Longitudinal Relationships Between Ideal Body Short-Form Video Exposure, Self-Objectification, and Preference for Muscularity in a Partner Among Chinese Young Women

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Abstract

Cultivation theory suggests that exposure to ideal body images may influence women's self-objectification and partner preferences. According to selective exposure theory, women who self-objectify and prefer muscularity may choose media that aligns with their interests, particularly media showcasing idealized bodies. This longitudinal study examined the reciprocal relationships between ideal body short-form video exposure, self-objectification, and preference for muscularity in a partner in women. A total of 215 Chinese women (M_{age} = 21.1, SD = 2.5, range = 19–30) completed measures of ideal body short-form video exposure, self-objectification, and preference for partner muscularity at baseline and at 6-month follow-up. Cross-lagged panel analyses were used to analyze the reciprocal relationships between variables. The results revealed that viewing thin-ideal female body short-form video was associated with decreased self-objectification six months later. Viewing muscular-ideal male body short-form videos was not significantly associated with preference for muscularity after six months. However, preference for muscularity was associated with increased viewing of muscular-ideal male body short-form video six months later. Self-objectification was associated with an increased preference for muscularity in a partner six months later. The findings partially support the media selectivity theory.

Introduction

Objectification theory posits that a woman's body or body parts are considered objects in most male-dominated societies (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Women would internalize this norm and view their bodies from a third-person perspective. Thus, women are more susceptible to habitually monitor their bodies to adhere to the thin standard. This process is conceptualized as self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and usually manifests as body surveillance (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). A growing number of studies revealed the negative effects of self-objectification on women's mental health, such as depression and disordered eating (see reviews, B. A. Jones & Griffiths, 2015; Schaefer & Thompson, 2018).

In media portrayals, a thin body for women and a muscular body for men are often considered the ideal standard of attractiveness in Western societies (Aubrey & Frisby, 2010; Ricciardelli et al., 2010; Vandenbosch et al., 2013). These ideals are frequently showcased on social networking sites (SNS) through various forms, including profile photos, photo albums, and user posts (Hall et al., 2012; Sarabia & Estévez, 2016). As a result, the constant sharing of images and videos on SNS serves as a powerful medium for promoting appearance-related ideals, such as the display of idealized body types (Hall et al., 2012). Furthermore, the beautification features of smartphone applications—such as filters and face-slimming effects—along with advanced photo-editing technology, have made it easier to enhance and circulate these idealized portrayals on SNS, further reinforcing their popularity (Lee & Lee, 2021; Vendemia & DeAndrea, 2018).

Cultivation theory is a widely used theoretical framework for understanding media's effect on users' self-objectification (Bahk, 2001; Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Cultivation theory illustrates how individuals construct their perceptions of real society under the clout of mass media. Cultivation theory posits that the pervasive use of mass media causes its messages to become mainstream (Bahk, 2001; Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Media plays an essential role in shaping individuals' perceptions of norms. According to cultivation theory, frequent exposure to idealized body images on SNS influences women's beauty standards, aligning them with the ideals portrayed online.

Many cross-sectional correlational studies have verified the effect of SNS use on women's self-objectification in Western nations. Thin-ideal body portrays on media and thin-ideal internalization are strongly associated with self-objectification (e.g., Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2012; T. A. Myers & Crowther, 2007; Van Diest & Perez, 2013). Experimental design studies have also revealed that exposure to images of thin-ideal women increases state self-objectification among women (e.g., Aubrey et al., 2009; de Vries & Peter, 2013; Harper & Tiggemann, 2007; Hopper & Aubrey, 2016; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2012).

Longitudinal correlational studies, however, have revealed mixed results regarding the relationship between media use and self-objectification in Western societies. For instance, Aubrey (2006a) found that while exposure to sexually objectifying television increased trait self-objectification in young women, it did not lead to heightened body surveillance one year later. Similarly, Skowronski et al. (2021) reported that the use of sexualized video games and Instagram images predicted body surveillance indirectly through the prioritization of appearance over competence, six months later, in both female and male adolescents. In contrast, Vandenbosch and Eggermont (2015) found that attractiveness-related SNS use—rather than general SNS use intensity—was linked to body surveillance six months later in adolescents of both genders. These inconsistent findings suggest that exposure to body-related media does not uniformly result in self-objectification, underscoring the need for further research in this area.

In recent years, short videos have rapidly gained popularity worldwide, featuring a substantial amount of content related to thin-ideal female bodies and muscular-ideal male bodies (Pryde et al., 2024). Although cross-sectional studies have found a correlation between short video usage and women's self-objectification (Lian et al., 2020; Mink & Szymanski, 2022; T. Zhao & Zheng, 2023), there has been no longitudinal research to verify whether such a relationship exists. Additionally, algorithm-driven short videos are more personalized (Lee et al., 2022), and individuals' active choices and preferences also influence the personalized presentation of short video content (Zeng et al., 2021). Therefore, this study employs a longitudinal design to explore the bidirectional relationship between exposure to ideal body types in short videos and self-objectification from the perspective of the interaction between media and individuals.

Effect of Short-Form Video Exposure on Self-Objectification

In China, the short-form video has been blooming in recent years. As of June 2022, of 1.05 billon Internet users in China, 91.5% are short-form video users (CNNIC, 2022). There are various short-form video applications in China, including TikTok, Kwai, and Tencent Wesee. Among these, TikTok and Kwai are the two most popular apps. Over half of short-form video users (54.8%) viewed short-form videos every day in China (CNNIC, 2022). A typical short-form video has a duration of 15 seconds. It differs from other SNS in that short-form video apps have features such as personalized content curation based on algorithms. Users are repeatedly exposed to certain content based on their personal preferences.

Female bodies are commonly sexualized and objectified in short-form videos in China (Xiao, 2019). A content analysis revealed that beauty-related content is most common among female Internet celebrities on TikTok (Shutsko, 2020). However, few studies have examined the potential influence of short-form video apps on women's

self-objectification. Short-form video use intensity is positively correlated with self-objectification among Chinese and U.S college students (Lian et al., 2020; Mink & Szymanski, 2022). An experimental study revealed that exposure to fitspiration TikTok videos had an indirect effect on body dissatisfaction via state appearance comparison in Australia women (Pryde & Prichard, 2022). These findings suggest that short-form video media use is associated with women's self-objectification. However, it remains unclear whether this effect is directly caused by the idealized bodies portrayed in short-form videos. To the best of our knowledge, no longitudinal study has examined the association between thin-ideal female body short-form video exposure and self-objectification. We hypothesized that viewing thin-ideal female body short-form videos may be longitudinally associated with increased self-objectification, based on the cultivation theory (**H1**).

Muscular Male Body in Short-Form Videos and Partner Preference

Muscular male body displays are also common on social networking sites (SNS) in Western societies (Lonergan et al., 2021). Several studies have also indicated that the muscular male body is perceived as the ideal male body in China (Jung et al., 2010; Xiaojing, 2017; Yeung et al., 2021). However, previous research has predominantly focused on the impact of female thin-ideal body media exposure on women's self-objectification. According to cultivation theory, exposure to muscular-ideal male body media may similarly influence women's appearance-oriented partner preferences. Women may internalize the beauty standards portrayed by muscular-ideal body media and apply these standards to their actual or ideal partners.

This idea aligns with the "visual diet" hypothesis, which suggests that repeated exposure to a particular category of stimuli fosters a preference for that type of stimulus through visual adaptation effects (Boothroyd et al., 2012). In line with cultivation theory, the visual diet hypothesis indicates that frequent exposure to muscular-ideal male bodies could similarly influence women's partner preferences, as they become visually adapted to these standards. Experimental studies support this by showing that viewing male bodies with higher (versus lower) muscle mass can shift preferences toward more muscular male bodies (Jacques et al., 2021). Conversely, exposure to low muscular bodies reduces preferences for muscularity (Jacques et al., 2021). Together, these theories highlight the potential for media exposure to shape women's partner preferences through both internalized beauty standards and visual adaptation processes.

Previous theoretical and empirical studies have indicated that exposure to muscular male body short-form videos may shape women's preference for muscular male bodies. We explored the effect of muscular male body short-form video exposure on preference for muscularity in a romantic partner. Therefore, we hypothesized that viewing muscular male body short-form videos might be longitudinally associated with an increased preference for muscularity in a partner (**H2**).

Media Selective Exposure: Effect of Self-Objectification on Short-Form Video Exposure

Selective exposure theory (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985) posits that individuals are motivated to seek attitudinal media content that may enhance connections or avoid exposure to counter-attitudinal media content that may create dissonance. Women who engage in self-objectification view themselves primarily through the lens of others, often valuing appearance over other personal attributes (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Moradi & Huang, 2008). Selective exposure theory suggests that these women are likely to seek out media content that validates their focus on appearance, such as videos showcasing thin-ideal bodies (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). Short-form video platforms use algorithms that cater to user preferences, reinforcing selective exposure (Bishop, 2020). Women who engage with thin-ideal content are more likely to be shown similar videos, thus perpetuating their selective exposure to self-objectifying media. From this perspective, women with high self-objectification are more sensitive to appearance-related media content and more likely avoid thin female body short-form videos, which may trigger their negative body images.

Several longitudinal study designs with a cross-lagged analysis have explored the potential effect of self-objectification on ideal body media exposure in Western nations (Aubrey, 2006a, 2006b; Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018). Aubrey's studies (2006a, 2006b) revealed that trait self-objectification was negatively associated with sexually objectifying media exposure one year later in both young men and women. Another study also revealed that body surveillance was negatively associated with media internalization six months later in adolescents (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018). These two studies indicated a selective avoidance, rather than a selective exposure effect. This study examines the longitudinal association between self-objectification and short-form video

exposure. Given the findings on selective avoidance, we hypothesized that self-objectification may be longitudinally associated with decreased viewing of thin-ideal female body short-form videos (**H3**).

Women who prefer muscular male bodies may be more likely to engage in selective exposure by actively seeking media content that reflects these preferences (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). This selective exposure reinforces their existing ideals and preferences by repeatedly exposing them to images and videos that match their aesthetic or attraction standards (Vandenbosch, & Eggermont, 2012). Viewing muscular-ideal male bodies could also provide psychological gratification, including fantasy, escapism, or pleasure derived from viewing aesthetically pleasing forms (Li, 2020; Zou, 2022). Women who prefer muscularity in men may find satisfaction and enjoyment in viewing this type of content, which further drives their selective exposure behavior. Therefore, we hypothesized that a preference for muscularity may be longitudinally associated with increased viewing of muscular-ideal male body short-form videos (**H4**).

Self-Objectification and Appearance-Oriented Partner Preference

In romantic relationships, self-objectified women are more likely to objectify their partners, as seen in U.S. studies (Zurbriggen et al., 2011). Women who self-objectify tend to prioritize physical appearance not only in themselves but also in their potential partners (Zurbriggen et al., 2011). This emphasis on appearance is likely influenced by the internalization of societal beauty standards, which often idealize a toned or muscular physique in men (Hausenblas et al., 2013). Consequently, these women may seek partners who embody these ideals, aligning their preferences with their own internalized beliefs about appearance. Supporting this notion, a recent study found that body surveillance was linked to an appearance-oriented partner preference among Chinese lesbian and bisexual women (Xu & Zheng, 2022). Therefore, self-objectification may lead to a heightened preference for muscularity in a partner. Based on this, we hypothesize that self-objectification may be longitudinally associated with an increased preference for muscularity in partners (**H5**).

Moreover, a reciprocal effect may also exist. Societal standards often portray muscularity as the ideal male body type, closely linking physical appearance to overall value and desirability in a partner (Jung et al., 2010; Yeung et al., 2021). When women prioritize muscularity in their partners, it may reflect an internalization of these cultural standards, leading them to apply similar appearance-based judgments to themselves (Pritchard & Cramblitt, 2014). This internalization can prompt women to focus excessively on their own appearance, striving to meet comparable ideals of attractiveness to match the perceived "high value" of a muscular partner (Sanchez & Broccoli, 2008). Therefore, preference for muscularity in a partner may also result in self-objectification. We hypothesized that a preference for muscularity in a partner may be longitudinally associated with increased self-objectification (**H6**).

The Current Study

Previous longitudinal studies have reported conflicting findings on the relationship between ideal body media exposure and self-objectification in women. Notably, nearly all of these studies have focused on Western adolescents (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018; Sevic et al., 2020; Skowronski et al., 2021; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2015). Both theoretical and empirical research suggest a reciprocal relationship between the use of idealized body media and self-objectification. In China, short-form video platforms are a significant part of SNS; however, research on the effects of ideal body short-form video exposure remains limited. To address this gap, the present study employed a longitudinal design to explore the reciprocal relationship between exposure to ideal body short-form videos and self-objectification.

Additionally, previous studies have not distinguished between content featuring female versus male ideal body types. Guided by objectification theory and selective exposure theory, we hypothesized that exposure to thin-ideal female body content in short-form videos would be associated with self-objectification (H1 and H3), while exposure to muscular-ideal male body content would be linked to a preference for muscularity in romantic partners among women (H2 and H4). Finally, we investigated the reciprocal relationship between self-objectification and the preference for muscularity in romantic partners (H5 and H6).

Methods

Procedure

Participants were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling strategies from June 2021 to December 2021. The recruitment advertisement was posted on WeChat (the most popular instant message app) and users were able to further share the advertisement in their own WeChat moment. The advert stated that the study was related to short-form video use and that participants should be: (1) 18 years of age or older, (2) female short-form video users, who were (3) willing to participate in surveys twice. Participants could click on an attached link or scan a QR code to start the survey. The survey was hosted on Wenjuanxing, the most popular professional Chinese survey website. On the first page of the survey, we presented a brief introduction to the survey, criteria of potential participants, and asked for informed consent. The participants provided email addresses at Time 1 (T1) and the survey link was sent again via email six months later (Time 2, T2). First, the participants completed demographic information, including sex, age, height, weight, occupation, education, and relationship status. Thereafter, participants completed measures of short-form video exposure, self-objectification, and preference for muscularity. Due to the setup of the survey website, participants could only submit their responses after completing all items, so there is no missing data in this study.

Participants

In T1, the sample included 293 participants of whom 243 completed the T2 survey. Those who did not complete T2 were excluded. Twenty-eight participants failed the attention check and were excluded from the data analysis. The final sample included 215 female participants aged 19–30 (M_{age} = 21.14, SD = 2.46). Only three participants (1.4%) had a high school degree, 194 (68.9%) had college degrees, and 64 (29.7%) had graduate degrees or higher. The majority of the participants (77.2%) were students and reported Han ethnicity (93%). Approximately half of the participants (49.8%) were single.

Measures

Ideal Body Short-Form Video Exposure

Media exposure is often measured with single items (Coromina & Saris, 2009), which can provide reliability and validity comparable to multi-item scales (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Wanous & Hudy, 2001). A meta-analysis found moderate correlations between both single-item and multi-item self-reports and logged data (Parry et al., 2021). Therefore, we used single-item measures to assess exposure to ideal body short-form videos. One item was used to assess thin-ideal female body short-form video exposure: *How often do you view short-form videos of women showing a thin body shape while using social media?* One item was used to assess muscular-ideal male body short-form video exposure: *How often do you view short-form videos of men showing muscular body shape while using social media?* Participants responded to each item on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*).

Self-Objectification

The body surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996) was used to measure self-objectification. An example item is: *During the day, I think about how I look many times.* Participants responded to eight items on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). We computed the mean score of the items, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-objectification. This measure has been used successfully with Chinese samples and has been found to have good construct validity and internal consistency in various Chinese samples (e.g., Wang et al., 2019). The McDonald's ω for the subscale in this study was ω = .78 in T1 and ω = .84 in T2.

Preference for Muscularity in a Romantic Partner

Five items adapted from the Preference for Attractiveness and Thinness in a Partner Questionnaire (PATPQ, Legenbauer et al., 2009) were used to assess preference for muscularity in an ideal romantic partner in this study.

The PATPQ was developed to assess preference for attractiveness and thinness of a partner in heterosexual and homosexual men and women. The original PATPQ includes 12 items with a single dimension. Some original items on the PATPQ described a dislike of overweight bodies; however, these were removed in this study because disliking overweight bodies does not necessarily equate to a preference for muscular bodies. Similarly, a preference for slender bodies does not imply a preference for muscularity. We selected items that could explicitly express a preference for muscular bodies. Therefore, original items emphasizing inner values and general physical attractiveness were also removed. Finally, five items from the PATPQ were chosen based on the authors' discussion because they were deemed the most adaptable for clearly assessing preferences for muscularity. For example, the original item *It is important for me that my partner is slender* was adapted to *It is important for me that my partner is muscular.*

Participants were asked to respond on each item based on their preference for an ideal romantic partner from 1 (*do not agree*) to 4 (*totally agree*). We computed mean score of items, with higher score indicating greater preference for muscularity in a romantic partner. The exploratory factor analysis in T1 revealed that all items were located as a single factor. The factor loadings ranged from $\lambda = .46$ to $\lambda = .67$. A confirmatory factor analysis in T2 indicated a good structural validity, $\chi^2(5) = 7.59$, $p = .180$, RMSEA = .049, 90% CI = [.000, .115], SRMR = .028, CFI = .985, and TLI = .971. McDonald's ω for this measure were $\omega = .71$ in T1 and $\omega = .72$ in T2.

Data Analysis

First, descriptive statistics for the focus variables and Z-order correlations between the variables at both T1 and T2 were calculated with IBM SPSS 25. Dependent samples t-tests were conducted to examine relationship status differences in focus variables. A cross-lagged model with Mplus 8.0 was used to analyze reciprocal relationships between thin-ideal female body short-form video exposure and self-objectification (H1 and H3), muscular-ideal male body short-form video exposure and preference for muscularity in a romantic partner (H2 and H4), and self-objectification and preference for muscularity (H5 and H6).

Additionally, to test whether the relationship between muscular-ideal male body exposure/self-objectification and preference for muscularity was moderated by relationship status, we conducted a multigroup analysis. The change in χ^2 and degrees of freedom between the unconstrained and constrained models were used to evaluate group differences. The unconstrained model is the baseline model where no constraints are imposed across groups. In this model, all parameters (e.g., factor loadings, intercepts, structural paths) are freely estimated separately for each group. The constrained model imposes equality constraints on specific parameters across groups to test if these parameters are equivalent.

Results

The correlations among the variables are presented in Table 1. Thin-ideal female body short-form exposure in T1 was negatively correlated with self-objectification in T2 ($r = -.14$, $p = .042$). Self-objectification in T1 was not significantly correlated with thin-ideal female body short-form exposure in T2. Muscular-ideal male body short-form video exposure in T1 was positively correlated with the preference for muscularity in a romantic partner in T2 ($r = .14$, $p = .043$). Preference for muscularity in a romantic partner in T1 was positively correlated with muscular-ideal male body short-form video exposure in T2 ($r = .34$, $p < .001$).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics and Z-Order Correlations Among Variables.*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Thin-ideal female body video exposure T1[b]	2.99	0.97	—						
2. Thin-ideal female body video exposure T2[b]	3.00	0.99	0.46***	—					
3. Muscular-ideal male body video exposure T1[b]	2.82	1.19	0.42***	0.29***	—				
4. Muscular-ideal male body video exposure T2[b]	2.77	1.10	0.32***	0.34***	0.68***	—			
5. Self-objectification T1[a]	4.43	0.96	−0.04	−0.10	−0.13+	−0.11	—		
6. Self-objectification T2[a]	4.18	1.02	−0.14*	-0.19**	−0.13+	−0.12+	0.64***	—	
7. Preference for muscularity in a partner T1[c]	2.16	0.58	0.08	0.15*	0.31***	0.34***	−0.02	−0.02	—
8. Preference for muscularity in a partner T2[c]	2.14	0.54	−0.01	0.18*	0.14**	0.24***	0.11+	0.07	0.63***

Note. +p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; Absolute range: [a]1–7; [b]1–5; [c]1–4.

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of the focus variables by relationship status, along with the results of *t*-tests. Since eight *t*-tests were conducted, Holm's-Bonferroni correction was applied (Holm, 1979). Women in relationships and single women showed no significant differences in the frequency of exposure to thin-ideal female body videos at both T1 and T2. Significant differences emerged in the frequency of exposure to muscular-ideal male body videos at both T1 and T2, with women in relationships reporting higher exposure compared to single women. Additionally, there were significant differences in muscularity preference at T2, but not T1, with women in relationships showing a higher preference for muscularity than single women. However, no significant differences were observed in self-objectification between the two groups.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of Ideal Body Exposure, Self-Objectification, and Preference for Muscularity by Relationship Status.*

	Single (n = 107)		In relationships (n = 108)			
	M	SD	M	SD	t	d
1. Thin-ideal female body video exposure T1	2.92	0.97	3.06	0.97	1.06	0.14
2. Thin-ideal female body video exposure T2	2.84	0.95	3.17	1.00	2.44	0.33
3. Muscular-ideal male body video exposure T1	2.55	1.05	2.99	1.11	2.99*	0.41
4. Muscular-ideal male body video exposure T2	2.57	1.10	3.07	1.24	3.16*	0.43
5. Self-objectification T1	4.4	0.96	4.47	0.95	0.49	0.07
6. Self-objectification T2	4.31	1.05	4.05	0.98	1.86	0.25
7. Preference for muscularity in a partner T1	2.08	0.55	2.24	0.60	2.02	0.28
8. Preference for muscularity in a partner T2	2.01	0.47	2.27	0.57	3.73**	0.51

Note. Adjusted p-values after applying Holm's-Bonferroni correction; *p < .05; **p < .01.

The cross-lagged model exhibited an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(6)$ = 6.57, p = .363, RMSEA = .021, 90% CI = [.000, .093], SRMR = .029, CFI = .999, TLI = .995. The specified model paths and results are shown in Fig. 1. The original output for the model is available on supplementary material. We hypothesized that viewing thin-ideal female body short-form videos would be associated with increased self-objectification (H1), while self-objectification would be associated with decreased short-form video exposure (H3). Results revealed that thin-ideal short-form video exposure in T1 was negatively associated with self-objectification in T2 (β = −.11, p = .023). Self-objectification in T1 was not significantly associated with thin-ideal short-form video exposure in T2 (β = −.071, p = .234). H1 was not supported, and we obtained the opposite result for H1. H3 was not supported.

Figure 1. *Cross-Lagged Model With Reciprocal Relationship Between Thin-Ideal Female Body Short-Form Video Exposure and Self-Objectification, Muscular-Ideal Male Body Short-Form Video Exposure and Preference for Muscularity in a Romantic Partner, Self-Objectification and Preference for Muscularity in a Romantic Partner.*
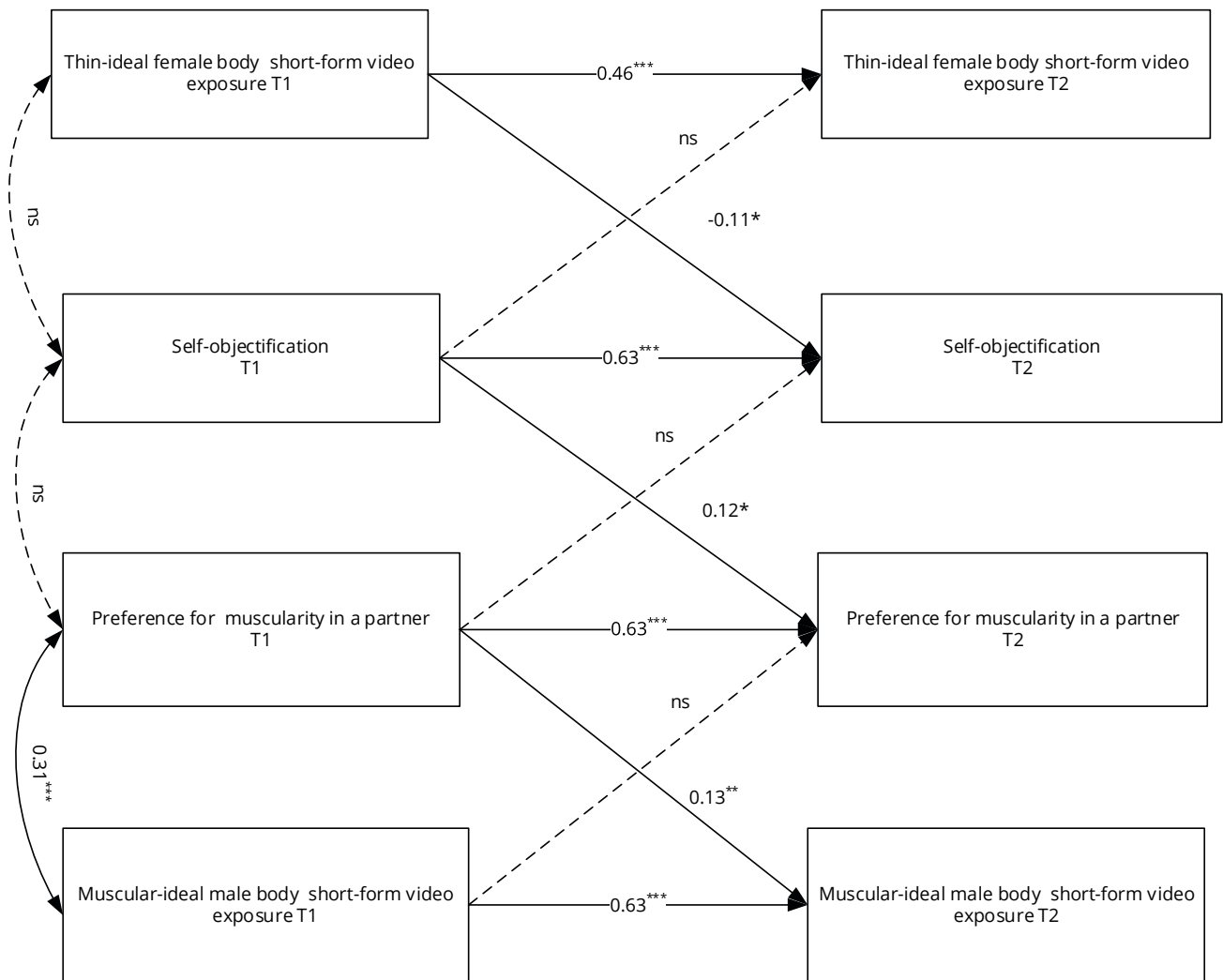
Note. $^{*}p < .05$; $^{***}p < .001$; ns: non-significant.

We hypothesized a reciprocal relationship between muscular male body short-form videos exposure and preference for muscularity in a partner (H2 & H4). Results revealed that muscular-ideal male body exposure in T1 was not significantly associated with preference for muscularity in T2 ($\beta = -.052$, $p = .348$). Preference for muscularity in T1 was positively associated with muscular-ideal male body exposure in T2 ($\beta = .13$, $p = .011$). H2 was not supported and H4 was supported. There was no significant relationship status difference in the association between muscular-ideal male body exposure and preference for muscularity, $\Delta\chi^2$ ($\Delta df = 4$) = 4.37, $p = .358$.

We hypothesized a reciprocal relationship between self-objectification and preference for muscularity (H5 & H6). Results revealed that self-objectification in T1 was positively associated with a preference for muscularity at T2 ($\beta = .12$, $p = .024$). Preference for muscularity in T1 was not significantly associated with self-objectification at T2 ($\beta = .012$, $p = .825$). H5 was supported, and H6 was not supported. The multigroup analysis revealed no significant relationship status difference in the association between self-objectification and preference for muscularity, $\Delta\chi^2$ ($\Delta df = 4$) = 3.65, $p = .455$.

Discussion

This study examined the longitudinal associations between ideal body short-form video exposure, self-objectification, and partner muscularity preference in women. We found a negative association between thin-ideal female body exposure and self-objectification. Consistent with the selective exposure theory, preference for

muscularity in a romantic partner was longitudinally associated with muscular-ideal male body exposure. In addition, self-objectification was longitudinally associated with a preference for muscularity in partners.

Contrary to our expectations, viewing thin-ideal female body short-form videos decreased women's self-objectification six months later. This finding is contrary to previous cross-sectional results on short-form video exposure (Lian et al., 2020; Mink & Szymanski, 2022; Pan et al., 2022; Pryde & Prichard, 2022). Our finding is consistent with some previous findings that exposure to idealized body image has positive impacts on body image (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997; Holmstrom, 2004; Knobloch-Westerwick & Crane, 2011; Mills et al., 2002; P. N. Myers & Biocca, 1992). Nonetheless, caution should be taken in concluding that viewing thin-ideal female body short-form videos would decrease women's self-objectification because there are no other longitudinal studies regarding the effect of viewing ideal body short-form videos.

One potential explanation is the potential effect of body improvement actives (e.g., exercise). Individuals viewing ideal body display videos may be motivated by their exercise and fitness. Viewing sexualizing media has also been associated with increased exercise intentions (Murray, 2017) and changes in appearance (Pan et al., 2022). It has been proposed that engaging in physical activities might encourage women to concentrate on their bodies' physical capabilities rather than their appearance to others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Slater & Tiggemann, 2012). A longitudinal study revealed that time spent playing sports was predictive of lower self-objectification one year later in adolescent girls (Slater & Tiggemann, 2012). Knobloch-Westerwick and Crane (2011) found that young women who were exposed to thin-ideal messages for 10 days reported increased body satisfaction. Therefore, it is possible that some ideal body short-form video viewers also engaged in exercise offline and then self-objectification decreased.

Inconsistent with our expectation, we did not find a significant longitudinal association between self-objectification and thin-ideal female body exposure. Previous studies have revealed that self-objectification is negatively associated with sexually objectifying media exposure (Aubrey, 2006a, 2006b) and media internalization (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018). The current findings did not support either selective avoidance or selective exposure effects in terms of thin-ideal female body exposure. Social media platforms offer a vast array of content that includes body-positive, neutral, and thin-ideal imagery (Aubrey et al., 2024; Harriger et al., 2023). Women who self-objectify might be exposed to a mix of these types of content, making it difficult to establish a clear link between self-objectification and selective exposure to thin-ideal videos specifically.

Previous research has predominantly focused on the impact of thin-ideal female body media exposure on self-objectification in women, while the potential influence of muscular-ideal male body media has been largely overlooked. To our knowledge, this study is the first to explore the potential effect of exposure to muscular-ideal male body short-form videos on women's preference for muscularity in romantic partners. Although prior research has shown that exposure to objectifying media is associated with partner objectification (Zurbriggen et al., 2011), our findings did not reveal a longitudinal association between exposure to muscular-ideal male body content and a preference for muscularity. Muscularity is often seen as a key indicator of masculinity (Edwards et al., 2017), and research on preferences for masculinity frequently draws on an evolutionary perspective (Buss & Schmitt, 2019). Women's preferences for masculinity and muscularity in men are shaped by various personal factors, including early life experiences, menstrual cycle phases, and pathogen disgust sensitivity (B. C. Jones et al., 2013; Koehler & Chisholm, 2009; Little et al., 2007). Our findings suggest that women's preferences for masculinity and muscularity may be less influenced by media exposure than by these individual factors.

Alternatively, we found that preference for muscularity was associated with increased muscular-ideal male body exposure six months later. This indicated that some women viewed muscular-ideal male body videos because of their preference for muscularity in partner choice. This finding is consistent with selective exposure theory. Women preferring muscularity may actively view videos of muscular male bodies to satisfy their preference online via a "visual diet." This study indicates an association between partner preference and media exposure. To our knowledge, several studies focused on the potential effects on media exposure on partner preference (Taylor, 2012, 2021). However, the potential effect of partner preference on selective exposure is scarce. This relationship should be further examined in future studies.

Self-objectification was associated with an increased preference for muscularity in a partner six months later. Previous studies have indicated that self-objectified individuals are more likely to objectify their partners (Zurbriggen et al., 2011). The preference for muscularity in a partner is a manifestation of partner objectification. The current findings underscore the potential impact of self-objectification on partner preferences, suggesting that individuals who self-objectify may be more likely to prioritize certain physical characteristics in their partners.

This highlights the broader implications of self-objectification, extending its effects from self-perception to how one evaluates potential partners, and points to a need for further research on how self-objectification influences relationship dynamics and partner selection criteria.

Limitations and Further Directions

First, the majority of the participants in this study were well-educated young women. The findings of this study may not be generalizable to the general population of Chinese women. Second, it is crucial to consider limitations of single-item measures and the potential impact on the validity of the constructs. We recommend that subsequent studies address these limitations by employing multi-item measures to ensure a more robust evaluation of media exposure and its associated effects. Third, our findings indicate that women may selectively view muscular-ideal male bodies. However, we did not assess the motivation (e.g., actively seeking or passively exposure) for viewing muscular-ideal male body short-form videos. Further research should explore the different effects of passive exposure and active viewing. Finally, the two-wave design limited the use of a random intercept model (Mulder & Hamaker, 2020), which has proven effective in distinguishing within-person and between-person effects in cross-lagged modeling. Future research employing three or more waves with random intercept models is needed to validate these findings further.

Conclusion

This study found that thin-ideal female body short-form video exposure was longitudinally associated with decreased self-objectification among women. It indicated that viewing thin-ideal media does not always have negative effects on self-objectification. Viewing muscular-ideal male body short-form video may be motivated by user preferences for muscularity in a partner. The findings partially support the media selectivity theory. Self-objectification was associated with an increased preference for muscularity in a partner, indicating the potential influence of self-objectification on partner preference.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Authors' Contribution

Lijun Zheng: conceptualization, supervision, funding acquisition, formal analysis, methodology, visualization, writing—original draft, writing—review & editing. **Tiannan Zhao:** conceptualization, data curation, investigation.

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