

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN MUSIC VIDEOS¹

UN MARCO CONCEPTUAL DE LA COSIFICACIÓN SEXUAL DE LAS MUJERES EN VIDEOS MUSICALES

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Abstract

Feminist theory has extensively explored the sexualization of women's images across time. Women are sexually objectified in music videos, TV series, ads, cinema, video games, and other types of audiovisual content. Scholarship has acknowledged, for instance, that women's visual objectification in news, publicity, and cinema can lead to discrimination and gender-based violence. Audiovisual content is especially impactful, while digital content has a broader and more immediate reach than

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other types of content. On the one hand, the consumption of music videos and other digital content among minors is rising. On the other hand, music videos influence the normalization of gender violence and gender stereotypes in girls and boys. Despite its importance, until now, there is no conceptual framework of the sexualization of women in music videos. What elements compose the sexual objectification of women in music videos? What dimensions does it encompass? Can they be operationalized to serve as a basis for further analysis? Based on a literature review and analysis by three gender experts of five of the most popular music videos on YouTube in 2020, this article offers a new framework that can serve as a reference. This topic is especially relevant in the age of platforms because, once these videos are online in the public domain, they become the basis for biased algorithmic decision-making.

Keywords: sexualization; gender; women; objectification; gender; music videos; audiovisual content; impact.

Resumen

La teoría feminista ha explorado la sexualización visual de las mujeres. Los estereotipos de género y la sexualización se encuentran en videos musicales, cine, series de televisión, anuncios, videojuegos y otros contenidos audiovisuales. El contenido audiovisual es especialmente impactante dado que la cosificación y sexualización de las mujeres en las noticias, la publicidad y la ficción puede conducir a la discriminación y la violencia de género. Entretanto, lo digital tiene un alcance más inmediato y amplio que otro tipo de contenidos. Por un lado, el consumo de los videos musicales y otros contenidos digitales entre menores está en aumento. Por otro, los videos musicales influyen en la normalización de la violencia de género y los estereotipos de género en las niñas y los niños. A pesar de su importancia, hasta ahora no existe un marco conceptual de la sexualización de las mujeres en los videos musicales. ¿Qué elementos componen este tipo de sexualización? ¿Qué dimensiones abarcan? ¿Pueden generar un marco teórico con variables observables que sirva para realizar otros estudios? Basándonos en una revisión de literatura y el análisis de tres expertas en género de cinco de los videos musicales más populares en YouTube en 2020, este artículo ofrece un marco que puede servir de referencia para futuros estudios sobre la influencia de los videos musicales. Este asunto es especialmente relevante en la era de las plataformas porque, una vez en el dominio público, estos videos sexualizantes se convierten en la base para una toma de decisiones algorítmicas sesgadas.

Palabras clave: sexualización; género; mujeres; objetivación; género; videos musicales; contenido audiovisual; impacto

1. INTRODUCTION

Objectification theory analyses the sociocultural contexts that reduce women to their bodies or body parts and associate a woman's value with her appearance and sexual purposes (Szymanski et al., 2011, p. 6). Feminist theory has extensively explored the objectification of women's images since the 90s (Heldman 2012; Langton 2009; Nussbaum 1995; Szymanski et al. 2011). For objectification to occur, the conventional view assumes that two agents are involved: the objectifying and the objectified. Usually, the subject casts an *objectifying gaze* over a woman (the object), who cannot avoid it since the watching is ubiquitous (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In the absence of a specific conceptual framework, this article is focused on the sexual objectification of women in music videos.

The man generally has the power to objectify; namely, the man is the acting subject, and the woman is the passive object. One of the sources of this power disparity is produced and preserved by the male consumption of pornography (MacKinnon, 1987). Pornography often dehumanizes and humiliates women; men who learn to interact with women through demeaning pornography also learn to treat women as objects (MacKinnon, 1987). In objectifying processes, women's sexual body parts attract more attention than their faces (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). Referring to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, Afolayan (2018) contends that in the gazer's gaze, the gazed—generally a woman—is reduced to a thing, and so, when apprehended in the gazer's contemplation, she passes judgment on herself according to his criteria, expectations, and meanings.

Sometimes women self-objectify themselves or each other (Berger, 1990). One example is what happens in fitness centers, where women often measure each other, casting objectifying gazes (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The intense social pressure on women to meet a «norm of appearance» force them to live up to the objectifying standards (Saul, 2003). For example, Pérez Rufi identifies several music videos produced by women in which the objectification of women can be observed (Perez Rufi, 2017). Levy notes that sometimes a show of what looks like feminist strength can disguise an objectifying act (Levy, 2006). An example is singer Beyoncé on stage with the word «FEMINISM» in spectacular neon lights while wearing a skimpy

costume in 2016. However, when female artists sexualize themselves, «they have more autonomy over their role as the ‘gazed’ or the ‘gazer’» (Mewawalla, 2019). While it is interesting to note that women can engage in the objectification of other women and self-objectification, it is not the focus here.

There can be objectification without overt sexualization. For instance, Heldman (2012) observes how some ads employ women’s bodies as canvases that are «marked up or drawn upon» to emphasize jingles without being sexualized. One advertising strategy has been, precisely, making women’s bodies into bottles, cans, and boards to display brand names and messages, as seen in Figure 1. The 2020 «Hazte Vaquero» (Be a cowboy) campaign to promote meat consumption in Spain included showing food symbols on a female torso together with this message: «An authentic cowboy knows the benefits of meat-eating; and also SALAD!»². Besides, the campaign, still active at the time of writing, employs a series of images that can be described as stereotyping, sexist, and sexualizing. Here, women are shown serving food and buying at the butcher’s, and a close-up of a female mouth eating meat is displayed provocatively, while men appear barbecuing the meat and taking care of the cattle.

Figure 1. «Be a cowboy» campaign³

UN AUTÉNTICO VAQUERO
CONOCE LOS BENEFICIOS
DE COMER CARNE, Y TAMBIÉN
#ENSALADA!

La proteína
cárnica como
componente esencial
en una
dieta variada
y equilibrada.⁽¹⁾

La carne de vacuno es muy apreciada
por su sabor y contenido
en aminoácidos esenciales y sales
minerales, tal y como recuerda desde
la Sociedad Española de Médicos
de Atención Primaria (Semergen).

Las proteínas tienen altas calidades,
y en proporciones muy equilibradas
entre sí de aminoácidos esenciales.
Cada aminoácido es muy necesario
por el organismo y, por lo tanto,
únicamente pueden obtenerse por
medio de la dieta.

Esta característica, junto al elevado
contenido de digestibilidad, hace que
las proteínas cárnicas presenten un
elevado valor biológico o nutricional
para los humanos. La carne también es
una importante fuente de aminoácidos
no esenciales, que son una importante
vía de obtención de energía en
diferentes órganos y tipo ocular.⁽²⁾

Source: <https://haztevaquero.eu/>

2. «Un auténtico vaquero conoce los beneficios de comer carne; ¡y también #ENSALADA!»
3. This image has been removed from the website.

The instrumentalization of women's bodies is not new. Real women's bodies are used as plates in *nyotaimori*, the Japanese tradition of eating sushi off a motionless, naked woman's body (Bindel, 2010). Jones and other artists have portrayed women's bodies as pieces of furniture (Prendergast, 2014). In music videos, women have appeared as a slot car track (in *Blurred Lines*, 2013, by Robin Thicke⁴), a rocking mare (in *Hateful love*, 2016, by Little Big⁵, seen in Figure 2), and even side tables (in *Booty*, 2018, by C. Tangana, Becky G & Alizzz⁶).

Figure 2. Film still, Little Big, *Hateful love*



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6od76UNHt-M>

Sexualization is more frequent than simple objectification (Álvarez et al., 2021). When they are sexualized, women lack humanness or agency (Vaes et al., 2011) and are also identified as switchable things with sexual purposes (Cikara et al., 2010). The sexualization of women is, thus, understood here as assessing or portraying them in sexual terms or reducing them to sexual objects. The processes of sexualization can be connected to stereotyping (i.e., a simplification formed about people, communities, and situations). These two concepts share a common ground in that «they are the effect of a

4. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyDUC1LUXSU&feature=youtu.be>

5. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6od76UNHt-M>

6. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAc3T4aMENI>

mental process of categorization» (De Marco, 2012, p. 75). Reducing people to categories and labels deprives them of complexity, freedom, and humanness. A process of sexualization is almost always negative (although there is no agreement on how harmful it is). For instance, frequently sexualizing material shows women as underachievers and inferior (Gervais et al., 2011). Meanwhile, stereotyping is not necessarily wrong, as stereotypes can help people navigate complex or unknown situations (Dyer, 1999). What is of interest in stereotypes is «who controls and defines them (stereotypes), what interests they serve» (Dyer, 1999, p. 12).

Lippmann defined a stereotype as an over-generalized, rigid, and simplified idea or image of a particular group of people (Lippmann, 1922/2009). A stereotype condenses people's expectations about others, including personality traits, preferences, appearance, or abilities. Stereotypes are often inaccurate and resistant to new information or correction (Myers & Twenge, 2017). An effective function of stereotypes is that they incite unanimity (Dyer, 1999). While such generalizations may help make quick decisions, they may be erroneous when applied to individuals and are often a basis for prejudice. For instance, Nier et al. (2013) found that people who tend to draw inferences from behavior and ignore situational constraints are more likely to stereotype low-status groups and females as incompetent, while high-status groups tend to be labeled as competent and males. Stereotyping can be problematic when it «is derived from aspects of a culture known to lead to harmful behavior», resulting in discriminatory action and discrimination (Caliskan et al., 2017, p. 2). Sexualized stereotypes include the generalization of the idea that girls and women should prioritize their sex appeal for the appreciation of boys and men (Spears Brown, 2019).

The music video is a short film that integrates a song with images and is produced for marketing or artistic reasons. As a genre, it emerged in the 80s. Music videos became popular in the 80s with the advent of the US pay television channel MTV in 1981. Since then, the consumption of music videos and other audiovisual digital content has become popular among minors and is increasing (Pedrero-Esteban et al., 2019; Russell et al., 2017).

The audiovisual sexualization of women goes beyond commercials, music videos, and shows, and it significantly impacts women's and girls' lives. Examining the representation of violence against African American

women in local TV in the 1990s, Meyers (2007) concludes that most victims were portrayed as «stereotypic Jezebels whose lewd behavior provoked assault, and absolved the perpetrators of responsibility» (p. 95). This is a mechanism defined by Wodak et al. (1999) as a shift of blame (p. 36). Women's visual sexualization in media can lead to discrimination, eating disorders, psychological issues, and gender-based violence (e.g., Meyers, 2007). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) explore the consequences for girls and women internalizing men's gaze.

«Habitual body monitoring» can lead to «shame and anxiety» and, in turn, to an array of mental health risks that can include «unipolar depression, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorders» (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 173). Besides, they can influence how men treat women (Aubrey et al., 2011; Stevens Aubrey et al., 2011; Van Ouytsel et al., 2014).

The sexualization of women and girls in advertising has been thoroughly explored. For instance, research proves that advertising offers traditional and stereotyped images of men and women, relations, and gender roles (Goffman, 1976; McArthur & Resko, 1975). Music videos do not influence behavior in the same direct way publicity does; therefore, they are not considered persuasive communication.

However, music videos have potent effects on people. Music videos have become «audiovisual creations with a cinematographic vocation» that function as «witnesses of the expectations and concerns of urban subcultures and tribes» (Sánchez López & García Gómez, 2009, p. 25). As such, they can be vehicles for «ways of living, behaving and thinking» (Sánchez López & García Gómez, 2009, p. 25). Sedeño Valdellós (2007) considers that music videos have become seduction and advertising mechanisms. Russell et al. (2017) argue that they influence minors' behavior effectively. And Taylor (2007) notes that they help disseminate stereotypes to the point that they are «one of the most influential visual culture forms to hit youth culture since the advent of television» (p. 230). Music videos can produce «strong, predictable, nonconscious cognitive effects on viewers», leading to stereotypical behavior (Hansen, 1989). Music videos –both professional and amateur– influence the normalization of gender violence and gender stereotypes in girls and boys (Kaili, 2018).

Music videos provide some of the most potent examples of the sexual objectification of women (Aubrey & Frisby 2011). Karsay et al. (2017) look at music videos to conclude that both men and women can «adopt the objectifying gaze elicited in media» and that «exposure to objectifying media has direct negative effects on women (and men)» (p. 45). One problem may be that the music industry is dominated by men (Wang, 2020). Music videos often change the standards of how women are evaluated and evaluate themselves (Karsay et al., 2017, p. 45). Aubrey et al. (2011) connect the sexual objectification of female artists in music videos with a growing «acceptance of interpersonal violence» (p. 360).

Kistler and Lee (2009) say that not all musical genres objectify equally; for instance, R&B/Hip hop is more objectifying than country music. Morgan-White (2017) notes that the genre that sexualizes the more is *reggaetón*—with female dancers twerking, a coitus simulacrum—, and that, while the sexual objectification of women is widespread, hypermasculinity seems to be declining in pop music. The five videos examined here can be labeled as pop music.

Digital content—including music videos— has a broader and more immediate reach than other types of content. On the one hand, music videos and other digital content consumption are growing (Pedrero-Esteban et al., 2019; Russell et al., 2017). On the other hand, there is a proliferation of so-called user-generated content, including music videos. Users' participation in creating music videos—a global activity even though the most popular music videos originate from a limited number of locations— is growing (Park et al., 2014) to the point that Gilbert (2020) says they will shape the future of the music industry. YouTube is one of the largest video-sharing platforms, where professionals and amateurs contribute to making, uploading, and watching content.

The dehumanization that takes place in the sexualization of women can lead to brutality. «Violence has to do with the non-intellectual conditions in which the persecution of the 'other' can be normalized and become part of the daily fabric of existence. In this sense, ideas can literally hurt a person»

(Evans, 2017)⁷. Thus, violence originates in the minds of people, especially men (Evans, 2017). When women are sexually objectified, their ability to be a subject is taken away, as they are seen as objects that can be damaged. As Bernstein (2012) notes, although violence involves the violation of human lives, it can also include an attack on the dignity of people.

Despite its potential for harm, sexual objectification is increasingly difficult to spot. For example, Beyoncé's *Run the world* (2011) is considered one of the most empowering videos for women (Gonzales & Maher, 2021; McMaster, 2017; Pineda, 2021). Using a framework to determine whether ads are empowering or not (Pando et al., 2020; Rodríguez & Gutiérrez, 2017) to analyze *Run the world*, it can be observed that, although the video displays some empowering elements (e.g., the messages champion girls' and women's authority), it is quite sexualizing. For instance, all women are quasi-nude while men are fully dressed, most wear disabling high heels, and Beyoncé goes on her knees to scrawl around a completely dressed man's legs (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Film still, Beyoncé, *Run the world*



Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBmMU_uwe6U

7. «La violencia tiene que ver con las condiciones no intelectuales en las que la persecución del 'otro' pueden normalizarse y volverse parte del tejido cotidiano de la existencia. En este sentido, las palabras pueden herir literalmente a una persona».

Many young people cannot perceive sexism, prejudice, or stereotyping against women based on their sex (Vidal, 2018). Bourdieu explained that male dominance is so integrated into our social practices and unconscious that we barely notice it (Bourdieu, 2001). This author theorized masculine domination as *symbolic violence*, or mild, imperceptible, omnipresent power exercised through everyday practices (Bourdieu, 2001). This domination is exercised through institutionalized relations—within the family, work, school, media, and state—, normalizing and eternalizing the arbitrary (Bourdieu, 2001). We consider music videos are part of this mechanism of symbolic violence.

Despite this difficulty, some videos seem to have crossed the line. Maluma's *Cuatro Babys* has been controversial for derogatory comments toward women (Morgan-White, 2017). A [Change.org](#) campaign demanded in 2017 that the song—showing how Maluma has a hard time choosing between four women— be removed from digital platforms for being demeaning to women, who are portrayed as almost naked, serving men, worthy only for their sexual proficiency, decorative and silent, interchangeable, and lacking the power of decision (Morgan-White, 2017).

Figure 4. Film still, Maluma, *Cuatro Babys*



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXq-JP8w5H4>

Based on a literature review and analysis by three gender experts of five of the most popular music videos on YouTube in 2020, this article offers a conceptual framework that can serve as a reference. This topic is especially relevant in the age of platforms such as YouTube because, once these videos are online in the public domain, they become the basis for biased algorithmic decision-making (Gutiérrez 2021; Whittaker et al., 2018). For example, historical biases emerge when data entrenching undesirable trends are employed for algorithmic decision-making (Coleman, 2013). That means that algorithms trained on pictures of sexualized women will produce results in sexualizing women. If histories of discrimination go unchallenged, they become part of standard algorithmic systems (Crawford, 2016).

The structure of this article is as follows: First, we offer a methodological section. Second, we look at the relevant literature on reification, objectification, and sexualization. And third, we provide a conceptual framework of the sexualization of women in music videos. The authors elaborated all the tables and figures; theirs are the translations, while the original text is offered in endnotes. The experts in this study have offered their explicit consent to disclose their names and use their insights.

2. OBJECTIVES, METHODS & MATERIALS

Our main goal is to unpack the basic visual elements of the sexual objectification of women in music videos, so we produce a heuristic tool that can serve to examine a wide variety of videos. The research questions are:

- Which are the main visual elements of the sexual objectification of women in music videos?
- How can these dimensions be articulated into observable variables so they serve to determine the level of sexual objectification of women in any music video?

We follow these steps: 1) We select three gender experts. 2) We conduct a literature review to determine the main dimensions of the sexual objectification of women. 3) The experts validate the dimensions. 4) The experts define 18 variables of the sexual objectification of women in music videos. 5) The experts test the variables on the five music videos. 6) We compare the results to produce a usable framework.

The experts were chosen based on their gender, media expertise, and availability and have given their informed consent to be included in this study (see Table 1). A limitation of the experts' section is that the three are women.

Table 1. The gender experts

Expert	Gender expertise
Raquel Jiménez Manzano (1)	With a degree in Political Science and Sociology and postgraduate studies in mainstreaming gender perspectives in public policies, she coordinates the online training project «Virtual School for Equality», Institute for Women and Equal Opportunities.
María Martín Barranco (2)	Law graduate. Founder of the Virtual School for Feminist Empowerment (EVEFem). Advises on equality to several institutions and companies. Author of <i>Ni por favor, ni por favora</i> (2019) and <i>Mujer tenías que ser: La construcción de lo femenino a través del lenguaje</i> (2020).
Nuria Coronado Sopena (3)	A journalist specialized in feminist studies. She has a degree in Information Sciences and a master's degree in Radio Production, Librarianship, and Documentation. She writes for La Hora Digital and appears on TeleMadrid and Madrid Television. She is the author of <i>Hombres por la Igualdad</i> (2017), <i>Mujeres de Frente</i> (2019), and <i>Comunicar en Igualdad</i> (2019). She was awarded the Athena prize for her professional work defending equality (2021).

We met remotely in four meetings from February 1 to February 24, 2020, lasting from 1 hour to 4 hours each. The experts generated the variables articulated as yes/no questions, often used in surveys to gauge people's attitudes. When enough data are gathered, those conducting a survey based on yes/no questions offer a measure based on a percentage of how applicable or not applicable a proposition is (Briggs, 2015).

The 2019 music videos selected to test the variables are *Swing*, by Danny Ocean; *Me Quedo*, by Aitana and Lola Indigo; *Never Really Over*, by Katy Perry; *Fresa*, TINI, and Lalo Ebratt; and *Quizás*, Rich Music, Sech, Dalex ft. Justin Quiles, Wisin, Zion, Lenny Tavárez, and Feid (see Figures 5-9). The experts randomly chose the videos among the most popular on YouTube.

Figure 5. Film still, Danny Ocean, *Swing*



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RYTD8uDqWU>

Figure 6. Film still, Aitana, Lola Indigo, *Me Quedo*



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJcm2dLUjVo>

Figure 7. Film still, Katy Perry, *Never Really Over*



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEb5gNsmGj8>

Figure 8. Film still, TINI, Lalo Ebratt, *Fresa*



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmeyoMooJPY>

Figure 9. Film still, Rich Music, Sech, Dalex ft. Justin Quiles, Wisin, Zion, Lenny Tavárez, Feid, *Quizás*



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Cuwgzbejdc>

To conduct the analysis, we worked with the experts, comparing the available definitions of sexual objectification reviewed here and applying them to the scrutiny of the videos to produce a comprehensive framework of the sexualization of women in music videos (Table 3), as seen next.

3. REIFICATION, OBJECTIFICATION, AND SEXUALIZATION

Reification can be defined as the process of «transforming human properties, relations, and actions» into manufactured products or objects (Petrović, 1983). The concept of reification rose to prominence through Georg Lukács's work, which, inspired by Karl Marx's idea of commodity fetishism, considers it a problem of the capitalist society. For Lukács (1972), reification is the act by which social relations are perceived as inherent attributes of the people involved in them, transforming objects into people and people into objects. The result is that subjects are rendered passive and determined by things, while objects are rendered as active factors (Lukács 1972). Thus, reification is an all-encompassing and consensual phenomenon kept in check by social norms (Buchler, 2016). The objectification of women, instead, arises from a power imbalance between men and women. It is mainly concerned with

female physical characteristics with psychological and social impact, primarily unregulated and non-consensual, although women can participate (Buchler, 2016).

Feminist studies deal with both the sexual objectification of women, in general, and women's objectification in the audiovisual medium. De Beauvoir refers to the woman as an object that others observe (de Beauvoir, 1981, p. 130). For de Beauvoir, being seen as a thing, as a sexual object, prevents the individual from being recognized as free. Bartky Lee (1990) formulates one of the most referenced definitions of sexual objectification of women: it is the act of considering women as a body, body parts, or sexual functions capable of representing her, ignoring her characteristics as a person. Objectification is generally used within feminist theory to refer to how women are treated as lifeless things, often sexual objects, especially in publicity and pornography, where female bodies are a means to sell products and arouse men. In an objectification process, the woman is reduced to her breast, genitalia, buttock, or mouth metonymically, and she or her body parts become a proxy for sexual allure or intercourse. To summarize, the objectification of women, according to Bengoechea (2006) is:

A systematic process whereby a sensitive being becomes dehumanized, reduced to a thing, an insignificant being without social status, something that can be exchanged, possessed, stored, displayed, used, abused, and discarded. Women gradually realize their category as objects in this society through all the rites and collective forms that transform them into a spectacle and an object that can be possessed⁸. (p. 30)

The sexualization of women relates to their objectification since it is the manner through which women are regarded in sexual terms and evaluated as objects. The sexualization of women naturalizes violence and encapsulates them in «fantasies of manageable victims» (Bengoechea, 2006, p. 38). Sexism is maintained through symbolic violence, whereby society «perpetuates the

8. Bengoechea abridges previous definitions. *Un proceso sistemático por el que un ser sensible se deshumaniza se reduce a una cosa, a un ser insignificante sin estatus social, se convierte en algo que se puede intercambiar, poseer, trocar, guardar, exhibir, usar, maltratar, disponer y desechar. Las mujeres se van dando cuenta paulatinamente de su categoría de objeto en esta sociedad a través de todos los ritos y formas colectivas que la sitúan como espectáculo y objeto de posesión.*

relations of domination of men over women, making the latter partakers of their own subordination» (Verdú, 2018, p. 10). This symbolic violence is typically funneled through words, images, songs, and cinema, which enable «the internalization by men and women of the habits and behaviors imposed by a patriarchal social order» (Verdú, 2018, p. 10).

MacKinnon (1987) and Haslanger (2012) concur the sexual objectification of women is necessarily ethically intolerable. But according to Nussbaum (1995), there can be benign cases of sexual objectification, for instance, during a healthy sexual relationship. Although this is taken to be a disagreement, Stock (2015) explains that the two theories arrive at different proposals because their theoretical aims are different. While Nussbaum and Langton look at whether their definition captures all the meaningful contexts in which the concept is applied, MacKinnon and Haslanger look at whether theirs offers explanatory value and a useful way of categorizing observed phenomena with a view to effective moral criticism (Stock, 2015). We based our framework on Nussbaum and Langton, among others, for their comprehensiveness, as we do not focus on reception, impacts, or ethical concerns. Besides, the realm of consensual intercourse is not part of this discussion.

These and other authors have broken down the sexual objectification of women into different elements. In the 90s, Nussbaum enhanced the concept of objectification, as initially proposed by Dworkin (1981) and MacKinnon (1987). Nussbaum (1995) states that the sexual objectification of women usually includes seven mechanisms: a) instrumentality (i.e., treating a person as a tool); b) denial of autonomy (i.e., treating someone as if they lacked willpower); c) inertness (i.e., treating someone as if «lacking in agency»); d) fungibility (i.e., treating a person as interchangeable with objects); e) violability (i.e., treating a person as lacking in «boundary integrity»); f) ownership (i.e., treating someone as if they could be owned); and g) denial of subjectivity (i.e., treating a person as if their opinions lacked interest) (pp. 256-257). Nussbaum's framework is a reference in gender studies and has been employed to examine female and male sexualization in music videos, finding «increased sexual hostility and stereotypical portrayals against women» (Qamar et al., 2021, p.137) and that men can be sexually objectified as well (Ali & Qamar, 2020).

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argue that the common factors in most forms of sexual objectification seem to be the experience of being treated as a body (or a collection of body parts), valued predominantly for use (or consumption) by others, and being denied equality (p. 174)

From the field of philosophy, Langton (2009) studies in *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* the sexualization of women in pornography. She proposes that sexual objectification has three different properties: a) reduction to body parts (i.e., identifying a person with their body parts); b) reduction to appearance (i.e., treating a person based on how they look); and c) silencing (i.e., treating a person as if unable to speak). Rather than focus on supposed harm, Langton contemplates the possibility that pornography constitutes harm by subordinating and silencing women. Langton explores the idea that pornography enacts social norms deeming women inferior. She also argues, along with MacKinnon and Hornsby, that pornography silences women in a way that confers authority to men. Where Nussbaum (1995) says that objectifying someone involves assuming they do not have autonomy, Langton notes there are ways to objectify without completely denying autonomy. Besides, Langton has opened a debate about the authority required for sexual objectification and has been criticized for it (see Butler, 1997, among others). Nevertheless, this is an inconclusive discussion; we do not dwell on this matter because it has not been settled.

Taking a functionalist view, Goffman considers *gender display* as a ritual that can «iconically reflect fundamental features of the social structure» (Goffman, 1976, p. 76). Wallis employs Goffman's framework to analyze 12 nonverbal displays associated with subordination, domination, sexuality, and aggression in music videos by male and female lead performers (Wallis, 2011). Conclusions showed that gender displays mainly emphasize stereotypical ideas of women as sexual objects and to a lesser degree, females as secondary and males as aggressive (Wallis, 2011).

From political science, Heldman (2012) offers a seven-question test to examine visual sexualization, which includes the following queries: «1) Does the image show only part(s) of a sexualized person's body? 2) Does the image present a sexualized person as a stand-in for an object? 3) Does the image show a sexualized person as interchangeable? 4) Does the image affirm the idea of violating the bodily integrity of a sexualized person that can't

consent? 5) Does the image suggest that sexual availability is the person's defining characteristics? 6) Does the image show a sexualized person as a commodity (something that can be bought and sold)? 7) Does the image treat a sexualized person's body as a canvas?». Heldman's questionnaire includes many of the issues observed earlier.

Finally, the Spanish Observatory of Women's Image (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2014) establishes criteria to determine whether there is sexism in audiovisual content, including 1) attitudes that contribute to gender violence; 2) placing women in positions of inferiority; 3) belittling women; 4) using the female body as bait or a sexual object; 5) stereotyping women, attributing appropriate social options or activities for women and other forms of sexism, and 6) using women's bodies as canvases.

The sexual objectification of women comprises a range of behaviors exceeding the characteristics offered by these authors. These include staring or leering at women's bodies, making derogatory or sexual comments about them, taking unsolicited photographs of their bodies, sending unsolicited sexually-charged messages to them, publishing sexualized images of them, tailing and harassing them, and acting threateningly towards women (Calogero, 2011, pp. 3-4). However, we focus on the most identifiable ones.

The consequence of being objectified through many channels is that, over time, women internalize a vision of themselves as observers, an effect called self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Self-objectification is, thus, difficult to separate from the objectification of others since it acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Generally, women are stereotyped as less *agentic* than men (Hentschel et al., 2019). For example, in music videos, women are often represented as lifeless, voiceless, and decorative. However, gender stereotypes are so ingrained in our imaginations that people neither detect them (Hentschel et al., 2019) nor recognize the sexualization or stereotyping of women as harmful, despite various studies showing their negative impact (e.g., Álvarez-Hernández et al., 2015; Ballesteros et al., 2018; Vidal, 2018).

4. ANALYSING THE SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN MUSIC VIDEOS

Since some of the characteristics of sexual objectification are still debated –especially autonomy, silencing, and authority issues— we focus on what they have in common. In Table 2, we have grouped these characteristics into two main dimensions: *Objectification* involves treating women or their body parts as things. Meanwhile, *sexualization* refers to their exhibition or body parts as *stimuli* for coitus. A third dimension, *abuse*, refers to women being mistreated or portrayed in subservient poses that suggest that they can be harmed. For simplicity's sake, we consider it a form of extreme sexual objectification. The two dimensions do not capture all issues; for example, Ministerio de Igualdad includes issues such as demeaning women. However, those criteria relate to sexism or discrimination against women because of their sex.

Table 2. Comparison of sexual objectification characteristics in literature⁹

Nussbaum (1995)	Fredrickson and Roberts (1997)	Langton (2009)	Wallis (2011)	Heldman (2012)	Ministerio de Igualdad (2014)	Common dimensions
Instrumentality	Valued for use by others	Reduction to body parts (for the benefit of others)	Subordination	Women are shown as anatomical parts	Body as a (sexual) tool	Objectification
Denial of autonomy, lacking personal freedom or will	Denial of equality	Silencing	Domination & subordination	Women are shown as an object & as a commodity	Inferiority	Objectification
Inertness, lacking agency, passivity	Valued for use of others	Reduction to body parts & silencing	Domination & subordination	Women are shown as anatomical parts & as an object	Body as a sexual tool	Objectification & sexualization

9. NA refers to «non-applicable».

Fungibility, lacking boundary and integrity	NA	Silencing	Sexualization	Women are shown as an object	NA	Objectification
Violability	Valued for use by others	Reduction to body parts	Aggression & sexualization	Violability	Invitation to violence	Abuse & sexualization
Ownership, interchangeable object	Denied equality (owner/owned)	Silencing	Subordination	Interchangeability	Inferiority & body as a sexual tool	Objectification
Denial of subjectivity and experiences need not be taken under consideration	Denied equality	Reduction to body parts & silencing	Domination & subordination	Women are shown as anatomical parts & as object & as a commodity	Inferiority & sexism	Objectification & sexualization
NA	NA	Reduction to appearance	NA	Women valued for their sexual ability	NA	Sexualization
NA	NA	NA	NA	Women's body as a canvas	Women's body as a canvas	Objectification
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Scorn, undervalue, or ridicule	Abuse

The experts initially defined objectification as, firstly, the exposure of a woman's body or body parts as an element to attract the attention of a target audience (adolescents and youths) toward a product (song) or the subject (singer). Secondly, as an interchangeable or decorative element in the video. Likewise, sexualization is «a narrative fixation on a woman's body, emphasizing her body or body parts to show her as a sexual tool available to men and gauging her social value on the sexual desire she can arouse». The experts unpacked these two dimensions into 18 variables, formulated as yes/no questions referring to actual images (Table 3).

Table 3. Variables of the sexualization of women's images in music videos

Dimension «Objectification»	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are women's bodies shown incomplete? 2. Are women's bodies shown complete but with their backs turned? 3. Do women show themselves so that their face is not identified? 4. Are women shown in a passive attitude or just being looked at? 5. Do women show themselves in a posture that implies subordination (e.g., kneeling or lying on top of each other)? 6. Could the women shown be substituted for an object that would play their role (e.g., lamp, table, board)? 7. Is the role assigned to the women shown «serving» (e.g., a woman playing the role of a tray)?
Dimension «Sexualization»	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is women's position secondary or complementary to men's (e.g., men appear in the center as protagonists, while women seem interchangeable at the sides)? 2. Are women presented in a suggestive attitude through non-verbal language (e.g., caressing others or themselves)? 3. Are women presented passively, waiting to be chosen, and unemotional? 4. Are women presented in party settings, with suggestive lights, and as companions? 5. Do the women correspond to a stereotyped beauty canon (e.g., thin, thick-lipped, long-haired, and young)? 6. Are women's clothing scarcer than men's? 7. Are the materials used in women's clothing intended to reveal their bodies as much as possible (e.g., lycra)? 8. Are the items used in women's clothing reminiscent of sadomasochism/fetishism (e.g., leather boots)? 9. Is the infantilization of women through clothing (e.g., school skirts)? 10. Is the clothing worn by women inappropriate for the situation (e.g., going to the pool in bikinis and heels)? 11. Do men exhibit complementary elements of power (e.g., cars, motorcycles, watches) while women do not?

The experts then watched the videos and answered these questions independently. The average level of agreement was more than 97 percent. Table 4 shows the number of times the expert offered an affirmative answer.

Table 4. Evaluation of the music videos by the experts (# of affirmative answers)

	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3
<i>Swing</i>	12	13	12
<i>Me Quedo</i>	7	8	8
<i>Never Really Over</i>	10	11	10
<i>Fresa</i>	13	13	13
<i>Quizás</i>	12	13	13

The experts agreed on almost all questions. The only discrepancy was on variable 2.5 «The women correspond to a stereotyped beauty canon (e.g., thin, thick-lipped, long-haired, and young)», referring to stereotyped appearance.

The video with a higher level of affirmative answers –or sexual objectification— is *Fresa*, followed by *Swing* and *Quizás*. In comparison, the one with the lower level is *Me Quedo* (which does not mean there is no sexualization). The most common variables were (1.1) «Women’s bodies shown incomplete»; (2.2) «Women presented in a suggestive attitude through non-verbal language (e.g., caressing others or themselves)»; (2.5) «The women correspond to a stereotyped beauty canon (e.g., thin, long-haired, and young)»; (2.7) «The materials used in women’s clothing intended to reveal their bodies as much as possible (e.g., lycra)». The only absent variable was (2.8) «The items used in women’s clothing reminiscent of sadomasochism/fetishism (e.g., leather boots)».

On the other hand, the most objectifying video was *Swing* (where a mermaid-like woman hovers aimlessly around a full-dressed man in the water), followed by *Never Really Over* and *Quizás*. The less objectifying and sexualizing video is *Me Quedo*. While the most sexualizing video is *Fresa*, followed by *Quizás*.

Based on this analysis and the literature review, we next redefine *objectification* and *sexualization*.

Table 5. A conceptual framework of the sexual objectification of women in music videos

OBJ.	Instrumentalization	Reduce women to a body or body parts that can, then, be utilized, or place women in an inferior position so they can be exploited.
	Denial of autonomy	Portray women as silent beings, denying them parity with the male singer, placing them in a position of subordination (even considering them things), or showing them as voiceless and passive.
	Lifelessness	Degrade women to inert, decorative things, beings, or body parts.
	Fungibility	Deny women their individuality and complexity to the point that they can be interchangeable. We consider fungibility as a form of considering women «identical» or replaceable (Amoros, 1987). This often appears in music videos by showing women of standardized beauty (i.e., young, thin, thick-lipped, long-haired) and similarly (un)dressed.
	Commodification	Show women as commodities that can be owned or bought.
	Invisibilization	Deny women their subjectivity (e.g., promoting only the male singers' points of view).
	Canvas	Use women's bodies as canvases.
SEX.	Sexual metonymy	Degrade women to a body or body parts (typically breasts, mouths, and genitalia) for sexual intercourse or as <i>stimuli</i> for coitus.
	Violability	Portray women or their body parts in subservient positions, which makes them seem vulnerable to sexual violence or abuse.
	Sexual submission	Project the male singer's sexual desire, denying the women's points of view. We understand this is part of a long tradition of denying women's sexual interests.
	Sexual adroitness	Value women for the ability to satisfy men's sexual desires (typically the male singer's).
	Decorativeness	Reduce women to their appearance and portray them as sexually alluring decorations for the male singer's benefit.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The first idea from this analysis is that the sexual objectification of women in music videos is a multifaceted phenomenon, and determining the different elements that integrate this phenomenon is not a straightforward business. Thus, the definitions provided here include intersections. For example, to be interchangeable, women are first denied autonomy, subjectivity, and a voice. The case of the «*Hazte Vaquero*» campaign shows too how the sexual objectification of women appears in combination with other related phenomena such as sexism and stereotyping.

The second idea is that some sexually objectifying variables seem more recurrent than others. At the same time, they do not capture, for instance, whether women dance in a way reminiscent of sexual intercourse. Publicity frequently exposes women in various stages of undress and sexually suggestive poses, insinuating «everything from masturbation to fellatio» and in subordinate positions or available for male consumption (Arnold, 2021; Blloshmi, 2013). But music videos seem to be more explicit, showing women almost always skimpy dressed, sometimes totally naked, and engaged in actions that could be deemed pornographic. Examples include the overtly sexual choreographies in *Me quedo*, the perspective from a transparent floor of the crotch of a female dancer in shorts squatting for a better view in *Quizás*, and the emphasis on the singers' mouth in *Fresa* (a metaphor for mouth). The implications for intense sexual objectification can be dear; not only can they cause health issues in girls and women, but they can also affect how men behave toward women. For instance, Van Ouytsel et al. (2014) connect the consumption of music videos and pornography with sexting—the practice of sharing sexually charged photographs via mobile phone—between adolescents. Meanwhile, the sexual objectification of female artists in music videos can have adverse effects on male undergraduates' sexual beliefs, including negative sexual views, tolerance of violence, and attitudes about sexual harassment (Aubrey et al., 2011).

And the third idea is that the sexual objectification of women in music videos might be more pernicious than women's sexual objectification in other types of audiovisual material. Although this idea is not a result of the analysis here, the fact that music videos are not perceived as persuasive

communication might be especially problematic when young people who consume them tend to experience difficulties in identifying the sexualization of women. Music videos circulate among young people more widely and freely on sharing platforms like YouTube than ads and other audiovisual content.

Connected to these ideas, the lack of curation on these platforms deserves further discussion. The music business is set to earn \$6 billion in revenues from user-generated content on sharing platforms by 2022 (Mulligan & Jopling, 2020). YouTube is the second biggest search engine and the leading streaming music service worldwide (Evers, 2020), so discovering new music videos is easy. Unlike traditional television (e.g., MTV) or ads, in music videos, there is a problem of under-curation (Boardman, 2016). In 2011, Buzzi noted that user-generated content was increasing massively, while control of objectionable content was a challenge (Buzzi, 2011). Although the cases studied here are professionally produced videos, it has never been so simple to make an amateur video and upload it online. But Qamar et al. (2021, p. 137) find «stronger sexual objectification in music videos than other content», including advertising, entertainment, and others. And there are no standards and enforcement policies for fairness and equality on these platforms like those in regulating publicity. YouTube user interface warns users that they cannot upload content sexualizing or harming minors, and wrongdoers can see their channels suspended or canceled. «Explicit content meant to be sexually gratifying» is not allowed on YouTube, and posting pornography «may result in content removal or channel termination... In most cases, violent, graphic, or humiliating fetishes are not allowed on YouTube» (YouTube, 2021)¹⁰. Nevertheless, these rules may catch the grossest irregularities. Still, they are not enough to capture issues in videos such as Maluma's *Cuatro Babys*, whose criticism is left to the people who consume them (and was never removed). In contrast, for example, publicity is regulated in different countries to avoid sexism and the sexualization of girls, despite challenges to implementation (Redacción, 2019). The videos

10. On September 7, 2022, YouTube updated their Nudity and sexual content policy to «more consistently enforce our Community Guidelines».

examined here, though sexualizing, are readily available on YouTube and promoted by the platform as the most popular in 2020.

The high level of agreement among the experts demonstrates that the framework offered here is a viable instrument for gauging the sexual objectification of women in music videos. We consider that offering a framework that captures most occurrences can be useful. It is a heuristic tool that could be operationalized to spot the sexual objectification of women automatically. Nevertheless, some challenges remain. Variables, such as the infantilization of women, are less automatically detectable than, for example, whether a woman is naked or not. Besides, even if all the variables were machine-readable, it is to be seen with which intensity they are present in a video to determine to what degree it is sexualizing women.

Finally, another area for further inquiry is the study of the impact of the sexual objectification of women on people. Given the increasing problems in identifying the sexual objectification and the algorithmic consequences, it is worth exploring the sexual objectification of women in music videos as a form of antifeminist resistance.

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