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Equal Opportunity Objectification? The Sexualization of Men and Women on the Cover of *Rolling Stone*

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Abstract A number of journalists and scholars have pointed to the sexual objectification of women and men in popular media to argue that Western culture has become "sexualized" or even "pornified." Yet it is not clear whether men or women have become more frequently—or more intensely sexualized—over time. In a longitudinal content analysis of images of women and men on more than four decades of *Rolling Stone* magazine covers (1967–2009), we begin to answer such questions. Using a unique analytical framework that allows us to measure both the frequency and intensity of sexualization, we find that sexualized images of men and women have increased, though women continue to be more frequently sexualized than men. Yet our most striking finding is the change in *how* women—but not men—are sexualized. Women are increasingly likely to be "hypersexualized," but men are not. These findings not only document changes in the sexualization of men and women in popular culture over time, they also point to a narrowing of the culturally acceptable ways for "doing" femininity as presented in popular media.

Keywords Sexual socialization · Sexualization · Gender · Media · Popular culture

Introduction

In recent years, a number of scholars and journalists have argued that American culture has become "sexualized" (APA Task Force 2007; Attwood 2009; Olfman 2009) or even "pornified" (Paul 2005; see also Dines 2010; McRobbie 2004; Paasonen et al. 2007). This widely examined phenomenon has been given a plethora

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of names, including "the rise of raunch culture" (Levy 2005), "striptease culture" (McNair 2002), "porno chic" (McRobbie 2004; Rush and La Nauze 2006), "rape culture" (Ezzell 2009), the "mainstreaming of prostitution" (Farley 2009), and the "amazing expanding pornosphere" (McNair 2002). "Increasingly *all* representations of women," Gill (2007:81) argues, "are being refracted through sexually objectifying imagery" (emphasis in original). It is not only women who are sexualized in the popular media, scholars argue; men are sexualized as well (Bordo 1999; Pope et al. 2000; Rohlinger 2002). "The erotic male," Rohlinger (2002:70) contends, "is increasingly becoming *the* depiction that dominates mainstream conceptions of masculinity" (emphasis in original).

Researchers find evidence for the increased sexualization of women and men in a spate of cultural artifacts, including the mainstream popularity of adult film actress Jenna Jameson and her memoir, *How to Make Love Like a Porn Star* (e.g., Dines 2010; Levy 2005; Paul 2005); the "skyrocketing" number of undressed men in advertisements (Pope et al. 2000:56); the prevalence of pole-dancing exercise classes for women (e.g., Farley 2009; Levy 2005); the "blatant sexual fetishization—even idolatry—of the male organ" in TV and movies (Bordo 1999:30); and the success of "Girls Gone Wild," the "reality" television program and Website that feature young women being urged to take off their clothes by off-screen cameramen in exchange for a T-shirt with the show's logo (e.g., Dines 2010; Farley 2009; Levy 2005; Paul 2005).

Yet analyzing only sexualized cultural artifacts—and there are certainly many to choose from—does not provide conclusive evidence that American culture has become "pornified." Indeed, it is easy to dismiss such charges unless we know whether sexualized representations of women and men have become more common—or more intensely sexualized—over time. Moreover, although the existence of sexualized images of men might suggest that, today, the popular media is something of an "equal opportunity objectifier" as some observers suggest (e.g., Frette 2009; Taylor and Sharkey 2003), the simple presence of images of sexualized men does not signal equality in media representations of women and men.

In a longitudinal content analysis of more than four decades of *Rolling Stone* magazine covers (1967–2009), we begin to answer such questions. Using a unique analytical framework that allows us to measure both the frequency and intensity of sexualization, we find that representations of women and men have indeed become more sexualized over time, though women continue to be more frequently sexualized than men. Yet our most striking finding is the change in *how* women—but not men—are sexualized. Women are increasingly likely to be "hypersexualized," while men are not. In our analysis, hypersexualization is the combination of a multitude of sexualized attributes—body position, extent of nudity, textual cues, and more—the cumulative effect of which is to narrow the possible interpretations of the image to just, as de Beauvoir (1949) wrote, "the sex." Our findings thus not only document changes in the sexualization of men and women in popular culture over time, they also point to a narrowing of the culturally acceptable ways for "doing" femininity (West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987) as presented in popular media.

These findings are important because research has shown that sexualized images may legitimize or exacerbate violence against women and girls, sexual harassment,

and anti-women attitudes among men (Farley 2009; Kalof 1999; Lanis and Covell 1995; Machia and Lamb 2009; MacKay and Covell 1997; Malamuth and Check 1981; Malamuth et al. 2000; Milburn et al. 2000; Ohbuchi et al. 1994; Ward 2002; Ward et al. 2005), increase rates of body dissatisfaction and/or eating disorders among men, women, and girls (Abramson and Valene 1991; Aubrey and Taylor 2009; Aubrey et al. 2009; Groesz et al. 2002; Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2004; Harrison 2000; Hofschire and Greenberg 2001; Holmstrom 2004; Lucas et al. 1991; Pope et al. 2000; Stice et al. 1994; Tiggeman and Slater 2001; Turner et al. 1997), increase teen sexual activity (Brown et al. 2005; Brown et al. 2006; Pardun et al. 2005; Villani 2001), and decrease women and men's sexual satisfaction (American Psychological Association 2007; Roberts and Gettman 2004; Weaver et al. 1984; Zillmann and Bryant 1988).

Before turning to our findings, we consider research on the sexualization of women and men within the broader literature on gender and the media. We then discuss our data and methods, outlining our analytical framework that measures both the incidence and extent of sexualization. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings.

Sexualization, Gender, and the Media

In *Gender Advertisements*, Erving Goffman (1979) sought to uncover the covert ways that popular media constructs masculinity and femininity. In a detailed analysis of more than 500 advertisements, Goffman contrasted women's lowered heads with men's straight-on gazes, men's strong grasps versus women's light touches, women's over-the-top emotional displays with men's reserved semblances, and more. The relationship between men and women, Goffman argued, was portrayed as a parent–child relationship, one characterized by male power and female subordination.

Missing from Goffman's analysis, however, was an examination of the sexualization of women (and men) in these images. Yet this was likely a conscious strategy on Goffman's part. As Vivian Gornick explained in the book's introduction, he eschewed images of "clutched detergents and half-naked bodies" in order to reveal the "unnatural in the natural" (vii-ix). And there may have been good reason for this. At the time, the sexual objectification of women in the popular media was already the subject of intense political debate. It had become the central target of many "second wave" feminists, who had launched campaigns to cover such advertisements with graffiti and stickers that read "this ad exploits women" (Bradley 2004; Castro 1990). Perhaps Goffman did not examine the sexualization of women because it was already considered passé, something that would soon be remedied by feminists' efforts. Or perhaps he avoided it because it was too obvious—such flagrant objectification did not require a high-powered sociological lens.

Many contemporary studies of gender and sexualization in popular culture take as their starting point Goffman's analysis in *Gender Advertisements* (e.g., Binns 2006; Johnson 2007; Kang 1997; Krassas et al. 2001, 2003; Lindner 2004;

Rohlinger 2002; Umiker-Sebeok 1996). This is somewhat perplexing given that Goffman specifically excluded questions related to sexualization and objectification in his study. But these researchers have attempted to redress this mismatch by adding variables intended to capture sexualization. For example, in an examination of advertisements in women's magazines in 1979 and 1991, Kang (1997) added two new variables to Goffman's coding categories: body display (degree of nudity) and independence (self-assertiveness). Using this expanded empirical framework, Kang finds that while some aspects of gender stereotyping—such as men shown as taller than women—had virtually disappeared by 1991, body displays of women had increased. Interpreting this combination of increases and decreases in gender stereotyping as a kind of balancing scale, Kang concludes that little changed in advertisements' portrayal of women over the 11-year time span. "Twelve years after the Goffman study," Kang writes, "magazine advertisements are still showing the same stereotyped images of women" (988–989). But a closer look at Kang's data, in fact, reveals substantial changes: nude or partially nude images of women increased nearly 30% from 1979 to 1991.

Lindner (2004) further developed Kang's analytical framework in a study of women in advertisements in *Time* and *Vogue* from 1955 to 2002. In addition to Goffman's and Kang's coding schemes, Lindner used three other variables: movement (the ability to move fast and far), location (domestic versus public), and objectification (whether the major function of the model is to "be looked at"). Using these measures, Lindner finds that both magazines rely on gender stereotypes but in different ways, particularly in terms of sexualization. "Stereotyping in *Time* occurs without the use of sexualized images of women," Lindner concludes, "whereas in *Vogue*, these sexualized images are the primary way of portraying women in positions of inferiority and low social power" (419–420). Although her data reveal a clear difference between the two magazines, they do not indicate any change in the sexualization of women over time. In Lindner's analysis, neither body display nor objectification changed noticeably from 1955 to 2002.

Krassas et al. (2003) also built on Goffman's framework in a study of sexualized representations of women and men in two men's magazines, *Maxim* and *Stuff*, in 2001. In addition to Goffman's categories, the authors added measures of nudity (breast/chest and buttock exposure) and objectification (some concealment of face combined with some level of body exposure). Using these variables, the authors find that—in 2001 at least—women were much more likely than men to have exposed breasts and buttocks, and were three times more likely to be sexually objectified.

These studies have made important steps in empirically examining sexualized representations of women and men in popular media. But they tell only part of the story. For example, Krassas et al. (2003) analyze images of both men and women, but only at a single point in time. Kang (1997) and Lindner (2004) examine change over time, but look only at images of women. This raises the question of whether men too have been increasingly sexualized in popular culture, as some have suggested (e.g., Bordo 1999; Pope et al. 2000; Rohlinger 2002; Thompson 2000). Additionally, Kang (1997) and Lindner (2004) datasets may not be sufficient to adequately measure change over time. Kang's analysis is based on only 2 years of

data (1979 and 1991), and Lindner's analysis is based on just twelve issues of each magazine across five decades.

Furthermore, although each of the studies described uses additional variables in order to measure sexualization, in our assessment they do not yet capture the full range of sexualized attributes. They do not include variables for genital accentuation (but see Krassas et al. 2001), open mouths and/or tongue exposure, sex acts or simulations (but see Reichert and Carpenter 2004; Reichert et al. 1999; Soley and Kurzbard 1986), and sexual referents in the textual description of the images (but see Johnson 2007; Soley and Kurzbard 1986). And, perhaps more importantly, all studies of sexualization measure only the presence or absence of aspects of sexualization in isolation. As a consequence, while they document the incidence of sexualized attributes, they do not measure whether the image as a whole—the woman rather than just her breasts—has become more frequently or more intensely sexualized over time. In the following section, we outline our empirical framework that builds on these studies to provide a more comprehensive measure of sexualization.

Data and Methods

We examine the covers of *Rolling Stone* for two key reasons. First and foremost, *Rolling Stone* is a well-known popular culture magazine in the U.S. Although in the early years the magazine focused almost exclusively music and music culture, by the 1970s its covers regularly featured an array of pop culture icons not limited to the music world. Today the magazine is well known for its coverage of politics, film, television, current events and, of course, popular music. Its covers generally feature a wide range of celebrities, including comedians, actors, musicians, models, politicians, record producers, military analysts, civil rights activists, journalists, film directors, athletes, and more. As a result, representations of men and women on the cover of *Rolling Stone* resemble popular cultural images broadly, particularly more so than lifestyle magazines which are often explicitly about sex, relationships, or sexuality. Our second reason for choosing *Rolling Stone* is its longevity. Launched in 1967, *Rolling Stone* has published more than one thousand covers across its lifespan. This extensive dataset offers an ideal window into changes in the sexualization of women and men in popular culture over time.

Dataset

There are 1,046 covers of *Rolling Stone*, starting with its first issue in November of 1967 through the end of 2009 (including those issues that featured multiple covers). We downloaded all covers from the *Rolling Stone* website in January 2010. We then cross-checked the cover images and their dates with two books that chronicled the history of *Rolling Stone* (Gatten 1993; Rolling Stone 2006), as well as with another website which had compiled all of its covers (Kabouter 2010).

Of the full set of 1,046 covers, we excluded 115 from our analysis for a number of reasons: they did not portray people (e.g., just text or cartoon characters), they

showed crowds with no discernable image to code, or they featured collages of covers that had previously been published. Of the remaining 931 covers, 651 featured only men and 205 featured only women (either alone or in groups). In those covers that showed groups of either men or women, we coded the central figure in the image (usually this was literally the person at the center of the image, but at times it was the dominant person in terms of his/her size or action). Another 75 covers featured women and men together. In those cases, the central man and woman were each coded separately. We thus analyzed a total of 1,006 cover images (726 images of men and 280 images of women) across 42 years of *Rolling Stone* magazine.

Coding Scheme

We conceptualize representations of women and men as falling along a continuum of sexualization: images may be not at all sexualized, slightly sexualized, clearly sexualized, or highly sexualized. To capture these differences, we developed a 23-point additive scale consisting of 11 separate variables, the sum of which indicates the degree to which an image is sexualized. We briefly describe each of the variables below, and Table 1 shows the frequency distribution for each.

Clothing/Nudity (0–5 points)

A number of studies have found style of clothing and extent of nudity to be important markers of sexualization (e.g., Johnson 2007; Kang 1997; Krassas et al. 2003; Lambiase and Reichert 2006; Nitz et al. 2007; Paek and Nelson 2007; Reichert 2003; Reichert and Carpenter 2004; Reichert et al. 1999; Soley and Kurzbard 1986; Soley and Reid 1988). We developed a six-point scale for this variable, ranging from unrevealing clothing (0 points) to completely naked (5 points). Those images that featured models wearing slightly revealing clothing, such as women wearing shirts with modestly low necklines or exposed arms and shoulders, scored a "1" on this measure. Images that scored a "2" in this category featured models wearing clothing that was somewhat revealing; this included exposed midriffs on both women and men. Images that scored a "3" featured models wearing highly revealing and/or skin-tight clothing. Images that scored "4" in this category featured models wearing swimsuits and lingerie, that is, apparel that is not generally considered "clothing" at all. Images that scored a "5" in this category featured models wearing nothing at all (or only minimal clothing, such as socks and shoes but nothing else).

Touch (0–3 points)

A number of researchers have examined the use of "touch" to suggest sexualization in media images (e.g., Reichert and Carpenter 2004; Reichert et al. 1999; Soley and Kurzbard 1986). We analyzed the nature of "touch" for each cover image on a 0–3 scale. Our measure included all forms of touch, including self-touch, touching others, and being touched. Cover models who were neither touching nor being

Table 1 Frequency distribution of coding categories for men (M) and women (W)

	Coded as "0"		Coded as "1"		Coded as "2"	
	M	W	M	W	M	W
Clothing/nudity	n = 554 (77%)	n = 78 (28%)	n = 70 (10%)	n = 44 (16%)	n = 56 (8%)	n = 20 (7%)
Touch	n = 496 (69%)	n = 141 (50%)	n = 206 (28%)	n = 93 (33%)	n = 20 (3%)	n = 39 (14%)
Pose	n = 659 (91%)	n = 149 (53%)	n = 50 (7%)	n = 99 (35%)	n = 15 (2%)	n = 34 (12%)
Mouth	n = 595 (82%)	n = 154 (55%)	n = 116 (16%)	n = 105 (37%)	n = 13 (2%)	n = 23 (8%)
Breasts	n = 653 (90%)	n = 154 (55%)	n = 54 (7%)	n = 59 (21%)	n = 17 (2%)	n = 69 (24%)
Genitals	n = 666 (92%)	n = 213 (76%)	n = 48 (7%)	n = 42 (15%)	n = 10 (1%)	n = 27 (10%)
Buttocks	n = 718 (99%)	n = 254 (90%)	n = 3 (< 1%)	n = 16 (6%)	n = 3 (< 1%)	n = 12 (4%)
Text	n = 652 (90%)	n = 177 (63%)	n = 52 (7%)	n = 79 (28%)	n = 20 (3%)	n = 26 (9%)
Head vs. body shot	n = 258 (36%)	n = 40 (14%)	n = 466 (64%)	n = 242 (86%)	–	–
Sex acts	n = 720 (99%)	n = 277 (98%)	n = 4 (1%)	n = 5 (2%)	–	–
Sexual role play	n = 719 (99%)	n = 259 (92%)	n = 5 (1%)	n = 23 (8%)	–	–

	Coded as "3"		"Coded as "4"		Coded as "5	
	M	W	M	W	M	W
Clothing/nudity	n = 30 (4%)	n = 38 (13%)	n = 7 (1%)	n = 76 (27%)	n = 7 (1%)	n = 26 (9%)
Touch	n = 2 (< 1%)	n = 9 (3%)	–	–	–	–
Pose	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mouth	–	–	–	–	–	–
Breasts	–	–	–	–	–	–
Genitals	–	–	–	–	–	–
Buttocks	–	–	–	–	–	–
Text	–	–	–	–	–	–
Head vs. body shot	–	–	–	–	–	–
Sex acts	–	–	–	–	–	–
Sexual role play	–	–	–	–	–	–

touched scored "0" on this measure. "Casual touching," for example, a model clasping his hands together or resting her arm on someone else's shoulder, scored a "1." Those images that scored a "2" exhibited some kind of provocative touching. These included, for example, Cameron Diaz lifting her shirt and resting her hand on her bare stomach just under her breast (August 22, 1996). The highest score in this category—3 points—was given to those covers that featured explicitly sexual touching (by oneself or someone else). These included, for example, David Spade pinching a woman's nipple (September 16, 1999) and Janet Jackson's breasts being cupped by disembodied male hands (September 16, 1993).

Pose (0–2 points)

Extending Goffman's (1979) analysis of body posture to studies of sexualization, researchers have analyzed an image's pose as a key element of its sexualization (e.g., Johnson 2007; Krassas et al. 2003; Lambiase and Reichert 2006). We created three codes to capture sexualized body postures. Images in which the cover model was not posed in any way related to sexual activity—standing upright, for example —scored "0" in this category. Images scored "1" for a variety of poses that were suggestive or inviting of sexual activity, including lifting one's arms overhead and any kind of leaning or sitting. Images that scored a "2" on this measure were overtly posed for sexual activity; this included lying down or, for women, sitting with their legs spread wide open.

Mouth (0–2 points)

Goffman (1979) found that women were often shown in advertisements to be covering their mouths or sucking on their finger as part of what he called "licensed withdrawal"—a lack of presence and, therefore, power. Although a number of studies have analyzed images in terms of their licensed withdrawal (e.g., Binns 2006; Kang 1997; Lindner 2004), we are not aware of any study that has examined a model's mouth as an element of his or her sexualization. In our study of *Rolling Stone* covers, however, we found mouths to be an important characteristic of sexualization and we developed three scores to measure it. The lowest score (0 points) was for mouths that did not suggest any kind of sexual activity, including closed lips, broad toothy smiles, and active singing, talking, or yelling. One point was given to mouths that were somewhat suggestive of sex; this included images in which the model's lips were parted slightly but not smiling. Images that scored a "2" featured models whose mouths were explicitly suggestive of sexual activity: This included models whose mouths were wide open but passive (not actively singing or yelling but, perhaps, posed for penetration), whose tongue was showing, or who had something (such as a finger) in his or her mouth.

Breasts/Chest; Genitals; Buttocks (0–2 points each)

A small number of studies have examined whether a focal point of the image is the model's breasts/chest, genitals, and/or buttocks (e.g., Krassas et al. 2001, 2003;

Rohlinger 2002). We used these as three separate variables, scoring each of them on a 0–2 scale. Those images in which these body parts were either not visible or not a focal point scored a "0" for each of the three variables. If one or more of these body parts were somewhat emphasized—if, for example, a women's breasts were a centerpiece of the image but still mostly concealed by clothing—the image received a "1" in the appropriate category. If one of these body parts was a major focus of the image—if a model's pants were unbuttoned and pulled down, for example—the image received a "2" for that variable.

Text (0–2 points)

Relatively few studies analyze an image's text as part of its sexualization (but see Johnson 2007; Soley and Kurzbard 1986). In our examination of *Rolling Stone* cover images, however, we found the text describing an image to be an important element of its sexualization. We coded only the text on the magazine cover that was directly related to the cover image. Most of these "coverlines" were not related to sex or sexuality and scored "0" on this measure. Text that contained some sexual innuendo, such as "Kid Rock Gets Lucky" (October 10, 2007), scored "1" in this category, and coverlines that made explicit references to sex or sexuality, such as "Asia Argento: She Puts the Sex in XXX" (September 5, 2002), scored "2."

Head vs. Body Shot (0–1 point)

A number of studies in this field distinguish between those images which are primarily headshots, featuring only the model's head and perhaps shoulders, and those which feature substantially more of their body (e.g., Baumann 2008; Goffman 1979; Lambiase and Reichert 2006; Johnson 2007; Schwarz and Kurz 1989). On our scale of sexualization, headshots scored "0" and body shots scored "1."

Sex Act (0–1 point)

Perhaps because relatively few popular media images depict models engaging in (or simulating) sex acts, only a few studies measure this variable (e.g., Reichert and Carpenter 2004; Reichert et al. 1999; Soley and Kurzbard 1986). In our analysis of *Rolling Stone* magazine covers, however, a small but hard to ignore number of such images prompted the creation of this new variable. Images in which the cover model was engaged in a sex act (e.g., kissing or embracing someone while lying naked in bed) or simulating a sex act (e.g., affecting fellatio or masturbation) scored "1" in this category.

Sexual Role Play (0–1 point)

Finally, although we found no studies that measured symbols of sexual role playing—such as infantilization (e.g., child-like clothes) or bondage/domination (e.g., leather bustier, leather straps, dog collars, studded bracelets)—in our analysis the infrequent yet conspicuous presence of such symbols led to the creation of this

variable. Cover images that suggested sexual role playing scored "1" in this category.

Analytic Strategy

We coded the covers of *Rolling Stone* in several passes. The authors first worked together to establish coding rules for all variables, jointly coding three randomly selected years of covers. The second author then coded the remaining cover images, working closely with the first author to resolve any questions that arose. Upon the completion of coding, we randomly selected 10% of covers (n = 93) to code independently as a reliability check (these 93 covers did not include the years we had coded together or the images that had been in question). Our Cohen's Kappa reliability scores were perfect (1.00, $p < .001$) for three variables ("genitals," "sexual role play," and "sex act") and indicated substantial agreement for the remaining variables (see Landis and Koch 1977), ranging from .707 ("bottom"; $p < .001$) to .891 ("clothing"; $p < .001$).[1]

After coding was complete, the images' scores on the 23-point scale of sexualization clustered into three distinct groups: nonsexualized images (which scored 0–4 points), sexualized images (5–9 points), and hypersexualized images (10 or more points). We tested for reliability between coders for these three categories as well. In our 10% random sample of covers, there was near-perfect agreement between authors' categorization of images as nonsexualized, sexualized, and hypersexualized: Kappa was found to be .972 ($p < .001$).

Dividing the images into these three categories—nonsexualized, sexualized, and hypersexualized—captures important differences between them. Consider, for example, the two images presented in Fig. 1. Both covers feature people who are naked and in a kneeling position, yet the impact of the images is quite different. The band members of Blind Melon are clearly sexualized—they are naked and the text asserts that they are "ripe and ready"—but they are not hypersexualized. They are not posed to engage in sexual activity; they do not touch themselves or each other; they are not arching their backs to emphasize their chests, genitals, or buttocks (in fact, their backs are rather slumped); and they gaze somberly into the camera, with their mouths closed. In fact, their nudity and textual description seem at odds with their otherwise nonsexualized characteristics.

In contrast, the cover image of Laetitia Casta is *hyper*sexualized. Like the members of Blind Melon, she is both naked and kneeling, but her back is arched to emphasize her breasts and buttocks. Rather than posing on an unremarkable white background, Casta is kneeling on a bed of pink rose petals. Her body faces away from the camera, but her head is tilted back and is turned so that her eyes can meet the viewer's gaze. Her lips are slightly parted. Her arm is raised over her head and touches her hair, which falls down her back. Her skin glistens, as though it has just been oiled. Casta, the text tells us, is the star of *Rolling Stone's* "hot list."

[1] For the "text" variable, Kappa = .887 ($p < .001$); "body," Kappa = .876 ($p < .001$); "mouth," Kappa = .722 ($p < .001$); "pose," Kappa = .831 ($p < .001$); "breasts/chest," Kappa = .739 ($p < .001$); "touch," Kappa = .726 ($p < .001$).

Fig. 1 Sexualization vs. hypersexualization

The difference between these two images is clear, yet measuring nudity alone would not capture it. Our scale of sexualization does. By our measure, the Blind Melon cover scored 9 points, placing it at the top of the sexualized category. The Casta image, by contrast, scored 15 points, placing it well into the hypersexualized category. A gestalt-level analysis confirms this difference; in this paper we offer the tools to measure it. In the following sections, we detail our findings and discuss their implications.

Findings

Before looking at questions of intensity, we first examine changes in the frequency of sexualized images over time. In order to do so, we combine sexualized and hypersexualized images into one category and compare them to nonsexualized images. Figure 2 shows that sexualized representations of women have increased significantly ($x^2 = 6.8$, $p < .01$), and sexualized representations of men have also increased, but not significantly ($x^2 = .99$). In the 1960s, 11% of men and 44% of women on the covers of *Rolling Stone* were sexualized. In the 2000s, 17% of men were sexualized (a 55% increase), and 83% of women were sexualized (an 89% increase). It is also telling to look at these figures another way: nonsexualized images of women dropped from 56% in the 1960s to 17% in the 2000s, while nonsexualized images of men dropped only slightly from 89% in the 1960s to 83% in the 2000s. Notably, in the 2000s, the same proportion of women were sexualized

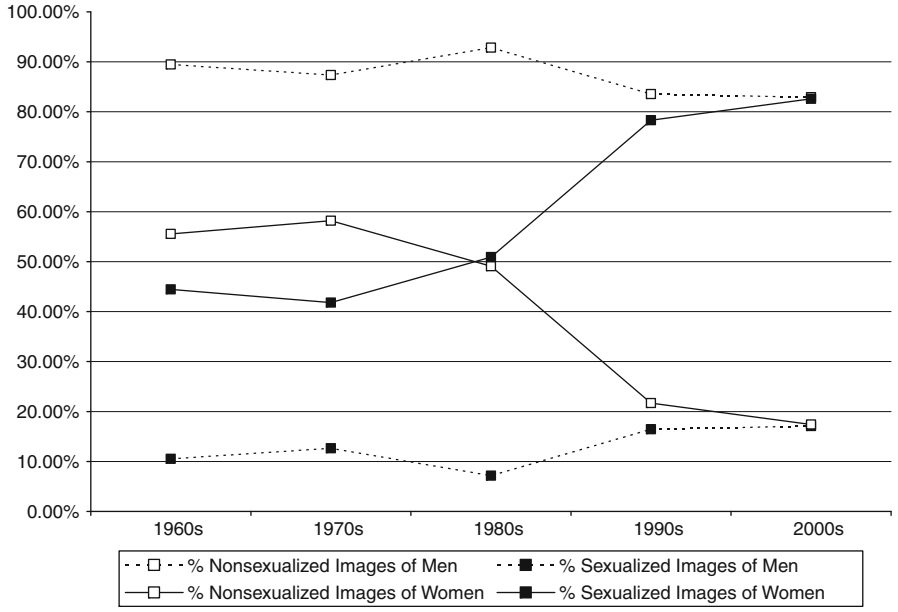


Fig. 2 Nonsexualization vs. sexualization of men and women on *Rolling Stone*

as men were nonsexualized (83%). Chi-square tests demonstrate the significance of this difference: $x^2 = 90.02$, $p < .001$.

These findings speak clearly to debates about the sexualization of men in popular media. While sexualized images of men have increased, men are still dramatically less likely to be sexualized than women. This difference is further highlighted by looking at the numerical frequency of such images: In the 2000s, there were 28 sexualized images of men (17% of male images) but 57 sexualized images of women (83% of female images), and there were 136 nonsexualized images of men (83% of male images) but only 12 nonsexualized images of women (17% of female images). Perhaps even more telling is the difference between men and women at the low end of the scale. In the 2000s, there were 35 images of men which scored a "0" on our scale and another 39 images which scored just 1 point, indicating that these images displayed no (or almost no) sexualized attributes. Together they accounted for 45% of all images of men in the 2000s. By contrast, there was not a single image of a woman in the 2000s that scored 0 points, and only 2 images of women scored 1 point on the scale, accounting for less than 3% of images of women in the 2000s.

Intensity of Sexualization

The difference in the sexualization of men and women is even more striking when we examine the intensity of their sexualization. In our analysis, we find a broad range in the degree of sexualization—some images are only somewhat sexualized while others are so intensely sexualized that we have labeled them "hypersexualized." In order to capture such differences, we split the sexualized category into

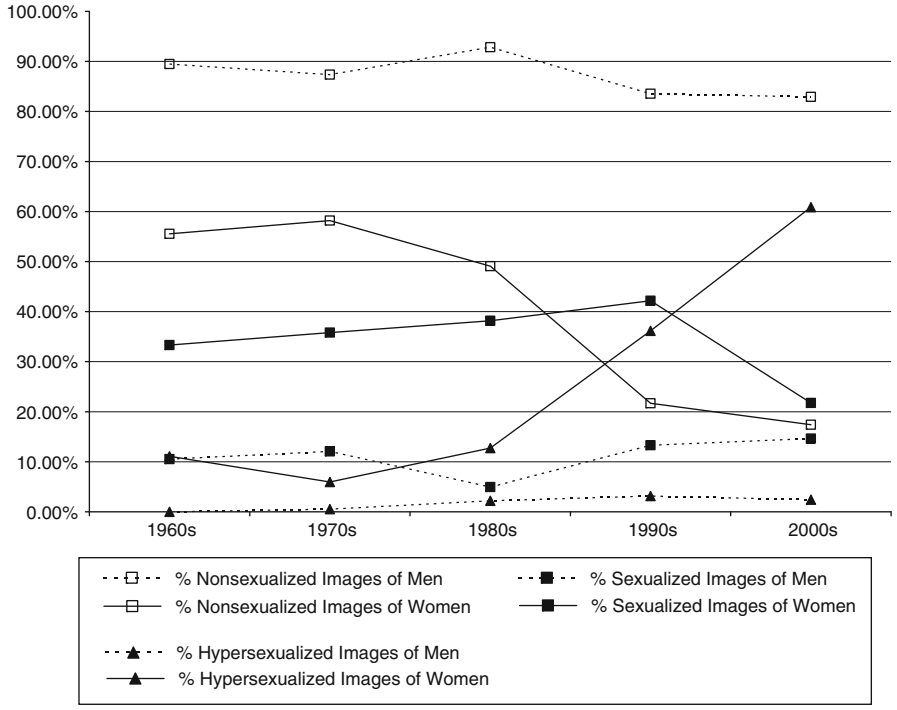


Fig. 3 Nonsexualization, sexualization, and hypersexualization of men and women on *Rolling Stone*

two groups: those that were simply sexualized (such as the Blind Melon image described above) and those that were hypersexualized (such as the Casta image). In this more nuanced analysis we divide *Rolling Stone* cover images into three categories: nonsexualized, sexualized, and hypersexualized (see Fig. 3).

Looking first at images of men, we see that the vast majority of them—some 83% of men in the 2000s—fall in the nonsexualized category. This represents a noteworthy, though comparatively small, decrease from the 1960s when 89% of men were not sexualized. Many nonsexualized images of men are close-up headshots (36% across all years): they do not show the man's body nor do they indicate any level of nudity with bare shoulders or chest. Typically the man's mouth is closed and he is looking directly into the camera, though at times he might be smiling or looking to one side. The text in such images usually does not carry any sexual innuendo. On more than four decades of *Rolling Stone's* covers, 162 images of men—or 22%—scored a zero on our scale, displaying no sexualized attributes.

Other images of men in the nonsexualized category are slightly more sexualized. One example of this is a 1997 image of actor Brad Pitt (April 3). On our scale, this image scored 4 points, placing it at the top of the nonsexualized category. The cover shows Pitt's face and part of his torso (1 point). He is wearing a plush white bathrobe (1 point), which is open to reveal part of his chest (1 point). He looks

directly into the camera through tousled hair, his lips are very slightly parted (1 point). The text reads, "Leader of the Pack: Brad Pitt Talks Tough."

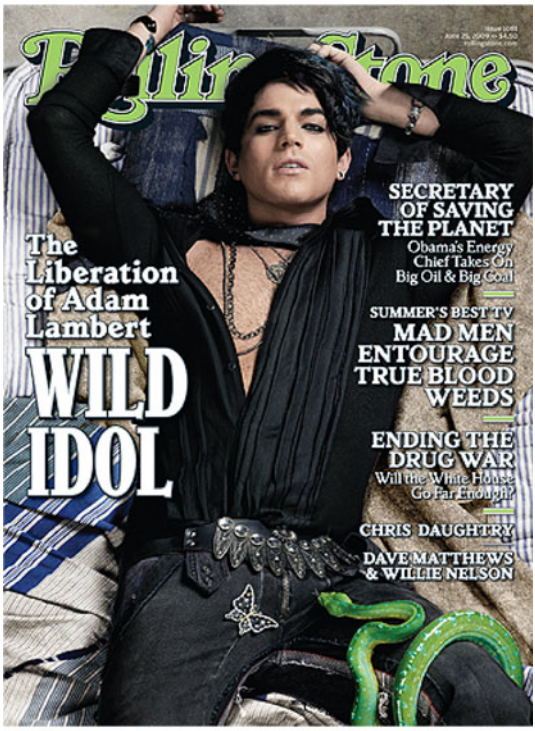
Although the majority of men on the cover of *Rolling Stone* are not sexualized, a sizeable minority fall into the sexualized (but not hypersexualized) category. In the 1960s, 10.5% of men were sexualized, and in the 1970s their proportion increased slightly to 12%. In the 1980s, sexualized representations of men dropped to just 5%, but in the 1990s sexualized images of men increased to 13.3%. Their numbers continued to increase somewhat, so that in the 2000s 14.6% of images of men were sexualized.

A 2006 cover featuring singer Justin Timberlake (September 21) offers an example of this category of sexualized men. On our scale, Timberlake's image scored 8 points—double that of the Brad Pitt cover described above—and falls squarely within the sexualized category. The image shows Timberlake's body from the thighs up (1 point). He is wearing a white T-shirt and jeans; he is looking directly into the camera and smiling broadly. Timberlake is carrying a guitar over one shoulder as if he were off to a gig, but his white T-shirt is soaking wet (3 points), clinging to his body and revealing his chest (2 points). The text reads, "Justin Timberlake: Wet Dream, The New King of Sex Gets Loose" (2 points).

Although sexualized images of men such as this one have become more common over time, *Rolling Stone* rarely features hypersexualized images of men. In the 1960s, there were no such images and, in the 1970s, there was just one hypersexualized image of a man, representing 1% of male images in that decade. In the 1980s, 2% of men were hypersexualized and, in the 1990s, 3% were. But in the 2000s, hypersexualized images of men dropped again to just over 2%.

The most prominent example of this category is a 2009 cover featuring pop singer Adam Lambert (June 25) (see Fig. 4). On our scale, the image scored 13 points, the highest score among men on the cover of *Rolling Stone*. The cover shows Lambert's body from the thighs up (1 point). He is lying on a bed (2 points) with his arms lifted overhead, conveying a sense of sexual passivity or vulnerability. One of his hands touches his hair (2 points). His eyes, which are lined with make-up, gaze into the camera, and his lips are slightly parted (1 point). Lambert is wearing tight black jeans and an unbuttoned black shirt (3 points), revealing part of his chest (1 point). His legs are spread and a bright green snake crawls up his leg, its head remarkably near his genitals (2 points). The text reads, "The Liberation of Adam Lambert: Wild Idol" (1 point). Given that Lambert is openly gay, perhaps it is not surprising that he is the most intensely sexualized man on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, since popular media portrayals of gay men often over-emphasize their sexuality (Gross 2001; Nardi and Bolton 1998). But what *is* perhaps surprising about this image is its comparison to the highest scoring image of women, described below.

Turning to images of women, we see different trends not only in the frequency but also in the intensity of their sexualization. Overall, nonsexualized representations of women have decreased since the start of *Rolling Stone*. In the 1960s, 56% of women on the magazine's cover were nonsexualized. In the 1970s, nonsexualized images of women increased slightly to 58% and then, in the 1980s, dropped to 49%.



Adam Lambert (singer)
June 25, 2009

Fig. 4 Hypersexualized man

In the 1990s, nonsexualized images of women took a sharp downturn, falling to 22%. In the 2000s, just 17% of women were nonsexualized.

A 2009 cover featuring country singer Taylor Swift (March 15) offers an example of this nonsexualized category. On our scale, Swift's image scored 3 points, placing it in the nonsexualized category even though it contains minor elements of sexualization, much like the Brad Pitt cover described above. The image shows Swift's upper body (1 point). She is wearing a white halter top that reveals her shoulders and arms (1 point), though her body is largely covered by her long blonde hair. Swift stares directly into the camera; her lips are closed. She is holding a guitar as though she is just about to play it, her fingers poised over the guitar strings. The text reads, "Taylor Swift: Secrets of a Good Girl" (1 point).

Just as nonsexualized images of women such as this one have become less common, in recent years sexualized (but not hypersexualized) images of women have also become less prevalent, though to a much lesser extent. In the 1960s, 33% of women on the cover of *Rolling Stone* were sexualized. This rate increased somewhat over the next several decades, taking an upturn in the 1990s to 42%. In the 2000s, however, sexualized (but not hypersexualized) images of women decreased by nearly half to 22%. But, as we will see in a moment, an even greater increase in hypersexualized images of women more than made up the difference.

A 2008 portrait of pop star Britney Spears (December 11) is an example of this sexualized category. On our scale, this image scored 6 points, placing it near the bottom of the category's range. The cover shows Spears' body from the hips up (1 point). She is looking away from the camera and smiling widely, as though she were laughing heartily. Her tousled blonde hair falls below her shoulders. She is wearing low-slung jeans and a gray T-shirt, which is rolled up to reveal much of her stomach (3 points). One hand holds her cheek (1 point), conveying a sense of youthful enthusiasm, and her other hand rests in her jeans' belt loop, pulling down her pants slightly (1 point) to reveal a glimpse of a tattoo below. The text reads, "Yes She Can! Britney Returns."

Although sexualized images of women such as this one have become less common in recent years, hypersexualized images of women have increased significantly since the start of *Rolling Stone* magazine. In the 1960s, there was just one hypersexualized image of a woman, representing 11% of images of women at the time. In the 1970s, 6% of women on the magazine's cover were hypersexualized and, in the 1980s, that number more than doubled to 13%. Hypersexualized images of women increased even more in the 1990s and 2000s, reaching 36 and 61% in each decade, respectively. As these data show, in the 2000s women were three and a half times more likely to be hypersexualized than nonsexualized, and nearly five times more likely to be sexualized to any degree (sexualized or hypersexualized) than nonsexualized. Chi-square tests demonstrate the significance of the increase in the sexualization—and specifically hypersexualization—of women over time. For women's sexualization of any kind (versus nonsexualization) in the 2000s compared to the 1960s, $x^2 = 6.8$, $p < .01$. And for women's hypersexualization (versus nonsexualization or sexualization) in the 2000s compared to the 1960s, $x^2 = 7.97$, $p < .01$.

In our analysis, it might seem that the hypersexualized category encompasses a wide range of sexualized images because its scale (10–23) is wider than the other categories. Yet even with such a wide range, the images in this category leave little room for interpretation as being about anything other than sex. To demonstrate this, it is instructive to look at two images of hypersexualized women, one at each end of the category's range (see Fig. 5). An example of the lower end of this category is a 2009 image of Blake Lively and Leighton Meester (April 2), two leads of the television show "Gossip Girl." On our scale, this image scored 12 points, one point less than the Adam Lambert cover, the top scorer among men. The image shows the upper bodies of both women (1 point), though Lively's portrait dominates the cover. She is wearing a very low-cut black tank top (3 points) that reveals much of her breasts (2 points). Meester leans in towards Lively; her face is touching Lively's hair (1 point), suggesting that beyond the image their bodies are also pressed together. The focal point of the image is a dripping, double-scoop ice cream cone, a phallus-like object which Lively holds up for both women to lick (1 point). Their mouths are wide open and their protruding tongues (2 points) are covered in ice cream. The text reads, "The Nasty Thrill of 'Gossip Girl'" (2 points).

Compare this image to one at the top end of the hypersexualized category: a 2002 cover featuring pop singer Christina Aguilera (November 14). This image scored 20 points, earning the highest score in our dataset. The picture shows nearly all of Aguilera's body (1 point). She is naked (5 points), except for black fishnet stockings

Blake Lively and Leighton Meester (actors)
April 2, 2009

Christina Aguilera (singer)
November 14, 2002

Fig. 5 Hypersexualized women

on her lower legs and black motorcycle boots (1 point). She is lying on a bed (2 points), which is covered with a rippling red satin sheet. Her head is tilted downwards, but she is looking into the camera. Her lips are parted (1 point), and her long hair is spread out around her shoulders. Aguilera's left hand holds a guitar, but only decoratively, not giving any indication that it is an instrument she might play. The guitar's neck is strategically placed so that it covers her left nipple. Her right hand clasps her other breast (3 points), not to cover it but to push it up provocatively. Her breasts are otherwise uncovered (2 points). Aguilera's body is contorted so that not only are her breasts exposed, but her buttocks (2 points) and, to a lesser degree, her genitals (1 point) are accentuated. The text reads, "Christina Aguilera: Inside the Dirty Mind of a Pop Princess" (2 points).

The new predominance of hypersexualized images of women such as these is illustrated further by examining the numerical frequency of such images. In the 2000s, there were 12 nonsexualized images of women, 15 sexualized images, and 42 hypersexualized images.[2] By contrast, there were 136 nonsexualized images of men, 24 sexualized images, and only 4 hypersexualized images of men in the 2000s. That

[2] Some might attribute the increase in the hypersexualization of women on the cover of *Rolling Stone* to a change in management: In 2002, *Rolling Stone* hired a new managing editor, Ed Needham, who was the former editor of *FHM*—the rather notorious "lad mag" that regularly features scantily-clad women on its covers. A closer look at our data, however, reveals a strong increase in the hypersexualization of women on the cover of *Rolling Stone* since the 1980s. Moreover, the proportion of hypersexualized images of women actually peaked at 78% in 1999, well before Needham's tenure. Hypersexualized images of women reached their second highest point (75%) in 2002, the first year of Needham's appointment, and then again in 2006, after Needham's 2-year stint at the magazine had ended.

there are more sexualized images of men than women should not be too surprising. Images of men have long dominated the cover of *Rolling Stone*. (Recall that our dataset is comprised of 726 images of men compared to 280 images of women.) What is surprising, however, is the asymmetry in nonsexualized and hypersexualized representations of men and women. In the 2000s, there were more than 10 times the number of hypersexualized images of women than men, and there were more than 11 times the number of nonsexualized images of men than women.

Discussion and Conclusion

In *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private*, Susan Bordo (1999) describes the different implications for men and women when they are sexualized in the same way. As evidence, she analyzes advertisements in which women and men are shown with their pants around their ankles. Bordo (1999:28) argues that women in such images seem "stripped or exposed," even more than if their pants were off altogether, because they resemble rape or murder victims shown in movies and television. By contrast, Bordo observes, men shown with their pants around their ankles convey "much the same confident, slightly challenging machismo" as they would otherwise.

If similarly sexualized images can suggest victimization for women but confidence for men, consider the implications when women are sexualized at the same rate as men are *not* sexualized, as they were on the covers of *Rolling Stone* in the 2000s. And the vast majority of those sexualized images of women—some 74%—were hypersexualized, meaning that they did not exhibit only one or two signals of sex, but a multitude of them. Often women in these images were shown naked (or nearly so); they were shown with their legs spread wide open or lying down on a bed—in both cases sexually accessible; they were shown pushing up their breasts or pulling down their pants; they were described as having "dirty minds" or giving "nasty thrills"; and, in some cases, they were even shown to be simulating fellatio or other sex acts.

Some researchers argue against using the phrase "sexual objectification" to describe such images because they often depict women as active, confident, and/or sexually desirous (e.g., Bordo 1999; Gill 2003, 2008, 2009). We argue, however, that the intensity of their sexualization suggests that "sexual object" may indeed be the only appropriate label. The accumulation of sexualized attributes in these images leaves little room for observers to interpret them in any way other than as instruments of sexual pleasure and visual possession for a heterosexual male audience. Such images do not show women as sexually agentic musicians and actors; rather, they show female actors and musicians as ready and available for sex.

Yet some scholars have criticized such statements as overly homogenizing because they render invisible differences in this process of sexualization (e.g., Gill 2009).[3] In our view, however, the very problem is one of homogenization. We argue

[3] Although a number of researchers have found that nonwhites are often sexualized in print media (Collins 1990; Hansen and Hansen 2000; West 2009), our analyses show no discernable difference in the

that the dramatic increase in hypersexualized images of women—along with the corresponding decline in nonsexualized images of them—indicates a decisive narrowing or homogenization of media representations of women. In *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, journalist Ariel Levy (2005:5) describes this trend: "A tawdry, tarty, cartoonlike version of female sexuality has become so ubiquitous, it no longer seems particular. What we once regarded as a *kind* of sexual expression," Levy writes, "we now view *as* sexuality" (emphases in original). In this article we offer empirical evidence for this claim.

Of concern is that this narrowing down of media representations of women to what Levy calls a single "cartoonlike version of female sexuality"—or what we might call "hypersexualized femininity"—suggests a corresponding narrowing of culturally acceptable ways to "do" femininity (West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987). This is not to say that there are no culturally available alternatives for women and girls as they make decisions about how to look and behave, but it does suggest that there may increasingly be fewer competing cultural scripts for ways of doing femininity. Thus, at least in popular media outlets such as *Rolling Stone*, it seems that just one aspect of femininity—sexuality, and *hyper*sexuality at that—has overshadowed other aspects of "emphasized femininity" (Connell 1987), such as nurturance, fragility, and sociability. Although such characteristics are themselves problematic, the ascendancy of only one version of femininity (and, at the same time, one version of female sexuality) seems particularly troubling.

Although *Rolling Stone* is a leader among popular culture magazines, more studies need to be done. We hope that our measure will be useful in analyzing representations of men and women in a wide variety of popular media, especially those targeting nonwhites and children. Yet in this article we have taken important steps toward empirically documenting the prevalence and intensity of the sexualization of men and women in popular culture. And what we found is striking: sexualized representations of both women and men increased, and hypersexualized images of women (but not men) skyrocketed. "While there is nothing wrong with a *little* objectification," Sut Jhally (1989:10) writes, "there is a great deal wrong and dangerous with a *lot* of objectification—that is when one is viewed as *nothing other than an object*" (emphases in original). And, for women on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, there is increasingly "a lot" of objectification.

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Footnote 3 continued
frequency or intensity of sexualization of whites and nonwhites. Overall, 12% of women and 12% of men on the cover of *Rolling Stone* were nonwhite. They were nonsexualized, sexualized, and hypersexualized at about the same rate as their white counterparts.

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