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Being Involved in Something One Should not Get Involved With:

Women's Resistance to Sexual Music Videos

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### Abstract

Research on sexual music videos has paid little attention to the possibility that viewers can resist the sexual content of music videos and has largely ignored the processes that may explain this resistance. The present study aimed to fill these gaps in the literature. In an experiment, 44 young women were shown either a music video with sexual content or a music video with neutral content. Subsequently, their reactions towards the music video were assessed. Involvement in the sexual music video, defined by emotionally driven attention, resulted in increased psychological discomfort. This discomfort, in turn, elicited resistance in the form of negative thoughts towards the music video. These effects were not found for involvement in the neutral music video. Our study suggests that young women's involvement in sexual music videos can elicit resistance, which is explained by increased psychological discomfort.

*Keywords:* sexual music video, involvement, psychological discomfort, resistance

Being Involved in Something One Should not Get Involved With:

Women's Resistance to Sexual Music Videos

There has been much concern about young people's sexual beliefs and behavior being negatively influenced by the media, especially with respect to sexual music videos (e.g., Greenberg & Hofschire, 2000; Zhang et al., 2008). Such concerns, as well as research on the effects of sexual media content, seem to be based largely on the assumption that audiences adopt media messages rather uncritically. However, a substantial amount of media effects research has increasingly centered on the idea of active audiences that interpret the content in different ways depending on their personal and social background (for example critical audience research, e.g., Fiske, 1987; Livingstone, 1998, 2007; Morley, 1992, 1999; and the uses-and-gratifications tradition, e.g., Rubin, 2009; Ruggiero, 2000). This notion of active audiences implies that viewers can disagree with, or even resist, media content that is not in line with their socialization (Livingstone, 1998, 2007; Steele & Brown, 1995).

There is some evidence that female viewers, in particular, may respond to sexual media content in a negative way. For instance, Laan et al. (1994) found that women's cognitive responses towards male-targeted pornographic video fragment were often negative. Similarly, Mosher and MacIan (1994) showed that women experienced more negative and less positive affect when they watched a male-targeted pornographic video compared to when they watched a female-targeted pornographic video. Despite these intriguing results in research on women's responses to sexual media content, there are at least two shortcomings in the literature. First, the possibility of women's resistance to sexual media content has hardly been studied for media genres that may be less sexually explicit than pornographic videos, but more often watched by young women, such as sexual music videos. Second, the studies that

have shown that female viewers can resist sexual media content (e.g., Brown & Schulze, 1990; Brown et al., 1993) have exclusively focused on the mere occurrence of resistance. However, we know little about the processes that may explain why women show resistance to sexual media content in the first place.

The present study aims to fill these two gaps in the literature. Specifically, we will investigate how and why female viewers resist sexual music videos. We propose that involvement in the sexual music video, defined by an emotionally driven attention towards the music video, elicits psychological discomfort (i.e., an expression of dissonance), which in turn may increase resistance. Although the concept 'resistance' has multiple meanings and interpretations (Durham, 1999), most conceptualizations seem to be based on a notion of audiences' critical and often negative reactions towards media content (e.g., Brown & Schulze, 1990; Brown et al., 1993; Durham, 1999; Engelen-Maddox, 2005; Irving & Berel, 2001; Laan et al., 1994). For instance, previous research has focused on women's counterarguing and critical thinking as ways to resist idealized media images of female bodies (e.g., Engeln-Maddox, 2005; Irving & Berel, 2001). Therefore, in the present study resistance will be conceptualized as negative thoughts towards the music video.

### **Resistance in Response to Sexual Media Content**

Research on the effects of sexual media content seems to have focused mainly on viewers' acceptance of the dominant (stereotypical) messages in the content (for reviews, see Brown & Bobkowski, 2011; Escobar-Chaves et al., 2005; Ward, 2003). As a result, viewers' resistance to sexual media content has received little attention. This is somewhat surprising because there are at least two prominent models in which resistance to media content plays an important role. In Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding-decoding model, audiences are not passive recipients, but interpret

media content actively and in idiosyncratic ways. Three different interpretations, or 'readings', are possible, based on individual experiences of the events depicted in the media content. Media users can interpret and accept the content as it was intended (a 'preferred' reading), reject it or disagree with it (an 'oppositional' reading), or 'negotiate' between the intended meaning of the content and their subjective meaning (Hall, 1980). Thus, the different readings that Hall suggests imply that media users do not always accept all media content. Moreover, the oppositional and negotiated readings imply that media users can even disagree with, or even resist, media content that is not in line with their experiences (Durham, 1999; Livingstone, 1998, 2007).

Similar to Hall's (1980) encoding-decoding model, Steele and Brown's (1995) Media Practice Model posits that media influences do not occur in a vacuum but depend on people's 'lived experience'. This 'lived experience', which refers to pre-existing knowledge, daily experiences and socialization, influences how audiences select, interact with, and apply media content in individual ways. This also holds for interpretations of sexual media content. For instance, in an ethnographic study on young adolescents' responses to sexual media content, Brown and colleagues (1993) found that sexually experienced girls criticized the content because of the inconsistencies they saw between the media content and real life experiences. These girls also criticized the portrayal of violence against women and of women as sex objects. Thus, media users can show different interpretations and evaluations of media content, which may also be critical and cynical. These interpretations and evaluations, in turn, determine the effect that the media content has on beliefs and behavior (Steele & Brown, 1995).

With regard to music videos, there is at least some evidence that viewers are not passively accepting sexual music video content, but interpret and evaluate the

content according to one's own subjective perception. (Brown, 2000, 2002; Steele, 1999). For instance, Kalof (1993) found that although male and female viewers similarly interpreted the masculine image (e.g., powerful and in control) in a sexual music video, they differed with respect to their interpretations of the feminine image (e.g., submissive vs. powerful). Furthermore, Brown and Schulze (1990) found that viewers' interpretations of the content in a sexual music video differed by gender and race. In line with the idea of an active audience (Livingstone, 1998, 2007; Steele & Brown, 1995), these findings thus suggest that viewers interpret and evaluate sexual music videos in different ways. However, it is still rather unknown whether resistance to sexual music videos occurs, and how such resistance can be explained.

### **Processes Underlying Resistance to Sexual Music Videos: Involvement and Psychological Discomfort**

Music videos are a highly involving type of media genre. Music videos have been shown to elicit high arousal and pleasure, even more so when the videos contain sexual content (Hansen & Hansen, 1990, 2000). High arousal and pleasure in response to a stimulus constitute an appetitive motivational state that directs attention towards the stimulus (Bradley & Lang, 2000; Bradley et al., 2001a, 2001b). Involvement in a sexual music video can therefore be seen as an emotion driven attention towards the video content. Similarly, Mosher and MacIan (1994) define involvement in sexual content as 'an affect-invested attentional focus on what matters most in the sexual scene' (p.101). However, sexual media messages are quite complex and filled with contradictory messages, particularly for women (e.g., Tolman, 2002). Thus, involvement in music videos may not be as straightforward when it occurs for sexual music videos.

In fact, previous research has shown that women's involvement in sexual media content is related to discrepant experiences (e.g., Allen et al., 2007; Attwood, 2005; Laan et al., 1994). For instance, women can show arousal and pleasure in response to pornographic content, while at the same time criticizing the content (Attwood, 2005). Moreover, women can experience a 'guilty attraction' to images of nude males because gazing at a male body is considered improper for women and in contrast with gender norms (Attwood, 2005). Women have also been found to label their sexual arousal in response to sexual media content negatively (Allen et al., 2007). For instance, Laan et al. (1994) showed that although women responded to man-targeted pornographic films with genital arousal, this arousal was paired with negative affect and low subjective sexual arousal.

These discrepant experiences may stem from women's involvement in an activity that is inconsistent with perceived social expectations and gender norms (Allen et al., 2007; Attwood, 2005). This resembles the experience of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), which refers to the perception of an inconsistency among one's cognitions. Cognitive dissonance involves a negative emotional state, characterized by psychological discomfort (Elliot & Devine, 1994). Such psychological discomfort could thus be elicited by involvement in sexual music videos, as involvement in the sexual and often stereotypical content of these videos may also be perceived as inconsistent with women's socialization. Our first hypothesis thus read: female viewers' involvement in a sexual music video will increase psychological discomfort (see H1 in Figure 1).

Psychological discomfort, in turn, is a motivational drive to reduce dissonance, for instance by arguing against the information that generates the dissonance (Elliot & Devine, 1994). Thus, when women experience psychological discomfort as a result of

their involvement in sexual media content, they can be expected to show resistance towards the content. Therefore, we hypothesized further that psychological discomfort would increase resistance towards the sexual music video (see H2 in Figure 1). Taken together, our first and second hypotheses imply that psychological discomfort mediates the effect of involvement in a sexual music video on resistance towards the music video. Formally, this is visualized as H3 in Figure 1.

### **Method**

To test our hypotheses, an experiment was conducted with a one-factorial between-subjects design (music video: sexual vs. neutral). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, a sexual condition or a neutral condition. Participants in the sexual condition ( $N = 22$ ) were shown the music video 'Pin Pon' by El Medico. The video shows a male artist observing and giving grades to scarcely dressed women, who are dancing for him in a sexually suggestive way. Participants in the neutral condition ( $N = 22$ ) were shown the music video 'Baby Lores Y Insurrecto Dejala ir 1' by Clan 537. This music video shows men and women interacting in a non-sexual way (e.g., talking and having fun together). Pretests among 16 undergraduates revealed that the two music videos were perceived as either sexual and gender-stereotypical or neutral in that respect.

The music videos were chosen to differ mainly on the presence of sexual content, and resembled each other in music genre (Cubaton), scenery (warm and sunny environment), and the presence of a male artist interacting with female characters. Both videos were of equal length. The music genre Cubaton was chosen as it is a relatively unknown music genre in the Netherlands, which would reduce the possible confounding influence of familiarity of the music video or liking of the music genre. Familiarity of the music video and liking of the music genre was tested by

asking participants to indicate whether they had seen the music video before by answering *yes* (coded 1) or *no* (coded 2), and how much they liked the music genre in the video on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a lot*). One-way ANOVA's showed that participants in the two conditions indeed did not differ in their familiarity with the music video ( $F [1,42] < 1, p = 1.00; M = 1.91, SD = .29$  for both conditions), or in their liking of the music genre of the music video ( $F [1,42] = 1.85, p = .18; M = 2.55, SD = 1.22$  for the sexual condition;  $M = 3.05, SD = 1.21$  for the neutral condition).

### **Sample**

Forty-four Dutch women aged 18-28, ( $M = 22.71, SD = 2.51$ ) were recruited to participate in the experiment at the University of Amsterdam. Of the sample, 47.7% was in a relationship, 75% was heterosexual, 22.8% was bisexual and 2.3% was lesbian. Participants were offered the possibility to take part in a lottery to win a gift certificate of 25 Euros as an incentive.

### **Procedure**

Before the experiment, participants were given general information regarding the (sexual) content of the experiment and requested for informed consent. Participants were then seated in separate cubicles with individual computers in order to ensure privacy and asked to follow the instructions on the computer. After watching a (sexual or non-sexual) music video, participants in both conditions completed the same questionnaire on the computer. The questionnaire included measures of involvement, psychological discomfort and a thought-listing procedure to measure negative thoughts towards the music video. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide personal information such as age, relationship status, and sexual orientation. Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

## Measures

**Involvement.** We conceptualized involvement in sexual media content as an emotion-driven attentional focus to the sexual content. Previous research has shown that emotion-driven attention to a highly arousing and positive stimulus results in shorter estimations of the duration of the stimulus (Angrilli et al., 1997; Noulhiane et al., 2007; Tipples, 2010). Conversely, longer estimations have been found for low-arousal positive stimuli, or high-arousal negative stimuli (Angrilli et al., 1997). Therefore, involvement in the music video was measured through time estimation. Participant were asked to indicate the duration of the music video by choosing one of the options: 1 (*3 minutes*), 2 (*3,5 minutes*), 3 (*4 minutes*), 4 (*4,5 minutes*) or 5 (*5 minutes*.) The measure was recoded such that higher scores indicated shorter time estimations and thus more involvement. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

**Psychological discomfort.** To compose a psychological discomfort scale, we used the same items as used in previous research to measure psychological discomfort (e.g., Elliot & Devine, 1994; Galinsky et al., 2000): uncomfortable, uneasy, and bothered. Participants were presented with each of these affective states and asked to indicate 'the extent to which each word describes the way you feel right now,' on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Other affective states that were added as filler items were: dissatisfied with myself and annoyed with myself (negative affect towards self), happy, good, friendly, energetic, and optimistic (positive affect; cf. Galinsky et al., 2000). We added filler items to avoid that participants would get suspicious about the purpose of the study. The three psychological discomfort-items loaded on one factor (explained variance 40%) and formed a reliable scale with a

Cronbach's alpha of .78. The items were therefore averaged to obtain one measure of psychological discomfort. Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 1.

**Resistance.** We used a thought listing procedure to measure negative thoughts towards the music video. Such an open-ended thought listing procedure is often employed to measure counterarguments to persuasive messages (e.g., Burkley, 2008; Tormala et al., 2006). Participants were asked to recall five thoughts they had while watching the music video and fill in each thought on a separate screen. Once this was completed, the five thoughts successively reappeared on the screen. Participants were asked to indicate for each thought whether the thought was positive, negative, or neutral. The negative thoughts score was composed by summing the amount of negative thoughts. Means and standard deviations of the negative thoughts score can be found in Table 1.

### **Randomization Check**

To make sure randomization was successful, we tested whether the participants in the two conditions were equal on the following variables that could possibly influence the main results: age, relationship status, and sexual orientation. For relationship status, participants were asked to indicate whether they were 'currently in a relationship;' 'currently not in a relationship, but has relationship experience;' or 'currently not in a relationship, and does not have relationship experience.' Sexual orientation was measured by asking participants to indicate their sexual preference on a 5-point scale, with the response options 1 (*males only*), 2 (*mainly males, but also females*), 3 (*both males and females*) 4 (*mainly females, but also males*) and 5 (*females only*). The option 'I prefer not to answer' was also given.

One-way ANOVA's showed that participants in the two conditions did not differ in age ( $F [1,42] = 2.73, p = .11$ ), relationship status ( $F [1,42] = 2.70, p = .11$ ), or sexual orientation ( $F [1,42] = .80, p = .38$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

We tested our hypotheses with ordinary least-square regressions. As we had directional hypotheses, one-tailed significance testing of our hypotheses was deemed appropriate. Because we were interested in the process of involvement in sexual music videos on resistance through psychological discomfort, we initially tested the hypotheses for the sexual music video condition only. To make sure that the expected process only held for involvement in a sexual music video, the effects of involvement on psychological discomfort and resistance were also separately analyzed for the neutral music video condition. In this analytical approach we followed the strategy developed by Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010), who also analyzed underlying mechanisms of media influence separately for an experimental and a neutral condition.

The mediation of psychological discomfort was investigated by hierarchical regression analysis. In this analysis, the mediator was entered in a second step in the regression analysis, so that the remaining effect of involvement on resistance could be tested while accounting for the influence of psychological discomfort. Because Shapiro-Wilk tests showed that the normality assumption was violated for the measures involvement, psychological discomfort and resistance ( $p < .05$ ), we also tested the mediation effect with bootstrapping, calculating a 90% bootstrap bias corrected and accelerated confidence interval (BCa CI) for 1000 bootstrap samples.

## **Results**

### **Manipulation Check**

Before testing the hypotheses, we first compared the sexual music video condition with the neutral music video condition on amount of involvement. Given that sexual stimuli have been shown to elicit more engagement, arousal and pleasure in previous research (e.g., Bradley et al., 2001a, 2001b, Hansen & Hansen, 1990), we expected that participants would be more involved in the sexual condition than in the neutral condition. In line with our expectations, exposure to the sexual music video led to more involvement ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) than exposure to the neutral music video ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ),  $F(1,42) = 3.71$ ,  $p < .05$ .

### **Regression Analyses**

Hypothesis 1 predicted that involvement in a sexual music video would increase psychological discomfort. A regression analysis for the sexual music video condition, with involvement as the independent variable and psychological discomfort as the dependent variable, showed that involvement was significantly and positively related to psychological discomfort,  $B = .32$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .17$ . Thus, higher involvement in the sexual music video resulted in more psychological discomfort. Hypothesis 1 was therefore supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that psychological discomfort would increase resistance towards the music video. The regression analysis for the sexual music video condition, with psychological discomfort as the independent variable and resistance as the dependent variable, showed that psychological discomfort significantly and positively predicted the amount of resistance towards the music video,  $B = 1.36$ ,  $SE = .30$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .51$ . This means that the more psychological discomfort viewers experienced, the more they resisted the sexual music video. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was also supported.

### **Mediation Analysis**

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the effect of involvement in a sexual music video on resistance would be mediated by psychological discomfort. Thus, when psychological discomfort is included as a predictor of resistance towards the music video in a hierarchical regression analysis, the association between involvement and resistance should disappear. We first analyzed the direct effects of involvement on resistance. Regression analysis for the sexual music video condition showed a significant direct effect of involvement on resistance,  $B = .72$ ,  $SE = .29$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .23$ . This means that women who were more involved in watching the sexual music video showed more resistance to the music video. Second, we added psychological discomfort to the regression analysis in a second step. The results showed that when psychological discomfort was added to the prediction, the effect of involvement on resistance was no longer significant,  $B = .35$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $p = .09$ . Moreover, adding psychological discomfort to the regression significantly improved the prediction of involvement on resistance,  $\Delta R^2 = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ . Thus, our third hypothesis was also supported. A summary of the hierarchical regression analysis is shown in Table 2.

The direct effect of involvement on resistance remained significant with bootstrapping. Further, the 90% BCa CI for the indirect effect of involvement on resistance, through psychological discomfort, was between .14 and .75 and was, as it did not include zero, significant. In sum, the bootstrap analyses confirmed the statistical significance of our results that we obtained on the basis of parametric significance tests.

#### **Additional Analyses: Neutral Music Video**

To test whether the effect of involvement on psychological discomfort and resistance only held for a music video with sexual content, we also analyzed the effects for the neutral music video condition. Involvement in the neutral music video

did not increase psychological discomfort,  $B = -.06$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $p = .69$ ,  $R^2 = .01$ . In addition, we also did not find a significant direct effect of involvement in the neutral music video on resistance towards the music video,  $B = -.28$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $p = .28$ ,  $R^2 = .06$ . This means that higher involvement in a neutral music video did not increase psychological discomfort, nor did it increase resistance towards the music video. Correlations between involvement, psychological discomfort and resistance, for both the sexual and the neutral music videos, are shown in Table 1.

### Discussion

To date, research on sexual music videos has paid little attention to the possibility that viewers resist the content of sexual music videos. Moreover, processes through which such resistance occurs were understudied. The present study showed that involvement in a sexual music video increased psychological discomfort for women. This discomfort, in turn, augmented resistance towards the music video in the form of negative thoughts towards the music video. Furthermore, we found higher involvement for the sexual music video condition compared to the neutral music videos condition. This is in line with previous findings that sexual stimuli elicit higher appetitive motivation compared to other positive stimuli (Bradley & Lang, 2000; Bradley et al., 2001a, 2001b). Being drawn to sexual media content in such a way may be perceived as being in contrast to young women's socialization (Allen et al., 2007; Attwood, 2005), which likely resulted in women's feeling that their involvement in the sexual music video was inappropriate. This expressed itself in feelings of psychological discomfort, which eventually elicited resistance to the content. In addition, psychological discomfort fully mediated the effect of involvement on resistance towards the music videos. Psychological discomfort can thus be seen as an explanation of how female viewers come to resist sexual media

content. Moreover, these effects were purely the result of involvement in sexual media content, as they were not found for involvement in a neutral music video. Thus, involvement in a neutral music video did not elicit psychological discomfort or resistance, most likely because involvement in non-sexual content did not conflict with women's socialization.

### **Implications for Research on the Effects of Sexual Media Content**

The overall pattern of our findings is in line with audience research that has put forward the idea of a more active audience that interprets media content in different ways, depending on experiences in daily life (Livingstone, 1998, 2007; Morley, 1992; Ward, 2003). This notion has been lacking in most research on sexual media content, which mostly seems to adhere to the idea of direct effects of sexual media content on audiences (Attwood, 2005). Research has shown associations between the use of sexual media content and various sexual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (for reviews, see Brown & Bobkowski, 2011; Ward, 2003). However, the empirical studies, along with their notion of direct causal effects of (sexual) media content, are not uncontested. The studies have been criticized for showing only small effect sizes and for not sufficiently taking into account contextual factors and pre-existing differences between viewers (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2011; Steinberg & Monahan, 2010). Such small overall direct effects may be the result of some viewers resisting media content. As a result, we need a better understanding of how viewers interpret and respond to sexual media content in order to understand the effects of sexual media content (see for elaboration, Ward, 2003). Building on previous research that showed critical and negative responses towards sexual media content (e.g., Brown & Schulze, 1990; Brown et al., 1993), the present study is an initial step

forward in improving our knowledge about how female viewers resist sexual media content, and sexual music videos in particular.

Our finding of the effect of involvement on resistance may seem in contrast to previous research that has shown that involvement in sexual music videos increases the effects of music videos on stereotypical beliefs (Strouse et al., 1994; Ward et al., 2005; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999). That is, one would expect that the effect of involvement on resistance towards the music video makes it less likely that beliefs are influenced by the content of the music video. However, the two types of effects are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In fact, over time they may be related. Our results do not preclude the possibility that women do resist sexual media content at the moment they are exposed to it, but that their beliefs are still influenced over time. Such delayed effects have been found in previous research on effect of persuasive messages (e.g., Gruder et al., 1978; Pratkanis et al., 1988; Priester et al., 1999). For instance, Gruder et al. (1978) found that giving subjects a discounting cue that a message was false resulted in a lack of immediate attitude change, but an increase in message-consistent attitudes six weeks later. A message is expected to have a delayed impact on attitudes because it remains active in memory, while the link to the discounting cue disappears over time (Gruder et al., 1978; Kumkale & Albarracín, 2004; Pratkanis, et al., 1988; Priester et al., 1999). This is especially the case when much attention is paid to the message and less attention is paid to the discounting cue (Priester et al., 1999).

A similar effect may occur when sexual media content is resisted. In this case, the psychological discomfort may work as a discounting cue that keeps the viewer from accepting the stereotypical images in the content. However, psychological discomfort is a state that dissipates quickly after resistance has occurred (Elliot &

Devine, 1994). As a consequence, involvement in the content may result in the sexual stereotypes being activated and stored up in memory, which eventually may affect attitudes over time. Investigating the long term effects of resistance to sexual media content is therefore an essential issue for future research on the effects of sexual media content.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting our findings. First, our sample consisted of higher educated young adult women. These women are likely to have developed skills for critical thinking, more so than younger or less educated women and may thus be more capable of being resistant. In this context, however, it is important to note that previous research has found similar analytic and interpretive responses to television by viewers with different educational levels (Neuman, 1982). In addition, younger audiences have also shown critical responses to sexual media content (e.g., Brown et al., 1993; Steele & Brown, 1995). Against this backdrop, future research should investigate the influence of developmental and educational levels on resistance processes more profoundly.

A second, and related, limitation is that our specific sample may have determined the type of resistance found. Generally, audience subgroups may be differentially sensitized toward certain resistance responses to sexual media content (Morley, 1999). For example, Boosalis and Golombisky (2010) showed that female students rejected sexual objectification of women in music videos. However, they did not criticize other biased messages in the music videos, for instance the importance of women's looks to be desirable to men. According to the authors, the young women rejected sexual objectification to make sense of their discomfort with the videos, without recognizing the dominant discourses that women should be beautiful. This is

likely the result of women being socialized to reject sexual objectification but not women's beauty imperative (Boosalis & Golombisky, 2010). The purpose of the present study was only to investigate how and why resistance to sexual music videos occurred, and not which specific aspects of the content elicited which type of resistance. However, future research should more thoroughly investigate the influence of socialization of certain subgroups in relation to resistance to specific aspects of sexual media content.

A final limitation concerns the use of a laboratory experiment to investigate resistance to sexual media content, with its well-known threat to external validity and the danger of creating demand characteristics. Although we do not discard these inherent shortcomings of experimental research, it is important to note that resistance responses have also been found in more natural settings (e.g., Brown et al., 1993; Steele & Brown, 1995). It thus seems likely that the processes we found also occur when women are confronted with sexual media content on a daily basis.

## **Conclusion**

The findings from the present study suggest that the negative influence of sexual media content on female viewers is not as straightforward as is often thought. Young women who are involved in a sexual music video can actually show resistance to the music videos, which is triggered by psychological discomfort (i.e., dissonance). This is in line with previous notions that viewers are capable of active interpretation and evaluation of media content, and can resist content that is inconsistent with their beliefs and expectations (Durham, 1999). This also implies that resistance to sexual media content may be increased when female viewers develop strong norms and expectations about sexuality that are in contrast with the stereotypical sexual images of television. Against this backdrop, it is important that we increase our knowledge on

the underlying mechanisms of resistance to sexual music videos, and the long-term effects of such resistance on sexual beliefs. Only then we can know whether the sexual content in music videos indeed has a negative effect on young women's sexuality, as is often assumed, and if so, whether and how such negative effects can be reduced. The present study can be considered as a first step in that direction.

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Table 1

*Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for the Sexual and Neutral Music Video Condition*

Variable	Sexual music video					Neutral music video				
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Involvement	1.00			3.82	1.01	1.00			3.13	1.32
2. Psych. Disc.	.41	1.00		1.78	.79	-.09	1.00		1.56	.79
3. Resistance	.48	.71	1.00	2.59	1.50	-.24	.33	1.00	2.09	1.54

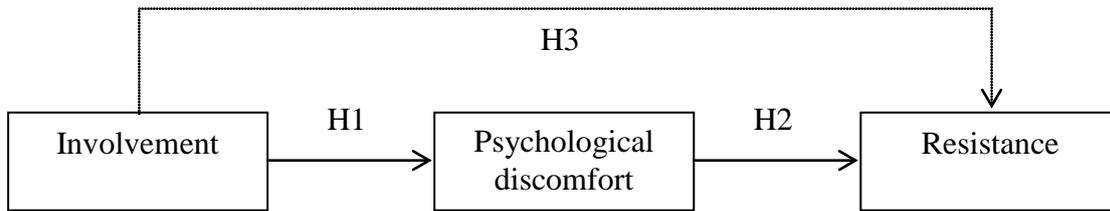
*Note.* Psych. Disc. = psychological discomfort. All correlations above .40 are significant at at least  $p < .05$  (one-tailed).

Table 2

*Summary of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis of the Mediation for Involvement in the Sexual Music Video on Resistance by Psychological Discomfort*

Variable	Resistance	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Step 1		
Involvement	.72*	.29
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.23	
Step 2		
Involvement	.35	.25
Psychological discomfort	1.17**	.32
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.55	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> $\Delta$	.32**	

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .



*Figure 1.* Psychological discomfort mediates the relationship between involvement in a sexual music video and resistance towards the music video.