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Tiffany Hoyt is a senior with a double major in Psychology and Criminal Justice and a minor in Spanish. She began this research in March 2012 and completed an Adrian Tinsley Program Summer project under the direction of Dr. Laura Ramsey. Tiffany presented this research at the ATP Summer Symposium and the 2013 National Conference on Undergraduate Research in Wisconsin. Her research has been expanded in an honors thesis to include the study of both men and women, and her work will be presented at the 2013 BSU Undergraduate Research Symposium. Tiffany will attend the University of Rhode Island in the fall to pursue a Master's Degree and a career in Student Affairs.

The objectification of women is widespread in the United States (American Psychological Association, 2007). In heterosexual relationships, a woman can feel objectified by her partner. When a woman feels objectified by her partner, she may internalize the objectification, feel like she has less control, and perceive more sexual pressure and coercion. However, there is relatively little research on objectification in romantic relationships. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to explore how partner-objectification might be related to sexual pressure in heterosexual relationships. A sample of 162 women from all over the United States participated in an online study that measured partner-objectification, self-objectification, sexual agency, and sexual pressure and coercion. The data were analyzed using bivariate correlations. Results showed that (a) partner-objectification is positively correlated with women's self-objectification, (b) self-objectification is negatively correlated with less freedom and control, and (c) less freedom and control is related to more sexual pressure. This research adds to the literature on romantic relationships and can inform interventions aimed at reducing sexual coercion.

In the United States, objectification is pervasive (American Psychological Association, 2007) and primarily affects women (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Objectification is a concern for women in countless aspects of their lives, including their work, school, political, and private environments (Nussbaum, 1999). To sexually objectify a woman is to mentally divide her body and mind in order to focus on her sexual body parts and functions. Her body parts are no longer associated with her personality, but are seen as instruments, and she is treated as a sexual object to be used by others (Bartky, 1990).

While there are many negative consequences to being objectified and objectification is generally considered to have a negative impact on women (Bartky,1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Zurbriggen, Ramsey, & Jaworski, 2011), some theorists have proposed that romantic relationships are one context where objectification is safe and even enjoyable because of the emphasis on physical attractiveness in romantic relationships (Nussbaum, 1999). On the other hand, viewing one's partner as an object or feeling like an object could create inequality in a relationship, as the objectified partner may feel like his/her needs and emotions are not being acknowledged. Furthermore, objectification theory purports that objectifying someone makes it easier to commit violence against that person (Fredrickson & Roberts,

1997), and so an objectified partner may be subjected to more sexual pressure and even sexual coercion. Surprisingly little empirical research has examined objectification in the context of romantic relationships. For this study, we focused on women in heterosexual relationships to determine how much women feel objectified by their romantic partner, if they internalize that objectification, and if that objectification is related to having less control in the relationship and experiencing sexual pressure and coercion in the relationship.

Partner-Objectification

Partner-objectification is thinking of a partner as a sex object instead of an equal partner in the relationship with his or her own feelings and emotions (Zurbriggen et al., 2011). Within a romantic relationship, it is expected that each partner will assess each other's attractiveness and anticipate sexual experiences. However, thinking of one's partner just as an object to be used for one's sexual desires could lead to negative consequences, such as partners feeling unequal in their relationship. The only published study on partner-objectification tested the relationship between media consumption, partner-objectification, and relationship satisfaction (Zurbriggen et al., 2011). The data showed that consuming objectifying media was positively associated with partner-objectification, which in turn predicted lower relationship satisfaction. In other words, the more that a person views their partner as an object, the less satisfied they are in the relationship. The current study seeks to build off of this research by examining and gaining a deeper understanding about how partner-objectification affects the person who is being objectified. For example, we hypothesize a positive correlation between partner- and self-objectification.

Self-Objectification

When women internalize the idea of being viewed as an object, they are engaging in a process known as self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Self-objectification has been empirically linked to a number of negative consequences, including constant body monitoring and self-surveillance, body shame, appearance anxiety, eating disorders, negative self-esteem, and poorer academic performance (Sanchez & Broccoli, 2008; Steer & Tiggemann, 2008). Particularly pertinent to romantic relationships, self-objectification is correlated with lower relationship satisfaction (Sanchez & Broccoli, 2008) and sexual dysfunction (Steer & Tiggemann, 2008). The basic nature of sex involves partners focusing on each other's bodies, which can magnify the sense of body shame and appearance anxiety associated with self-objectification and result in poorer sexual functioning (Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007; Steer & Tiggemann, 2008).

We hypothesized, that women who feel objectified by their partner are likely to internalize that objectification and experience self-objectification. Women in relationships could believe that their partner is looking at them like an object for sex, and therefore they would want to make sure their bodies are pleasing to their partner. Instead of concentrating on what their body can do and how it functions, women focus on how their body looks to others, especially if their partner reinforces this idea. Even women who claim to enjoy being sexualized by men experience self-objectification and actually feel more shame about their bodies than women who do not report enjoying sexualization (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011). The present study assesses whether feeling objectified by one's partner is related to experiencing self-objectification.

If a woman self-objectifies, she may concentrate on her body as a physical object that needs to be desired by men, and consequently focus much less on her own wants and needs. Indeed, previous research has shown a negative correlation between body image, self-consciousness, and sexual agency (Curtin, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2011). In the current study, it is hypothesized that more self-objectification is correlated with less agency in a relationship.

Agency

Previous research has linked objectification with the denial of agency, or the restriction of one's freedom to make decisions (Gray, Knobe, Sheskin, Bloom, & Barrett, 2011). Lowered sexual agency has been linked to a host of negative outcomes, including decreased sexual risk knowledge, difficulty in engaging in safe sex practices (such as requiring a partner to wear a condom during intercourse), and the inability to refuse unwanted sex (Curtin et al., 2011; Rostosky, Dekhtyar, Cupp, & Anderman, 2008).

Using assessments of condom use and sexual assertiveness, research has shown a direct link between self-objectification and diminished sexual health among adolescent girls (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006). Women who do not feel comfortable making sexual decisions in a relationship have difficulty advocating safe sex behaviors, such as condom use, which can negatively impact their sexual health. One specific study of condom use found support for the idea that women who have a lack of agency in a relationship and feel less power to make sexual decisions also feel sexual pressure (Gakumo, Moneyham, Enah, & Childs, 2011). The ability to negotiate condom use requires agency from both partners in a relationship; women who feel objectified and lack agency may also feel pressure from her partner and be unable to properly negotiate sexual behaviors.

Sexual Pressure & Coercion

Feeling objectified by one's partner, self-objectification, and sexual agency are particularly important variables to study because of their logical connection to sexual pressure and coercion. Sexual pressure is defined as feeling the need to conform to expectations to have sex due to a fear of consequences that may include losing benefits, being abandoned by one's partner, and physical or emotional threats (Jones & Gulick, 2009). Sexual coercion, on the other hand, is sexual pressure that involves threats of violence, actual physical force, or emotional manipulation (Shackelford & Goetz, 2004). By definition, an object has no agency, and so viewing a relationship partner as an object could interfere with one's ability to consider their partner's needs and desires, making it easier to pressure or coerce that partner into participating in particular sexual behaviors. Due to the internalization of that objectification (i.e., self-objectification) and lowered sexual agency, the objectified partner might feel pressure to perform more sexual activities and might be less inclined to act on their own feelings and emotions. The result of this pressure would be the objectified partner consenting to sexual behaviors that she otherwise would not consent to in an effort to please her partner.

This logic is reflected in the cultural expectations that men should be more aggressive and women should be more submissive (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Additionally, previous research demonstrates that sexual pressure is positively correlated with sexual victimization, and women who feel more sexual pressure are more likely to have unprotected sex (Jones & Gulick, 2009). This study tested whether objectification and agency are related to experiencing sexual pressure and coercion.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the present study: 1) partner-objectification will be correlated with increased self-objectification, lowered agency, and increased sexual pressure and coercion; 2) self-objectification will be correlated with lowered agency in romantic relationships; 3) lower agency in romantic relationships will be correlated with increased pressure and coercion to perform sexual behaviors.

METHODS

Participants

Two hundred sixty-seven female participants were recruited using the web service Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT) that distributes task requests to a population of workers throughout the United States who can volunteer to complete a task (such as a survey) for a nominal amount of money. Previous research has demonstrated that AMT can produce reliable data appropriate for social science research by providing samples that are more diverse and more representative of the U.S. population than typical samples gathered in college settings or typical internet samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011).

Three attention questions were randomly placed throughout the survey in order to evaluate whether the respondent was responding in a valid fashion. An example of an attention question used is: "If you have been reading the questions in this survey, click never;" those people who did not select "never" were marked as incorrectly answering one of the attention questions. Participants who did not answer at least two of the attention questions correctly or did not complete the majority of the survey items (*n*=45) were excluded from the analyses. Also, because the present study aimed to focus on heterosexual relationships, those who did not respond as being heterosexual (*n*=45) were eliminated from the data. The sample size for non-heterosexual participants was too small to permit thorough data analysis, and so analyses of those data are not included in the present study. Those women who have never been in a romantic relationship (*n*=11) were also eliminated from the data. Finally, women who answered the questions about their best opposite sex friend, as opposed to their current or previous partner, were eliminated from the data (*n*=2). This resulted in a final total of 162 participants.

The participants ranged in age from 18 to 69 (*M*=29.53, *SD*=11.90). The majority of the sample was working class (48.1%) or middle class (37.7%). A majority of the women who responded identified as White/Caucasian (78.4%). About 85% of the participants reported that they are currently in relationships. Out of the 164 women, 14.8% responded that they are single, 9.9% dating, 24.1% have a steady partner, 7.4% are engaged, 14.2% are living with their partner, and 29.6% are married.

Measures

Partner-objectification. A modified version of the partner-objectification scale (Zurbriggen et al., 2011) was used to assess how much each participant felt objectified by her partner. The scale was originally designed to measure how much a person objectified their partner, but it was modified to measure how much a person feels their partner objectifies them. For example, "I rarely think about how my partner looks" in the original scale was modified as "My partner rarely thinks about how I look" for the present study (this item was reverse scored). Participants used a 7-point scale from *disagree strongly to agree strongly* to respond to the 8 items in the measure. The reliability of a scale is calculated and shown with the symbol alpha (α). An alpha level of .7 or better shows that all of the items in the scale are measuring the same

construct. For this particular scale, α = .76.

Self-objectification. Self-objectification was measured using the surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Participants responded to the 8 items using a 6-point scale ranging from *disagree strongly to agree strongly* to measure how much she views her body from an observer's perspective (α = .88). An example of a reverse-scored item is "I think more about how my body feels than how my body looks."

Sexual agency. To measure sexual agency, participants completed four subscales of the Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale for Females (SSES-F; Bailes et al., 1989). Each subscale lists activities related to sexual agency and asks participants to respond with a 0 if they are unable to do any of the sexual activities. If they can do the sexual activities, they are asked to rate their confidence in their ability to do each of them from *1 (quite uncertain)* to *10 (quite certain)*. The four subscales used were body acceptance (2 items, α = .77, e.g., "Feel comfortable being nude with the partner"), refusal (2 items, α = .63, e.g., "Refuse an advance by a partner"), communication (5 items, α = .81, e.g., "Ask the partner to provide the type and amount of sexual stimulation needed"), and interpersonal interest/desire (6 items, α = .89, e.g., "Be interested in sex").

Sexual pressure. The Sexual Pressure Scale for Women-Revised (Jones & Gulick, 2009) was modified to be about a partner, instead of a generic person, to measure how much a person feels victimized or forced into unwanted sexual acts by their partner. An example of one of the 18 modified questions is: "How often have you had someone misinterpret the level of sexual intimacy you desired," changing "someone" to "your partner." Respondents answer on a 5-point scale ranging from *never to always*. The alpha coefficient for this scale was .82.

Coercion. The Sexual Coercion in Intimate Relationships Scale (SCIRS) was used to measure the frequency and severity of sexual coercion in a romantic relationship (Shackelford & Goetz, 2004). Items were answered on a 6-point scale, where respondents chose from a range of *act did not occur in the past month to act occurred 11 or more times in the past month*. The two subscales used were: Resource Manipulation/Violence (15 items, α = .93, e.g., "My partner threatened violence against me if I did not have sex with him" and Commitment Manipulation (10 items, α = .94, e.g., "My partner hinted that if I loved him I would have sex with him").

RESULTS

The means and standard deviations of each of the measured variables are presented in Table 1. Bivariate correlations were conducted to test each of the hypotheses. Table 2 shows the correlations between each variable.

Table 1. Survey Scales with Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD)

Survey Item	M	SD
Partner-Objectification	3.42	1.02
Self-Objectification Self-Surveillance Subscale	3.94	.97
Agency Body Acceptance Subscale	7.96	2.65
Agency Body Refusal Subscale	8.06	2.47
Agency Communication Subscale	9.07	1.88
Agency Interpersonal Interest/Desire Subscale	9.03	2.03
Coercion Resource Manipulation/ Violence Subscale	1.11	0.38
Coercion Commitment Manipulation Subscale	1.33	0.74
Pressure	1.90	0.49

DISCUSSION

The data for this study supported the hypotheses proposed for women in heterosexual relationships. The results showed that, for heterosexual women, 1) feeling objectified by a romantic partner is related to women objectifying themselves, feeling lowered agency, and perceiving more sexual pressure and coercion; 2) self-objectifying is related to feeling lowered agency in their romantic relationship; 3) feeling lowered agency in their romantic relationship is related to feeling sexual pressure and coercion from their romantic partner.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is important for relationships and has the potential to allow men and women to improve how they treat one another sexually. Being mindful of how and when one thinks of their partner as an object, sexually or otherwise, can help relationship partners become more purposeful in respecting one another and increasing their satisfaction with their relationship. In addition, acknowledging objectification can help women realize when they lack agency and allow them to resist and avoid sexual pressure.

Because this was a correlational study, no causal relationships can be determined, so caution is needed in interpreting these

Table 2. Non-zero Correlation for Each Variable

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Partner-objectification	-								
2. Self-objectification Self-Surveillance Subscale	.203**	-							
3. Agency Body Acceptance Subscale	-.232**	-.276***	-						
4. Agency Body Refusal Subscale	-.172*	-.317***	.142†	-					
5. Agency Communication Subscale	-.262***	-.180*	.437***	.316***	-				
6. Agency Interpersonal Interest/ Desire Subscale	-.278***	-.283***	.637***	.226**	.743***	-			
7. Coercion Resource Manipulation/ Violence Subscale	.132†	-.081	-.017	-.073	-.185*	-.170*	-		
8. Coercion Commitment Manipulation Subscale	.221**	-.040	-.108	-.154†	-.316***	-.298***	.698***	-	
9. Pressure	.288***	.121	-.075	-.286***	-.197**	-.234**	.521***	.588***	-

†p < .10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

findings. For example, the correlation between partner-objectification and self-objectification shows that women who feel that their partner objectifies them are more likely to also objectify themselves. However, these data do not reveal if partner-objectification causes women to objectify themselves, if women's self-objectification causes her partner to further objectify her, or if a third variable causes both self- and partner-objectification, producing a spurious correlation. The same logic follows for the other correlations reported. It is important that future research test these relationships experimentally to confirm whether self-objectification, partner-objectification, sexual agency, and sexual pressure and coercion are causally related, though this could be difficult given the ethical and logistical barriers to manipulating these variables. In particular, it would be beneficial to test for a causal relationship between partner-objectification and sexual pressure and coercion, as that would suggest that interventions aimed at reducing sexual violence in intimate relationships should include efforts to reduce objectification. A longitudinal study measuring these variables over time would also help gauge the direction of the relationship between partner-objectification and sexual pressure and coercion.

An additional limitation to this study includes the reality that we were unable to include both partners of a couple in a present relationship. While the data from Amazon Mechanical Turk is diverse and reliable, it does not give the option to find people who are in a romantic relationship together. Therefore, the data from the present study is all based on one individual's perception of the relationship. This affects how some variables are interpreted; for example, it is not possible to determine whether women who perceive that their partner objectifies them have a partner who *actually does* objectify them. To some extent, this may be a moot point because a person's construal of their partner's behavior can have stronger consequences for the relationship than their actual behavior (e.g., Murray, 1999). However, it would be interesting for future research to recruit both members of couples to further test and explore how objectification is related to agency and sexual pressure and coercion in romantic relationships.

Finally, future research could examine a sample beyond heterosexual women. Looking at data from men to see what happens when they feel objectified by women could also be enlightening to objectification research. It would be interesting and more inclusive to tailor a similar survey for same-sex couples to see if they experience the same connection between objectification and sexual pressure within their relationships.

Conclusions
This study is important for understanding and improving dynamics within heterosexual relationships. The findings in this study add to the literature on self-objectification and partner-objectification by showing a relationship between objectification and sexual pressure. The acknowledgement of these associations can help both men and women become more aware of how they are thinking about and treating their partner, as well as possibly lessen sexual pressure and coercion in romantic relationships. Future research should continue to investigate objectification in romantic relationships.

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