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Sexual Objectification of Women:
How Men Self Report Versus Women's Perceptions

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Abstract

Sexual objectification (SO) is an omnipresent experience for women that decreases their quality of life. Researching why SO occurs and is perpetuated can help us understand how to decrease the interpersonal, mental health, and safety consequences women face from being sexually objectified. The psychology component involved an empirical study aimed at better comprehending women's perceptions of their own SO and the connection SO has to Greek life. Nineteen men from Union College completed two scales to assess their direct and indirect SO of women, and 83 women from Union College reported their perceptions of college men's SO of women and their own experiences of sexual objectification. Results indicate that as a woman's experiences of SO increases, so does the degree to which she thinks the average college man sexually objectifies women. The results also demonstrate that women think men sexually objectify women more than men actually report. There was also found to be a negative correlation between B-IAT scores and direct measure scores of objectification for men. No connection to Greek life was found.

Sexual Objectification of Women

All women can recall a time when they were cat-called, encouraged to change their body shape, called a sexist name, had a sexual remark made about their body, or were sexually harassed or assaulted. These are just a few examples of how women are sexually objectified (Kozee et al., 2006), which unfortunately is something all women will experience in their lives to one extent or another. This occurs on all college campuses and is especially prevalent when campuses have all-male groups, such as Greek-life (Seabrook et al., 2019). Objectification of women is not only wrong in the moment, but has a variety of long-lasting negative consequences on women's mental health and overall quality of life (Li et al., 2015; Poon & Jiang, 2020; Szymanski et al., 2020). Although objectification and the negative effects it has on women have been studied (Li et al., 2015; Poon & Jiang, 2020; Szymanski et al., 2020), there is little research on women's perceptions of their own objectification. There is also little research on men's implicit objectification of women versus how they directly report their sexual objectification of women. Through understanding both women's perceptions of men and men's reported versus implicit sexual objectification of women, we can better understand sexual objectification and its consequences in order to work towards reducing sexual objectification by men and the consequences it has on women.

Literature Review

Objectification and Sexual Objectification

Objectification is when people are dehumanized and diminished by being treated as entities lacking thoughts and feelings (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Seabrook et al., 2018; Wright & Tokunaga, 2015). Sexual objectification takes this a step further by dehumanizing women by reducing them to their bodies or body parts, whose primary purpose is to be used by

men (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Wright & Tokunaga, 2015). The experience and psychological consequences of sexual objectification are omnipresent for women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Holland et al., 2017; Poon & Jiang, 2020), and also unique (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Women's Unique Experience

In society, women's value is primarily based on their physical attractiveness, but when women are valued for their attractiveness, they are seen as less human (Lerner et al., 1976). For example, when the focus is on their appearance, women are viewed as less competent, warm, and moral; in other words, less human (Heflick et al., 2011). Further, women are frequently evaluated based on their appearance (Buss, 1989; Hall & Crum, 1994). Therefore, women are frequently and automatically objectified. Men tend to objectify women more than women do (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005). In contrast, men's value in society is not mainly based on their physical attractiveness, nor are men seen as less human when people focus on their appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Heflick et al., 2011; Lerner et al., 1976). Men are also less frequently evaluated on their appearance to begin with (Buss, 1989; Hall & Crum, 1994). Therefore, men are raised in society with a certain level of power and privilege and, for that reason, they will never experience sexual objectification in the same way women do. Since sexual objectification is a unique experience for women the consequences women from sexual objectification are also unique.

Consequences

The most obvious consequence women face for being sexually objectified is being perceived as less human by others. Women are seen as less competent, warm, and moral, which affects their chances of success in life and in their interpersonal relationships (Heflick &

Goldenberg, 2009). Women are also more likely to be sexually victimized because they are dehumanized (Aubrey et al., 2011; Gervais et al., 2014; Jacques-Tiura et al., 2015; Rudman & Mescher, 2012). Men who engage in sexual objectification of women are more likely to be violent towards women, passively accept violence against women, and support sexist beliefs (Gervais & Eagan, 2017). Even men who implicitly dehumanize women are more inclined to rape women, sexually harass women, and disclose negative attitudes about female rape victims (Rudman & Mescher, 2012). This is because dehumanizing people is an antecedent to aggressing against them (Bandura, 2002; Bandura et al., 1975; Bar-Tal, 2000; Greitemeyer & McLatchie, 2011; Haslam, 2006; Kelman, 1973). It is easier to treat women with disrespect and violence when they are not seen as fully human (Seabrook et al., 2018). Sexual objectification of women is a common attitude among rapists (Polaschek & Ward, 2002). It is also tied to reduced blame for sexual assault perpetrators (Bernard et al., 2015; Gervais et al., 2018).

Another consequence of sexual objectification is that it can lead to women displaying more aggression and aggressive behaviors (Poon & Jiang, 2020). After being sexually objectified, women feel vulnerable and perceive the intentions of their objectifiers as hostile; in turn, this makes women more likely to be aggressive towards the source of their objectification (Poon & Jiang, 2020). See Figure 1.

College women who are more sexually objectified have been found to exhibit more depressive symptoms, body shame, body surveillance, rape precautions, safety concerns, and fear of men (Szymanski, et al. 2020). More body surveillance is, in turn, related to more body shame, rape precautions, safety concerns, fear of men, and appearance anxiety (Szymanski, et al. 2020). Finally, higher levels of body shame, appearance anxiety, rape precautions, and fear of men are associated with more depressive symptoms (Szymanski, et al. 2020). See Figure 2.

Objectification also contributes to increases in women's cognitive loads, which reduces women's cognitive performances, processes, and ability to focus on intellectual pursuits (American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2007; Gay & Castano, 2010; Hebl et al., 2004; Tiggemann & Boundy, 2008). It also contributes to reduced self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Gapinski et al., 2003).

Self-Objectification

Arguably, the most important direct consequence of sexual objectification is self-objectification; women are socialized to “adopt an observer's perspective on their physical selves” (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. #177) because they have internalized the sexually objectifying male gaze (Calogero, 2004; Gay & Castano, 2010). People's views of themselves are socially constructed and reflect how others view and treat them, which is why for women self-objectification occurs from being sexually objectified (Cooley, 1902; Tufts, 2006). Women internalize the constant societal messages they receive telling them that their value is based on their appearance and being a sexual object for men, and in turn they begin to view themselves in the same way; as an object to be used by and for men (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Women are also taught that they need to work on their physical appearance to meet impossible and conflicting standards for men, which further encourages women's self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Murnen et al., 2003).

Objectification theory hypothesizes that women self-objectify to both predict how others will evaluate them and to evaluate themselves (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). However, some researchers hypothesize that women only do the latter because self-objectification is associated with self-esteem and not anxiety (Breines et al., 2008). Despite the exact reason why women

self-objectify, self-objectification demonstrates that women have deeply internalized the cultural objectification of women.

Both objectification theory and studies have indicated that women who are objectified more are more likely to self-objectify (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Li et al., 2015; Murnen et al., 2003). Although to a lesser degree, women being indirectly exposed to sexual objectification (e.g., through sexually objectifying media) tend to have higher levels of self-objectification (Groesz et al. 2002; Li et al., 2015; Ward et al., 2017). Minute physical and social cues in one's environment can also prompt women to self-objectify (Tiggemann & Boundy, 2008). Even positive cues (for example, a compliment) that bring women's attention to their physical appearance increases self-objectification and the consequences of self-objectification, such as body shame (Tiggemann & Boundy, 2008). Cues that do not require women to explicitly focus on their physical appearance can still induce self-objectification and its consequences, as well (Tiggemann & Boundy, 2008). The constant accumulation of these subtle physical and social cues in the environment is predicted to have long-term detrimental consequences for women (Tiggemann & Boundy, 2008).

For heterosexual women, the relationship between sexual objectification and self-objectification is partially mediated by ideal beauty internalization (Li et al., 2015). Sexual objectification has a positive effect on ideal beauty internalization, and this causes more stable self-objectification (Li et al., 2015). These effects are more pronounced when objectification is experienced directly instead of indirectly (Li et al., 2015). This research shows how sexual objectification is related to unrealistic gender roles and beauty standards for women.

In sum, sexual objectification has a variety of direct consequences for women, including decreased chances of success in life and interpersonal relationships, increased risk of being a

victim of sexual violence and harassment, increased aggression, depressive symptoms, body shame, body surveillance, rape precautions, safety concerns, fear of men, cognitive loads, and self-objectification. (American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2007; Aubrey et al., 2011; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Gay & Castano, 2010; Gervais et al., 2014; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Jacques-Tiura et al., 2015; Li et al., 2015; Murnen et al., 2003; Poon & Jiang, 2020; Rudman & Mescher, 2012; Szymanski, et al. 2020; Tiggemann & Boundy, 2008).

Secondary Consequences

Many of the consequences of sexual objectification lead to further consequences, one of which is sexual dysfunction (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007). Sexual objectification, both directly and indirectly, is linked to more body shame and appearance anxiety (Groesz et al., 2002; Szymanski, et al. 2020). Body shame and appearance anxiety can make women feel more self-conscious during sexual activities (Steer & Tiggemann, 2008), have more negative sexual experiences (Cash, 2004), and have more sexual problems (Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007). Lower body self-esteem, another consequence of sexual objectification (Szymanski, et al. 2020), is linked to lower sexual assertiveness related to condom use self-efficacy (Auslander et al., 2012). This decreased sexual autonomy can cause other risks for women, such as STDs and pregnancy (Auslander et al., 2012). Exposure to more sexually objectifying media predicted more self-sexualization, which in turn is related to diminished sexual agency (alcohol use to feel sexual, lower condom self-efficacy, and negative feelings about level of sexual experience) (Ward et al., 2017). See Figure 7.

Healthy sexuality involves having positive feelings about one's own body and developing positive romantic relationships (Auslander et al., 2012). This is extremely difficult for women to

obtain when they lack sexual assertiveness from body shame and appearance anxiety and are seen as less than human by their partners. This affects men too, as men who objectify their partners more also have lower relationship and sexual satisfaction (Zurbriggen et al., 2011).

Self-objectification, a consequence of sexual objectification, also has a variety of detrimental consequences for women's mental health. Increases in self-objectification predict decreased hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Breines et al., 2008). Hedonic well-being is simply feeling good and not feeling bad, and eudaimonic well-being is a holistic healthiness that people feel when their behaviors and activities align with their core values (Breines et al., 2008). While most women experience a decrease in well-being from self-objectification, women with high self-esteem and high trait appearance-contingent self-worth report increased well-being (Boeringer et al., 1991; Breines et al., 2008). See Figures 4 and 5. However, on average, self-objectification is harmful to women's well-being (Breines et al., 2008). Although self-objectification increases some women's well-being, it is still harmful to all women by consuming a large amount of time and energy that could instead be directed towards other activities that provide more meaning and a sense of accomplishment (Breines et al., 2008).

The fact that some women feel better in the short term from self-objectifying may explain why women tolerate objectifying environments and self objectify despite the consequences. It allows women to develop an ego-involved state and feel validated based on their appearance (Breines et al., 2008). Some women actively seek out objectifying situations because they enjoy and feel validated by them (Breines et al., 2008). Plus, it benefits women in some ways to focus on their appearance and get male validation, such as increased job and marriage opportunities (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). However, in the long-term, the repercussions of self-objectifying likely far exceed the temporary benefits (Breines et al., 2008), not to mention that women

internalizing and playing into the culture of objectification perpetuates the systemic issue, which hurts other women. Society teaches women to believe that this is what they want and are freely choosing to do when actually they are doing so because sexual objectification and misogyny have been indoctrinated in them (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Self-objectification also can lead to negative body regard, which leads to depressive symptoms, which increases women's risk for self-harm (Muehlenkamp et al., 2005). See Figure 3. Additionally, self-objectification is associated with more disordered eating, negative feelings, and body shame—as well as decreased intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and cognitive functioning (Basow et al., 2007; Breines et al., 2008; Gapinski et al., 2003).

Greek Life's Role

Sexual violence is a pervasive problem on college campuses, which is partly aggravated by the presence of Greek life. Fraternity men are found to objectify women more readily and have higher levels of sexual violence, rape myth acceptance, and sexual deception and coercion (nonphysical coercion and using drugs and alcohol as a sexual strategy) than men not in these groups (Bleecker & Muren, 2005; Boeringer et al., 1991; Cole et al., 2020; Crosset et al., 1996; Frintner & Robinson, 1993; Koss & Gaines, 1993; Martin & Hummer, 1989; Seabrook et al., 2018; Sweeney, 2014). Partly, fraternity members accept sexual violence against women and rape myths more because they endorse traditional masculine gender norms, feel pressure from friends to uphold these norms, and promptly objectify women more (Lonsway et al., 2008; Payne et al., 1999; Seabrook et al., 2018). See Figure 6. In other words, fraternity men try to meet masculine gender roles, such as being hypersexual, to prove their masculinity at the cost of objectifying, sexually victimizing, and blaming women and supporting other men doing the same (Gervais & Eagan, 2017; Sanday, 1990). While all men feel pressure to be masculine (Vandello

& Bosson, 2013), this pressure is stronger in fraternities (Seabrook et al., 2018)--although the pressure to meet these masculine roles may be a more important factor than actually meeting the standard of being hypermasculine for fraternity men (Corprew & Mitchell, 2014).

One way fraternities encourage men to prove their masculinity is through bonding and initiation rituals that objectify women (Sanday, 1990; Sanday, 2007; Sweeney, 2014). Fraternity members have also been found to use more degrading sexual language in reference to women's bodies (Murnen et al., 2000), as well as have more images of women in their rooms; further, these images tend to be more degrading (Bleecker & Muren, 2005). The degrading images are correlated with higher rape supportive attitudes, again indicating that fraternity men objectify women more (Bleecker & Muren, 2005). Fraternity men objectify women more which is related to the fact that they tend to have a narrow and stereotyped conception of women, femininity, masculinity, and heterosexuality (Martin & Hummer, 1989). Women are viewed and used as objects to prove the social success of fraternities, which encourages them to sexually objectify and coerce women as if it is a game (Martin & Hummer, 1989). Greater objectification of women is linked to increased sexual violence against them, so it is unsurprising that fraternity men also express more hostility towards women (Cole et al., 2020). These traditional views and hostility towards women are correlated with fraternity men feeling more pressure to engage in locker room talk that sexually objectifies women (Cole et al., 2020). Men are also more likely to sexually objectify women when they are socially compared to their male peers, which is likely to occur in all-male groups (Gervais et al., 2015). This demonstrates how in many ways fraternity men try to be masculine for other men at the expense of sexually objectifying and victimizing women.

Additionally, fraternity members tend to have more traditional attitudes toward women and a stronger belief in male dominance (Kalof & Cargill, 1991; Schaeffer & Nelson, 1993), which is associated with more rape myth acceptance (Lutz-Zois et al., 2015) and negative beliefs about rape survivors (Costin & Schwarz, 1987; Hill & Marshall, 2018). Fraternity members also are more likely to “reject women’s political leadership, oppose women’s rights, and believe in differential work roles” (Robinson et al., 2004, p. #871). Further, men who endorse traditional and restrictive attitudes toward women tend to hold more negative attitudes toward women (Spence et al., 1973). Fraternity members have more stereotypical attitudes on gender norms, especially related to men having the active dominant roles and females the submissive passive roles, than sorority members and non-Greek life members (Kalof, 1993; Kalof & Cargill, 1991; Robinson et al., 2004). Fraternity culture often reinforces these traditional gender roles and increases the risk of sexual assault (Harris & Schmalz, 2016). However, rape myth acceptance is generally higher among men and all people pledging in Greek life (McMahon, 2010).

It is not totally understood if men who join Greek life already objectify women because they are drawn to being in a group that has the same traditional and sexist values, or if there is something about actually being in a fraternity that causes men to objectify women more (Bleecker & Muren, 2005). It may be a combination of both factors; men who join Greek life already have traditional gender roles, rape myth acceptance, and objectify women more, and then these ideas are reinforced by being part of a fraternity with like-minded individuals.

Objectification of women is inherently linked to sexual violence (Aubrey et al., 2011; Bandura, 2002; Bandura et al., 1975; Bar-Tal, 2000; Bernard et al., 2015; Gervais et al., 2014; Gervais et al., 2018; Gervais & Eagan, 2017; Greitemeyer & McLatchie, 2011; Haslam, 2006; Kelman, 1973; Jacques-Tiura et al., 2015; Polaschek & Ward, 2002; Rudman & Mescher, 2012;

Seabrook et al., 2018). Fraternity membership is connected to both (Bleecker & Muren, 2005; Boeringer et al., 1991; Cole et al., 2020; Crosset et al., 1996; Frintner & Robinson, 1993; Koss & Gaines, 1993; Martin & Hummer, 1989; Seabrook et al., 2018; Sweeney, 2014). Physical aggression and sex-role stereotyping are more common among fraternity men and, in fact, fraternity membership is one of the best predictors of sexual aggression (Lackie & Man, 1997). It is hypothesized that this is because fraternity men want to sexually and socially dominate women (Lackie & Man, 1997; Sanday, 1990).

Fraternity men have more sexual aggression, hypermasculinity, and rape myth acceptance, and this effect is greater at smaller colleges and among older men (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). This may be more true at smaller colleges because fraternities have more control over what is considered acceptable masculine behavior and because there may be “fewer alternative outlets for socialization...the effects of all-male groups are more pronounced” (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007, p. #154). The effects being larger for older men indicates that being a member of a fraternity may instill or reinforce sexual aggression, hypermasculinity, and rape myth acceptance (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). All male hypermasculine groups are associated with higher levels of sexual aggression, and this is theorized to be because men are afraid of femininity (i.e., misogynistic) (Ducat 2004; Lotto, 2006; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007).

Fraternity environments are similar to environments that sexual assaulters are typically from. Perpetrators of sexual assault are more likely to feel peer pressure to have sex “by any means,” feel more uncomfortable with their peers making “egalitarian statements about women,” and be more objectifying towards women when explaining how their peers talk about women (Jacques-Tiura et al., 2015). Environments, where friends use objectifying language about women, normalize that coercive tactics are acceptable (Jacques-Tiura et al., 2015). It is possible

that this also applies to why fraternity men are more likely to commit sexual violence against women.

Self-objectification, a huge consequence of sexual objectification, occurs more in sorority women and women intending to join a sorority (Basow et al., 2007). This suggests that women who join Greek life have internalized their sexual objectification more than other women, although why this is has yet to be determined. Living in a sorority is not related to greater self-objectification, indicating that it is something about women who join Greek life rather than about being a part of the group. Women who join sororities have a high drive for thinness, high body dissatisfaction, and high risk for eating disorder attitudes and behaviors (Basow et al., 2007). Sorority women also have more body surveillance and body shame than women not in Greek life and not intending to join, both of which are consequences of sexual objectification, (Basow et al., 2007).

Sororities contribute to the sexually objectifying Greek life culture that also harms them. As mentioned previously, some women actively seek out objectifying situations because they can be enjoyable and validating in the short term (Breines et al., 2008). Sorority members who are loyal to fraternities are willing to cover up, ignore, and perpetuate fraternities' problematic behavior to preserve their social status and hierarchy (Franklin 2008; Sanday 2007; Sweeney 2011). However, this comes at a cost, as sorority women are 74% more likely to be victims of sexual violence (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). Despite the detrimental consequences, sorority women tend to support fraternity culture for social status and acceptance (Harris & Schmalz, 2016).

Women's Perceptions

Despite the vast research and theories on the sexual objectification of women, there is very little research on women's perceptions of their own objectification. Murnen et al. (2003) studied children's perceptions. They found that girls who reject sexually objectifying images of women had the lowest internalization of the thin ideal, the highest self-esteem, and realized the standard was unattainable; comparatively, girls who were uncertain how to respond had the lowest self-esteem, the most internalization of the standard, and thought this standard was important to attain and could be attained. This may be because loss of voice is associated with body image issues (Murnen et al., 2003; Smolak & Munsterteiger, 2002; Tolman & Porsche, 2000). Boys did not have a consistent response to objectified images of men and did not react as strongly to the pictures as girls did (Murnen et al., 2003). Boys knew that the muscular standard was unreasonable and not expected of them, whereas girls knew the thin ideal was expected of them (Murnen et al., 2003). Sexual objectification of women is internalized in girls at a young age and is related to the thin ideal, body dissatisfaction, eating disorder attitudes and behaviors, and self-objectification.

Chen et al. (2013) also studied women's perceptions of their own objectification. They found that sexually objectifying comments from men tended to make women feel contaminated and in turn feel sinful and have cleansing urges. See Figure 8. However, this only happened to women who perceived themselves as responsible for their objectification. This effect has been noticed in women who have been sexually victimized (Fairbrother et al., 2005; Fairbrother & Rachman, 2004), but it can occur from even subtle nonphysical forms of sexual objectification (Chen et al., 2013).

Hypotheses

There has been a significant amount of research on sexual objectification of women, its' connection to Greek life, and the consequences it has on women—specifically self-objectification. However, research has yet to understand if these effects related to sexual objectification for both men and women have to do with being in a Greek life organization or the type of people that Greek life attracts. Additionally, very little research has been conducted on (a) how women's own sexual objectification impacts their perceptions of men, or (b) how men report their sexual objectification of women compared to their actual objectification of women.

The following hypotheses were made:

1. The more men directly report sexually objectifying women the more they will implicitly objectify women.
2. All women, despite Greek life status, will think that men will report more sexual objectification of women than men actually do. Again, this may be because men are reluctant to admit they dehumanize women or because women experience sexual objectification so much that they think all men are this way.
3. As women experience more sexual objectification in their lifetimes, they think men will report more sexual objectification of women. Again, this may happen because they will generalize their experience to all men.
4. Women in Greek life and women intending to join Greek life will think that men objectify women more than women not in Greek life. This was predicted because women intending to join and women in Greek life may be more exposed to objectifying fraternity environments and generalize that behavior to all men.
5. Women in Greek life will report the most objectification in the past year, then women intending to join, and then women not in Greek life. This was predicted because sorority

women are likely more exposed to the fraternity environment that sexually objectifies women more. Women intending to join are likely exposed to the fraternity environment the next most, and women not in Greek life are likely least exposed to this environment.

6. All women, regardless of Greek life status, will report similar amounts of sexual objectification over their lifetimes. This is plausible because sexual objectification of women is so pervasive that all women may experience it in relatively similar degrees (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Holland et al., 2017; Poon & Jiang, 2020).

This research is important because the culture of sexual objectification of women happens everywhere and constantly, and is related to so many consequences for women that reduce their quality of life. Better understanding sexual objectification, why it happens, and its consequences can help us to learn how to lessen it and its consequences. Women need to be viewed as fully human to lead an equitable life and this cannot occur with the ubiquitous culture of sexual objectification.

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited at Union College through campus emails and psychology classes. They completed the study for \$5 or for course credit. There were 102 total participants, with 19 identifying as male and 83 identifying as female. Five participants were excluded from the study: one for not indicating their gender, 3 women who were members of Greek life but dropped, and 1 woman in a sorority that is not part of the National Panhellenic Conference.

Of the male participants, 1 identified being in a fraternity that is not a part of the Interfraternity Council, and 18 identified as not being in a fraternity and not intending to join. There were 10 first-year students, 3 sophomores, 2 juniors, and 4 seniors. Their mean age was

19.63. Fourteen identified as White, 2 as Asian, 2 as multiple races, and 1 as Black or African American.

Of the female participants, 20 identified as being in a sorority, 12 identified as intending to join a sorority, and 51 identified as not being in a sorority and not intending to join. There were 26 first-year students, 20 sophomores, 22 juniors, and 15 seniors. Their mean age was 19.66. Sixty-one identified as White, 11 as Asian, 4 as multiple races, 4 as Black or African American, 1 as American Indian or Alaskan Native, 1 as other (Latina), and 1 preferred not to say.

Measures

For the study, which received IRB approval, the male participants completed the Female Object Brief Implicit Association Test (B-IAT) to measure their unconscious objectification of women (Rudman & Mescher, 2012). The B-IAT uses words that represent “Women” (*women, woman, female, she, her, and girl*), “Human” (*human, culture, logic, rational*), “Object” (*object, tool, device, thing*), and “Neutral” (*sunset, dust, green, yellow, blue, orange*). The B-IAT measures response latency when associating the words together. A higher score is supposed to indicate more implicit objectification of women and a lower score less implicit objectification of women. The IAT response practice times were also used, as this has been found to increase the accuracy of the results (Greenwald et al., 2003). The male participants also completed the Men's Objectification of Women Scale, which directly measures men's levels of objectification of women (Curran, 2004). It consists of twenty-five questions scored on a five-point scale (*1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided or Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree*). Lastly, the male participants filled out the demographics form about their gender, age, class year, Greek life affiliation, and race.

The female participants filled out the Men's Objectification of Women Scale, just as the male participants did (Curran, 2004). However, female participants were asked to complete this scale as they thought the average college man would. Next, the women participants filled out the Sexual Objectification Scale (ISOS). This scale measures participants' own experiences of sexual objectification, both in the past year and in their lifetimes. It consists of 21 questions, each scored on a 5 point scale with options of *Never*, *Rarely*, *Occasionally*, *Frequently*, and *Almost Always* (scored 1 to 5, respectively). Each question is asked twice, once for “*how many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE?*” and once for “*how many times IN THE PAST YEAR?*” Lastly, the women participants filled out the same demographics form as the men.

Procedure

Male participants signed up for a timeslot through Union College's Sona Systems site or emailed the experimenter to sign up. They came to the psychology lab for the study and signed an informed consent form before beginning the study. In a room with a computer, participants completed the B-IAT on Tellab.org. Participants entered a code that was randomly assigned to them to link their IAT scores to the latter questionnaire and demographics form. Next, participants did short practice rounds before the actual IAT. Participants were asked to press the left arrow key for “Women and Object” words and the right arrow key for “Human and Neutral” words when they appeared on the screen. They then did the practice rounds with the linked words switched, followed by the real reverse test, with “Women and Human” words being pressed on the left arrow key and “Human and Neutral” words being pressed on the right arrow key. The pairing of words presented was counterbalanced.

Afterward, on the same computer through Google Forms, participants filled out the Men's Objectification of Women Scale. After that, still on Google Forms, participants were asked to

complete a demographics form. When the study was completed, participants were given either \$5 or psychology class course credit. They were also given a brief debriefing right after to minimize risk and were asked to email the researcher if they wanted the full debriefing after all data was collected. This was done to make sure participants did not find out what the study was about before participating and to ensure participants' anonymity by not collecting their emails.

Female participants signed up through Union College's Sona Systems site to get the link to the survey or clicked the link in the advertisement email sent to students on campus. The survey was administered through Google Forms. Participants virtually signed an informed consent form. They then completed the Men's Objectification of Women Scale as they thought the average college man would. Participants then completed the ISOS. After that, participants completed the demographics form. Lastly, they were virtually given a brief debriefing after they submitted the form to minimize risk and were asked to email the researcher if they wanted the full debriefing after all data was collected. This was done to make sure participants did not find out what the study was about before participating and to ensure participants' anonymity by not collecting their emails.

Results

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis predicted that the more men directly reported sexually objectifying women, the more they would implicitly objectify women. This was assessed using a linear regression to predict men's directly reported sexual objectification of women based on their implicit objectification of women. The directly reported sexual objectification of women did explain a significant amount of the variance in implicit objectification of women, $F(1, 17) = 4.94, p = .040, R^2_{\text{adjusted}} = .18$. The regression coefficient ($B = 45.84, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [38.67,$

53.02]) indicated that an increase in directly reported sexual objectification of women corresponded to a decrease in implicit objectification of women—the opposite of what was predicted. See Figure 10.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted that all women, regardless of Greek life status, would think that men would report more sexual objectification of women than men actually did. This was supported by an independent samples *t*-test. Compared to the 83 female participants ($M = 72.39$, $SD = 17.39$), the 19 male participants ($M = 51.21$, $SD = 11.54$) demonstrated significantly lower scores on the Men's Objectification of Women Scale, $t(100) = 5.05$, $p = <.001$.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 predicted that as women experienced more sexual objectification in their lifetimes, they would think that men would report more sexual objectification of women. This was assessed using a linear regression. Lifetime sexual objectification experience did explain a significant amount of the variance in the women's prediction of men's direct report of sexual objectification, $F(1, 81) = 5.99$, $p = .017$, $R^2_{\text{adjusted}} = .06$. As predicted, the regression coefficient ($B = 54.62$, $p <.001$, 95% CI [39.73, 69.52]) indicated that an increase in women's lifetime sexual objectification experience corresponded to an increase in how much they thought men would directly report sexually objectifying women. See Figure 9.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 predicted that women in Greek life and women intending to join Greek life would think that men objectify women more than women not in Greek life. A one-way ANOVA was run to compare the effect of Greek life status on how much women think men would directly report sexually objectifying women. It failed to find a statistically significant difference in how

much women thought men would directly report sexual objectification of women among women in Greek life, women intending to join Greek life, and women not in Greek life ($F = 2, 80) = 1.08, p = .344$.

Hypothesis 5

The fifth hypothesis predicted that women in Greek life would report the most objectification in the past year, then women intending to join, and then women not in Greek life. A one-way ANOVA was run to compare the effect of Greek life status on sexual objectification in the past year. It found no statistically significant difference in sexual objectification in the past year among women in Greek life, women intending to join Greek life, and women not in Greek life ($F = 2, 80) = 1.56, p = .217$.

Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis 6 predicted that all women, regardless of Greek life status, would report similar amounts of sexual objectification over their lifetimes. A one-way ANOVA compared the effect of Greek life status on lifetime sexual objectification. It revealed, as predicted, that there was not a statistically significant difference in lifetime sexual objectification among women in Greek life, women intending to join Greek life, and women not in Greek life ($F = 2, 80) = .82, p = .445$.

Discussion

Sexual objectification of women has many consequences that negatively impact women's quality of life. This study aimed to assess women's perceptions of men's sexual objectification based on Greek life status and objectifying experiences, as well as compare men's directly reported sexual objectification of women to their implicit objectification of women.

It was found that the more men directly report sexually objectifying women, the less they implicitly objectify women according to the IAT. One explanation for this is that men who sexually objectify women more (according to the IAT) are less likely to be honest when asked directly about doing so. It is also possible that men who objectify women less (according to the IAT) report that they sexually objectify women more than they actually do because they are trying to conform to masculine ideals. It could also be both of these occurring at the same time.

It was also found that women thought the average college man would report being much more sexually objectifying than college men actually reported. Again, this could be due to the men not being honest about how much they really sexually objectify women, but it could also be that women think men sexually objectify women more than they actually do. Women commonly experience sexual objectification and witness other women experiencing it as well, and they may generalize this to more men than it truly applies to. This result may indicate another consequence of sexual objectification for women. If women think that men sexually objectify more than they do, women may have a difficult time forming healthy romantic or platonic relationships with men. Women may be using their cognitive resources being cautious of men, which could tax their mental health and reduce their ability to direct their cognitive resources towards other pursuits.

This relates to the finding that the more that women have experienced sexual objectification in their lifetimes, the more sexually objectifying they think the average college man is. One possible explanation for this result is that women's perceptions of men are based on their own experiences of sexual objectification. Women who have more experiences of being sexually objectified understandably have more negative expectations that men will be more sexually objectifying of women. Based on the results, it is possible that the more women are

sexually objectified, the more consequences they face—in part because of their more negative perceptions of men. However, it is also possible that women who report more sexual objectification in their lifetimes are more aware of being sexually objectified and more sensitive to its consequences. This might explain why women who report more lifetime sexual objectification think that men are more sexually objectifying.

The present study found that there was no connection between how women in Greek life, women intending to join Greek life, and women not in Greek life perceived men's levels of sexual objectification. This could be because Union College is a small college and, regardless of whether they are in Greek life or not, students get a relatively similar experience because Greek life culture dominates the social environment. Since all students roughly experience the same environment despite Greek life status, they may not have different perceptions of men because their experiences are actually rather similar. At smaller schools, fraternities have more control over the entire social environment and there are not as many alternative social scenes (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). The Covid-19 pandemic is also extremely likely to have influenced the results. None of the participants from the study experienced being in Greek life for an entire year before the pandemic. Participants were members of their organizations for one trimester maximum before the pandemic. Further, the Greek life environment was drastically different during the pandemic, when most Greek life events were not allowed—not to mention that the students currently in Greek life were not influenced as much by the previous members of the Greek life organizations due to the pandemic. For these reasons, Greek life on Union College's campus during data collection was likely quite different than it was before the pandemic.

There was also no difference found between Greek life status and experiences of sexual objectification in the last year for women. Again, this may be due to Union College's small size

and the effect the Covid-19 pandemic had on Greek life. Since Union College is small, the experience for students differs a lot less than at a big school, which perhaps explains why all women reported similar amounts of objectification over the past year. These results might have looked different had the study been conducted at a large school, where there are more diverse social scenes and students can more easily avoid Greek life's influence.

As predicted, all women despite Greek life status had similar amounts of lifetime sexual objectification. Since sexual objectification is such an omnipresent experience for women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Holland et al., 2017; Poon & Jiang, 2020), it makes sense that all women despite Greek life status would experience the same amount of sexual objectification in their lifetimes.

This study demonstrated that sexually objectifying women may have even more consequences on top of the many consequences it already has for women. The more women are sexually objectified, the more they think men sexually objectify women; this could likely be tied to worse relationships with men and an increased cognitive load. These consequences not only could negatively impact women but also men. If women are unable to trust and have healthy relationships with men, then men are also going to have a harder time forming healthy relationships with women. Sexual objectification of women is a huge factor in gender inequality, which not only negatively impacts both women and men. Understanding sexual objectification better is necessary to reduce its consequences and foster gender equality.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to the study that should be addressed. First, the measures used for the study have their limitations. The Men's Sexual Objectification of Women Scale does not consider that some items are more severe and therefore might have more consequences and

effects than others. For example “*How often have you been touched or fondled against your will*” is much more severe and likely has more negative consequences than “*how often have you been whistled at while walking down the street?*” Yet, these items are scored equally.

The IAT also has various issues. A significant limitation of the IAT is that it is unclear if it actually measures implicit associations. The test assumes that it measures implicit biases based on reaction time differences. However, it is unclear whether reaction time differences reflect implicit associations. This is likely a simplified explanation for the response latency. Humans have many different cognitive processes at play and the IAT assumes that it is only measuring implicit associations as if all other cognitive processes are not at play, which seems highly unlikely. Another problem with the IAT is that responses completed incorrectly are removed. However, when a participant gets a question wrong, that data is likely an important factor that should not be discarded. For example, if a participant keeps accidentally associating women with objects in the part of the IAT where they are supposed to be associating women with humans, that may be telling us something.

In terms of problems with the data and its collection, there was occasional noise from other students in the lab, which might have impacted reaction times for some participants. Additionally, on the IAT, none of the male participants had very objectifying scores, which could have influenced the result that found a negative correlation between IAT scores and the Men’s Objectification of Women Scale scores. A study with more men who have higher objectifying scores on the IAT might produce different results. This is tied to the fact that the sample size for male participants was very small. Plus, none of the men who participated in the study were members of an Interfraternity Council Fraternity, which may have skewed the results.

This study intended to sort the male participants into three groups like the women: in Greek life, intending to join Greek life, and not in Greek life and not intending to join. However, it was extremely difficult to recruit male participants, so this portion of the study had to be cut. Otherwise, the study could have examined if Greek life status influences men's B-IAT scores and/or the Men's Implicit Objectification of Women scale scores. This could help to better understand if sexually objectifying women is related to being in a fraternity or if it is the type of men that join fraternities or a combination of both.

There was also a small sample size for women in Greek life and women intending to join Greek life. Although the trends in data aligned with hypotheses related to Greek life, we did not find significant results. If the sample size had been bigger for these two groups, it is possible the results would have been significant. The study also may have not found significance because Union College is a small college. As previously mentioned, at small colleges Greek life culture influences and dictates the entire social scene and there are not many alternative outlets for socialization (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Thus, all students have a relatively similar social experience despite their Greek life status. Therefore, at larger colleges or universities where social groups are more distinct from each other, there is a higher likelihood that we would find significant results related to Greek life status.

Union College is also a small private liberal arts school that may attract certain types of students from certain similar backgrounds. Levels of experience with sexual objectification and perceptions of male sexual objectification of women may be more varied in the actual population.

This study also did not account for international students or sexuality. International students may have different results because of cultural differences in their societies. While there

are cultural gender differences across countries, there is still much overlap of stereotypical gender roles and sexual objectification of women despite the many differences. Additionally, sexuality may have impacted the results. Although men are socialized similarly, it is possible that homosexual men are less likely to sexually objectify women. It is also possible that homosexual women have had fewer objectifying experiences than straight or bisexual women. Consequently, homosexual women may have different perceptions about men's levels of sexual objectification of women.

Lastly, the participants do not accurately represent the diversity of the United States. The male portion of the study underrepresented Black or African Americans, native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, and American Indians or native Alaskans. The female portion of the study underrepresented Black or African Americans and native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders.

Future Directions

Future research should study the difference between men who are in Greek life, intending to join, and not in Greek life and not intending to join. This will help to distinguish if Greek life attracts men who already readily sexually objectify women or if being in a fraternity makes men sexually objectify women more. It would also be helpful to study this with a larger and more diverse sample size of men to have a larger range of IAT scores, considering the present study did not have any men with high objectification scores. This could help to better understand what is happening with the correlation between men's B-IAT scores and their Men's Objectification of Women Scale scores. This entire study should also be replicated at larger colleges or universities where it is more likely that there will be a distinction based on Greek life status. This could help to determine if there is a difference between women's perceptions of men and experiences of sexual objectification based on Greek life status at larger colleges. Future research should not

only consider women's perceptions of men's sexual objectification of women but also their opinions—perhaps by adding a qualitative component to the study. While the current study examined women's perceptions of how much they think men sexually objectify women, it does not tell us if the women think these behaviors are acceptable or not. Understanding women's opinions on this would provide a deeper understanding of how sexual objectification affects women.

Conclusion

Sexual objectification of women is a chronic experience for women that sets them back in society. This study aimed to better understand how women's experience of sexual objectification and Greek life status affect their perception of men. It also aimed to understand men's willingness to report their sexual objectification of women versus their implicit objectification of women. The results provide evidence that (1) there is an inverse relationship between men's implicit objectification of women (according to the B-IAT) and their directly reported scores of sexual objectification of women; (2) women think that men will report sexually objectifying women much more than men actually report; (3) the more experiences women report of being sexually objectified, the more they think men will report sexually objectifying women; and (4) Greek life status had no significant effect on women's past year or lifetime perceptions of men or experiences of sexual objectification.

A main takeaway from this study is that women's experiences of sexual objectification impacts their perceptions of men, which likely has consequences for women, such as being unable to form healthy and trusting relationships with men. Another main takeaway is that men's implicit objectification of women does not align with their reported levels of sexual objectification. While this study gives more insight into men's sexual objectification of women

and women's experiences and perceptions of this, there is still so much more that needs to be researched. It is vital to better understand women's perceptions of and opinions about their sexual objectification, the consequences of sexual objectification, and why men's outward sexual objectification of women does not match their implicit objectification of women to figure out how to reduce sexual objectification of women and mitigate its many consequences. Sexual objectification of women is a systemic issue that is often overlooked in society because of its pervasiveness, but in order for women to lead truly equitable lives it must be better and more widely understood so that it can effectively be combated.

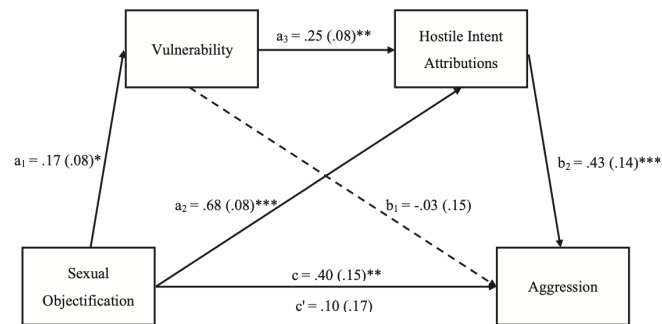
Figure 1

FIGURE 1 The effect of sexual objectification on aggression was serially mediated by vulnerability and hostile intent attributions (Experiment 1). Coefficients are unstandardized with standard errors in parentheses. Notes: a_1 = direct effect of sexual objectification on vulnerability; a_2 = direct effect of sexual objectification on hostile intent attributions; a_3 = direct effect of vulnerability on hostile intent attributions; b_1 = direct effect of vulnerability on aggression; b_2 = direct effect of hostile intent attributions on aggression; c = total effect of sexual objectification on aggression without accounting for vulnerability and hostile intent attributions; c' = direct effect of sexual objectification on aggression when accounting for vulnerability and hostile intent attributions; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 2

Fig. 1 Results of the path model predicting depression from interpersonal sexual objectification as serially mediated by body surveillance with body shame, appearance anxiety, rape precautions, safety concerns or fear of men. BMI was entered as a covariate. Values are standardized coefficients. Black, solid paths are significant ($p < .05$) whereas grey, dashed paths are not. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

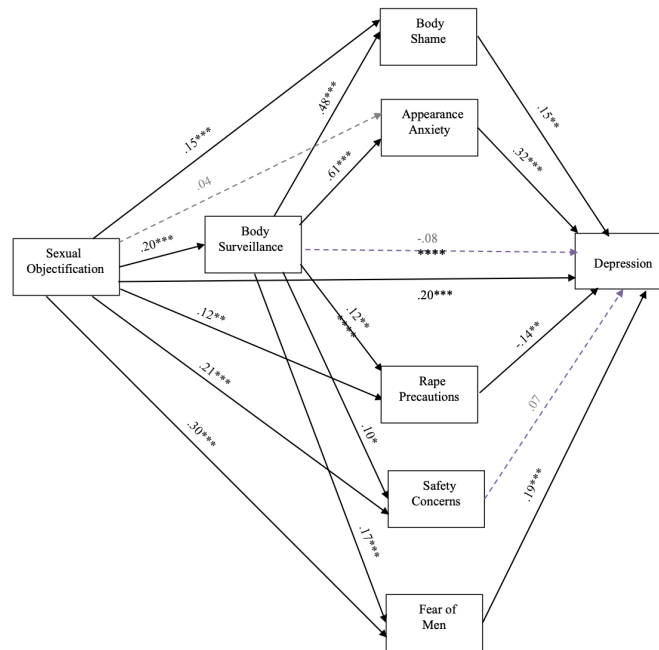


Figure 3

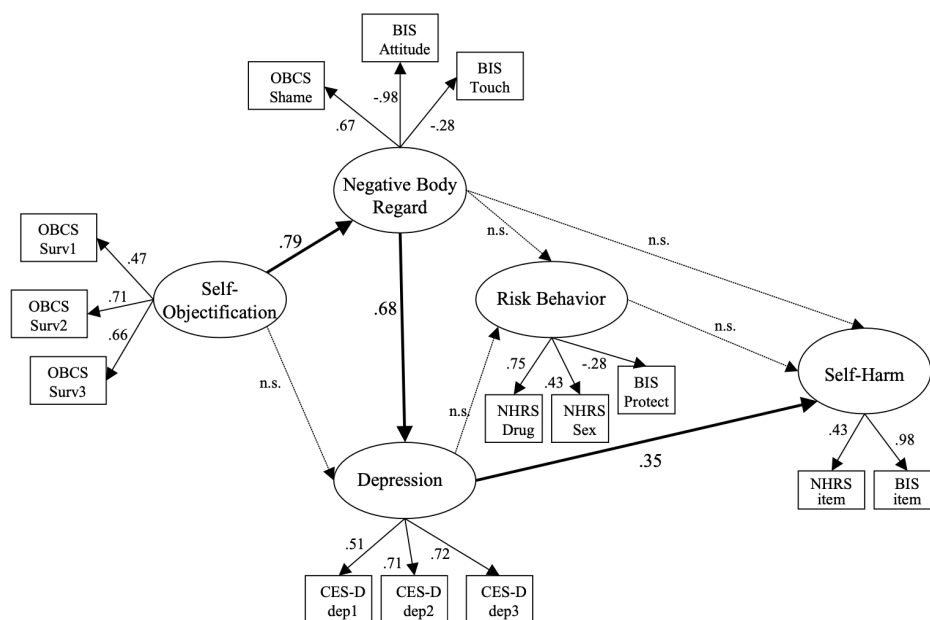


Fig. 2. Respecified model of self-objectification and self-harm with standardized parameter estimates. All parameter estimates are significant at the $p < .01$ level.

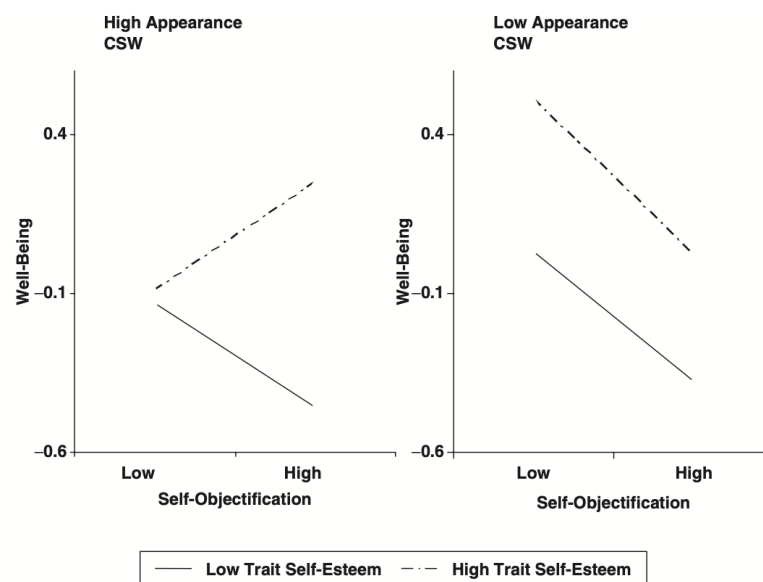
Figure 4

Figure 1 Cross-Level Interaction (Trait Self-Esteem \times Trait Appearance-Contingent Self-Worth [CSW] \times State Self-Objectification) Predicting State Well-Being

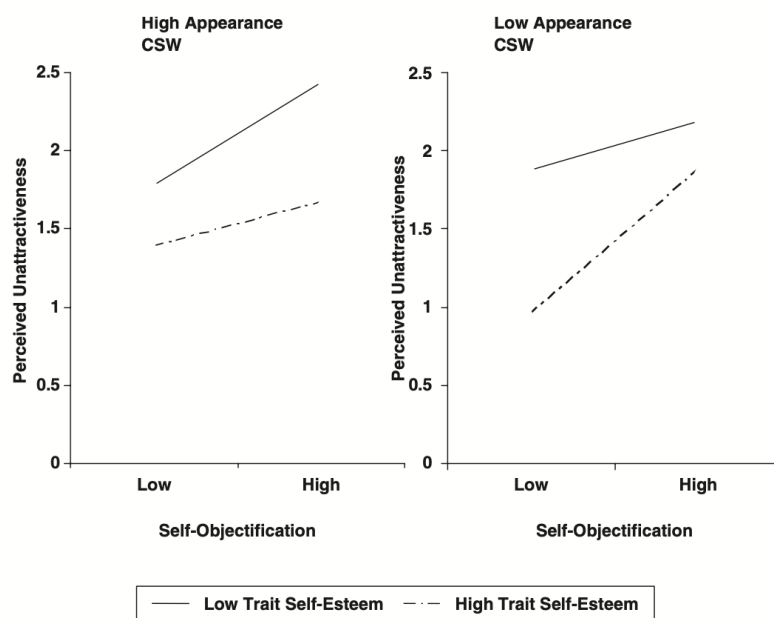
Figure 5**Figure 2** Cross-Level Interaction (Trait Self-Esteem \times Trait Appearance-Contingent Self-Worth [CSW] \times State Self-Objectification) Predicting State Perceived Unattractiveness

Figure 6

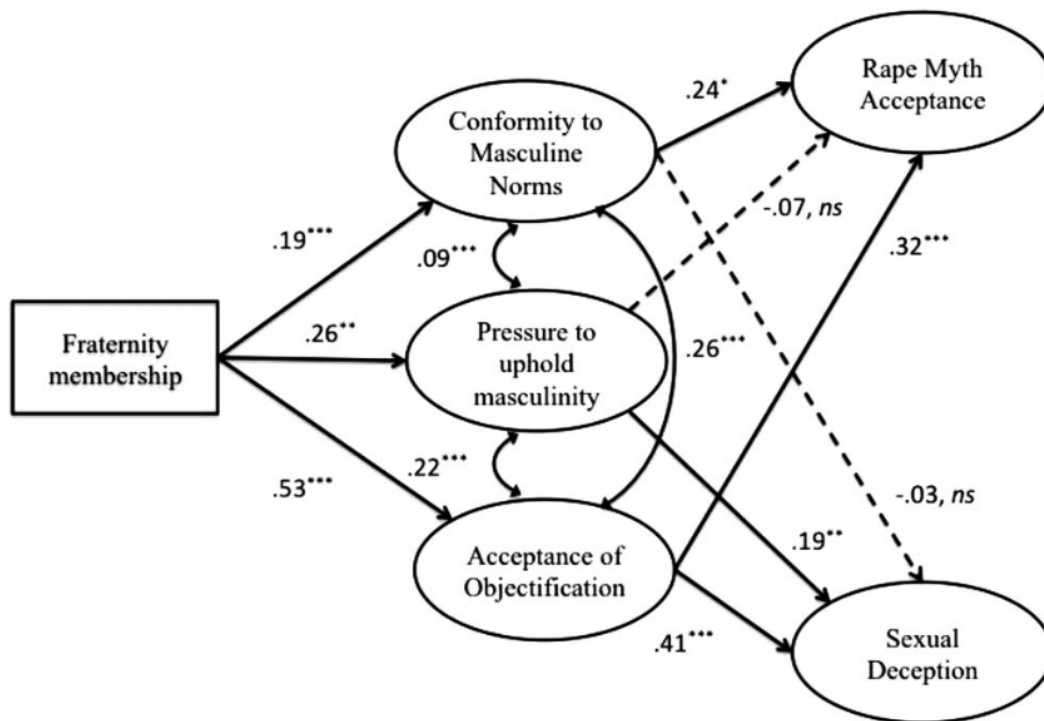


Figure 2. Final structural model with unstandardized coefficients. Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant pathways. Fraternity membership coded such that 1 = member and 0 = nonmember. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 7

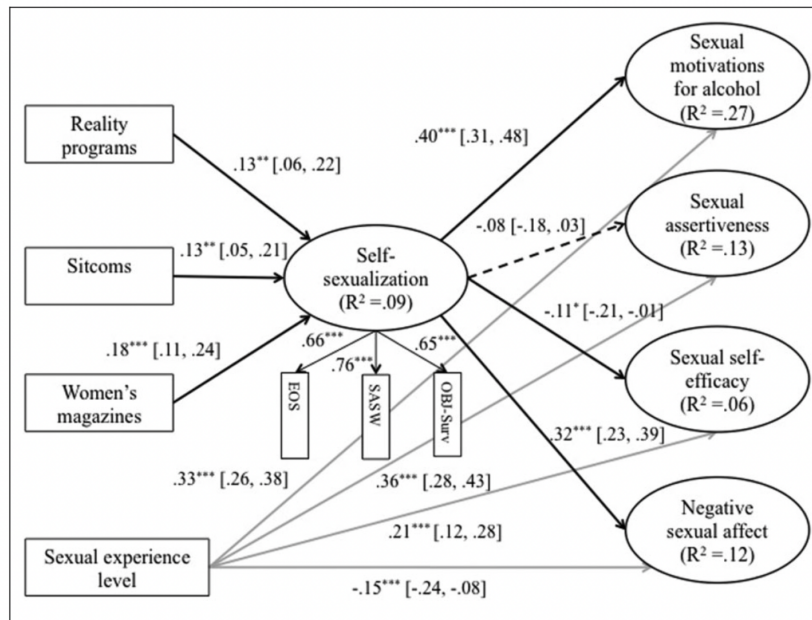


Figure 2. Final structural model with bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals. EOS = Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale; SASW = Sexual Appeal Self Worth Scale; Obj-Surv = Surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scales–Youth. Grey lines denote pathways from control variable to outcome variables.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

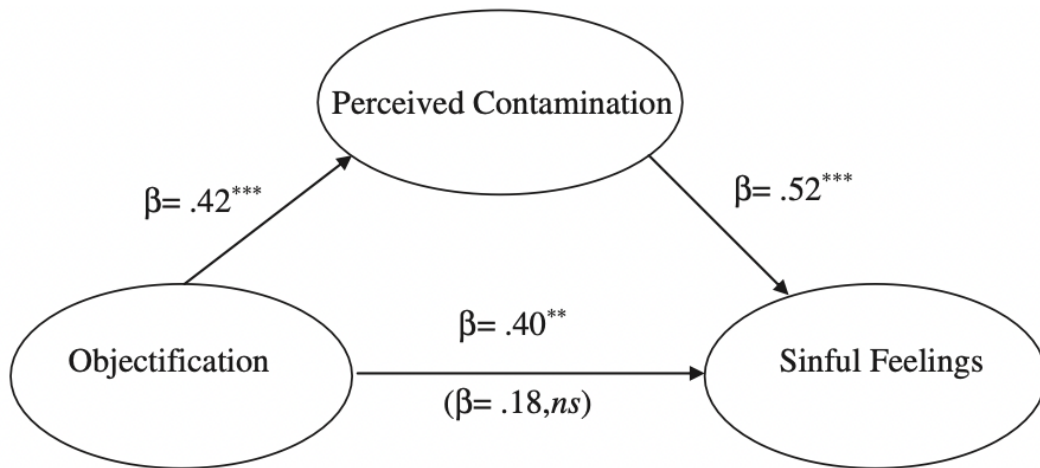
Figure 8

Fig. 2. Perceived contamination mediates the effect of objectification on sinful feelings (Experiment 2). *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Figure 9

Scatterplot Depicting Correlation Between Women's Lifetime Sexual Objectification and Women's Predicted Scores for Men on the Men's Objectification of Women Scale.

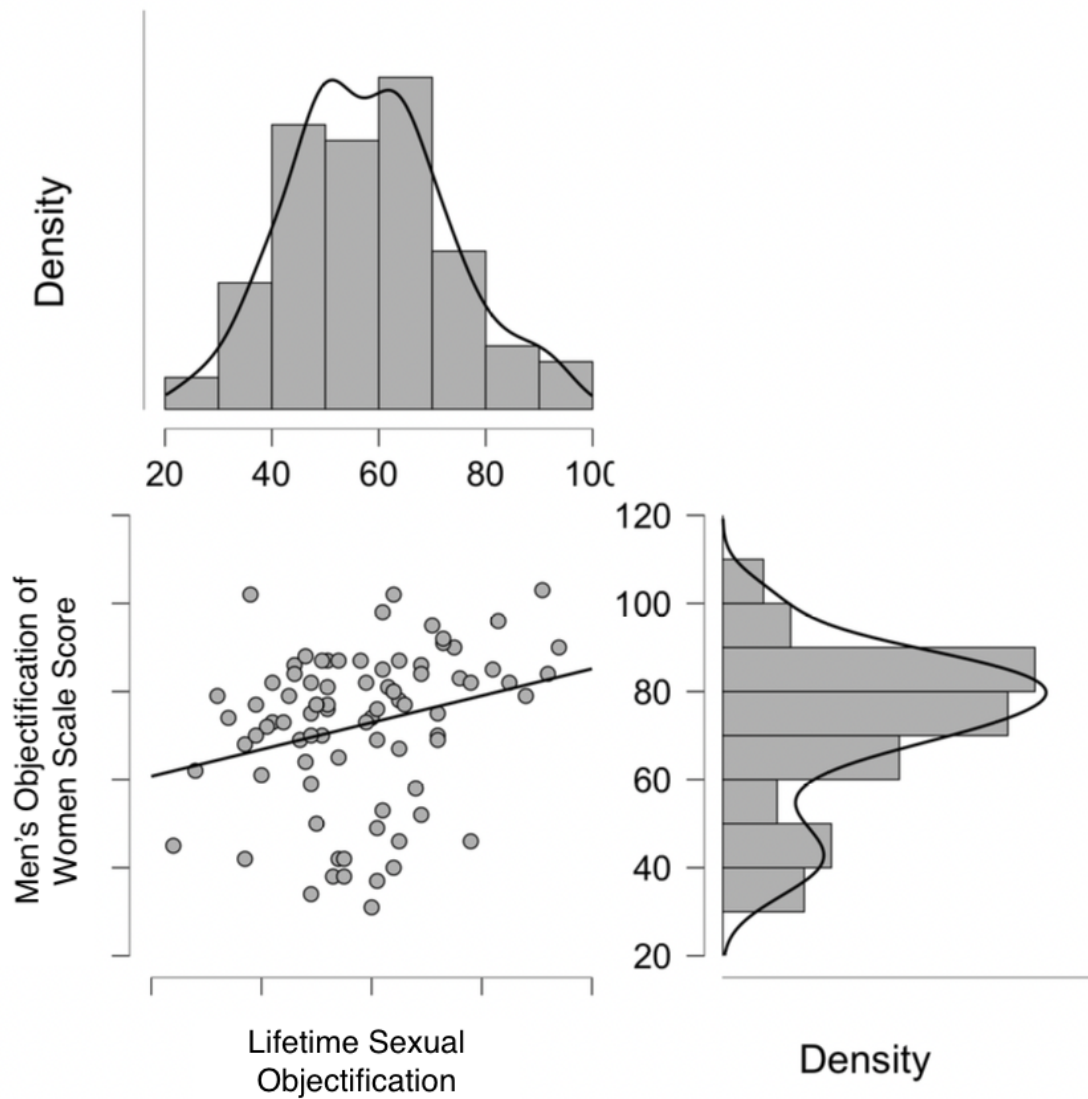
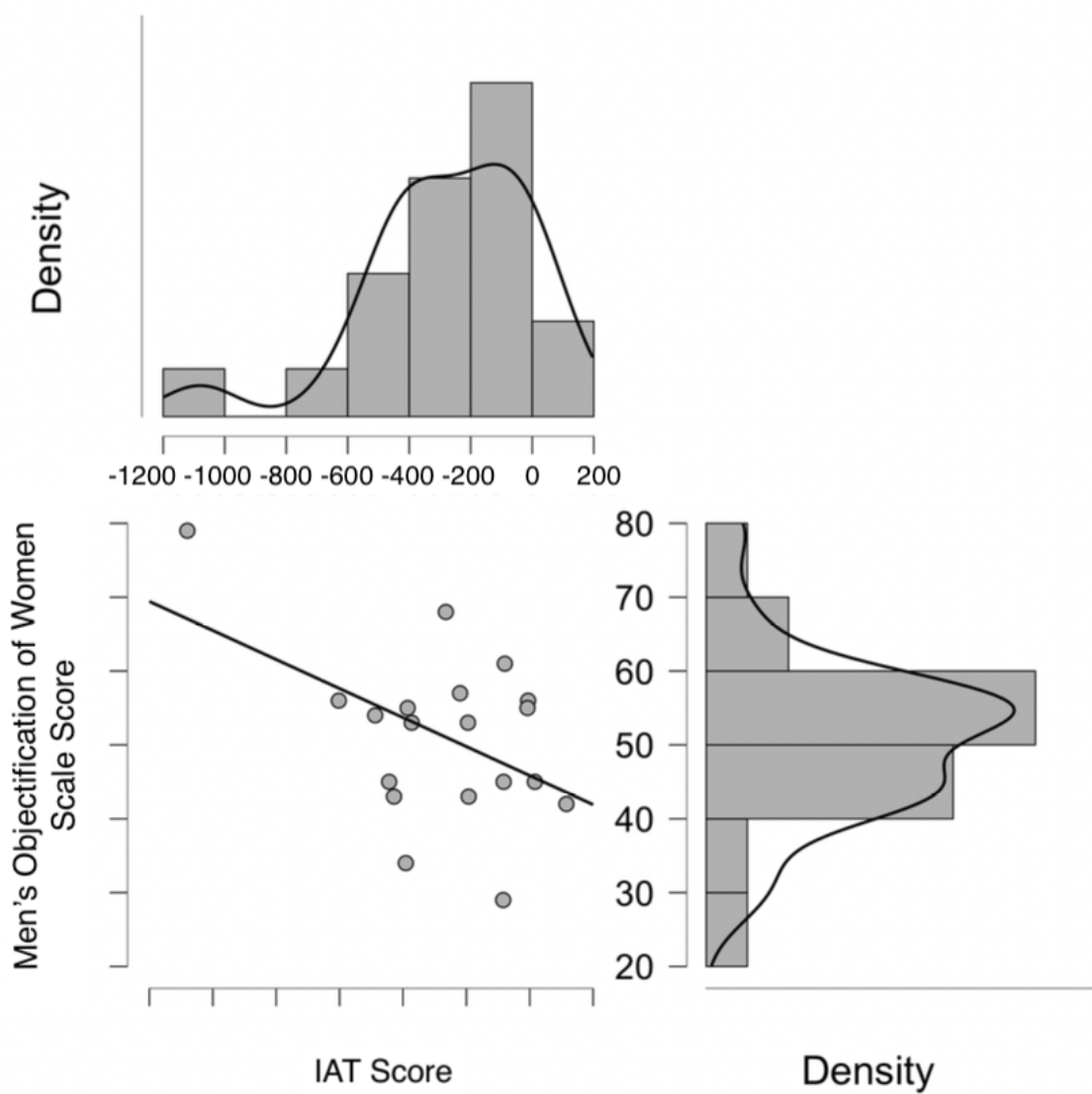


Figure 10

Scatterplot Predicting the Correlation Between Men's IAT scores and Men's Objectification of Women Scale Scores



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