

**SELF PERCEPTION AMONG YOUNG JEWISH WOMEN RELATIVE TO EXPOSURE TO
SEXUALIZING VISUAL MEDIA**

by

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Dear Colleagues, School Faculty Members, and Study Participants,

As you are aware, I have been working on a study of Orthodox Jewish young women and media exposure. This study was initiated for the dual purposes of meeting the dissertation requirements for my PhD in psychology at Capella University, and to gain insight into a population that has been under-represented in psychological literature. Over the course of a year, I recruited Orthodox Jewish participants at women's colleges, summer camps, and in public areas throughout NY state. The results of the study were very enlightening, and I've attached a user-friendly summary of those results for your review. This document is a short overview of the research goals, procedures, and outcomes. Should you be interested in perusing the full dissertation document, it will be published in early 2016. I would be glad to send you a copy of the final document as well as a pre-print of any future publications, such as journal articles, on this topic. Please send me an email request at sschwartz.gluck@gmail.com if you'd like to be added to the email list for future publications.

Thank you for your interest in this research!

Best Regards,

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Executive Summary

Popular American media such as TV, movies, and music videos often affects the way people see themselves and the world around them. This study looked at the ways in which women are shown on screen, and how that affected a group of Orthodox Jewish young women. The media often makes it seem like in order for women to be beautiful, they need to be very thin and perfect. Many researchers have studied college-aged women, and have found that when women watch American media, they are more likely to have low self-esteem and to be unhappy with the way they look (Aubrey, Hopper, & Mbure, 2011; Wright, 2009). On the other hand, girls who grow up in the Orthodox Jewish culture often learn that it is best to be modest by covering their bodies so that they would be noticed for their minds and hearts rather than how they look (Andrews, 2011). Some Orthodox Jews even choose not to watch any non-Jewish media at all. These differences between Jewish teachings and American media mean that American Jewish women might learn completely opposite things from the media than what they learn from Jewish books. This study of 155 single, Orthodox Jewish young women included people from colleges, seminaries, and public areas in the state of NY. The study participants included some who reported that they watched a lot of American media, and others who reported never having watched any non-Jewish media in their entire lives. All of the participants were asked to complete a survey about their beliefs and behaviors but were not exposed to any media during this study. After all of the surveys were analyzed, there were some interesting results that were found. When participants watched higher levels of media, this was associated with lower levels of general self worth and lower levels of body confidence. Those who reported higher levels of religiosity were less likely to watch American media and more likely to have higher general levels of self

worth. This was the first time that Orthodox Jewish girls and popular media were looked at by a psychological researcher.

The Research Problem

American TV, movies, and music videos often make women look weak, dependent, and as objects to be appreciated for their beauty. There are so many ways in which this happens. For example, women's bodies are often zoomed in on even when those bodies are not important in understanding the plot of the show. Men's faces, on the other hand, are shown more often than their bodies. In music videos, male artists often perform surrounded by women in tiny, skintight clothing who are pretty much used as props. The basic message is that beauty means being very thin (even unhealthy), having perfect hair and makeup (even when one first wakes up in the morning, even when one is stuck in a rainstorm, even while escaping from danger), and being able to get the attention of men. Women who meet those conditions are often looked at as being good people, and they even have better chances of getting a job and finding a husband (Tylka & Calogero, 2011). Women who don't have those Barbie-like looks often spend a lot of time and money trying to make themselves look that way, sometimes by controlling what they eat, learning to hate their own bodies, or going under the knife for plastic surgery. There have been many researchers who have studied college-aged American women and have found that watching media can be very harmful (Agbo-Quaye & Robertson, 2010). However, this study is the first time that a researcher has looked at the way that the media affects Orthodox Jewish young women.

The Population

Orthodox Jews are a unique group, and there has not been that much research that has focused on this group. Part of the reason for this is that Jews have been hurt in the

past (example: the Holocaust), and therefore tend to stick together and avoid outsiders. However, in the last 10 years there have been Orthodox Jewish researchers who were able to successfully study members of the population (Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, & Siev, 2010; Schnall, Pelcovitz, & Fox, 2013). This is important because when information about a group becomes available, it is easier to understand the group and then to provide practical services.

Orthodox Jewish young women are different from mainstream American college women in a few important ways. In Judaism, the way to be an ideal women is to be modest, to fear G-d, and to focus on having positive character traits. In fact, the less one worries about how they look on the outside, the better. As stated in Proverbs, "*Sheker hachain, vehevel hayofi, isha yirat hashem, hi tithallal,*" which translates as, "charm is deceptive and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears G-d, she is to be praised." This means that the Jewish way of being a good woman is quite different from what popular media suggests.

The young women in this study were recruited at women's colleges, seminaries, summer camps, and in public areas within New York State. Of the 215 who wanted to be in the study, 155 met the conditions of being Orthodox Jewish, between the ages of 18-24, never married, never pregnant, and attended all-girls' school from first grade until the present. Of the 155 young women who were in this study, 13 reported that they had *never* watched any non-Jewish media, and 57 reported that they 'almost never' did. Most of the participants reported that they were very religious, with 93 scoring the highest possible score on the religiosity questions, and the rest had varying levels of religiosity. This meant that the study included people who truly represented a range of Orthodox Jewish young women from New York.

The Research Survey

The participants in this study answered about 70 questions on a paper and pencil survey. There were four sections. The first section asked questions about age, and asked people to check off if they had ever been married, pregnant, or gone to a coed school. The second section was the Student Religiosity Questionnaire, which listed Jewish values and asked people to rate how much they agreed with those values from 1-5. The third section was the Lifetime Media Exposure Questionnaire, and asked questions about non-Jewish media watching from elementary school through the current time. The fourth section was the Self Perception Profile for College Students, and asked participants to rate how they felt about themselves in general, how they felt about their bodies, and how intelligent they felt.

Data Analysis

Once all the surveys were collected, they were entered into a computer program called SPSS. All of the survey answers were carefully reviewed, and the missing or unclear answers were marked. Then, a few scientific tests (bivariate regression, Pearson correlations, and Spearman's rho) were run in order to find the answers to the research questions. These tests were designed to look at all of participants' survey answers, and to compare and contrast those answers. The tests were looking for "correlations," or connections within all of the survey responses.

Research Questions	Answers
1. Among young Jewish women who diverge in their religiosity, does self-perception of global self worth vary relative to consumption of sexualizing visual media?	Yes. When participants reported higher levels of media watching, this was associated with lower general self worth, no matter how religious the participants were.
2. Is religiosity associated with reported sexualizing visual media consumption?	Yes. Participants who reported lower levels of religiosity were more likely to report watching higher levels of media.
3. Is religiosity associated with self-perception?	Yes. Participants who reported higher levels of religiosity were more likely to report higher levels of self worth.
4. Is self-perception of intellectual ability associated with sexualizing visual media consumption?	No. There was no connection between media consumption and self-perception of intellectual ability.
5. Is self-perception of physical appearance associated with sexualizing visual media consumption?	Yes. Participants who reported higher levels of media watching were more likely to have negative perceptions of their physical appearance (body, weight, looks).

Conclusions

The current results suggest that Orthodox Jewish young women are affected by the objectification of women in popular media. No matter how much they believed in Jewish values, those who watched non-Jewish media were more likely to have decreases in global self worth and in their self-perception of physical appearance. However, the results did suggest that women who reported higher levels of religiosity were also less likely to watch popular media, and were more likely to report positive global self worth. This may be viewed as a reflection of the complex reality of American Jewish women. Those who strongly value their Judaism are less likely to watch popular media. However, even the most religious women, when they do choose to watch American media, report significant negative impacts on their self-perception.

While Judaic culture often aims to empower and de-objectify women, the vivid on-screen content that is widely available in America may be a stronger influence. While

some sects within Judaism have attempted to ban the Internet and media, the current results suggest that there are many Orthodox Jewish young women who do not follow those restrictions. Therefore, there may be a strong need for culturally sensitive media literacy education in Orthodox Jewish schools, so that girls may learn how to critically evaluate the various influences to which they may be exposed.

Most importantly, the current study represents an initial examination of media and Orthodox Jews. The conclusion of this study may signify the beginning of many new conversations, interventions, and academic studies among Orthodox Jewish community members and psychological researchers.

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