**The sources and consequences of sexual objectification**

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**ABSTRACT**

Sexual objectification (treating a person as a body or collection of body parts) involves a cultural prioritizing of women’s sexual appearance and appeal over other attributes. Sexual objectification is prevalent, permeates many aspects of women’s lives, shapes general assumptions about women, and exacts many consequences on women and society. In this Review, we synthesize empirical evidence about the sources and consequences of seeing women as sexual objects, and of women’s objectification of themselves (self-objectification). In general, sexually objectified women are perceived more negatively, and as less competent and less fully human than non-sexually objectified women. Exposure to this cultural messaging has broad consequences and fuels sexist attitudes and violence toward women. A central consequence for women is self-objectification, which is associated with a more negative body image; diminished mental, physical, and sexual health; and impaired cognitive performance. Sociocontextual factors influence women’s experiences with sexual objectification, and here we explore the role of race and ethnicity, in particular. We conclude with suggested directions for future research.

**[H1] Introduction**

Sexual objectification occurs when a person is treated as a body (or collection of body parts), valued predominantly for their sexual appeal and the ways they can fulfill other people’s sexual needs1,2. Sexual objectification occurs mainly for women and adolescent girls, and takes multiple forms, occurring at the interpersonal level (for example, verbal and nonverbal evaluations of a woman’s body, unwanted sexual advances), at the cultural level (for example, exposure to objectified representations of women in traditional and social media), and as an immersive interpersonal or cultural experience (such as in modeling and beauty pageants)3. These behaviors are not benign but are a form of sexism that strips women of the qualities that make them human (including their competencies, emotions, and cognitions) and restricts focus to their sexual body parts and functions. Sexual objectification is prevalent4,5 and linked to viewing women, as a group, as primarily sexual objects and to women’s valuing themselves mainly for their sexual appeal to others. Both perspectives are problematic, and are associated with women’s diminished mental, physical, and sexual health6,7, reduced cognitive performance8, and vulnerability to violence2,9.

Most research on sexual objectification has relied on two theories that were proposed independently yet contemporaneously – objectified body consciousness10 and objectification theory2. Objectified body consciousness10 was conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprised of three inter-related components: body surveillance (chronically monitoring the body), body shame (feeling bad because one perceives that one’s body does not meet cultural beauty standards), and appearance control beliefs (believing that with enough effort one can control what one’s body looks like). By contrast, self-objectification*,* which is conceptually similar to body surveillance and entails scrutinizing and monitoring the body for compliance with cultural beauty standards, was put forward as a unidimensional construct2. Both theories were developed in response to a Western cultural milieu that overvalues women’s physical and sexual attractiveness and undervalues their personhood, such as their capacities, thoughts, and feelings. In such environments, women experience interpersonal treatment based on their attractiveness (for example, objectifying comments or gazes from others), and mass media commonly depict women as sexual objects. In response to these conditions, women might internalize external perspectives as primary means to view their bodies, thereby considering themselves as an object for others’ evaluation. Such self-objectification disrupts embodiment, that is, experiencing the world through one’s body (for example, through movement11) because of pressure to meet external standards.

In this Review, we summarize research on sexual objectification, with particular attention to studies published in the past decade. First, we discuss the sources of sexual objectification. Next, we review the consequences of seeing women as sexual objects, and in women’s objectification of themselves. Finally, we explore how the sexual objectification experiences of women of color align with and diverge from those of white women and propose directions for future research. Given the breadth of research on sexual objectification, we focus on studies of adult women or studies addressing men’s treatment of adult women (for a review concerning youth, see12; for a review of impacts for boys and men, see13). Building on existing reviews6,7, we seek to provide a synthesis of findings rather than critiques of individual studies.

Concerning specific terminology, many scholars have expanded the original theorizing underlying most research on sexual objectification to include the construct of sexualization4. Sexual objectification and sexualization are related constructs but are not synonymous (Box 1). Here we use the terms sexually objectifying or objectifying unless authors used sexualized or sexualizing when describing their experimental stimuli or findings.

**[H1] Sources of sexual objectification**

The sexual objectification of women is ubiquitous in patriarchal societies and is conveyed by many sources. One prominent source of women’s sexual objectification is experienced via the models of beauty ideals and normative assumptions observed in traditional mainstream media, namely television programs and commercials, music videos, movies, magazines, and video games (for a review, see5). In these venues, sexually objectifying content takes multiple forms, including the overrepresentation of women wearing clothes that expose a lot of skin, verbal comments about women’s bodies and appearance, camera angles that target sexual body parts, and the explicit and implicit valuing and rewarding of women’s appearance over other attributes. Such treatment has been documented across media. In scripted television programs, high value is placed on women’s physical attractiveness and sexual appeal14,15, with one analysis reporting 24 sexualizing instances per TV episode16. This emphasis on women’s physical attractiveness also extends to television programs aimed at 8-to-12-year-olds17 and unscripted (‘reality’) programming18. In one analysis of the highest degree of body exposure observed for each of 622 reality TV characters, only 4% of female cast members exhibited no body exposure, versus 32% of male cast members19. Sexually objectifying depictions of women are especially prevalent and explicit in music videos. In one analysis, 65% of popular music videos contained sexual objectification, and 91% of female artists wore provocative clothing (compared to 36% of male artists20). Indeed, in music videos women are consistently more provocatively dressed than men, reveal more body parts, and dance in more sexually suggestive ways21-25.

Similar patterns of greater sexual objectification of women relative to men have been found in magazines26, print advertisements27, music lyrics28,29, video games30,31, and fictional films32. Furthermore, advertisements in teen magazines are more appearance-focused (71%) than nonappearance-focused (30%33. Although the findings above are specific to US media, these patterns have been documented globally, and have been reported for scripted Spanish TV programs34, TV programs popular with Flemish youth35, TV ads from the Philippines36, and trailers and posters for Hindi films37. Although differences in the levels of sexual objectification for female and male characters are not always observed (for example, see ref15), overall findings indicate that sexually objectified portrayals of women are highly prevalent across mainstream media.

Sexually objectifying content is also present on social media, especially image-based social networking sites such as Instagram and Facebook38-40. The affordances of social media, including interactivity, comparison with similar others, opportunities for public validation (for example, ‘likes’), and the ability to compose, edit, and control self-presentation, might enhance the appeal and power of these platforms41. In one study, 54% of images of women posted with the hashtag ‘fitspiration’ contained at least one aspect of objectification (such as an alluring or sultry gaze), and almost 26% of objectified images of women involved sexy posing42. Other similar analyses have found that ‘fitspiration’ posts of women are substantially more sexualized than posts of men43,44. However, more general content analyses of social media profiles (typically of college women) are less consistent in terms of the prevalence of sexual objectification: Some studies have found fairly high levels45,46, whereas others have found low47-50 or modest levels of sexual objectification51. For example, one analysis of undergraduate women’s Facebook profiles reported a mean sexualization score of 19.0 (on a scale from 0 to 25)45, whereas another analysis of U.S. undergraduate women’s Instagram and Facebook profiles reported mean sexualization scores of 4.9 and 4.2 (on a scale from 0 to 23), respectively50. Together, these findings indicate that exposure to sexual objectification on social media might vary depending on platform and hashtag usage.

Interactions at the personal level also convey messages that promote sexual objectification. These interpersonal interactions include verbal and nonverbal evaluations of the female body (such as leering and making sexual comments) and unwanted sexual advances (including unwanted touching and sexual harassment). Women regularly and frequently experience these phenomena. Interpersonal sexual objectification was reported an average of 2.7 times over five days in one multi-nation sample of women aged 18 to 46ref 52 and 3.7 times per week in a sample of Australian women aged 18 to 46ref 53. The most frequently reported events include being a target of an objectifying gaze, catcalls, whistles, or stares54. The Interpersonal Sexual Objectification Scale55 (Table 1) is the most widely used measure for assessing the general frequency of interpersonal sexual objectification and examines the occurrence of fifteen specific behaviors. Findings across 21 samples reveal average frequencies of experiences of interpersonal sexual objectification between ‘rarely’ and ‘occasionally’ (between 2 and 3 on a 5-point scale)3, 55-72.

Although all women are vulnerable to sexual objectification, sexism, racism, and heteronormativity intertwine to influence the nature of sexually objectifying experiences73. Queer, transgender, and racialized women experience severe forms of sexual objectification, such as sexual harassment, physical attacks, and sexual assault, at higher rates than heterosexual and white cis-women73-75. In addition to experiencing body comments and sexualized gazes, queer women and women of color also report being fetishized and must navigate stereotypes of hypersexuality and sexual availability to men73-76. Overall, interpersonal sexual objectification is a regular occurrence for most women, and some women are more vulnerable to its more extreme forms.

Finally, sexual objectification is communicated via cultural products marketed to girls and women, including sexualized clothing and toys (for example, Barbie dolls), appearance-enhancing products, and Halloween costumes77. Cultural sexual objectification is also evident in gender ideologies that value appearance and beauty for women but not men78; in the prevalence of beauty pageants for girls and women; in the abundance of careers that exploit women’s but not men’s bodies and sexual appeal (for example, exotic dancing, cocktail waitressing, cheerleading; Box 2); and in the sexualizing of normal female body functions, such as breastfeeding79, and everyday social activities, such as drinking alcohol80,81.

**[H1] Consequences of seeing women as sexual objects**

Sexually objectifying cultural messages communicated through media, cultural norms and activities, or interpersonal interactions, generate significant consequences. These messages shape explicit and implicit attributions about women and fuel sexist attitudes and violence toward women.

**[H2] Explicit and implicit attributions**

One set of consequences reflects explicit assumptions about sexually objectified women. Experimental studies have found that sexually objectified or sexualized women are perceived more negatively than non-sexually objectified or non-sexualized women on multiple dimensions, including being seen as less capable82, intelligent82,83, competent47,82-87, determined82, agentic87, fully human88, moral82,86, worthy of moral consideration83,89, warm86, socially appealing47,84, and as having less self-respect82 (for a review, see ref5). Similar patterns have been found in studies comparing sexualized and non-sexualized female student government candidates90, female businesswomen91,92, and female athletes93,94. Moreover, participants evaluate other professionally-dressed women more negatively after being exposed to images of sexualized women95,96.

Most research on sexual objectification has used white targets as stimuli. However, some studies have included Black targets97,98 or have matched the race or ethnicity of the target and participant99. In one such study female participants (66% white, 22% Black), rated Black sexualized targets as more popular than Black non-sexualized targets, whereas white sexualized targets were rated as less popular than white non-sexualized targets97. In that study sexualization was operationalized as seductive body language, cleavage and skin exposure, and sheer clothing. By contrast, in another study where sexual objectification was operationalized as self-touch and cleavage, participants (53% white, 46% Black) did not rate Black versus white targets differently in terms of perceptions of their morality, warmth, or competence98. Collectively, the existing evidence indicates that sexually objectified or sexualized women are perceived less positively than their non-objectified or non-sexualized counterparts.

Because people’s explicit responses can be subject to social desirability biases such as the need to appear moral, ethical, or intelligent100,101, psychologists have also used implicit measurement techniques to investigate whether sexual objectification causes people to be perceived or categorized as objects. Many of these studies draw on a large literature demonstrating that person recognition involves different mental processes than object recognition. Specifically, people are processed configurally, as a holistic Gestalt, whereas objects are processed analytically, in a more piecemeal fashion102,103. This processing difference can be measured via the body inversion effect103 in which participants are slower to process upside-down images of people compared to properly oriented (upright) images, whereas images of objects are generally processed equally well in either orientation. An initial study found an inversion effect indicative of configural processing for sexualized men but not for sexualized women, suggesting that sexualized women (but not men) are perceived as objects rather than humans104. Although critics have argued that these processing differences could be due to confounding factors such as greater asymmetry in the images of women compared to the images of men105 or idiosyncratic differences in stimuli106,107, the key finding that sexualization leads women to be processed as objects has been replicated in multiple studies drawing on both behavioral and neuroscience methods108-110. This effect is found more consistently for female targets, but it has also been observed for male targets111.

Other studies have used the Implicit Association Test112 to probe unconscious associations with sexually objectified women. In one such study, objectified women were more readily associated with animal words than were non-objectified women, non-objectified men, or objectified men113; in another study, women high in self-objectification showed stronger associations between objectified women and animal words than did women low in self-objectification114. Studies such as these that probe implicit or unconscious dehumanizing biases hold promise in elucidating the far-reaching effects of sexualization.

**[H2] Gender beliefs and sexism**

Sexual objectification is related to individuals’ support for sexism, traditional gender roles, and objectifying beliefs about women. Frequent everyday exposure to media that are typically high in sexually objectifying content, such as music videos, women’s magazines, and reality TV, is associated with stronger support of sexist or objectifying beliefs about women18, 115-121. Findings from experimental studies support these associations. Undergraduates exposed to specific media featuring sexually objectified women endorsed sexist statements or traditional gender stereotypes more strongly than participants without this exposure120, 122-125 (but see ref126 for null effects). In one study, women shown clips from superhero movies that included portrayals of sexualized female victims (for example, shown as weak and in need of rescue) expressed stronger support for traditional gender role beliefs than those who were shown no media content124.

Similar results have emerged with more interactive media. For example, playing a video game as or among sexualized female avatars predicts stronger endorsement of hostile sexism127, greater acceptance of rape myths128,129, greater tolerance of sexual harassment128,130, greater self-objectification131,129, and an underestimation of women’s cognitive abilities132. These effects are sometimes moderated by circumstances of the gameplay, such as level of immersion127, visual similarity to the avatar131, and level of cognitive load involved133. Failures to find effects of sexualized avatars on sexist attitudes and beliefs134,135 have been attributed to poor external validity of the laboratory gaming experience127, or the power and agency of sexualized female avatars, which might override perceptions that they are passive sexual objects127,134,135.

The consequences of sexual objectification extend beyond sexist beliefs and perceptions to actual behaviors. Exposure to sexually objectifying media has been associated with increases in looking at female bodies with an objectifying gaze136, asking more sexist questions during mock job interviews137, and stronger intention to engage in sexual coercion, share sexist jokes through digital media, or harass female communication partners138,139. More broadly, holding objectifying attitudes towards women in general has been linked to heavier use of a sexualizing gaze towards women140 and greater support of hostile sexism among women and men141,142. Indeed, greater support for objectifying beliefs about women is correlated with greater support of hostile sexism and the Madonna-Whore dichotomy—the contradictory, binary belief that women are either ‘good’ (for example, chaste and pure) or ‘bad’ (for example, seductive and promiscuous)— among heterosexual men in Israel, Germany, and the U.S., and greater support for sexual double standards among heterosexual men in Israel and the U.S.143,144. Together, these findings indicate that consuming sexually objectifying media and internalizing objectifying beliefs about women can trigger limiting and sexist perspectives toward women.

**[H2] Dehumanization and interpersonal violence**

Sexual objectification is a risk factor for violence, harassment, and rape-supportive attitudes, partly because the sexually objectified person is perceived as less human (a phenomenon known as dehumanization) and elicits less empathy145. As noted above, participants rate sexualized women as having less competence, warmth, and morality (markers of humanization) than non-sexualized women146,147. Moreover, in experimental studies participants were less likely to say they would help a sexualized versus non-sexualized victim of intimate partner violence148, were more approving of bullying when it was directed toward a “sexually available” girl versus a girl whose description did not suggest promiscuity149, were slower or less willing to help a sexualized versus non-sexualized victim of sexual harassment150, and engaged in more actual aggression toward an objectified versus non-objectified woman by choosing to have her hold her hand in ice water for a longer amount of time151 or choosing to give her a louder burst of white noise152.

Dehumanization mediates the association between objectification and aggression (ref 88, but see ref 133). For example, in one study with Italian college students, the reduced willingness to help a sexualized victim of intimate partner violence was mediated by ‘moral patiency’ (a measure of perceived humanity)148. Empathy for the victim or target is also influenced by sexualization. One study found that Fijian women who viewed a music video that featured sexualized women later displayed less empathy for a hypothetical female victim of intimate partner violence153. According to one proposed model reduced empathy mediates the association between viewing sexually objectifying media and accepting sexual harassment145.

Correlational studies provide additional support for these associations. More frequent exposure to objectifying media is associated with men’s greater endorsement of women as sexual objects and, in turn, greater support of rape myths and violence against women119,121 and more frequent use of deceptive courtship practices119. A meta-analysis of 166 studies and 321 independent effects sizes reported that sexualized media (compared to neutral media) were positively associated with aggressive behavior (*r*=.19), thoughts (*r*=.14), and attitudes (*r*=.13)9. Moreover, men who report that they sexually objectify women are more likely to justify violence against women, perpetrate physical and psychological abuse against partners63, and commit acts of sexual aggression154-156; however, one study found this latter association in college students in the U.S. but not in the Philippines156. Again, this association might be mediated by dehumanization63.

**[H1] Consequences of seeing oneself as a sexual object**

In addition to shaping how individuals perceive women in general, sexually objectifying experiences and messages influence how women perceive themselves, most notably by spurring self-objectification or objectified body consciousness. With self-objectification, women value themselves predominantly for their body’s sexual appeal and less for their competencies, personality, or other traits. This narrow self-perception has extensive consequences for women’s cognitive performance and mental, physical, and sexual health (Figure 1). Despite these adverse consequences, women sometimes engage in self-objectification and even report enjoying the sexualized gaze (Box 3), partly because the costs of sexual objectification are often hidden while the potential benefits are promoted. Indeed, the culture’s extreme focus on monitoring and policing women’s appearance behooves women to self-objectify in an effort to control how others will perceive and engage with them.

Self-objectification can arise from multiple actions, including experiencing a sexualized gaze or commentary from others, engaging in appearance-focused activities (for example, exotic dancing or trying on swimwear), or viewing or engaging with sexually objectifying media2. Indeed, a meta-analysis of 50 studies and 261 effect sizes found a positive effect of sexualizing media on self-objectification (*r*=.19) that was independent of participant characteristics (age, gender, race, and student status), study design, publication year, and measure of objectification157. Similarly, social media use and specific social media behaviors (such as posting selfies or receiving comments about one’s appearance) are related to greater self-objectification in undergraduate women158-160. In this section we synthesize findings across the individual actions that might produce self-objectification to focus on its consequences for women.

**[H2] Mental health and well-being**

According to objectification theory, self-objectification is likely to lead to mental health consequences such as shame, anxiety, and depression2. There is indeed robust evidence that self-objectification is associated with greater depressive symptoms (for review, see ref161). Although most studies on self-objectification and depression have been conducted using predominantly white U.S. college samples, this association has also been found among Belgian162, Australian163, Taiwanese164, Canadian165, and Indian166 women. In addition, a correlation between self-objectification and depressive symptoms in women has been observed in U.S. samples where the majority of participants are Latina and/or Black59,167,168 (but see ref 69). These findings are supported by experimental studies in which self-objectification is primed or manipulated125,169. Associations between self-objectification and depressive symptoms have been found to be partially or fully mediated by body shame and appearance anxiety (for reviews see refs161,170), and by dissociation171, fear of men and taking of precautions to protect oneself from rape3, and use of internalizing coping strategies59.

Self-objectification is also correlated with lower self-esteem in North American female college students172, older women in Canada (mean age 66173), male and female college students in the U.S.174, and mid-life women and men in the U.S. (mean age 36ref 175). As with depression, associations between self-objectification and self-esteem are often mediated by factors such as body shame175-177 or appearance anxiety172,177. Self-objectification is also associated with higher levels of loneliness175, deliberate self-harm178, and narcissism179, and lower levels of life satisfaction180, subjective well-being165, and positive affect, vitality, and ‘flow’ (a pleasurable state of energized focus in which one loses track of time)181.

Several studies support objectification theory’s prediction that self-objectification should be associated with anxiety (for a review, seeref 182). For example, self-objectification is correlated with generalized anxiety in American female and male college students174 and in white and Black American female college students183. Specific anxiety about risk and harm to the body is also associated with self-objectification. Women who self-objectify provide higher estimates of their risk of being a victim of rape or intimate partner violence compared to those who do not self-objectify54,184. Not surprisingly, self-objectification in women is correlated with fear of being raped184, fear of men3, and anxiety about personal safety185. Women who score higher on self-objectification report taking more precautions to protect themselves from rape3 and having a restricted sense of their freedom of movement185. In sum, self-objectification interferes with positive mental health.

**[H2] Body satisfaction and eating disorders**

Objectification theory posits that habitual body monitoring in response to objectifying appearance pressures predicts body shame2. Specifically, shame results when a woman feels that her body does not live up to cultural beauty expectations and that others judge her body as undesirable. Thus, eating disorders might be one consequence of self-objectification, as women might engage in maladaptive eating practices in an attempt to achieve culturally-determined ideal body sizes. Indeed, a meta-analysis186 of 53 studies found that self-objectification is associated with disordered eating (*r* = .39) (see also ref 187). The effect was stronger in women (*r* = .41) than men (*r* = .20). In addition, the association was stronger among Caucasian (*r* = .42) and Asian American women (*r* = .42) compared to African American or Black women (*r* = .34), was strongest among heterosexual women (*r* = .39), and was weakest among heterosexual men (*r* = .23)186. There is also evidence that body surveillance is correlated with other appearance beliefs among undergraduate women, including weight and/or shape concerns183 and body dissatisfaction62. Together, these findings indicate that self-objectification is associated with a range of maladaptive body attitudes and eating behaviors.

Furthermore, self-objectification has implications for women’s attitudes toward cosmetic surgery. Greater self-objectification, body surveillance, and body shame are related to greater consideration of cosmetic surgery in English188, Australian189, Chinese190, German191, and American192 women. In addition, talking about bodies and posting and editing selfies more frequently on social media are associated with increased body surveillance and shame, and consequently greater consideration of cosmetic surgery, among female Chinese college students193-195. These findings indicate that the extent to which women are interested in elective cosmetic surgery is related to their tendency to self-objectify.

**[H2] Physical health**

Self-objectification is linked to women’s physical health and greater participation in health-compromising behaviors, possibly because women who self-objectify might pay less attention to their internal states and personal health. Several findings support this explanation. First, among young women, higher levels of self-objectification are associated directly or indirectly via body shame with a greater motivation to drink to cope196,197, heavier consumption of alcohol and other drugs58, and greater likelihood of being a smoker198,199. Second, because white yet tanned skin is a core part of the feminine beauty ideal, greater body and skin-tone surveillance are linked to heavier skin tanning behaviors and inclinations among white women200-202 and to skin-bleaching behaviors among Indian and Black women203,204, despite the health risks of these behaviors. Third, greater self-objectification is associated with less sensitivity to internal states, including less accurate detection of one’s heartbeat205. Indeed, one study found that greater self-objectification predicted both greater skin exposure and reports of feeling less cold when wearing little clothing outside a nightclub on a cold night, suggesting that self-objectification is linked with denial or diminished awareness of bodily sensations206. Fourth, greater self-objectification is associated with lower levels and less enjoyment of physical activity207,208 (but see ref 209, for null results), and stronger endorsement of appearance-related reasons to exercise and fewer health and/or fitness reasons210,211. Overall, these findings illustrate that greater self-objectification is linked to less attention to internal states and greater willingness to engage in health-risk behaviors.

**[H2] Cognitive performance**

Self-objectification is theorized to impair cognitive performance by consuming attentional resources2. In the first empirical test of this proposition, state self-objectification (a temporary state of high self-objectification) was manipulated by assigning participants to wear either a swimsuit (objectifying condition) or sweater (non-objectifying condition) while completing a math test212. Women assigned to wear a swimsuit performed worse (marginal effect, *p* = .056) on the math test compared to women assigned to wear a sweater, whereas men’s performance was not influenced by dress. A subsequent study used the same paradigm but had male participants wear a speedo rather than swim trunks; in this case, all participants in the swimsuit condition performed worse than participants in the sweater condition213 (but see ref 214 for null effects). Similar research using this paradigm found that women in the swimsuit condition exhibited slower reaction times on a measure of cognitive flexibility (Stroop test) compared to women in the sweater condition215.

Other manipulations have also been used to create a state of self-objectification216. For example, one study found that American female college students who received an objectifying gaze performed worse on a math test than those who did not, whereas men’s performance did not differ between conditions217 (see also refs 218,219). Other studies that experimentally manipulated objectification by placing mirrors and scales in testing rooms report null or conditional effects220-222. Researchers speculate that these manipulations likely produced null findings because they were too subtle222 or were overpowered by another aspect of the experimental design221, and therefore did not induce self-objectification. Importantly, a systematic review of findings across nine studies concluded that self-objectification does impair cognitive functioning8 (see also ref 182). Taken together, the literature indicates that self-objectification might influence women’s cognitive performance and perhaps men’s to a lesser extent, but the effects likely vary based on the manipulation used to induce self-objectification.

**[H2] Sexual health and sexual agency**

A core theorized outcome of women’s self-objectification is diminished sexual well-being2. When greater attention is given to how the body looks than to how it feels, women’s ability to derive sexual pleasure and their inclination to advocate for their needs might be jeopardized. Moreover, greater attention to body appearance might lead to more body shame and appearance anxiety, which, in turn, might diminish sexual confidence. Empirical findings support these contentions, especially when self-objectification is measured by body surveillance. Women who report a greater tendency to monitor their appearance also report lower levels of sexual satisfaction224, 225; see 223 for null results, sexual esteem224-226, and sexual assertiveness225,227, and greater sexual appearance anxiety228, sexual monitoring227, sexual risk behaviors229, and body self-consciousness during sexually intimate moments230,231. Some studies do not report direct contributions of body surveillance to sexual well-being but instead report mediated connections, whereby body surveillance predicts women’s sexual well-being through other factors such as self-consciousness during intimacy232,233, body shame232,234-236, or appearance anxiety163,228.

However, these effects of self-objectification on sexual well-being vary based on the measurement of self-objectification. Connections between self-objectification and women’s sexual well-being are relatively weak when measured via the Self-Objectification Questionnaire alone163, 233,237,238, but are more robust with a combined assessment of objectified body consciousness, which predicts lower condom negotiation efficacy, lower relationship satisfaction, and greater body self-consciousness during intimacy239,240.

Finally, there are downstream consequences of objectification from a romantic partner, specifically. Objectifying a partner might represent an inability to see her as a whole, complete person, which could interfere with the ability to connect emotionally and build a fully satisfying relationship241. Indeed, empirical evidence indicates that for heterosexual women, perceiving objectification from a partner is linked to greater self-objectification which, in turn, is associated with lower sexual satisfaction242, lower perceived relationship quality243, decreased interest/desire in sex244, and decreased ability to refuse sex from a partner244. Together, these findings illustrate that engaging in self-objectification, either in general or spurred by perceived partner objectification, might diminish women’s sexual comfort, agency, and satisfaction.

**[H1] Sexual objectification and women of color**

The tenets of objectification theory were not assumed to apply uniformly across all women but were instead proposed to vary by sociocontextual factors such as culture, class, race, and ethnicity2. Concerning race, in particular, there is evidence that the sexual objectification experiences of women of color align with and diverge from those of white women in meaningful ways. Black women typically report lower levels of body surveillance and self-objectification compared to white women213,230,245-247, but Asian and Latina women sometimes report lower230,248,249, higher213, or comparable levels247,250 of body surveillance and self-objectification compared to white women. Consistent with objectification theory, among Asian American women, greater body surveillance predicts greater body dissatisfaction, greater body shame, lower body esteem, greater consideration of cosmetic surgery, and higher eating disorder symptomatology248,250-253. Similar associations are reported among Asian national women in China, Korea, and Pakistan193,194,254,255. Analyses testing pathways between body surveillance, body shame, and disordered eating among Latina women also support objectification theory’s core model69,247,248,256. By contrast, among Black women, although greater body surveillance is linked to greater body shame, which in turn predicts more symptoms of disordered eating or reduced sexual agency70,229,247,257, these paths are sometimes weaker for Black women than for white women230,247,258.

Despite evidence that some associations emerge as expected among women of color, concerns have been raised about the meaning of these findings because the theories and measures were developed to reflect the experiences of white, Western women. Importantly, women of color face distinct beauty standards from their cultures of origin that are not reflected in typical assessments of self-objectification. Western beauty ideals prioritize thinness, pale skin, blond hair, and traditional European American facial features259. Norms for other cultural groups differ from this standard. For example, whereas many Asian cultures do value thinness and light skin, facial features and facial shape are often more central to judgments of women’s attractiveness than are bodily features252,260. To address these differences, scholars working with women of color have begun to incorporate culture-specific aspects into their assessments, including eye shape and size surveillance261, facial surveillance260, and skin-tone surveillance166,203,262, which are often more predictive of women’s well-being than the original body surveillance and self-objectification scales.

Objectification processes among women of color might also reflect the psychological impact of dueling appearance expectations. Women of color in majority white nations are exposed to two standards of beauty, rendering their social comparison processes more complex259. They might be surveilling their bodies and comparing themselves to both standards, must contend with appearance critiques and pressures from both cultures, and might feel highly conflicted in seeking to conform to two ideals252,259,263,264. Moreover, internalizing ideals that are not only unattainable but that specifically devalue racially-relevant features might be especially harmful. As such, internalizing each ideal might produce unique consequences that might vary based on proximity to the white ideal. According to theories of stigmatized groups265, Black women (who might be farther from the white ideal than Latina or Asian women) might feel more able to engage in adaptive disidentification from the historically oppressive white ideal, drawing instead on alternative in-group values266.

For women of color, the impact of these dueling appearance norms might also vary based on the strength of one’s ethnic or racial identity. Specifically, scholars have examined whether having an affirming ethnic or racial identify enables women of color to distance themselves from appearance expectations of the dominant culture60,70. Among Black women, holding positive feelings about one’s racial group is indeed associated with less body dissatisfaction267,268, lower internalization of mainstream beauty ideals268,269, fewer eating, shape, and weight concerns269, fewer maladaptive eating behaviors270, and greater body appreciation269. By contrast, among Asian American women, a strong ethnic or racial identity exacerbates body image concerns and is linked with a greater drive for thinness271, higher levels of body dissatisfaction259,272 (but see ref 273, for null results), and higher levels of disordered eating attitudes272. Moreover, for Asian American women, a strong ethnic or racial identity strengthens associations between pressure for thinness and body preoccupation274 and between appearance bias and body shame60. Because Asian and Eurocentric appearance standards overlap considerably, Asian women with a high ethnic or racial identity might experience added pressure to attain both standards60. Another possibility is that because many Asian cultures are collectivistic, such that personal goals are sublimated in favor of group goals, Asian American women with a strong ethnic or racial identity might experience additional pressures to conform to all cultural ideals, including appearance ideals248,274, and might perceive nonconformity as a failure that reflects badly on close others.

Furthermore, women of color are subjected to racialized forms of sexism and sexual objectification that are not experienced by white women275. Such racism includes stereotypes about group members (for example, sexually exotic ‘China Dolls’ or sexually insatiable Jezebels), teasing about phenotypic attributes (such as nose width or eye shape), racial fetishism and exotification, assumptions of a universal appearance (“they all look alike”), and other gendered racial microaggressions that often include inappropriate comments about the bodies, sexuality, and attractiveness of women of color97,253,261,264,276,277. These experiences are objectifying in that they treat women of color as caricatures instead of distinct individuals, fragment them and focus on specific body parts, judge them as less than human or not human, discount personal feelings or thoughts, and treat individual members as interchangeable251,277. These racialized objectification experiences might become internalized to create self-denigrating views of race-related features, promote greater adherence to white beauty standards, and possibly motivate unhealthy attempts to change one’s appearance261,278. Facing sexual objectification based on multiple social identities might make women of color more vulnerable to chronic self-objectification and to the violence that comes from dehumanization253,278.

To address this concern, scholars have begun to jointly examine objectification and racism251,252. For example, one study examined contributions of objectification variables and ethnic discrimination experiences to mental health among Latina women69. Both body surveillance and racial discrimination yielded significant, positive indirect associations with eating disorder and depressive symptomatology, mediated by body shame. New scales have also been developed to incorporate both phenomena. For example, assessments of gendered racial microaggressions include subscales addressing assumptions of beauty and sexual objectification (with items such as “objectified based on physical features”279). Among Black women, experiencing sexually objectifying gendered racial microaggressions more frequently and perceiving them as more stressful have each been associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms, greater psychological distress, lower body appreciation, and greater appearance-contingent self-worth168,277,279.

Finally, intersectionality theorists posit that individuals’ multiple intersecting identities shape their experiences in contextually-dependent ways, thereby leading to different sexual objectification experiences97,280. Using this framework, scholars have begun to test how sexual objectification processes are shaped by intersections of race, gender, and body size97, or how self-objectification varies within subgroups of Asian American women261. Future work should incorporate other social identities, such as class and sexual orientation.

To summarize, women of color face many of the pressures and consequences outlined by objectification theory and experienced by white women, but they also have distinct experiences shaped by culture-specific beauty ideals, dueling expectations, and interlocking systems of gender and racial oppression264. This multiplicity of experience demands awareness that current approaches might not fully capture the dehumanization to which women of color are subjected251.

**[H1] Summary and future directions**

Sexual objectification is a powerful force that permeates many aspects of women’s lives, including their consumption of traditional and social media and their everyday interpersonal interactions. This cultural prioritizing of women’s sexual appearance and appeal shapes assumptions about women. At the most basic level, sexually objectified women are perceived more negatively than non-objectified women and are seen as less competent and less fully human. Exposure to this cultural messaging has broad consequences for women’s well-being and violence toward women. A central consequence for women is self-objectification, that is, valuing one’s appearance and sexual appeal above other attributes. This self-perspective is harmful and is associated with a more negative body image; diminished mental, physical, and sexual health; and increased risk for eating disorders.

Much of the research on sexual objectification has focused on the deleterious effects of self-objectification on women. However, researchers should consider more deeply how sexual objectification is related to women’s ability to be autonomous members of society. For example, women in the U.S. recently lost federal protection of their bodily autonomy when the Supreme Court overturned the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling that federally protected a woman’s right to an abortion. Thus, women’s right to self-determination in the U.S. has been limited through a denial of their autonomy to control their reproduction. This denial of autonomy will have material, social, and psychological consequences for women forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term. In Iran, adolescent girls and young women demonstrated publicly against their government’s denial of their autonomy and attempts to silence them in the wake of the death of a 22-year-old woman, Mahsa Amini, who died in police custody for alleged non-compliance with a law mandating that women veil in public281. Thus, the sexual objectification of women in societies around the world has direct implications for women’s human rights including living as autonomous agents in their society. The issue of autonomy has been central to international law on human and women’s rights since World War II (for example in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), and women’s economic autonomy continues to be crucial to their ability to control their lives282. We encourage researchers to consider how sexual objectification influences all aspects of women’s humanity and their ability (or inability) to function within environments that sexually objectify their social group as a dominant practice.

Several other areas need further attention, as well. First, scholars should expand research on the consequences of sexual objectification. Given concerns about policy changes affecting women’s rights, more research is needed on the link between self-objectification and political action. Research has already shown that higher levels of self-objectification are associated with greater support for the gender status quo283,284 (but for null results, see ref 237), less intention to engage in gender-based social activism283,284, and lower levels of political interest, efficacy, and information-seeking285. Self-objectification might contribute to sustaining the gender status quo by directing women’s energies toward managing their external appearance at the expense of other domains and social issues286. Research should continue to explore these connections, incorporate current social policies and newer forms of activism, and investigate moderators of these associations. More research is also needed on the impact of self-objectification on women’s performance. Existing analyses have focused on performance on academic tests, such as math tests. Real-world and long-lasting effects on other performance domains should also be studied. For example, how do stronger tendencies to self-objectify influence women’s career choices or perseverance on challenging workplace tasks?

Second, as the media landscape expands and shifts, research approaches must evolve with it, especially investigations of social media. Current analyses of the prevalence of sexually objectifying images on social media have focused on specific hashtags such as ‘thinspiration’ and ‘fitspo’. Future research needs to look across content and platforms more broadly, including newer platforms such as Tik Tok, because the affordances of specific platforms are not equivalent287. Moreover, experimental studies that test the impact of sexually objectifying media on women’s mental health should include diverse types of sexually objectifying media, not just thin-ideal media.

Third, potential differences and changes in the nature or frequency of objectifying interactions and women’s reactions to them (including the tendency to self-objectify) across the lifespan should be examined. In particular, research should investigate whether these experiences vary with age or with particular life events such as pregnancy, breastfeeding, divorce, and menopause. Longitudinal research is needed to better understand the trajectory of sexual objectification across adulthood and to understand differential consequences for specific life stages. Expanding the populations studied beyond white college women will also help identify who is most vulnerable to the negative consequences of self-objectification.

Fourth, scholars need to continue theorizing about the nature and dynamics of the sexual objectification construct. Standardizing the operationalization and measurement of sexual objectification and sexualization would allow for better cross-study comparisons and identification of overall trends. There is also a need to theorize and empirically assess whether self-objectification and self-sexualization can be distinguished and, if so, if they yield different consequences.

Finally, more research is needed on potential protective factors and interventions (Box 4), perhaps borrowing from work conducted with adolescents. For example, data suggest that engagement in team sports is beneficial for enhancing feelings of embodiment among adolescent girls12. It would be useful to test similar premises among adult women of various ages. Similarly, it might be beneficial to examine the potential impact of empowering or counter-stereotypical media content, building on effective media literacy programs among youth (see ref 288 for meta-analytic review). Indeed, exposure to educational or empowering media campaigns has shown benefits among adult men289 and women290. Together, these efforts will expand knowledge about the wide-reaching consequences of sexual objectification and potential interventions to mitigate negative outcomes.

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Table 1.

*Popular scales for measuring self-objectification, self-sexualization and interpersonal objectification*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Scale name** | **Assesses** | **Total # of items** | **Subscales** | **Sample item** | **Psychometric properties** |
| Objectified Body Consciousness Scale10 | Extent to which women internalize cultural beauty standards and consider their body as an object for evaluation by men | 24 | Body surveillance | “During the day, I think about how I look many times”. | Cronbach’s α = .79 undergraduate women; .76 middle-aged women (Study 2) |
| Body shame | “When I am not the size I think I should be, I feel ashamed.” | Cronbach’s α = .84 undergraduate women; .70 middle-aged women (Study 2) |
| Appearance control beliefs | “I can weigh what I’m supposed to when I try hard enough.” | Cronbach’s α = .68 undergraduate women; .76 middle-aged women (Study 2) |
| Self-objectification Questionnaire212 | The extent to which individuals view their body in appearance-based vs. competence-based characteristics | 12 (subsequently shortened to 10 items) | - | Participants rate the importance of 6 appearance-based characteristics (for example, weight), and 6 competence-based characteristic (for example, muscular strength) to their physical self-concept. | N/A |
| Self-Objectification Beliefs and Behaviors Scale62 | Multi-dimensional measure of self-objectification in women | 14 | Internalizing an observer’s  perspective of the body | “I consider how my body will look to others in the clothing I am wearing.” | Cronbach’s α = .91 (Study 2) |
| Equating the body to who one is as a person and valuing appearance above other attributes | “How I look is more important to me than how I think or feel.” | Cronbach’s α = .92 (Study 2) |
| Interpersonal  Sexual Objectification Scale55 | Frequency with which women experience sexual objectification | 15 | Body evaluation | “How often have you felt that someone was staring at your body?” | Cronbach’s α = .92 and .94. (Study 3: T1 and T2, 3 weeks later) |
| Unwanted explicit sexual advances | “How often has someone made a degrading sexual gesture towards you?” | Cronbach’s α = .82 and .86. (Study 3: T1 and T2, 3 weeks later) |
| Interpersonal Sexual Objectification Scale—Perpetration Version291 | Frequency with which men or women perpetuate sexual objectification | 15 | Body gazes | “How often have you  leered at someone’s body?” | Women*: r*α = .87  Men: *r*α = .86  (Study 1) |
| Body comments | “How often have you made a rude, sexual remark about someone’s body?” | Women*: r*α = .80  Men: *r*α = .84  (Study 1) |
| Unwanted explicit sexual advances | “How often have you touched or fondled someone against her/his will?” | Women*: r*α = .88  Men: *r*α = .85  (Study 1) |
| Women’s Objectification of Women Scale292 | Frequency with which women experience objectification by other women | 9 | - | “Has a woman given you unwelcome advice about your appearance?” | Cronbach’s α = .88 (Study 4) |
| Men’s Objectification of Women Scale293 | Men's objectification of women | 22 or 12 (short form) | Internalized sexual objectification | “I often imagine what women I meet on a daily basis would be like in bed.” | 22-item form: Cronbach’s α = .92  12-item form: Cronbach’s α = .92 |
| Disempathy and commenting about women's bodies | “You can tell a lot about a woman’s sexual availability by how she looks.” | 22-item form: Cronbach’s α = .84  12-item form: Cronbach’s α = .72 |
| Insulting unattractive women | “I make jokes about ugly women.” | 22-item form: Cronbach’s α = .84  12-item form: Cronbach’s α = .84 |
| Objectification Perpetration Scale155 | Men’s objectifying attitudes about women including cognitions, motivations, and behaviors | 16 | Sex-based objectification | “It is sometimes okay for me to manipulate women to have sex with them.” | Cronbach’s α = .97 (Study 2) |
| Appearance-based objectification | “Whether a woman is attractive or not depends on what I think.” | Cronbach’s α = .88 (Study 2) |
| Scale for Pervasive Gaze and Gaze Provocation Behaviors in Heterosexual Women and Men294 | Pervasive body gaze towards others and provocative behaviors that invite gaze from others toward the self | 12 | Pervasive body gaze | “No matter where I am, I typically find myself looking at the bodies of men/women.” | Women*:* α = .86  Men: α = .88  (Study 1) |
| Body gaze provocation | “I make an effort to behave in a manner which attracts attention to my body.” | Women*:* α = .86  Men: α = .89  (Study 1) |
| Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale295 | The extent to which a woman enjoys sexualized, appearance-based attention from men | 8 | - | “It is important to me that men are attracted to me.” | Cronbach’s α = .86 (Study 2) |
| Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale-Revised296 | The extent to which one enjoys sexualized attention from individuals of a gender one is attracted to (the original scale measured male gaze specifically) | 8 | - | “I feel proud when people (of the gender I’m attracted to) compliment the way I look.” | Cronbach’s α = .83 (Study 2) |
| Self-Sexualization  Behavior Questionnaire for Women227 | The frequency with which college women engage in self-sexualizing behavior | 10 | - | “How often do you do the following things specifically in order to look sexy? Wear a low-cut blouse or dress? Remove or trim genital hair?” | Cronbach’s α = .84 (Study 3) |
| Sexualizing Behavior Scale297 | College women’s likelihood and/or acceptance of engaging in  sexualizing behavior | 10 | Own likelihood of participating in sexualizing behaviors  (Sexualizing Behavior) | How likely are you to take a pole dancing or strip aerobics class | Cronbach’s α = .78 |
| General acceptance of sexualizing behaviors  for women (Sexualizing Acceptance) | How appropriate is it for women to attend a female nude dance bar with male friends or boyfriend? | Cronbach’s α = .89 |

**Figure captions**

**Figure 1.****Theorized objectification processes.** Exposure to sexual objectification in society leads to self-objectification. With self-objectification, women value themselves predominantly for their body’s sexual appeal and less for their body functions, competencies, personality, or other traits. This narrow self-perception has extensive consequences for women’s cognitive performance and mental, physical, and sexual health. Adapted from refs2,6,10,212.

**Box 1**: **Theory and terminology**

Research on sexual objectification often features several terms including objectification, sexual objectification, and sexualization and their derivatives (such as objectified, sexualized), which are related but distinct constructs5. Much of the research on sexual objectification relies on objectification theory2 and theorizing on objectified body consciousness10 and sexualization4. However, although not as frequently considered, theorizing on dehumanization298 and its application to sexual objectification (animalistic vs. mechanistic dehumanization299) are also relevant. Furthermore, this research has been informed by important conceptual work outside of psychology.

For example, work in philosophy has outlined seven ways in which an individual can be objectified: instrumentality (treated as a tool for another’s purposes); denial of autonomy (right to self-determination is denied); inertness (treated as not having agency); fungibility (treated as interchangeable with others); violability (person’s bodily integrity is ignored); ownership (treated as another’s property); and denial of subjectivity (person’s experiences and feelings are ignored)300. According to this work, objectification can be—but is not necessarily—sexual. For example, parents might deny the autonomy of their young children. Denial of autonomy can also be sexual objectification, for example, when a woman is tied up with ropes in pornography. Later work added three additional forms of objectification: reduction to body (value another person for their body or body parts), reduction to appearance (value another person based on their aesthetics), and silencing (another person’s capacity for speech is ignored)301. Objectification scholars in psychology have drawn on some of these ideas (such as reduction to body) more heavily than others (such as fungibility).

At present, the field does not have a shared understanding of how sexual objectification and sexualization are distinct constructs. For example, researchers agree that sexual objectification entails a denial of mind and personhood as one is treated as an object by another, whereas sexualization entails a focus on another’s sexual appeal85,148. However, some researchers specify that sexualization involves valuing a person for their sexual appeal85 whereas others focus on visual aspects of sexualization (for example, level of undress148). Others have proposed that sexualization is a form of sexism5.

More broadly, researchers’ use of terminology to refer to sexual objectification and sexualization is variable and overlapping. Sometimes these terms are used synonymously. In other cases, researchers use a particular term (such as sexually objectified) over another term (sexualized), for the same experimental stimuli (for example, a woman wearing a bikini). The literature would benefit from more precise definitions of these constructs, consistent usage of terms and operationalizations, as well as clarity pertaining to the associated underlying theoretical frameworks.

**Box 2: Sexually objectifying environments**

One understudied source of sexual objectification are women’s experiences working in or moving through sexually objectifying environments, such as beauty pageants, strip clubs, or cheerleading competitions. In sexually objectifying environments attention is strongly oriented towards women’s bodies, they have little power over their surroundings, and male gaze is both approved of and encouraged. These conditions create an intensely immersive and objectifying experience, above and beyond the traditionally objectifying environments women navigate in their daily lives. Quantitative studies of waitresses working in sexually objectifying environments underscore their experiences of body shame and dissatisfaction302,303, anxiety, rumination, and disordered eating303, depression and diminished job satisfaction304, and burnout and intentions to leave the workplace305. These associations extend to related professions. For example, compared to college students, exotic dancers report higher levels of body surveillance and greater valuation of physical attractiveness over physical competence306.

Qualitative studies confirm that women working in these environments are aware of both everyday experiences of sexual objectification such as the male gaze, and more extreme versions such as unwanted touching and sexual harassment. They report that they are always being judged based on their bodies and are often required to follow strict regulations about their appearance307,308. Although the women acknowledge some benefits of these environments, including financial support, popularity (for example, high school cheerleaders309), or learning to set boundaries with men307, their working experiences are often fraught with negative emotions, a high degree of ambivalence, and appearance anxiety. Consequently, women in these environments report using a range of resistance strategies to cope with objectification and subsequent negative emotions, including setting personal rules about interactions with men, creating a separate work persona, detaching emotionally, and making light of unwanted attention307,308.

**Box 3: Sexual objectification versus sexual empowerment**

Some scholars have been critical of research focused on the negative effects of sexual objectification and self-objectification and have argued that sexual objectification can be enjoyable and self-objectification empowering. One critique is that research on sexual objectification overwhelmingly focuses on the harms associated with sexuality (especially women’s sexuality), thereby playing into cultural fears about the dangers of female sexual desire310. These critics argue that women’s sexual desire needs to receive equal attention from researchers who should ask whether sexualization or objectification can arise from women’s own agency and be empowering or lust-promoting311. These critiques appear to conflate sexual objectification with sexuality or sexual behaviors and desires more generally; however, these are distinct concepts which are generally not conflated by sexual objectification researchers312.

A second critique assumes that objectification theory constructs women as passive vessels with no agency to resist the objectifying messages they encounter in the broader culture313. However, objectification theory does not advance a deterministic model of the effects of objectification. Furthermore, it has inspired a large body of work seeking to understand ways in which various identities, beliefs, and actions can interrupt the pathway from objectification to self-objectification to negative mental and physical health consequences314.

In general, published work advancing the argument that sexual objectification can be empowering has been mainly theoretical. However, there is one relevant body of empirical work on the enjoyment of sexualization. Enjoyment of sexualization refers to the extent to which women find men’s sexual attention enjoyable, positive, and rewarding. However, the root cause of this enjoyment is up for debate. For example, a woman’s enjoyment of sexualization could be a sign that she is sexually agentic and empowered, and able to act on her own sexual desire. Alternatively, enjoyment of sexualization could be a sign of the brutal effectiveness of patriarchal oppression, in that the object of oppression is so well socialized that she comes to enjoy her own objectification. There is evidence to support both the positive (e.g., ref 315) and negative (e.g., ref 241) interpretation. One study sought to disentangle some of these mixed and conflicting results by testing how self-objectification and enjoyment of sexualization predict sexual health and empowerment225. Although enjoyment of sexualization was associated with greater entitlement to sexual pleasure, it was not linked with greater sexual assertiveness or satisfaction. These findings suggest that whereas women might enjoy the sexual attention they receive for their sexual appearance, they are not necessarily better positioned to enact behaviors that lead to the satisfaction of their sexual desires, even if they do feel more entitled to sexual pleasure.

**BOX 4: Potential protective factors and intervention strategies**

Given the negative consequences of sexual and self-objectification, effective strategies are needed to combat adverse outcomes. Although more research is required, there are promising initial results regarding potential protective factors and intervention strategies.

**[H1] Feminist beliefs and identity**

Several studies have found a mitigating role of feminist beliefs and feminist identity, such that these factors predict less body surveillance and shame316 and minimize the effects of Instagram usage on body surveillance317. Furthermore, a meta-analysis of 26 studies318 found a small but significant association (*r* = .12, *p* <.001) between feminist identity and positive body image. However, self-objectification was not explicitly assessed. Still, understanding the mechanisms behind this protective role requires further exploration. For example, feminist identity delivers greater protection against thin-ideal internalization (which is linked to self-objectification319), compared to feminist beliefs alone320. Additionally, there are inconsistencies regarding the protective nature of feminist beliefs in cases of upward appearance-focused social comparison and body image disturbance321. Whereas feminist beliefs protected against body image disturbance behaviors(such as body checking), they did not buffer against maladaptive cognitions(such as body dissatisfaction).

**[H1] Mindful self-compassion**

Mindful self-compassion typically includes self-kindness, mindfulness, and recognition of common humanity322. Correlational studies have established that mindful self-compassion protects against feelings of self-objectification, body shame, and body surveillance323-326. Mindful self-compassion interventions, including digital micro327,328 and multi-week interventions329, have also shown lasting effects in increasing body appreciation and reducing negative self-referential beliefs (body dissatisfaction, body shame, contingent appearance-based self-worth330-332) (for mixed and/or null results, see refs333,334).

**[H1] Function over form**

Functional awareness refers to a shift in one’s focus from the body’s appearance to how it functions and feels. Several interventions have attempted to promote functional awareness, including yoga programs335-339 and structured body functionality writing programs340,341. These programs decrease self-objectification and increase body appreciation, connectedness, and satisfaction. These benefits might arise from the association between interoceptive awareness (that is, awareness of internal physical sensations) and self-objectification, although the association is still not fully understood163,205,342,343. Additionally, sports participation has been associated with lower levels of self-objectification, mainly among adolescent girls344. Additionally, sports participation has been shown to be negatively associated with self-objectification. For example, in a study conducted with female adolescents, researchers found a negative relation between time spent participating in sports and self-reported levels of self-objectification344.

Although there is growing evidence to support the positive effects of function over form interventions, additional research is needed to understand the differential impacts of mode of delivery, dosage, functionality domain, and user identity345.

**[H1] Reducing beauty-based comparisons**

Finally, reductions in beauty-based social comparisons and increases in body-positive content exposure might minimize self-objectification. Several studies have manipulated social media use to reduce maladaptive social comparisons, which contribute to increased body-image disturbance and self-objectification346-348. For example, adolescents experienced decreased body shame and surveillance and increased mental states following a three-day social media fast, and these effects were mediated by improvements in self-compassion and self-esteem347. Fitness apps have also been shown to improve body satisfaction349, indicating that social media use focused on body function might buffer against self-objectification. Exposure to body-positive social media content (for example, content that celebrates body diversity and is not digitally manipulated) has also been shown to increase body satisfaction compared to thin-ideal content exposure, which increases self-objectification350,351. However, body-positive captions did not influence body perceptions, particularly when paired with thin-ideal images352,353. This discrepancy could indicate that the protective benefits of body-positive messaging might be limited to visual content.