



Empowerment Sold Separately: Two Experiments Examine the Effects of Ostensibly Empowering Beauty Advertisements on Women's Empowerment and Self-Objectification

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Abstract

Empowerment-themed advertisements are becoming an attractive marketing strategy for companies due to their popularity among female consumers, but there is no known empirical work examining their effectiveness at increasing women's felt empowerment. The explicit narrative of these ostensibly empowering advertisements seems empowering, but the visual messages still resemble traditionally objectifying campaigns, which have been known to lead to objectification in women. This series of two experiments measures the effects of nominally empowering messages on women's post-exposure feelings of empowerment and self-objectification. In Experiment 1, 135 U.S. college women were randomly assigned to view ostensibly empowering beauty advertisements, traditional beauty advertisements, or control advertisements. They then completed a measure of state objectification and participated in a 3-min public speaking exercise as a measure of apparent empowerment. In Experiment 2, a more diverse sample of 326 U.S. women completed an online version of the study with a new measure of felt empowerment. Results of both experiments indicated higher state objectification following exposure to traditional beauty advertisements as compared to control advertisements, with some evidence indicating that the ostensibly empowering beauty advertisements also primed state objectification. Reported self-efficacy (Experiment 1) and felt empowerment (Experiment 2) did not differ by condition, but speech performance was judged as more empowered for individuals who saw the ostensibly empowering ad. We discuss potential explanations for the findings and offering suggestions for improving the effectiveness of these advertisements while decreasing risk of self-objectification.

Keywords Empowerment · Objectification · Advertising · Mass media · Body image · Consumerism

In 2004, Dove responded to reports of women's discontent with idealized representations of beauty in advertising with the creation of their "Real Beauty" campaign (Deighton 2008). As part of the campaign, Dove began featuring a diversity of body types and ages in their advertising with the goal of increasing body satisfaction in women (see

Dove 2019). The company's efforts were rewarded with financial success and increased brand exposure, and some estimates suggest that Dove's revenue has almost doubled since the launch of the campaign in 2004 (Neff 2014). Short video ads such as the "Real Beauty Sketches" have been shared virally by potential consumers on YouTube and social media channels, and in 2013 *Business Insider* declared "Real Beauty Sketches" the most virally shared video of all time (Stampler 2013).

Since 2004, many other companies have followed Dove's example and used feminist messages to appeal to female consumers. After decades of seemingly unapologetic objectification of women in advertising (Kilbourne 2010), we are now seeing advertising strategies that speak to women's empowerment with commercials that draw attention to gender stereotypes (e.g., Always' [feminine hygiene products] "Throw Like a Girl", Pantene's [hair care products] "#Shinestrong campaign"), champion individuals who have succeeded

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against all odds (Under Armour's [clothing, footwear, and sporting equipment] "I Will What I Want"), and encourage women to defy societal gender pressures to follow their dreams (CoverGirl's [cosmetics] "Girls Can" campaign). On the surface, these ostensibly empowering beauty advertisements seem progressive because they take a step away from the objectifying ideals of young (Goodman et al. 2008), flawless (Morris and Nichols 2013), underweight (de Freitas et al. 2018), and digitally edited (Reaves et al. 2004) models who are often central to beauty advertising. Whereas the Dove "Real Beauty" movement encouraged women to love their bodies (Dove 2019), these empowerment-themed advertisements take the message a step further and encourage women to love *themselves*.

Messages of empowerment and objectification, though seemingly in conflict, are frequently presented simultaneously in these media messages. For example, the #ShineStrong series by Pantene addresses feminist issues such as double standards for women in the workplace but features models who are conventionally beautiful. The Under Armour commercial featuring Misty Copeland [a ballet dancer] includes a narrative of triumph over setbacks and adversity, but visual images still contain framing in line with traditional critiques of objectification. Specifically, in the 30-s broadcast version of the campaign, audiences see a brief glimpse of Copeland's entire figure in the first frame, but Copeland's face does not appear again until nearly half-way through the video. Although these ostensibly empowering advertisements contain an explicit message of empowerment, no known work has been done to examine their effectiveness at increasing women's felt empowerment. The current study examines the psychological effects that these advertisements may have on women's levels of self-objectification and felt empowerment after exposure.

Media Use and Self-Objectification

Scholars have suggested that exposure to idealized images in mass media is harmful for women for over three decades (Kilbourne 2010), and self-objectification is one of the mechanisms scholars have used to explain media contributions to body dissatisfaction for women (Harper and Tiggemann 2008). Objectification theory suggests that women's lived experiences are largely affected by cultural representations of the body and that visual images of women in media often detach the body, body parts, or sexual functions from the individual they represent (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Objectified bodies are depicted as existing for the evaluation, pleasure, and consumption by others, and this objectified representation shifts agency from the subject to the viewer. Living in a culture that sexualizes bodies and values them primarily for their aesthetic and sexual qualities can lead individuals to internalize this objectified perspective, a process referred to as self-

objectification (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Individuals who self-objectify adopt a preoccupation with their appearance and consider their body from a third-person perspective. Instead of thinking of the body as a subject with agency, they tend to think of their bodies as an object to be critiqued and evaluated by themselves and others. Self-objectification has been measured at the state and trait levels, with state objectification transpiring on a context-dependent basis and trait objectification occurring relatively consistently within an individual (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997).

Whereas initial studies identified correlational links between self-objectification and frequent exposure to magazines and television shows depicting a thin body ideal, scholars later demonstrated causal evidence through studies involving experimental manipulations and longitudinal data (for a meta-analysis, see Tiggemann 2014). A longitudinal study by Aubrey (2006) suggests that long-term exposure to sexually objectifying television is related to increased trait self-objectification in female participants over time, indicating that the mass media contributes to the prevalence of appearance concerns as a part of women's self-image. Similarly, a study by Vandenbosch and Eggermont (2016) linked both mass media and social media use to increased self-objectification over time in a sample of female Dutch adolescents. A recent meta-analysis by Karsay et al. (2018) found a robust relationship between media use and increased levels of self-objectification and reported that this effect occurred across ages and ethnicities. This relationship between media viewing and increased state objectification seems to be particularly prevalent in individuals who are higher in trait social comparison, higher in trait objectification, or lower in self-esteem or self-efficacy (Tiggemann 2014).

Higher levels of self-objectification have been linked with both harmful psychological processes such as decreased self-esteem and depression (Thompson et al. 1995), decreased physical self-esteem (Harrison and Hefner 2014), and health risks, including disordered eating (Harrison 2000; Tylka and Hill 2004; Vandenbosch and Eggermont 2016). Additionally, women who evaluate themselves primarily on the basis of appearance have been shown to perceive themselves as less competent than those who evaluate themselves on other dimensions (Gapinski et al. 2003), thus this process may serve to limit opportunities for women.

State objectification is associated with decreases in cognitive (Fredrickson et al. 1998; Quinn et al. 2006) and physical (Harrison and Fredrickson 2003) performance. These findings have been explained by the cognitive load hypothesis, which suggests that as women self-objectify, attention is split between the task at hand and self-monitoring. The cognitive load hypothesis has been supported by experimental research, with researchers finding that individuals higher in trait self-objectification who were placed in a

highly objectifying condition were slower at a word completion task than those who were low in trait self-objectification or those placed in a low-objectification condition (Gay and Castano 2010). Because self-objectification leads to negative psychological, physical, and cognitive process, it is generally thought to be a harmful process.

In the context of media research, tensions between objectification and empowerment have primarily been studied through shifts from sexually passive to sexually empowered representation, and there is little research on media messages that are intended to be generally empowering. No longer just passive objects of the male gaze, many women in advertising are now portrayed as agentic individuals in control of their own sexuality (Gill 2008). Although this change may seem progressive, sexual empowerment has been shown to lead to mixed outcomes for women. For example, a correlational survey by Erchull and Liss (2014) found that measures of sexual empowerment were associated with both positive outcomes (e.g., sexual self-esteem and sexual assertiveness) and negative outcomes, including endorsement of sex as power and having faked an orgasm.

In an experiment by Halliwell et al. (2011), undergraduate women were exposed to sexually passive images of women, sexually agentic images, or control advertisements. Interestingly, they found that whereas women in both the sexually agentic and sexually passive conditions reported increases in weight dissatisfaction, women in the sexually agentic condition reported higher levels of self-objectification than did women in the other conditions. In contrast to these findings, a study by Pennell and Behm-Morawitz (2015) found that exposure to sexualized female superheroes, as compared to sexualized-victims, led to a higher prioritization of body competency items, thus decreasing state objectification. Overall, the findings in relation to sexual empowerment and objectification are varied, and scholars have described complicated relationships between women's bodies and power.

Ostensibly Empowering Advertising

Since 2013 we have been seeing a growth in ostensibly empowering advertising (ETA), coined “femvertising” by SheKnows Media (2016) in the United States. This marketing movement contains ostensibly empowering messages and seeks to merge profit goals with feminist-themed messages (SheKnows Media 2016). Pantene was one of the first companies to employ this advertising approach with their #ShineStrong campaign, launched in 2013, but several other U.S. companies have since adopted this approach. In particular, companies which have historically been criticized for their objectification of women, such as those in the beauty industry, have been among the most frequent adaptors of this strategy.

Whereas companies such as Dove began creating body-positive messages in the early 2000s, ostensibly empowering advertising moves past the pro-body message and tackles other issues women face, such as gender stereotypes and discrimination. The focus of these messages, as well as the types of companies that have employed them, vary greatly, but they share a focus on employing female talent and messages that intend to inspire and encourage female consumers (SheKnows Media 2016).

The motive behind ostensibly empowering advertising has been questioned, and even described as a more “palatable” feminism (Zeisler 2016), but there is clear evidence of the market potential of advertisements with empowerment-focused messages (Abitbol 2016; Akestam et al. 2017; Kapoor and Munjal 2017). Susan Wojcicki, CEO of YouTube [American video-sharing website], indicated in a 2016 report that advertisements containing empowerment themes were 2.5 times less likely to be skipped, and 80% more likely to be commented on or shared by women aged 18–34 than similar advertisements without empowerment themes (Wojcicki 2016). A consumer survey by SheKnows Media (2016) found that 53% of 3058 women reported choosing to purchase products because they liked how the women were portrayed in the company's advertising and that nearly half of women surveyed had stopped purchasing a product due to a negative representation of women by that company. Additionally, 47% of women in their sample reported sharing a TV or print ad that contained a pro-female message. The same survey found that 88% of women and 74% of the 764 men surveyed remembered seeing recent advertisements that featured positive female representation, indicating that these messages were both prevalent in the market and memorable to participants.

With media literacy skills, women learn to remain guarded against media representations of the thin-ideal (McLean et al. 2016), such as those used in traditional beauty advertisements. It is possible that advertisements structured with empowerment themes bypass critical reflection of audience members due to the belief that empowerment-themed advertisements are progressive and beneficial to women. In line with this speculation, Akestam et al. (2017) found that exposure to advertisements using less stereotypical representations (e.g., “femvertisements”) led to higher brand appeal than did exposure to traditional advertisements. Specifically, they found that the relationship between advertising exposure and attitude toward the advertisement was mediated by perceived stereotypicality and psychological reactance (Akestam et al. 2017). In a meta-analysis by Want (2009), the effect sizes for self-objectification were largest when participants were asked to view the advertisements through a dimension other than appearance. This suggests that the most objectifying advertisements may be those that contain an explicitly non-objectifying message along with an implicit emphasis on beauty and body ideals—the structure of most ETAs.

To our knowledge there is no published work that empirically and systematically evaluates the empowering or objectifying capacities of empowerment-themed media messages. In order to understand the empowering potential of these advertisements, it can be helpful to understand how empowerment is discussed in other contexts, such as organizational psychology, feminist literature, and social work.

Empowerment

Empowerment refers to an individual's ability to gain mastery over their goals and outcomes (Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988) and control over resources and decisions (Narayan 2005). It can be described on both structural and psychological levels, and although the levels can be conceptualized independently, they are also interactive (Narayan 2005). Just as an individual who has high access to resources (i.e., structural empowerment) but is low in psychological empowerment may fail due to lack of goal pursuit, individuals who are low in structural empowerment but high in felt empowerment may also fail due to a lack of support and available resources. Both levels are necessary for long-term success, but for the purposes of our paper, we will focus on the psychological (i.e., felt) level of empowerment because this is the level most ETAs attempt to target.

Understanding the psychological level of empowerment is warranted because generalized felt empowerment has been identified as an important contributor toward subjective well-being (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005). Situation-specific empowerment has been shown to lead to beneficial outcomes such as positive emotions (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005), increased advocacy for personal goals and needs (Zimmerman 1995), workplace effectiveness (Spreitzer 1995), and lower rates of employee burnout (Livne and Rashkovits 2018). Prior experience with achieving one's goals can lead to greater feelings of psychological empowerment, thus psychological empowerment may be cyclical (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005).

Just as exposure to violent media content can promote short-term aggressive behavior via priming mechanisms, arousal, and an aggressive-negative affect state (Bushman 1998; Bushman et al. 2015), exposure to empowering media may promote empowered actions, and it may help individuals who have access to structural empowerment to first begin to achieve their goals. To use the media and aggression example again, although there are multiple factors that may influence a child's use of violent behaviors, eliminating exposure to violent media is an easy way to eliminate a risk factor. Similarly, exposure to empowering media may only be one contributing

factor to an individual's feelings of psychological empowerment, but it may provide an immediate boost that inspires goal-seeking, whereas structural empowerment may take generations to acquire.

The Current Research

The relationship between mass media messages and self-objectification has been studied extensively by scholars, but to our knowledge there is no research on ostensibly empowering media messages. Furthermore, there is little work that examines the relationship between objectification and felt empowerment when the two constructs are presented together. The present study uses an experimental design to examine the psychological effects of ostensibly empowering media while extending what we know about media and self-objectification. Experiment 1 provided initial evidence of the effects of these advertisements, whereas we conducted Experiment 2 (a) to replicate the results of Experiment 1 and (b) to measure felt empowerment using a different dependent variable. Experiment 2 was intended to address some of the limitations in Experiment 1, including a more diverse sample and a new measure of felt empowerment.

Because little research exists on women's responses to empowering media, we proposed four hypotheses and a research question. (a) Women exposed to traditional beauty advertisements will report greater state objectification than will women exposed to control advertisements (Hypothesis 1a), and women exposed to ostensibly empowering beauty advertisements will report greater state objectification than will women exposed to control advertisements (Hypothesis 1b). (b) We asked: How will state objectification of women exposed to traditional beauty advertisements compare to that of women exposed to ostensibly empowering beauty advertisements? (c) Women who are exposed to ostensibly empowering beauty ads will report higher levels of state self-efficacy/felt empowerment than will women in the other conditions (Hypothesis 2). (d) Women who are exposed to ostensibly empowering beauty ads will be judged as more empowered in a speaking task than will women in the other two conditions (Hypothesis 3). (e) State objectification will mediate the effect of condition on speaking exercise performance, such that individuals who self-objectify will exhibit worse performance (Hypothesis 4). (In addition, we tested trait objectification as a potential moderator between condition and state objectification. The results of this test were not significant, and a full description of the results can be found in the [online supplement](#).)

Experiment 1

Method

Participants

The present study was approved by the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences IRB prior to recruitment and data collection. Participants were 135 U.S. female college students enrolled in an introductory communications course, and they received credit for participation. According to self-reports, 74% (100) were non-Hispanic White, 13% (17) were Asian/Asian-American, 4% (5) were Biracial/Multiracial; 3% (4) were non-Hispanic Black, 3% (4) were Hispanic, 3 participants did not report their race/ethnicity, 1 participant was Pacific Islander, and a final participant identified as “other.” Ages in this sample ranged from 18 to 22 ($M = 18.66$, $SD = .82$). Participants reported their family household income, with 5.9% (8) reporting incomes below \$30,000, 8.9% (12) reporting incomes between \$50,000–\$70,000, 14.8% (20) reporting incomes between \$70,000–\$100,000, 27.4% (37) reporting incomes between \$100,000–\$200,000, 54% reporting incomes above \$200,000, and 3% (4) choosing not to report family income. BMI was calculated from participants’ reported height and weight, and it ranged from 17.51 to 45.54, with 14 participants excluded from analyses using BMI due to a procedural error in which early respondents did not report their weight ($n = 121$, $M = 22.3$, $SD = 4.02$). In total, 4.4% (6) participants were underweight, 76.3% (103) were normal weight, 5.2% (7) were overweight, and 3.7% (5) were obese according to conventional BMI classifications. Three participants were eliminated from the speaking task analyses due to an inability to verify that participant ID was correctly matched with the corresponding speaking results.

Stimuli

Participants viewed a 12-min selection from the movie *Koyaanisqatsi* interspersed with 4 total minutes of condition-specific advertising for a total exposure time of 16 min. The *Koyaanisqatsi* movie clips were identical across conditions and depicted scenes from nature and busy city streets, with no dialogue. Although some of the movie clips contained images of people, these people were presented at a distance and in large groups and should not have triggered body awareness. Advertisements from each condition were randomly ordered and then edited into the neutral video at roughly equal intervals to reflect common practice on sites like YouTube or Hulu [streaming services for television programs]. Total advertising exposure time was matched across all conditions, and the ostensibly empowering beauty and traditional beauty conditions were matched by company type,

product type, contemporaneousness, and models’ age and ethnicity. Stimuli in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition featured models with more diverse body-types than the traditional beauty condition, although both conditions primarily included thin and conventionally attractive models.

Ostensibly Empowering Beauty Condition The four advertisements in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition were chosen due to their emphasis on women’s general (not sexual) empowerment and their classification into the genre of “femvertising” (Ciambriello 2014; Griner 2014; Muller 2015). Specific advertisements included Under Armour’s “I Will What I Want” commercial, two Pantene advertisements from the #ShineStrong series (“Stop Apologizing” and “Double Standards”), and a Covergirl [cosmetics] advertisement from the *Girls Can* series. As described in the introduction section on Empowerment Themed Advertisements, the Under Armour “I Will What I Want” advertisement (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rtX91YGaBXw>) featured the adult Misty Copeland dancing solo on a stage as the voice of a narrator (presumably the young Copeland herself) reads a rejection letter that she received as a child aloud. The Pantene advertisement “Stop Apologizing” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcGKxLJ4ZGI>) presents eight models across seven scenarios in which women apologize for benign actions such as asking a question, using a shared armrest, or being interrupted. The advertisement then flips the narrative to display alternatives in which the women used alternative phrases resulting in positive feedback. The “Double Standards” advertisement from the #ShineStrong series (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEAnYmpBxFw>), also produced by Pantene, highlights double standards in the workplace, such as the notion that men are labeled as the “boss” whereas women performing the same role and exhibiting the same behaviors are labeled as “bossy.” The “Double Standards” advertisement features four female models of varying race and ethnicities. A final advertisement from Covergirl titled “Girls Can” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-5WoDzdMr8&feature=youtu.be>) features six celebrities as they discuss their success in careers that defied gendered stereotypes, such as becoming a rockstar, comedian, or a hockey player. The celebrities list a range of activities in which girls are discouraged from participating, with the ultimate message that “girls can” do these activities.

The specific plots of the advertisements varied, but all advertisements used in our empowerment condition were produced by cosmetic, haircare, or clothing companies, and all emphasized ostensibly empowering narratives that challenged traditional gender stereotypes. The advertisements depicted models from a variety of ethnicities, body shapes and sizes, and celebrity statuses. With the exception of the Under Armour advertisement, which included specific references to ballerina Misty Copeland’s figure, the stimuli in this condition

did not explicitly reference beauty standards, and none of these advertisements featured a specific product.

Traditional Beauty Condition The five advertisements used as stimuli in the traditional beauty condition were from companies analogous to those in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition but included explicit endorsements of beauty ideals and products in place of empowerment-themed content. The advertisements for this genre were typically shorter in duration (30 s rather than one minute) than the empowerment-themed beauty ads, thus the exposure time was matched for total duration rather than number of advertisements.

To the extent that was possible, the advertisements in the traditional beauty condition were matched with advertising characteristics in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition. For example, the Under Armour advertisement used in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition was matched with an advertisement for Nike [athletic wear] that featured a single female dancer in the traditional beauty condition (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXruP7R-NE&feature=youtu.be>). Both the Under Armour and Nike commercials alternated visual framing between close-up and full-body shots. The Nike model was comparably slim to Copeland, but less muscular. Although both advertisements featured dancers, only the ostensibly empowering advertisement featured the empowerment-focused narrative.

As another example, the Covergirl “Girls Can” advertisement in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition featured a diverse range of celebrities such as Ellen DeGenerous [actor and television talk-show host] discussing the societal limitations placed on women. The comparable traditional beauty Covergirl advertisement (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWp297iE6lw>) featured images of celebrity Katy Perry [singer], also a celebrity figure, but focused exclusively on her make-up and appearance. Other commercials in this condition included a Maybelline [cosmetics] commercial for “dream liquid moose” that claimed to help the viewer create smooth, perfect, “airbrushed” skin, and a Pantene commercial for “miracle” hair serum (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVsSx0xy3c8>) that transformed an everyday woman in pajamas into a celebrity with the final message “new hair new you.” A second Pantene commercial in this condition featured a beauty blogger as she describes the benefits of the “Aqua Light” conditioner (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pTGAs0qnDA&feature=youtu.be>). All commercials in this condition focused on a single model (skin tones and ethnicities varied across advertisements), although the Maybelline commercial (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WocyqzdddzE&feature=youtu.be>) introduced a second model near the end of the clip, and the Pantene commercial presented an additional 12 characters in supplemental roles such as limo drivers, photographers, or fans.

Control Condition The control condition advertisements were commercials for gender-neutral products that did not include female actors. Specific imagery included advertisements for: Net10 [wireless services] (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTBzny8sso0&feature=youtu.be>), which contained colorful sketches illustrating the affordances of the wireless network, an All-State [insurance] commercial (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsasTuSQd8M&feature=youtu.be>) featuring spokesperson Dennis Haysbert discussing humorous takes on holiday-related accidents; A Geico [insurance] commercial (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTAWPBG623A&feature=youtu.be>) that featured the cartoon gecko spokesperson discussing car insurance as he approaches the nose of Mt. Rushmore; an iPhone [cell phone] commercial (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4_D_XkUJIA&feature=youtu.be) depicting a discussion between Siri [an automated helper] and Cortana; a Microsoft commercial (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pw9AkNI1Oak&feature=youtu.be>) advertising the Surface computer; a Merrill Lynch [stock broker] commercial (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogyRjFzUz5k&feature=youtu.be>) featuring themes of innovation, and a commercial for Apple [computer] (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMO1NI19_p4&feature=youtu.be) featuring the Macbook Pro adorned with various stickers. As with the other conditions, advertisements in the control condition ranged in length from 30 s to 90 s, and total exposure time was matched at 4 min.

Prior Exposure to Advertisements

External validity was prioritized in the selection of the advertisements, and all advertisements used in our study were widely circulated and available on YouTube at the time of the study. Only 65 (23.8%) participants reported that they had seen the advertisements presented in their condition prior to the study, 60 (22%) had not seen the advertisements before, and 7 (2.6%) were unsure. A Chi-squared test of independence was performed to see whether there were differences in prior exposure to advertisements across conditions, and this test was not significant, $\chi^2(4, n = 122) = 7.70, p = .31$.

Procedure and Measures

Felt empowerment can be conceptualized as an umbrella term that encompasses concepts such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, and feelings of personal control (Narayan 2005). It is notoriously challenging to define and measure because it may manifest differently across individuals, and even across contexts within the same individual (Zimmerman 2000). We gave significant consideration to our operationalization of felt empowerment, and we ultimately chose to use a modified state self-efficacy measure to evaluate each participant’s internal

experience of empowerment. Judges' ratings of performance on a public speaking task were used as a measure of apparent empowerment. Although there are validated measures such as the Gender Empowerment Scale that can be used to measure women's levels of structural empowerment (see Charmes and Wieringa 2003, for discussion), these scales do not capture the individual's level of felt empowerment. Self-efficacy is conceptually related to empowerment (Zimmerman 2000), and we felt that it was the subcomponent of felt-empowerment that best captured what the advertisements were trying to inspire. Felt empowerment is most effective when it is acknowledged and appreciated by others, such as a job interview context. Thus, self-efficacy is only one component of felt empowerment, and it may not fully capture the participant's experience. In order to test apparent empowerment, we had participants perform the public speaking task in front of two female research assistants who were uninformed about experimental condition.

Participants were greeted by a female research assistant and then seated in a room with a single computer. Following a consent form, they answered items assessing their trait self-efficacy and trait self-objectification. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of the three conditions we described previously: ostensibly empowering beauty, traditional beauty, or control. After viewing these ads, participants completed a measure of state objectification (the Twenty Statements Test, Fredrickson et al. 1998), read instructions about the brief public speaking task they would complete, and then completed state self-efficacy scale modified to reflect feelings toward the public speaking task.

Following the self-efficacy measure, participants were met by a female research assistant who read scripted instructions and explained to each participant that they would be giving a 3-min presentation about their strengths and weaknesses to a panel of two research assistants, and they should think of the task as an interview to join the research team. Participants were informed that they should speak for the entire 3 min and that the research assistants would not be asking questions or speaking. They then completed the 3-min speaking task to the panel of two female research assistants. Following the speaking exercise, participants were escorted back to their computer to finish the online questionnaire. The final portion of the questionnaire contained demographic questions including each participant's age, height, weight, race/ethnicity, and family income. Participants were thanked and dismissed and then debriefed via email after all data had been collected.

Trait Objectification Trait self-objectification was measured through the Self-Objectification Questionnaire developed by Fredrickson et al. (1998). This validated scale allows participants to rank-order ten statements about their physical self-concept in order of personal importance. It includes statements representing functional values (e.g., “When considering your

physical self-concept what rank do you assign to physical coordination?”) as well as aesthetic values (e.g., “When considering your physical self-concept what rank do you assign to physical attractiveness”). The final score is calculated by subtracting the sum of competency questions from the appearance questions. Potential scores range from -25 to $+25$, with higher scores representing higher importance placed on appearance, which is interpreted as higher trait self-objectification. For this sample ($n = 120$), the mean score was $-.87$ ($SD = 13.61$), indicating that there was a slight tendency toward lower trait objectification, but a one-sample t -test against zero indicated that the mean difference was not significantly different from baseline, $t(120) = -.70, p = .484$.

State Objectification State objectification was measured with the modified Twenty Statements Test (Fredrickson et al. 1998), with participants providing answers to complete the statement “I am...” 20 times. Following the procedure of Fredrickson et al. (1998), we coded the statements into five categories: 0 for references to body shape and size (e.g., “small,” “overweight,” “skinny,” etc.), 1 for other words describing physical appearance (e.g., “blonde,” “pretty,” “unattractive,” etc.), 2 for physical competence words (e.g., “strong,” “athletic”), 3 for traits and abilities (e.g., sister, mother, etc.), 4 for states or emotions (e.g., happy, sad, bored, etc.), and finally 5 for items that were ambiguous or otherwise not codeable. The state objectification score represents the sum of words coded as either 0 (body shape or size) or 1 (physical appearance). Statements that pertained to physical competency (e.g., “strong”; “athletic”) were not counted in the state objectification score. Scores in this sample ranged from 0 to 5 ($M = 1.19, SD = 1.19$), with the majority (63.6%, $n = 77$) of participants using either zero or one body word. Although these state objectification scores may at first seem low, similar values are commonly reported with other studies using the TST to measure state objectification following media exposure (Aubrey et al. 2009; Harrison and Fredrickson 2003).

Trait Self-Efficacy Trait Self-efficacy was measured using the New General Self-Efficacy scale (Chen et al. 2001). This scale consists of seven Likert-type questions that ask participants to rate how much they feel each statement applies to them on a scale of 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*). A sample item is: “Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well.” Most participants in the sample had relatively high trait self-efficacy ($M = 3.90, SD = .51, \alpha = .83$). Only 6 of 121 participants rated themselves at or below 3 on the scale, indicating a left-skewed distribution. To account for this skewedness, a standardized version of the variable using z-scores was created and used in the analysis.

State Self-Efficacy State self-efficacy was assessed after participants saw the stimulus materials and read the speaking task

instructions, but prior to completing the public speaking task. Participants were asked to rate statements related to perceived ability on a 7-point scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample statements include: “I’m certain I can make a good impression” and “Compared with other students in this study I will do well on the speaking task.” Scores for the state self-efficacy pre-test ranged from 1.57 to 6.86 ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.16$, $\alpha = .95$).

Apparent Empowerment Observers rated the participants’ performance on a 7-point scale, from 1 (*Not at All*) to 7 (*Extremely*), for the following nine adjectives: confident, awkward (reverse-coded), self-conscious (reverse-coded), poised, empowered, comfortable, scattered (reverse-coded), nervous (reverse-coded) and commanding/authoritative. Observers also answered (using the same 7-point scale) the following six statements: “I would want to work with this person on a group project,” “This person appeared to enjoy the speaking exercise,” “I would want this person to come speak to our class,” “This person was in control of the situation,” “This person ‘owned the room,’” and “This person presented herself well.” Prior to beginning data collection, the research team met to discuss the definitions of adjectives in the evaluation form as well as potential expressions of these behaviors. The judges were instructed not to ask the participants questions during the presentation unless the participant was silent for an extended time, in which case they asked generic questions or prompts (e.g., “please elaborate on...”).

Scores on all 15 statements were averaged to yield a composite score that ranged from 1 (*Least Empowered*) to 7 (*Most Empowered*). Actual scores ranged from 1.60 to 6.74 ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.31$), and Cronbach’s alpha for the 15 items across both judges was .78. Participants’ pre-speaking self-efficacy scores were positively correlated with observed empowerment, $r(120) = .43$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the judges’ evaluations were largely congruent with the participant’s internal experience of empowerment. A total of 11 female research assistants participated as judges for this interview exercise (two in each participant session). For this exercise, we were interested in the judges’ perceptions of empowerment, similar to the type that would occur in a job interview; thus, this was an appraisal task and not a coding exercise. As such, discrepancies between judges’ scores were anticipated and not discouraged. Although judges’ agreement was not a goal of the exercise, we calculated the ICC to measure agreement between the two coders using a one-way, mixed effects model for absolute agreement in scores as suggested by Hallgren (2012). The ICC for average empowerment scores across adjectives and statements between judges for this exercise was acceptable ($ICC = .63$), and thus judges tended to have similar opinions on observed empowerment.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for Experiment 1 can be found in Table 1. State self-efficacy scores positively correlated with trait self-efficacy and judges’ observations of empowerment, indicating that participants’ self-reported self-efficacy prior to the speaking task tended to correspond with both their trait-level reports of self-efficacy and the judges’ observations of empowerment. State self-efficacy and state objectification were positively correlated as well, indicating that in this sample, individuals who used more appearance-related words in the TST also expected to perform better on the public speaking task. Judges’ observations of empowerment were positively correlated with self-reported family income. Individuals who reported a higher family income tended to have a lower BMI, were more likely to report their race/ethnicity as White/Caucasian, and were younger.

State Self-Objectification

The main effect of advertising condition on state objectification was examined using an ANCOVA model with state objectification as the dependent variable; experimental condition as the predictor variable; and BMI, race/ethnicity, family income, and age included as covariates. There was a significant main effect for experimental condition, $F(2, 117) = 3.200$, $p = .045$, $\eta_p^2 = .055$, and pairwise comparisons among the three conditions showed that individuals in the traditional beauty condition ($n = 42$, $M = 1.55$, $SD = 1.27$) varied significantly from the control group ($n = 40$, $M = .95$, $SD = 1.13$; $p = .020$, $d = .50$, 95% CI $[-1.13, -.10]$). Individuals in the empowerment beauty condition ($n = 36$, $M = 1.06$, $SD = 1.09$) did not report significantly higher state objectification than did those in the control group ($p = .70$, $d = .10$, 95% CI $[-.65, .42]$) nor was there a significant difference between the empowerment beauty and traditional beauty conditions ($p = .062$, $d = .41$, 95% CI $[-1.05, .03]$). Age was not a significant predictor in the model, $F(1, 117) = .37$, $p = .545$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$, nor was BMI, $F(1, 117) = 1.73$, $p = .191$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$; race, $F(1, 117) = 1.22$, $p = .273$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$; or family income, $F(1, 117) = .31$, $p = .579$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$.

Participants exposed to traditional beauty advertisements used an average of .60 more objectifying words to describe themselves than those in the control group and .54 more words than the ostensibly empowering beauty condition, ultimately supporting Hypothesis 1a but not Hypothesis 1b. The difference in state objectification following exposure to empowerment-themed beauty ads as compared to traditional beauty ads was not significant, answering our research question.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables, Experiments 1 and 2

Variables	Experiment 1 <i>M (SD)</i>	Experiment 2 <i>M (SD)</i>	Correlations									
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Trait objectification	−.45 (13.28)	3.68 (11.11)	–	.02	−.09	.07	−.05	.03	−.10	−.03	.09	−.06
2. Trait self-Efficacy	3.92 (.49)	3.88 (.68)	.05	–	.03	.36**	.17	−.03	.11	−.03	.07	−.03
3. State objectification	1.15 (1.16)	1.67 (1.70)	−.09	.06	–	.22*	.13	.08	.05	−.03	−.08	.05
4. State SE / AECL	4.42 (1.14)	24.35 (29.20)	.11*	.55**	−.09	–	.32**	.13	.09	−.16	.02	.07
5. Apparent empowerment	4.38 (1.28)	–	–	–	–	–	–	.08	.21*	.13	−.11	.09
6. BMI	22.30 (4.02)	29.39 (23.62)	.00	−.12*	.08	−.05	–	–	−.24**	−.04	−.01	.07
7. Family income	3.89 (1.22)	.91 (1.23)	.02	.14*	.04	.08	–	−.01	–	.29**	−.21*	.04
8. Race/Ethnicity	.76 (.43)	.64 (.48)	−.16**	−.07	−.03	−.09	–	.04	.00	–	−.20*	.15
9. Age	18.68 (.80)	24.34 (3.85)	.04	.07	.00	.13*	–	−.03	.15**	.09	–	−.09
10. Prior exposure to Ads	2.44 (.60)	1.67 (.84)	.03	.04	.05	−.10	–	.03	−.02	−.11	−.21**	–

State SE / AECL represent self-efficacy in Experiment 1 and felt empowerment in Experiment 2. Observed empowerment represents speech performance and was only measured in Experiment 1. BMI was calculated from self-reported height/weight. Race/ethnicity coded Other = 0, White = 1. Correlations for Experiment 1's sample are reported above the diagonal of the correlation matrix; for Experiment 2, below

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

State Self-Efficacy

To learn whether condition had an impact on participant levels of self-efficacy (Hypothesis 2), we performed an ANCOVA using participants' state (pre-speech) self-efficacy as the dependent variable (control: $n = 42$, $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.47$; ostensibly empowering beauty: $n = 42$, $M = 4.48$, $SD = .82$; traditional beauty: $n = 46$, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.10$), and experimental condition as the predictor variable. Experimental condition was not a significant predictor of state self-efficacy when controlling for trait self-efficacy, race/ethnicity, and income, $F(2, 124) = .27$, $p = .76$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$; thus experimental condition did not lead to differences in participants' perceptions of their own self-efficacy. Trait self-efficacy was a significant predictor in the model, $F(1, 124) = 18.19$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .128$. No other covariates were significant predictors: race/ethnicity, $F(1, 124) = .05$, $p = .83$, $\eta_p^2 = .000$, and income, $F(1, 124) = .34$, $p = .56$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$. Thus Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Apparent Empowerment

To test whether individuals in the empowerment condition were higher in observed empowerment than were those who saw other advertisements (Hypothesis 3), we used an ANCOVA model with judges' reports of observed empowerment as the dependent variable (control: $n = 40$, $M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.38$; ostensibly empowering beauty: $n = 42$, $M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.21$; traditional beauty: $n = 46$, $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.24$) and experimental condition as the predictor variable, controlling for trait self-efficacy, race/ethnicity, and family income. The omnibus test was significant, $F(2, 126) = 4.11$, $p = .019$, $\eta_p^2 = .063$, and pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences between the ostensibly empowering beauty condition

and the control condition ($p = .035$, $d = .46$, 95% CI [.04, 1.13]) as well as between the ostensibly empowering beauty condition and traditional beauty condition ($p = .007$, $d = .11$, 95% CI [.20, 1.23]). There was no significant difference in observed empowerment between individuals in the traditional beauty condition and control condition ($p = .601$, 95% CI [−.39, .67]). Only income was a significant predictor in this model: trait self-efficacy, $F(1, 126) = 2.64$, $p = .107$, $\eta_p^2 = .021$, race/ethnicity, $F(2, 126) = 1.54$, $p = .217$, $\eta_p^2 = .012$, and income, $F(1, 126) = 4.84$, $p = .030$, $\eta_p^2 = .038$. In sum, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Mediating Role of State Objectification

We used the PROCESS SPSS macro (Hayes 2013; Model 4) to test whether state objectification levels mediated the relationship between condition and participants' felt empowerment (Hypothesis 4), again including BMI, age, race/ethnicity, and income as covariates. Contrary to our initial hypothesis, this model was not significant, indicating that state objectification did not mediate the relationship between condition and the judges' empowerment perceptions, $F(5, 111) = 1.20$, $p = .316$, $R^2 = .05$.

Discussion

The findings of Experiment 1 partially supported our prediction that exposure to beauty advertisements would lead to greater state objectification. In line with our prediction, individuals in the traditional beauty condition reported a significantly higher state objectification level than those in the control group. Contrary to our predictions, mean scores for state objectification in the empowerment beauty advertising

condition were between the other two conditions and did not differ significantly from either the control or the traditional beauty condition. Additionally, state objectification was not found to mediate the relationship between condition and judges' ratings of felt empowerment. Overall, the results from Experiment 1 suggest that although exposure to traditional beauty advertisements primed state objectification, the mean scores for state objectification for participants in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition fell between the two other conditions and did not significantly differ from either the control advertisements or the traditional beauty condition. Furthermore, participants who were exposed to advertisements in the empowerment condition did not report higher levels of self-efficacy prior to the speaking task than did those in the other two conditions, but they were judged as being more empowered than those who saw either control advertisements or traditional beauty advertisements.

Experiment 2

Method

Participants

This study was approved by the University of Michigan IRB prior to recruitment and data collection. Recruitment of respondents who identified as female and were aged 18 to 30, distributed throughout the United States, was completed through a Qualtrics panel recruiting participants. Fully 326 respondents completed the 15–20 min. online survey in exchange for an incentive of their choice provided by Qualtrics. Respondents' age averaged 24.39 years old ($SD = 3.84$). According to self-reports, 65% (211) were non-Hispanic White, 13% (42) were non-Hispanic Black, 12% (39) were Hispanic, 3.7% (12) were Biracial/Multiracial, 3% (11) were Asian/Asian-American, 1% (3) were Pacific Islander, 1% (3) were American Indian/Native Alaskan and 2% (5) identified as "other." A majority (53%, 171) reported household incomes below \$29,000, 20% (66) between \$30,000–\$49,000, 14% (44) between \$50,000–\$69,000, 7% (22) between \$70,000–\$90,000, 6% (18) above \$100,000. The average BMI in Experiment 2 was 30 ($N = 318$, $SD = 23.48$), with 6% (21) meeting criteria to be classified as underweight, 38% (123) as normal weight, 23% (75) as overweight, and 30% (99) as obese. Seventeen participants did not give valid responses to at least half of the TST questions and were eliminated from subsequent analyses testing state objectification. A single participant responded to all twenty statement questions with the word "beautiful." This participant was also omitted from the state objectification analyses due to a lack of adherence to the task instructions.

Procedure and Measures

Participants completed the experiment online and were told that ours was a study about the effectiveness of advertisements from various companies. Following the consent form, participants completed the measure of trait self-objectification (Fredrickson et al. 1998). The mean trait objectification score in this sample was 3.80 ($SD = 11.09$), indicating that the sample as a whole exhibited a slight tendency toward higher trait objectification.

After completing the trait objectification measure, participants were given the following prompt:

In a moment you will view a selection of advertisements related to a specific product. These products are randomly chosen from a list of common items such as technology products, household cleaners, beauty products, or insurance. We are interested in the effectiveness of these messages. You will be asked questions at the end of the study to measure your recall of the advertising content, so please pay attention and watch the advertisements carefully.

They were then randomly assigned to see 4 min of advertisements from one of the conditions in Study 1 (traditional beauty, ostensibly empowering beauty, or control). The filler video content was omitted from this study due to concern that participants would minimize the survey browser and not watch the video in its entirety.

Following the advertising exposure, participants answered a modified version of the Twenty Statements Test (Fredrickson et al. 1998) using the prompt:

Media can often have an impact on how people view themselves. Please take a moment to think about how the advertisements you saw today made you feel about yourself and your identity. There are twenty numbered blanks on the page below. Please write twenty answers to the simple question "Who am I?" in these blanks. Just give twenty different answers to this question; answer as if you were giving the answers to yourself- not someone else. Write your answers in the order that they occur to you, and don't worry about logic or "importance."

Although different from the instructions presented in our first study, a similar adaptation of the TST wording has been used in prior studies of self-objectification (Fredrickson et al. 1998). Scores represent the number of appearance words used, ranging from 0 to 13 ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 1.70$), with most participants ($n = 175$, 57%) using either zero or one body word. TST scores from Experiment 2 exhibited a larger range than those from Experiment 1, and an independent means t -test indicated that scores in Experiment 2 were significantly higher than those in Experiment 1, $t(454) = -2.93$, $p = .004$.

Following the Twenty Statement Task, we measured felt empowerment using the Affective Empowerment Checklist (AECL) (Couture and Harrison 2018), an adaptation of the Multiple Affective Checklist (MAACL) (Zuckerman and Lubin 1965) that includes empowerment words. Participants indicated the extent to which 30 adjectives currently described them from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*A Great Deal*). Fifteen of the adjectives represented empowerment concepts (e.g., “empowered,” “mighty,” “capable”) and 15 adjectives represented disempowerment concepts (e.g., “timid,” “ineffective,” “exploited”). The final score was calculated by subtracting the total score for disempowerment words from the total score for empowerment words. Possible scores range from -90 to 90 . The mean score in the present sample was 24.20 ($SD = 29.27$, range = -79 to 90), indicating that most participants reported feeling more empowered than disempowered after media exposure. Reliability of this scale was excellent ($\alpha = .92$). Participants answered an attention check question, completed demographic questions, and were debriefed.

As part of the demographic questions, participants were asked if they had seen the advertisement before the start of the study. Only 144 (35.7%) had not seen any of the advertisements prior to the study, 125 (39.2%) had seen some of the advertisements, 54 (16.9%) had seen all of the advertisements, and 22 (6.9%) were unsure. A Chi-squared test of independence indicated that prior exposure to advertisements differed significantly across conditions, $\chi^2(6, n = 319) = 43.21, p < .001$. A follow-up Chi-squared test of independence indicated that exposure to the two beauty advertising conditions was not significantly different, $\chi^2(3, n = 216) = 4.22, p = .24$, indicating that differences were due to higher levels of prior exposure in the control condition. Twenty-nine participants in the control condition reported seeing all of the advertisements prior to the study as compared to 17 individuals in the traditional beauty condition and 13 individuals in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition. Fully 58 of the participants in the control condition reported seeing some of the advertisements prior to the study as compared to 38 individuals in the objectification condition and 30 individuals in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition. Only 16 individuals in the control condition reported not having seen any of the advertisements as compared to 42 in the traditional beauty condition and 57 in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition. Finally, 5 participants in the control condition were unsure if they had seen the advertisements before compared to 11 individuals in the traditional beauty condition and 8 individuals in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for Experiment 2 can be found in Table 1. Similar to the results

of Experiment 1, participants who reported higher trait self-efficacy at the start of the study also tended to report higher levels of felt empowerment post-exposure to the stimulus. Unlike the results of Experiment 1, in Experiment 2 trait self-efficacy was negatively correlated with BMI and positively correlated with higher reported income. State objectification was not significantly correlated with any other variables in Experiment 2. Reported felt empowerment was positively correlated with age, indicating that in this sample, older individuals tended to report feeling more empowered. Family income was positively correlated with age, indicating that older participants reported more household income. Finally, younger participants were significantly more likely to report having seen the advertisements used in the study.

State Self-Objectification

The main effect of advertising condition on state objectification was again examined using an ANCOVA model with experimental condition used as the independent variable and state objectification as the dependent variable, as well as BMI, race/ethnicity, family income, and age included as covariates. Controlling for the covariates, there was a significant main effect for experimental condition, $F(2, 307) = 12.98, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .078$. Pairwise comparisons among the three conditions indicated that individuals in the traditional beauty condition ($n = 103, M = 2.51, SD = 2.14$) expressed significantly higher state objectification than individuals in the control group ($n = 105, M = 1.20, SD = 2.23; d = .59; p < .001, 95\% CI [-1.85, -.79]$). Controlling for the covariates, there was also a significant difference in state objectification between the two beauty advertising conditions, with individuals in the traditional beauty advertising condition expressing higher state objectification than did those in the empowerment-themed beauty advertising condition ($n = 106, M = 1.54, SD = 1.99; p < .001, d = .55; 95\% CI [.45, 1.50]$). There was no significant difference in state objectification between individuals in the control condition and the empowerment-themed beauty advertising condition ($p = .20, d = .18, 95\% CI [-.87, .18]$). None of the covariates was a significant predictor in the model: age, $F(1, 307) = 1.07, p = .302, \eta_p^2 = .003$; BMI, $F(1, 307) = 1.34, p = .248, \eta_p^2 = .002$; race/ethnicity, $F(1, 307) = .67, p = .41, \eta_p^2 = .004$; and income, $F(1, 307) = .09, p = .77, \eta_p^2 < .001$.

Participants exposed to empowerment beauty advertisements used an average of .34 more objectifying words to describe themselves than did those in the control group. Participants exposed to traditional beauty advertisements used an average of 1.31 more objectifying words to describe themselves than did those in the control group, and .97 more words than did those in the empowerment condition. Overall, these findings provide support for Hypothesis 1a but not Hypothesis 1b.

Felt Empowerment

To test the effect of condition on felt empowerment, we performed an ANCOVA using experimental condition as the predictor variable and participants' scores on the AECL as the outcome (control: $M = 23.18$, $SD = 29.09$; ostensibly empowering beauty: $M = 25.22$, $SD = 28.81$; traditional beauty: $M = 23.29$, $SD = 30.24$). Experimental condition was not a significant predictor of felt empowerment when controlling for trait self-efficacy, race/ethnicity, and income, $F(2, 322) = 1.02$, $p = .360$, $\eta_p^2 = .006$, indicating that advertising condition did not have an effect on felt empowerment. Trait self-efficacy was a significant predictor in the model, $F(1, 314) = 127.11$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .292$. No other covariates were significant predictors: race/ethnicity, $F(1, 314) = 1.15$, $p = .28$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$, and income, $F(1, 314) = .00$, $p = .95$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$.

Discussion

Experiment 2 was conducted both to replicate the findings of Experiment 1 and to extend the results with a new state measure of felt empowerment. The results of Experiment 2 largely mirrored those of Experiment 1, with findings indicating that state objectification was highest for participants exposed to traditional beauty advertisements, followed by those in the ostensibly empowering beauty condition, and lowest in the control condition. Notably, whereas the results of Experiment 1 indicated that only individuals in the traditional beauty condition showed significantly higher self-objectification following exposure to the advertisements, Experiment 2 indicated that the ostensibly empowering beauty advertisements also primed participants' state objectification at a rate that was higher than for the control ads. Similar to the finding in Experiment 1, in Experiment 2, felt empowerment was not higher following exposure to the empowerment messages than in the other conditions.

General Discussion

As expected, our results connected exposure to traditional beauty advertising with higher state objectification, and individuals in both experiments reported higher state objectification following exposure to traditional beauty advertisements than to control advertisements. Traditional beauty advertisements typically emphasize perfection in appearance and encourage women to engage in social comparison with the actors and models in the advertisements (Want 2009), which may have led to the higher levels of state objectification observed in our studies. In contrast to the message in traditional beauty advertisements, the ostensibly empowering beauty advertisements encourage women to embrace themselves as they are. In Experiment

2, we found that exposure to empowerment-themed beauty ads resulted in significantly greater state objectification than did exposure to control advertisements.

Ostensibly empowering advertising is nominally about empowerment, but the visual images presented in these advertisements are strikingly similar to those in traditional beauty advertisements. These ostensibly empowering advertisements still frequently featured thin models whose appearance conforms to traditional beauty norms as well as camera framing that isolates women's body parts. Finally, a common theme in the ostensibly empowering advertisements (for example, the Under Armour commercial featuring ballerina Misty Copeland) is narration that critiques traditional beauty norms and expectations. Although the spoken message is one of empowerment, the visuals reinforce viewers' awareness of a conventionally beautiful, athletic body type. Although it is appealing to take these ostensibly empowering ads at face value, our findings suggest that the objectifying visuals that remain in these messages may ultimately prime objectifying for some viewers. Additional research should be conducted to discover the reasons that these advertisements were still objectifying, as well as to test images that could be empowering without being objectifying.

In both experiments, the ostensibly empowering messages failed to lead to positive psychological outcomes (self-efficacy in Experiment 1 and felt empowerment in Experiment 2). This could be explained in at least two ways: it may be that the ostensibly empowering messages were simply ineffective at increasing felt empowerment or it may be that the undertones of objectification in the visual messages undercut or somehow interacted with the empowerment message. Future work should examine visual and textual components independently, as well as collectively, in order to better understand the relationship between empowering language and objectifying imagery when the two are presented together.

In Experiment 1, although participants did not feel more efficacious prior to the speaking task, observers' judgments of empowerment were higher for participants exposed to the ostensibly empowering beauty messages than those in the other conditions. This raises interesting questions about the relationship between felt empowerment and observed empowerment generally, as well as in response to gendered advertisements. As one may expect, the women who viewed traditional advertisements did not show greater felt empowerment as compared to the control condition—but it is important to note that they also did not show lower responses in either felt or apparent empowerment as may have been expected. There is very little research that looks at empowerment and objectification in the same mediated context, and more research is needed to understand how these two constructs function when presented simultaneously.

The relationship between women's bodies and women's power is anything but simple. Most research on this topic

emerges from the critical-cultural tradition, where there is a rich, ongoing discussion about women's intentional use of self-sexualizing as an expression of empowerment. Gill (2003, p.103) refers to the process of intentionally objectifying oneself as "subjectification" in reference to the individual's position as both subject and object and outlines the challenges that arise when this is done through consumption of sexualizing clothing and products. In an experimental study, Aubrey et al. (2011) examined the effect of viewing self-sexualizing music videos portraying female artists as sexually agentic on participants' outcomes, and they found that exposure to self-sexualizing videos predicted modern sexism in men and enjoyment of sexualization in women. Thus, sexualization in media may have negative consequences, even when women are presented as sexually empowered. Although women may experience felt empowerment when they subjectify, it does not necessarily eliminate detrimental outcomes because they are objectified by others. The finding in the Aubrey et al. (2011) study raises complex questions about the experiences of the self as an empowered subject versus others' observation of self as a sexual object.

Intuitively it seems that priming state objectification would reduce felt empowerment because the two are thought to have competing outcomes, but we did not observe this relationship in our sample. If felt empowerment and objectification are opposite ends of the same continuum, we would expect to see lower levels of felt empowerment as objectification levels become higher, and vice versa. The only significant correlations between felt empowerment and objectification observed in our study were in fact in the opposite direction, with higher state objectifiers in the first experiment rating themselves as having higher self-efficacy across conditions in Experiment 1. It is worth noting that this observed relationship did not translate to observer ratings of empowerment in Experiment 1, and there was no significant relationship between state objectification and felt empowerment in Experiment 2. In prior research, cognitive tasks, such as math tests (Fredrickson et al. 1998) and Stroop color naming tasks (Quinn et al. 2006), have been used to measure performance during states of heightened objectification. The speaking task used in the present study is different because it is a self-presentation task and success is contingent upon appearing competent. Self-objectification is related to heightened awareness of other's perceptions during performance, therefore, participants who were higher in state objectification may have felt more practiced for the speaking task.

Additionally, it is customary for researchers examining self-objectification through the Twenty Statements Test to treat both positively and negatively worded responses (e.g., pretty and ugly) equally, and thus no distinction is placed on the valence of appearance-focused words. The theoretical justification behind this decision is that any participant using appearance-words to describe themselves is linking their

self-worth with their appearance, which has been repeatedly associated with negative consequences. However, in the context of our study, thinking of themselves as they appear to others may have led women to believe that they would be more prepared for a public speaking experience, especially if they described their appearance in a positive way. Further research using a variety of outcome measures is needed to understand the complex relationship between objectification and felt empowerment.

Limitations and Future Directions

One clear limitation in our study is the small sample and largely homogenous sample in Experiment 1. Participants in Experiment 1 were students enrolled in a Communication course; as such, their media literacy skills be greater than those of the general population. In addition, our first sample was fairly homogeneous, with most participants being young and White. This demographic is frequently targeted by beauty companies, and thus the sample is appropriate, but it is limited nonetheless. In addition to this narrowness, it is worth noting that our participants were thinner on average than the typical American young woman, which may have facilitated a connection between objectification and felt empowerment in their minds. The small sample size may have left us underpowered to detect the relatively small difference in state objectification between the control condition and ostensibly empowering beauty condition in Experiment 1.

By measuring trait objectification prior to the stimulus exposure in both experiments, it is possible participants became sensitized to the study goals. Although the stimuli in Experiment 1 were embedded within a neutral video, we chose to use a different cover story in Experiment 2 due to the challenges of interacting with an online sample. No one in Experiment 2 reported suspicion regarding the study's purpose, but it is possible that participants were able to discern the study's goals based on the advertisements received and were responding in line with these expectations.

Finally, although our study provided initial evidence of the effects of ostensibly empowering advertisements, it focused narrowly on beauty advertisements and left many questions about the relationship between self-objectification and felt empowerment unanswered. Our conditions varied on two dimensions: the explicit discussion of empowerment and the explicit discussion of appearance. This provides a limitation in our ability to say with complete certainty which dimension was driving the effects.

Future work should examine content analyses of ostensibly empowering advertisements, as well as experimental designs that test these outcomes using an expanded range of advertisements. Implicit task outcomes may be helpful as well. For example, the use of a lexical decision task following media exposure would provide simultaneous

measurement of objectification and felt empowerment schemata, and it would allow researchers to understand the implicit effects of these advertisements.

Practice Implications

Industry professionals need to remain diligent in considering the social effects of their advertisements, even those that are nominally beneficial to women, and remember that even advertisements with positive intentions, if not carefully designed, may lead to unintended outcomes such as increased state objectification. The results of our study indicate that although advertisements containing empowerment themes are potentially an improvement over their traditional counterparts, they may still have the unintended effect of priming state objectification in comparison to neutral advertisements. Additionally, although we found some evidence that exposure to ostensibly empowering advertisements improved judged speech performance, this exposure did not ultimately seem to carry over to women's feelings of empowerment. If a company's primary goal with these advertisements is to empower women, future advertisement development should include testing to make sure that materials used effectively empower, while being sensitive to the presence of any objectifying content or imagery.

Conclusions

Empowerment as a broad concept is frequently discussed by scholars and the general public, but there is little consensus about what felt empowerment looks like and what causes it to ebb and flow. It is often discussed as a mythical and ephemeral construct, which complicates efforts to operationalize it in quantitative research. Although there is a growing body of work that examines the impact of traditionally objectifying advertisements on women, more research needs to be done examining the relationship between verbal messages of empowerment and the objectifying imagery against which they are juxtaposed in ostensibly empowering advertising. Exposure to ostensibly empowering beauty advertisements resulted in lower state objectification than traditional beauty advertisements, but these ostensibly empowering advertisements were still more objectifying than the neutral ads. This pattern indicates that although ostensibly empowering advertisements may be a step in the right direction, they still pose risks of priming state objectification. Additionally, the ostensibly empowering advertisements were not effective at increasing participants' felt empowerment and self-efficacy, indicating that they held little psychological benefit to the women in our sample. Future work should examine what makes for an effective empowering message that does not objectify at the same time.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Research Involving Human Participants This study was approved by the University of Michigan IRB, and we have complied with the American Psychological Association's ethical standards in the treatment of participants.

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