prevalent in contemporary music videos. Moreover, Karsay et al. (2018) demonstrated that exposure to sexually objectifying music videos influences viewers' gazing behavior, further perpetuating the objectification of women. The continued scholarly interest in this topic is driven by the increasing sexualization of various forms of American popular culture and the persistence of gender and racial stereotypes in music videos (Ward et al., 2005). Studies have shown that music videos not only reflect societal norms but also shape them, influencing young viewers' perceptions of gender roles and relationships (Hansen & Hansen, 2000; Ward et al., 2005).

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

OBJECTIFICATION THEORY

Objectification theory, developed by Fredrickson and Roberts in 1997, highlights the pervasive sexual objectification of women in Western culture and its numerous negative consequences. The theory suggests that both explicit and implicit forms of objectification of the female body contribute to its primary psychological consequence, self-objectification. Explicit objectification refers to direct, observable emphasis on the body or body parts through sexualized display, fragmentation, or visual focus. Implicit objectification operates more subtly through narrative positioning, camera framing, or role assignment that prioritizes appearance, passivity, or symbolic function over subjectivity and agency. Both forms contribute to the development of an unhealthy self-perspective known as self-objectification (Fredrickson B. L., et al., 1998).

Throughout this dissertation, sexualization and objectification are treated as related but non-identical concepts. Sexualization refers to the use of eroticized styling, body exposure, movement, framing, or thematic cues that emphasize sexual appeal as a central visual register (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Karsay et al., 2018). Objectification refers to representational positioning that reduces a person's subjectivity, complexity, or personhood by prioritizing the body, or body parts, as the primary site of meaning, pleasure, or evaluation (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Nussbaum, 1995; Papadaki, 2010). Sexualization can contribute to objectification, but it is not automatically objectification; objectification can also occur without overt sexualization through forms of reduction such as categorical labeling, tokenistic inclusion, or narrative marginalization (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Nussbaum, 1995; Papadaki, 2010).

This distinction is essential for interpreting genre differences, particularly where some genres produce constraint through respectability and authenticity codes rather than overt erotic display.

Self-objectification leads to women constantly monitoring themselves, anticipating how others will judge their appearance and subsequently treat them (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Moradi & Huang, 2008; Winn & Cornelius, 2020). More recent reviews confirm that this internalization of the objectifying gaze depletes cognitive resources by diverting attention toward appearance-based self-monitoring, which can impair cognitive functioning and exacerbate negative self-conscious emotions such as shame and anxiety (Winn & Cornelius, 2020). While studies have not produced a single percentage representing how many women self-objectify or how often, it is acknowledged as a common phenomenon, especially in cultures that emphasize female beauty standards (Arroyo et al., 2014; Wagner Oehlhof et al., 2009; Fredrickson et al., 1998). Research suggests factors like media consumption, social media usage, and societal pressures around beauty can all contribute to self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This constant pressure to conform to societal beauty standards can have detrimental effects on women's mental health. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) have focused on the negative impacts this objectification can have on women's lives, and studies have shown that anticipating male attention results in higher levels of body shame and social anxiety compared to anticipating female attention. Studies have investigated different groups of women and found that self-objectification leads to increased body shame, appearance anxiety, disordered eating, self-surveillance, and reduced mental performance and motivation (Fredrickson et al., 1998; McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Parsons & Betz, 2001; Tiggemann & Slater, 2001; Calogero et al., 2005). The pressure to conform to societal beauty standards can lead to disordered eating patterns and a preoccupation with one's appearance (Calogero R. M.,

2004). Women may feel the need to constantly compare themselves to others and engage in self-surveillance, leading to a reduced sense of self-worth and motivation (Tiggemann & Slater, 2001).

Objectification theory also suggests that certain social contexts can trigger and amplify self-objectification (Calogero R. M., 2004). For example, women may feel more pressure to conform to beauty standards in settings such as the workplace or social media, where appearance is often scrutinized. The constant barrage of images of "perfect" bodies on social media can lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-objectification.

Objectifying Male Gaze

The objectifying male gaze refers to the way in which men tend to view women as objects of sexual desire rather than as whole, complex individuals (Berger, 1972; Mulvey, 1975). When women anticipate the male gaze, they may start to internalize this objectifying perspective and see themselves as mere objects of desire rather than as autonomous beings with their own thoughts, feelings, and desires. This can lead to a sense of powerlessness and helplessness, which can further reinforce the objectifying male gaze (Berger, 1972; Mulvey, 1975). The anticipation of the male gaze can have a significant impact on women's mental and emotional well-being. By reinforcing feelings of body shame and social physique anxiety, it can further perpetuate the objectifying male gaze and contribute to a culture that values women primarily for their physical appearance.

Self-Objectification

Self-objectification is a phenomenon that has been studied extensively in psychology and has been found to have numerous negative effects on women's mental health and well-being. It is the process by which individuals view themselves as objects to be evaluated based on their

appearance, rather than as whole, complex beings with thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). One of the ways in which self-objectification can be exacerbated is through the act of trying on swimsuits (Fredrickson B. L. et al., 1998). Research has shown that even when no actual observers are present, women can feel like they are being observed and evaluated when trying on swimsuits, which can lead to feelings of shame about their bodies (Fredrickson et al., 1998; Calogero & Tylka, 2007; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). This can, in turn, lead to poor performance on cognitive tasks, such as math tests, and can even result in decreased food intake. Another way in which self-objectification can be heightened is through imagined scenarios (Tiggemann & Slater, 2001). When women imagine themselves in body-focused situations, such as a dressing room or on the beach, they report higher levels of dissatisfaction with their bodies and lower self-esteem and body esteem compared to women who imagine themselves in non-body-focused situations, such as a being at home. This suggests that even the anticipation of being evaluated based on appearance can have negative effects on women's mental health (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

It is important to note that not all forms of observation lead to self-objectification. According to objectification theory, self-objectification occurs when individuals internalize the male gaze, which is a way of looking at women that sexually objectifies them (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This means that women are viewed primarily as objects of desire for men, rather than as whole, complex beings. When women internalize this gaze, they begin to view themselves in the same way, which can have numerous negative effects on their mental health and well-being (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Moradi & Huang, 2008).

It is a widely accepted notion that women have to constantly anticipate and respond to the male gaze. This means that women are often aware of the possibility of being looked at and

judged by men, and as a result, they tend to become more self-conscious about their appearance and behavior (Arroyo et al., 2014; Wagner Oehlhof et al., 2009; Fredrickson et al., 1998). This anticipation of the male gaze can lead to greater feelings of body shame and social physique anxiety, which can further reinforce the influence of the objectifying male gaze (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Body Shame

Body shame is a pervasive issue that affects many individuals, particularly women, around the world. It can be defined as the negative emotions and thoughts that people experience in relation to their physical appearance (Calogero & Tylka, 2007; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). These feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt often arise as a result of comparing oneself to the idealized beauty standards that are constantly promoted in the media and society. In particular, women may feel the need to live up to the expectations of the male gaze (Calogero & Tylka, 2007; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). As a result, women may feel pressured to conform to certain physical standards in order to be considered attractive or desirable. The impact of the male gaze and idealized beauty standards can be significant. When individuals feel that their physical appearance does not measure up to these standards, they may experience feelings of shame, embarrassment, and self-consciousness (Calogero & Tylka, 2007; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). These negative emotions can be incredibly damaging to one's self-esteem and overall well-being (Calogero & Tylka, 2007; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001).

Social Physique Anxiety

Social physique anxiety is a phenomenon that has been widely discussed in the world of psychology and sociology (Hart et al., 1989; Kade & Vos, 2010). It refers to the fear of being judged or evaluated based on one's physical appearance (Hart et al., 1989; Kade & Vos, 2010).

This fear is not limited to any particular gender or age group, but it is particularly prevalent among women (Hart et al., 1989; Kade & Vos, 2010). When women anticipate the male gaze, they may become more self-conscious about their body language, posture, and movements in order to avoid being perceived as unattractive or undesirable (Hart et al., 1989; Kade & Vos, 2010). This can lead to a constant state of anxiety and stress, which can further reinforce the objectifying male gaze (Hart et al., 1989; Kade & Vos, 2010). Social physique anxiety can have a significant impact on a person's mental health and well-being as it can lead to feelings of low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Hart et al., 1989; Kade & Vos, 2010). Women who experience social physique anxiety may also have a distorted body image, which can lead to disordered eating behaviors and other unhealthy habits (Hart et al., 1989; Kade & Vos, 2010).

INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY

Intersectionality Theory, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), is a critical framework that examines how multiple aspects of identity, such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, intersect to create unique and compounded experiences of discrimination and oppression. The theory argues that individuals who occupy multiple marginalized identities (e.g., a Black woman or a Latina lesbian) experience forms of discrimination that cannot be understood by focusing on one identity category alone. Instead, intersectionality considers how overlapping identities interact in ways that produce distinct experiences of marginalization and social injustice (Crenshaw, 1989).

This framework is particularly important for understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of oppression that marginalized individuals face in various societal structures. Rather than viewing categories like race and gender as separate and isolated, intersectionality emphasizes that these factors intersect and work together to shape people's lived experiences in nuanced

ways. For example, Black women may experience sexism differently from white women, as their oppression is also deeply influenced by their racial identity. Similarly, the experiences of women of color are not the same as those of white women, nor can they be understood solely through the lens of gender or race in isolation.

Intersectionality provides a more holistic approach to understanding social inequality, recognizing that oppression is not simply additive but rather interwoven and shaped by the dynamics between different forms of marginalization. This perspective allows for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the varying and layered forms of oppression faced by individuals, particularly those with intersecting marginalized identities.

Matrix of Domination

Collins' (1990) matrix of domination extends intersectionality by explaining how intersecting identities are organized through interlocking systems of power. Rather than focusing only on how identities intersect at the individual level, the matrix of domination emphasizes the structural arrangement of power across social institutions, cultural representation, and everyday experience. In this framework, oppression operates through mutually reinforcing systems that shape not only lived experience but also the production and circulation of meaning.

This framework is particularly useful for examining music videos because representation is not produced solely through individual creative choices. Instead, it is shaped by genre conventions, industry expectations, platform visibility, racialized histories, gender norms, and audience interpretation. Music videos function as sites where these systems converge, visually organizing femininity, race, sexuality, and genre belonging within broader cultural hierarchies. Collins' later work on Black sexual politics further clarifies how race, gender, sexuality, and representation operate together within contemporary cultural systems (Collins, 2004).

In this dissertation, the matrix of domination provides a structural lens across all three studies. In Study 1, it helps explain how gendered and racialized portrayals are embedded in genre-specific visual codes. In Study 2, it informs interpretation of how performers negotiate structural pressures related to genre, race, gender, and marketability. In Study 3, it helps explain how audiences interpret portrayals through existing cultural assumptions about femininity, sexuality, race, and genre authenticity.

The matrix of domination also supports the distinction between overt sexualization and broader forms of constraint. While some genres objectify women through body-centered display, others constrain women through respectability politics, authenticity testing, racial exclusion, or credibility demands. These mechanisms operate differently across genres but remain connected as expressions of the same underlying systems of power (Collins, 1990).

MEDIA LITERACY

Media Literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in a way that fosters critical engagement and enables individuals to recognize and challenge the social, cultural, and ideological forces within media (Fastrez & Landry, 2024; Scheibe & Sperry, 2022). In the context of this study, media literacy is essential for understanding how music videos construct and convey gendered and racialized stereotypes. Media literacy empowers viewers, particularly younger audiences, to critically question these portrayals and recognize the broader impacts on identity, self-perception, and social norms. As an analytical tool, media literacy provides a lens for this study to explore not only the content of music videos but also their social and cultural implications, particularly in terms of how female performers are represented and perceived across different genres. Given the prominence of objectification and stereotyped portrayals in music videos, media literacy equips viewers with the skills to deconstruct and

challenge these messages, thus fostering more inclusive and equitable understandings of gender and race in media.

Constructivist Media Decoding

Constructivist Media Decoding (CMD) is a pedagogical framework within media literacy that encourages a structured, question-driven approach to media analysis (Sperry & Scheibe, 2022). CMD focuses on six core concepts, authorship, format, audience, content, purpose, and point of view, which guide viewers to critically examine the construction and intent of media messages. CMD emphasizes active engagement with media, prompting audiences to consider how media portrayals are shaped by commercial motives and social ideologies. In this study, CMD will serve as a methodological approach to systematically deconstruct the ways in which music videos reinforce or challenge gendered and racialized stereotypes. By applying CMD's core concepts to the analysis of content and audience interpretation, this study will critically assess how objectification and intersectional identities are embedded in media portrayals. This approach aligns with media literacy objectives by promoting a deeper awareness of how media representations affect individual and collective perceptions of gender and race, ultimately encouraging more critical and reflective engagement with media content.

AGENCY

In this dissertation, agency is used in three analytically distinct senses to prevent the concept from becoming a catch-all. This distinction is important because a video may contain high levels of sexualization while still positioning the performer as active, directive, or narratively central. Likewise, performers may describe forms of agency that are not visible in the final video, and audiences may infer agency differently depending on genre norms, race, gender, and social location.

Textual Agency

Textual agency refers to how the video positions the performer within the narrative and visual field. This includes whether she is framed as initiating action, directing attention, controlling the scene, resisting reduction, or functioning primarily as spectacle. In Study 1, textual agency is used to analyze what the video itself grants the performer on screen.

Strategic Agency

Strategic agency refers to the off-screen negotiation work performers describe as they manage genre expectations, platform visibility, industry pressure, and gatekeeping. In Study 2, this concept is used to examine how performers understand their own choices, compromises, refusals, and acts of self-presentation within specific genre contexts.

Perceived Agency

Perceived agency refers to what audiences infer about empowerment, intention, and control when they view the portrayal. In Study 3, this concept is used to analyze how viewers interpret whether a performer appears active, empowered, constrained, objectified, or in control of her image.

INTEGRATION OF THEORIES

The integration of Objectification Theory and Intersectionality Theory allows for a nuanced analysis of how different genres of music videos contribute to the sexual objectification and stereotyping of female performers. While Objectification Theory underscores the general tendency to reduce women to their physical attributes, Intersectionality Theory adds complexity by exploring how these portrayals intersect with race and ethnicity, creating unique experiences of discrimination and marginalization. This dual-theoretical framework enriches the analysis of

music videos, as it highlights the ways in which gendered and racialized stereotypes are reinforced or challenged across various music genres.

In addition to Objectification Theory and Intersectionality Theory, this study incorporates media literacy and CMD to further explore female performers' portrayals in music videos. Objectification Theory suggests that media representations contribute to self-objectification, particularly among female audiences, as they internalize societal standards that prioritize physical appearance (Robillard, 2012). Intersectionality Theory provides a framework for understanding how overlapping identities, such as race and gender, impact media representation (Kelly & Currie, 2021). By integrating media literacy and CMD, this study moves beyond basic content analysis, using these frameworks to unpack biases, intentions, and the broader impacts of media portrayals. Together, these theories and methodologies allow for a critical examination of how genre-specific portrayals in music videos influence perceptions of female identity, promoting critical awareness among audiences and advocating for more inclusive, empowering, and equitable media practices.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY 1

Study 1 establishes the foundation of this dissertation by examining how female performers are represented in music video texts across four genres: Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal. Rather than treating media portrayals as uniform, this study analyzes how genre-specific conventions shape the visual and narrative construction of gender, agency, and racialized meaning. In doing so, it provides a systematic account of the representational patterns that structure what audiences see on screen. As such, this study serves as the starting point for the broader analytic trajectory of the dissertation. By identifying how objectification, empowerment, and stereotype operate within genre-coded media environments, Study 1 identifies the representational patterns that performers later describe navigating in Study 2 and that audiences interpret in Study 3.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF GENDER AND RACIAL PORTRAYALS IN MUSIC VIDEOS

This study aimed to replicate and extend Aubrey and Frisby's (2011) analysis by incorporating rock and metal music videos into the sample. The focus was on the sexual objectification of women performers and the intersectionality of gender and race in these portrayals, with the goal of establishing a baseline understanding of how female performers are portrayed in music videos across four genres, Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal. By analyzing these videos through the lens of Objectification Theory and Intersectionality Theory, this study identified patterns of objectification, stereotypical portrayals, and genre-specific norms. The findings from Study 1 informed the development of interview questions for Study 2, as they revealed specific themes regarding the portrayal of female artists in each genre.

METHODOLOGY

A content analysis was conducted on 104 music videos, with 26 videos selected from each genre (Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal) to ensure balanced representation. Videos were chosen based on popularity and visibility over the past five years to capture contemporary trends in the visual portrayal of cisgender female performers. The original design targeted 100 videos (25 per genre), but the final dataset included four additional videos that were initially selected for pilot testing and retained after confirming the codebook's effectiveness.

Prior to full-scale coding, a pilot analysis of one video from each genre was conducted to test and refine the codebook. These pilot cases provided valuable insights into genre-specific framing and validated the coding scheme across diverse visual and narrative contexts. Minor adjustments were made to clarify variable definitions and ensure intercoder consistency.

Although 25 videos per genre was the original goal, the study design allowed for analytic flexibility. Provisions were made to halt coding in any genre if thematic saturation was reached, that is, when new data ceased to yield new patterns or insights. While early signs of saturation began to emerge around the 15th to 20th video in each genre, all genres continued to present enough subtle variation and genre-specific nuance to justify completing the full target of 26 videos per genre. As a result, all 104 videos were ultimately analyzed.

In addition to the visual analysis, each video's lyrics were reviewed to assess how verbal content reinforced or contradicted the visual portrayal. This variable, "Lyrical Alignment," captured the relationship between the song's thematic message and accompanying imagery, offering a more nuanced view of performer agency, narrative cohesion, or lyrical-visual dissonance.

Because this study focused on the visual representation of female performers rather than musical or vocal elements, all videos were analyzed with the audio muted. This ensured undistracted attention to camera framing, choreography, costuming, facial expression, and narrative structure. The researcher acknowledges a personal affinity for rock and metal music, which could have introduced unconscious bias during musical interpretation. Muting the audio served as a reflexive control measure to maintain visual objectivity and methodological consistency across all genres.

This choice also represents a limitation. Including audio may have provided additional insight into how vocal delivery, lyrical emphasis, instrumentation, and genre-specific sonic conventions shape the interpretation of agency, objectification, and empowerment. Because Study 1 focused specifically on visual representation, these sonic dimensions were outside the scope of the analysis; however, future research could examine how visual and musical elements work together to construct gendered and racialized meaning in music videos.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: How are female lead vocalists portrayed across Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal music videos in terms of objectification and gendered roles? How do these portrayals compare to those of other on-screen female performers, including dancers, extras, and supporting visual performers?

RQ2: Are there significant differences in the levels of sexual objectification and stereotypical portrayals of female performers across these genres?

RQ3: How do racialized stereotypes intersect with gendered portrayals of women in each genre?

HYPOTHESES

H1: Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop music videos will show higher levels of sexual objectification of female performers compared to Country and Rock/Metal music videos.

H2: Racialized stereotypes in Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop will disproportionately affect women of color, depicting them in more hypersexualized and stereotyped roles than their counterparts in Country and Rock/Metal.

H3: Female performers in Country and Rock/Metal will be more frequently portrayed in traditional or narrative-based roles, emphasizing relational or domestic aspects over sexual appeal.

Together, these hypotheses align with the three research questions by testing genre-based differences in objectification (RQ1 and RQ2), racialized and intersectional portrayals (RQ3), and the presence of traditional or narrative-based roles across genres (RQ1).

SAMPLE

A purposive content analysis was conducted on 104 music videos, originally designed as a sample of 100, with four pilot videos later retained, comprising 26 per genre across Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal. The goal was to identify patterns of sexual objectification, gendered roles, and racialized stereotypes. These videos were selected to represent a cross-section of the most popular and culturally impactful music videos from the past five years, with a focus on cisgender female performers across Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal. Rather than relying solely on currently trending tracks, the selection emphasized songs with sustained popularity and influence, reflecting enduring genre norms and viewer engagement.

Spotify's Web Application Programming Interface (API) was initially used to gather data on the top-performing female artists over the past five years, based on long-term streaming metrics and popularity scores. Genre-specific playlists such as "Rap Caviar," "Pop Hits," "Hot Country," and "Rock This" were consulted to identify high-visibility artists with widespread audience reach. From these lists, music videos were selected based on both streaming performance and the availability of official video content.

However, an initial review of the top-performing artists revealed a lack of racial and ethnic diversity in certain genres. For example, the highest-streamed Country and Rock/Metal artists were overwhelmingly white, while Hip-Hop/Rap was dominated by Black performers. To address this imbalance and align with the study's intersectional framework, a purposeful sampling strategy was implemented to ensure the inclusion of racially and ethnically diverse female performers in each genre, particularly Latina, Black, and Asian artists. Additional videos were selected based on artist identity, genre classification, and cultural relevance to better reflect the broader demographic spectrum of women in music.

All selected videos featured a female lead vocalist, defined as the primary visual and narrative focus of the video, typically emphasized through camera framing, visual dominance, and lyrical delivery. Female background performers were also included in the analysis, with attention paid to differences in portrayal between central and supporting roles. This distinction allowed for a more nuanced examination of how objectification and racialized stereotypes vary by performative position.

To establish the reliability and clarity of the coding process, one video from each genre (four total) was initially selected for use in a pilot study. These videos were used to test and refine the coding scheme, clarify definitions within the codebook, and ensure consistent

application across different genre contexts. Upon confirming the codebook's effectiveness, these four pilot videos were retained in the final dataset, expanding the total sample size from 100 to 104 music videos. The full list of videos included in the Study 1 sample is provided in Appendix G.

CODING AND VARIABLES

Each video was coded for specific elements related to objectification and gendered and racialized representation. These variables were designed to capture both observable visual features and their broader interpretive significance within the music video text.

Key variables included gendered portrayals, role type, camera focus and framing, and race and ethnicity. Gendered portrayals were assessed through indicators of sexualization, including clothing, body exposure, and suggestive poses. Role type distinguished whether performers were presented in performance-based, narrative, or objectified roles. Camera focus and angles were coded to capture the extent to which visual framing emphasized the performer's physicality through close-ups, panning shots, or body fragmentation. Race and ethnicity were recorded to examine how representation and objectification varied across racialized identities and genre contexts.

These variables were conceptualized through an integrated approach combining theoretical frameworks such as Objectification Theory and Intersectionality with established content analysis measures (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Karsay et al., 2018). Sexualization was operationalized through a set of visual and behavioral indicators, including body exposure, sexualized movement, sexualized gaze, and sexualized dance. While these indicators are commonly used as proxies for objectification, in this study they were interpreted in relation to

whether the performer was reduced to bodily display or maintained subjectivity and control within the scene.

Empowerment was coded as a binary variable (0 = not empowered, 1 = empowered) to capture textual agency. This measure assessed whether the performer was positioned as initiating action, directing narrative movement, or resisting passive visual framing. Importantly, empowerment was treated as an on-screen construct rather than a reflection of performer intent, and was interpreted in relation to genre-specific norms that shape how agency is expressed and recognized.

Racialized stereotypes were coded based on identifiable tropes, such as the Jezebel, exotic Latina, or submissive Asian, as well as recurring aesthetic markers that aligned with historically racialized forms of representation. Lyrical alignment assessed whether visual elements supported, contradicted, or remained neutral in relation to the song's lyrical themes surrounding gender, identity, or empowerment.

Several visual variables were coded on five-point scales to capture degree rather than simple presence or absence. A score of 1 indicated little to no presence of the coded feature, while a score of 5 indicated that the feature was highly prominent, repeated, or central to the performer's visual representation.

For example, body exposure ranged from minimal or modest presentation (1), in which clothing did not draw attention to the body, to extensive exposure (5), in which revealing costuming or styling made the body a central visual focus. Mid-range scores reflected partial exposure or genre-typical styling that emphasized appearance without making bodily display dominant.

Sexualized gaze, operationalized through camera focus and framing, ranged from non-sexualized visual emphasis (1), such as face-centered or performance-oriented shots, to repeated or sustained framing of specific body parts (5), including breasts, buttocks, hips, legs, or midriff. Higher scores reflected fragmentation or visual emphasis that directed attention primarily toward sexualized physical features.

Sexualized movement ranged from little to no suggestive movement (1) to frequent or central use of explicitly sexualized choreography (5), including movements such as grinding, twerking, hip thrusting, body tracing, or crawling.

These scale distinctions allowed for differentiation between videos in which appearance functioned as part of standard performance aesthetics and those in which the performer's body became a primary site of visual meaning. This distinction was critical to the analytic framework, as sexualization and objectification were treated as related but not identical constructs. A video could include revealing clothing or stylized movement without fully reducing the performer to objectified display if narrative control, direct address, or other forms of textual agency were maintained.

Full definitions, coding criteria, and decision rules are provided in Appendix A: Codebook. The statistical procedures used to assess genre-based differences, including one-way ANOVAs, Tukey HSD post hoc tests, eta squared effect sizes, internal consistency analysis, and power analysis, are described in the quantitative results section below.

Themes

The coding scheme replicated Aubrey and Frisby's (2011) categories with added variables for intersectional analysis. Themes included:

1. **Body Exposure**: Assessing the amount of skin exposed by the performers.
2. **Sexualized Movement**: Analyzing movements and actions that are sexually suggestive or provocative.
3. **Sexualized Gaze**: Evaluating how often the camera focuses on sexual body parts of the performers.
4. **Objectifying Commentary**: Identifying lyrics or dialogue that refer to performers in a sexualized or objectifying manner.
5. **Clothing**: Examining the type of clothing worn by performers, noting how revealing or suggestive the outfits are.
6. **Sexual Roles**: Looking at the roles that performers take on in the videos, such as seductresses or victims.
7. **Aggression**: Analyzing the presence and nature of aggressive behaviors, including both physical aggression and dominance.
8. **Sexualization of Dance**: Assessing dance routines and choreography for sexually suggestive moves or positions.
9. **Traditional Gender Roles and Gendered Portrayals:** A key theme will be the portrayal of women in traditional gender roles, such as passive romantic partners or nurturing figures, across all genres, where women are often depicted in subordinate or objectified roles, with variations in sexualization and agency depending on the genre.
10. **Intersectionality of Race and Gender**: Analyzing how race and gender intersect in the portrayal of female performers, particularly in terms of victimization and aggressiveness.

11. **Empowerment**: Analyzing empowerment helps to understand how music videos portray women in positions of strength and independence, countering traditional objectification narratives.
12. **Diversity**: Investigating diversity ensures that the study captures a wide range of female identities and experiences, providing a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of women in music videos.
13. **Cultural Variations in Gendered Portrayals:** Analyzing the cultural differences in the portrayal of female performers across genres, recognizing that gender portrayals may vary depending on the cultural norms, values, and gender expectations specific to each region. For example, Hip-Hop/Rap from the U.S. may emphasize sexualized portrayals of women, while K-Pop from South Korea may reflect different cultural standards of femininity and agency, leading to distinct representations in music videos.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although this study analyzed publicly accessible media content, several ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure responsible research practices.

First, the interpretation and coding of portrayals were approached with sensitivity to how gender and race are represented in popular culture. The analysis frequently addressed complex themes, such as sexual objectification, racialized tropes, and intersectional power dynamics, which required thoughtful handling to avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes. To that end, the researcher prioritized framing results in a constructive and critical manner, emphasizing the cultural significance and complexity of each portrayal rather than flattening them into simple categories.

Second, the researcher's positionality as the sole coder was a central ethical consideration. Feminist and critical race methodologies recognize that the researcher's identity, experiences, and sociocultural perspective inevitably influence interpretation. Throughout the project, I maintained reflexive awareness of how my positional standpoint, as a media scholar, musician, and cultural critic, shaped the way I understood and classified portrayals of women in music videos. This awareness informed the ongoing refinement of the codebook, and it was intentionally integrated into the analysis to enhance transparency and credibility.

Third, cultural sensitivity was a guiding principle throughout the study. Each genre, Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal, reflects distinct cultural norms, histories, and performance conventions. For example, while sexualized portrayals in Hip-Hop/Rap may reflect cultural assertions of power and self-ownership, similar portrayals in Pop may follow more commercialized or objectifying tropes. Rather than applying a universal lens, the analysis accounted for these differences, interpreting portrayals in genre-specific and culturally grounded contexts. This approach reduced the risk of oversimplification or cultural misjudgment and allowed for a more nuanced, accurate reading of each video.

Finally, while the goal was objectivity and rigor, I acknowledge that all interpretations are ultimately shaped by the researcher's lens. As such, I employed a reflexive, iterative approach that remained open to contradiction, ambiguity, and multiplicity of meaning. Videos were not coded as inherently “good” or “bad,” but rather analyzed for how their portrayals aligned with broader patterns of representation, power, and identity.

By taking these ethical steps, the study aimed not only to document how female performers are portrayed in music videos, but also to contribute meaningfully to ongoing conversations about media literacy, gender equity, and cultural representation.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Overview of Sample

A total of 104 music videos were analyzed across four genres: Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal, with 26 videos selected per genre to ensure balanced representation. Four videos, one from each genre, were first used in pilot testing to evaluate the clarity and applicability of the codebook. After the pilot review confirmed that the coding scheme was appropriate, those four videos were retained as part of the final dataset rather than excluded. Thus, the final analytic sample consisted of 104 videos.

All videos featured a cisgender female lead singer and were released within the past five years. Selection was guided by Spotify streaming data and curated genre playlists, prioritizing tracks with sustained popularity. However, initial API-driven sampling revealed a strong racial skew in certain genres: Country and Rock/Metal were dominated by white performers, while Hip-Hop/Rap disproportionately featured Black artists. To ensure alignment with the study's intersectional framework, purposeful sampling was employed to supplement the top-performer lists with Latina, Asian, and Black artists in underrepresented genres. This method allowed for greater racial and ethnic diversity across all four genre samples.

The final sample included artists of various racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Black, Latina, Asian, Indigenous, and white performers. Every video was analyzed for both visual and lyrical content, with a focus on objectification, empowerment, gender roles, and racialized stereotypes. The balance of genres and purposeful inclusion of racially diverse performers provided a robust foundation for both quantitative comparisons and thematic exploration of how female performers are portrayed across contemporary music video culture.

Quantitative Results by Genre

All quantitative variables were coded at the video level. Five-point scale variables were coded from 1, indicating little to no presence of the feature, to 5, indicating that the feature was highly prominent, repeated, or central to the performer's visual representation. Binary variables were coded as 0 = absent and 1 = present. Scores therefore reflect the overall prominence or presence of a feature within each video rather than the number of discrete occurrences within a video. For example, if objectifying commentary appeared multiple times in a single video, the variable was coded as present for that video rather than counted as multiple separate events.

Descriptive statistics by genre are presented in Table B1, and one-way ANOVA results are presented in Table B2. One-way ANOVAs were conducted to assess whether objectification-related portrayals differed significantly across genre. The five variables analyzed were Body Exposure, Sexualized Gaze, Sexualized Movement, Empowerment, and Racialized Stereotype Presence. Genre was treated as the independent grouping variable, with four levels: Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal.

Table B1

Descriptive Statistics for Study 1 Quantitative Variables by Genre

Genre	N	Body Exposure M (SD)	Sexualized Gaze M (SD)	Sexualized Movement M (SD)	Empowerment M (SD)	Racialized Stereotype Presence M (SD)
Hip-Hop/Rap	26	3.92 (1.55)	3.92 (1.62)	0.77 (0.43)	1.00 (0.00)	0.69 (0.47)

Genre	N	Body Exposure M (SD)	Sexualized Gaze M (SD)	Sexualized Movement M (SD)	Empowerment M (SD)	Racialized Stereotype Presence M (SD)
Pop	26	3.31 (1.16)	2.92 (1.26)	0.62 (0.50)	0.81 (0.40)	0.12 (0.33)
Country	26	1.85 (1.05)	1.50 (1.07)	0.08 (0.27)	1.00 (0.00)	0.08 (0.27)
Rock/Metal	26	2.23 (0.82)	1.46 (0.81)	0.15 (0.37)	0.96 (0.20)	0.04 (0.20)

Table B2

One-Way ANOVA Results for Study 1 Quantitative Variables by Genre

Variable	F	df	p	η^2
Body Exposure	17.35	3, 100	< .001	.342
Sexualized Gaze	24.58	3, 100	< .001	.425
Sexualized Movement	18.83	3, 100	< .001	.361
Empowerment	4.36	3, 100	.006	.116
Racialized Stereotype Presence	22.61	3, 100	< .001	.404

The ANOVA results showed statistically significant genre differences across all five variables. Body Exposure differed significantly by genre, $F(3, 100) = 17.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .342$. Hip-Hop/Rap had the highest mean score (M = 3.92), followed by Pop (M = 3.31), Rock/Metal (M = 2.23), and Country (M = 1.85). Sexualized Gaze also differed significantly by genre, F(3,

100) = 24.58, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .425$, with Hip-Hop/Rap again showing the highest mean (M = 3.92), followed by Pop (M = 2.92), Country (M = 1.50), and Rock/Metal (M = 1.46). Sexualized Movement followed the same general pattern, $F(3, 100) = 18.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .361$, with Hip-Hop/Rap (M = 0.77) and Pop (M = 0.62) substantially higher than Rock/Metal (M = 0.15) and Country (M = 0.08).

Empowerment also differed significantly by genre, $F(3, 100) = 4.36$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2 = .116$. Hip-Hop/Rap and Country both had the highest possible mean score (M = 1.00), followed closely by Rock/Metal (M = 0.96), while Pop had the lowest empowerment mean (M = 0.81). This indicates that empowerment was not simply the inverse of sexual objectification. Hip-Hop/Rap videos showed high objectification indicators while also frequently positioning central female performers as dominant, self-directed, or visually assertive. Racialized Stereotype Presence also differed significantly across genres, $F(3, 100) = 22.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .404$. Racialized stereotypes were most prevalent in Hip-Hop/Rap videos (M = 0.69; 18 of 26 videos, 69.2%), followed by Pop (M = 0.12; 3 of 26 videos, 11.5%), Country (M = 0.08; 2 of 26 videos, 7.7%), and Rock/Metal (M = 0.04; 1 of 26 videos, 3.8%).

Effect sizes indicated that genre accounted for substantial variance in Body Exposure, Sexualized Gaze, Sexualized Movement, and Racialized Stereotype Presence, with a smaller but still meaningful effect for Empowerment. Homogeneity of variance was examined as part of the ANOVA procedure. Because several variables were bounded or binary, the results were interpreted alongside descriptive statistics and effect sizes rather than relying on significance testing alone. Given the observed effect sizes, the analyses were sufficiently sensitive to detect meaningful genre-based differences in the coded variables.

Results by Research Questions and Hypothesis

Research Question 1

RQ1 asked how female lead vocalists were portrayed across Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal music videos in terms of objectification and gendered roles, and how these portrayals compared to those of other on-screen female performers, including dancers, extras, and supporting visual performers.

The findings showed clear genre-based differences in how women were visually positioned. Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop videos showed higher mean scores for Body Exposure, Sexualized Gaze, and Sexualized Movement than Country and Rock/Metal. However, the results also showed that sexualization did not automatically eliminate agency. Hip-Hop/Rap videos, for example, had the highest objectification-related scores while also showing uniformly high empowerment scores (M = 1.00). This suggests that central female performers in Hip-Hop/Rap were often framed through sexualized visual codes while also being positioned as assertive, dominant, or self-directed. By contrast, Country and Rock/Metal videos relied less on overt sexualization and more on narrative, symbolic, relational, or performance-based forms of representation.

Across the sample, female lead singers generally received more narrative and visual agency than supporting female performers. Background dancers, extras, and supporting visual performers were more likely to function decoratively or atmospherically, particularly in Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop videos where body-centric framing and sexualized choreography were more common. This distinction is important because objectification was not distributed evenly within the same video. Lead singers were more likely to be framed as agents of the performance, while

supporting performers were more likely to intensify the visual environment around the central artist.

Research Question 2 and Hypothesis 1

RQ2 asked whether there were significant differences in levels of sexual objectification and stereotypical portrayals of female performers across genres. H1 predicted that Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop music videos would show higher levels of sexual objectification of female performers compared to Country and Rock/Metal music videos.

H1 was supported. Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop videos had higher mean scores than Country and Rock/Metal on the core objectification indicators of Body Exposure, Sexualized Gaze, and Sexualized Movement. Body Exposure differed significantly across genres, $F(3, 100) = 17.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .342$. Sexualized Gaze also differed significantly, $F(3, 100) = 24.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .425$. Sexualized Movement likewise differed by genre, $F(3, 100) = 18.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .361$. These findings support the prediction that Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop videos would contain more overt sexual objectification than Country and Rock/Metal videos.

The descriptive patterns further support this conclusion. Hip-Hop/Rap had the highest mean scores for Body Exposure ($M = 3.92$) and Sexualized Gaze ($M = 3.92$), while Pop also showed elevated scores for Body Exposure ($M = 3.31$) and Sexualized Gaze ($M = 2.92$). By contrast, Country showed much lower levels of Body Exposure ($M = 1.85$) and Sexualized Gaze ($M = 1.50$), while Rock/Metal also remained comparatively low on these measures (Body Exposure $M = 2.23$; Sexualized Gaze $M = 1.46$). Sexualized Movement was present in 20 of 26 Hip-Hop/Rap videos (76.9%) and 16 of 26 Pop videos (61.5%), compared with 2 of 26 Country videos (7.7%) and 4 of 26 Rock/Metal videos (15.4%).

Research Question 3 and Hypothesis 2

RQ3 asked how racialized stereotypes intersected with gendered portrayals of women in each genre. H2 predicted that racialized stereotypes in Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop would disproportionately affect women of color, depicting them in more hypersexualized and stereotyped roles than their counterparts in Country and Rock/Metal.

H2 was supported by the combined quantitative and qualitative findings. Quantitatively, Racialized Stereotype Presence differed significantly across genres, $F(3, 100) = 22.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .404$. Racialized stereotypes were most prevalent in Hip-Hop/Rap, where they appeared in 18 of 26 videos (69.2%). They were less common in Pop, appearing in 3 of 26 videos (11.5%), and rare in Country and Rock/Metal, appearing in 2 of 26 Country videos (7.7%) and 1 of 26 Rock/Metal videos (3.8%).

The qualitative analysis clarified what these differences meant in context. In Hip-Hop/Rap, racialized stereotypes often appeared through hypersexualized framing, body-centric camera work, and choreography emphasizing buttocks, thighs, hips, or sexually suggestive movement. These portrayals were especially visible in videos featuring Black and Latina performers. In Pop, racialized sexualization was less frequent but still appeared through exoticized, glamorous, or spectacle-oriented visual framing. In Country and Rock/Metal, women of color were less likely to be portrayed through overt sexualization, but their lower visibility and occasional peripheral placement pointed to a different kind of racialized constraint: whiteness remained the default visual norm in both genres.

Hypothesis 3

H3 predicted that female performers in Country and Rock/Metal would be more frequently portrayed in traditional or narrative-based roles, emphasizing relational or domestic aspects over sexual appeal.

H3 was supported in relation to lower sexual appeal and greater reliance on narrative or symbolic framing, though the pattern differed between Country and Rock/Metal. Country and Rock/Metal videos showed substantially lower levels of Body Exposure, Sexualized Gaze, and Sexualized Movement than Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop. Country had the lowest Body Exposure mean ($M = 1.85$) and the lowest Sexualized Movement mean ($M = 0.08$). Rock/Metal also showed low Sexualized Gaze ($M = 1.46$) and low Sexualized Movement ($M = 0.15$). These findings indicate that Country and Rock/Metal relied less on overt sexualized display than Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop.

Qualitatively, however, the two genres differed in how they represented women. Country videos more often emphasized storytelling, emotional resilience, relational autonomy, rural authenticity, and personal struggle. Rock/Metal videos more often emphasized symbolic empowerment, performance intensity, resistance, transformation, or mythic imagery. Therefore, H3 was supported, but with an important qualification: Country leaned more strongly toward relational and narrative traditions, while Rock/Metal emphasized symbolic or resistant forms of empowerment rather than domestic or romantic roles.

Qualitative Results by Genre

Hip-Hop/Rap

Hip-Hop/Rap videos frequently showcased themes of self-possession, luxury, sexual dominance, and visual command. Central female performers often appeared in tight or revealing clothing, performed sexualized choreography, and were filmed through body-centric camera

angles. These visual strategies sometimes aligned with objectifying conventions, but they were often paired with lyrical and performative cues of confidence, autonomy, wealth, and control. As a result, Hip-Hop/Rap frequently presented a complicated combination of high sexualization and high agency.

This pattern helps explain why Hip-Hop/Rap had high scores for both objectification-related variables and empowerment. Erotic display was often framed as part of dominance rather than passivity. However, this did not eliminate objectification. Background performers in Hip-Hop/Rap videos were more likely to be framed decoratively, particularly through group choreography, sexualized posing, or party-scene aesthetics. Thus, agency was concentrated most strongly around the lead singer, while supporting women often intensified the sexualized visual environment without receiving comparable narrative control.

Pop

Pop videos also demonstrated elevated objectification indicators, though generally at lower levels than Hip-Hop/Rap. Pop combined body exposure, stylized beauty, choreographed movement, and polished spectacle. Rather than relying as heavily on erotic dominance, Pop often framed femininity through glamour, emotional vulnerability, desirability, and self-branding. Body exposure and sexualized gaze remained present, but these elements were frequently embedded in a more polished aesthetic register.

Empowerment in Pop was less consistent than in the other genres, as reflected in the lower Empowerment mean (M = 0.81). Many performers retained visual centrality and stylistic control, but their portrayals were less often coded as overtly dominant or self-directed. Pop also showed fewer racialized stereotypes than Hip-Hop/Rap but more than Country or Rock/Metal.

This suggests that Pop's objectification patterns were less extreme than Hip-Hop/Rap but still structured by visual spectacle, marketable femininity, and uneven access to narrative depth.

Country

Country videos featured the lowest overall levels of sexualized representation. The quantitative results showed low mean scores for Body Exposure (M = 1.85), Sexualized Gaze (M = 1.50), and Sexualized Movement (M = 0.08). Qualitatively, Country videos tended to center storytelling, emotional resilience, relational conflict, nostalgia, and personal strength. Female performers were often framed as daughters, partners, mothers, rebels, survivors, or reflective narrators rather than as erotic objects.

Empowerment in Country was high (M = 1.00), but it took a different form than in Hip-Hop/Rap. Rather than being expressed through sexual dominance or bodily display, empowerment was more often conveyed through moral strength, emotional endurance, leaving harmful relationships, embracing identity, or claiming space within rural and familial settings. However, Country's lower sexualization did not mean the absence of constraint. Whiteness, respectability, and authenticity remained powerful visual codes that shaped who appeared to belong comfortably within the genre's narrative world.

Rock/Metal

Rock/Metal fell between Pop and Country in Body Exposure but remained low on Sexualized Gaze and Sexualized Movement. The genre's Body Exposure mean was 2.23, while Sexualized Gaze averaged 1.46 and Sexualized Movement averaged 0.15. Qualitatively, Rock/Metal videos presented a wider range of visual strategies, including gothic symbolism, mythic imagery, performance intensity, spiritual confrontation, and transformation. Central

female performers were often framed as powerful, mysterious, resistant, or otherworldly rather than as erotic objects.

Empowerment in Rock/Metal was high (M = 0.96), but it was usually expressed through vocal authority, symbolic power, survival, confrontation, or visual intensity. Sexualized dance was rare, and objectification was more likely to occur through genre categorization or exceptionalism than through overt erotic display. Although women of color were intentionally included in the sample, Rock/Metal remained visually coded as predominantly white, making the relative invisibility of women of color an important form of representational constraint.

Intersectional Findings by Race and Genre

An intersectional analysis of the sample revealed that portrayals of female performers varied not only by genre but also by race. Women of color, particularly Black, Latina, and Asian performers, were more likely to appear in roles shaped by racialized tropes, though the degree and nature of those stereotypes differed across genres.

In Hip-Hop/Rap, Black and Latina performers were often framed through hypersexualized aesthetics. Camera work frequently emphasized buttocks, thighs, hips, and other sexualized body parts, and choreography frequently featured twerking, grinding, or other eroticized movements. While these portrayals were sometimes paired with themes of confidence, wealth, dominance, and self-possession, they also drew on historical stereotypes that associate Black and Latina femininity with sexual availability, excess, or exoticism. Thus, empowerment and racialized sexualization often appeared together rather than as opposites.

In Pop, racialized sexualization was subtler but still present. White performers were more likely to receive narratives organized around romance, emotional agency, or self-discovery, while

performers of color were more often placed within highly stylized, glamorous, or spectacle-oriented visual environments. This pattern did not mean that performers of color lacked agency, but it did suggest that access to emotional depth and narrative complexity was unevenly distributed across racial identity.

In Country, purposeful sampling increased the number of women of color included as lead singers. When women of color were centered, they were generally framed within Country's dominant narrative traditions, including emotional resilience, relational autonomy, personal struggle, and grounded authenticity. However, in several white-led videos, women of color appeared in limited or peripheral roles, such as friends, guests, or background figures, without comparable narrative function. These inclusions suggested symbolic diversity while leaving whiteness intact as the genre's central representational norm.

In Rock/Metal, women of color were relatively rare in mainstream examples but were included in the sample to reflect emerging diversity. When present, Black, Asian, and Latina performers often appeared as leaders, spiritual figures, resistant subjects, or visually powerful lead singers. These portrayals often challenged sexualized stereotypes. At the same time, their relative rarity underscored the continued whiteness of mainstream Rock/Metal visibility. In this genre, racialized constraint appeared less through overt stereotype and more through limited presence and exceptionalism.

Taken together, the intersectional findings show that racialized portrayals intersect with gendered genre conventions in distinct ways. Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop more frequently linked women of color to sexualized or spectacle-oriented visibility, while Country and Rock/Metal more often reproduced whiteness as normative through absence, tokenism, or exceptionalism.

These patterns support the conclusion that race shaped not only whether women were visible, but also what kind of agency, desirability, and legitimacy their portrayals made available.

Comparative Summary

Overall, Study 1 showed that genre was a statistically and interpretively significant factor in the portrayal of female performers. Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop contained higher levels of body exposure, sexualized gaze, and sexualized movement, supporting H1. Racialized stereotypes were most prevalent in Hip-Hop/Rap and appeared in genre-specific ways across the sample, supporting H2. Country and Rock/Metal showed lower levels of overt sexualized display and relied more heavily on narrative, symbolic, relational, or performance-based forms of representation, supporting H3 with the qualification that Country and Rock/Metal expressed these patterns differently.

These findings answer the study's research questions by showing that objectification is not distributed uniformly across genres. Instead, each genre organizes gendered and racialized representation through its own visual grammar. Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop more often foreground sexualized visibility, though not always without agency. Country and Rock/Metal less often rely on overt sexualization, but they remain structured by other constraints, including whiteness, authenticity, respectability, genre credibility, and symbolic exceptionalism. Study 1 therefore establishes the representational baseline for the dissertation: female performers' visibility, agency, and objectification are shaped by genre-specific visual codes that intersect with race and gender.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the visual and lyrical portrayal of cisgender female performers across 104 music videos spanning four genres: Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal.

Using a combination of quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic coding, the study identified systematic, genre-based differences in how sexual objectification, gendered roles, and racialized stereotypes are constructed. Across the dataset, genre functioned as a primary organizing structure shaping how performers were visually framed, how empowerment was expressed, and how race intersected with gender to influence representation.

Quantitative findings demonstrated that Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop contained significantly higher levels of sexual objectification, including greater body exposure, sexualized gaze, and sexualized movement. In contrast, Country and Rock/Metal exhibited lower levels of overt sexualization and relied more heavily on narrative, emotional, or symbolic forms of empowerment. These differences were consistent across variables and supported by large effect sizes, reinforcing that genre is not simply a descriptive category but a statistically and substantively meaningful factor structuring representation.

Qualitative analysis further clarified how these differences operate. In Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop, objectification frequently co-occurred with visible markers of agency, such as direct gaze, assertive posture, and lyrical themes of autonomy or success. In Country and Rock/Metal, empowerment was more often expressed through relational narratives, emotional resilience, or symbolic positioning rather than sexual display. These findings indicate that empowerment is not absent in highly sexualized genres but is instead expressed through different genre-specific visual and cultural logics.

Interpretation of Key Findings

The results support the expectation that sexual objectification is most pronounced in Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop, consistent with prior research (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011), while also demonstrating how these portrayals have evolved. In Hip-Hop/Rap, objectification frequently

coexisted with assertions of power, dominance, and economic success. Female performers were often framed as commanding attention within highly stylized visual environments, suggesting a more complex relationship between objectification and agency than earlier models of passive sexualization would predict.

To describe this recurring pattern, this study introduces the concept of strategic self-objectification, defined as a representational configuration in which erotic self-display is framed within the text as intentional, functional, and compatible with dominance within genre conventions. This term is used analytically rather than normatively. It does not assume that performers are fully liberated from objectifying structures; rather, it highlights how genre conventions can render particular forms of empowerment legible through sexualized visual codes. In this sense, agency and objectification are not mutually exclusive but can coexist within commercial systems that reward visibility through sexualized aesthetics, particularly for marginalized performers.

In Pop, objectification remained prevalent but was often mediated through polished aesthetics, controlled choreography, and emotional narrative framing. Empowerment was more frequently tied to self-definition, romantic autonomy, or emotional resilience rather than overt dominance. However, this empowerment was unevenly distributed across racial lines. White performers were more likely to be positioned within narratives emphasizing emotional depth and subjectivity, while performers of color were more often situated within visually stylized or spectacle-driven roles.

Country and Rock/Metal presented alternative configurations of femininity. Country emphasized storytelling, relational identity, and emotional resilience, frequently positioning performers within grounded, non-sexualized roles. Rock/Metal, by contrast, framed performers

through symbolic, mythic, or resistant aesthetics, emphasizing autonomy, transformation, and defiance rather than erotic appeal. While both genres exhibited lower levels of sexual objectification, they maintained their own constraints, particularly in relation to racial representation and genre boundaries.

Comparison to Prior Research

These findings both affirm and extend prior work on gender representation in music videos. Consistent with Aubrey and Frisby (2011), Hip-Hop and Pop were the genres most associated with sexualized portrayals. However, this study extends that work by incorporating Rock/Metal and by applying an explicitly intersectional framework that accounts for racialized differences in representation.

Where earlier studies emphasized passive sexualization, this analysis identifies more complex portrayals in which sexualization and agency co-occur. While this does not negate the presence of objectification, it complicates its interpretation and suggests that contemporary portrayals operate through hybridized forms shaped by both performer agency and industry expectations.

The study also foregrounds race as a central axis of analysis. Across genres, whiteness functioned as an implicit norm, particularly in Country and Rock/Metal, where performers of color were either underrepresented or positioned as exceptions. In Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop, performers of color were more visible but were also more likely to be associated with hypersexualized or exoticized visual tropes. These findings indicate that gender representation cannot be fully understood without accounting for how race structures visibility, agency, and aesthetic positioning within genre systems.

Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to Objectification Theory by demonstrating that objectification operates differently across genre contexts. Rather than functioning as a uniform process, objectification is shaped by genre-specific conventions that influence how sexualization is presented, interpreted, and made meaningful. In some contexts, performers are positioned as agentic within objectifying frameworks, suggesting the need for more flexible theoretical models that can account for the co-presence of agency and constraint.

The study also supported Intersectionality Theory by illustrating how race and gender intersect within genre-based systems of representation. Access to narrative depth, visibility, and perceived legitimacy varied across both gender and racial lines, reinforcing the importance of analyzing media texts through multiple, intersecting dimensions of identity.

Finally, the findings align with the matrix of domination framework by highlighting how representations are structured through interlocking systems of power, including industry norms, genre conventions, and audience expectations. These systems shape not only what is represented but also how those representations are interpreted and valued within broader cultural hierarchies.

Unexpected Findings and Nuances

Several nuanced patterns emerged beyond the initial hypotheses. One of the most significant was the consistent co-occurrence of sexualization and agency in Hip-Hop/Rap, suggesting that empowerment and objectification are not necessarily oppositional within this genre.

In Pop, a subtler pattern emerged in which narrative agency was unevenly distributed across racial lines. White performers were more frequently granted emotional depth and

narrative centrality, while women of color were more often positioned within visually stylized roles lacking comparable narrative development.

In Country, a recurring pattern involved the inclusion of a single Black or Brown background performer in otherwise white-led videos. In these cases, these performers were typically positioned in peripheral roles without narrative function. While not universal, this pattern appeared frequently enough within the sample to suggest a form of tokenistic inclusion that signals diversity without substantively altering the genre's dominant racial structure.

In Rock/Metal, the relative absence of performers of color contrasted with the strong symbolic empowerment afforded to those who were present. These performers were often framed as exceptional or resistant figures, highlighting both the genre's potential for alternative representation and its continued limitations in terms of systemic inclusion.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that genre conventions shape how sexualization, objectification, and agency co-occur and how each becomes legible within genre-specific interpretive frameworks.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sampling strategy relied on a purposive approach guided by Spotify's API, which prioritizes popularity and visibility. This likely overrepresents mainstream content while underrepresenting independent or alternative productions.

Second, although the study achieved equal representation across genres, genre itself is not monolithic. Subgenre variation may influence both the frequency and framing of objectification and empowerment, and was not fully captured here.

Third, while thematic redundancy was observed within genres, saturation was not formally tested using established qualitative criteria. Future research may benefit from more formalized saturation procedures.

Fourth, all coding was conducted by a single researcher. Although a detailed codebook and pilot testing were used to enhance consistency, the absence of inter-coder reliability testing remains a limitation.

Fifth, the study focused on videos released within the past five years, providing a contemporary snapshot rather than a longitudinal perspective.

Finally, the study was limited to cisgender female performers. While this allowed for focused comparisons, it excludes the representation of trans, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming artists, whose inclusion is necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of gender in music media.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

This study demonstrates that objectification in music videos is not a singular or uniform phenomenon but a genre-structured system of representation. Patterns of sexualization, empowerment, and racialized portrayal vary systematically across genres, shaping how performers are framed and how audiences interpret those representations.

The findings suggest that future research should move beyond binary frameworks of objectification to account for the coexistence of agency and constraint within media texts. They also highlight the importance of treating genre as a central analytic variable and of integrating race more explicitly into analyses of gender representation.

Future work should extend this analysis by incorporating audience reception data, examining platform-specific dynamics, and exploring a broader range of performer identities. Longitudinal and multi-method approaches may further clarify how these representational patterns evolve and how they influence both performers and audiences over time.

CHAPTER 5

STUDY 2

Before turning to the qualitative analysis, it is important to clarify how Study 1 informs the design and purpose of Study 2. Study 1 established that portrayals of cisgender female performers are systematically patterned by genre, with distinct configurations of objectification, empowerment, and racialized representation emerging across Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal. However, while these findings identify what appears on screen and how those representations are structured, they do not account for how performers themselves interpret, negotiate, or respond to these patterns. In particular, Study 1 cannot determine the extent to which objectifying portrayals are externally imposed, strategically adopted, or actively resisted by performers within industry and genre constraints. Study 2 addresses this limitation by shifting the unit of analysis from media texts to performer experience, examining how artists understand and navigate the representational systems identified in Study 1. In doing so, it provides a necessary interpretive layer that connects observable patterns of representation to the lived realities and decision-making processes of those who produce them.

NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH FEMALE PERFORMERS ACROSS GENRES

Study 2 explored the personal experiences of female performers in Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal. Building on the themes identified in Study 1, this study aimed to understand how these artists have navigated self-objectification, audience expectations, and genre-based pressures throughout their careers. By examining how these performers internalized or resisted objectifying portrayals, Study 2 offered qualitative insights into the lived experiences behind the representational patterns observed in Study 1.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a narrative analysis approach to examine how female performers made sense of their experiences. Narrative analysis focuses on understanding the stories people tell about their lives, allowing researchers to explore how individuals construct meaning around key themes, events, or experiences (Riessman, 1993). Through this method, I analyzed how female performers articulated their journeys, challenges, and strategies for navigating objectification and genre-specific expectations in the music industry.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: How do female performers across Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal experience and navigate industry-driven expectations around self-presentation and objectification?

RQ2: In what ways do female artists internalize, resist, or redefine the genre-specific pressures to conform to gender and racial stereotypes?

RQ3: How does the intersection of gender and race influence female performers' experiences of agency and self-objectification within each genre?

SAMPLE AND RECRUITMENT

A purposive sample of 20 female performers was recruited for this study, with five participants selected from each genre: Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal. The original goal was to engage exclusively mid- to high-profile artists with established careers in the music industry. However, due to scheduling constraints and access limitations, the recruitment strategy was revised to include a broader range of participants. Ultimately, each genre sample

included a mix of mid-level, high-profile, and emerging artists, ensuring a balanced and diverse array of experiences.

Participants were identified through targeted outreach, including professional networks, social media messaging, and direct email contact. Artists were selected based on their active engagement in their respective genres, willingness to discuss industry norms and personal representation, and availability for in-depth interviews. Care was taken to ensure demographic and genre diversity, including a range of racial and cultural identities. Based on publicly available information, participants represented a broad adult age range spanning approximately the early 20s to mid-40s, reflecting a mix of emerging, mid-career, and established performers across genres. All interviews were conducted one-on-one and centered on the artists' personal narratives of navigating gender, race, objectification, and empowerment within their careers.

INTERVIEW DEVELOPMENT AND THEMES

Interview questions were developed based on the prominent themes identified in Study 1. These themes guided the design of semi-structured interviews to explore how female performers navigate the intersection of gender, race, and genre expectations. The four central thematic areas included:

- **Self-presentation**: How performers chose to present themselves visually, stylistically, and lyrically, either aligning with or resisting genre-specific norms.
- **Audience expectations**: The pressures and expectations communicated by fans, industry professionals, and media regarding appearance, behavior, and identity.
- **Internalization and self-objectification**: The extent to which performers perceived and responded to objectifying portrayals of women in their genre, and how this shaped their self-image.

- **Agency and resistance**: The strategies artists used to assert independence, push back against stereotypes, and reclaim narrative control over their work and public image.

These themes provided a flexible framework that allowed participants to share their experiences in their own words while ensuring consistent coverage across interviews. The final semi-structured interview protocol is provided in Appendix C.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Semi-structured narrative interviews were conducted through online communication platforms, including Zoom and Facebook Messenger. Interview format varied according to participant availability and preference. Some interviews were conducted synchronously through video or audio conversation, while others occurred asynchronously through written message exchanges. Synchronous interviews generally lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes, while asynchronous interviews unfolded over a longer period through back-and-forth written responses. This flexible approach allowed participants to respond in formats that were accessible and comfortable while ensuring coverage of key themes related to objectification, agency, and genre-specific pressures.

Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover commonalities and divergences across genres. Grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)and the coding procedures described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) guided the analytic process. After transcribing each interview, I began with initial coding, assigning descriptive labels that captured the core ideas expressed by participants. These codes were then refined through focused coding, where related initial codes were grouped into broader conceptual categories.

As patterns emerged, I engaged in constant comparison, iteratively comparing new data to existing codes and categories to sharpen distinctions and deepen conceptual understanding. This process eventually led to the identification of a core category that encapsulated the overarching theme across narratives. Throughout the process, I composed analytic memos to track emerging insights, theoretical connections, and methodological reflections, as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1998). These memos served as critical tools in developing a cohesive and grounded theoretical narrative of female performers' experiences across genres.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout Study 2, ethical guidelines were strictly followed to protect the rights and well-being of all participants, who were female performers from diverse music genres. Prior to the commencement of the study, ethical approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix I). Informed consent was secured from each participant, ensuring they understood the study's purpose, procedures, and any potential risks involved. Participants were clearly informed that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence or negative impact on their careers. They were also assured of the confidentiality of their responses and that no personally identifiable information would be linked to the data presented in the findings.

Given the sensitive nature of the interviews, which explored themes of self-objectification, industry pressures, and gendered or racialized expectations, great care was taken to ensure a respectful and supportive interview environment. Participants were encouraged to share only what they felt comfortable disclosing and were given the option to pause or discontinue the interview at any time. This emphasis on agency and comfort helped mitigate emotional risk.

All interview data were anonymized to protect participant identity, including the use of pseudonyms in reporting findings. Any identifying information was removed during transcription, analysis, and reporting. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored, with access restricted only to the researcher.

Following each interview, participants were debriefed and provided with a clear explanation of the study's objectives, the role of their contributions, and how the data would be used. They were also given contact information in case they had further questions, concerns, or wished to request a summary of the study's findings.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This qualitative study draws on 20 semi-structured narrative interviews with cisgender female performers across four genres, Rock/Metal, Pop, Country, and Hip-Hop/Rap. The sample was racially and ethnically diverse, allowing for intersectional insight into how participants navigated industry expectations around gender, race, visual self-presentation, and objectification.

The findings are organized around the study's three research questions, with attention to the patterns that emerged across participants' narratives.

RQ1: How Do Female Performers Experience and Navigate Industry-Driven Expectations Around Self-Presentation and Objectification?

Across all genres, participants described constant negotiation between personal identity and external pressures, especially around visual presentation. While some artists saw their aesthetic choices as empowering, others described them as calculated responses to industry norms or necessary compromises for visibility.

Pop

Pop performers consistently reported the most intense industry demands regarding appearance. “Bree” (Latina) emphasized that stylized sex appeal was not a choice but a baseline.

“I learned really fast that people were deciding if they liked me before they ever heard the song. It was all about the image first. If the picture didn’t hit, the music didn’t matter.”

She explained that visual branding often carried more weight than artistic identity, and that audiences would form opinions based on promotional images or video thumbnails before hearing a single note. “Eden” (white) described similar pressures around marketability.

“They would talk about ‘marketability,’ but everyone knew what that meant. It meant how you looked, how you dressed, and how well you fit what they thought a pop artist should be.”

Several participants described situations where promotional photographers or directors attempted to emphasize their bodies in ways that did not align with the themes of their music, noting that refusal often required negotiation or risked subtle professional retaliation.

Pop artists also described a growing awareness of algorithmic forces that amplified or punished certain aesthetics. They observed that social media posts featuring more stylized or revealing imagery were rewarded with engagement spikes, which shaped the expectations of managers and handlers who monitored those metrics.

“If I posted something more polished or more revealing, it would immediately get more engagement. After a while, you start thinking, okay, this is what I have to do if I want people to see me at all.”

Participants noted that this created a form of self-surveillance where every visual decision carried commercial weight and affected playlist placements, festival bookings, and perceived cultural relevance. A few performers discussed the sense of futility that came from feeling judged before being heard, emphasizing how difficult it was to disentangle empowerment from the market logic that underpinned much of their visual presentation.

In addition, Pop performers noted that their genre occupies a uniquely public-facing position, which invites commentary from audiences who often feel entitled to police their appearance. Several participants described experiences similar to those expressed by performers in other genres, such as being misinterpreted based on a single frame or dismissed because a particular stylistic choice did not match preconceived expectations. These accounts suggest that while Pop is often described as the most controlled and image-driven genre, the mechanisms of that control reflect broader cultural tendencies to value women's bodies as visual commodities before recognizing their artistic contributions.

Hip-Hop/Rap

In Hip-Hop/Rap, artists described a paradoxical space where hypersexualized imagery was both culturally embedded and commercially required. "Kiki" (Black) spoke about growing up admiring visually powerful women in rap, only to discover that embodying similar imagery as an artist often led to a sense of pressure rather than empowerment.

"I grew up watching women in rap and thinking they looked powerful. But when you're the one doing it, it doesn't always feel like power. It feels like pressure to keep that image up all the time."

She described the tension between wanting to honor the lineage of women she admired and feeling obligated to maintain a level of visual intensity that sometimes overshadowed her lyricism. “Nova” (Asian American) discussed the challenge of navigating an industry that simultaneously celebrated and scrutinized her appearance.

“People see you first and decide what you are before they ever hear your music. By the time they listen, they’ve already made up their mind.”

Participants also described instances in which directors or photographers encouraged visual choices that emphasized their bodies or aligned with narrow expectations of femininity within the genre. These expectations extended across promotional materials, interviews, and photo shoots, where artists were urged to embody a version of “confidence” that often meant revealing clothing or sexualized posing.

“Confidence, in this space, usually just means showing more skin. That’s what they push for in shoots and videos.”

Artists of color described an additional layer of constraint related to racialized assumptions about how they should look. “Tasha” (Latina) recalled being advised to adopt a more explicitly “urban” style for promotional images.

“They kept telling me to look more ‘urban,’ but it wasn’t about the music. It was about fitting a certain image they already had in mind.”

Nova described how a director suggested using stereotypical East Asian props during a video shoot, highlighting how race can be appropriated visually in ways that reduce artists to cultural shorthand.

"It felt like they were trying to turn me into a visual stereotype instead of an artist."

Several participants noted that fans also contributed to policing their image. Some recounted being criticized for appearing "too sexual" or "not sexual enough," indicating that what counted as acceptable self-presentation was heavily mediated by the expectations of others. These experiences parallel findings from Rock and Metal performers who described being judged before being heard, reinforcing the notion that visual pre-judgments cut across genres even when the content of those judgments differs.

Country

Country artists reported pressures tied less to overt sexualization and more to highly specific aesthetic expectations tied to tradition, authenticity, and regional identity. "Holly" (white) described the genre's visual code as a blend of wholesomeness and understated glamour.

"There's a look people expect, and if you step outside of it too much, they start questioning if you belong in the genre at all."

She noted that deviations from this look, such as edgier attire or bold color palettes, were sometimes discouraged by managers who feared alienating core audiences. Holly explained that even minor stylistic adjustments were treated as meaningful narrative choices that signaled whether an artist respected the genre's cultural heritage.

Artists of color in Country music described a distinct form of misrecognition grounded in racialized assumptions about who "belongs." "Jasmine" (Black) explained that her natural hair repeatedly drew intrusive attention during photo shoots.

"My hair became the focus in photo shoots instead of the music. It was like they didn't know what to do with me visually."

“Marisol” (Latina) recounted being told that her album artwork did not “read” as Country even though she wore cowboy boots and a hat.

“I had the boots, the hat, everything. But they still said it didn’t read as country. That’s when you realize it’s not really about the outfit.”

Several participants added that their attempts to incorporate elements of their heritage into their visual presentation were met with mixed reactions.

“Elena” (Latina) explained, “When you bring your culture into it, some people connect with it, but others act like you’re breaking some kind of rule.”

These stories parallel the experiences of performers in other genres who described being evaluated based on thumbnails or brief visual cues, indicating that even in a genre that emphasizes modest, traditional presentations, visual representation remains a powerful site of gatekeeping.

Country artists also described a quiet form of social pressure from within the community. Many explained that the genre's visual expectations are deeply entwined with notions of authenticity, which themselves are shaped by longstanding cultural norms. As a result, experimenting with appearance, whether through color, silhouette, or symbolism, could be misinterpreted as a rejection of the genre’s identity rather than a form of artistic exploration. These patterns reveal that while Country may avoid the overt hypersexualization seen in Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap, its visual norms are no less prescriptive or influential.

Rock/Metal

Rock and Metal performers described their genres as comparatively more tolerant of nonconforming or theatrical visual identities, yet they also emphasized that this supposed

freedom was accompanied by a persistent undercurrent of gendered expectation. Several participants noted that their genre had a reputation for valuing authenticity, musicianship, and aggression over glamour, but this cultural mythology often obscured the subtle pressures that shaped how women were expected to appear. A recurring theme among Rock and Metal performers was the frustration of being labeled as "female fronted."

One participant, identified here as "Rhea" (white), explained, "Female fronted is not a genre. It's not a description of sound. It just tells people there's a woman in the band." Her frustration with that label shaped how she approached visual presentation early in her career. She intentionally avoided corsets, dresses, and highly stylized gothic attire because she associated those visuals with the narrow image often imposed on women in metal during the early and mid-2000s. Instead, she performed in band shirts, skinny jeans, and high-top sneakers, hoping to signal that her music belonged to the broader tradition of power metal and melodic metal rather than the symphonic subgenre that had become shorthand for women vocalists.

"I didn't want to walk on stage and have people assume what we sounded like just because of how I looked."

Rhea also emphasized that these choices were not only about artistic identity, but about managing how audiences interpreted her presence. As she explained, "It is not just about what you want to show. It is about what you can show without consequences. If fans think you are showing too much, some of them read it like you want to bang them in the back of the tour bus like some 80s cock rocker."

Rhea recalled the discomfort of being repeatedly categorized by fans and promoters as a symphonic act despite having no keyboards, no operatic vocals, and a largely melodic death

metal sound. She described how audiences would sometimes stand back with folded arms during the first songs of a set, seemingly waiting to confirm whether she fit their preconceived expectations of what a woman in metal was supposed to sound like.

"You could see people deciding what we were before we even started playing."

Only after performing screamed passages and traditional heavy metal vocals would these same audience members express surprise and often approach her after shows to tell her that they had not anticipated the power and aggression of her delivery.

Participants also described industry figures who encouraged them to modify their image in ways that aligned with gendered stereotypes. Rhea recalled that an influential promoter once told her that the band was not visually distinctive enough and pointed specifically to her casual stage clothing as a hindrance to recognition.

"When they said we didn't stand out visually, what they really meant was I wasn't styled in a way that made me the focus."

Similarly, when presenting album artwork to a label, she and her bandmates were asked why the cover did not feature a portrait of the singer surrounded by soft, floral imagery associated with many female-fronted metal acts.

"They basically wanted the cover to be me, not the band."

The band declined to modify the artwork, insisting that their visual identity should center the entire group rather than the body of one member. This refusal became an important symbolic stance for them, reinforcing their belief that the band's image should reflect the music rather than market-driven assumptions about gender.

To counter these pressures, several Rock and Metal participants embraced heavier, darker, or more aggressive aesthetics. Rather than using visual styling to replicate femininity, they treated stage wear as armor intended to redirect attention toward the performance. Rhea described how her look evolved over time as the band replaced members and moved away from their earlier melodic death metal sound toward a style more rooted in classic heavy metal. She began incorporating black catsuits, leather jackets, studded belts, pauldrons, and bracers into her wardrobe.

"I started thinking about what I wore as armor. Something that made people focus on the performance instead of my body."

These choices allowed her to project authority on stage while maintaining control over how her body was framed and discussed within the genre community.

At the same time, participants acknowledged cultural hostility toward women in metal that went beyond appearance. Several described online comments that dismissed "female singers" as inherently unfit for heavy music, regardless of vocal style. One participant referred to a radio personality who publicly stated that women did not belong in metal, a sentiment echoed by fans who criticized vocals based solely on thumbnail images or preconceived notions about "operatic" female voices. Rhea described how some commenters admitted they had not listened to the music at all and instead reacted negatively based on a photograph.

"People didn't listen to the song. They just saw a girl in the thumbnail."

Despite these challenges, Rock and Metal participants also described moments of empowerment and validation. Several noted that the most rewarding experiences came from fans who recognized their individuality and artistry, rather than reducing them to gendered categories.

Rhea in particular described receiving messages from parents of young girls who appreciated her decision not to rely on sexual imagery.

"When people come up after a show and talk about the vocals or the performance instead of how I look, that's when I know I've done something right."

These interactions supported her belief that resisting objectifying expectations could create broader cultural impact without requiring intentional moral positioning.

Conclusion

The findings for RQ1 reveal that female performers across genres experience a persistent tension between personal authenticity and external pressure, with the form of that pressure shifting according to the visual logics of each musical tradition. Although Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap remain the genres with the most overt expectations of stylized or sexualized imagery, the expanded narratives make clear that all genres exert powerful influences on how women are expected to appear before they are heard. In Pop, artists described visual presentation as a prerequisite for entry, with success often tied to the ability to maintain a polished and provocative aesthetic that satisfies both human gatekeepers and algorithmic ones. Their accounts revealed how thumbnails, promotional stills, and social media posts function as critical sites of evaluation long before musical content becomes relevant.

Hip-Hop/Rap performers similarly described pressures grounded in visual intensity, but noted that these pressures are inseparable from the genre's complex cultural history. Participants framed their experience as a navigation between honoring the visual traditions of rap and resisting the commercialization of those same traditions, especially when expectations for appearance overshadowed their skills as lyricists or performers. Their stories highlight how

cultural authenticity, sexual empowerment, and industry pressure intersect in ways that produce meaningful constraints, even when framed as empowering expressions of confidence.

Country artists reported a different but equally impactful set of pressures tied to notions of tradition, wholesomeness, and regional identity. Their accounts show how visual expectations in Country are anchored in an idealized image of rural femininity, expressed through modest clothing, natural styling, and adherence to a culturally specific idea of authenticity. Artists of color described how these norms rendered them perpetually visible yet misunderstood, as their appearance often contradicted entrenched assumptions about who counts as a legitimate Country performer. Their experiences mirror concerns raised by artists in other genres about being judged before being heard and indicate that genre policing is not restricted to styles associated with sexualization but also to those linked to cultural heritage.

Rock and Metal performers reported a distinct but parallel set of pressures that focused less on overt sexualization and more on categorical reduction and assumptions about genre identity. They described being labeled “female fronted” as a form of objectification that collapsed diverse musical styles into a single gender-based category. Their narratives highlighted how the presence of a woman vocalist could override sonic characteristics and direct fans and industry professionals to impose expectations borrowed from past eras of metal that centered corseted or romanticized femininity. These performers also described how refusing to meet those expectations often required adopting heavier and more aggressive aesthetics in order to redirect attention away from their bodies and toward their musicianship.

Across genres, participants described the experience of being visually evaluated before being musically appreciated. This pattern underscores the finding that objectification in the music industry operates through both explicit and implicit mechanisms, from algorithmic cues

and marketing strategies to genre-specific norms and fan assumptions. RQ1 is therefore answered through a complex picture of negotiated self-presentation in which external pressures shape aesthetic choices across all genres, demonstrating that even genres with lower levels of overt sexualization impose strict visual boundaries that affect how women are received and understood.

RQ2: In What Ways Do Female Artists Internalize, Resist, or Redefine the Genre-Specific Pressures to Conform to Gender and Racial Stereotypes?

Performers described a wide range of responses to genre expectations, from embracing dominant visual norms to subtly or overtly resisting them. While some viewed their presentation as a form of creative control, others framed it as a carefully measured response to industry demands, cultural stereotypes, or audience assumptions.

Pop

In Pop, resistance often took the form of calculated autonomy. Artists like "Mika" (Asian American) described curating every frame of their public image to maintain a sense of control in a genre where visual identity could overshadow musical identity.

"I have to manage the frame before anyone hears the voice."

Several performers noted that resisting sexualized or market-driven imagery required strategic planning, since even small deviations from expected visual norms could result in reduced algorithmic reach or diminished label support.

Participants described learning to anticipate how audiences would interpret their appearance. This form of preemptive self-management resembled the experiences of artists in other genres who spoke about the power of thumbnails and first impressions. Bree explained

that, early in her career, she received negative reactions to a video before anyone had listened to the song, suggesting that visual cues alone can decisively shape reception.

"Once people have already decided who you are from one image, it is hard to get them to actually hear the music."

Several Pop artists described creative strategies for resisting these pressures. Some developed dual personas, allowing them to maintain a distinction between their public-facing identity and their personal sense of self. Others found subtle ways to reshape expected norms, such as incorporating unconventional fashion elements or thematic motifs that pushed against genre boundaries while remaining visually engaging. This approach mirrors resistance strategies in Rock and Metal, where artists used stylization as a form of armor, though Pop performers tended to favor controlled glamour rather than theatrical concealment.

Hip-Hop/Rap

Hip-Hop performers often framed resistance as a complex negotiation between authenticity, cultural expectation, and personal comfort. Kiki explained that while she admired the bold visual traditions associated with women in rap, she did not always feel comfortable replicating those images.

"I respect where that look comes from, but I do not always want it to be the only way people understand me."

She described the emotional labor required to maintain a confident persona even when she felt ambivalent about the visual expectations that accompanied her position. Her reflections highlighted the difficulty of differentiating between empowerment and obligation, especially when success seemed tied to maintaining a specific kind of visibility.

Participants described moments when they attempted to shift focus toward their lyricism or musicality, only to encounter industry figures who valued their image more than their artistic contributions. Tasha recalled being told she needed to "lean into the look" despite wanting to emphasize her writing.

"I kept trying to bring it back to the music, but they kept bringing it back to how I should look."

Other participants described the pressure to adopt fashion choices that did not reflect their personal style but were considered commercially advantageous within the genre. Several Hip-Hop performers also discussed the limited space for visual experimentation. While the genre is often celebrated for stylistic diversity, participants found that deviations from expected norms, whether toward modesty or avant-garde fashion, could quickly attract criticism. This criticism frequently centered on perceived authenticity, echoing concerns expressed by artists in Rock and Metal who described being policed by fans who felt ownership over genre aesthetics.

Artists of color in Hip-Hop faced an added challenge when resisting hypersexualized imagery, as their efforts to shift focus toward their music were sometimes interpreted as disinterest in embracing cultural traditions. Nova described how declining to participate in certain visual tropes led some critics to question her legitimacy, mirroring the way artists in Country and Rock/Metal reported gatekeeping tied to race and appearance.

Country

Country artists described their resistance as rooted in subtle, incremental decisions that preserved their connection to the genre while asserting individuality. Holly explained that rather

than rejecting the “girl-next-door” aesthetic outright, she sought ways to adapt it to her own sensibilities.

“You learn how far you can push before people decide you are not country anymore.”

She experimented with bolder color schemes or modern silhouettes while maintaining an overall look that still aligned with industry norms. These small acts of resistance were meaningful in a genre where even minimal deviation from tradition could attract attention.

Artists of color discussed how resistance intersected with their racial identity. Jasmine refused to chemically alter her hair for promotional shoots, even when stylists suggested doing so would help audiences perceive her as more traditionally “country.”

“I’m not going to change my fucking hair just so someone else can feel more comfortable calling me country.”

Marisol incorporated subtle cultural references into her wardrobe and visuals, such as patterned embroidery significant to her heritage. She described these choices as both personal affirmation and deliberate counter-narratives to assumptions about who belongs in the genre.

Participants also described tension between innovation and authenticity. Several artists noted that Country audiences often interpret visual experimentation as evidence that a performer is not genuinely committed to the genre. This created a precarious dynamic where attempting to avoid homogenization risked being labeled an outsider. Such dynamics echoed the experiences of Rock and Metal performers who faced skepticism for deviating from established visual codes, even when their music clearly aligned with genre expectations.

Country performers frequently emphasized that their resistance was shaped by the genre's broader cultural context. Rather than using confrontational or overtly transgressive imagery, they relied on coded forms of expression. This approach allowed them to navigate audience expectations while gradually expanding what counts as acceptable visual representation within Country music.

Rock/Metal

In Rock and Metal, resistance to objectification commonly took the form of strategic aesthetic choices designed to minimize sexual framing and emphasize creative or thematic cohesion. Participants described an ongoing effort to shift attention away from their bodies and toward the musical and conceptual elements of their work. Rhea reflected that her vocal identity became a primary site of resistance.

"I never wanted to be known as a hot singer. I wanted to be known for my voice."

She spent years refining her technique across both clean and aggressive styles so that her performances could serve as the central marker of her identity as an artist. She explained that if audiences left a concert talking about her vocal range, power, and consistency rather than her clothing or appearance, then resistance had been successful.

Several participants described disagreements with labels, directors, and photographers who attempted to frame their bodies in ways they did not consent to. Rhea described a promotional shoot where a director repeatedly tried to film her body in a manner that highlighted curves rather than the full stage uniform she had designed to convey strength and thematic coherence. She intervened and insisted on camera angles that centered the entire band and avoided fragmenting her body into sexualized images.

Rhea acknowledged that visibility can be complicated for any lead singer: “Everybody wants to be a rock star. Everybody wants to be the face of the band at some point. But I wanted the image to be the band and the performance, not just pieces of my body.”

She also described refusing requests to pose alone for album covers or promotional posters, arguing that such imagery reinforced the message that the woman was the selling point rather than the band or the music.

Other Rock and Metal performers incorporated theatrical armor or fantasy-inspired costuming as a form of bodily reclamation. One participant noted that the more elaborate her stage outfit became, the less outsiders focused on her physical form, allowing her to present herself as a character rather than as a gendered body. Rhea echoed this sentiment when she described the band's shift toward an aesthetic rooted in the imagery of battle, struggle, and perseverance. These elements were not chosen merely for stylistic flair, but because they symbolized the collective effort of touring, recording, and surviving as an independent metal band. By portraying herself and her bandmates as fighters rather than objects of desire, she created a visual narrative aligned with her understanding of the genre's ethos and her own experiences.

Resistance in Rock and Metal also manifested as active rejection of external pressures to sexualize or feminize imagery. Participants described turning down suggestions to incorporate traditionally feminine visual motifs, such as floral patterns, bright lighting, or romanticized poses. When labels or promoters questioned these choices, performers explained that such imagery neither aligned with their artistic vision nor reflected the themes of their music. Rhea noted that she was aware of the commercial risks involved in refusing these expectations, but she

argued that long-term artistic integrity and the respect of the fan base mattered more than short-term market advantage.

"If you want to use your body to sell your art, that is your choice. But I never wanted that to be my brand."

This stance was reinforced by audience members who thanked her for providing an alternative model of femininity in metal that prioritized skill and storytelling over sexuality.

An additional theme emerging from Rock and Metal participants involved how they navigated backlash that did not directly relate to gender but intersected with expectations of authenticity. One participant described the widespread negative reaction to the band's decision to use an artificial intelligence tool to create a partially animated music video. Although the band had collaborated with a visual artist and compensated that artist for their work, many fans perceived the use of digital tools as inauthentic or unethical. Rhea explained that although the band did not regret the artistic decision, the intensity of the backlash taught them how quickly audiences might conflate visual innovation with betrayal, particularly when such innovation involved technology. As a result, the band decided to minimize public discussion of the tool going forward. This example highlights how visual presentation in Rock and Metal is monitored not only for gender conformity but for adherence to notions of purity and authenticity that carry their own pressures and limitations.

Conclusion

The findings for RQ2 demonstrate that internalization, resistance, and redefinition of genre-specific pressures are processes shaped by the interplay of individual agency, commercial necessity, and cultural expectation. In Pop, artists navigated this terrain by cultivating strong

personal branding strategies that allowed them to exert some degree of control within an image-centric genre. Their narratives show that resistance often takes the form of calculated adjustments rather than outright rejection, as they work to present themselves in ways that satisfy both artistic values and commercial realities. Their dual personas and careful management of publicly visible imagery reveal the emotional labor required to resist becoming wholly defined by the visual expectations of the genre.

Hip-Hop/Rap performers described resistance as an ongoing negotiation between cultural homage and creative autonomy. Their accounts illustrate the difficulty of separating empowerment from obligation when visual performance is deeply embedded in the genre's expressive traditions. Several participants acknowledged that resistance sometimes meant redefining what it means to be visually confident, stepping away from hypersexualized imagery without rejecting the genre's history or its embrace of bold self-expression. Their experiences also highlight the constraints imposed by racialized stereotypes, which can limit the range of acceptable self-presentation and create additional pressures to embody or reject certain cultural signifiers.

Country performers engaged in resistance through subtle, symbolic gestures that allowed them to expand the genre's visual lexicon without alienating audiences who value tradition. Their strategies included incorporating cultural elements tied to their heritage, refusing to alter natural features such as hair texture, and weaving subversive references into wardrobe and staging. This form of coded resistance underscores how performers negotiate conservatism embedded in Country's visual culture, revealing that even small deviations carry significant meaning within this genre's tightly bound visual norms.

Rock and Metal performers exercised resistance by refusing feminized imagery and by asserting full agency over their visual representation. Their narratives emphasized the importance of being seen as musicians rather than gendered bodies, which often meant adopting aggressive or theatrical aesthetics that de-centered sexuality entirely. Several participants described declining requests to highlight their bodies in promotional materials and working to ensure that their imagery centered the band or conceptual themes rather than gender. Their reflections also highlighted how resistance sometimes expanded beyond gender and into questions of authenticity when they navigated fan backlash for visual experimentation involving digital tools. This reveals that resistance in this genre is multifaceted, involving both gendered and subcultural considerations.

Taken together, these narratives demonstrate that resistance to objectification and stereotype is not uniform but deeply shaped by genre and identity. Participants across genres adopted strategies that allowed them to maintain artistic integrity while navigating structural pressures that demanded conformity to specific visual codes. Racial and ethnic minority performers consistently faced an added layer of complexity, as resisting gendered expectations required them to also navigate racialized assumptions about who belongs in each genre. These findings emphasize that resistance is neither entirely autonomous nor entirely reactive. Instead, it is a form of strategic navigation that requires performers to continually assess the potential risks, consequences, and cultural meanings of their visual choices.

RQ3: How Does the Intersection of Gender and Race Influence Female Performers' Experiences of Agency and Self-Objectification?

Intersectionality emerged as a major theme across all interviews. White performers generally discussed image and objectification through the framework of gender alone and tended

to situate their experiences within conversations about industry expectations, sexism, and feminist critique. Performers of color, by contrast, described negotiating objectification through the compounded forces of gender and racial identity. Their narratives frequently included accounts of stereotype, tokenism, exoticization, and misclassification that shaped how they understood themselves within their genre.

Pop

Bree noted how her Latina identity was marketed as "exotic flair," often overshadowing her songwriting and musicianship.

"It felt like my culture was something they could package before it was something I could express."

She explained that her cultural identity became a commercialized aesthetic before it was recognized as a personal heritage, and that she often felt reduced to a visual trope rather than a full artistic persona. Mika described being told to "smile more" during live shows to "soften her image," a comment she connected to racialized assumptions that Asian women should be pleasant, delicate, and accommodating.

"They wanted me to be softer, more approachable, like I had to match what they expected an Asian woman to be."

These expectations shaped how they navigated autonomy. They reported constantly evaluating whether expressing their cultural identity authentically might alienate some audiences or whether minimizing it might help them avoid fetishization.

Several Pop performers also noted that race became particularly salient online, where thumbnails and promotional stills often shaped initial perceptions before audiences heard any music.

"By the time someone clicks, they have already decided what kind of artist you are based on how you look."

Some explained that being racialized at first glance meant their agency was already constrained. Their self-presentation was filtered through cultural expectations that dictated how a Latina, Asian American, or Black Pop artist should appear, behave, and brand herself. These artists described agency as a delicate balancing act involving both cultural pride and protective self-limitation.

Hip-Hop/Rap

In Hip-Hop/Rap, performers of color faced a double bind in which their racial identity was inseparable from the genre's visual and cultural history. Kiki described how cultural symbols tied to Black femininity were both celebrated and distorted.

"People love the image of confidence, but they do not always listen to what you are actually saying."

She explained that audiences embraced the aesthetics of confidence and sexuality associated with Black women in rap, but often dismissed the political or lyrical substance behind the work. This disconnect created a tension between artistic control and audience expectations, forcing her to consider how much of her identity to foreground in each visual presentation.

Tasha recounted being labeled a "spicy Latina" regardless of her musical style or lyrical content.

"That label followed me everywhere. It did not matter what the song was about."

She explained that the industry treated her racial identity as a fixed marketing asset even when she resisted that framing. Nova described being asked to pose with chopsticks for a promotional shoot, a moment that demonstrated how quickly cultural identity could be reduced to caricature.

"It made me feel like they were more interested in a stereotype than in who I actually was."

These artists experienced racialization as an added layer of surveillance that shaped how they moved through the genre. Even attempts to resist hypersexualization or stereotype occasionally resulted in accusations of inauthenticity, suggesting that both race and gender simultaneously shaped the limits of their agency.

Country

Country artists of color described a near constant battle for legitimacy grounded in assumptions about who belongs in the genre. Jasmine recounted being mistaken for a background singer during a video shoot, despite being the headlining act.

"I was standing there as the artist, and they were treating me like I was part of the crew."

Marisol described how fans assumed she was part of the catering crew before her show, and noted that even when she was embraced by audiences, she felt more like an invited guest than a full member of the Country community.

"You can be accepted, but still not fully seen as belonging."

She described this condition as being "included but not integrated," a phrase that captured the emotional and cultural distance that performers of color often felt.

These artists described using subtle forms of visual and lyrical expression to reclaim space within the genre. Jasmine refused requests to alter her natural hair, treating it as both personal authenticity and cultural resistance.

"My hair is part of who I am, and I'm not going to change it just to make people more fucking comfortable."

Marisol used embroidery, accessories, and Spanish-language references to signal her identity without confronting genre expectations directly. They described agency as the ability to exist in a genre that did not imagine them at its center. This often required significant emotional labor, especially when their self-presentation contradicted audience expectations shaped by whiteness as the default Country aesthetic.

Rock/Metal

Rock and Metal performers described intersectionality as a dynamic process shaped by genre identity, race, and visual expectation. "Nyx," a biracial participant, noted that she was celebrated for her vocal power but fetishized for her skin tone.

"People would compliment my voice, but then immediately comment on my skin like it was part of the act."

She explained that some fans treated her racial identity as an aesthetic novelty rather than an element of her lived experience. She described feeling pressure to maintain a visually "edgy" presence in order to justify her place in a genre that remains overwhelmingly white.

“It felt like I had to look the part even more just to be taken seriously.”

“Ravenna,” by contrast, explained that her whiteness afforded her a level of freedom that her peers of color did not experience.

“I can experiment and people call it creative. Someone else does the same thing and it gets questioned.”

She described being able to experiment with theatrical, conceptual, or traditionally masculine aesthetics without being accused of violating genre expectations. Her reflections illustrated how racial privilege shaped the range of acceptable visual performance in Rock and Metal.

Rhea expanded the understanding of intersectionality within the genre by describing how categorical labels intersect with gendered assumptions.

“The moment you are labeled female fronted, people stop hearing the music and start imagining what you are supposed to sound like.”

She explained that being placed into the “female fronted metal” category often triggered additional assumptions about sound, style, and genre identity. Although this label was rooted in gender rather than race, Rhea noted that the classification functioned as a kind of imposed identity that overrode both musical content and personal agency. This intersected with racial dynamics within the fanbase, where whiteness was often presumed, and where deviations from that expectation could result in misunderstanding or exoticization.

Several Rock and Metal performers described how misinterpretation often originated from promotional stills or thumbnails.

"People will decide what you are from a picture before they ever press play."

Rhea noted that some negative comments simply described her appearance rather than the music, reinforcing the idea that women in the genre are first seen through the lens of bodily judgment rather than musicianship. Such patterns mirror those described in Pop and Hip-Hop, but in Rock and Metal they intersect with a deep-seated cultural narrative that imagines the genre as neutral, rebellious, and merit-based. The experiences of performers in this study challenge that assumption by demonstrating that race and gender remain powerful forces shaping recognition, belonging, and agency.

Conclusion

This intersectional lens brought into focus stark disparities in how agency was experienced and expressed across racial lines. While all participants described negotiating gendered expectations, women of color consistently reported an added layer of scrutiny shaped by racialized stereotypes, cultural assumptions, and exclusions embedded within their genres. They were not only navigating what it meant to be a woman in the industry but also what it meant to be a Black woman in Country, an Asian woman in Hip-Hop, a Latina in Pop, or a mixed-race performer in Rock and Metal. These intersections created challenges that were often invisible to their white counterparts, who tended to confront sexism without simultaneously confronting racialization.

Participants described making highly strategic decisions about how much of their cultural identity to reveal or obscure.

As Bree (Latina) explained, "You are always thinking about how much of yourself is safe to show."

These decisions were not only aesthetic but also existential, shaping career opportunities, booking access, radio play, playlisting, and overall market viability. Some were instructed explicitly to "tone it down" or "play up the exotic," revealing how industry gatekeepers sought to commodify racial identity when it was profitable and suppress it when it was not. Others experienced misrecognition rooted in visual cues alone, demonstrating how racialized and gendered judgments often precede actual engagement with their music.

Agency for performers of color was therefore characterized by ongoing calculation. Their ability to resist objectification or reclaim identity was shaped by the realities of a commercial landscape that frequently demanded assimilation, cultural performance, or strategic silence.

Several participants described this as a uniquely draining form of emotional and cultural labor that required constant vigilance. They felt responsible for anticipating audience perception, mitigating backlash, and protecting themselves within visual environments that commodify their identities while limiting their expressive freedom.

These findings demonstrate that racial identity intensifies experiences of objectification and narrows the pathways through which agency can be safely exercised. Intersectionality is therefore not an auxiliary concern but a central analytical tool for understanding how gendered expectations operate differently across racial and genre lines. The experiences of performers across Pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Country, and Rock/Metal reveal that self-objectification, resistance, and artistic autonomy are profoundly shaped by the interplay of gender and race within the visually driven economy of the contemporary music industry.

Cross-Genre Themes

Empowerment vs. Market Demands

Across all four genres, participants described navigating a complex tension between personal empowerment and the external demands of a visual marketplace. While the specifics of these pressures varied by genre, the underlying dynamic remained consistent: visual self-presentation was rarely a matter of pure choice. Instead, it reflected an intricate interplay of personal identity, commercial expectation, and cultural meaning.

Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap performers portrayed this negotiation as a near-constant process, shaped by the knowledge that success frequently depended on maintaining a visually compelling persona aligned with both platform algorithms and audience expectations. As Maya (Pop) explained, “You start realizing that what gets seen is not always what feels like you.” These performers described the emotional labor of presenting confidence, sensuality, or glamour even when those elements were dictated more by market logic than by personal expression. Their accounts reflected a heightened awareness of the omnipresent gaze that evaluated them before any music was heard.

Country performers discussed empowerment within a more conservative aesthetic structure. They described finding strength in subtle reinterpretations of genre norms, incorporating cultural motifs or modern fashion elements that allowed them to maintain authenticity while gently pushing against tradition. As Elena (Country) noted, “You learn how to work inside the lines while still making something that feels like your own.” Their resistance was often quiet but intentional, shaped by the need to balance cultural expectations with personal expression.

Rock and Metal performers articulated empowerment through rejection of sexualization, categorical labeling, and feminizing visual conventions. They frequently framed their stage presentation as a form of armor that protected their bodies from objectification while reinforcing artistic identity. As Rhea (white) explained, “When I step on stage, I want people to see the performance, not evaluate my body.” Some described how resisting gendered imagery became a source of pride, particularly when young fans and parents expressed appreciation for their refusal to rely on objectifying visuals. These reactions reinforced the idea that empowerment is not only expressed through personal autonomy but can also carry communal significance.

Across all genres, the pursuit of empowerment remained constrained by the realities of the visual economy. Even acts of resistance were shaped by external pressures, audience expectations, and the risk of professional repercussions. As Jade (Hip-Hop/Rap) explained, “Even when you are making your own choices, you know those choices have consequences.” This underscores that empowerment within the music industry is not simply a matter of self-assertion, but an ongoing negotiation within systems that prioritize marketable femininity, recognizable cultural symbols, and genre-specific visual codes.

Race as Constraint and Power

Racial identity shaped self-presentation in distinct yet interconnected ways across genres. Performers of color described how their racial identity influenced not only how they were styled and marketed, but also how audiences interpreted their appearance and sound. Their narratives revealed that visual representation served as a frequent site of both constraint and cultural affirmation.

Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap artists of color described experiences of exoticization, stereotyping, and pressured visibility. As Sarai (Hip-Hop/Rap) explained, “Sometimes it feels

like your identity is something they want to package, not something they want to understand." Their racial identities were often treated as branding assets that could be emphasized, stylized, or commodified. These artists described moments where industry representatives encouraged them to fit simplified cultural narratives, restricting their ability to present themselves authentically. At the same time, they acknowledged that their racial identity could serve as a source of creative strength that distinguished them within crowded markets, though accessing this strength often required navigating the discomfort of being reduced to a stereotype.

Country artists of color encountered a different set of constraints tied to the genre's predominantly white cultural history. As Jasmine (Black) explained, "You can be doing everything right and still feel like you have to prove you belong." They described being misrecognized, marginalized, or treated as outsiders despite their skill and authenticity. Their accounts revealed that race functioned not only as a visual marker but as a signal of genre belonging, shaping how they were interpreted by gatekeepers, collaborators, and audiences. Yet their cultural identity also served as a form of power when they incorporated heritage elements into performance, creating small but meaningful shifts in how audiences understood the genre.

Rock and Metal performers presented a nuanced view of race as both invisible and hyper-visible depending on context. White performers, such as Rhea (white), reflected on the freedom that racial privilege afforded them within the genre. As she explained, "I can change my look and it is seen as creative, not as a statement about where I belong." Performers of color, such as Nyx (mixed race), described heightened scrutiny and fetishization. As Nyx explained, "You get noticed, but not always for the reasons you want." These reflections reveal how race filtered notions of genre authenticity. Even when not explicitly acknowledged, racial dynamics were embedded in expectations about who belongs and how identity is interpreted.

Across all genres, race functioned as a force that shaped not only aesthetic decisions but the emotional labor required to navigate visibility.

Genre Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping emerged as a pervasive theme that influenced performers in every genre, though its mechanisms varied considerably. Participants described implicit and explicit rules regarding appearance, sound, and attitude that defined who belonged and who did not.

In Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap, gatekeeping centered on maintaining a visually compelling and commercially viable image aligned with dominant beauty standards and cultural scripts. As Maya (Pop) explained, "There is a very specific version of what success is supposed to look like, and you are measured against it constantly." Artists described pressure to maintain hyper-polished aesthetics, perform confidence through sexualized imagery, and conform to rapidly shifting trends. These expectations restricted the range of acceptable femininities and imposed risk on deviation.

Country artists described gatekeeping grounded in tradition and continuity. As Elena (Country) explained, "People treat the genre like something that has to be protected." Deviations from expected visual codes often triggered questions about authenticity. Performers of color faced additional barriers, as their presence alone could prompt skepticism about belonging. These boundaries were enforced not only by industry actors but also by audiences who positioned themselves as cultural gatekeepers.

Rock and Metal performers described gatekeeping through categorical labeling and ideological commitments to authenticity. As Rhea (white) explained, "Once you are put in a box, it is hard to get people to hear anything outside of it." The label "female fronted" emerged as a

significant constraint, collapsing diverse musical identities into a single gendered category. This labeling shaped booking decisions, media coverage, and audience expectations.

Gatekeeping in Rock and Metal also extended to resistance against technological innovation. As Nyx (mixed race) noted, “People will question your authenticity over the tools you use, not the music you make.” These responses revealed that gatekeeping was not only gendered, but tied to broader cultural beliefs about purity, rebellion, and tradition.

Across genres, gatekeeping functioned as a system of boundaries that limited artistic movement, shaped audience interpretation, and contributed to patterns of exclusion.

Strategic Navigation

Across genres, performers described strategic navigation as a necessary skill in managing the conflicting demands of visual culture, audience expectation, and artistic identity. This required constant evaluation of how to present oneself in ways that advanced career goals without compromising personal values.

Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap performers described navigation as a form of brand management, carefully curating images that balanced authenticity with industry expectations. As Jade (Hip-Hop/Rap) explained, “You are always adjusting, even when you think you are being yourself.” They described intentional decisions about when to conform and when to subtly resist, using small visual cues to shape perception.

Country performers described navigation through subtle boundary-pushing within established norms. As Elena (Country) explained, “You do not break the rules outright. You bend them just enough.” Rather than rejecting tradition, they worked within it, introducing gradual shifts that allowed space for identity while maintaining audience acceptance.

Rock and Metal performers described navigation as a process of resistance and redirection. As Rhea (white) explained, “It is about redirecting attention back to the music, over and over again.” They used costuming, performance style, and visual aesthetics to shift focus away from their bodies and toward their musicianship. This often required active negotiation over promotional materials, stage presentation, and media framing.

Across genres, participants described strategic navigation as emotional, cultural, and creative labor. As Sarai (Hip-Hop/Rap) explained, “You are constantly calculating how to move without losing yourself.” Their decisions were shaped by an awareness that visual identity could influence access, reception, and long-term career viability. Navigation was not optional, but essential, revealing the extent to which visual performance operates as a core component of artistic agency.

DISCUSSION

The findings of Study 2 reveal that female performers across genres navigate a multifaceted terrain shaped by gendered expectations, racialized assumptions, and deeply ingrained visual norms. Although each genre presents a unique set of pressures, the overarching theme is one of strategic negotiation, where performers must continually balance agency, authenticity, and commercial viability within an environment that places disproportionate emphasis on visual self-presentation. Study 2 extends the findings of Study 1 by illustrating how the symbolic representations observed in music videos are rooted in the lived experiences of performers, who must engage not only with artistic and industrial expectations but with cultural narratives that define what femininity and racial identity should look like within their respective genres.

The expanded narratives complicate the binary of empowered versus objectified behavior by revealing that performers often experience these states simultaneously. Agency is not expressed solely through autonomy or rebellion but through careful navigation of visual codes that carry significant cultural and commercial implications. Performers described empowerment as a process that involved both asserting control over their image and making calculated decisions about when to comply with expectations to maintain visibility or avoid professional consequences. This dynamic was particularly evident in Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap, where artists described highly stylized and often sexualized imagery as both a tool for creative expression and a demand imposed by male-dominated industry structures. Their reflections underscore that empowerment in these genres exists within a bounded system that rewards conformity to highly specific visual ideals.

Similarly, Country performers revealed how authenticity operates as both a cultural value and a restrictive force. Their accounts showed that deviation from traditional visual cues, even for the purpose of artistic growth, was often treated as a violation of the genre's identity. While Country artists appeared to experience less overt sexualization, their narratives emphasized a different kind of objectification rooted in racialized and gendered expectations about who belongs within the tradition. Their struggles illuminate how objectification can operate through normative ideals that present themselves as neutral or wholesome but nonetheless exert pressure on performers to conform to specific visions of femininity or cultural identity.

Rock and Metal performers described a form of objectification structured less around sexualization and more around categorical reduction and assumptions about genre identity. For these artists, gendered labeling often overshadowed musicianship, as their presence in a male-dominated genre triggered expectations derived from the history of women in metal rather than

from their actual sound or performance style. The narratives of performers such as “Rhea” demonstrated how resisting these labels required deliberate visual strategies, including dressing in armor-like stage wear, rejecting feminized imagery, and insisting upon band-centered promotional materials. Their stories challenge the belief that Rock and Metal are inherently egalitarian spaces defined by rebellion and merit, revealing the persistence of gatekeeping practices that shape belonging along gendered and racial lines.

The findings also emphasize the importance of intersectionality in understanding self-objectification and agency. Women of color in all genres described the compounded pressures of racialized and gendered scrutiny, which intensified the labor of managing public identity. Their accounts illustrate how objectification operates not only through body-centric sexualization but also through cultural stereotyping, exoticization, and assumptions embedded within genre histories. For these performers, agency involved navigating multiple layers of interpretation, from being misread in promotional images to having their cultural identity treated as a commodity. They described the constant calculation involved in deciding how much of their heritage to display or obscure, revealing that self-presentation often carried both personal and professional risks that white performers did not face.

Study 2 further highlights the significance of first impressions in shaping audience judgment across genres. In many cases, participants described being evaluated visually before their music was heard, a process amplified by digital platforms that rely heavily on thumbnails, still images, and promotional snapshots. This pattern was consistent across Pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Country, and Rock/Metal, and mirrors trends identified in Study 1, where visual cues in music videos heavily influenced how women were represented. The interview with Rhea underscored how these instantaneous evaluations can lead to misclassification and dismissal based solely on

visual identity. Her experiences demonstrate the broader point that visual objectification in the industry is not merely a matter of sexualization but also of categorical sorting, cultural assumption, and limited visual repertoires that shape how women are allowed to appear.

Together, the expanded narratives from Study 2 illustrate that resistance, adaptation, and empowerment are iterative, dynamic processes deeply inflected by genre context. Performers across genres adopted strategies that ranged from subtle subversions of tradition to overt rejections of sexualized imagery. These strategies were not merely stylistic choices but forms of self-preservation that allowed artists to carve meaningful space within structures that often limited their expressive freedom. Several performers described how resistance gained significance over time, particularly when fans interpreted these visual choices as meaningful representations of alternative models of femininity. This finding supports the conclusion that agency is relational, shaped both by the performer's intentions and by the interpretations of audiences who respond to their work.

The discussion also points to the central role of technology in shaping objectification and agency. Artists in multiple genres described how digital tools, platform algorithms, and online engagement metrics influenced the visibility of certain visual styles. These discussions were especially pronounced among Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap performers, who confronted the demands of visually saturated platforms that rewarded sexualized or sensational imagery. Rock and Metal performers described a different but related dynamic in which fans policed authenticity when digital visual tools such as stylized animation were used. Together, these narratives highlight how technological changes impact the visual economy of the music industry and influence how objectification and agency are lived experiences.

Overall, the findings from Study 2 extend the theoretical expectations developed from Study 1 and show how genre, race, gender, and technological mediation shape performers' experiences of objectification and agency. They demonstrate that the pressures to conform to hypersexualized standards are most visible in Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap, while Country and Rock/Metal performers encounter subtler yet equally restrictive norms tied to tradition, toughness, or conceptual framing. They also confirm that race significantly modifies these pressures, shaping not only how performers are objectified but also how they exercise agency within visually regulated spaces. The intersections of gender, race, genre expectation, and technological mediation create a complex system in which female performers must continually negotiate their position and identity.

Taken together, the discussion underscores that visual self-presentation in the music industry is far from superficial. It is a site of negotiation where gendered and racialized meanings are constructed and contested, where artists assert identity and resist constraint, and where cultural narratives about femininity, authenticity, and desirability are both reproduced and challenged. Study 2 demonstrates that understanding objectification requires moving beyond surface-level analyses of representation toward a deeper engagement with how performers experience these pressures within genre-specific ecosystems. Through their narratives, participants reveal the ongoing work required to maintain agency in a landscape shaped by powerful visual expectations and entrenched cultural scripts.

Limitations

Due to time constraints, I was limited to interviewing five participants per genre. While this approach allowed for the collection of rich and detailed narratives, the small sample size restricted the generalizability of findings across all female performers within each genre.

Although the study produced deep qualitative insight, the limited number of participants means that the experiences documented here cannot be assumed to represent the full range of perspectives within Pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Country, or Rock/Metal. Additionally, although the study aimed to include mid to high profile artists, difficulties in securing participation from such figures led to a necessary expansion of the sample to include some emerging artists. As a result, the perspectives presented may not fully represent either end of the industry spectrum, particularly when considering the distinct pressures experienced by artists with larger audiences and more extensive media exposure.

Self-reporting and social desirability biases were also present. Participants may have portrayed their experiences in a more favorable light or downplayed certain challenges in order to align with social norms or protect their public personas. These biases likely impacted the authenticity of some responses, particularly around sensitive topics such as self-objectification, racialized expectations, and pressures from the music industry. Some participants expressed awareness that their remarks about promotional teams, labels, or fan communities might be interpreted negatively, which may have made them more cautious in their descriptions. In a few cases, participants reflected on earlier stages of their careers through a retrospective lens that could have shaped or softened their interpretations of past events.

The retrospective nature of the interviews presented an additional limitation. Participants were asked to reflect on their careers and past experiences to contextualize their current perspectives. While this approach yielded important insights, it also introduced the potential for selective memory or reinterpretation of past events, which may have influenced the consistency and accuracy of the data, especially regarding how industry norms and portrayals have shifted over time. Some participants acknowledged that their understanding of objectification and

agency had changed as they gained experience, which made it difficult to separate earlier perceptions from later reinterpretations. This challenge was more pronounced in genres like Rock and Metal, where artists described long-term shifts in visual identity, genre labeling, and audience expectations that unfolded across many years.

The depth and quality of data also varied depending on the rapport established with each participant and the practical constraints surrounding the interview. Some participants were interviewed while actively touring, traveling, or managing performance schedules, which limited the amount of time available and occasionally required interviews to be conducted from the road. In some cases, limited comfort, scheduling constraints, or abbreviated interview windows led to less candid or detailed responses. Conversely, interviews in which participants felt especially at ease produced exceptionally rich narratives, such as in the case of the Rock and Metal performer whose extensive reflections shaped several of the expanded thematic areas in this study. The presence of particularly strong or particularly brief narratives created unevenness in how much detail each participant contributed, which may have unintentionally amplified or muted certain genre-specific themes.

Another limitation involves the reliance on digital communication platforms for conducting interviews. While online formats allowed for flexible scheduling and wide geographic reach, they may have affected the depth of conversation. Some participants responded in writing rather than speaking, which limited follow-up questions and reduced opportunities for spontaneous elaboration. Nonverbal cues were also limited, making it more difficult to interpret emotional nuance or identify moments where deeper probing might have been valuable. These constraints may have shaped the kinds of narratives that emerged and influenced how participants discussed sensitive topics related to gender, race, and identity.

A further limitation concerns the role of genre-specific fan cultures and online communities, which were frequently discussed but not directly studied. Participants described how audience reactions, thumbnails, social media comments, and fan expectations influenced their self-presentation, yet this study did not include data from those fan communities themselves. As a result, the findings reflect artists' perceptions of these pressures rather than a direct analysis of the discourse surrounding them. This gap is particularly relevant in genres where online commentary plays a significant role in shaping an artist's identity, such as Pop and Rock/Metal, where participants described being judged before being heard based solely on visual cues in digital spaces.

Finally, the study did not capture the full breadth of technological influences on self-presentation. Several participants referenced the impact of platform algorithms, engagement metrics, and even fan backlash toward the use of digital visual tools. While these insights were valuable, the study design did not include systematic examination of how these technologies shape the circulation and reception of visual imagery. These technological dynamics likely have significant implications for objectification and agency, but they remain outside the empirical scope of this study.

Together, these limitations underscore the need for continued research that expands the diversity of participants, incorporates multiple data sources, and examines the broader ecosystem of media, technology, and audience behavior that surrounds female performers in contemporary music culture.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

This study contributes to ongoing scholarship on gender, race, and representation in the music industry by illuminating how female performers across four major genres, Rock and

Metal, Pop, Country, and Hip-Hop/Rap, navigate the competing demands of artistic identity, cultural expectation, and industry pressure. Through narrative interviews with twenty diverse performers, the research provides insight into the genre-specific and intersectional forces that shape visual self-presentation and the experience of objectification. The narratives presented in this study extend the representational patterns identified in Study 1 by placing them in a lived context. They reveal that symbolic depictions in music videos are rooted in the daily negotiations that performers undertake in order to remain visible, marketable, and creatively authentic.

The findings reinforce the understanding that genre functions as far more than a stylistic category. It acts as a cultural framework that encodes specific norms regarding femininity, race, tradition, and authenticity. Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap artists described a landscape dominated by visual intensity, algorithmic pressure, and expectations for stylized femininity that often intersected with racialized perceptions. These performers emphasized that visual presentation operates as both opportunity and constraint, offering visibility within a saturated market while imposing a form of objectification tied to the commodification of gendered and racialized bodies.

Country artists revealed a different set of pressures. Their narratives highlighted the constraints of a genre that valorizes tradition, modesty, and continuity. The women in this study described navigating these expectations through subtle forms of aesthetic resistance, integrating cultural motifs or personal symbols into their presentation while remaining mindful of conservative expectations. The tension between authenticity and innovation was particularly pronounced for Country performers of color, whose racial identities often signaled deviation from the genre's perceived norms. Their experiences demonstrate how whiteness operates as an unspoken default that shapes recognition, belonging, and legitimacy within this genre.

Rock and Metal performers described a unique dynamic in which gendered expectation collided with genre-specific ideals of authenticity and rebellion. Their accounts reveal that objectification in these genres often emerges not through overt sexualization but through categorical reduction and the imposition of gender-based labels that precede musical evaluation. Participants described actively working to resist visual tropes associated with the "female fronted" category, which they felt constrained not only how their music was perceived but also how their bodies were interpreted within the scene. This form of objectification operated through simplification rather than sexualization, reducing a wide array of sounds and identities to a single imagined category defined by the presence of a woman.

The intersectional insights across all three research questions underscore that agency within the music industry is deeply conditioned by racial identity. Women of color described a compounded experience in which visual judgments were filtered simultaneously through gendered assumptions and cultural stereotypes. Their narratives emphasized that self-presentation carries additional emotional, cultural, and professional risks when racial identity becomes a focal point of audience interpretation. These performers described carefully weighing how to portray their heritage, how to avoid being reduced to caricature, and how to resist the pressures to assimilate. Their accounts reveal intersectionality as a fundamental dimension of artistic identity in contemporary music culture, shaping the possibilities for visibility, expression, and resistance.

Taken together, the findings from Study 2 show that performers' experiences of objectification and agency vary by genre, race, and industry context. Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap artists described sustained pressure to conform to stylized and often sexualized visual ideals, while Country and Rock/Metal performers described less overt but still restrictive expectations

tied to tradition, toughness, authenticity, and conceptual framing. Performers of color across genres consistently identified the intersection of race and gender as central to their experiences of objectification, agency, and professional navigation.

These findings also illustrate the need to reconsider simplistic binaries that have dominated discussions of empowerment within the music industry. Empowerment is not merely the opposite of objectification, nor is it solely a matter of creative autonomy. Instead, it appears as a strategic process embedded within structures of market logic, genre tradition, and cultural interpretation. The expanded narratives from this study reveal that performers exercise agency through negotiated adaptation, subtle resistance, aesthetic experimentation, and selective conformity. This understanding of empowerment emphasizes its relational nature. It is shaped not only by artists' personal intentions but also by how audiences, labels, platforms, and fan cultures interpret their visual and musical output.

This study further highlights the growing importance of visual technologies and digital platforms in shaping how objectification and agency operate. Participants described the significance of thumbnails, still images, platform algorithms, and engagement metrics in determining how their work reached audiences. Rock and Metal performers also described the backlash that can arise when visual experimentation violates audience expectations of authenticity. These accounts demonstrate that technological forces have become central to the construction of gendered and racialized identities in the contemporary music industry. Future scholarship will need to account for how digital environments mediate visual culture and contribute to ongoing patterns of objectification.

Several implications emerge from these findings. First, researchers should continue to explore how genre-specific norms shape women's experiences of self-presentation, particularly

through longitudinal analysis that traces how these norms evolve over time. Second, further research should examine the perspectives of performers who identify outside the gender binary, as well as those whose racial or cultural identities do not align with dominant narratives within their genre. Third, scholars should investigate the role of fan cultures and online communities more directly, as these groups significantly influence how performers interpret and respond to visual expectations. Fourth, given the increasing influence of digital tools and artificial intelligence in visual production, future research should examine how these technologies shape artistic identity, gatekeeping, and audience reception.

Ultimately, Study 2 demonstrates that objectification is not a single phenomenon but a constellation of pressures, interpretations, and structural forces that vary according to genre, race, and cultural history. It reveals the complexity of agency within the music industry and provides a nuanced view of how female performers assert themselves within systems that continuously evaluate them through visual, gendered, and racialized lenses. By pairing content analysis in Study 1 with narrative interviews in Study 2, this research offers both macro and micro perspectives on the construction of identity in music video culture. Together, these studies underscore the necessity of understanding objectification as a lived, negotiated process rather than a purely representational one, and they highlight the ongoing work required to challenge entrenched norms within gendered and racialized media environments.

CHAPTER 6

STUDY 3

Before introducing the audience-focused analysis, it is important to clarify how Studies 1 and 2 collectively inform the design and purpose of Study 3. Study 1 established that portrayals of cisgender female performers are systematically structured by genre, with distinct configurations of objectification, empowerment, and racialized representation across Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal. Study 2 extended these findings by demonstrating that performers are not passive subjects of these portrayals, but active agents who negotiate, adapt to, and sometimes resist genre-specific expectations within industry and cultural constraints. However, while these studies explain how representations are constructed and how performers navigate them, they do not address how audiences interpret these portrayals in real time. Study 3 addresses this gap by shifting the unit of analysis to audience reception, examining how viewers decode gendered and racialized representations through existing genre frameworks, cultural assumptions, and media literacy processes. In doing so, it completes the analytic progression of the dissertation by connecting production, representation, and interpretation within a unified framework.

MEDIA LITERACY, GENRE, AND AUDIENCE INTERPRETATION OF GENDER PORTRAYALS IN MUSIC VIDEOS

Study 3 examined how a brief media literacy intervention shaped audience interpretations of gender portrayals in music videos across four genres: pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Rock/Metal, and country. Using a mixed experimental design with media literacy exposure as a between-subjects factor (primer vs. no primer) and genre as a within-subjects factor (each participant viewed one full video from each genre in randomized order), participants completed an online survey

assessing perceptions of objectification and sexualization, perceived performer agency, CMD-based critical decoding judgments, racialization salience, engagement and identification, and state self-objectification. The study was grounded in the premise that media literacy can support critical viewing practices by helping audiences identify how media messages are constructed and how genre conventions shape portrayals of gender and race.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In Study 3, Constructivist Media Decoding (CMD) served as the methodological framework for the media literacy primer and for the measurement of participants' critical interpretation of music video portrayals. CMD emphasizes active engagement with media through six core concepts: authorship, format, audience, content, purpose, and point of view (Sperry & Scheibe, 2022). In this study, those concepts were used to prompt participants to consider how music videos are constructed, who creates them, what visual techniques they use, what audiences they address, and what assumptions about gender, race, sexuality, and agency they may reinforce.

CMD also informed the survey instrument by shaping items that assessed participants' critical decoding of the videos after exposure. The CMD-related variables measured whether participants recognized objectifying or stereotypical portrayals, questioned the purpose and construction of those portrayals, and considered how genre conventions influenced the meanings attached to female performers' bodies, race, and agency. Because Study 1 identified genre-specific visual patterns and Study 2 showed that performers actively negotiate those expectations, Study 3 used CMD to test whether a brief media literacy intervention could shift how audiences interpreted those same types of portrayals during viewing.

The theoretical framework for Study 3 also incorporated Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), which informed both the design of the media literacy intervention and the interpretation of audience responses. Objectification Theory posits that when women are depicted primarily in terms of their physical appearance, they are reduced to objects of visual evaluation, a process that can contribute to self-objectification and related psychological effects. In the context of this study, the theory was used to guide how participants were prompted to recognize and evaluate objectifying content in music videos.

Specifically, Objectification Theory informed the operationalization of key survey constructs related to participants' perceptions of body-focused framing, sexualized presentation, and evaluative gaze. These constructs were aligned with the visual features identified in Study 1, such as body exposure, sexualized camera focus, and movement, and were incorporated into the survey instrument to assess how participants identified and interpreted these elements during viewing. In addition, the theory guided items measuring participants' reflections on self-perception, social comparison, and perceived media influence, allowing for analysis of how exposure to objectifying portrayals may shape attitudes toward gender, appearance, and identity.

Within the CMD framework, Objectification Theory provided a conceptual lens for interpreting how participants made meaning of these portrayals. It enabled analysis of whether participants identified objectifying cues, how they evaluated those cues, and whether they framed them as normative, problematic, or empowering within specific genre contexts. In this way, Objectification Theory functioned as a bridge between the visual features of the media texts and the cognitive and interpretive processes examined in Study 3.

For the experimental group, participants received a media literacy intervention grounded in CMD, which included a 20-minute session focusing on the six CMD concepts. Participants

were taught to apply these concepts as they analyzed music videos from various genres (Hip-Hop/Rap, pop, country, and Rock/Metal). The media literacy session also included a practice activity, in which participants critically engaged with a neutral video clip to familiarize themselves with CMD's approach before applying it to the music videos included in the study.

The survey instrument used in Study 3 incorporated questions derived from both Objectification Theory and CMD. Participants completed measures aligned with objectification and critical decoding, including the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS) (McKinley & Hyde, 1996), a validated instrument designed to measure body surveillance, body shame, and appearance control beliefs. For example, prior studies have used the OBCS to examine relationships among objectifying media exposure, body surveillance, body shame, self-objectification, disordered eating attitudes, and body dissatisfaction in women and adolescent girls (McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Moradi & Huang, 2008; Tiggemann & Slater, 2001). The survey also assessed whether participants in the experimental group, after receiving media literacy instruction, reported lower levels of body surveillance and body shame, consistent with the expectation that critical engagement could counteract some effects of objectification.

The OBCS was used to measure the psychological impact of objectification, particularly the extent to which participants internalized objectifying portrayals in music videos. OBCS items assessed body surveillance (the tendency to monitor one's appearance), body shame (negative feelings about one's body), and appearance control beliefs (the extent to which individuals believe they can control their appearance to meet societal standards). These measures provided empirical data on how exposure to sexualized content in music videos related to participants' body image and self-objectification.

By incorporating Objectification Theory and OBCS into the analysis, the study evaluated not only how genre-specific portrayals were associated with body image and self-objectification, but also whether critical engagement through media literacy (via CMD) was associated with reduced internalization of objectification and healthier body-related perceptions in the immediate post-viewing context.

Details of the media literacy intervention, including the specific questions based on CMD concepts and additional examples of the music videos selected for analysis, are provided in Appendix C. The Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS) and its questions are provided in Appendix E.

METHODOLOGY

Study 3 employed a 2 × 4 mixed experimental design examining the effects of media literacy exposure and music genre on participants' interpretations of gender portrayals in music videos. Media literacy exposure served as the between-subjects independent variable with two levels: control condition and CMD primer condition. Music genre served as the within-subjects independent variable with four levels: Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal. Each participant viewed one full-length music video from each genre in randomized order, allowing genre-based differences to be compared within the same participant while also testing whether the CMD primer produced differences between experimental conditions.

This design tested the main effects of genre and media literacy exposure, as well as the Genre × Media Literacy Exposure interaction. Dependent variables included perceived objectification, perceived agency, critical decoding, race salience, engagement, traditional and

potentially harmful gender norms, and state self-objectification. Demographic variables, including age, gender, and race, were included as covariates in follow-up models.

Stimuli were drawn from the same 104-video pool used in Study 1, with 26 videos represented in each genre. The full list of videos used for both the Study 1 content analysis and the Study 3 stimulus pool is provided in Appendix G. Qualtrics was used to randomize which specific video participants received within each genre, ensuring that participants were exposed to only one video per genre while distributing viewings across the available video pool. Videos were embedded directly in the survey using an HTML5 video player. Participants were instructed to watch each video in its entirety before continuing, and survey flow controls were used to separate stimulus viewing from post-viewing measures to reduce carryover effects and to standardize the sequence of exposure and response.

After each video, participants completed a consistent set of post-viewing measures designed to capture genre-specific perceptions while maintaining comparability across conditions. These measures assessed perceived objectification and sexualization, perceived performer agency, critical decoding judgments aligned with CMD, racialization salience, engagement and identification, and state self-objectification. The study also included a brief post-primer check for participants in the media literacy condition to assess comprehension and attention to the primer content, including both objective items and an open-ended response prompt. Demographic items were included in the survey to describe the sample and to support exploratory analyses of moderation.

All procedures were implemented through an online Qualtrics survey and completed asynchronously by participants using personal devices. The full study, including the primer

(when assigned), four full music videos, and survey measures, was designed to be completed in a single session. The Study 3 experimental design is summarized in Figure F8.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 30.0). Preliminary analyses included data screening for missing values, outliers, and assumption checks for normality and homogeneity of variance. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all dependent variables across genre and condition.

To test the study hypotheses, a series of mixed-model analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted. Media literacy condition (CMD primer vs. control) was treated as a between-subjects factor, and music genre (Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, Rock/Metal) was treated as a within-subjects factor. Separate analyses were conducted for each dependent variable, including perceived objectification, perceived agency, critical decoding, race salience, engagement, traditional gender norms, harmful gender norms, and state self-objectification.

Main effects of genre and condition, as well as Genre × Condition interaction effects, were examined to determine whether exposure to the CMD primer influenced participants' interpretations differently across genres. Where significant effects were observed, post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise tests were conducted to clarify differences between genre conditions.

In follow-up models, demographic variables including age, gender, and race were included as covariates to assess whether observed effects were robust across participant characteristics. Effect sizes are reported using partial eta squared (ηp^2), and statistical

significance was evaluated at $\alpha = .05$, with marginal effects ($p < .10$) noted where appropriate given the study's sample size.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Study 3 investigated whether exposure to a CMD-based media literacy primer was associated with differences in how participants interpreted gendered and racialized portrayals in music videos, and whether those interpretations varied across pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Rock/Metal, and country. The study focused on three broad outcome domains: recognition and evaluation of gender portrayals (including sexualization and objectification), attitudes and judgments related to gender roles and cultural norms, and body-related responses immediately following exposure. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1. How did media literacy exposure affect participants' recognition of gender portrayals and stereotypes in music videos across genres (pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Rock/Metal, and country)?

RQ2. What impact did media literacy exposure have on participants' evaluations and judgments related to gender roles after viewing music videos from each genre?

RQ3. How did media literacy exposure influence body consciousness and state self-objectification responses following exposure to music videos across genres?

RQ4. Did the effect of media literacy exposure vary by genre in terms of gender portrayal recognition, gender-related judgments, and body-related responses?

RQ5. How did demographic characteristics, including gender and race, relate to differences in participants' interpretations of gender portrayals and body-related responses, and did these characteristics moderate the relationship between media literacy exposure and the study outcomes?

HYPOTHESES

This study was guided by the assumption that media literacy instruction could foster critical thinking and shape the interpretation of gender portrayals in music videos. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Constructivist Media Decoding (CMD) and Objectification Theory, as well as prior research on media effects and media literacy, the study evaluated the following hypotheses. Given mixed evidence on the effectiveness of brief media literacy interventions, the study evaluates both the presence and magnitude of these effects (Jeong et al., 2012; Guess et al., 2020).

H1. Media Literacy Main Effect**.** Participants who receive the CMD-based media literacy primer will demonstrate greater critical recognition of objectification, gender stereotypes, and representational cues compared to participants in the control condition.

H2. Genre Main Effect. Participant responses will vary significantly by music genre. Exposure to Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop videos will be associated with higher perceived objectification and sexualization, whereas exposure to Country and Rock/Metal videos will be associated with lower perceived objectification and different forms of perceived agency.

H3. Genre Effects on Self-Objectification Outcomes. Exposure to more sexualized genres (Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop) will be associated with higher levels of state self-objectification, including body surveillance and body shame, compared to exposure to less sexualized genres (Country, Rock/Metal).

H4. Interaction Effect. The effect of media literacy exposure on participants' interpretations of gender portrayals will vary by genre. Specifically, the CMD primer is expected to

differentially influence how participants interpret objectification and agency across genres.

SAMPLE AND RECRUITMENT

Participants were recruited from a large southwestern university, targeting both undergraduate and graduate students. All procedures for Study 3 were reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix J).

Consistent with the IRB-approved recruitment plan, the study initially anticipated approximately 200 participants. Recruitment occurred through email outreach to students enrolled at the university, including distribution through relevant university listservs and instructor or departmental channels where available. The recruitment message provided a brief description of the study's purpose, explained the nature of participation, and included a link to the online informed consent form and Qualtrics survey.

A total of 166 participants completed the study and were included in the final analytic sample. Although the IRB materials anticipated approximately 200 participants, the final sample was sufficient to conduct the planned mixed-model analyses, while limitations related to sample size and statistical power are addressed in the limitations section.

The recruitment materials emphasized that participation was voluntary and that respondents could decline to answer any question or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. To encourage participation while maintaining confidentiality, the study offered an optional entry into a raffle for one (1) $50 Amazon gift card. Raffle entry was collected through a separate Qualtrics form so that email addresses used for the drawing were not linked to survey responses.

Eligibility criteria required that participants be at least 18 years old, fluent in English, and able to access a device with internet connectivity and audio. Although no strict upper age limit was imposed, recruitment primarily targeted university students, and the expected age range was 18 to 30. Participants were randomly assigned to either the media literacy condition or the control condition through Qualtrics randomization to support comparability across groups.

The study sought to recruit a diverse sample with respect to gender and race or ethnicity to support exploratory analyses of demographic variation in media interpretation. Upon completion of the survey, participants received a debriefing statement describing the study's aims and were provided with contact information for the research team and relevant resources.

STIMULUS VIEWING AND DATA COLLECTION

In Study 3, participants completed an online survey designed to measure how exposure to genre-specific portrayals of female artists in music videos related to body surveillance, body shame, and appearance control beliefs. The Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS) (McKinley & Hyde, 1996)was used to assess the psychological dimensions of objectification. The OBCS includes three subscales, body surveillance, body shame, and appearance control beliefs, which are central for evaluating how portrayals of women in music videos relate to self-perception and body image. A visual representation of the Study 3 mixed experimental design is provided in Figure F8.

Participants were randomly assigned to either the control group or the experimental group. In both groups, participants engaged in stimulus viewing in which they watched full-length music videos drawn from each of the four genres: Hip-Hop/Rap, pop, country, and Rock/Metal. To ensure variety in music video exposure while reducing systematic bias, the study used a within-subjects approach for genre. Each participant viewed one music video from each

genre, ensuring exposure to a range of gendered and racialized portrayals of female performers. At the same time, each participant remained in only one of the two media literacy conditions.

Participants in the control group viewed the music videos without any media literacy intervention and then completed the post-viewing questionnaire. After each video, they answered survey items designed to assess body surveillance, body shame, and appearance control beliefs, along with additional measures aligned with the study outcomes.

Participants in the experimental group first completed a media literacy intervention grounded in Constructivist Media Decoding (CMD; Sperry & Scheibe, 2022). The intervention lasted approximately 20 minutes and introduced the six CMD concepts: authorship, format, audience, content, purpose, and point of view. After completing the media literacy instruction, participants viewed the same sequence of genre-based music videos as the control group. Following each video, they completed the same post-viewing questionnaire, which also included measures assessing critical engagement with the portrayals they watched and the extent to which they were able to identify commercial and ideological forces shaping the media messages.

Across both conditions, the study used a 2 × 4 mixed experimental design to examine how media literacy condition and music genre related to body surveillance, body shame, and appearance control beliefs. Media literacy condition functioned as the between-subjects factor, with participants assigned to either the CMD primer condition or the control condition. Music genre functioned as the within-subjects factor, as each participant viewed one video from each genre. This design allowed the study to assess whether body-related responses differed by genre, by media literacy condition, or by the interaction between genre and condition.

Details on the specific OBCS questions and CMD-related measures, as well as the 7-point Likert scale used to assess responses, are provided in Appendix E and Appendix D, respectively.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study adhered to ethical guidelines designed to protect the rights and well-being of participants throughout the research process. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks before agreeing to participate. An informed consent statement was provided that explained the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and the confidentiality of the data collected. The consent materials also clarified that the music video clips included in the study could contain sexually suggestive or objectifying portrayals of women, and participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before consenting.

To protect participant privacy, all study data were anonymized. Personally identifiable information was not linked to survey responses, and study materials were securely stored with access restricted to the researcher. Participants were informed that responses would be treated confidentially and that only aggregate results would be reported in analyses and dissemination.

Given the potentially sensitive nature of the media content, participants were informed in advance about the possibility of emotional or psychological discomfort associated with viewing objectifying or sexualized portrayals. Participants who became uncomfortable were able to discontinue participation at any point without penalty. When appropriate, participants were provided with information about mental health resources and support options. The survey

concluded with a debriefing statement that explained the study's broader aims and provided additional context regarding gender portrayals in music videos.

Finally, participants assigned to the experimental condition were informed that the media literacy instruction emphasized critical engagement with gendered and racialized portrayals and encouraged reflection on how media content can shape perceptions. All participants were debriefed at the end of the study and were reminded that they could contact the research team with follow-up questions or concerns.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Results are organized according to the study hypotheses and corresponding research questions. For each hypothesis, findings are reported in terms of statistical significance, direction of effect, and consistency across genres. Descriptive statistics and ANCOVA results are provided in Appendix H, Tables I1–I2. The results also address the study's five research questions, with hypothesis tests reported in relation to the broader interpretive, evaluative, body-related, genre-based, and demographic dimensions of the study.

Sample Characteristics and Procedure Checks

The analytic sample for Study 3 comprised 166 participants, split between the control condition (no primer; 53.0%, n = 88) and the media literacy condition (CMD primer; 47.0%, n = 78). The mean age of participants was 29.53 years. Gender was distributed as 48.8% male (n = 81), 47.6% female (n = 79), 2.4% non-binary or third gender (n = 4), and 1.2% prefer not to say (n = 2). Race and ethnicity were collected using multi-select indicators, so percentages reflect endorsement rates and are not mutually exclusive. Most participants selected White (81.3%, n = 135). Additional selections included Asian (10.8%, n = 18), Black (2.4%, n = 4), and Other, AIAN, or NHPI (11.4%, n = 19), with 1.2% preferring not to report race (n = 2). Most

participants selected a single race category (91.6%, n = 152), whereas 7.8% selected multiple categories (n = 13). For models using the binary race covariate, 81.9% were coded as White only (n = 136) and 17.5% were coded as non-White (n = 29).

The sample included participants across a range of adult ages, allowing age to be examined as a covariate in models of interpretation and state self-objectification. Because age emerged as a significant predictor across several outcomes, age-adjusted models are reported where relevant.

Among participants assigned to the media literacy condition (n = 78), compliance with the instructional materials was high. All participants passed the embedded attention check (100%). Performance on the CMD primer knowledge check showed a ceiling pattern: 57.7% answered all seven items correctly and an additional 33.3% scored six out of seven. This indicates that participants in the CMD condition generally attended to and understood the primer content before viewing the music videos.

Measures and Reliability

All dependent variables were treated as genre-specific repeated-measures outcomes across Pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Rock/Metal, and Country. Composite scores were calculated so that higher values indicated higher standing on each construct.

Perceived objectification assessed the extent to which the female performer was judged as sexualized or objectified and showed excellent internal consistency across genres (α = .942 Pop; α = .956 Hip-Hop/Rap; α = .971 Rock/Metal; α = .959 Country). Perceived agency assessed the extent to which the portrayal positioned women as active, empowered, and in control rather than passive and showed acceptable internal consistency (α = .763 Pop; α = .721 Hip-Hop/Rap; α

= .820 Rock/Metal; α = .751 Country). CMD decoding assessed critical, constructivist interpretation of media portrayals and showed good internal consistency (α = .806 Pop; α = .791 Hip-Hop/Rap; α = .807 Rock/Metal; α = .800 Country).

Race salience assessed the extent to which racial cues and racialized stereotyping were noticed and experienced as salient during viewing and was acceptable across genres (α = .756 Pop; α = .729 Hip-Hop/Rap; α = .797 Rock/Metal; α = .783 Country). Engagement assessed interest and attentional involvement while viewing and showed strong internal consistency (α = .851 Pop; α = .898 Hip-Hop/Rap; α = .845 Rock/Metal; α = .802 Country). State self-objectification assessed momentary self-focused appearance monitoring elicited by the clip and showed excellent internal consistency (α = .944 Pop; α = .916 Hip-Hop/Rap; α = .944 Rock/Metal; α = .937 Country). Traditional and potentially harmful gender norms, abbreviated as TradHarm, assessed perceived endorsement or normalization of traditional and potentially harmful gender norms prompted by each clip. It was analyzed as a two-item composite and ranged from weak to good across genres (α = .615 Pop; α = .425 Hip-Hop/Rap; α = .803 Rock/Metal; α = .656 Country).

Primary analyses used mixed-model repeated-measures GLMs with genre as the within-subjects factor and media literacy condition as the between-subjects factor. Follow-up models included age, gender, and race as covariates. Gender was self-reported and coded as 1 = male, 2 = female, and 3 = nonbinary or other, reflecting the full set of response options collected. Coefficients for gender are interpreted in relation to this coding, with negative values indicating lower scores at higher gender coding. Race was modeled as White only versus non-White for model stability, and findings involving race are interpreted cautiously due to the relatively small non-White subgroup.

H1: Media Literacy Main Effect

H1 predicted that participants who received the CMD-based media literacy primer would demonstrate greater critical recognition of objectification, gender stereotypes, and representational cues compared to participants in the control condition.

H1 was not supported. Across recognition-related outcomes, the main effect of media literacy condition was not statistically significant. Media literacy condition did not significantly predict perceived objectification, $F(1, 164) = 0.161$, $p = .689$, $\eta p^2 = .001$. It also did not significantly predict CMD decoding, $F(1, 164) = 0.316$, $p = .575$, race salience, $F(1, 164) = 2.744$, $p = .100$, or gender portrayal problem ratings ($p > .05$).

These findings indicate that, although participants in the CMD condition attended to and understood the media literacy primer, the brief intervention did not produce a broad main effect on participants' recognition of objectification, stereotypes, or critical representational cues. In other words, the CMD primer did not significantly increase overall critical recognition compared to the control condition.

H2: Genre Main Effect

H2 predicted that participant responses would vary significantly by music genre. Specifically, exposure to Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop videos was expected to be associated with higher perceived objectification and sexualization, while exposure to Country and Rock/Metal videos was expected to be associated with lower perceived objectification and different forms of perceived agency.

H2 was supported. Genre significantly predicted multiple outcomes, including perceived objectification, perceived agency, CMD decoding, race salience, TradHarm, engagement, and state self-objectification.

Perceived objectification varied significantly by genre, $F(3, 492) = 50.019$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .234$. Hip-Hop/Rap was rated highest in perceived objectification ($M = 5.278$), followed by Pop ($M = 4.612$), Country ($M = 3.812$), and Rock/Metal ($M = 3.514$). This pattern is consistent with the expectation that Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop would be perceived as more objectifying than Country and Rock/Metal.

Perceived agency also differed significantly by genre, $F(3, 489) = 14.829$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .083$. Rock/Metal ($M = 5.595$) and Country ($M = 5.508$) received the highest agency ratings, followed by Pop ($M = 5.198$), with Hip-Hop/Rap rated lowest ($M = 4.980$). These findings suggest that genres perceived as less objectifying were also more likely to be interpreted as granting performers agency, although agency remained relatively high across all genres.

CMD decoding differed by genre, $F(3, 492) = 26.948$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .141$. Hip-Hop/Rap received the highest CMD decoding scores ($M = 5.063$), followed by Pop ($M = 4.724$), Country ($M = 4.700$), and Rock/Metal ($M = 4.287$). Race salience also differed significantly by genre, $F(3, 492) = 24.030$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .128$. These patterns indicate that genre shaped not only objectification judgments but also how participants recognized racialized and representational cues.

Traditional and potentially harmful gender norms also differed significantly by genre, $F(3, 492) = 19.126$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .104$. Hip-Hop/Rap had the highest TradHarm mean ($M =$

4.816), followed by Country (M = 4.415), Pop (M = 4.401), and Rock/Metal (M = 3.881). Engagement differed by genre as well, Pillai's Trace = .316, $F(3, 162) = 24.960$, $p < .001$.

Taken together, these genre-based differences strongly support H2. Genre was the most consistent predictor of participant interpretation, with Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop generally associated with higher perceived objectification and Rock/Metal and Country generally associated with higher perceived agency.

H3: Genre Effects on State Self-Objectification Outcomes

H3 predicted that exposure to more sexualized genres, specifically Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop, would be associated with higher levels of state self-objectification, including body surveillance and body shame, compared to exposure to less sexualized genres, specifically Country and Rock/Metal.

H3 was supported. State self-objectification differed significantly by genre, $F(3, 492) = 35.493$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .178$. Participants reported higher state self-objectification following exposure to Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop videos than following exposure to Country and Rock/Metal videos. This finding is consistent with the prediction that genres with higher perceived sexualization would produce stronger immediate body-related responses.

The genre effect on state self-objectification remained important in follow-up analyses. In the age-adjusted model, age significantly predicted state self-objectification, $F(1, 162) = 34.606$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .176$. Age coefficients were positive in all four genres: Pop ($B = .073$, $p < .001$), Hip-Hop/Rap ($B = .064$, $p < .001$), Rock/Metal ($B = .088$, $p < .001$), and Country ($B = .078$, $p < .001$). This indicates that older participants reported higher state self-objectification across genres.

Gender-adjusted models also showed significant coefficients for Hip-Hop/Rap (B = −.413, p = .010), Rock/Metal (B = −.421, p = .012), and Country (B = −.351, p = .031), with Pop non-significant (p = .220). These findings suggest that body-related responses varied not only by genre but also by participant characteristics.

Overall, H3 was supported as a genre-based hypothesis. State self-objectification was not uniform across viewing conditions; rather, it varied significantly depending on the genre of the video viewed.

H4: Genre × Media Literacy Interaction Effect

H4 predicted that the effect of media literacy exposure on participants' interpretations of gender portrayals would vary by genre. Specifically, the CMD primer was expected to differentially influence how participants interpreted objectification and agency across genre contexts.

H4 was partially supported. Across most outcomes, Genre × Media Literacy Condition interactions were not statistically significant. The Genre × Media Literacy Condition interaction was not significant for perceived agency (p = .339), CMD decoding (p = .484), race salience (p = .947), TradHarm (p = .128), state self-objectification (p = .717), or engagement (multivariate p = .194). These findings indicate that the CMD primer generally did not produce genre-specific shifts in participant responses across most dependent variables.

However, one exception emerged for perceived objectification. In the baseline objectification model, the Genre × Media Literacy Condition interaction approached statistical significance, $F(3, 492) = 2.360$, $p = .071$, $\eta p^2 = .014$. Given the relatively small sample size and limited power to detect small interaction effects, this result is interpreted cautiously as a marginal

effect. When age was included as a covariate, the Genre × Media Literacy Condition interaction for perceived objectification reached statistical significance, Pillai's Trace = .055, $F(3, 160) = 3.104$, $p = .028$, with the corresponding within-subjects interaction also significant, $F(3, 486) = 3.389$, $p = .018$, $\eta p^2 = .020$.

This pattern suggests that the CMD primer may have had a limited genre-contingent effect on perceived objectification once age was accounted for. However, because similar interactions did not appear consistently across other outcomes, H4 is best interpreted as partially supported. The media literacy intervention did not broadly alter interpretation across genres, but perceived objectification showed some evidence of genre-contingent sensitivity to the CMD condition, particularly in the age-adjusted model.

RQ1: Recognition of Gender Portrayals and Stereotypes

RQ1 asked how media literacy exposure affected participants' recognition of gender portrayals and stereotypes across genres.

Consistent with the hypothesis tests, media literacy condition did not significantly predict recognition-related outcomes. The CMD primer did not produce significant differences in perceived objectification, CMD decoding, race salience, or gender portrayal problem ratings ($ps > .05$).

However, recognition varied significantly by genre. Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop were consistently associated with higher perceived objectification and higher detection of representational issues, while Rock/Metal and Country were associated with lower levels. Age also emerged as a significant predictor across multiple recognition measures, with older participants demonstrating higher levels of critical recognition.

Taken together, these findings indicate that recognition of gender portrayals was driven more strongly by genre and participant characteristics than by the brief media literacy intervention.

RQ2: Evaluations and Judgments of Gender Roles

RQ2 asked how media literacy exposure affected participants' evaluations and judgments related to gender roles and norms.

Media literacy condition did not significantly predict perceived agency or TradHarm scores (ps > .05), indicating that the CMD primer did not shift participants' evaluations of gender roles in a broad or consistent way.

In contrast, genre differences were statistically significant. Rock/Metal and Country were associated with higher perceived agency, while Hip-Hop/Rap was associated with lower perceived agency and higher endorsement of traditional or potentially harmful gender norms. These patterns suggest that genre-specific representational conventions strongly shape how participants evaluate gender roles.

Demographic covariates, particularly age and gender, also influenced evaluative judgments, indicating that interpretations of gender norms are shaped by both media content and viewer characteristics.

RQ3: Body-Related Responses and State Self-Objectification

RQ3 asked how media literacy exposure influenced body consciousness and state self-objectification following exposure to music videos.

Media literacy condition did not significantly predict state self-objectification or engagement (ps > .05), indicating that the CMD primer did not reduce immediate body-related responses in the viewing context.

However, genre differences were significant. State self-objectification was higher following exposure to Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop and lower following exposure to Rock/Metal and Country. These findings align with the pattern of perceived sexualization across genres.

Age again emerged as a strong predictor, with older participants reporting higher levels of state self-objectification across genres. Gender differences were also observed in several genre-specific models.

These results suggest that body-related responses are sensitive to genre-based cues but are not easily altered through a single brief media literacy intervention.

RQ4: Variation of Media Literacy Effects by Genre

RQ4 asked whether the effect of media literacy exposure varied by genre.

Across most outcomes, Genre × Media Literacy Condition interactions were not statistically significant, indicating that the CMD primer did not systematically alter interpretation in a genre-specific manner.

One exception emerged for perceived objectification. The interaction approached statistical significance in the baseline model and reached significance in the age-adjusted model. This suggests a limited and context-dependent effect of the CMD primer on objectification judgments.

Overall, the findings indicate that media literacy effects were not robustly moderated by genre. Genre remained the dominant factor shaping interpretation.

RQ5: Demographic Influences and Moderation

RQ5 asked how demographic characteristics related to participant responses and whether they moderated the relationship between media literacy exposure and study outcomes.

Demographic variables, particularly age, were consistently associated with multiple outcomes. Age predicted perceived objectification, CMD decoding, race salience, TradHarm, engagement, and state self-objectification. Several Genre × Age interactions were also significant, indicating that age-related effects varied across genres.

Gender was associated with objectification, TradHarm, and several genre-specific outcomes, while race effects were primarily genre-contingent rather than uniform main effects.

Evidence that demographic variables broadly moderated the effect of media literacy condition was limited. Instead, demographics functioned primarily as independent predictors of interpretation and response.

These findings suggest that participant characteristics, especially age, play a meaningful role in shaping how media content is interpreted, independent of media literacy intervention.

Demographic Covariates and Exploratory Findings

Although the hypotheses focused on media literacy, genre, state self-objectification, and the Genre × Media Literacy Condition interaction, demographic covariates provided additional context for interpreting the results. Age was the most consistent demographic predictor across outcomes. Age significantly predicted perceived objectification, $F(1, 162) = 31.969$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .165$; CMD decoding, $F(1, 162) = 18.153$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .101$; race salience, $F(1, 162) =$

30.394, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .158$; gender portrayal problems, $F(1, 162) = 24.475$, $p < .001$; TradHarm, $F(1, 158) = 42.585$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .212$; engagement, $F(1, 162) = 19.536$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .108$; and state self-objectification, $F(1, 162) = 34.606$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .176$.

Several Genre × Age interactions were also significant, including perceived objectification, $F(3, 486) = 9.587$, $p < .001$, and TradHarm, $F(3, 474) = 6.109$, $p < .001$. These results indicate that age-related differences were not uniform across genres but varied depending on the genre viewed.

Gender was associated with several outcomes. Gender predicted the overall perceived objectification average, $F(1, 163) = 6.787$, $p = .010$, $\eta p^2 = .040$, and the overall TradHarm average, $F(1, 163) = 7.065$, $p = .009$, $\eta p^2 = .042$. Genre × Gender was significant for TradHarm, $F(3, 489) = 2.925$, $p = .033$, and for CMD decoding, $F(3, 489) = 5.811$, $p < .001$. Gender coefficients were also significant for race salience, gender portrayal problems, and state self-objectification in several genre-specific models.

Race effects were most evident as genre-contingent effects rather than uniform main effects. For perceived objectification, Genre × Race was significant, Pillai's Trace = .051, $F(3, 160) = 2.891$, $p = .037$. For TradHarm, Genre × Race was significant, $F(3, 486) = 3.082$, $p = .027$, and the race main effect was marginal, $F(1, 162) = 3.803$, $p = .053$. Race also predicted engagement, $F(1, 163) = 7.320$, $p = .008$, and state self-objectification, $F(1, 162) = 4.682$, $p = .032$.

These demographic findings should be interpreted as exploratory. The non-White subgroup was relatively small, and binary race coding was used for model stability. As a result, race-related effects should not be treated as definitive evidence of racial-group decoding

differences. Instead, they indicate that participant demographics, particularly age, meaningfully shaped interpretation and body-related response in ways that future research should examine with larger and more diverse samples.

Summary of Hypothesis Tests

The overall results reveal a clear pattern. H1 was not supported: the CMD primer did not produce a significant main effect on critical recognition outcomes. H2 was supported: participant responses varied significantly by genre across multiple interpretive outcomes. H3 was supported: state self-objectification differed significantly by genre, with more sexualized genres associated with higher body-related responses. H4 was partially supported: most Genre × Media Literacy Condition interactions were not significant, but perceived objectification showed a marginal interaction in the baseline model and a significant interaction after adjusting for age.

Taken together, these findings indicate that genre exerted a stronger and more consistent influence on participant responses than the brief media literacy intervention. Although the CMD primer was understood by participants, it did not consistently shift interpretation or state self-objectification in the immediate viewing context. The findings suggest that genre-based schemas are durable interpretive frameworks and may be difficult to disrupt through a single brief intervention.

DISCUSSION

Taken together, the Study 3 results indicate that genre-based stimulus differences were the most powerful and consistent drivers of participant responding, whereas the CMD media literacy primer did not operate as a uniform, between-subjects main-effect intervention. One plausible explanation is that the genre manipulation itself carried strong, readily legible cues that participants could recognize without assistance. Across measures, Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop were

reliably evaluated as more objectifying or more problematic, and Rock/Metal and Country were evaluated as less objectifying and more agentic. When stimulus differences are large and salient, a brief primer may have limited room to shift responses in the aggregate, particularly when participants already possess baseline familiarity with contemporary gender discourse and can identify objectification without formal instruction. In this sense, the primer may have been competing against a ceiling effect in "recognition" for the most overtly sexualized content, while also competing against a floor effect for content that was less sexualized and therefore less likely to be judged as problematic regardless of instruction.

A second explanation concerns the nature and dosage of the intervention. The primer was designed to introduce CMD concepts and encourage reflective interpretation, but it was necessarily brief and delivered in a single sitting. Media literacy interventions often show stronger effects when instruction is sustained, iterative, and paired with guided practice. A short primer may successfully increase comprehension of the concepts, as reflected in the strong check performance, but still fail to translate into measurable differences on downstream outcomes when the dependent variables are affective, value-laden, or anchored in stable cultural beliefs. Stated differently, "understanding" a media literacy framework does not guarantee that participants will apply it spontaneously during viewing, nor that they will shift their judgments in ways that are large enough to register as main effects across multiple outcomes.

Third, some of the dependent measures themselves may have constrained the primer's ability to produce detectable effects. Several outcomes capture evaluative judgments that are partly normative rather than purely cognitive, such as whether portrayals are harmful, acceptable, or stereotypical. These judgments can be influenced by personal ideology, moral framing, political identity, and prior attitudes toward gender and sexuality, which may not shift in a brief

exposure. In addition, some outcome domains were psychological and self-referential, such as state self-objectification. Those processes may be triggered automatically by visual cues and embodied comparison mechanisms that are relatively resistant to short-term cognitive instruction. The pattern in Study 3 is consistent with the idea that media literacy may be better suited to shaping interpretive talk and explicit critical reasoning than to immediately suppressing embodied or affective responses during exposure.

The age findings provide further insight into these dynamics. Across several recognition-oriented measures, older participants reported higher levels of critical decoding and greater recognition of problematic or objectifying content, particularly in Pop, Rock/Metal, and Country, with Hip-Hop/Rap often showing minimal age dependence. One interpretation is that age may be functioning as a proxy for accumulated interpretive resources. Older participants have had more years of media exposure and, importantly, more years of exposure to shifting public discourse about gender representation. Many participants in the older portion of the sample may have encountered feminist and media criticism frameworks through workplace training, parenting contexts, or broader cultural debates in ways that foster a more articulated critical vocabulary. This interpretation does not require assuming that older participants were "prudish." Rather, it suggests that they may have been more practiced at labeling representational problems, distinguishing between sexuality and objectification, and evaluating media through an explicitly ethical or sociocultural lens.

At the same time, it is also plausible that younger participants were, in some contexts, relatively desensitized to sexualized media conventions, particularly in genres where hypersexualized aesthetics are normalized and routinized. Younger adults have grown up in an environment of constant social media imagery, influencer culture, and platform-based video

ecosystems where sexual display and self-branding are ubiquitous. In that media environment, objectifying cues may be processed as typical genre grammar rather than as a notable representational problem, especially when the portrayal aligns with familiar templates of "what a music video looks like." This normalization can reduce the likelihood that viewers will report the portrayal as problematic even if they can recognize it in an abstract sense. Importantly, this account is not that younger viewers are unaware, but that their baseline threshold for labeling content as objectionable may be higher because the cultural baseline for sexual display has shifted.

Age may also be functioning as a cohort-linked proxy rather than a purely developmental variable. Older and younger participants likely differ in the media environments that shaped their interpretive norms (e.g., pre-platform versus platform-native video culture), in the vocabulary available to label representational problems, and in the comfort level associated with reporting moralized judgments about gender and race in a university research setting. In addition, because the sample was recruited from a university context, age may partially index role differences (e.g., undergraduate versus graduate) and related differences in training exposure, political socialization, or institutional discourse. These possibilities cannot be disentangled in the present design, but they underscore that "age effects" here likely reflect multiple social and interpretive pathways.

The age pattern also helps interpret the mixed relationship between recognition and body-related outcomes. Older participants reported higher recognition on several measures, yet age was positively associated with state self-objectification. One plausible mechanism is upward social comparison during exposure. Music videos frequently feature young women who are presented through highly curated styling, lighting, editing, choreography, and camera framing

that emphasize thinness, firmness, and youth as aesthetic ideals. For older viewers, these portrayals may be more likely to trigger self-evaluative contrast, not because older participants are necessarily more invested in appearance norms, but because the stimuli foregrounded a culturally dominant youthful body ideal that may feel less attainable with age-related bodily change. In that context, heightened critical awareness can coexist with heightened self-monitoring. Older participants may simultaneously recognize objectification as a representational problem and experience greater self-focused attention because the clips activate comparison processes that are immediate and embodied. This interpretation aligns with objectification theory's emphasis on situational triggers, suggesting that self-objectification may be amplified when the depicted bodies are both highly idealized and socially positioned as the normative standard, particularly when viewers perceive a larger gap between the portrayed ideal and their own bodies.

A related explanation is that age may reflect differences in the salience of aging and appearance maintenance as a social issue. As people move further from the cultural "peak" of youth that is disproportionately celebrated in popular visual media, they may become more aware of how strongly attractiveness norms are tied to age. Exposure to idealized younger bodies can therefore function as a cue that increases body surveillance and self-evaluative attention, even among viewers who reject the representational logic at the level of explicit judgment. This helps explain why recognition and critique did not operate as a protective buffer against state self-objectification in the present data. This pattern is consistent with objectification theory, which suggests that self-objectification involves both cognitive monitoring of the body and affective responses such as shame, anxiety, or self-comparison (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Moradi & Huang, 2008). Prior research also indicates that body surveillance and body

dissatisfaction remain salient across adulthood, suggesting that critical recognition of objectification does not necessarily prevent self-evaluative body monitoring (McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001).

Taken together, these interpretations suggest that the psychological distance between the viewer and the portrayed ideal may shape the intensity of self-referential response. When that distance is experienced as larger, the same visual cues that prompt critical recognition may also intensify body-focused attention. In future work, this mechanism could be tested more directly by measuring perceived similarity to the performer, perceived attainability of the body ideal, and trait-level body comparison tendencies, and by examining whether those variables mediate the relationship between age and state self-objectification during exposure.

Finally, the fact that Hip-Hop/Rap frequently showed weaker or non-significant age slopes suggests an additional possibility: some genre conventions may be so stable and so strongly coded that age-based interpretive differences are minimized. Hip-Hop/Rap clips may have been interpreted through a widely shared cultural script in which sexualization and performance are expected, which could compress age differences. Alternatively, it may reflect that the Hip-Hop/Rap stimulus contained cues that were so salient that participants across ages converged in their recognition judgments, producing little remaining variance for age to explain. Either way, the genre-specific pattern reinforces the central finding of Study 3: the interpretive environment created by the stimulus matters greatly, and demographic predictors operate differently depending on the genre context.

In sum, Study 3's discussion points toward a model in which genre provides powerful interpretive cues that shape recognition, judgments, and self-referential responding, while brief media literacy exposure may be insufficient to produce broad main effects on these outcomes.

Age, gender, and race covariates, by contrast, appear to capture durable differences in interpretive orientation and response thresholds that influence how participants evaluate portrayals and how strongly they differentiate among genres.

Limitations

Although Study 3 yielded clear evidence of genre-based differences in perceived objectification, agency, critical decoding, and related outcomes, several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the experimental design relied on a fixed set of four genre conditions (Pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Rock/Metal, and Country) and a specific set of stimulus clips. As a result, the observed genre effects may partly reflect the particular videos selected, the performers featured, and the production choices within those clips, rather than stable properties of each genre as a whole. Even though the genre set was chosen to reflect broad stylistic variation, it does not capture the full diversity of music video production practices, subgenres, or platform-specific video cultures. The results should therefore be interpreted as evidence of differences among these operationalized genre conditions, and future work should test additional genres, subgenres, and a broader library of stimuli to strengthen generalizability.

Second, the sample was recruited from a single university context, and the demographic composition of the sample constrained generalizability. While the study included participants beyond traditional college age, the distribution skewed toward younger adults overall, and the sample was predominantly White. This is important because the covariate models indicated that age was systematically associated with several key outcomes. Where age effects were significant, they were generally positive, indicating that older participants tended to report higher critical decoding and stronger recognition of problematic gender and racialized content in several genres. At the same time, age was also positively associated with state self-objectification,

suggesting that greater critical recognition did not necessarily correspond to lower body-focused responding. Given these patterns, replication with a more age-diverse and racially diverse sample is necessary to determine whether the observed demographic trends hold across different populations and viewing contexts.

Third, the study relied on self-report measures administered immediately after exposure. Although the scales demonstrated strong internal consistency for most constructs, self-report remains vulnerable to demand characteristics, social desirability concerns, and variability in how participants interpret items. These concerns are especially relevant for constructs that carry moral or political valence, such as judgments about sexism, harm, or acceptability. This suggests that future research should continue to refine and validate brief harm-oriented measures tailored to music video contexts.

Fourth, the design assessed immediate responses to a single exposure session rather than cumulative, longitudinal effects. Participants viewed multiple clips in one sitting, which supports inference about short-term reactions and genre comparisons, but it cannot address how repeated exposure over months or years shapes gender schemas, self-objectification, or critical media habits. Similarly, the Media Literacy primer represented a brief, single-session intervention. The results indicated that the primer did not produce consistent main effects across outcomes and that any condition-related differences were limited and contingent on model specification. This suggests that brief interventions may be insufficient to produce uniform shifts in evaluative or self-objectification outcomes, and it underscores the need for longitudinal and repeated-instruction designs that can evaluate whether media literacy effects accumulate or persist over time.

Finally, although the IRB materials anticipated approximately 200 participants, the final analytic sample included 166 completed responses. While this sample was sufficient for the planned mixed-model analyses, it limited statistical power for detecting small interaction effects, particularly for race-based comparisons given the relatively small non-White subgroup and the use of a White versus non-White covariate. This analytic choice was pragmatic for model stability, but it collapses substantial heterogeneity across racial and ethnic identities and may obscure meaningful within-group differences and differences by specific racialized positionalities in relation to particular genre traditions. Future studies would benefit from larger and more diverse samples that allow race and ethnicity to be modeled with greater specificity and that support more precise tests of moderation across demographic groups.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

Study 3 provided evidence that audience responses to gender portrayals in music videos were structured primarily by genre, with consistent differences across Pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Rock/Metal, and Country in perceived objectification, perceived agency, critical decoding, and related outcomes. Across multiple dependent measures, Hip-Hop/Rap and, to a lesser extent, Pop tended to elicit higher ratings of objectification and greater perceived problems in portrayal, whereas Rock/Metal and Country more often elicited lower objectification and higher perceived agency. These results reinforce the importance of treating "music video content" as heterogeneous rather than monolithic. Genre functioned as a meaningful organizing variable for how viewers evaluated women's portrayal, how they interpreted the social implications of those portrayals, and how they reported immediate psychological responses during viewing.

At the same time, the CMD-based media literacy primer did not produce broad main effects across outcomes in the manner often assumed by media literacy interventions. Rather

than shifting participants' overall evaluations uniformly, the primer's influence was limited and contingent, becoming statistically visible in specific contexts once demographic variance was modeled. This pattern suggests that brief, single-session instruction may not reliably override powerful genre-linked interpretive cues, particularly when outcomes involve affective or self-referential processes such as state self-objectification. In this respect, Study 3 contributes to media literacy scholarship by clarifying the boundary conditions of short-form instruction and by indicating that critical decoding and evaluative judgments may not shift in parallel. Viewers can demonstrate stronger recognition and critique without necessarily experiencing reduced body-focused responding in the moment.

Study 3 also demonstrated that demographic factors were not merely background descriptors but were systematically related to interpretation and response. Age was a particularly consistent predictor in the covariate models and, where significant, tended to be associated with stronger critical decoding and greater recognition of problematic gender and racialized cues in several genres. However, age was also positively associated with state self-objectification, indicating that heightened critical recognition did not necessarily function as a protective factor against body-focused responses during exposure. Gender and race covariates also accounted for variance in several outcomes, and in some models they shaped the degree to which participants differentiated genres, reinforcing the importance of modeling demographics directly rather than relying on "average viewer" assumptions. Race-related associations were less interpretable at the subgroup level due to sample composition and analytic aggregation, but the observed Genre × Race patterns reinforce the need for replication with larger and more racially diverse samples.

These findings suggest several priorities for future research. First, stimulus sampling should be broadened so that genre effects are not conflated with idiosyncrasies of a small set of

videos or performers. Larger, systematically sampled clip libraries, potentially stratified by production features (camera framing, lyrical content, dance choreography, narrative role, and gaze structure), would allow researchers to identify which elements of music video grammar drive objectification judgments and self-objectifying responses. Second, media literacy interventions should be tested in formats that more closely resemble instructional practice, including multi-session curricula, repeated exposure to decoding exercises, and designs that measure persistence of effects over time. Third, future studies should model race and ethnicity with greater specificity than a White versus non-White contrast. In Study 3, that binary operationalization was a pragmatic analytic decision driven by the sample's limited racial diversity and small cell sizes for specific groups, which would not have supported stable estimates or meaningful subgroup comparisons. With only a very small number of Black participants and a relatively small Asian subgroup, any attempt to model race using multiple categories would have substantially reduced statistical power, inflated standard errors, and risked overinterpreting unstable effects. Accordingly, future research should prioritize recruitment strategies that yield more racially and ethnically diverse samples, including purposeful oversampling of underrepresented groups where appropriate, so that race and ethnicity can be examined in a way that does not collapse distinct identities into a single residual category and that permits adequately powered tests of moderation across groups. Finally, the divergence between critical recognition outcomes and state self-objectification outcomes highlights a key theoretical implication: constructivist decoding and objectification processes may operate on partially independent pathways. Clarifying when and how critical decoding translates into psychological buffering remains an important next step for integrating CMD-oriented frameworks with Objectification Theory in media effects research.

CHAPTER 7

INTEGRATED DISCUSSION

This dissertation provided a multi-method analysis of how female performers were portrayed and interpreted across four major music genres, Hip-Hop/Rap, Pop, Country, and Rock/Metal, with sustained attention to gendered and racialized meaning-making. Guided by Objectification Theory and Intersectionality Theory, and supplemented by Constructivist Media Decoding (CMD) as an interpretive and intervention framework, the project examined representation at the level of music video texts, negotiation at the level of performer experience, and reception at the level of audience interpretation and body-related response. Across the three studies, a consistent pattern emerged: genre operated as a powerful organizing script that shaped which forms of femininity were made visible, which forms of agency were legible, and how viewers evaluated both the social meaning and personal impact of what they watched.

It is useful to distinguish among three forms of impact addressed in this dissertation. First, Study 3 captures interpretive impact, referring to how readily participants identify portrayals as objectifying, stereotypical, or problematic. Second, it captures immediate embodied response, including state self-objectification and body surveillance during exposure. Third, this project does not assess longitudinal developmental outcomes such as sustained changes in self-concept or body image. The findings therefore speak most directly to how genre cues structure immediate recognition and immediate self-referential response rather than long-term causal effects.

Study 1 established the representational baseline by demonstrating that portrayals of women varied systematically by genre. Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop contained higher concentrations of sexualized imagery and body-centric framing, while Country and Rock/Metal relied more

heavily on alternative representational logics, including authenticity, respectability, credibility, and symbolic authority. Lower overt sexualization did not equate to the absence of constraint. Instead, each genre employed distinct mechanisms for structuring gendered visibility and legitimacy. These patterns extended Objectification Theory by demonstrating that objectification operates not only through sexual display but through genre-coded visual grammar that shapes narrative positioning, bodily emphasis, and legitimacy. They also extended Intersectionality Theory by showing that race functioned as a structuring axis within genre, shaping who was centered, how performers were framed, and what forms of femininity were culturally legible.

Study 2 extended these patterns into lived experience by examining how performers navigated industry expectations and genre-specific constraints. Across interviews, performers described strategies ranging from accommodation to resistance, shaped by the demands of visibility, authenticity, and marketability within each genre. While performers across genres described being evaluated visually, the criteria for evaluation differed. Pop and Hip-Hop/Rap emphasized stylization and visibility, often tied to sexualized aesthetics, while Country emphasized authenticity and tradition, and Rock/Metal emphasized credibility and genre legitimacy. These findings contributed to Objectification Theory by identifying the institutional and cultural processes through which objectification is produced and maintained. They contributed to Intersectionality Theory by demonstrating that performers' negotiations of visibility and legitimacy were shaped by intersecting identities and genre-specific expectations.

Study 3 examined whether these genre patterns extended to audience interpretation and whether a brief CMD-based media literacy intervention altered those interpretations. Genre effects were robust across all outcome domains. Participants consistently rated Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop as higher in objectification and perceived harm, and Rock/Metal and Country as higher in

perceived agency. The CMD primer did not produce consistent main effects across outcomes. This does not indicate that media literacy is ineffective, but rather that brief, single-session interventions may be insufficient to override strong genre-based interpretive frameworks during immediate exposure. CMD appears to operate more effectively at the level of reflective interpretation than at the level of immediate embodied response. Where effects did emerge, they were limited and context-dependent. Age accounted for meaningful variation across outcomes, with older participants demonstrating higher levels of critical recognition alongside higher levels of state self-objectification, indicating that recognition and embodied response may co-occur rather than operate in opposition.

Across the three studies, the findings converge on a central conclusion: objectification is best understood as a genre-structured representational environment. Genre conventions shape the co-occurrence of sexualization, narrative positioning, and perceived agency, while also shaping how audiences interpret and respond to these portrayals. Sexualization does not map cleanly onto agency or passivity, and critical recognition does not necessarily produce immediate psychological buffering. Instead, genre-specific visual grammars, institutional expectations, and viewer characteristics interact to produce patterned forms of meaning-making.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation contributes to Objectification Theory, Intersectionality Theory, and media literacy scholarship by specifying how gendered and racialized representation operates within genre-structured media environments and by identifying the limits of brief media literacy intervention in shaping immediate audience response.

First, this project extends Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) by demonstrating that objectification is not solely a function of sexualized display, but is organized

through genre-specific visual and institutional logics. Objectification operates through multiple pathways, including eroticized display, narrative reduction, credibility testing, authenticity norms, and the normalization of whiteness. These findings show that lower levels of overt sexualization do not necessarily correspond to reduced constraint, but may instead reflect alternative mechanisms of gender regulation embedded within genre traditions.

Second, this dissertation advances Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990) by demonstrating that gendered representation and reception are inseparable from racialized visibility and genre-based expectations. Race operated as a structuring axis rather than an additive variable, shaping who was centered, how performers were framed, and what forms of femininity were considered legitimate. Patterns such as hypersexualization, tokenism, exoticization, and erasure were distributed unevenly across genres and tied to both performer identity and genre norms.

Third, this project contributes to Constructivist Media Decoding (CMD) and media literacy research by clarifying the boundary conditions of brief intervention. Study 3 demonstrated that CMD-consistent interpretation is measurable and associated with demographic variation, but that a single-session intervention did not produce consistent main effects across interpretive or embodied outcomes. Recognition of problematic portrayals did not reliably translate into reduced self-objectification, suggesting that cognitive decoding and affective self-response may operate in parallel during exposure. These findings indicate that media literacy effects depend on repetition, context, and outcome type.

Across these contributions, the dissertation advances a central theoretical claim: objectification is not a uniform media effect but a genre-structured system of representation, lived negotiation, and audience interpretation. By integrating content analysis, performer

narratives, and experimental audience data, this project provides a more precise account of how gendered and racialized meanings are produced, maintained, and interpreted in contemporary music media.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This dissertation examined how female performers are represented, how they experience those representations, and how audiences interpret them across four major music genres. The findings demonstrate that objectification is not a singular or uniform phenomenon, but a genre-structured system shaped by visual conventions, industry expectations, and audience interpretation.

The results help explain why brief media literacy interventions may struggle to produce immediate change. Participants did not approach each video as a neutral text, but through established genre-based frameworks that shaped how objectification and agency were recognized. As a result, a single exposure to media literacy instruction was insufficient to override these interpretive defaults. Future media literacy efforts should move beyond one-time interventions toward repeated, scaffolded approaches that explicitly engage genre as an interpretive system.

Genre-specific approaches to media literacy may be particularly effective. In Hip-Hop/Rap and Pop, instruction may benefit from addressing hypersexualization, body-centered framing, and the relationship between visibility and power. In Country and Rock/Metal, instruction may focus more on authenticity norms, exclusion, and gendered credibility. These differences demonstrate that genre is not simply a stylistic category, but a structuring force that shapes how gender and power are represented and understood.

The findings also highlight the importance of examining representation, experience, and interpretation together. Study 1 established the representational patterns, Study 2 revealed the lived experience of navigating those patterns, and Study 3 demonstrated how audiences interpret

them. Taken together, these studies show that objectification operates across multiple levels of analysis and must be understood as a system rather than a single effect.

Future research should expand this work by examining additional genres, platform-specific dynamics, and broader performer identities, including transgender and non-binary artists. Longitudinal research is needed to assess how repeated exposure and sustained media literacy interventions influence interpretation and embodied response over time. Further work should also explore how industry structures, platform algorithms, and audience expectations interact to shape representation and reception in contemporary media environments.

This dissertation demonstrates that music video objectification is a genre-shaped system of representation, lived negotiation, and audience interpretation. These findings show that objectification cannot be reduced to a single visual pattern or media effect, but must be understood as an interaction between genre conventions, industry structures, performer agency, and audience meaning-making. Fully accounting for this system requires attention not only to what appears on screen, but also to the conditions under which those images are produced and the interpretive frameworks audiences bring to them.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

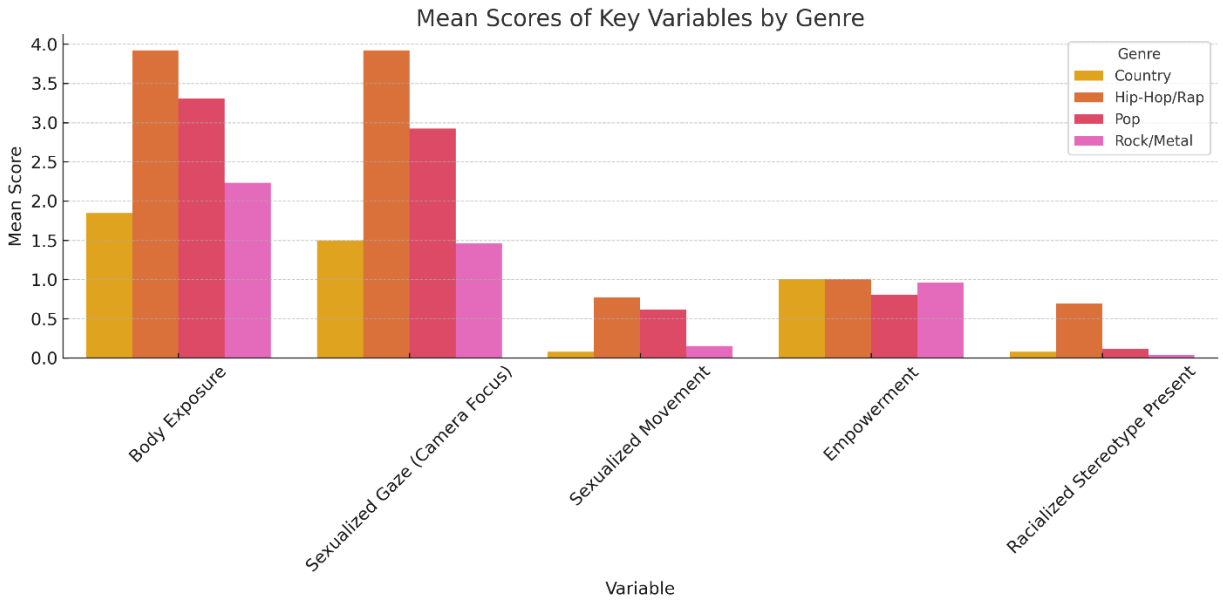
Codebook for Study 1: Content Analysis of Music Videos

Variable Name	Description	Type	Example	Coding Options
Body Exposure	How much skin is visible on the central female performer	Ordinal (1–5)		1 = Fully clothed, 5 = Nearly nude
Sexualized Movement	Are movements sexually suggestive (e.g., twerking, grinding)?	Binary		0 = No, 1 = Yes
Sexualized Gaze (Camera Focus)	Frequency of camera focusing on sexualized body parts	Ordinal (1–5)		1 = None, 5 = Constant focus
Objectifying Commentary	Do lyrics/dialogue refer to the body or use objectifying terms?	Binary		0 = No, 1 = Yes
Clothing	How revealing or suggestive is the clothing?	Ordinal (1–5)		1 = Conservative, 5 = Lingerie or less
Sexual Roles	Is she framed as seductress, victim, aggressor, or independent?	Categorical		Seductress / Victim / Aggressor / Empowered / Neutral
Aggression	Is there aggression shown toward or by the performer?	Categorical		None / Victimized / Aggressor / Both
Sexualization of Dance	Are dance movements overtly sexual?	Binary		0 = No, 1 = Yes
Traditional Gender Roles	Does the performer	Binary		0 = No, 1 = Yes

	portray a stereotypically feminine or submissive role?			
Race of Lead Singer	Racial identity of the central female performer	Categorical		Black / White / Latina / Asian / Mixed / Other
Racialized Stereotype Present	Are race-based stereotypes present?	Binary		0 = No, 1 = Yes
Empowerment	Is the performer portrayed with autonomy, control, and authority?	Binary		0 = No, 1 = Yes
Diversity of Representation	Are multiple racial, body-type, or LGBTQ+ identities visibly present?	Binary		0 = No, 1 = Yes
Cultural Variation in Gender Portrayal	Is the portrayal shaped by regional/cultural genre norms?	Categorical		Yes – Genre Specific / Yes – Cultural / No – Generic
Empowerment Type	Type of empowerment depicted in visuals or lyrics	Categorical		Vocal / Visual / Sexual / Narrative / Economic
Lyrical Alignment	Does the thematic message of the lyrics reinforce or contradict the visual portrayal?	Categorical		Reinforces / Contradicts / Neutral / Unclear
Context Notes	Free-text space for coders to explain ambiguous or genre-specific interpretations	Text		E.g., leather outfit typical in metal, not necessarily sexualized

APPENDIX B

Figure B1. Mean scores of Body Exposure, Sexualized Gaze, Sexualized Movement, Empowerment, and Racialized Stereotype Presence across four genres. Data reflects results from Study 1 content analysis (N = 104).



APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Core Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about your journey as an artist—how you got started and what led you to the style or genre you're most known for?
2. How would you describe your image or identity as a performer? Has that changed over time?
3. In your experience, how do expectations around appearance or image differ in your genre?
4. Do you feel pressure—either internal or external—to present yourself in a certain way on stage or in music videos?
5. Have there been moments in your career where you felt objectified or pressured to be more sexualized in your presentation?
6. Do you see self-sexualization as empowering, limiting, or both? How do you personally navigate that line?
7. How do your fans respond to your visual style, lyrics, or image?
8. Do you think your race or ethnicity has influenced how you're perceived or treated in the industry?
9. Have you ever made an intentional decision to reject industry or genre expectations in your work?
10. What does "empowerment" mean to you as a performer—and what does it look like in your music or videos?

11. Is there anything else you want to share about how you've navigated gender, race, or expectations as a female artist in your genre?
12. What advice would you give to younger artists trying to find their voice in this industry?

Genre-Specific Follow-Ups

Hip-Hop/Rap

- In Hip-Hop, there's often a strong emphasis on image and sexual confidence—do you feel that this creates freedom, pressure, or both for female performers?
- Have you ever felt you had to "own the gaze" or use sexual expression to gain credibility or visibility in the genre?
- Do you think there's space in Hip-Hop for alternative images of femininity that aren't based on erotic appeal or dominance?

Pop

- Pop culture often emphasizes perfection—glamour, beauty, relatability. Have you ever felt boxed in by that image?
- Do you think Pop music allows room for women to show emotional complexity without being sexualized or simplified?
- Have you ever had to choose between commercial appeal and authenticity when presenting yourself visually or lyrically?

Country

- Country music often leans into ideas of tradition and "authentic" femininity. How has that shaped your self-presentation?

- Have you ever felt pressure to look or act a certain way to be accepted in Country spaces (e.g., conservative, rural, soft-spoken)?
- If you're a woman of color in Country, how have you navigated being visible in a genre that is still perceived as predominantly white?

Rock/Metal

- Rock and Metal have strong visual identities and historically male-dominated spaces—how do you define your presence within that?
- Have you ever felt pressure to "de-sexualize" yourself to be taken seriously as a performer in this genre?
- Do you feel empowered by your genre's aesthetic (e.g., gothic, aggressive, symbolic), or do you still encounter limiting expectations?

APPENDIX D

Sample Constructivist Media Decoding (CMD) Questions

- **Authorship**: Who created this media, and what are their intentions? Are gender and race representations in the video shaped by specific commercial motives or cultural values?
- **Format**: How are the videos structured to emphasize certain visual elements, and what effect do these choices have on how gender and race are portrayed?
- **Audience**: How might different audience groups interpret the video, and how do gender and race affect audience engagement and interpretation?
- **Content**: What explicit and implicit messages about gender and race are conveyed through the video's imagery, lyrics, and narrative?
- **Purpose**: What is the overall message of the video, and how does it align with or challenge societal norms regarding gender and race?
- **Point of View**: From whose perspective is the video presented? Does the perspective reinforce traditional power dynamics (e.g., male gaze, racialized stereotypes)?

APPENDIX E

Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS)

Surveillance Scale

1. I rarely think about how I look.*
2. I think it is more important that my clothes are comfortable than whether they look good on me.*
3. I think more about how my body feels than how my body looks.*
4. I rarely compare how I look with how other people look.*
5. During the day, I think about how I look many times.
6. I often worry about whether the clothes I am wearing make me look good.
7. I rarely worry about how I look to other people.*
8. I am more concerned with what my body can do than how it looks.*

Body Shame Scale

9. When I can't control my weight, I feel like something must be wrong with me.
10. I feel ashamed of myself when I haven't made the effort to look my best.
11. I feel like I must be a bad person when I don't look as good as I could.
12. I would be ashamed for people to know what I really weigh.
13. I never worry that something is wrong with me when I am not exercising as much as I should.*
14. When I'm not exercising enough, I question whether I am a good enough person.
15. Even when I can't control my weight, I think I'm an okay person.*
16. When I'm not the size I think I should be, I feel ashamed.

Control Scale

17. I think a person is pretty much stuck with the looks they are born with.*
18. A large part of being in shape is having that kind of body in the first place.*
19. I think a person can look pretty much how they want to it they are willing to work at it.
20. I really don't think I have much control over how my body looks.*
21. I think a person's weight is mostly determined by the genes they are born with.*
22. It doesn't matter how hard I try to change my weight, it's probably always going to be about the same.*
23. I can weigh what I'm supposed to when I try hard enough.
24. The shape you are in depends mostly on your genes.*

*Items are reverse scored

Response Options:

7-point Likert scale

Strongly disagree – 1

Strongly disagree – 7.

APPENDIX F

Figure F1. Estimated marginal means of perceived objectification (Obj) across four genres (Pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Rock/Metal, Country) for Study 3 (N = 166). Higher scores indicate greater perceived objectification.

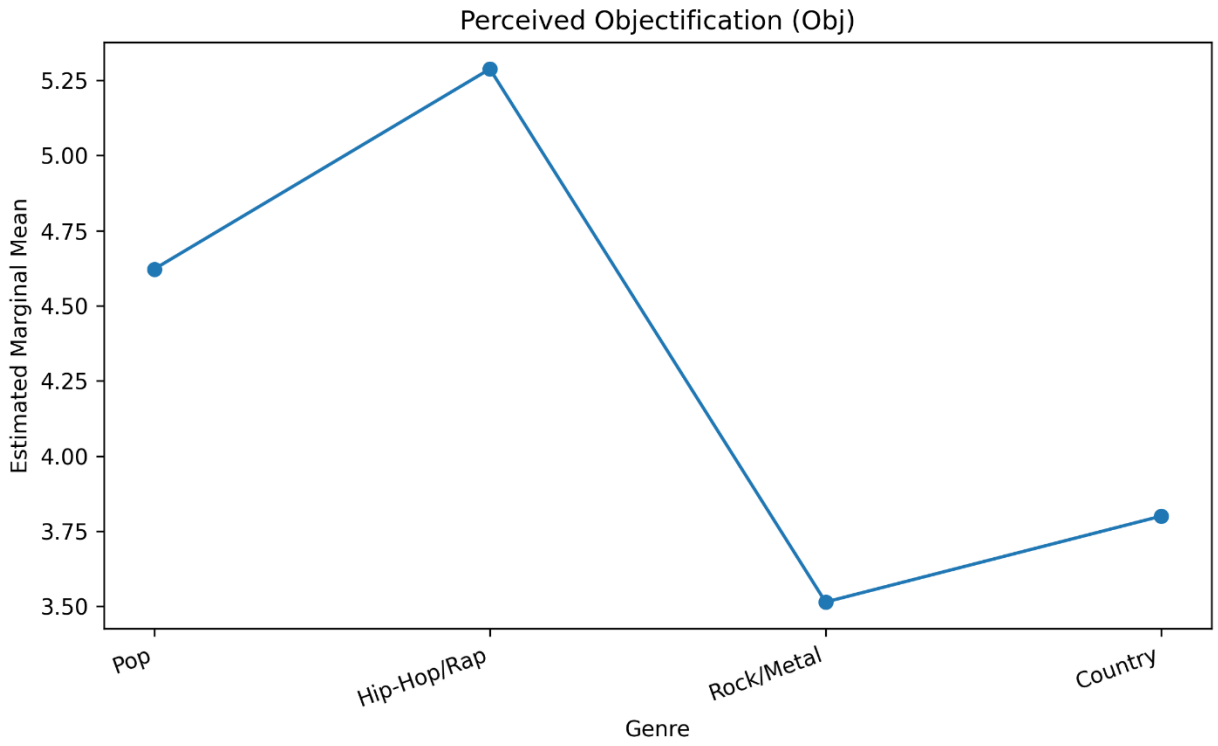


Figure F2. Estimated marginal means of perceived agency (Agency) across four genres (Pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Rock/Metal, Country) for Study 3 (N = 166). Higher scores indicate greater perceived performer agency.

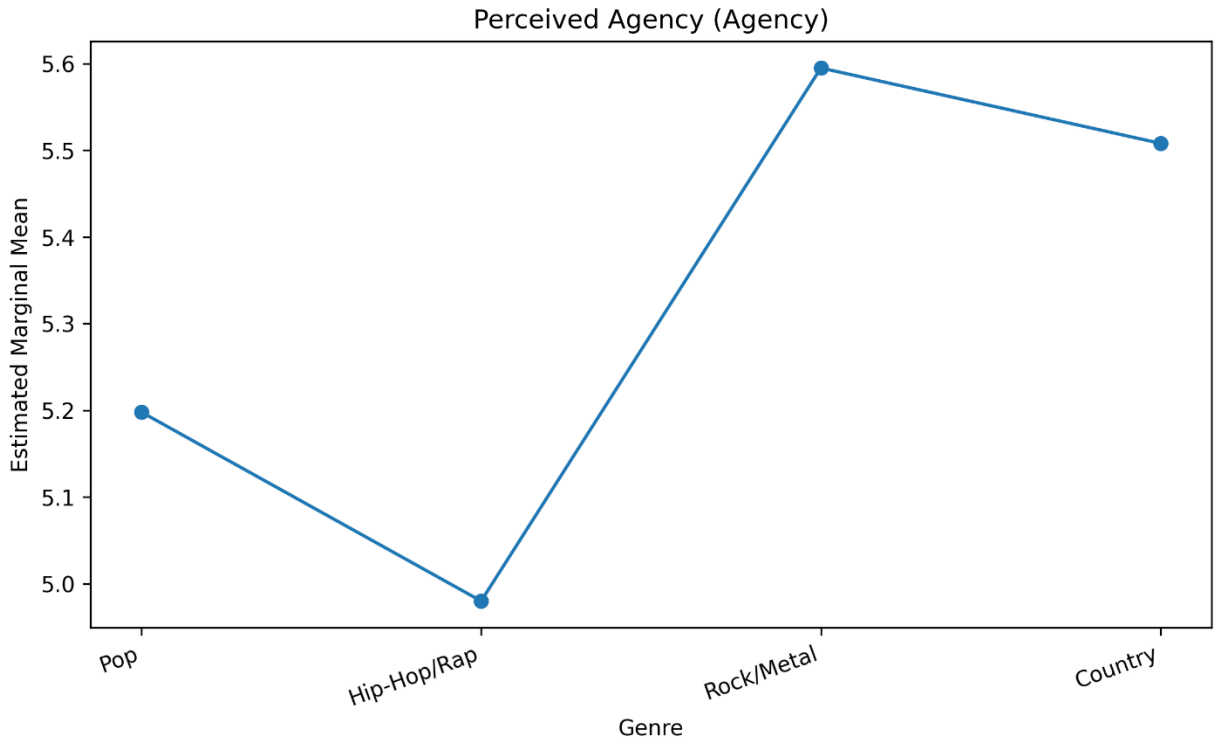


Figure F3. Estimated marginal means of traditional and potentially harmful gender norm endorsement/normalization (TradHarm) across four genres (Pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Rock/Metal, Country) for Study 3 (N = 166). Higher scores indicate greater perceived endorsement/normalization of traditional and potentially harmful gender norms.

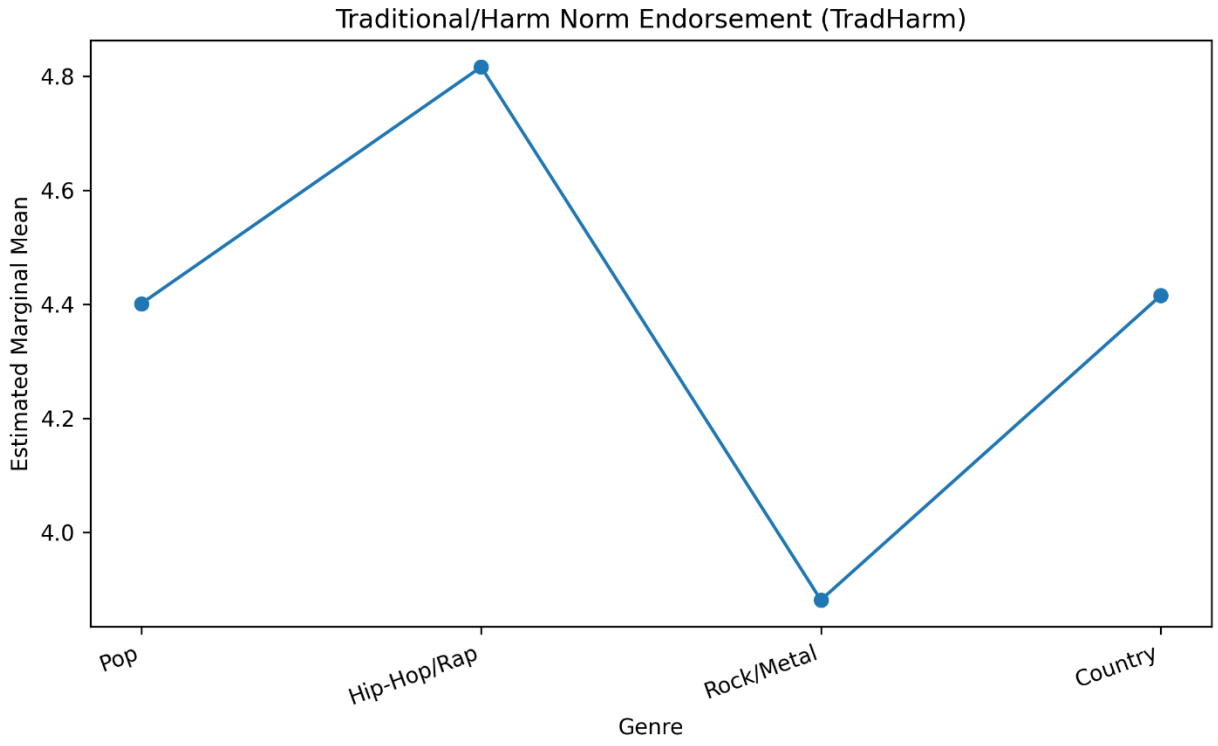


Figure F4. Estimated marginal means of state self-objectification (SelfObj) across four genres (Pop, Hip-Hop/Rap, Rock/Metal, Country) for Study 3 (N = 166). Higher scores indicate greater state self-objectification.

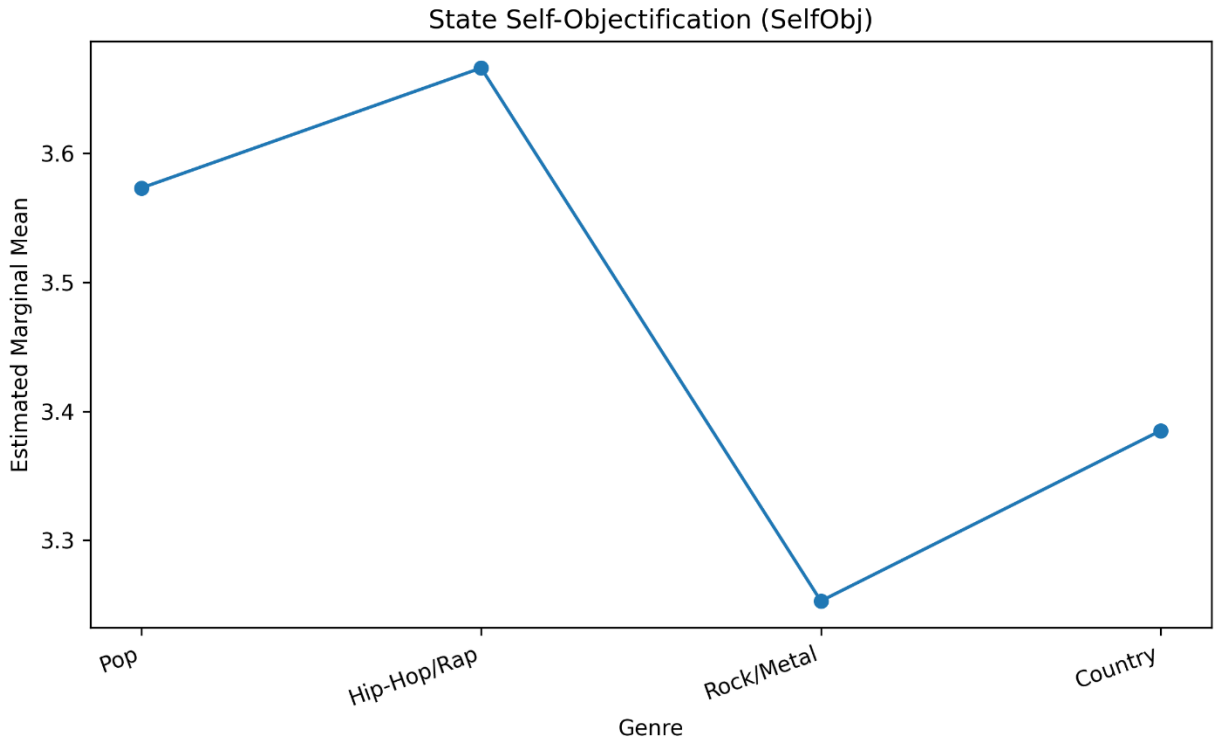


Figure F5. Estimated marginal means of perceived objectification (Obj) by genre and condition (control vs. CMD primer) in Study 3, controlling for age (N = 166). Higher scores indicate greater perceived objectification.

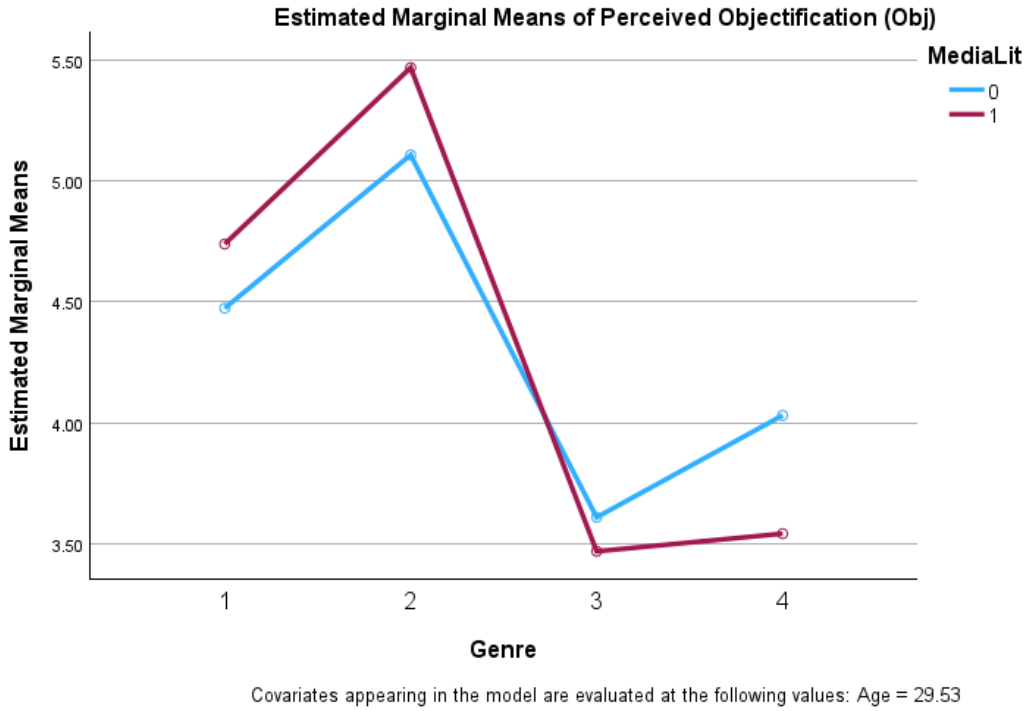


Figure F6. Relationship between age and CMD decoding (average across genres) in Study 3 (N = 166). Higher scores indicate greater constructivist media decoding.

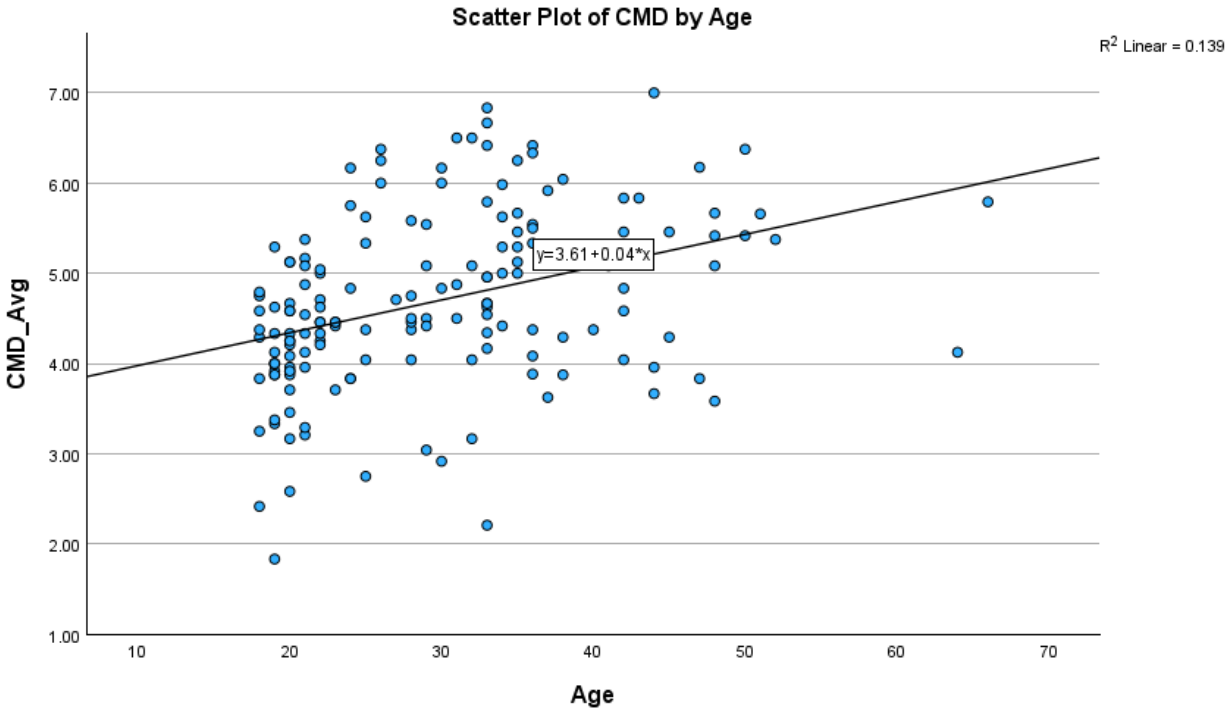


Figure F7. Estimated marginal means of perceived objectification by genre and condition in Study 3 (N = 166), controlling for age. Higher scores indicate greater perceived objectification of the female performer.

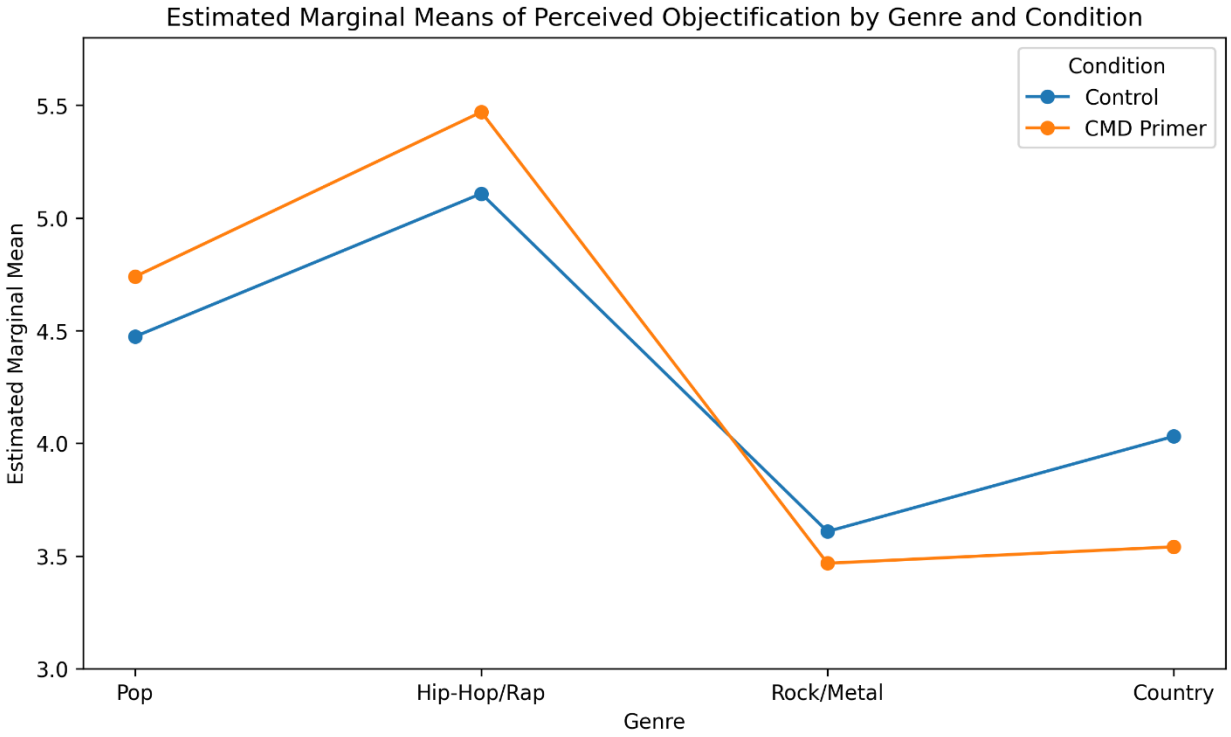


Figure F8. Study 3 mixed experimental design. Participants were randomly assigned to either the control or CMD primer condition, then viewed one video from each of four genres before completing outcome measures.

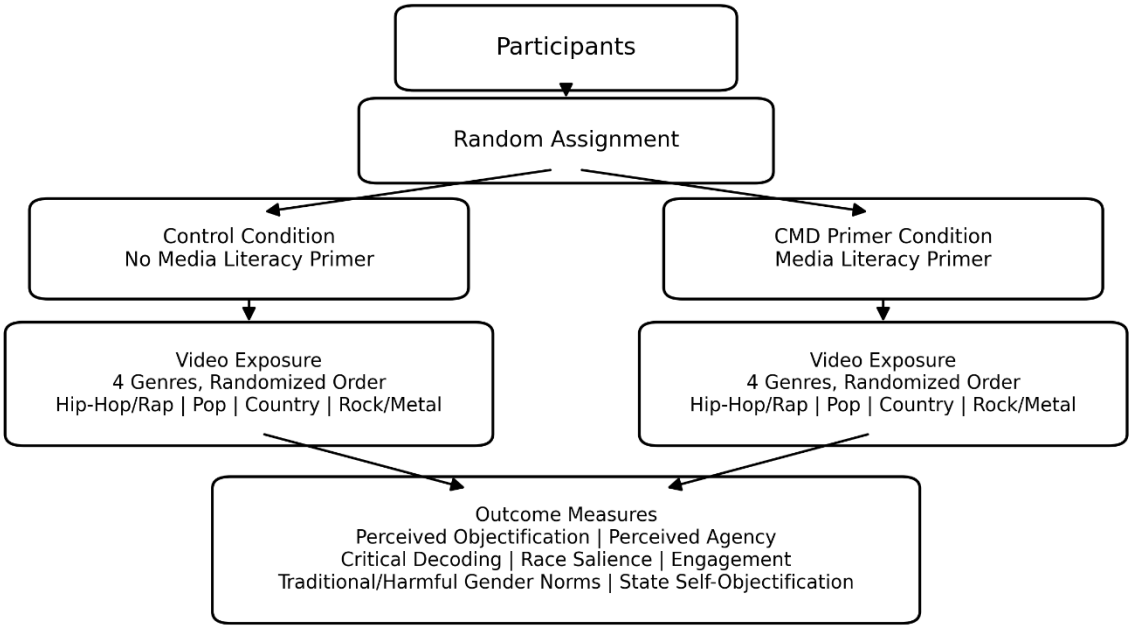


Figure F8. Study 3 Mixed Experimental Design

APPENDIX G

Music Video Sample and Study 3 Stimuli by Genre

Hip-Hop/Rap

Artist	Song Title	Year	YouTube URL
Megan Thee Stallion	Hiss	2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVgCLQ_JQfU
Nicki Minaj	Super Freaky Girl	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5uAR9w7LBg
Doja Cat	Woman	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxW5yuzVi8w
Ice Spice	Princess Diana	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMq-I0dejjE
Cardi B	Up	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCiBgLOcuKU
Saweetie ft. Doja Cat	Best Friend	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xJUCsyMQes
City Girls	Twerkulator	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62-iVogg5jA
Lizzo ft. Cardi B	Rumors	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4P9XUrniiK4
Snow Tha Product	Look at Me	2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKFVWslPEHM
Chika	High Rises	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzJxo1I8a6c
Ruby Ibarra	Here	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZpdTh8ZsDo
Latto	Big Energy	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8GpG8C0YzA
Nathy Peluso	DELITO	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfFvBp5ocHo

BB Trickz	Missionsuicida	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIWoqc00EPI
Doechii	What It Is	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phtcAd8j6Ro
Sexyy Red	SkeeYee	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Id5Mh2T7rWc
Bhad Bhabie	Ms. Whitman	2025	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yo7_px4vXYQ
BIA	Whole Lotta Money	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhpBInq5p8M
Tierra Whack	Link	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONR1doMju80
Awich	Queendom	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zUq_5ia1sI
Megan Thee Stallion	Thot Shit	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KynkMn5Hv3Q
Hitkidd & GloRilla	FNF Lets Go	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ww6ykF2ktaI
Kaliii	Area Codes	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3pLoVClX9M
Cardi B ft. Megan Thee Stallion	WAP	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hsm4poTWjMs
Lizzo	About Damn Time	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXXxciRUMzE
Saweetie	My Best	2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4DbcvEcujA

Pop

Artist	Song Title	Year	YouTube URL
Taylor Swift	Cruel Summer	2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrKQvyXpNgc
Sabrina Carpenter	Espresso	2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVli-tstM5E
Billie Eilish	What Was I Made For?	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cW8VLC9nnTo
Olivia Rodrigo	Vampire	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RlPNh_PBZb4
Ariana Grande	Yes and?	2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eB6txyhHFG4
Dua Lipa	Dance the Night	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiC1rgCPmUQ
Doja Cat	Paint the Town Red	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4_9TFeMfJE
Charli XCX	Good Ones	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjAuUXdSFaM
Lana Del Rey	Candy Necklace	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2e0H6MUWyU
Rina Sawayama	Hold the Girl	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikkfuGeAfYg
Tate McRae	Greedy	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=To4SWGZkEPk

Bebe Rexha	Heart Wants What It Wants	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrGhXL9zCPQ
Kali Uchis	Moonlight	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBukbgTN0cE
RosalÃa	DespechÃ¡	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5g2hT4GmAGU
Gracie Abrams	Where do we go now?	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TydmNr585qY
Miley Cyrus	Flowers	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7KNmW9a75Y
Camila Cabello ft. Ed Sheeran	Bam Bam	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8VfKZCOo_I
Halsey	So Good	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6tv11_KMiM
NIKI	High School in Jakarta	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4CF4km1rUQ
FKA twigs	Tears in the Club	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZTKjzAJLCk
Zara Larsson	Can't Tame Her	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNcX0qqnE2Y
JhenÃ© Aiko	Lead the Way	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K08o44cr3ww

Becky Hill ft. David Guetta	Remember	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhCxrUEW3PM
Anne-Marie ft. Shania Twain	Unhealthy	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nc3dBG1NesE
Jessie Ware	Free Yourself	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aD7F6M9fsms
Normani	Motivation	2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKXSh14svlQ

Country

Artist	Song Title	Year	YouTube URL
Lainey Wilson	Heart Like A Truck	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNReepITjN0
Maren Morris	The Bones	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvPMVKUI9go
Gabby Barrett	I Hope	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcCH6JpcK5w
Kelsea Ballerini ft. Kenny Chesney	Half of My Hometown	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abYaq2tWGYs
Carly Pearce	Next Girl	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5KKh5gFock
Miranda Lambert	Bluebird	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUB8ogvze_8
Ingrid Andress	More Hearts Than Mine	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_A8Zjwr9m0
Tenille Arts	Somebody Like That	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX-S5dwsTVA
Ashley McBryde	One Night Standards	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3LLA6vNcQk
Kaia Kater	The Right One	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0O7GB77pUY
Hailey Whitters	Everything She Ain't	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miC3hoAaqKc

Valerie Ponzio	Just a Bordertown	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZosrTZnxWPo
Mickey Guyton	How You Love Someone	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrLm3nANX88
Reyna Roberts	Pretty Little Devils	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVmBmsn69B8
Chapel Hart	You Can Have Him Jolene	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lizBVO4MWFA
Tiera Kennedy	Found It in You	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrfO8LPRRk4
Andrea Vasquez	Reverse	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKhkg0IJnoA
Raye Zaragoza	Fight Like a Girl	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubDIF1G57a4
Kassi Ashton	Dates in Pickup Trucks	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFT4IbfV0u8
Caylee Hammack	Small Town Hypocrite	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9L9obo3cuas

Joy Oladokun	Changes	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3LA6S2IyvE
Lindsay Ell	wAnt me back	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y065nyQJ1u4
Allison Russell ft. Brandi Carlile	You're Not Alone	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHzPT6bCGoQ
Maddie & Tae	Die from a Broken Heart	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xbaoi-lifOM
Brooke Eden	No Shade	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAoJWJPTsVg
Amber Lawrence	Live A Country Song	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lK3-ZT5M43E

Rock/Metal

Artist	Song Title	Year	YouTube URL
Paramore	This Is Why	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIYJ7VaSxYY
Halestorm	Back From The Dead	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srT0pgC_yto
Evanescence	Better Without You	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgRClfCU1ZE
The Pretty Reckless	Death by Rock and Roll	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P87N1qsoERI
In This Moment	The Purge	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soVg7yjNG5s
Spiritbox	Circle With Me	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0WzT0OJ-E0
PVRIS	Monster	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvHjUpHTfO4
Lizzy Hale ft. Amy Lee	Break In	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUuVReJSrc4
Jinjer	Vortex	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AiaOSGZTwtY
Nightwish	Noise	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LczGSoibRe8
Within Temptation	The Purge	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoBIQkL4r0s
Lacuna Coil	Layers of Time	2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGSed4hnEv8

Santigold	Disparate Youth	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIMMZQJ1H6E
The Warning	Choke	2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlOy0XbFVlM
Rina Sawayama	STFU!	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XojM2D3F-Dc
Elis Paprika & The Black Pilgrims	Mi CorazÃ³n	2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnMMETv21v4
Rachel Chinouriri	All I Ever Asked	2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QXSnc_9OuU
Liv Kristine ft. Fernando Ribeiro	River of Diamonds	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLXj-eixGKo
Tarja Turunen ft. Marko Hietala	Left on Mars	2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TgQOj3rwzE
Delain	Ghost House Heart	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfP_OhLQvOE
Brass Against	Umbra	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9NNZ3bqcgg
Babymetal ft. Poppy	from me to u	2025	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qayP_YUrf9I

Battle Beast	No More Hollywood Endings	2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZzhUPe-Bck
Unleash The Archers	Abyss	2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bGmjnkDTTI
Sasami	Honeycrash	2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAMUs4F01g8
Vixen	Red	2023	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_VP7E3tUFM

APPENDIX H

Table I1

Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Objectification by Genre

Genre	Mean	SD
Pop	4.601	1.576
Hip-Hop/Rap	5.281	1.615
Rock/Metal	3.542	1.912
Country	3.797	1.861

Table I2

ANCOVA Results for Perceived Objectification

Effect	F	p	Partial η^2
Genre	29.731	< .001	.158
Genre × Age	12.492	< .001	.073
Genre × Condition	3.067	.028	.019

Between-Subjects

Effect	F	p	Partial η^2
Age	36.477	< .001	.188

Effect	F	p	Partial η^2
Condition	0.000	.996	.000

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW IRB APPROVAL



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: December 23, 2025 **IRB#:** 19079

Principal Investigator: Glenn Alan Flansburg

Approval Date: 12/22/2025

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: From Screen To Self: Gender, Race, and the Objectification of Female Performers In Music Videos across Four Genres

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Eric Pennello, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX J

SURVEY IRB APPROVAL

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: December 23, 2025 **IRB#:** 19301

Principal Investigator: Glenn Alan Flansburg

Approval Date: 12/22/2025

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: From Screen To Self: Gender, Race, and the Objectification of Female Performers In Music Videos across Four Genres

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

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- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,



Eric Pennello, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board