BRIEF REPORT

When Do People "Check Out" Male Bodies? Appearance-Focus Increases the Objectifying Gaze Toward Men

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Objectification studies have mostly focused on why and how women are objectified, but relatively little is known about what drives the objectification of men. This article aims to examine the objectifying gaze toward men, which is operationalized in the present article as decreased focus on men's faces and increased focus on men's body parts (arms, chest, and stomach). We considered the role of appearance (vs. personality) focus and ideal body shape on the objectifying gaze toward men. Specifically, we instructed 65 participants (36 men) to either evaluate the appearance or the personality of men while their eyes were monitored. To assess the objectifying gaze, we examined dwell time (i.e., total time spent fixating on an area) on targets' face, arms, chest, and stomach as well as first fixation time (i.e., how quickly face, arms, and stomach were fixated relative to the onset of the image). Consistent with our main hypothesis, results indicated that appearance-focused participants looked at faces for less time and chests, arms, and stomachs for more time than personality-focused participants. Participants also looked at men's arms for more time for men's bodies with high (vs. average and low) ideal body shapes. We discus these results and their implications in the light of objectification and body perception theories.

Keywords: sexual objectification, objectifying gaze, person perception, impression formation, eye tracking

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Male bodies are increasingly objectified in the media through advertisements that reduce them to their sexualized bodies (Rohlinger, 2002). Moreover, men report experiencing sexual objectification during their interactions with others (Davidson, Gervais, Canivez, & Cole, 2013). Despite the fact that both men and women are likely to self-objectify (e.g., Calogero, 2009) and to objectify other men (Bernard et al., in press; Loughnan et al., 2010), few studies have examined the processes through which men are objectified in everyday social interactions. This article

begins to fill this gap by examining whether appearance-focus and ideal body figures elicit the objectifying gaze toward men.

"Checking out," "ogling," and "staring" are common expressions referencing the visual inspection of bodies. This phenomenon is known as the "objectifying gaze" (Kaschak, 1992) and represents an important channel through which objectification is perpetuated and communicated to targets (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Kozee, Tylka, Augustus-Horvath, & Denchik, 2007). This objectifying gaze can be operationalized as attending to other's bodies more and faces less (Gervais, Holland, & Dodd, 2013). In this view, the eye-tracker is a well-tailored tool to assess the objectifying gaze because it allows researchers to examine the location and the duration of attention to people's face and bodies. Eye-tracking studies demonstrate that people spontaneously spend more time looking at faces than other body areas when viewing human figures (Hewig, Trippe, Hecht, Straube, & Miltner, 2008) given that faces are crucial to evaluate target characteristics such as gender, age, and attractiveness (Quadflieg & Macrae, 2011). Eye-tracking studies have nonetheless found that this focus on people's faces might be modulated by target and perceiver characteristics (for review, see Wenzlaff, Briken, & Dekker, 2016). A few studies have examined factors that cause people to attend to men's bodies. Employing other-sex targets, Lykins, Meana, and Kambe (2006) showed that people spend more time looking at bodies of erotic (vs. nonerotic) stimuli (see also Lykins, Meana, &

Strauss, 2008). When looking at images of both male and female bodies, men and women fixate more on faces when exposed to clothed bodies, whereas men and women gaze for more time on chest and pelvic regions when exposed to naked bodies (Nummenmaa, Hietanen, Santtila, & Hyönä, 2012). Focusing on a perceiver characteristic, Bolmont, Cacioppo, and Cacioppo (2014) found that both men and women fixate for more time on other-sex bodies when driven by sexual desire.

Although it is clear that target nudity and sexual desire prompt people to attend to men's bodies, we know less about what factors might prompt objectifying gazes toward men in their everyday lives such as when they are fully clothed. We suggest that appearance-focus will elicit the objectifying gaze toward men. Gervais et al. (2013) found that appearance-focused participants exhibited the objectifying gaze toward women more than personality-focused participants. Consistent with studies that show that focusing on men's (and women's) physical appearance is associated with dehumanized perceptions (Loughnan et al., 2010), our main hypothesis is that appearance-focused participants will display more objectifying gazes toward men than personality-focused participants. Specifically, we expected appearance-focused participants to fixate for more time (Hypothesis 1a) and more rapidly (Hypothesis 1b) on male body parts and for less time and less rapidly to male faces relative to personality-focused participants.

We also examined the effect of ideal body shape on the objectifying gaze toward men. Visual media frequently utilize men with high ideal body shapes (men's bodies with larger chests, bigger biceps, and narrower stomachs) to convey Western beauty ideals. The proportion of men's bodies depicted as muscular and sexualized has increased during recent decades (Rohlinger, 2002). In Western countries, these images convey the notion that muscularity is a key dimension when considering ideal male body shapes and masculinity (Helgeson, 1994). Although men who exercise frequently derive benefits (e.g., Lassek & Gaulin, 2009), exposure to images of muscular men is nonetheless associated with many negative outcomes for men such as more body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann, Martins, & Churchett, 2008) and increased drive for muscularity (Daniel & Bridges, 2010). Relatedly, self-objectification among men is positively associated with drive for muscularity (Grieve & Helmick, 2008). Recent research is consistent with the notion that men's bodies with high ideal body shapes are more likely to be visually processed similarly to objects (Bernard et al., in press). Men with ideal body shapes might be seen as more attractive, and research shows that attractiveness predicts focus on sexual body parts (Dagnino, Navajas, & Sigman, 2012). Consistently, Gervais, Vescio, and Allen (2012) found that men's bodies with ideal body shapes were seen as more interchangeable (i.e., another indicator of objectification) compared to men's bodies with average body shapes. Our second hypothesis was that participants will fixate for more time (Hypothesis 2a) and more rapidly (Hypothesis 2b) on body parts and for less time and less rapidly on faces for men with ideal (vs. average and low) body shapes. Consistent with most objectification studies (e.g., Bernard et al., in press; Bernard, Gervais, Allen, Delmée, & Klein, 2015; Vaes, Paladino, & Puvia, 2011), we did not expect a moderating effect of participant gender, but we nonetheless explored this possibility.

Method

Participants

Sixty-five students from a Midwestern U.S. university participated for course credit and/or monetary compensation (36 men; $M_{age} = 19.82$ $SD = 2.11$; 85% of the sample was Caucasian).

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to a focus condition and were given the following instructions: "Welcome to the study 'Person Perception.' We are interested in your first impressions of people. Specifically, we are interested in your first impressions of people's appearance (personality). First, you will be shown a picture of a person. You should focus on the person's appearance (personality). Second, immediately following the picture, you will be asked to rate how negative or positive the person's appearance (personality) is on a 7-point scale (1 = Extremely negative; 7 = Extremely positive)." At the end of the study, participants filled sociodemographic questions and were debriefed.

Participants wore an eye tracker and viewed pictures of men in a random order for 3,000 ms following a 500-ms fixation cross that appeared at the center of a computer screen. Thirty pictures of college-aged men were presented to participants, including pictures of men's bodies having high ($n = 10$), average ($n = 10$), and low ideal body shapes ($n = 10$). Men were photographed wearing blue jeans and white tank tops. We modified the bodies of these men to obtain pictures of men's bodies with high (larger chests, bigger biceps, and narrower stomachs), average (medium chests, medium biceps, medium stomachs), and low ideal body shape (smaller chests, smaller biceps, and larger stomachs) via Photoshop (see Appendix). Versions of these images have been used previously in research examining objectification (Gervais et al., 2012).

A separate sample of 11 participants ($M_{age} = 24.90$ years; five women, five men, and one person who did not report demographic information) rated the degree to which each picture "fit the cultural ideals of masculine attractiveness" on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 4 = neutral, 7 = very much). Repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed the expected main effect of ideal body shape, $F(2, 20) = 109.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .92$. Participants evaluated men with high ideal body shapes ($M = 4.65$, $SE = .31$) as fitting the ideals of masculine attractiveness more than men with average body shapes ($M = 3.66$, $SE = .24$), $F(1, 10) = 46.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .83$, and they also rated the bodies of men with average body shapes as fitting the ideals of masculine attractiveness more than men with low ideal body shapes ($M = 2.14$, $SE = .20$), $F(1, 10) = 113.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .92$.

We utilized an SR Research Ltd. EyeLink II system (Mississauga, Ontario, Canada) to measure gaze, with a high spatial resolution and a sampling rate of 500 Hz. The dominant eye was monitored for all participants. Thresholds for detecting the onset of a saccadic movement were acceleration of 8,000°/s², velocity of 30°/s, and distance of 0.5° of visual angle. Movement offset was detected when velocity fell below 30°/s and remained at that level for 10 consecutive samples. The average error in the computation of gaze position was less than 0.5°. A 9-point calibration procedure was performed at the beginning of the experiment, followed by a

9-point calibration accuracy test. We defined five interest area templates using rectangular boxes around faces, arms (i.e., shoulders and arms), chests, and stomachs. The box sizes were based on men's bodies with high ideal body shapes, so the sizes of the boxes were identical across men's bodies with high, average, and low body shapes.

Measures

We considered two dependent variables: dwell time (total time spent fixating on a region over the course of a trial) and first fixation time, which represents how quickly a region was fixated relative to the onset of the image. Note that if a region was not fixated in the 3,000-ms window, we gave it a value of 3,000 for the first fixation time analyses.

Results

We submitted Dwell Time to a 4 (Body part: face, arms, chest and stomachs) × 2 (Focus: appearance, personality) × 3 (Ideal body shape: high, average, low) × 2 (Participant gender: men, women) mixed-model ANOVA with body part and ideal body shape as the within participant factors. For First Fixation Time, the body part factor did not contain chest because the chest was aligned with the fixation point. As participants did not decide to fixate that location, it is impossible to get an accurate measure of first fixation for chests, although this is possible for all other body parts of interest (see Gervais et al., 2013). When Mauchly's test revealed that sphericity was not assumed, we corrected the number of degrees of freedom using the Greenhouse-Geisser estimates. Descriptive statistics are available in Table 1.

Dwell Time

Consistent with Hypothesis 1a, the ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between body part and focus, $F(1.16, 70.63) = 13.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$ (Table 2). Appearance-focused participants fixated on faces for less time than personality-focused participants, $F(1, 61) = 13.44$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$. Appearance-focused participants fixated on arms, $F(1, 61) = 6.40$, $p = .014$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$; chests, $F(1, 61) = 9.32$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$; and stomachs, $F(1, 61) = 12.19$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$, for more time compared to personality-focused participants.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, a significant interaction between body part and ideal body shape also emerged, $F(4.22, 257.18) = 4.55$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$ (Table 3). Participants fixated on the faces of men with average body shapes for more time than the faces of

Table 2

Dwell Time Means (Standard Errors) as a Function of Body Part and Focus

Body part	Appearance-focus	Personality-focus
Face	1,356 (81)[a]	1,819 (97)[b]
Arms	299 (24)[a]	204 (29)[b]
Chest	548 (31)[a]	403 (36)[b]
Stomach	175 (15)[a]	91 (18)[b]

Note. All values are milliseconds. Higher scores indicate more attention. Means within rows with different superscripts are significantly different, ps < .05.

men with high, $p = .024$, and low ideal body shapes, $p = .012$. Arms of men with high ideal body shapes were gazed at for more time than arms of men with average, $p = .036$, and low ideal body shapes, $p = .004$. Unexpectedly, participants fixated on stomachs of men with low ideal body shapes for more time than stomachs of men with average and high ideal body shapes, ps < .001. See online supplemental materials for secondary results. Other effects and interactions did not reach significance, all ps > .08.

First Fixation Time

Supporting Hypothesis 1b, a significant interaction between body part and focus emerged, $F(2, 122) = 6.63$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$ (Table 4). Compared to personality-focused participants, appearance-focused participants fixated more rapidly on arms, $F(1, 61) = 10.21$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, and stomachs, $F(1, 61) = 8.84$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$. Moreover, appearance-focused participants fixated less rapidly on faces relative to appearance-focused participants, although this difference did not reach significance, $F(1, 61) = 1.68$, $p = .199$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$.

An interaction between body part and ideal body shape also emerged, $F(2.82, 171.99) = 10.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$ (Table 5). However, inconsistent with Hypothesis 2b, this interaction was driven by first fixation time on stomachs with participants fixated more quickly on stomachs of men with low ideal body shapes, compared to men with average and high ideal body shapes, ps < .001. See online supplemental materials for secondary results.

Discussion

There is a growing body of research documenting the factors that contribute to the objectification of women (e.g., Vaes et al., 2011). In contrast, very little research has examined when and why

Table 1

Dwell Time Means and First Fixation Means (Standard Errors) for Body Part and Ideal Body Shape

	Body part				Ideal body shape		
Time	Face	Arms	Chest	Stomach	High	Average	Low
Dwell time	1,587 (63)[a]	252 (19)[b]	476 (24)[c]	133 (12)[d]	610 (11)[a]	614 (11)[a]	612 (10)[a]
First fixation time	302 (17)[a]	1,935 (58)[b]	NA	1,808 (66)[b]	1,391 (41)[a]	1,380 (43)[a]	1,273 (34)[b]

Note. All values are milliseconds. For dwell times, higher scores indicate more attention. For first fixation times, lower scores indicate more attention. For body part and ideal body shape, means within rows with different superscripts are significantly different, ps < .05. NA = First fixation time for chest is not taken into account because participants were asked to focus on this area at the onset of each image.

Table 3

Dwell Time Means (Standard Errors) as a Function of Ideal Body Shape and Focus

Body part	High ideal body shape	Average ideal body shape	Low ideal body shape
Face	1,572 (67)[a]	1,637 (65)[b]	1,553 (64)[a]
Arms	276 (21)[a]	243 (21)[b]	236 (20)[b]
Chest	479 (28)[a]	465 (28)[a]	484 (24)[a]
Stomach	114 (12)[a]	113 (15)[a]	172 (16)[b]

Note. All values are milliseconds. Higher scores indicate more attention. Means within rows with different superscripts are significantly different, ps < .05.

men are objectified probably because most research has found that women are more likely to be objectified (Bernard, Gervais, Allen, Campomizzi, & Klein, 2012, 2015; Gervais et al., 2012; Gervais, Vescio, Förster, Mass, & Suitner, 2012; Vaes et al., 2011). This gap in the literature is concerning given that men report being objectified by others with significant consequences (Davidson et al., 2013; Swami & Voracek, 2013). This study is a first step toward better understanding when and why men are sexually objectified.

First, we found that appearance-focus increased the objectifying gaze toward male bodies, and this effect was not moderated by participant gender. Although men and women may have different motives when focusing on men's appearance (e.g., Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005), they both focus their attention on the same body parts when appearance-focused. This might be because size and shape of the torso and arms are key features that both men and women use to assess men's physical attractiveness and muscularity (e.g., Cohane & Pope, 2001; Swami & Tovée, 2005). A similar pattern of results for female bodies has been found (Gervais et al., 2013), thereby suggesting that appearance-focus is a key mechanism through which people focus on body parts when evaluating both same- and other-sex targets.

Second, our hypothesis regarding the effect of ideal body shape on the objectifying gaze received partial support. Participants indeed fixated on the arms of men with high ideal body shapes for more time and they fixated on their faces for less time. However, the participants fixated on stomachs of men with low ideal body shapes for more time than stomachs of men with ideal and average body shapes. This finding also suggests that less attractive people

Table 4

First Fixation Means (Standard Errors) as a Function of Body Part and Focus

Body part	Appearance-focus	Personality-focus
Face	325 (22)[a]	280 (27)[a]
Arms	1,749 (75)[a]	2,121 (89)[b]
Chest	NA	NA
Stomach	1,613 (85)[a]	2,004 (101)[b]

Note. All values are milliseconds. Lower scores indicate more attention. Means within rows with different superscripts are significantly different, ps < .05. NA = First fixation time for chest is not taken into account because participants were asked to focus on this area at the onset of each image.

Table 5

First Fixation Means (Standard Errors) as a Function of Ideal Body Shape and Focus

Body part	High ideal body shape	Average ideal body shape	Low ideal body shape
Face	303 (22)[a]	306 (19)[a]	298 (15)[a]
Arms	1,883 (63)[a]	1,955 (73)[a]	1,966 (69)[a]
Chest	NA	NA	NA
Stomach	1,988 (89)[a]	1,880 (89)[a]	1,557 (70)[b]

Note. All values are milliseconds. Lower scores indicate more attention. Means within rows with different superscripts are significantly different, ps < .05. NA = First fixation time for chest is not taken into account because participants were asked to focus on this area at the onset of each image.

may sometimes be visually inspected and reduced to their body parts. Although men's arms and chests clearly convey cues revealing the extent to which a body is muscled, it is plausible that men's stomachs provides information related to the presence versus absence of body fat, which is another important feature related to Western men's attractiveness ideals. This possibility has largely been overlooked in the existing objectification literature because stimuli used in prior work were often highly attractive (e.g., Bernard et al., 2012), but see Heflick, Goldenberg, Cooper, and Puvia (2011), who did find that the effect of appearance-focus on dehumanized perceptions was not moderated by the level of attractiveness of female targets, suggesting that more and less attractive people are sometimes objectified with dehumanizing consequences. Future research could examine the gaze toward unattractive versus attractive male targets, using an indicator of attractiveness other than ideal body shape (e.g., symmetry).

This study focused on the objectifying gaze, but we did not assess the outcomes of such a gaze. Research has found that appearance-focus is associated with biased attribution of personality characteristics such as warmth, competence, and morality when participants evaluate female, but not male targets (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Heflick et al., 2011). Future research might explore when and why such a target gender effect is at play when considering the effect of appearance-focus on social perception. Although our research cannot directly answer this question, it is likely that this target gender effect is not driven by differences in the objectifying gaze toward female versus male targets given that both targets are associated with more objectifying gazes during an appearance-focus manipulation (see Gervais et al., 2013). It might be the case that the consequences of such objectifying gazes are different. For example, Gervais, Vescio et al. (2012) found that both men and women's bodies with high ideal body shapes were more fungible (interchangeable), but the men were still regarded as more powerful than women.

Our findings indicate that appearance-focus leads to longer fixations on body parts. However, we do not know yet what drives the effect of appearance-focus on dehumanized perceptions. Research should investigate the correlations between fixation on arms, stomachs, chests, and face, on the one hand, and attribution of personality traits, on the other hand. Relatedly, eye-tracking studies showed that people spontaneously fixate on faces for more time than other body areas when viewing human figures (Hewig et al., 2008), and we know that headless bodies are more likely to be

dehumanized (Loughnan et al., 2010) and visually processed similarly to objects (Minnebusch, Suchan, & Daum, 2009). However, it remains unclear whether the fixation on faces is humanizing and/or whether the fixation on body parts is dehumanizing. Conducting an experiment during which gaze fixations are recorded for bodies with head (vs. headless) bodies might enable researchers to better elucidate this question.

The present work is the first to examine the effect of appearance-focus and ideal body shape on objectifying gazes toward men. This research revealed that men are sometimes the recipients of objectifying gazes. Future research should replicate these effects and elaborate on when and why such gazes lead to negative social perception as well as potential adverse consequences for men themselves.

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Appendix

Examples of a Man With High, Average, and Low Ideal Body Shape (Miniaturized Versions)

Faces have been blurred to mask the identity of the male in the image. All participants consented to have their pictures used in future research and are available for research purposes from the first author upon request. Faces were exactly the same across body shape. See the online article for the color version of this figure.