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# ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNDE KİMLİK BOYUTLARININ KENDİNİ NESNELEŞTİRME ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

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Öz

Kendini nesneleştirme, bireylerin bedenlerinin başkaları tarafından nasıl değerlendirildiğine odaklanan bir kavramdır. Özellikle kadın çalışmalarında incelenen kendini nesneleştirmede, kadınların kendilik algılarının bedenlerine ilişkin değerlendirmelerini etkilediği bilinmektedir. Bu bağlamda bu çalışmada kimlik boyutlarının kendini nesneleştirme üzerindeki etkisinin araştırılması amaçlanmıştır. Katılımcılar 18-39 yaş arası (ortalama=21.77, ss=3.88) 215 üniversiteli kadın öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Veri toplama aracı olarak Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Kimlik Gelişimi Boyutları Ölçeği ve Kendini Nesneleştirme İnanç ve Davranışları Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Korelasyon analizi sonucuna göre, kendini nesneleştirme ile içsel yatırım, içsel yatırımla özdeşleşme, seçeneklerin genişlemesine araştırılması ve seçeneklerin derinlemesine araştırılması arasında olumsuz ilişkiler vardır. Bununla birlikte, kendini nesneleştirme ile seçeneklerin saplantılı araştırılması arasında pozitif bir ilişki vardır. Çoklu regresyon analizi sonuçlarına göre içsel yatırım, içsel yatırımla özdeşleşme ve seçeneklerin genişlemesine araştırılmasının kendini nesneleştirmeyi negatif olarak yordadığı, ancak seçeneklerin derinlemesine araştırılmasının kendini nesneleştirme üzerindeki etkisinin anlamlı olmadığı bulunmuştur. Ayrıca seçeneklerin saplantılı araştırılmasının kendini nesneleştirme üzerindeki etkisi pozitif bulunmuştur. Sonuçlar, kimlik ve kendini nesneleştirme literatürü bağlamında tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik boyutları, Kendini nesneleştirme, Kadın.

#### The Effect of Dimensions of İdentity on Self-Objectification in University Students

#### Abstract

Self-objectification is a concept that focuses on how individuals' bodies are evaluated by others. It is known that women's self-perceptions affect their evaluations of their bodies, especially in self-objectification, which is studied in women's studies. In this context, it was aimed to investigate the effects of identity dimensions on self-objectification in this study. The participants consisted of 215 university women students between the ages of 18-39 (mean = 21.77, sd=3.88). Personal Information Form, The Dimensions of Identity Development Scale, and Self-Objectification Beliefs and Behaviors Scale were used as data collection tools. According to correlation analysis, there were nagative relationships between self-objectification and commitment, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth, and exploration in depth. However, there was a positive relationship between self-objectification and ruminative exploration. According to the results of multiple regression analysis, it was found that commitment, identification with commitment, and exploration in breadth negatively predicted selfobjectification, but the effect of exploration in depth on self-objectification was not significant. In addition, the effect of ruminative exploration on self-objectification was found to be positively. The results are discussed in the context of identity and self-objectification literature.

Keywords: Identity dimensions, Self-objectification, Women.

#### 1. Introduction

Women who perceive their interactions with their bodies differently than men, due to the influence of the cultural and social environments they live in throughout their lives, are more likely to be inspectors of their own bodies. This situation is examined by the self-objectification theory. This

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theory proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) addresses the relationship of individuals with their bodies. The theory states that there is a third factor that intervenes between the body and the individual, and concludes that the body exists 'not only biologically' but also 'in a cultural and social context'. In addition, this theory emphasizes the state of being affected by the idea of the "ideal woman" that a woman constantly encounters in the sociocultural environment she is in, by giving importance to cultural elements (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003).

Self-objectification is a term that focuses on perceptions of how one's body is seen by others (Calogero, 2013). Since society directs women to care about their appearance, women feel the need to be too busy with their bodies to look thin, attractive, and beautiful. For some women, beauty turns into a force that will enable them to achieve their goals in all areas of life. To use this power, they strive to improve their appearance and achieve the ideal female body (Aubrey, 2006a; 2006b). This situation reveals sexual self-objectification. In sexual objectification, comparisons in the media and interpersonal interaction are very important. Sexually objectified women gradually perceive themselves as objects rather than subjects and attach more importance to their external appearance than to internal processes (Lindner & Tantleff-Dunn, 2017). This process is experienced through self-objectification. In other words, the concept of self-objectification and their bodily sensations is shown in the model of the self-objectification theory put forward. The internalization of culturally derived ideal beauty standards is also related to the fact that women have negative ideas about their bodies and suffer from body image problems (Moradi, 2010).

The sexual objectification has been the subject of much research over the past 20 years. Sexual objectification can affect women's social roles, identities, and self-perceptions. Studies reveal the perception that objectifying women can limit their success and sense of self (Daniels & Gillen, 2015). In a study by Calogero (2013), it is argued that women's seeing themselves as objects negatively affects their participation in social movements. Since it is suggested in studies on self-objectification that objectification is important in limiting women's perceptions of what they can achieve, it is recommended to conduct research on identity and self-concept (Daniels & Gillen, 2015). In fact, it is known that identity statuses have an effect on the individual's body perception (Talu, 2020) and are related to self-expression, which is defined as giving priority to the wishes, expectations, and needs of others (Demir Kaya & Çok, 2023).

Identity, which is considered as the answer to the question of 'who am I', is formatted during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Individuals get to know themselves by choosing the one that is suitable for their from various options in life, starting from adolescence (Erikson, 1994). Since it is known that women in this period format their identities in line with close relationships and have a different functioning compared to men (Laney et al., 2013), the identity formation of young women may be related to the concept of self-objectification, which is especially common among young women. Erikson's and Marcia's Theories, which was created in line with this theory, are the most impressive theories. However, the Five-Dimensional Model of Identity Formation (Luyckx, 2006), based on these theories, draws attention among the models that have focused on the process of identity development in recent years. The Five-Dimensional Model of Identity Formation, which includes commitment, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, and ruminative exploration dimensions, is widely used in studies on identity (Luyckx et al., 2006, 2008).

Commitment and active exploration generally affect the degree to which individuals feel, identify, and internalize their choices (Luyckx et al., 2006). On the other hand, self-objectification is known to inhibit cognitive functioning. Women who objectify themselves, instead of being what they want, make a commitment by acting with the options and preferences of others. In a study, it was seen

that women who had an identity crisis and could not find a solution internalized the view of social beauty at a higher level. Individuals who do not have a clear sense of identity may be more influenced by the society while constructing their own selves. For this reason, they are also at greater risk for body image difficulties (Lambert, 2011). Therefore, these attitudes of women who lack realistic assessments of their bodies and who constantly approach their bodies through a third-person perspective and experience a split self may be a result of their identity dimensions. According to previous studies, identity is generally handled in the context of statuses and its relationship with body image or body perception is discussed (Talu, 2020). The present study can fill an important gap in the literature by examining women's objectification of themselves within the scope of the Five-Dimensional Model of Identity Formation, which is a very current model in the identity literature. In addition, since it is known that young women evaluate their identities in the context of their relationships with others and therefore experience a sense of identity and intimacy at the same time (Erikson, 1987), considering self-objectification, which is more common in young adult women (Lindner & Tantleff-Dunn, 2017), may contribute to the literature. It is accepted that these two concepts are very important in the same developmental period and gender. In this direction, the study aims to investigate the effect of identity formation in women on selfobjectification. For this purpose, the following hypotheses were formed.

- 1. Commitment predicts self-objectification significantly.
- 2. Identification with commitment predicts self-objectification significantly.
- 3. Exploration in breadth predicts self-objectification significantly.
- 4. Exploration in depth predicts self-objectification significantly.
- 5. Ruminative exploration predicts self-objectification significantly.

# 2. Method

# 2.1. Research Design

The correlational pattern model was used to investigate the relationship between dimensions of identity and self-objectification. This model defines the formation and degree of relationships among variables (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In this study, this model was preferred to determine to what degree women's formatting their identities is related to self-objectification.

# 2.2. Participants

The participants consisted of 215 university women between the ages of 18-39 (mean = 21.77, sd = 3.88). A cross-sectional survey model was used to examine the predictive relationships between identity dimensions and self-objectification. In the cross-sectional survey model, variables are described in a single measurement (Büyüköztürk et al., 2015).

# 2.3. Research Process

Firstly, information about the study was added to the informed consent form. After this consent form was applied to the participants, they were informed about the confidentiality of the study. The research data were conveyed to the students online via google form. As a result, the process was completed by reaching 215 participants.

# 2.4. Instruments

# 2.4.1. The Personal Information Form

It is a form prepared in order to reveal information about the age and university of the participants in the study.

### 2.4.2. The Dimensions of Identity Development Scale

This scale was developed by Luyckx et al. (2008), adapted into Turkish by Morsünbül (2011), and a validity and reliability study was conducted on a female sample by Demir Kaya and Çok (2022). The scale consists of 5 sub-dimensions: exploration in depth (eid), exploration in breadth (eib), ruminative exploration (re), commitment (c), and identification with commitment (iwc). Each of the sub-dimensions consists of five items and there are 25 items in total in the scale. Items in the 5-point Likert-type scale are ranked from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The Cronbach's Alpha of the original scale was .81 for eib, .79 for eid, .86 for re, .86 for c, and .86 for iwc. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale, which was adapted into Turkish by Morsünbül (2011), in order for the above-mentioned dimensions; .87, .89, .90, .88 and .89. In the study conducted by Demir Kaya and Çok (2022), these values are respectively; .79, .68, .75, .80 and .77. Within the scope of this study, the mentioned values are respectively .94, .83, .89, .93, and .94.

#### 2.4.3. Self-Objectification Beliefs and Behaviors Scale

The scale, developed by Lindner and Tantleff-Dunn (2017) and adapted into Turkish by Demir Kaya and Çok (2023), is a 5-point Likert scale and consists of 14 items. There are two sub-dimensions in the scale: observer's perspective (7 items) and the body as self (7 items). The lowest total score is calculated as 14 and the highest total score as 70. In the scale developed by Lindner and Tantleff-Dunn (2017), Cronbach's Alpha values were calculated as  $\alpha = .91$  for the observer's perspective sub-dimension,  $\alpha = .92$  for the body as self sub-dimension, and  $\alpha = .92$  for the whole scale. In the adaptation study conducted by Demir Kaya and Çok (2023), these values were found as .86, .82 and .89, respectively. In the present study, these values are respectively .88, .89, and .92.

### 2.5. Data Analysis

In order to evaluate the parametric conditions, firstly extreme values were examined and Mahalanobis test was performed to extreme values. The normality assumption of the data was examined using the skewness and kurtosis coefficients. Then, Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationships between identity dimensions and self-objectification. Then, Durbin-Watson (D-W) analysis was performed to test autocorrelation between variables before performing multiple linear regression analysis on the data. Multi-collinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). SPSS 22.00 package program was used.

#### 2.6. Ethical Approval

Firstly, the necessary permissions were reached from the researchers who adapted or developed the scales to Turkish. Then, E.88656144-000-2300029084 numbered ethics committee permission was obtained from Atatürk University on 24.01.2023. Thus, the research process was started.

#### **3. Findings**

In the research, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effect of self-objectification of identity dimensions such as commitment, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, and ruminative exploration. Before performing the multiple linear regression analysis, it was examined whether the normality assumption was met or not by using the skewness and kurtosis coefficients. When Table 1 is examined, it can be said that the skewness and kurtosis values of the variables are between -2 and 2, which show a normal distribution. Then, Durbin-Watson (D-W) analysis was performed to test autocorrelation between variables before performing multiple linear regression analysis on the data. After the analysis, the Durbin-Watson value was found to be 1.24. Since this value varies between 1.5 and 2.5, it can be assumed that there is no autocorrelation between the variables (Field, 2005). The problem of multi-

connectivity was evaluated using VIF and VIF values were found to be between 1.59 and 4.60. The fact that these values are less than 10 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014) indicates that there is no problem of multi-connectivity.

Table 1 presents the findings of the correlation analysis applied to determine whether there is a relationship between the five dimensions and self-objectification.

| Variables                      | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Commitment                     | 1     |       |       |       |       |       |
| Identification with commitment | .78** | 1     |       |       |       |       |
| Exploration in breadth         | .73** | .62** | 1     |       |       |       |
| Exploration in depth           | .62** | .80** | .61** | 1     |       |       |
| Ruminative exploration         | 58**  | 54**  | 36**  | 36**  | 1     |       |
| Self-objectification           | 67**  | 67**  | 58**  | 56**  | .51** | 1     |
| Mean                           | 20.30 | 19.47 | 20.00 | 19.03 | 14.34 | 28.37 |
| Standard deviation             | 3.88  | 4.14  | 3.83  | 3.59  | 4.94  | 9.50  |
| Skewness                       | -1.26 | 99    | 80    | 60    | 02    | .72   |
| Kurtosis                       | 1.14  | 1.02  | .94   | 1.31  | 81    | .26   |

 Table 1. The relationship identity dimensions and self-objectification

After the statistical analyzes, there were negative significant relationships between selfobjectification and commitment (r = -.67, p<.01), identification with commitment (r = -.67, p<.01), exploration in breadth (r = -.58, p<.01), exploration in depth (r = -.56, p<.01), while there was a significant positive relationship between ruminative exploration (r = .51, p<.01). The predictive power of the five dimensions for self-objectification was investigated by multiple linear regression analysis. The obtained results are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of multiple linear regression analysis on the prediction of self-objectification

| Variables                      | В     | Standard Error B | В   | t     | р     |  |
|--------------------------------|-------|------------------|-----|-------|-------|--|
| Constant                       | 57.48 | 4.23             |     | 13.60 | <.001 |  |
| Commitment                     | 56    | .23              | 23  | -2.48 | .014  |  |
| Identification with commitment | 57    | .23              | 25  | -2.44 | .016  |  |
| Exploration in breadth         | 39    | .18              | 16  | -2.16 | .032  |  |
| Exploration in depth           | 17    | .22              | 07  | 79    | .428  |  |
| Ruminative exploration         | .32   | .12              | .16 | 2.75  | .007  |  |

As a result of the multiple linear regression analysis, it was seen that the model was significant (F(5, 209) = 47.42, p<.001) and explained approximately 53% of the change in the self-objectification variable. According to the standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ), the relative importance of the predictor variables on self-objectification; identification with commitment, commitment, ruminative exploration, and exploration in breadth. When the t-test results were examined, it was found that the variables of identification with commitment, ruminative exploration, and exploration in breadth. When the t-test results were exploration, and exploration in breadth were significant predictors of self-objectification, while exploration in depth did not have a significant effect.

### 4. Result, Discussion, and Recomments

In the study, the relationships between identity dimensionals and self-objectification were examined and it was found that commitment, identification with commitment, and exploration in breadth negatively predicted self-objectification. However, the effect of exploration in depth on self-objectification was nonsignificant. In addition, the effect of ruminative exploration on self-objectification was found to be positively.

According to the results, it was determined that commitment and identification with commitment had a negative effect on self-objectification. Commitments includes individuals' awareness of identifying their own emotional states, internalizing their choices, and how they feel (Luyckx et al.,

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2006). Objectification Theory argues that self-objectification inhibits awareness by suppressing cognitive functioning. In this context, women are socialized by being evaluated by others and do not explore their options regarding their own wishes (Cary et al., 2021). A study by Sherman and Zurbriggen (2014) revealed that there is a relationship between sexualization experiences and future commitment or decisions. Individuals who do not have a certain sense of identity are more vulnerable to the effects of society while forming their own self-structure. This situation may cause them to be at a greater risk in terms of body image difficulties (Lambert, 2011). Commitment is the process by which individuals understands themselves better and adopts their personal characteristics. This situation increases the self-confidence of the individual and plays an important role in the identity (Luyckx et al., 2006). Along with the commitment, the process of self-identification helps the individual discover identity and develops a more coherent sense of self. Commitment and identification support the individuals to better understand themselves, adopt their characteristics, and develop a stronger sense of self (Vankerckhoven et al., 2023). In this context, commitment and identification can positively affect women's self and body perception and contribute to a healthier self. In this case, it supports the finding that commitment and identification.

According to the another findings of the research, the effect of exploration in breadth on selfobjectification is significant. This finding suggests that in breadth exploration of options can reduce selfobjectification. A study reveals that not actively exploring options complicates the decision-making process and creates a feeling of uncertainty, placing individuals in a position that constantly evaluates options and acts as an outside observer (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). Self-objectification emerges behaviorally through body monitoring or self-monitoring, and in this process, there is a decision-making process regarding an ideal body image without functional exploration of options. Self-objectification impairs also women's motivation levels in daily activities. Therefore, women's self-objectification is the result of women's not functionally evaluating the options in their focus by acting as a distraction (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). On the other hand, exploring options in breadth can enable individuals to gain more insight into their choices and better understand their own values and goals (Luyckx et al., 2006). This may reduce the level of self-objectification by offering a more realistic view of individuals' selves. On the other hand, the effect of exploration in depth on self-objectification is nonsignificant. The reason for this situation may be that individuals evaluate their appearances superficially without examining the options in depth in the process of self-objectification. So much so that when women objectify themselves, they may tend to conform to the existing norm instead of dealing with the thoughts and feelings about the ideal woman image in depth.

Based on the findings, it was found that the ruminative exploration increased the tendency for self-objectification in women. In some cases, individuals may become stuck in an ruminative search of options. This may manifest itself as constantly seeking new options, being overly meticulous in the decision-making process, or being indecisive (Waterman, 1993). On the other hand, the tendency of women to objectify themselves refers to the process of internalizing the objectifying perspectives, expectations, and evaluations of the society towards women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Women may be exposed to social influences that tend to be evaluated according to the perspectives of others and perceived as objects. Studies show that ruminative choice seeking in the process of identity discovery may increase the tendency of an individual to evaluate himself and his environment in a dysfunctional way (Luyckx et al., 2006). This may reflect a dysfunctional search for options. In this context, the search for excessive and dysfunctional options in the process of self-identification and identity formation causes a tendency to adapt to social expectations, shape the body according to the expectations of third parties, and objectify oneself.

There are some limitations in the study. First of all, the participants in this study are university students. Considering that identity is an important developmental task in adolescence and that self-objectification is experienced at an early age, it can be recommended that future studies be conducted with adolescents. Second, in this cross-sectional study, longitudinal studies can be carried out in order to determine the change over time of identity formation, which has a dynamic pattern, and the self-objectification that it affects. In addition, the effect of identity on self-objectification can also be investigated with qualitative studies by considering the narrative identity approach.

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