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The Object of Desire: How Being Objectified Creates Sexual Pressure for Women in Heterosexual Relationships

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The Object of Desire: How Being Objectified Creates Sexual Pressure for Women In

Heterosexual Relationships

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Abstract

The objectification of women is widespread in the United States (American Psychological Association, 2007), although there is relatively little research on objectification in romantic relationships. The purpose of this research was to explore how partner-objectification might be related to sexual pressure in heterosexual relationships. It was hypothesized that men who objectify their partners would be more likely to sexually pressure and/or coerce their partners. Additionally, a woman who feels objectified by her partner was hypothesized to internalize the objectification, feel like she has less control in the relationship (i.e., less sexual agency), and perceive more sexual pressure and coercion from her partner. Data from both men and women were collected online in two studies. In Study 1, men (119 from all over the United States and 57 from the BSU student subject pool) completed measures on partner-objectification, coercion, and pressure. Partner-objectification was positively correlated with sexual pressure and coercion in the general sample, but not consistently for the student sample. In Study 2, women (162 from all over the United States and 117 from the BSU student subject pool) completed measures of partner-objectification, self-objectification, sexual agency, sexual pressure and coercion. In Study 2, results in both samples showed that (a) partner-objectification is positively correlated with women's self-objectification, (b) self-objectification is negatively correlated with sexual agency, and (c) lower sexual agency is related to more sexual pressure. This research can inform interventions aimed at reducing sexual coercion and improve the way people learn to treat one another within romantic relationships.

The Object of Desire: How Being Objectified Creates Sexual Pressure for Women

In Heterosexual Relationships

Objectification occurs when an individual is viewed as a physical object. In the United States, objectification is pervasive (American Psychological Association, 2007) and primarily affects women (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). It is an omnipresent force in women's 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. Her body parts and their functions are no longer associated with her personality and emotions, but instead are seen as instruments (Bartky, 1990). As a result, she is treated as a sexual object to be used by others.

On average, women in the United States are sexually objectified in subtle ways at least one to two times per week (Gervais, Vescio, & Allen, 2011). The objectification can come in the form of a whistle, a well-intentioned compliment on her body, a joke, or most often, an advertisement (Bartky, 1990). One of the subtlest ways women are objectified is the male gaze, which is simply a look that men give women to inspect their bodies (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The gaze is difficult to avoid because women cannot control who looks at their bodies. Accordingly, women can feel even less control when they know they are being looked at to please men's sexual desires (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This lack of control can affect all relationships, including romantic ones, where women can feel like they are not free to make decisions and must give in to the demands of their partner.

Women can be objectified through the male gaze directly in social encounters and indirectly through differing degrees in the media. Women are constantly portrayed in the

media as an object for men to look at, which shows how often men gaze at women in social contexts. The portrayal tells women that their bodies are always being objectified, even if the men they come in contact with on a regular basis are not the ones doing the objectifying (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). American culture also encourages the objectification of women because it gives strong financial support for industries like cosmetics and pornography (Wolf, 1990).

There have been a variety of different theories that attempt to explain the role of objectification. Evolutionary theory helps to explain how the objectification of women is so pervasive and accepted. For men, physical attractiveness is one of the most valued characteristics in mate selection, purportedly because physical attractiveness signals women's reproductive viability (Buss, 1989). From an evolutionary standpoint, a woman's breasts, hips, and other body parts used for reproduction are important signals for men to determine if a woman is fit to carry his children. If a man is looking at his partner's body to assess viability of reproduction, he is probably assessing their partner's attractiveness. Attractiveness is usually compared between partners and can be used as a way to negotiate how one is treated within the relationship, especially in heterosexual relationships (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Even though attractiveness may have been a part of finding someone fit to reproduce in evolutionary history, it could have negative implications for relationships if the individuals focus too much on his or her partner's body and too little on their thoughts and emotions.

In addition to the evolutionary perspective, the sociocultural perspective also proposes an explanation for the objectification of women, because it examines how women are objectified in a cultural context. American culture shapes expectations for

women's behavior and gives meaning to the pressure imposed on women by society (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Women are raised to fit cultural standards of beauty and to see themselves as an object designed to please others, especially men (Wolf, 1990). The media encourages objectification by portraying particular behaviors of men and women, especially in showing women behaving as objects and men treating them as such. Women are taught that they need to monitor and improve their appearance if they are going to be seen as desirable to men, and that they should take pleasure in being identified as objects (Bartky, 2003). In fact, one standard women often conform to is the idea that the woman's role in a relationship is to please her man sexually (Bretthauer et al., 2006). This idea puts sex before other aspects of the relationship, such as friendship, emotional connection, and equality. A woman who learns that her body is constructed to please men may also believe she is supposed to accept the constant male gaze that is judging her body (McKinley & Hyde, 1996).

In addition to being objectified by men and objectifying themselves, women also objectify each other. In a survey of one hundred thirty-two men and women at a university, Strelan and Hargreaves (2005) found that women were more likely than men to self-objectify, both men and women objectified women more than they objectified men, and a woman's self-objectification is correlated with objectifying other women due to the tendency to compare oneself socially with others . Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) proposes that people tend to compare themselves to others socially. Linder, Tantleff-Dunn, & Jentsch (2012) examined 549 women at a large university in the southeastern United States and examined measures of self-objectification, objectification of others, social comparison, body shame, body dissatisfaction, and eating

disorder symptomatology. Data from the study supported objectification theory and showed that women who often compare their own appearance to that of other women feel worse about their own bodies and are more likely to suffer from disordered eating.

Objectification is generally considered to have a negative impact on women (Bartky, 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Zurbriggen, Ramsey, & Jaworski, 2011). Some of the negative consequences of objectification include poorer academic performance (Moradi & Huang, 2008), lowered self-esteem (Calogero & Thompson, 2009), and sexual dysfunction (Steer & Tiggemann, 2008). Some theorists have proposed the idea 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). However, viewing one's partner as an object could interfere with acknowledging the objectified partner's needs and emotions. In addition, the lack of acknowledgement of the partner's needs and emotions could lead to objectification in the relationship. Empirical research is needed to understand objectification in the context of romantic relationships.

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). 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 a person viewed their partner as an object, the less satisfied they were in their relationship.

Objectification theory purports that objectifying someone may make 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. Sexual pressure is defined as conforming to expectations to have sex or fear consequences like losing benefits, being abandoned by one's partner, or facing threats (Koss et al., 2007). Sexual coercion is sexual pressure that involves threats of violence, actual physical force, or emotional manipulation (Shackelford & Goetz, 2004). Of the women who report sexually coercive acts, 93% were committed by men they knew, such as their partner (Testa & Livingston, 1999), clearly demonstrating the need to study sexual coercion in the context of romantic relationships.

Previous research shows that both college men and men from the general community show high rates of sexual coercion. In fact, in two recent studies a third of college men who are sexually active reported using nonphysical tactics, like arguments about sex and the relationship, threats to end the relationship, manipulation of emotions, and intentional ignorance of the partner's refusal to have sex, to get their unwilling partner to have sex with them (DeGue & DiLillo, 2004; Lyndon, White, & Kadlec 2007). Twenty-two percent to 27% of men from community samples reported using the same strategies to get unwilling women to have sex with them (Calhoun, Bernat, Clum, & Frame, 1997; Senn, Desmarais, Verberg, & Wood, 2000). Not surprisingly then, 7 out of 10 college women reported experiencing "emotional manipulation" from men who were looking to have sex with them (Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003).

Evidence of the link between objectification and sexual violence is present in the media. In studies of music content, men on Music Television (MTV) appeared in an

aggressive and dominant fashion, whereas women were shown to be subservient to men and sexual (Bretthauer, Zimmerman, & Banning, 2006). With women being viewed as objects, it is likely that men who are taught to be more dominant will treat women as a objects and consequently act more violently toward them. Video games have even become so explicit about men's and women's expected roles that one game rewards players who kick a prostitute to death (Media Report to Women, 2003). Romantic relationships could be affected by these portrayals of heterosexual relationships in the media, showing a need to study partner-objectification and violence.

Summary of the Present Research

Building on this previous research, this study will explore the objectification of women in the context of heterosexual relationships. It is particularly important to examine the objectification of women due to the findings that men report less self-objectification, body surveillance, and body shame than women (Moradi & Huang, 2008), an indication that more needs to be done to evaluate the extent to which these negative consequences affect women's relationships. Though not all men objectify women, it is important to study the negative consequences that women suffer as a result of those men who do.

The current research is presented in two studies. In the first study, men's objectification of their female partners is examined in relation to sexual pressure and coercion. The second study measures how much women perceive being objectified by their partner, objectify themselves, feel control, and experience pressure and coercion in their romantic relationships. Both studies included a sample from the general population

and a student sample from a university, in an effort to test if results would be replicated

across two samples.

Study 1

Study 1 measured partner-objectification, sexual pressure, and sexual coercion in

two samples of heterosexual men. The first sample included men of varying ages from

across the United States, while the second sample focused on male college students. The

following hypotheses about males were tested in the present study: 1) objectifying one's

partner is positively correlated with increased sexual pressure, and 2) objectifying one's

partner is positively correlated with increased sexual coercion.

Method

Participants: Sample 1. One hundred ninety-nine male participants were

recruited using a web service known as Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT), which

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. An

example of an attention question used was: "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. Men who did not answer at least two

of the attention questions correctly or did not complete the majority of the survey items

were eliminated from the dataset (*n*=49). Also, because the present study aimed to focus

on heterosexual relationships, those who did not respond as being heterosexual were

eliminated from the data (*n*=16). 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. Participants had been given the option to answer survey questions

about their best opposite sex friend if they had never been in a romantic relationship. Men

who have never been in a romantic relationship, answered the survey about their best

opposite sex friend, or did not indicate who they were responding to the questions about

were eliminated from the present analyses (*n*=15). This resulted in a final total of 119

participants.

The participants ranged in age from 18 to 61 years (*M*=25.98, *SD*=7.99). The

majority of the sample was working class (31.9%) or middle class (47.9%). Most of the

men who responded identified as White/Caucasian (81.5%). The men identified as being

politically very liberal (13.4%), liberal (32.8%), moderate (40.3%), conservative (11.8%),

or very conservative (1.7%). About 64% of the participants reported that they are

currently in a relationship. Out of the 119 men, 36.1% responded that they are single,

16.0% dating, 19.3% have a steady partner, 6.7% are engaged, 6.7% are living with their

partner, and 15.1% are married.

Participants: Sample 2. Seventy-three men were recruited through the student

subject pool in the psychology department at Bridgewater State University and completed

the survey online. To be consistent with Sample 1, the men who did not answer at least

two of the attention questions correctly or did not complete the majority of the survey

items (*n*=7), did not respond as being heterosexual (*n*=2), have never been in a romantic

relationship (*n=2*), or answered the questions about their best opposite sex friend (*n=5*), were eliminated from the data. A final total of 57 participants remained.

The participants ranged in age from 18 to 36 years (*M*=20.73, *SD*=43.97). Most of the sample was working class (22.8%) or middle class (59.6%). The vast majority of the men who responded identified as White/Caucasian (98.2%). The men identified as being politically very liberal (5.3%), liberal (19.3%), moderate (63.2%), or conservative (12.3%). About 83% of the participants reported that they are currently in a relationship. Out of the 57 men, 17.5% responded that they are single, 33.3% dating, 38.6% have a steady partner, 1.8% are engaged, and 8.8% are married.

Measures.

Partner-objectification. The partner-objectification scale (Zurbriggen et al., 2011) was used to assess how much each participant objectifies his partner. Participants used a 7-point scale from *disagree strongly* to *agree strongly*. The three subscales were: self-surveillance (8 items, e.g., "During the day I think about how my partner looks many times," $\alpha = .74$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .62$ for Sample 2), body shame (8 items, e.g., "When my partner can't control his/her weight, I feel like something must be wrong with him/her," $\alpha = .87$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .66$ for Sample 2), and control beliefs (8 items, e.g., "It doesn't matter how hard my partner tries to change her weight, it's probably always going to be about the same." $\alpha = .80$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .58$ for Sample 2).

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 the participant pressures his partner to engage in sexual acts. This measure was also modified to reflect the male perspective so that the items would reflect how much

the man sexually pressured the woman in the relationship. Items were answered on a 5-point scale ranging from *never* to *always*. The three subscales used for this measure were: men expect sex (5 items, e.g., "There are times my partner feels I would leave her if she did not have sex with me," $\alpha = .83$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .08$ for Sample 2), women's sex role (5 items, e.g., "A woman needs to please her man sexually to hold on to him," $\alpha = .88$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .73$ for Sample 2), and sexual coercion (3 items, e.g., "I have threatened to hurt my partner after she told me she would not have sex with me," $\alpha = .88$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .00$ for Sample 2). For the student sample, there was no variability on two of the three items in the sexual coercion subscale, prohibiting further analyses of this variable. For those two items, all the men selected 1, indicating that the act had never occurred. The men expect sex subscale for Sample 2 was also excluded due to low reliability.

  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 three subscales used were: resource manipulation/violence (15 items, e.g., "I threatened violence against my partner if she did not have sex with me," $\alpha = .98$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .67$ for Sample 2), commitment manipulation (10 items, e.g., "I hinted that if my partner loved me, she would have sex with me," $\alpha = .98$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .69$ for Sample 2), and defection threat (10 items, e.g., "I told my partner that other women were interested in me, so that she would have sex with me," $\alpha = .46$ Sample 2). The defection threat subscale was not administered to Sample 1. It was added

for Sample 2, but it was not analyzed further for the male students, due to low reliability.

Results

The means and standard deviations of each variable can be seen in Table 1. Bivariate correlations were run to test each of the hypotheses. Table 2 shows the correlations between all of the variables for both samples.

Sample 1.

Does partner-objectification relate to pressure? The partner-objectification self-surveillance subscale had a significant positive correlation with two of the pressure subscales: men expect sex, $r(117)=.32$ $p<.001$, and women's sex role, $r(117)=.45$, $p<.001$. The more a male objectifies his female partner by monitoring how her body looks, the more he pressures her to act sexually, specifically in expecting sex and making her feel like it is her role as a woman to provide sex.

The partner-objectification body shame subscale had a significant positive correlation with each of the pressure subscales: men expect sex, $r(117)=.64$, $p<.001$, women's sex role, $r(117)=.72$, $p<.001$, and sexual coercion, $r(117)=.45$, $p<.001$. This means that the more a man feels shame about his partner's body, the more he expresses his expectation of sex as a part of the relationship, makes her feel as though it is her role in the relationship to provide that sex, and coerces her sexually.

In contrast, the partner-objectification control beliefs subscale was negatively correlated with all three pressure subscales: men expect sex, $r(117)=-.26$, $p=.005$, women's sex role subscales, $r(117)=-.20$, $p=.028$, and sexual coercion, $r(117)=-.34$, $p<.001$. The data show that the more control a man thinks his partner has over how her

body looks, the less he tends to expect sex from her, to make her feel like it is her role in the relationship to have sex with him, and to sexually coerce her.

   Does partner-objectification relate to coercion? The partner-objectification self-surveillance subscale had a marginally significant positive correlation with the coercion resource manipulation/violence subscale, $r(117)=.17$, $p=.059$ and a significant correlation with the commitment subscale, $r(117)=.19$, $p=.042$. The more a male looks at his female partner and observes the way her body looks, the more he tends to coerce her to act sexually by threatening her with his resources and his commitment to their relationship.

   The partner-objectification body shame subscale also had a statistically significant relationship with the coercion subscales: resource manipulation/violence $r(117)=.45$, $p<.001$ and commitment $r(117)=.52$, $p<.001$. A man who feels shame regarding his partner's body is likely to coerce his partner to act sexually by threatening to withhold the resources he provides for her and to leave her.

   The partner-objectification control beliefs subscale had a statistically significant negative correlation with the coercion resource manipulation/violence subscale, $r(117)=-.26$, $p=.004$, and a marginally negative correlation with the coercion commitment subscale, $r(117)=-.17$ $p=.069$. A male who believes his partner can control the way her body looks is unlikely to coerce her using the resources he provides for her or his commitment to the relationship.

   Sample 2.

   Does partner-objectification relate to pressure? The partner-objectification self-surveillance subscale had a marginally significant positive correlation with the pressure women's sex role subscale $r(55)=.33$, $p=.013$. The more a male objectifies his female

partner by monitoring how her body looks, the more he tends to pressure her to act sexually by making her feel like it is her role as a woman to provide sex.

The partner-objectification body shame subscale did not have a significant correlation with any of the pressure subscales. This means a man making a woman feel shame about her body is not related to his pressuring her to act sexually.

The partner-objectification control beliefs subscale was marginally negatively correlated with the women's sex role subscale $r(55)=-.25$, $p=.063$. This means that the more control a man thinks a woman has over how her body looks, the less he tends to make her feel like it is her role in the relationship to provide sex.

Does partner-objectification relate to coercion? The partner-objectification surveillance, body shame, and control beliefs subscales did not have any significant relationship with any of the coercion subscales. A man looking at his partner's body, feeling shame about her body, or feeling like she can control what her body looks like is not related to him sexually coercing her.

Discussion

The data for Study 1 revealed mixed support for the hypotheses proposed for men in heterosexual relationships. Generally, the results showed that partner-objectification is significantly correlated with increased sexual pressure and coercion for the men from all over the United States, but not for the college men.

Partner-objectification, pressure, and coercion. Partner-objectification was related to several of the pressure and coercion subscales in the general sample of men. The *men expect sex* and *women's sex role* subscales of the pressure measure, as well as the *resource manipulation/violence* and *commitment* subscales of the coercion measure

were strongly related to partner-objectification for the sample of men from all over the

United States. When a man frequently objectifies his partner, he tends to sexually

pressure her based on the assumption that men expect sex and that it is a woman's role in

the relationship to provide that sex. In addition, the more a man objectifies his partner,

the more he uses his resources and commitment to her to manipulate his partner into

behaving sexually.

Interestingly, the control beliefs subscale of the partner-objectification measure

was negatively related to pressure and coercion. The more a man believes his partner has

control over what her body looks like, the less her partner pressures and coerces her. It

may be the case that these control beliefs are not as objectifying as the surveillance and

shame beliefs, given that an object would be assumed to have no control over itself.

These control beliefs may actually be beneficial to a relationship, because if a man

believes his partner can control her own body, her partner will be less likely to objectify

her and make her feel like she needs to have sex with him.

Men may believe that their surveillance and control beliefs about the female's

body are warranted because attractiveness is a method of evolutionary mate selection.

However, women who are pressured by their partner are more likely to be victimized by

them and engage in unprotected sex (Jones & Gulick, 2009). The victimization of

women and lack of safe sex practices among partners shows the need to move away from

defending objectification with evolution and progress to more equal treatment of women

in relationships.

Differences between the Samples. Based on these findings, it may be the case

that partner-objectification is related to sexual pressure and coercion for men in general,

but not for male college students. However, there are multiple factors that could have produced different results between the samples. Some of these factors include an overall difference in age range, which could have an effect on the seriousness of the relationships between males and females; sexual norms of college students; and social desirability in answering the survey.

The men's data from the general sample could be different from the student sample because the age difference and lack of racial diversity in the men's demographics. The males in the general sample have a larger age range than the males in the student sample. The men in the student sample ranged from 18-36, whereas the men in the general sample ranged from 18-61. Also, almost every male who took the survey in the student sample was white, showing less diversity in ethnicity than the general sample. If it is the case that age and/or race influences objectification and sexual pressure and coercion, these differences between the samples could explain the conflicting results.

The difference in age could also produce different quality answers in the context of relationships. Older men may be in more serious relationships and may be more intertwined in their relationships. For example, men who are older probably have established jobs and a place of their own to live. The men who are older and more settled than college students may do more for the women they are with, like paying for things that they need. Because of a higher financial commitment to their partners, older men may expect sex from their partner and may use pressure to get it. It may also be the case that the difference in age could signify changing attitudes toward objectification and increasing equality in relationship roles for men and women.

College students who took this survey may also be different from the overall sample collected across the United States in reference to social norms. In many cases, students are not living with their relationship partner and have different sexual expectations. College relationships are usually more casual than those of older couples, and sex may be a more casual part of college relationships. Men who leave the college setting often find more committed relationship and leave the "hookup culture" behind them in search of a more meaningful connection (Bogle, 2008). If sex is a normal activity many college students engage in, the men who responded to the survey may not need to pressure their partners in order to have sex.

There is also a suspicion that the college students could have taken the survey less seriously than the general sample. Men from the general sample were getting paid to answer the survey items (albeit a nominal amount) and may have taken more time to thoroughly complete the items than students who could have quickly chosen random answers just to get credit for a class assignment. Some of the scales used in the student sample showed very low reliabilities, which indicates that they were not answering the questions in a consistent way, supporting the notion that they may not have been thoughtfully reading and responding to the questions.

In addition, the men who chose to participate in the study from BSU may have responded according to the idea of social desirability. Men from the student subject pool may have answered in ways they thought others would expect or want. College students may have thought that since the survey was available through the school, professors or other students could access the data provided. While the participants were ensured that all data would be kept confidential, the college men may have felt bad if they pressure or

coerce their relationship partners, causing them to provide a socially acceptable response. Men from the general population may not have cared as much about social desirability because they are not tied to the school and may have felt that their responses would not have been judged as harshly as students attending the school.

While there were differences in the significance of the relationships between partner-objectification with pressure and coercion for the two samples, it is important to note that data did support parts of the hypotheses. The relationships found between these variables warrant further investigation from the female perspective, which can be found in Study 2.

Study 2

Study 2 examined objectification and sexual pressure from the female perspective. In this study, women responded to items measuring the perceived objectification they feel from their partner, how much they objectify themselves, the amount of control they feel within their relationship, and how much pressure or coercion they feel from their partner.

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). Women are encouraged to enjoy objectification and constantly evaluate themselves from an observer's perspective (Calogero, Tantelduff-Dunn & Thompson, 2011) to ensure that they will fit society's beauty ideals and be admired physically (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Women are taught to adopt these cultural attitudes and beliefs about their body being seen as an object and incorporate the beliefs into their sense of self (Fredrickson &

Roberts, 1997). Women are overwhelmingly compared to society's standards of beauty, causing them to work towards achieving these standards as a personal goal, making it difficult to discern their personal interests from society's gendered expectations (McKinley & Hyde, 1996).

Men and women have different ways of viewing their bodies as a whole, with previous research showing that women are more focused on how attractive their body is and men are more focused on how their body can function effectively (Lerner, Orlos, & Knapp, 1976). This difference in bodily views further explains why women are more likely to self-objectify than men. Women who are evaluated and seen as more beautiful are more successful in their social and economic lives than women who are obese or unattractive—a factor that does not have as much of an effect on men (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). At work, women are given more negative evaluations than men if they are not viewed as feminine and are often discriminated against much more than men when they are seen as less attractive (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2011). Socially, women whose bodies are more attractive have much more popularity, success with dating, and more opportunities for marriage (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). According to Naomi Wolf's *Beauty Myth* (1990), a third of women are "strongly dissatisfied" with their bodies, causing anxiety, lower self-esteem, and sexual dysfunction.

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 (Moradi & Huang, 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).

Previous research has shown that women who claim to enjoy being sexualized self-objectify more often, feel more shame about their bodies, and report more sexual objectification from others than women who do not report enjoying sexualization (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011). In romantic relationships, women are encouraged to enjoy sexualized attention from their partner, even if it is in the form of partner-objectification. Within relationships, women may internalize that objectification, in an effort to appear desirable to him. Therefore, this study tests the hypothesis that partner-objectification is related to self-objectification for heterosexual women in romantic relationships.

Agency

If a woman self-objectifies, then 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. Previous research has linked objectification with the denial of agency, or the restriction of one's freedom and ability to make decisions (Gray, Knobe, Sheskin, Bloom, & Barrett, 2011). By definition, an object has no agency, and so viewing a relationship partner as an object could interfere with one's ability to see their partner as an independent person, instead of a collection of sexual instruments. 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 relationship between self-objectification and diminished sexual health among adolescent girls (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006). In the current study, it is hypothesized that self-objectification will be correlated with less agency in a relationship.

Sexual Pressure and Coercion

In part due to lowered sexual agency, an objectified partner might feel pressure to perform more sexual activities and might be less inclined to act on her own feelings and emotions. Therefore, the woman might consent to sexual behaviors that she otherwise would not, in an effort to please her partner. In fact, 34% of women in the United States report having unwanted sex with their partner (Basile, 2002). In terms of sexual behaviors, this implies that women who are objectified by their relationship partners are more likely to feel pressure from their partners to participate in particular sexual behaviors, with little regard for what the objectified partner may desire. In a study of condom use, the data supported the idea that women who feel sexual pressure also have a lack of agency in a relationship and feel less power to make sexual decisions (Gakumo, Moneyham, Enah, & Childs, 2011).

Sexual roles are full of cultural expectations that men should be more aggressive, while women are to take on the submissive role (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Women's self-surveillance and constant body monitoring, along with body shame can cause women to feel self-conscious and prevent her from enjoying sexual activity with her partner (Fuller-Tysczkiewicz, Reynard, Skouteris, & McCabe, 2012). If partners are

following cultural expectations and women are experiencing these negative consequences as a result, it should come as no surprise that women report more sexual dissatisfaction and dysfunction than men in heterosexual relationships (Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007).

Additionally, sexual pressure is positively correlated with sexual victimization. Women who feel more sexual pressure are more likely to have unprotected sex (Koss et al., 2007). This study will test whether objectification and agency are related to experiencing sexual pressure and coercion.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested for women in the present study: 1) feeling objectified by one's partner is correlated with increased self-objectification, lowered agency, and increased sexual pressure and coercion; 2) self-objectification is correlated with lowered agency in romantic relationships; 3) lower agency in romantic relationships is correlated with increased pressure and coercion to perform sexual behaviors.

Method

Participants: Sample 1. Two hundred sixty-five female participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT). Women who did not answer at least two of the attention questions correctly or did not complete the majority of the survey items were excluded from the analyses (n=46). Also, women who did not respond as being heterosexual were eliminated from the data (n=44). Those women who have never been in a romantic relationship or answered survey items about their best opposite sex friend were also eliminated from the data (n=13). This resulted in a final total of 162 participants.

The participants ranged in age from 18 to 69 years (M=29.53, SD=11.90). Most 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%). The women identified as being politically very liberal (10.5%), liberal (38.3%), moderate (36.4%), or conservative (14.2%). About 85% of the participants reported that they are currently in a relationship. 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.

Participants: Sample 2. One hundred thirty-six women were recruited through the student subject pool in the psychology department at Bridgewater State University. Women who did not answer at least two of the attention questions correctly or did not complete the majority of the survey items were excluded from the analyses (n=7). The women who did not respond as being heterosexual (n=4), have never been in a romantic relationship (n=4), or answered the questions about their best opposite sex friend as opposed to their current or previous partner (n=2) were eliminated from the data. This resulted in a final total of 117 participants.

The participants ranged in age from 18 to 46 years (M=20.55, SD=4.19). The majority of the sample was working class (27.4%) or middle class (56.4%). Most of the women who responded identified as White/Caucasian (90.6%). The women identified as being politically very liberal (3.4%), liberal (21.4%), moderate (63.2%), conservative (7.7%), or very conservative (1.7%). About 87% of the participants reported that they are currently in a relationship. Out of the 117 women, 12.8% responded that they are single,

32.5% dating, 47.9% have a steady partner, 1.7% are engaged, 3.4% are living with their

partner, and 1.7% are married.

Measures.

Partner-objectification. A modified version of the partner-objectification scale

used by Zurbriggen et al. (2011) assessed how much each participant feels objectified by

her partner. The scale was originally designed to measure how much a person objectifies

their partner. Zurbriggen et al. (2011) created the subscale by modifying items from the

self-surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley &

Hyde, 1996). For this study, the partner-objectification measure was further modified to

assess how much a person feels their partner objectifies them. For example, "I rarely

think about how my partner looks" (reverse scored) in the original scale was modified as

"My partner rarely thinks about how I look" (reverse scored) for the present study.

Participants used a 7-point scale from *disagree strongly* to *agree strongly* to respond to

the 8 items in the measure (α = .76 for Sample 1, α = .73 for Sample 2).

Self-objectification. Self-objectification was measured using three subscales of the

Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Participants responded

to the items using a 6-point scale ranging from *disagree strongly* to *agree strongly*. The

three subscales used were: self-surveillance (e.g., "I think more about how my body feels

than how my body looks," reverse scored, α = .88 for Sample 1, α = .81 for Sample 2),

body shame (e.g., "When I can't lose weight, I feel like something must be wrong with

me," α = .86 for Sample 1, α = .88 for Sample 2), and control beliefs (e.g., "I think a

person can look pretty much how they want to if they are willing to work at it," α = .82

for Sample 1, α = .76 for Sample 2).

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, e.g., "Feel comfortable being nude with the partner," $\alpha = .77$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .81$ for Sample 2), refusal (2 items, e.g., "Refuse an advance by a partner," $\alpha = .63$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .77$ for Sample 2), communication (5 items, e.g., "Ask the partner to provide the type and amount of sexual stimulation needed," $\alpha = .81$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .87$ for Sample 2), and interpersonal interest/desire (6 items, e.g., "Be interested in sex," $\alpha = .89$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .91$ for Sample 2).

Sexual pressure. The Sexual Pressure Scale for Women-Revised (Jones & Gulick, 2009) was modified to be about a partner, instead of a generic person, in order to measure how much a person feels victimized or forced into unwanted sexual acts by their partner. The four subscales used for this measure were: show trust (5 items, e.g., "I do not ask my partner to use a condom because he may think I do not trust him," $\alpha = .79$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .83$ for Sample 2), men expect sex (5 items, e.g., "There are times I feel my partner would leave me if I did not have sex with him/her," $\alpha = .82$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .78$ for Sample 2), women's sex role (5 items, e.g., "A woman needs to please her man sexually to hold on to him," $\alpha = .83$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .79$ for Sample 2), and sexual coercion (3 items, e.g., "My partner has threatened to hurt me after I told him/her I would not have sex with him/her," $\alpha = .74$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .72$ for Sample 2).

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 three subscales used were: resource manipulation/violence

(15 items, e.g., "My partner threatened violence against me if I did not have sex with

him," $\alpha = .93$ for Sample 1, $\alpha = .68$ for Sample 2), commitment manipulation (10 items,

e.g., "My partner hinted that if I loved him I would have sex with him," $\alpha = .94$ for

Sample 1, $\alpha = .86$ for Sample 2), and defection threat (10 items, e.g., "My partner told

me that other women were interested in him, so that I would have sex with him," $\alpha = .92$

for Sample 2; this scale was not administered to Sample 1).

Results

The means and standard deviations of each variable measured with the scales

described in the methods can be seen in Table 3. Bivariate correlations were run to test

each of the hypotheses. Table 4 shows the correlations between each female variable.

Sample 1.

Does partner-objectification relate to self-objectification? A significant positive

correlation was found between partner-objectification and the surveillance subscale for

self-objectification, r (160)= .20, p=.009, showing that women who feel like their partner

objectifies them also tend to monitor their own bodies. The body shame subscale for self-

objectification had a marginally significant correlation with partner-objectification,

r(160)=.14, p=.076, meaning that women who feel objectified by their partner tend to feel

more shame about their bodies. Finally, the control beliefs subscale revealed a

nonsignificant correlation with partner-objectification, which means that women's ideas

of control over their body shape did not relate to partner-objectification.

Does self-objectification relate to agency? The self-objectification surveillance

subscale had a significantly negative correlation with the agency acceptance subscale,

$r(159)=-.28$, $p<.001$, the agency refusal subscale, $r(159)=-.32$, $p<.001$, and the agency

interest/desire subscale, $r(159)=-.28$, $p<.001$. The data also showed a significant negative

correlation with the agency communication subscale $r(159)=-.18$, $p=.022$. This means

that a woman who self-objectifies by looking at her body from an observer's perspective

is less likely to accept her body, refuse advances from her partner, have interest in and

desire towards her partner, and communicate sexually with her partner.

The self-objectification body shame subscale also had a significant negative

correlation with the agency subscales: acceptance subscale $r(159)=-.50$, $p<.001$, refusal

subscale $r(159)=-.21$, $p=.006$, communication subscale $r(159)=-.20$, $p<.001$ and

interest/desire subscale $r(159)=-.27$, $p<.001$. Together these correlations shows that a

woman who feels shame about her body from an inability to conform to societal

standards is less likely to accept her body, refuse advances from her partner,

communicate sexually with her partner, and have interest in and desire towards her

partner.

The self-objectification control beliefs subscale does not have a significant

correlation to the agency acceptance subscale, the agency refusal subscale or the

communication subscale. The data indicate that control beliefs about one's body do not

relate to the acceptance of a woman's body, the refusal of advances by one's partner, or

her ability to communicate with her partner sexually in this study. The control beliefs

subscale had a significant positive correlation with the agency interest/desire subscale $r(159)=.18$, $p=.025$. The data show that a woman who has freedom to feel interest and desire in a relationship tends to have self-objectifying control beliefs about her body.

Does agency relate to coercion? The agency acceptance subscale was not significantly correlated with the coercion manipulation/violence or commitment. A woman's ability to feel comfortable with her body is not related to feeling threatened by her partner with violence or their relationship.

The agency refusal subscale is also not significantly correlated with the coercion manipulation/violence subscale; however, it is marginally significantly correlated with the coercion commitment subscale. A woman who is unable to refuse sexual advances by her partner is not related to her feeling threatened or coerced by her partner because of his resources, but it is related to her feeling coerced because of her partner's commitment, or lack thereof, to the relationship.

The agency communication subscale had a significant negative correlation with the manipulation/violence coercion subscale, $r(159)=-.19$, $p=.02$. A woman who is unable to communicate with her partner about sexual needs or desires tends to be related to her feeling coerced because of resources that her partner uses to manipulate her. The communication subscale was significantly negatively correlated with the coercion commitment subscale, $r(159)=-.32$, $p<.001$. A woman who feels her partner coerces her by threatening his commitment to the relationship tends to be unable to communicate her sexual needs or desires to her partner.

The agency interest/desire subscale was marginally significantly correlated with the coercion manipulation/violence subscale $r(159)=-.17$, $p=.031$ A woman's interest or

desire in sex tends to be related to her feeling coerced by her partner's manipulation of the resources he provides. The agency interest/desire subscale was significantly negatively correlated with the coercion commitment subscale $r(159)=-.30$, $p<.001$. A woman will not feel as much interest or desire for her partner if she feels threatened or coerced by him.

Does agency relate to pressure? The agency acceptance subscale was significantly negatively correlated with the pressure men expect sex subscale $r(159)=-.20$, $p<.001$. The more a woman accepts her body and feels comfortable with her partner, the less likely she feels pressure to act sexually with her partner because her male partner expects sex from her.

The agency refusal scale was negatively correlated with the pressure show trust $r(160)=-.162$, $p=.040$ and the men expect sex subscales, $r(159)=-.17$, $p=.035$. A woman who feels less able to show her partner that she trusts him and refuse advances from her partner will tend to feel more victimized or forced to act sexually with her partner. The agency refusal subscale was significantly negatively correlated with the pressure women's sex role subscale, $r(159)=-.30$, $p<.001$. This means that a woman feeling unable to refuse sex is related to her feeling like her male partner expects sex from her.

The agency communication subscale had a significant negative correlation with the pressure men expect sex subscale, $r(159)=-.29$, $p<.001$. A woman who is unable to communicate with her partner about sexual activities will also feel more forced to act sexually and give in to the demands of her partner. The agency communication subscale also had a marginally negative correlation with the show trust pressure subscale $r(160)=-$

.13, *p*=.104. This means that a woman who is unable to communicate with her partner is more likely to show a lack of trust in her partner.

The agency interest/desire subscale was significantly negatively correlated with the both pressure subscales, including the men expect sex subscale, *r*(159)=-.37, *p*<.001, and the pressure sexual coercion subscale, *r*(159)=-.18, *p*=.026. A woman who feels more interest or desire for her partner will not feel like her male partner expects sex from her or like her partner coerces her sexually.

Sample 2.

Does partner-objectification relate to self-objectification? A significant positive correlation was found between partner-objectification and the surveillance subscale for self-objectification, showing that women who feel like their partner objectifies them also tend to monitor their own bodies, r(115)=.32, p<.001. The body shame subscale for self-objectification had a significant correlation with partner-objectification, meaning that women who feel objectified by their partner may feel shame in her body, *r*(115)=.27, p<.001. Finally, the control beliefs subscale revealed a nonsignificant correlation with partner-objectification, which means that women's ideas of control over their body shape did not relate to partner-objectification.

Does self-objectification relate to agency? The self-objectification surveillance subscale had a significantly negative correlation with the agency acceptance subscale *r*(114)=-.35, *p*<.001, meaning that a woman who self-objectifies by looking at her body from an observer's perspective is less likely to accept her body. There was no significant correlation with the agency refusal, communication, or interest/desire subscales. A woman who self-objectifies by looking at her body does not relate to refusing advances

from her partner, communicating sexually with her partner, or being interested in and desiring her partner.

The self-objectification body shame subscale also had a significant negative correlation with the agency acceptance subscale, $r(114)=-.47$, $p<.001$. A woman who feels shame about her body is less likely to accept her body according to these data. The body shame subscale had a marginally significant negative correlation with the agency refusal subscale, $r(114)=-.22$, $p=.012$. A woman who feels shame about her body tends to be less able to refuse a sexual advance from her partner. The self-objectification body shame subscale did not have a significant correlation with the communication or interest/desire subscales. The data show that a woman feeling shame about her body from an inability to conform to societal standards is not related to her ability to communicate sexually with her partner or have interest in and desire towards her partner.

The self-objectification control beliefs subscale showed statistically significant positive correlations to all of the agency subscales, including acceptance, $r(114)=.34$, $p<.001$, refusal, $r(113)=.33$, $p<.001$, communication, $r(114)=.24$, $p=.008$, and interest/desire, $r(114)=.21$, $p=.024$. The data indicate that the more control a woman feels she has over how her body looks, the more likely she is to accept her body, refuse advances from a partner, communicate her sexual preferences, and have interest and desire in having sex with her partner.

Does agency relate to coercion? The agency acceptance subscale was significantly negatively correlated with the coercion manipulation/violence subscale, $r(114)=-.22$, $p=.018$, and the commitment subscale, $r(114)=-.23$, $p=.015$, and it was marginally correlated well as the defection threat subscale $r(114)=-.16$, $p=.087$. A

woman's ability to feel comfortable with her body tends to be related to feeling threatened by her partner with violence, her partner's commitment to the relationship, and the threat of her partner having a casual relationship with another woman.

The agency refusal subscale was not significantly correlated with any of the coercion subscales. The ability of a woman to refuse sexual advances by her partner was not related to her feeling threatened or coerced by her partner.

The agency communication subscale had a marginally negative correlation with the coercion manipulation violence subscale, $r(114)=-.15$, $p=.098$. A woman's ability to communicate her sexual preferences with her partner tends to be related to her feeling coerced because of resources that her partner uses to manipulate her. The agency communication subscale does not have a significant negative correlation with the coercion commitment subscale or the defection threat subscale. A woman who is unable to communicate with her partner about sexual needs or desires is not related to her feeling coerced or threatened by her partner's commitment to her, or feeling threatened by her partner stating that he could pursue causal relationships with other women.

The agency interest/desire subscale was significantly correlated with the coercion manipulation/violence subscale, $r(114)=-.25$, $p=.007$, and the coercion commitment subscale, $r(114)=-.25$, $p=.006$. A woman's lowered interest or desire in sex is related to her feeling more coerced by her partner's manipulation of the resources he provides and his commitment to her. The coercion defection threat subscale was marginally negatively correlated with the agency interest/desire subscale $r(114)=-.15$, $p=.099$. A woman's lowered interest or desire in sex tends to be related to feeling threatened by her partner threatening to pursue a relationship with another woman.

Does agency relate to pressure? The agency acceptance subscale was significantly negatively correlated with the pressure men expect sex subscale $r(114)=-.32$, $p<.001$. A woman's ability to accept her body and feel comfortable with her partner is negatively correlated with feeling forced to act sexually with her male partner who expects sex from her.

The agency refusal scale was negatively correlated with the pressure show trust $r(114)=-.19$, $p=.041$, men expect sex, $r(113)=-.20$, $p=.030$ and women's sex role subscales $r(113)=-.18$, $p=.051$. A woman who is unable to show trust in her partner, feels less able to refuse advances from her partner may feel more victimized or forced to act sexually with her partner based on his expectation of sex and his belief that it is her role in the relationship to provide sex for him.

The agency communication subscale was marginally negatively correlated with the pressure show trust subscale $r(114)=-.23$, $p=.014$. A woman's inability to communicate with her partner about sexual activities is related to a woman feeling a lack of trust in her partner.

The agency interest/desire subscale was negatively correlated with the pressure show trust $r(114)=-.22$, $p=.017$ and men expect sex subscales, $r(114)=-.20$, $p=.031$. A woman feeling less interest or desire for her partner tends to be related to her feeling victimized by her partner or forced to act sexually with him based on her lack of trust in him and his expectation of sex.

Discussion

The data in both samples for this study support the hypotheses proposed for women in heterosexual relationships. Generally, the results showed that: 1) women who

feel objectified by a romantic partner are more likely to objectify themselves, feel

lowered agency, and perceive more sexual pressure and coercion; 2) women who

objectify themselves are more likely to feel lowered agency in their romantic

relationship; and 3) women who feel lowered agency in their romantic relationship are

more likely to feel sexual pressure and coercion from their romantic partner. This study

is important for understanding relationships and has the potential to allow men and

women to improve how they treat one another sexually.

Partner-Objectification and Self-Objectification.

Women who feel that their partner objectifies them tend to objectify themselves.

It could be that a woman who feels that her partner looks at her like a sex object then

internalizes these feelings and views herself as an object for her partner's desires. It could

also be the reverse, where a woman who self-objectifies gives her partner more reason to

objectify her. Because this was a correlational study, there is a possibility that partner-

and self-objectification both influence each other or that there is another factor

influencing the two forms of objectification. Regardless of the direction of the causal

relationship between these variables, it is important to find ways to possibly lower the

objectification that occurs within relationships.

Overall, data from the study showed that partner-objectification correlated with

the surveillance and body shame subscales for self-objectification. Women who are

objectified by their partner feel like they also monitor their own bodies and feel shame

about their bodies. This finding is not surprising, as McKinley and Hyde (1996) found

that women are taught to accept the male gaze and internalize the thoughts of making

themselves physically attractive for a male partner. In addition, the modified partner-

objectification scale used to measure the amount of objectification women feel from their partner (Zurbriggen et al., 2011) used items based on the self-surveillance subscale of the self-objectification measure, and so the correlation between the measures could be partly due to the similarity in the wording of the items.

A woman feeling a lack of control over how her body looks is not related to being objectified by her partner. The control beliefs subscale is different from the other self-objectification subscales, because it is assessing how much control a person believes they have over their body. This may relate to agency differently than the self-surveillance and body shame subscales because the control beliefs subscale conceptually similar to agency, in that both measures are looking at how much control a woman feels. Therefore, the differences in the correlations for this subscale compared to the others are not surprising.

Self-objectification has been shown to have negative effects on women. As discussed earlier, negative self-esteem, eating disorders, poorer academic performance, and sexual dysfunction have been correlated with self-objectification (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Research has also shown that women are unable to enjoy sex when they engage in constant self-surveillance and body monitoring (Fuller-Tysczkiewicz et al., 2012). If both partners in the relationship are to enjoy their sexual activities and have a satisfying relationship, it is important that the male does not engage in surveillance, shaming, or negative beliefs about how much control the female has over her body's shape. Because the data in this study supported the idea that self-surveillance and body shame are related to partner-objectification, it is clear that more research should be done to investigate

partner-objectification, as the way a man views the woman in a relationship could affect her in each of these areas.

Simply being aware of one's thoughts and how one is perceived by one's partner could even be enough to lower objectification in relationships. If the members of a relationship consciously think about their partners and acknowledge objectifying thoughts and behaviors, they can make an effort to give each partner equal control and fair treatment. 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. A potential study to test this idea would involve teaching people about objectification to see if their thoughts and behaviors change toward their partners.

Self-Objectification and Agency.

The self-objectification surveillance subscale was negatively correlated with each of the agency subscales, except the agency communication subscale, showing that a woman who self-objectifies and monitors her own body will also feel less agency in the relationship, especially in regards to accepting her body, refusing advances from a partner, and having interest in her partner. As previous research has found, women who feel less agency often have a difficult time using safe sex practices; a woman who feels like she cannot refuse sex may also have trouble asking her partner to use a condom during sex (Curtin et al., 2011; Rostosky et al., 2008).

The data indicated that the self-objectification body shame subscale was negatively correlated with each of the agency subscales. This means that a woman who feels shame about her body also feels less agency in the relationship. This finding implies

that encouraging women to accept and even appreciate their physical shape could improve their romantic relationships.

For the control beliefs subscale for self-objectification, the data revealed that women who feel they have control over their body shape feel more interest and desire for her partner in the relationship. Feeling control over her body does not significantly correlate with a woman's accepting her body, refusing advances from her partner, or sexually communicating with her partner.

Agency and sexual coercion and pressure. Although every correlation between the agency, coercion, and pressure subscales was not statistically significant, in general, women who had increased agency tended to be less likely to feel sexually coerced or pressured by their partner. This finding is important because women who feel more control within a relationship are less likely to be coerced into having unwanted sex with her partner. Given the number of women in the United States who are sexually coerced by men they know, it is crucial that women are empowered to feel control to accept and refuse sex, communicate their desires to their partner, and be interested in having sex in the first place. Data from this study showed that women who feel pressured by their partner to act sexually are less likely to accept their body or be able to refuse advances from their partner. A woman who does not feel pressure from her partner is more likely to have interest or desire to be with him sexually and be able to communicate her sexual needs and desires to her partner.

Thinking about self- and partner-objectification in terms of agency and sexual pressure could improve relationship satisfaction. Women who feel like they have no control and experience sexual pressure from their partner will not be as satisfied as

women who feel like they have control over their body and the decisions in the relationship, both sexual and otherwise. With women as the primary targets of objectification (McKinley & Hyde, 1996) and its effects on all aspects of their lives like work, school, and relationships (Nussbaum, 1999), this research can greatly improve the lives of women in more than just their relationships with men.

General Discussion

These studies are important for relationships and have the potential to allow men and women to improve how they treat one another sexually. Being more aware of how and when one thinks of their partner as an object, sexually or otherwise, can help relationship partners become more determined in respecting one another and increasing 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.

Limitations and Future Research

Because these are correlational studies, no causal relationships can be determined, so caution is needed in interpreting these 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, 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.

An additional limitation to this study includes the reality that it was not possible 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. The subjects from the subject pool were also individuals who were not partners in the same relationship. 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, there are a few possibilities for future research. One idea would be to include items asking men and women about previous relationships. The current studies focused on current relationships, or the participants' most recent relationship if they were currently single. Men and women may have engaged in objectification or pressure in past

relationships, so it may be worthwhile to see if objectification and pressure were part of earlier relationships. Additionally, it would be helpful to collect data from homosexual and bisexual individuals, who likely experience different gender dynamics in their romantic relationships. Future research could further investigate the consequences for the men who are objectifying their partner. For example, it is possible that a man who objectifies his partner may not feel emotionally connected to her and may not be as satisfied with the relationship overall. It is also important to continue looking into the negative consequences of partner-objectification, as not much research has been done to study these consequences.

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.

Attention to these issues can improve women's overall welfare. Particularly, women should be more aware of self-objectification and work to change the negative attitudes they have about their bodies. The media and models of the perfect woman are extremely unrealistic and do not accurately reflect the average woman or women of all ages, races, and ethnicities (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Both men and women can help to change the way the media portrays the relationship between men and women. This is especially important because in the American culture, beauty can be viewed as a form of "currency" that can determine power and be exchanged for success in life (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

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. People learn how to behave in relationships by watching their family and peers, so it is important for couples to learn healthy ways of treating each other and pass a positive influence on to future couples. Future research should continue to investigate objectification in romantic relationships.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Study 1, Samples 1 and 2

Survey Scale	Sample 1		Sample 2	
	M	SD	M	SD
Partner-Objectification Self-Surveillance Subscale	3.31	0.78	3.03	0.68
Partner-Objectification Body Shame Subscale	2.47	0.96	2.01	0.55
Partner-Objectification Control Beliefs Subscale	4.12	0.79	4.33	0.61
Pressure Men Expect Sex Subscale	2.85	0.84	1.89	0.64
Pressure Women's Sex Role Subscale	2.24	1.01	1.02	0.10
Pressure Sexual Coercion Subscale	1.22	0.62	1.04	0.11
Coercion Resource Manipulation Subscale	1.31	0.81	1.15	0.28
Coercion Commitment Subscale	1.40	0.92	1.01	0.04

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations for Study 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Partner-Objectification Surveillance Subscale	-	.263*	.012	N/A	.328*	N/A	-.169	.127
2. Partner-Objectification Body Shame Subscale	.460***	-	.175	N/A	-.085	N/A	-.044	-.014
3. Partner-Objectification Control Beliefs Subscale	.012	-.255**	-	N/A	-.248†	N/A	-.010	-.067
4. Pressure Men Expect Sex Subscale	.319***	.641***	-.258**	-	.N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5. Pressure Women's Sex Role Subscale	.452***	.717***	-.202*	.637***	-	N/A	.298*	.403**
6. Pressure Sexual Coercion Subscale	.085	.448***	-.335***	.585***	.410***	-	N/A	N/A
7. Coercion Resource Manipulation Subscale	.174†	.450***	-.260**	.533***	.471***	.747***	-	.423***
8. Coercion Commitment Subscale	.187*	.516***	-.167†	.541***	.545***	.650***	.841***	-

Note. Correlations from Sample 1 appear under the diagonal, while correlations from Sample 2 appear above the diagonal. †$p < .10$, *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$.   The Men Expect Sex and Sexual Coercion subscales of the pressure measure were not assessed for students in the subject pool due to low reliability.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Study 2, Samples 1 and 2

Survey Scale	Sample 1		Sample 2	
	M	SD	M	SD
Partner-Objectification	3.42	1.02	3.12	0.97
Self-Objectification Self-Surveillance Subscale	3.94	0.97	3.88	0.84
Self-Objectification Body Shame Subscale	3.17	1.07	2.85	1.02
Self-Objectification Control Beliefs Subscale	4.32	0.80	4.34	0.68
Agency Body Acceptance Subscale	7.96	2.65	7.79	2.88
Agency Refusal Subscale	8.06	2.47	8.32	2.78
Agency Communication Subscale	9.07	1.88	8.90	2.22
Agency Interpersonal Interest/Desire Subscale	9.03	2.03	9.17	2.24
Coercion Resource Manipulation/Violence Subscale	1.11	0.38	1.02	0.09
Coercion Commitment Subscale	1.33	0.74	1.15	0.36
Pressure Show Trust	2.20	0.49	2.15	0.46
Pressure Men Expect Sex Subscale	1.70	0.85	1.04	0.23
Pressure Women's Sex Role Subscale	2.26	0.94	1.52	0.67
Pressure Sexual Coercion Subscale	1.12	0.41	1.96	0.79

Table 4

Bivariate Correlations for Study 2

-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Partner-Objectification	-	.318***	.272***	-.131	-.185*	-.010	-.038	-.029	.047	.222*	.101	.103	.338***	.200*	.226*
2. Self-Objectification Self-Surveillance Subscale	.203**	-	.578***	-.198*	-.353***	-.086	.080	.007	.039	.252**	.135	-.054	.203*	.026	.039
3. Self-Objectification Body Shame Subscale	.140†	.456***	-	-.422***	-.471***	-.233*	-.023	-.040	.224*	.281**	.179†	.091	.359***	.170	.090
4. Self-Objectification Control Beliefs Subscale	.063	.156*	-.089	-	.337***	.327***	.243**	.210*	-.015	-.053	-.025	-.183*	-.180†	-.107	.022
5. Agency Body Acceptance Subscale	-.232**	-.276***	-.495***	.061	-	.416***	.501***	.603***	-.219*	-.255*	-.160†	-.111	-.323***	-.022	-.047
6. Agency Body Refusal Subscale	-.172*	-.317***	-.214**	.055	.142†	-	.553***	.582***	-.096	-.062	-.108	-.191*	-.202*	-.182†	.041
7. Agency Communication Subscale	-.262***	-.180*	-.202***	.094	.437***	.316***	-	.850***	-.154†	-.147	-.103	-.228	-.126	.029	-.017
8. Agency Interpersonal Interest/Desire Subscale	-.278***	-.283***	-.272***	.176*	.637***	.226**	.743***	-	-.249**	.252**	-.154†	-.221	-.200*	-.013	-.029
9. Coercion Resource Manipulation/Violence Subscale	.132†	-.081	.048	-.135†	-.017	-.073	-.185*	-.170*	-	.675***	.740***	-.388***	.317**	.293**	.149
10. Coercion Commitment Subscale	.221**	-.040	.033	-.072	-.108	-.154†	-.316***	-.298***	.698***	-	.762***	.378***	.420***	.349***	.049
11. Coercion Defection Threat Subscale	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	-	.475***	.371***	.264**	.129
12. Pressure Show Trust Subscale	.008	-.045	-.049	-.146†	.063	-.162*	-.129	.000	.191*	.200*	.158	-	.398***	.300**	.311**
13. Pressure Men Expect Sex Subscale	.350***	.171*	.161*	.002	-.204***	-166*	-.288***	-.373***	.474***	.535***	N/A	.189*	-	.422***	.411***
14. Pressure Women's Sex Role Subscale	.172*	.112	.071	.015	.042	-.303***	-.013	-.055	.267***	.358***	N/A	.146†	.341***	-	-.055
15. Pressure Sexual Coercion Subscale	.177*	-.054	.052	-.001	-.107	.003	-.113	-.175*	.670***	.660***	N/A	.179*	.475***	.233**	-

Note. Correlations from Sample 1 appear under the diagonal, while correlations from Sample 2 appear above the diagonal. †$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.