Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Social Psychology and Humanity Studies
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.HZ32253

Race, Sexualization, and Perceptions of Women's Skills and Attractiveness on Social Media

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Abstract. This research will investigate how observers evaluate women's competence and attractiveness through social media photo content based on their racial background. Research indicates that women who share sexualized content through revealing images or suggestive poses receive lower competence assessments from observers even though their qualifications remain unchanged. This research will extend on previous studies, investigating how different racial and gender stereotypes affect human perception. This study will present participants with profiles of women from four racial backgrounds (White, Black, Asian and Latina) who appear in both sexualized and non-sexualized photos for competence and attractiveness assessments. The research predicts that sexualized images will produce decreased competence ratings and increased attractiveness assessments among all groups yet Black and Latina women will experience the most significant competence devaluation. These findings will eventually demonstrate how digital bias combines racial and gender factors, which will enhance social media literacy and workplace bias understanding.

Keywords: sexualization, race, social media, bias

1. Introduction

Social media users now present their personal images as their main way to show their identity to others.

The combination of professional and personal content on social media platforms continue to cause ongoing bias and stereotype of female users. A series of researches demonstrate that women faced discrimination, based on people viewing their photo as sexually provocative. Daniels and Zurbriggen established that women who share sexualized images often receive higher ratings for physical attractiveness, but their perceived competence and intelligence also suffer significant declines [1]. These findings suggest the presence of a sexual double standard, which attractiveness appears when against perceived professionalism.

Psychological explanations for these behaviors explain how people make different social assessments about others through photos' sexuality, because they link emotional sensitivity to sexualized figures, but reduce their perceived rationality and professionalism [2]. Zayas and Shoda demonstrated how implicit self-other associations, which function subconsciously, lead to automatic evaluative judgments about social media photos [3].

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By examining how racial background affects how people assess women's competency and attractiveness based on their social media images, the study tends to expand on previous research. This study will analyze four racial groups—White, Black, Asian, and Latina—in order to comprehend gender stereotypes based on race impact evaluation, going beyond earlier research that mostly focused on White women. Due to preexisting preconceptions that depict Asian women as relatively subservient and meek and Black women as hypersexual and aggressive, viewers' perceptions of the identical image vary depending on the woman's race. Because of preexisting assumptions, viewers often interpret the same image differently depending on the woman's race. The primary research question looks into how people's perceptions of competence and attractiveness are affected by their race when they see images of women on social media that feature sexualized versus non-sexualized content.

The research predicts that sexualized images will boost attractiveness scores yet lower competence assessments for every racial demographic. Competence penalty will be more pronounced for Black and Latina women than for White and Asian women, based on prevailing racial stereotypes [4]. The research investigates digital self-presentation intersectionality to develop awareness about hiring practices and media literacy education.

2. Method

2.1. Procedures

The survey will be completed by participants through an online platform as individuals. Participants will view all eight photos in a random sequence; then evaluate each photo before answering brief demographic questions and receiving a full explanation of the study.

2.2. Participants

The research will enroll sixty adult participants aged 18 to 40 who join through social media platforms and university subject pool recruitment. Research participants will match gender distribution to achieve demographic representation.

2.3. Materials

The research will use eight social media profile images of women which include two pictures from each racial group (White, Black, Asian, Latina) showing both sexualized and non-sexualized content. Researchers will use standardized images with controlled lighting and expression and background elements. The participants will evaluate each profile through a 7-point Likert scale to assess competence and attractiveness where 1 represents "Not at all" and 7 represents "Extremely".

2.4. Data analysis

The study will use a 2 × 4 repeated-measures ANOVA to analyze data with Photo Type (Sexualized vs. Non-Sexualized) and Race (White, Black, Asian, Latina) as within-subject variables, and will measure perceived competence and attractiveness as its main outcome variables.

Study will perform post hoc t-tests to evaluate racial group differences for each photo presentation. The study will present effect sizes (Cohen's d) for all statistically significant results. The study design achieves 80% power to detect small-to-medium effects (d = .32) with an alpha level of .05 and 60 participants.

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3. Results

This research predicts that participants will view sexualized images as less competent yet more attractive than non-sexualized images. This pattern occurs across all racial groups, but with different intensity levels. Specifically, the competence penalty for Black and Latina women will be most pronounced when they present themselves in sexualized ways. Asian women will receive higher attractiveness ratings when shown in sexualized photos, but their competence ratings will decrease less than other groups.White women, however, will experience a moderate decline in competence ratings and a significant increase in attractiveness ratings [5].

Table 1. Predicted mean rating

Race	Photo Type	Competence	Attractiveness
White	Sexualized	3.5	5.8
White	Non-Sexualized	5.9	4.5
Black	Sexualized	3.2	5.5
Black	Non-Sexualized	5.6	4.3
Asian	Sexualized	3.0	5.6
Asian	Non-Sexualized	5.7	4.4
Latina	Sexualized	3.3	5.7
Latina	Non-Sexualized	5.8	4.5

4. General discussion

By showing that social media users evaluate women's competency and attractiveness based on both their ethnic background and degree of sexualization, the research's findings would advance existing understanding. According to Daniels and Zurbriggen, sexualized images will result in a decline in professional and intelligent evaluations of women. This indicates that racial stereotypes have an impact on these evaluations, as Asian women receive more positive aesthetic evaluations but lower assessments of capability, while Black and Latina women face stronger negative evaluations for the same photo type.

This study will demonstrate how online gender bias operates through intersectional mechanisms, which combine sexist and racist stereotypes to create automatic and subtle discrimination. The findings indicate that human resources policies need revision, because social media screening practices could unintentionally increase discrimination levels. Research should investigate how bias intervention programs and awareness training affect these results, while studying if these patterns exist among men and nonbinary people.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates how sexualization and race influence the perceptions of women's competence and attractiveness. The findings indicate that women's social media images cannot reflect their actual competence, since people's perceptions are evaluated by entrenched gender and racial bias.

By further analyzing the bias, this research will eventually emphasize the need to further advance evaluation in both online and offline scenarios. Future research should examine whether similar patterns will occur for men and other sexes, or the differences under online conditions and offline

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contexts. Understanding off of these problems are critical for ensuring equality under current society.

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