5-2021

“You don’t see yourself:” On the relationship between women’s body appreciation, self-objectification, and sexual agency

Shelby Elizabeth Cronkhite
Bates College, scronkhi@bates.edu

“You don’t see yourself:” On the relationship between women’s body appreciation, self-objectification, and sexual agency

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Psychology

Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Shelby Cronkhite

Lewiston, Maine

5/5/2021

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my greatest appreciation and deepest gratitude to the following persons who have contributed to making this study possible:

Kathryn Graff Low, Ph.D., my thesis advisor, for her support, guidance, encouragement, and knowledgeable suggestions. Her expertise was invaluable in formulating my research questions, model, and methodology. Her insightful feedback throughout the entire process pushed me to think more deeply about complex concepts and brought my work to a higher level.

Stella Santucci, for her assistance with data coding.

Shae-Lynn Fortier and **Emily Thibodeau** for being the sources of inspiration for this project.

My family and friends for their never-ending support and kind words of encouragement.

Table of Contents

Abstract

Based on objectification theory, this study investigated the relationship between body appreciation, self-objectification, and sexual agency in heterosexual and sexual minority women. This study hoped to elucidate a model of objectification and sexual health outcomes similar to that established by Claudat and Warren (2014); replicate the findings of Grower and Ward (2018) on the unique contributions of body appreciation to sexual agency; and fill the gap in the objectification literature identified by Kahalon et al. (2018) by investigating the effects of inducing a state of self-objectification based on safety concerns. In a cross-sectional design, 138 female college students ages 18-22 completed an online survey measuring objectification, body appreciation, and sexual agency, as well as one of three writing manipulations, to test whether self-objectification via the "sex object" schema activation mechanism could be induced (Kahalon, Shnabel, & Becker, 2018b). Hypotheses were tested using correlation analyses and mixed ANOVA. A series of multiple regression analyses were used to test the proposed model of the relationships between objectification, body appreciation, and sexual assertiveness. The results suggest no differences in key variables by sexual orientation. Moreover, trait-objectification was negatively related to body appreciation through self-surveillance. Body appreciation, in turn, was positively associated with sexual assertiveness. Body appreciation was also a unique predictor of other sexual health variables. Finally, the writing manipulation was unsuccessful in selectively inducing self-objectification based on safety concerns. Overall, the results of this study highlight the importance of cultivating body appreciation for women's sexual and psychological well-being.

"You don't see yourself:" [1] On the relationship between women's body appreciation, self-objectification, and sexual agency

When a woman looks in the mirror, what does she see? Many body image experts and cultural commentators alike would argue that what she observes is not her-self, but imperfections, vulnerabilities, and disappointment at failing to live up to internalized beauty ideals. Body image encompasses a woman's cognitive and emotional conceptions about her body (Cash & Smolak, 2011) and is socially constructed and learned (Woertman & van den Brink, 2012). Like body image, female sexuality is a complex phenomenon that includes sexual self-perceptions often intertwined with socially constructed values and norms (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006). Sexuality and sexual well-being are integral parts of the human experience and physical and psychological health. Sexual health is not simply "the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Still, it requires positive, respectful, and consenting sexual relationships, including pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, "free of coercion, discrimination, and violence" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019; Higgins, Mullinax, Trussell, Kenneth Davidson, & Moore, 2011, p. 1643). Research has frequently demonstrated the negative effects of having an objectified view of one's body on physical, psychological, and sexual well-being (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Much of the past research on objectification has focused on negative aspects of body image, including self-objectification, and their relationships with poorer sexual health and decreased sexual agency. However, more recently, researchers such as Satinsky, Reece, Dennis, Sanders, and Bardzell (2012) and Grower and Ward (2018) have directed their attention to the

[1] The above quotation should be attributed to Robert Vazquez-Pacheco.
Vazquez-Pacheco, R. (2005). Ken Chu You Don't See Yourself. In E. H. Kim, M. Machida, & S. Mizota (Authors), *Fresh talk, daring gazes: Conversations on Asian American art* (pp. 99-101). University of California Press.

protective effects of body appreciation on women's sexual experiences and agency. In line with their research, the current study aimed to understand the role of body appreciation in the sexual health and agency of heterosexual and sexual minority women.

Objectification Theory

Frederickson and Roberts (1997) first offered objectification theory as a framework for understanding women's experiences in a sexually objectifying culture by first observing that women in Western culture are frequently treated as objects or reduced to the function of their body parts. Moreover, women's value is often determined by their appearance and the ability of their body parts to please others, particularly heterosexual men. As a result, women are socialized to experience themselves from the perspective of an observer, engaging in continuous body-monitoring- a process known as 'spectatoring'- to determine their worth to society (Manago, Monique Ward, Lemm, Reed, & Seabrook, 2015; Masters & Johnson, 1970). Internalizing an observer's perspective can cause women to develop habitual self-consciousness as their bodies are continually observed, evaluated, and sexually objectified- even by the women themselves.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) posit that this kind of self-consciousness can induce negative psychological consequences in women such as recurrent shame (if they believe they have failed to measure up to internalized beauty standards) and anxiety regarding their appearance and physical safety (i.e., fear of sexual assault). Moreover, this form of self-consciousness is theorized to decrease women's experiences of peak motivational states, or "flow," and their awareness of internal bodily states (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Winn & Cornelius, 2020). Some of these negative mental health consequences are thought to be contingent on women's experiences of feeling dehumanized and lacking power (Manago et al.,

2015), while others are likely dependent on the reality that habitual body monitoring takes up immense cognitive capacity. For example, Meana and Nunnink (2006) found that appearance distraction was negatively correlated with sexual satisfaction.

According to objectification theory, when women experience their bodies from an outsider's perspective, their ability to engage in the present is limited and interferes with their awareness of bodily states and sexual desire (Masters & Johnson, 1970). The accumulation of these negative effects places women with an objectified view of their bodies at risk for depression, eating disorders, and sexual dissatisfaction and dysfunction (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Winn & Cornelius, 2020). Studies of the association between objectification and women's sexual well-being have largely supported Fredrickson and Robert's hypotheses (Calogero & Thompson, 2009; Curtin, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2011; Littleton, Breitkopf, & Berenson, 2005; Manago et al., 2015; Moradi & Huang, 2008; Parent & Moradi, 2015).

Self-Objectification vs. Sexual Objectification

Two important components of objectification theory terminology merit further distinction here. Sexual objectification refers to situations in which a person is reduced to the sexual parts and functions of her body. On the other hand, self-objectification refers to a consequence of repeated sexual objectification or a *self*-perspective that involves the general viewing of oneself through the eyes of a third person. Importantly, experiences of sexual objectification often take place outside of a woman's control and then may be internalized in the form of self-objectification (Calogero, 2012).

Sexual objectification can manifest in many different ways, including situations like leering or commenting on women's bodies, cat-calling female passersby, exposure to sexualized media and pornography, sexual harassment and violence, and rape (Calogero, 2012). According

to psychologist Rachel M. Calogero, sexual objectification commonly plays out in two areas: first, in actual interpersonal encounters with familiar individuals (i.e., family, friends, peers, employers, etc.) or with strangers, and second, in media encounters. Media encounters of sexual objectification occur in television, sports programs, commercials, music videos and lyrics, video games, magazines, newspapers, and more. Feminist theorists argue that as women accumulate sexually objectifying experiences, they are at greater risk of internalizing the objectification (Calogero & Thompson, 2009; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Research indicates that sexual objectification is a regular occurrence for most women in the United States. In addition to everyday experiences of sexual objectification, a great number of women have also experienced more severe forms of sexual objectification including sexual victimization (i.e., sexual harassment, rape, sexual assault; Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2010). According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), close to one-third of undergraduate women experience rape or sexual assault via physical force, violence, or incapacitation (RAINN, 2020). Women's self-reported experiences of sexual victimization increase their risk for negative psychological outcomes such as depression and PTSD (Koss, Bailey, Yuan, Herrera, & Lichter, 2003; Szymanski et al., 2010).

Sexual objectification also often intersects with women's other sociocultural identities, including sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, and social class. For example, lesbian and same-sex female relationships are becoming more sexualized and exploited in the media, possibly to fulfill the fantasies of some male audience members about having sexual relations with multiple women at a time (Szymanski et al., 2010). Moreover, media frequently portrays African American and Black women as sexually aggressive or sexually victimized, while Asian American women are typically depicted as sexually subservient and exotic. The intersections of

gender with other sociocultural identities may place some women at a greater risk for sexual- and self-objectification (Szymanski et al., 2010).

According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), self-objectification is one of the first psychological consequences for women living in a sexually objectifying culture (Calogero, 2012; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Studies with U.S. samples of women suggest that through self-objectification, sexual objectification reinforces traditional ideologies about femininity that discourage women from asserting themselves and their desires in sexual encounters. Therefore, greater self-objectification is associated with decreased confidence in women negotiating safe sex practices with sexual partners (Littleton et al., 2005; Parent & Moradi, 2015) as well as other negative outcomes for women, including unprotected sex, diminished sexual satisfaction (Curtin et al., 2011), and lower sexual self-efficacy (Manago et al., 2015).

One behavioral manifestation of heightened self-objectification is body surveillance (e.g., Slater & Tiggemann, 2010). Researchers have found that body surveillance correlates with lower levels of sexual satisfaction in women. This relationship is mediated by sexual self-esteem, body shame, and body self-consciousness (Calogero & Thompson, 2009; Claudat & Warren, 2014). Importantly, the results of these studies support Fredrickson and Robert's predictions about the effects of self-objectification on women's sexual, psychological, and physical well-being, suggesting the need for protective interventions to mitigate self-objectifying behavior.

Studies of self-objectification reliably find that heterosexual women and sexual minority women have similar levels of experience with sexual objectification. However, the link between sexual objectification and self-objectification is less understood for women who identify as lesbians (Cherkasskaya & Rosario, 2019). For example, in their study of objectification theory's applicability to women who identify as lesbians, Kozee and Tylka (2006) found higher levels of

body surveillance in young adult women who identify as lesbians compared to heterosexual women. Kozee and Tylka (2006) suggest that women who identify as lesbians may be more likely to self-surveil to avoid being dismissed or ridiculed because their sexual orientations violate the dominant heterosexual culture. Some theorists argue that internalized sexual objectification may intersect with internalized heterosexism. Therefore internalized heterosexism may lead some women who identify as lesbians to devalue same-sex relationships and place greater value on heterosexuality and the associated heterosexist expectations of womanhood, thus making them more likely to self-objectify and surveil (Szymanski et al., 2010). However, we could also speculate that women who identify as lesbians engage in more self-monitoring to ensure their appearance signals their orientation to other women and potential partners.

In contrast to Kozee and Tylka's (2006) findings, Hill and Fischer's (2008) found that women ages 18-61 years old who identify as lesbians reported significantly less body surveillance than heterosexual women. This discrepancy may be due to the samples including different age groups of women. However, Hill and Fischer (2008) also found no difference by sexual orientation in women's sexual- and self-objectification experiences. Finally, Engeln-Maddox, Miller, and Doyle (2011) found lower reports of self-surveillance in a community sample of women who identify as lesbians compared to women who identify as heterosexual. Based on their findings, the authors hypothesized that the gaze of other women may be less problematic and more relevant for women who identify as lesbians. In sum, the relationship between self-objectification and sexual orientation is still unclear.

Trait vs. State Self-Objectification

According to objectification theory, self-objectification can be both a state and a trait (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). State self-objectification represents a woman's *situational*

awareness or “activated internalization” of the objectifying perspective of an actual or imaginary observer toward her body (Winn & Cornelius, 2020, p.2). This awareness is followed by a subsequent preoccupation with her appearance (Kahalon et al., 2018a). On the other hand, trait self-objectification refers to the extent to which a woman has internalized an observer’s perspective toward her body and is chronically preoccupied with her body and appearance (Kahalon et al., 2018a). The word “trait” does not indicate complete resistance to change in this case but signifies some stability across situations.

Trait self-objectification may be evaluated using the Self-Objectification Questionnaire (SOQ; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998). The SOQ asks participants to rank ten different body attributes in the order of their importance to their physical self-concept. Five items are appearance-based, while the other five are related to physical ability and functioning. The sum of the ranks given to physical ability and functioning attributes is subtracted from the appearance-based attributes. Therefore, higher scores indicate greater importance placed on physical appearance.

In a related vein, there are several common measures used to assess state self-objectification. The Twenty Statements Test (TST; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998) is often used as a manipulation check in studies that intend to induce state self-objectification. On the TST, participants are asked to describe themselves using 20 statements. The more statements that relate to a participant’s body shape or physical attributes indicate greater state self-objectification. Moreover, the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS; McKinley & Hyde, 1996) has been used to measure trait self-objectification and can also be adapted to measure state self-objectification. For example, Breines, Crocker, and Garcia (2008) adapted the

self-surveillance subscale of the OBCS to evaluate participants' current (or state) preoccupation with their bodies.

Another measure used to assess a similar state-based kind of self-consciousness is the Body Image Self-Consciousness During Sexual Activity Scale (Wiederman, 2000). Relatively few studies have integrated measurements of body self-consciousness during sexual activity into studies of objectification theory. Instead, many studies focus on trait-level and dispositional evaluations of the body (i.e., body dissatisfaction). However, in their study of American female college students, Claudat and Warren (2014) incorporated a state measure of body image (the Body Image Self-Consciousness During Sexual Activity Scale) to account for the fact that women's body image experiences are likely to change relative to different situations (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Researchers found that body surveillance predicted increased body shame after controlling for BMI and relationship status and that body shame partially mediated the relationship between body surveillance and increased body self-consciousness during sexual activity. Moreover, they reported that controlling for body self-consciousness during sexual activity weakened (i.e., fully mediated) the positive association between body shame and decreased sexual satisfaction. (Claudat & Warren, 2014). Notably, body surveillance and shame were assessed at trait levels in the Claudat and Warren (2014) study, whereas body self-consciousness during sexual activity was included as a state measure.

As was briefly alluded to above, objectification theory identifies four central outcomes of women's self-objectification, including body shame, reduced "flow" experiences, appearance and safety anxiety, and diminished awareness of internal bodily states (Calogero, 2012; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Kahalon et al. (2018) identified several limitations of the current body of research on self-objectification. They argue that certain predicted outcomes of self-

objectification- specifically, safety anxiety, reduced "flow" experiences, and decreased awareness of internal bodily states- have not been examined sufficiently. Kahalon et al. (2018) also provided a model through which four different mechanisms trigger the negative effects of objectification: (a) appearance monitoring, (b) experience of discrepancy from appearance standards, (c) stereotype threat, and (d) activation of the "sex object" schema. Although the current study sought to investigate appearance monitoring as a mechanism impacting sexual agency, it also attempted to implement a priming manipulation to activate the "sex object" schema and understand the relationships between this mechanism, self-objectification, and body appreciation.

Sexual Agency

As discussed above, objectification theory has clear implications for women's sexual well-being. However, many studies in the past have conceptualized women's sexuality based on measures of physiological functioning and condom use self-efficacy (Satinsky et al., 2012), in large part missing women's subjective experiences of their sexuality. In their research of women's body appreciation, objectification, and sexual health outcomes, Grower and Ward (2018) measured sexual agency as a new way of conceptualizing women's sexuality. Sexual agency is a construct that reflects a woman's awareness of herself as a sexual agent. It also encompasses her ability to recognize and communicate her sexual desires and needs to herself and her sexual partner(s), and initiate behaviors that will lead to the satisfaction of her sexual desires (Grower & Ward, 2018).

Sexual agency has at least two dimensions: sexual subjectivity and sexual assertiveness. First, sexual subjectivity has been defined as "the pleasure we get from our bodies and the experiences of living in a body" (Martin, 2018, p.10) and a woman's "sense of sexual ownership

and bodily competence" (Cherkasskaya & Rosario, 2019, p.1672). Sexual subjectivity is a dimension composed of three elements, including sexual body-esteem; sexual desire and pleasure; and sexual self-reflection (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006). Adolescent girls who were high in sexual subjectivity also reported greater attunement to internal aspects of sexuality, such as sexual feelings, motivations, desires, tendencies, and preferences (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006). Those who were high in sexual subjectivity were also more likely to engage in safe-sex behaviors and were less likely to self-silence during sexual encounters and endorse sexual double standards (Cherkasskaya & Rosario, 2019; Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006).

Furthermore, in one study of female undergraduates at a large Midwestern university, researchers found significant negative associations between self-objectification and sexual subjectivity (Cary, Maas, & Nuttall, 2020). According to Calogero (2012), this relationship may be explained partly by the idea that self-objectification draws from a pool of limited cognitive resources. Therefore, devoting cognitive capacity to imagining how one's body is perceived by a partner rather than to other subjective aspects of a sexual experience compromises sexual satisfaction (Calogero, 2012).

The research on sexual subjectivity has, in a limited way, been extended to sexual minority women as well. Those studies that include sexual minority women suggest that these women score higher in sexual subjectivity than heterosexual women (Ussher, 2005; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). According to feminist scholars Diamond (2005) and Fine (1988), sexual minority women engage in important cognitive processes when grappling with same-sex sexual desire, arousal, and pleasures (as well as the social ramifications). These processes may allow them to become more aware of and more resistant to the cultural norms that generally undermine and discourage women's sexual desire. Furthermore, researchers who conducted interviews with

a young group of self-identified lesbians found that these women were empowered by their experiences of being another woman's object of desire and recognizing their own desirability that resulted from those experiences (Ussher, 2005; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). The authors concluded that their experience was more empowering because the women could either be active (sexual subject) or passive (sexual object) fluidly and without losing their sense of agency. Women in intimate relationships with men may feel more passive and may not experience the same empowerment in their sexual relationships as women in same-sex relationships (Ussher, 2005; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000; Cherkasskaya & Rosario, 2019).

In a related vein, Boislard and Zimmer-Gembeck (2011) found an association between women's same-sex sexual experience and greater entitlement to self-pleasure, greater sexual self-efficacy, and increased sexual self-reflection. This research indicates that women's sexual agency may vary by sexual orientation, possibly due to their level of sexual subjectivity and knowledge of what is sexually pleasing to them.

Another critical dimension of sexual agency is sexual assertiveness. Sexual assertiveness describes a woman's ability to reject unwanted sexual situations, effectuate wanted sexual situations, negotiate the use of protection, and communicate about sexual history with a partner(s). Past research has found that sexual assertiveness is positively correlated with body appreciation and sexual satisfaction (Neelen, 2018). Furthermore, in one study of sexual compliance behavior (i.e., consenting to and/ or engaging in sexual activies despite low self-reported sexual want), researchers reported that sexual assertiveness moderated the relationship between sexual want (desire for sexual activity) and sexual consent (Darden, Ehman, Lair, & Gross, 2019). Darden et al. (2019) also reported that women who scored low on sexual assertiveness scored high on sexual compliance. In another study, which separated refusal sexual

assertiveness (RSA) and initiation sexual assertiveness (ISA), researchers found that assertiveness in non-sexual situations was only one of several variables that predicted RSA and ISA, suggesting that there is something distinct about assertiveness in sexual contexts (Bouchard & Humphreys, 2019). Moreover, the authors found no significant differences in predictors of RSA and ISA by sexual orientation. However, they did note that LBQ+ women reported lower levels of RSA than heterosexual women overall (Bouchard & Humphreys, 2019).

Although there is mounting evidence linking women's experiences of sexual objectification and sexual assault, it is still largely unclear why this relationship exists. While in no way blaming women for their experiences of sexual victimization, objectification theory suggests that repeated experiences of sexual objectification trigger psychological processes in women (i.e., self-objectifcation) that could increase their risk for sexual victimization (Franz, DiLillo, & Gervais, 2016; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Using path analysis, Franz et al. (2016) found that higher body evaluation, a measure of sexual objectification by others, predicted sexual victimization both directly and indirectly through higher body surveillance and lower sexual assertiveness among their sample of undergraduate women. These findings underscore the adverse effects of repeated sexual objectification on women's psychological and sexual health.

One of the most widely used measures of sexual assertiveness is the Sexual Assertiveness Scale for Women (SAS), which measures three components of sexual assertiveness: initiation of desired sexual activity (ISA), refusal of unwanted sexual activity (RSA), and condom use insistence. Despite its popularity, this measure has several clear limitations. For example, condom use insistence is not generalizable to women in all relationships or stages of life, such as women who do not engage in penetrative sex or women in sexually monogamous relationships. Moreover, although some women may also choose not to insist on condom use based on their

own sexual preferences, they would appear to have low sexual assertiveness on the SAS (Bouchard & Humphreys, 2019). Another commonly used measure of sexual assertiveness is the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness. This measure takes a unidimensional approach, assessing primarily women's ability to communicate and initiate desired sexual activities. Because our sample included both heterosexual and sexual minority women, and because of the limitations of some dimensions of the SAS, we chose to use the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness as a proxy for sexual agency in the current study.

Body Appreciation

Advocates for a positive approach to psychology suggest that to fully understand the impact of body image on women's sexual health, researchers must study both its negative and positive features. Body appreciation pushes further than typical body image measures to evaluate women's respect, acceptance, and positive opinions about their bodies and their ability to recognize and reject unrealistic cultural standards of appearance and attractiveness (Ramseyer Winter, Satinsky, & Jozkowski, 2015). In past studies, women who scored higher on measures of body appreciation also reported greater body esteem and less body shame and self-objectification (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005). In one study on the impact of thin-idealized media exposure, women who reported greater body appreciation were protected from negative media exposure effects. In contrast, in women with low body appreciation, media exposure was correlated with more bodily concerns. Body appreciation was even found to be protective among women who appeared to have internalized the thin-ideal (Halliwell, 2013).

Moreover, women's body appreciation can manifest in behavioral differences. For example, Andrew, Tiggemann, and Clark (2016) found that body appreciation, over and above body dissatisfaction, predicted greater use of sun protection and more regular skin screenings.

These studies indicate that body appreciation has positive effects on both women's psychological and physical health.

Much of the existing research investigating women's body image and sexual orientation has focused on comparing women who identify as lesbians to those who identify as heterosexual. In their meta-analysis of the literature on women's body image and sexual orientation, Morrison, Morrison, and Sager (2004) found that body satisfaction was not significantly different in women who identify as lesbians versus those who identify as heterosexual. However, the results of individual studies are inconsistent (Ramseyer Winter et al., 2015). Ramseyer Winter et al. (2015) examined the differences in body appreciation between women who identify as heterosexual and LBQ+. Sexual minority women reported slightly higher mean body size and slightly greater body appreciation than heterosexual women, though the effect size of the latter finding was very small (Ramseyer Winter et al., 2015). One recent study found no sexual-orientation-based differences in body or sexual dissatisfaction. However, the researchers did note that body concerns had less of an effect on sexual dissatisfaction in women who identify as lesbians than in women who identify as bisexual or heterosexual (Moreno-Domínguez, Raposo, & Elipe, 2019). Using data from a large-scale national probability sample from New Zealand, Basabas, Greaves, Barlow, and Sibley (2019) found no significant differences in ratings of heterosexual, "plurisexual," and lesbian women's body satisfaction. Finally, in their meta-analysis of effect sizes from 75 primary studies published between 1986 and 2019, He, Sun, Lin, and Fan (2020) found that sexual minority and heterosexual women had no difference in body dissatisfaction and that lesbian and bisexual women had no difference in body dissatisfaction.

Researchers who have found significantly better body image among sexual minority women have proposed that lesbian subculture may have different and less strict body norms that

shield women who identify with that subculture from heteronormative beauty standards (Brown, 1987; Alvy, 2013). These subcultures include ‘femme’ and ‘butch’ cultures, which emphasize different presentation norms and expressions of femininity. Meyer, Blissett, and Oldfield (2001) suggest that femininity may influence women’s levels of body satisfaction and the extent to which they internalize heteronormative ideals, with more feminine presenting sexual minority women being more susceptible to body dissatisfaction than less feminine presenting or ‘butch’ sexual minority women. A limited number of studies have compared bisexual and lesbian women and generally reported no or small differences in body dissatisfaction (Steele et al., 2019). However, Hazzard et al. (2019) reported that the effect of internalizing the “thin-ideal” on body dissatisfaction was greater for bisexual women than lesbian women. These authors speculated that lesbian women may encounter less pressure for thinness from their romantic partners than bisexual women (Hazzard et al., 2019).

On the other hand, researchers who have found no significant body image differences between heterosexual women and sexual minority women propose that gender, and gendered societal norms of attractiveness, have a greater impact on body image than sexual orientation (Ramseyer Winter et al., 2015). The conflicting literature suggests that body image is a multifaceted construct that may have different implications for sexual minority women than heterosexual women, especially concerning sexual health.

Body appreciation also has important implications for women’s sexual health and satisfaction. Of particular interest to the current study is the impact of body appreciation on women’s sexual agency. Past research has shown that college women who report greater body appreciation are more comfortable talking to their partner(s) about sex (Ramseyer Winter, Gillen, & Kennedy, 2018). Moreover, another study found that greater body comfort was associated

with higher levels of sexual assertiveness, lower levels of risky sexual behavior, and higher condom use self-efficacy among undergraduate women (Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2005).

Similarly, Grower and Ward (2018) investigated the relationship between body appreciation and sexual agency in heterosexual college-age women. They examined whether body appreciation was associated with sexual agency, above and beyond self-objectification. The authors found that women with more body appreciation also reported greater condom use self-efficacy, sexual satisfaction, and sexual assertiveness, and less body self-consciousness during sexual encounters. Further, women with greater body appreciation reported more feelings of entitlement to pleasure. Importantly, these findings were consistent even when self-objectification was placed in the model as a covariate (Grower & Ward, 2018). This research highlights the importance of body appreciation as a protective factor for sexual agency in (heterosexual) women. However, it does not address the impact of body appreciation on the sexual agency of sexual minority women. Besides those cited above, to our knowledge, there are no other studies that address this question for women who identify as lesbians or bisexual.

The Current Study

Many studies have demonstrated the adverse effects of having an objectified view of one's body on physical, psychological, and sexual well-being (e.g., Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Past research has primarily investigated the negative impacts of self-objectification on body image and the relationship of these variables to poorer sexual health and decreased sexual agency. The current study aimed to understand whether body appreciation might function as a protective mechanism against the harmful effects of self-objectification on women's sexual health and agency. Moreover, we hoped to determine if inducing a state of objectification based

on safety concerns, in contrast to appearance, would alter participants' tendencies to participate in self-objectifying cognitions and behavior.

In part, this study hoped to develop a similar model to that of Claudat and Warren (2014). Our investigation also examined the effects of sexual orientation on the relationships between trait and state self-objectification, body appreciation, and sexual agency. As in Grower and Ward (2018), we used body appreciation instead of another facet of positive body image because a significant relationship between body appreciation and women's sexual well-being has already been established (e.g., Satinsky et al., 2012; Grower & Ward, 2018). Furthermore, while body appreciation is an established aspect of positive body image, high self-objectification is a validated contributor to negative body image (Grower & Ward, 2018). We included measures of both body appreciation and self-objectification in this study to determine if body appreciation is associated with measures of sexual agency above and beyond self-objectification (in both heterosexual and sexual minority women), as was reported by Grower and Ward (2018). Finally, we chose sexual agency instead of another measure of sexual function because agency taps into the association between women's feelings about their bodies and their power to make decisions in their sexual lives.

In hopes of contributing to the gap in the literature identified by Kahalon et al. (2018), we also included a priming manipulation of state self-objectification through "sex object" schema activation to determine if a safety threat induced comparable levels of objectification as that seen for appearance-related concerns. One-third of our participants were asked to write about an experience in which they felt objectified. Another one-third of our participants were asked to write about an experience in which they were objectified and felt unsafe. Finally, the remaining

participants were asked to write about an innocuous situation. We posit the following hypotheses:

- Women who report more self-objectification- regardless of sexual orientation- will also report lower levels of sexual agency, reflected in reports of less sexual assertiveness and lower sexual subjectivity.
- Women who appreciate their bodies more- regardless of sexual orientation- will also report more sexual agency (i.e., greater sexual assertiveness and sexual subjectivity).
- Body appreciation will be negatively correlated with state and trait self-objectification and positively correlated with sexual agency.
- As reported by Grower and Ward (2018), body appreciation will be associated with women's sexual agency, above and beyond variance due to self-objectification, regardless of sexual orientation.
- Based on the findings of Ramseyer Winter et al. (2015), sexual minority women will report higher levels of body appreciation than heterosexual women.
- Women who think about an objectifying and unsafe experience will include fewer appearance-related objectifying statements in the post-manipulation Twenty Statements Test than women in the objectification-neutral condition. Women in the objectifying-unsafe condition will also report greater body surveillance after the manipulation than women in the objectifying-neutral and control conditions

The ultimate goal of this investigation was to establish a model that connects objectification, body appreciation, and sexual agency, and to determine if body appreciation could be a protective mechanism against objectification and increase sexual agency in young adult women.

Method

Participants

A sample of 138 female college students ages 18-22 participated in this study. Participants were primarily recruited from the Bates College Psychology 101 pool and were rewarded course extra credit for their participation. Of the initial 138 initial participants, four were excluded because they indicated that they identified as male, and another 49 were excluded due to incomplete responses.

Of the final study sample (n = 85), 69.5% (n = 59) self-identified as White, while the remaining participants (28.2%; n = 24) identified as Women of Color. The majority of participants identified as heterosexual (74.1%; n = 63), while the remaining participants identified as sexual minorities (23.5%; n = 20). Two participants did not provide their racial identification or sexual orientation. Participants self-identified as first years (36.5%; n = 31), second years (27.1%; n = 23), third years (16.5%; n = 14), fourth years (14.1%; n = 12), or other (3.5%; n = 3.5). Two participants did not indicate their class year. Participants were of average BMI (M_{BMI} = 22.75, SD = 4.37, range 17.22-41.96). When asked to describe their current level of experience with dating and sexual relationships, participants reported one to two sexual relationships on average ($M_{experience}$ = 6.20, SD = 2.91, range 1-11). Participant characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

Procedure

Participants completed an online survey for this study and were required to sign an electronic consent form before beginning the survey (see Appendix). After giving consent, all participants completed the following measures:

- Ten item version of the Twenty Statements Test (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998).

- The Surveillance and Shame subscales of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996).
- The Trait Self-Objectification Questionnaire (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998).
- The Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (Pierce & Hurlbert, 1999).
- The Female Sexual Subjectivity Inventory (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006).
- The Body Appreciation Scale-2 (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005).
- The Body Image Self-Consciousness During Sexual Activity Scale (Wiederman, 2000).
- Demographic information (i.e., sexual orientation, race, age, sexual experience, income, BMI, and year in college).

Participants' sexual experience was measured using a scale developed by Grower and Ward (2018).

After completing the above measures, participants were directed to one of three prompts. The first prompt asked participants to “describe a time in which a person focused on your body and physical appearance rather than your personality” (objectified-neutral). The second prompt asked participants to “describe a time in which a person focused on your body and physical appearance rather than your personality, and you felt unsafe” (objectified-unsafe). The third prompt asked participants to “describe a routine event that you engaged in yesterday” (neutral event). The first and second prompt were followed by a brief description of settings in which objectification may have occurred (i.e., “this experience could have taken place in a gym, a nightclub, a party, or a number of other settings;” Loughnan, Baldissarri, Spaccatini, & Elder, 2017). All participants were asked to write a minimum of three sentences describing their experience.

After this manipulation, participants were prompted to complete the ten-item version of the Twenty Statements Test, the body surveillance and body shame subscales of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale, and the Body Appreciation Scale-2. We adapted the body-image measures to assess participants' current (state) feelings (i.e., "I am comfortable in my body right now"). Finally, participants were directed to a debriefing statement, including resources and the researchers' contact information (see Appendix).

We collected data using Qualtrics and stored the data online. Participants' responses included no identifying information such as email addresses.

Measures

1. Ten-Item Version of the Twenty Statements Test. The ten-item version of the Twenty Statements Test (TST) was used to examine the extent of appearance-based self-objectification by each participant. Before the manipulation, participants were asked to complete ten "I am…" statements. After the manipulation, participants completed the same exercise. Participants' responses were coded by one independent coder who was blind to the hypotheses and experimental conditions and one researcher using the coding scheme developed by Calogero (2013). Inter-rater reliability was high (96.8% agreement). Responses were coded for references to body shape, weight, and general physical appearance. We predicted that participants experiencing more appearance-based self-objectification should have used more appearance-related descriptors than those experiencing objectification based on concerns about safety and those not experiencing self-objectification. The TST has been used as a manipulation check of self-objectification in numerous studies with induced self-objectification conditions (see Calogero, 2013; Kahalon et al., 2018; Register, Katrevich, Aruguete, & Edman, 2015).

2. Body Surveillance and Shame. Body surveillance and shame (i.e., measures of self-objectification) were assessed using the 8-item Surveillance and the 8-item Shame subscales of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). These scales were used to measures women's habitual (trait) and induced (state) monitoring of their appearance. Participants were required to rate their level of agreement with eight statements on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to six (strongly agree). For the first round of assessment, sample items included, "I think it is more important that my clothes are comfortable than whether they look good on me" and "I feel ashamed of myself when I haven't made the effort to look my best." After completing the writing prompt manipulation, participants were asked to complete the assessments again, with the questions slightly manipulated to assess participants' feelings toward their bodies in the moment. For example, sample items on the second assessment included, "Right now, I think it is more important that my clothes are comfortable than whether they look good on me." For each participant, we calculated a pre- and post-manipulation total and mean scores (of the two subscales, respectively), with higher scores indicating greater body surveillance and shame. Across three samples of women, the body surveillance and shame subscales had appropriate reliability and validity and correlated negatively with body esteem (McKinley & Hyde, 1996).

3. Trait Self-Objectification. Trait self-objectification was measured using the Trait Self-Objectification Questionnaire (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998). This questionnaire asks participants to rank 12 aspects of their body according to how important those aspects are to their self-perception on a scale from one (most important) to 12 (least important). Six items were appearance-based, while the other six were related to physical ability and functioning. Items were reverse-scored such that the items participants ranked as most important were given a score

of 12, and the items participants ranked as least important were given a score of one. The sum of the scores for the physical ability items was subtracted from the sum of the scores for appearance items. Scores ranged from -36 to 36, with higher scores indicating greater trait self-objectification. Noll and Fredrickson's (1998) validation of this measure found appropriate test-retest reliability and validity. Moreover, they reported participants' scores were positively associated with increased body shame and disordered eating through regression analyses in samples of undergraduate women.

4. Sexual Assertiveness. To measure sexual assertiveness, an element of sexual agency, we used the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (Pierce & Hurlbert, 1999). This index is a self-report measure in which participants rate their ability to communicate their sexual needs to their partner(s), to refuse sexual techniques that are not satisfying or are uncomfortable, and their comfortability talking about sex. Items were rated on a scale of zero (never) to 4 (all the time). Sample items included, "I think I am open with my partner about my sexual needs," and "I find myself doing sexual things with my partner that I do not like" (Pierce & Hurlbert, 1999). Negative items were reversed-scored. Mean and total scores were calculated for each participant, with higher scores indicating greater sexual assertiveness. Test-retest correlation coefficients indicate high test-retest reliability for the measure in samples of women (Pierce & Hurlbert, 1999). Moreover, higher scores on the index are positively associated with sexual satisfaction, sexual desire, sexual arousal, reported consistency of orgasm, and closeness of relationships (Apt, Hurlbert, & Powell, 1993).

5. Sexual Subjectivity. Sexual subjectivity, another important component of sexual agency, was assessed using the Female Sexual Subjectivity Inventory (FSSI; Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006). The FSSI assesses five factors of sexual subjectivity, including sexual body-

esteem (ex. “I worry that I am not sexually desirable to others”), sense of entitlement to sexual pleasure from self (ex. “It is okay for me to meet my own sexual needs through self-masturbation”), sense of entitlement to sexual pleasure from their partner (ex. “I would expect a sexual partner to be responsive to my sexual needs and feelings”), self-efficacy in achieving pleasure (ex. “I would not hesitate to ask for what I want sexually from a romantic partner”), and sexual self-reflection (ex. “My sexual behavior and experiences are not something I spend time thinking about”). Participants were asked to rate their agreement with each statement on a scale of one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Negative items were reverse-scored and a mean score was calculated for each factor of the inventory, with higher scores indicating greater sexual subjectivity. In their validation of the measure, Horne and Zimmer-Gembeck (2006) found the FSSI had high test-retest reliability and validity in young women. The five subscales were significantly associated with sexual self-awareness, safe sex self-efficacy, and sexual anxiety. However, researchers found significant differences between heterosexual and sexual minority women on all inventory factors, except sexual body esteem. Sexual minority women were found to have a greater sense of entitlement to sexual pleasure from themselves and their partner(s), reported higher levels of self-efficacy in achieving sexual pleasure, and were more reflective on their sexual lives than heterosexual women (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006).

6. Body Appreciation. Body appreciation was measured using the Body Appreciation Scale-2 (BAS-2; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015; Avalos et al., 2005). This measure consists of 10 items that assess participants’ respect and valuation of their bodies. In this study, participants were asked to rate items on a scale from one (never) to five (always). Sample items included, “I feel love for my body,” and “I am comfortable in my body” (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Participants repeated this assessment after the writing manipulation. We manipulated the

questions slightly to reflect participants' feelings toward their bodies in the moment (i.e., "I feel love for my body right now"). Pre- and post-manipulation mean and total scores were calculated for each participant, with higher scores indicating greater body appreciation. The psychometrics of the BAS-2 have been upheld across several studies (Kling et al., 2019; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Moreover, Soulliard and Vander Wal (2019) confirmed the generalizability and validity of the BAS-2 in samples of sexual minority men and women, finding few significant differences between sexual minority women and heterosexual women.

7. Self-Consciousness During Sexual Activity. We used another state measure to assess participants' experiences of self-objectification during sexual activity. The Body Image Self-Consciousness During Sexual Activity Scale asked participants to rank how often they thought each of the 15 statements would be true for them on a scale of zero (never) to five (always). Sample items included: "I would feel very nervous if a partner were to explore my body before or after having sex," and "During sexual activity it is (would be) very difficult not to think about how unattractive my body is." Higher scores indicate greater body image self-consciousness (BISC) by summing across items. Across three populations of heterosexual college-age women, the BISC showed high internal consistency and convergent validity (Wiederman, 2000). Moreover, according to Wiederman (2000), BISC was negatively correlated with measures of well-being, self-rated attractiveness of body, sexual esteem, extent and frequency of heterosexual experience, and sexual assertiveness in a population of college-age women. BISC was also positively correlated with self-reported BMI, body dissatisfaction, sexual anxiety, and sexual avoidance. As of this writing, it is unclear if this measure has been validated among women who identify as lesbians or bisexual. However, in their study of men who identify as heterosexual or

gay and women who identify as heterosexual or lesbian, Peplau et al. (2009) used a similar measure to the BISC to assess body concealment during sex.

8. Sexual Experience. Sexual experience was measured using a scale developed by Grower and Ward (2018). Participants were asked, "How would you describe your current level of experience with dating and sexual relationships?" and indicated their response on a scale from zero to 10. Options 0-3 were labeled "just starting out/some dating," options 4-7 were labeled "1-2 sexual relationships," and options 8-10 were labeled "have had several sexual relationships" (Grower & Ward, 2018).

9. Demographics. Demographic information, including sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, income, weight, height, age, and year in college were also assessed as these are known correlates of women's body image and sexual experiences according to past research (Hurlbert, 1991; Sheeran, Abraham, & Orbell, 1999). We used height and weight data to calculate body mass index (kg/m^2). Race was recoded using a 0/1 binary (White = 0 and Women of Color = 1) due to the limited variability in race and ethnicity among the participants who did not identify as White. Sexual orientation was also recoded (heterosexual = 1 and sexual minority = 2) due to the limited representation of women who identified as lesbians or pansexual.

Data Analyses

Before our analysis, we examined the data to determine if they were normally distributed. Visual examination of histogram plots and skewness statistics indicated that study data were generally normally distributed, except for TST data which demonstrated a floor effect. Basic descriptive statistics were calculated using SPSS (i.e., mean values of and bivariate correlations between body surveillance, body shame, body self-consciousness during sexual activity, body appreciation, sexual assertiveness, BMI, and sexual experience). Multiple regression analyses

were used to build a path model and test the specific relationships between variables in the model. Mixed ANOVAs were used to determine if the writing manipulation affected participants' body appreciation, body surveillance, or body shame. Because the TST data were non-normally distributed, we recoded the data into a binary variable and used a non-parametric approach to analyze the effect of the writing manipulation on participants' self-objectification.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Means and standard deviations for key variables are shown in Table 2. Bivariate correlations between trait objectification, body appreciation, body self-consciousness during sexual activity (BISC), sexual assertiveness, body surveillance, body shame, and BMI are shown in Table 3. Bivariate correlations indicated that trait objectification was significantly negatively correlated with body appreciation and sexual assertiveness. Moreover, body appreciation was significantly negatively correlated with BISC, body surveillance, and body shame, but was significantly positively correlated with sexual assertiveness. Finally, sexual experience level was positively associated with sexual assertiveness.

Table 1.

Participant characteristics.

Characteristic	*N*	%
Race/ ethnicity		
White	67	78.8
Black or African American	3	3.5
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1.2
Asian	12	14.1
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3	3.5
Multiracial	6	7.1
Spanish, Hispanic, Latinx	6	7.1
Year in College		
First Year/ Freshman	31	37.3
Second Year/ Sophomore	23	27.7
Third Year/ Junior	14	16.9
Fourth Year/ Senior	12	14.5
Other	3	3.6
Household Income		
Less than $40,000	6	7.2
$40,000 to $80,000	23	27.7
Above $80,000	54	65.1
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	63	75.9
Lesbian	2	2.4
Bisexual	17	20.5
Other	1	1.2

Note. In our analyses race was recoded using a 0/1 binary (White = 0, Woman of Color = 1). Participants were allowed to select more than one race/ ethnicity. Sexual orientation was also recoded in our analyses (heterosexual = 1, sexual minority= 2).

Table 2.

Descriptive statistics for variables of interest.

	N	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Total Trait Objectification	84	-5.67	15.1	-36	32
Sexual Assertiveness Total	77	57.7	18.8	7	93
BISC Total	81	27.0	19.1	0	71
Body Appreciation Total Pre-Manipulation	84	33.8	8.09	17	50
Body Appreciation Total Post-Manipulation	78	32.5	9.92	11	50
Surveillance Total Pre-Manipulation	84	34.7	6.86	13	47
Surveillance Total Post-Manipulation	80	31.7	6.74	15	46
Shame Total Pre-Manipulation	83	27.1	8.37	13	48
Shame Total Post Manipulation	80	27.5	8.45	12	48
Sexual Experience Level	83	6.20	2.91	1	11

To explore if participants differed on key variables by race or sexual orientation and to reduce type I error, we used MANOVA with dependent variables of trait objectification, body surveillance, body shame, and BISC. There were marginally significant differences across the composite of all four variables by race, F (4, 74) = 2.421, p = .056; Hotelling's Trace = .131. In addition, race was associated with trait objectification (F (1, 77) = 4.646, p <.05) and BISC (F (1,77) = 6.627, p < .05), but was not significantly associated with body surveillance (F (1,77) = 1.030, p > .05) or body shame (F (1,77) = 1.833, p > .05), with Women of Color reporting greater body self-consciousness during sexual activity and less trait objectification than White women. There were no significant differences by sexual orientation for any of the variables of interest, F (4, 74) = .432, p = .785; Hotelling's Trace = .023.

Table 3.

Pearson r correlations of outcome variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Total Trait Objectification	-							
2. Body Appreciation Total	-.481**	-						
3. BISC Total	.420**	-.710**	-					
4. Sexual Assertiveness Total	-.445**	.548**	-.658**	-				
5. Mean Surveillance	.498**	-.669**	.634**	-.379**	-			
6. Mean Shame	.373**	-.645**	.654**	-.636**	.627**	-		
7. BMI	-.172	-.010	.104	.209	.046	-.085	-	
8. Sexual Experience Level	.181	.033	-.059	.267*	.208	-.078	-.114	-

Note. *p < .05, two-tailed. **p < .01, two-tailed.

Manipulation

Three separate 2 (time) by 3 (manipulation) mixed ANOVAs were run with dependent variables body surveillance, body shame, and body appreciation to test for the effects of the experimental manipulation. For body surveillance, there was a main effect of time (F (1, 75) = 50.334, p < .001), no main effect of manipulation (F (2, 75) = 1.643 p = .200), and no significant interaction (F (2, 75) = .027, p = .974). For body shame, there was a main effect of time (F (1,

74) = 39.219, $p < .001$), no main effect of manipulation (F (2, 74) = .539 p = .585), and no significant interaction (F (2, 74) = .236, p = .790). For body appreciation, there was a main effect of time (F (1, 73) = 6.083, p = .016), no main effect of manipulation (F (2, 73) = 1.006 p = .371), and no significant interaction (F (2, 73) = .474, p = .624). Contrary to our predictions, body surveillance decreased significantly, while body shame increased significantly across all three groups from time one to time two. Last, body appreciation decreased significantly across all three groups from time one to time two.

Because TST scores at time one and two were highly skewed (TST1 skewness = 2.098, *SD* = .261; TST2 skewness = 2.326, *SD* = .269), we recoded TST scores using a 0/1 binary, where participants who did not use any appearance-related descriptors received a score of 0, while participants who used one or more appearance-related descriptors received a score of 1. Non-parametric analyses were used to determine if the writing manipulation affected the number of "I am…" statements participants completed with appearance-related descriptors on the TST at time two. A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed no statistically significant difference in TST scores at time two between the different writing manipulations, *Kruskal-Wallis H* (2) = .730, p = .694, with a mean rank TST2 score of 40.48 for group one, 41.50 for group 2, and 37.03 for group three.

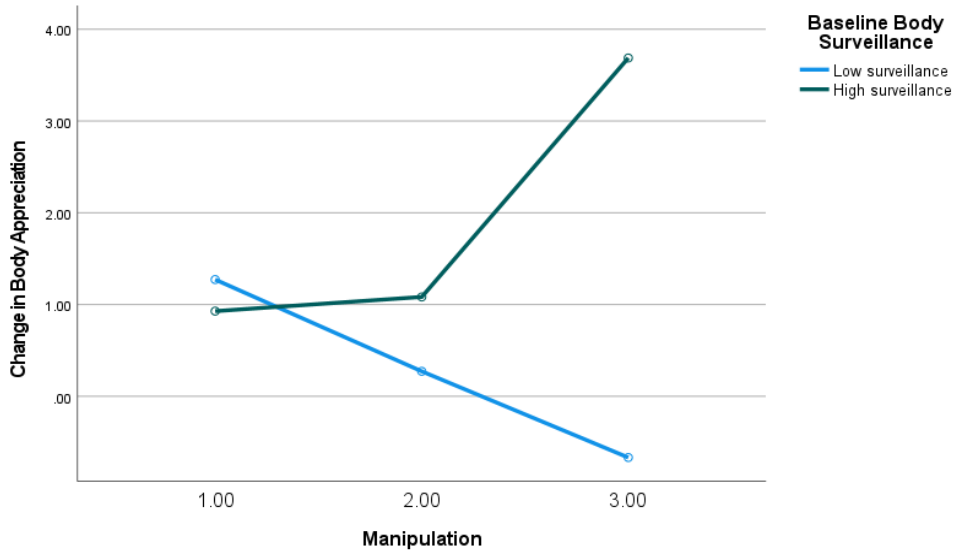
After our initial analyses of the manipulation, we looked more closely at the relationship between baseline body surveillance and how participants responded to the writing manipulation. We dichotomized participants into two groups based on baseline body surveillance, where participants above the mean of body surveillance were given a score of 1 (high surveillance), and participants below the mean of body surveillance were given a score of 0 (low surveillance). We used a 2x3 factorial design to examine the effect of baseline body surveillance and the writing

manipulation on change in body appreciation scores from time one to time two. A two-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant interaction between the effects of baseline body surveillance and the writing manipulation on change in body appreciation scores from time one to time two, F (2, 70) = 2.354, p = .102. However, there was a trend toward significance in the direction of those in the neutral condition who were high in surveillance, decreasing in body appreciation from baseline to follow up. These findings are summarized in Figure 1.

Interestingly, eight out of the 29 participants in the neutral prompt condition may have used the self-reflection exercise as an opportunity to self-objectify. For example, these participants wrote about calorie counting and exercising to burn extra calories. Of these eight participants, five were classified as having high body surveillance at baseline. Due to these interesting informal observations, we ran a chi-square test of independence to determine if there was a relationship between body surveillance at baseline and self-objectification in the neutral writing prompt group. There was no statistically significant association between body surveillance at baseline and self-objectification in the neutral writing prompt condition, X^2 (1, N = 29) = 1.222, p = .269.

Figure 1

Change in body appreciation from time one to time two by manipulation and baseline body surveillance.



Note. Body surveillance has been dichotomized to high (above the mean) vs. low (below the mean) surveillance. The manipulations are categorized as follows: 1 = objectified, neutral; 2 = objectified, unsafe; 3 = neutral event. Positive change = decrease in score.

Predictive Power of Body Appreciation

Two approaches have been used in the literature to determine the predictive power of body appreciation on sexual health outcomes. Ramseyer Winter (2017) proposed an SEM model that explored the associations among self-objectification, body appreciation, relationship quality, and preventative sexual health behaviors. On the other hand, Grower and Ward (2018) used stepwise multiple regression analyses to understand how body appreciation could predict several sexual health outcome variables. We decided to use both approaches in the current study. To examine the possibility of multicollinearity, the variance inflation factor was calculated for each set of predictor variables iteratively, and then for the full model of the path analysis. None of the

VIFs for each analysis exceeded 2.7, suggesting that the analyses were not affected by collinearity.

First, because sexual agency is a multi-dimensional construct, we analyzed body appreciation as a predictor of several sexual agency proxies by running a series of stepwise regression analyses (see Grower and Ward, 2018). To test whether body appreciation would predict the criterion BISC, sexual assertiveness, and entitlement to sexual pleasure from partner, we entered the respective demographic variables in the first block, followed by body surveillance and trait objectification in the second block, and body appreciation in the third block. By entering the variables in this way, we could see the change in variance accounted for by the inclusion of body appreciation. We chose more stringent significance criteria ($p < .01$) to control for multiple comparisons across the equations. Body appreciation was uniquely associated with sexual assertiveness above and beyond body surveillance and trait objectification. Women who appreciated their bodies more reported greater sexual assertiveness. Although the model predicting entitlement to sexual pleasure from a partner was significant, body appreciation was not uniquely associated with participants' self-reported entitlement to sexual pleasure from a partner. Moreover, body appreciation was uniquely associated with body self-consciousness during sexual intimacy, with women who appreciated their bodies more reporting less body self-consciousness during sexual intimacy. These results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4.

Body appreciation and body surveillance as predictors of women's sexual agency

	Total R^2	ΔR^2	*F*	β (*SE*)	*t*
Criterion: BISC					
Overall *F* (4,76)= 14.707***					
Step 1	0.092	0.092	1.827		
BMI				.087 (.494)	0.765
Race				.270 (4.722)	2.388
Sexual Experience				-.026 (.742)	-0.232
Sexual Orientation				-.071 (4.985)	-0.635
Step 2	0.5	0.408	11.67***		
Trait Objectification				.122 (.131)	1.177
Body Surveillance				.593 (2.226)	5.929***
Step 3	0.599	0.099	14.707***		
Body Appreciation				-0.458	-4.119***
Criterion: Sexual Assertiveness					
Overall *F* (7,72)= 8.625***					
Step 1	0.17	0.17	3.48		
BMI				.254 (.480)	2.276
Race				-0.203 (4.581)	-1.827
Sexual Experience				.279 (.720)	2.499
Sexual Orientation				-0.003 (4.837)	-0.027
Step 2	0.426	0.256	8.164***		
Trait Objectification				-.301 (.143)	-2.624
Body Surveillance				-.315 (2.423)	-2.853**
Step 3	0.482	0.056	8.625***		
Body Appreciation				.344 (.303)	2.639**
Criterion: Entitlement to Sexual Pleasure					
Overall *F* (7,77)= 3.195**					
Step 1	0.075	0.075	1.487		
BMI				.100 (.084)	0.884
Race				-.206 (.799)	-1.823
Sexual Experience				.142 (.126)	1.246
Sexual Orientation				-.077 (.844)	-0.685
Step 2	0.177	0.102	2.541		
Trait Objectification				-.279 (.028)	-2.106
Body Surveillance				-.099 (.479)	-0.778
Step 3	0.242	0.065	3.195**		
Body Appreciation				.373 (.060)	2.457

Note. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed. *** $p < .001$, two-tailed. Standardized betas from each step reported.

Structural Model

Second, we completed path analysis via a series of layered multiple regressions to build a predictive model of the associations between objectification, body surveillance, body appreciation, and sexual assertiveness. Because sexual assertiveness is an important component of women's sexual agency and encompasses various attitudes and behaviors regarding sexual activity, we used this variable to approximate women's sexual agency in our model. Sexual assertiveness also provides a single score for each participant, whereas sexual subjectivity provides multiple independent scores. Based on existing literature, BMI, race, sexual orientation, and level of sexual experience were included as control variables. Bivariate analysis revealed a strong, positive correlation between trait objectification and body surveillance, which was statistically significant (r = .505, n = 78, p < .0005). The first layer of multiple regression analysis showed a statistically significant inverse relationship between positive body appreciation and body surveillance (b = -5.604, β = -.616, R^2 = .546, p < .0005). Approximately 54.6% of the variance in body appreciation was explained by trait objectification and body surveillance. Surveillance mediated the negative relationship between trait objectification and body appreciation, as the correlation between trait objectification and body appreciation became non-significant (β = -.176, p = .081) when body surveillance was added into the model.

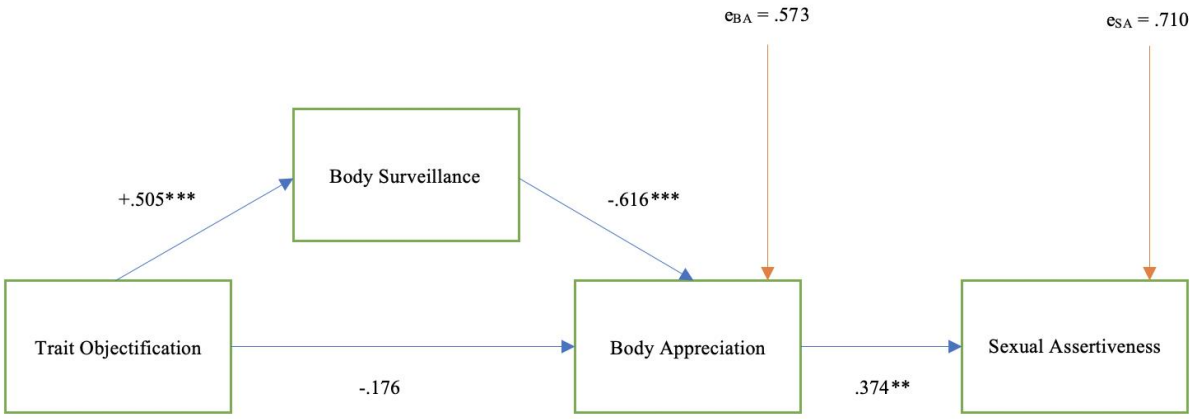
The second layer of multiple regression analysis showed a significant positive relationship between body appreciation and sexual assertiveness (b = .909, β = .374, R^2 = .495, p = .005). Therefore, approximately 49.5% of the variance in sexual assertiveness was explained by the model in this sample of women. Trait objectification and body surveillance were not significantly directly related to sexual assertiveness (respectively, b = -.279, β = -.219, p = .060; b = -2.852, β = -.125, p = .361). In other words, trait objectification and body surveillance were

related to sexual assertiveness through body appreciation in this sample. These results are summarized in Figure 2.

Overall, it appears that body appreciation plays a vital role in women's sexual agency and may serve as a protective factor against the adverse effects of self-objectification and body surveillance.

Figure 2.

Model tested in the present study.



Note. $^{**}p < .01$, two-tailed. $^{***}p < .001$, two-tailed. Standardized coefficients reported. Error terms for body appreciation (e_{BA}) and sexual assertiveness (e_{SA}) are shown.

Discussion

The current study tested a theoretically informed model of self-objectification, body surveillance, body appreciation, and sexual agency among a sexually diverse sample of college-age women to explain how these complex concepts relate to one another. We also sought to understand how body appreciation was uniquely related to various affective and behavioral components of women's sexual agency, above and beyond self-objectification. Finally, we attempted to induce "sex object" schema activation (Kahalon et al., 2018) using a writing

manipulation to compare the impact of this mechanism on self-objectification to that of appearance monitoring. This study contributes uniquely to the current body of research by targeting the role of positive body image (body appreciation) in the relationship between self-objectification and sexual agency.

In support of our hypotheses, we found the expected results for self-objectification, with women who reported greater trait self-objectification, body surveillance, and body shame also reporting lower body appreciation and sexual assertiveness. Moreover, women who reported greater self-objectification were more likely to report greater body self-consciousness during sexual intimacy. Notably, women who reported greater body appreciation were less likely to report body surveillance, body shame, and feelings of self-consciousness during sexual intimacy and more likely to report greater sexual assertiveness. These findings are consistent with prior research, which demonstrated a negative relationship between self-objectification, body surveillance, and body shame, and women's sexual agency (Rachel M. Calogero & Thompson, 2009; Grower & Ward, 2018; Parent & Moradi, 2015). Our findings are also consistent with objectification theory which argues that women who engage in continuous body monitoring and place great significance on appearance-based aspects of the self are more likely to feel ashamed about their bodies, to be less aware of how their bodies feel, and, as a result, be less assertive in sexual situations and experience less sexual pleasure (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

We did note that the correlations discussed above were generally more robust in our study than those reported by Grower and Ward (2018). This may be because our sample consisted only of college-age women ages 18-22, whereas Grower and Ward's (2018) sample encompassed women ages 18-40. Past research has indicated that women experience significant physical, psychological, social, and biological changes throughout their adult lives that may

impact how they think about and perceive their appearance (Altabe & Thompson, 1993; Kilpela, Becker, Wesley, & Stewart, 2015). Objectification theory predicts that women are most at risk for objectification during their reproductive years. Moreover, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) also posit that the adverse effects of objectification intensify during early adolescence and lessen as women approach middle-age. Therefore, it is possible that in young adult women, self-objectification has a stronger relationship with other variables such as body appreciation and sexual agency, as may have been the case in our study, than in older adult women.

Consistent with our hypothesis, we found that body appreciation was distinctly associated with body self-consciousness during sexual intimacy and sexual assertiveness above and beyond trait objectification and body surveillance. These findings are consistent with Grower and Ward's (2018). However, in our sample, body appreciation was not uniquely associated with participants' entitlement to sexual pleasure above and beyond trait objectification and body surveillance. This discrepancy may have resulted because Grower and Ward's (2018) sample covered a wider age range and only included women who identified as heterosexual. Our findings contribute uniquely to objectification theory in that they demonstrate an association between positive body image and self-objectification. Positive body image is not merely the opposite of negative body image but is regarded as a discrete, multifaceted construct (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Therefore, our results suggest a valuable protective function of body appreciation for women's sexual agency.

In contrast to our hypotheses, we found no differences in key variables (including body appreciation, trait self-objectification, body surveillance, and sexual agency) by participants' sexual orientation. Prior research on body dissatisfaction has shown no differences in heterosexual and sexual minority women (He et al., 2020). However, research on body

appreciation has revealed significant differences between heterosexual women and sexual minority women, with sexual minority women reporting higher body appreciation than heterosexual women (Ramseyer Winter et al., 2015). These apparent conflicts in the literature may be a consequence of comparing similar but discrete concepts. Accordingly, body appreciation should likely be treated as a distinct construct from body dissatisfaction, and it may interact differently with sexual orientation.

Furthermore, in contrast to our findings, some past research has uncovered differences between heterosexual and sexual minority women on key sexual agency variables (Cherkasskaya & Rosario, 2019; Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006; Kozee & Tylka, 2006; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). However, our finding that sexual assertiveness did not differ by sexual orientation is at least partially consistent with Bouchard and Humphreys' (2019) findings. These authors reported no significant differences by sexual orientation in initiation sexual assertiveness (i.e., the component of the SAS that is most comparable to the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness). Still, they did find that sexual minority women reported significantly lower refusal sexual assertiveness than heterosexual women.

Our results may differ from past research because our sample of sexual minority women consisted primarily of women who identified as bisexual. In contrast, some of the past research has included far more women who identified as lesbians. Moreover, the current study results may be in part due to our coding scheme in which heterosexual women were compared to sexual minority women. Given the modest number of sexual minority women in our sample, this coding scheme was appropriate. However, it could have obscured important differences between sexual minority women, although this coding scheme was also employed by Bouchard and Humphreys

(2019). More research is warranted to elucidate the role sexual orientation plays in sexual agency.

Importantly, race was significantly associated with trait objectification and body image self-consciousness during sexual intimacy in our sample. Women of Color experienced greater body image self-consciousness during sexual activity and less trait objectification than White women. In their study of body surveillance, shame, and body concern during sexual activity, Claudat, Warren, and Durette (2012) found important differences by race. Specifically, European American women reported significantly higher body surveillance than African American, Latina, and Asian American women. Asian American women also reported a significantly lower mean BMI than European American, Latina, and African American women. Moreover, African American women reported a higher mean BMI than European American women. The authors noted that their objectification model (i.e., body shame partially mediates the relationship between body surveillance and contextual body image during sexual activity) was maintained for women across all races and ethnicities. However, when they compared the strength of the model by racial and ethnic groups, they found that the relationship between body surveillance and body shame was significantly stronger for European American women than for African American women. The relationship between body shame and body concern during sexual activity was significantly stronger for European American women than for Hispanic/ Latina women as well (Claudat et al., 2012).

Furthermore, in their study of body image and racial and ethnic diversity in women, Winter, Danforth, Landor, and Pevehouse-Pfeiffer (2019) found that body appreciation did not differ significantly by race and ethnicity. However, they did note that Black women reported the highest body appreciation in their sample, while White women reported the lowest. Notably,

Black women also reported the highest average BMI, while Asian women reported the lowest average BMI in their sample (Winter et al., 2019). Their findings suggest that although most women have concerns about their body shape and size, Women of Color seem to place a higher value on other physical characteristics (i.e., facial features, hair) than White women. Therefore, Women of Color may experience body image differently than White women.

The findings of Winter et al. (2019) and Claudat et al. (2012) suggest that women of different races and ethnicities experience body image and its impacts in variable ways. Because race was coded in our study so that White women were compared to Women of Color, important differences between women of different races and ethnicities may have been missed. For example, Asian American women may have different body image norms and expectations than African American women (Evans & McConnell, 2010). Therefore, further research is warranted to understand better how the lived experiences of women of different races and ethnicities impact their understanding of their bodies and how these experiences relate to sexual behavior and agency.

The present study aimed to address limitations in the extant literature (Kahalon et al., 2018a) by using a writing manipulation to activate participants' "sex object" schema mechanism and observing the effects on self-objectification and body appreciation variables. We found no differences in participants' body appreciation, body surveillance, or body shame based on the manipulation, even when controlling for baseline trait objectification. Importantly, body surveillance did decrease significantly from time one to time two across all three groups. Distracting participants with a writing task may have decreased the cognitive capacity they had to self-surveil. However, body appreciation also decreased, while body shame increased from

time one to time two across all three groups. Our results suggest that simply asking participants to reflect on their bodies and sexuality leads to negative self-consciousness.

Kahalon et al. (2018) suggested four different mechanisms by which objectification triggers its adverse effects, including appearance monitoring and activation of the "sex object" schema. Our results indicate that it is difficult to activate the "sex object" schema mechanism without activating the appearance monitoring mechanism when measuring women's self-objectification. Because there were no differences in key variables by manipulation between the three groups, we can conclude that our manipulation was unsuccessful in selectively activating the "sex object" schema mechanism. Our failure to activate this schema might partly be because before the manipulation, all participants engaged in some level of self-reflection and self-monitoring when answering questions about their sexual behavior and body image. Therefore, the appearance monitoring mechanism was likely active in all participants before the manipulation. Appearance self-objectification appears to have also been invoked in the "unsafe" sex object condition. Thus, the appearance monitoring mechanism may have undermined any unique influence that the manipulation could have had.

Moreover, the current study offers a model with important implications for clinical practice and future research. First, body surveillance partially mediated the negative relationship between trait objectification and body appreciation. Furthermore, body appreciation partially mediated the relationship between trait objectification, body surveillance, and sexual assertiveness. The model provided an adequate fit to the data and accounted for 49.5% of the variation in college women's sexual assertiveness. These data are consistent with past research suggesting a mediating effect of body appreciation on the relationship between self-objectification and preventative sexual health behaviors (Ramseyer Winter, 2017) and research

suggesting unique contributions of body appreciation to women's sexual agency (Grower & Ward, 2018). Our model also expands upon past research by demonstrating how body appreciation might function as a protective mechanism against the adverse effects of self-objectification on body image and sexual agency.

Although we controlled for BMI in our model analyses, BMI was not a significant predictor of trait objectification, body surveillance, body appreciation, or sexual assertiveness. That BMI was not a significant predictor of body surveillance is consistent with past research (Claudat & Warren, 2014) and objectification theory, which posits that women are likely to monitor their appearance through body surveillance regardless of their body size (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). We can only speculate why our findings were not consistent with previous literature demonstrating a negative relationship between BMI and body appreciation (Ramseyer Winter, 2017). Our sample may not have captured a large enough range of BMIs, as our sample was predominately of average BMI. Therefore, our findings may not accurately reflect how women of greater or less than average BMI experience body appreciation. Furthermore, as is demonstrated in our model, variance in women's body appreciation appears to be better captured by other factors such as trait objectification and body surveillance. Additional research investigating BMI, body appreciation, and sexual agency is warranted to understand these variables better.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the current study offers valuable contributions to the body image literature, several limitations should also be considered. First, this study employed a cross-sectional design, meaning it does not allow for causal inferences. Second, all measures were self-report, which comes with the risk that participants answered questions based on what they perceived to be the

most socially desirable answer rather than the most reflective of themselves. Additionally, due to the nature of our sample, women were dichotomized into groups based on their sexual orientation (heterosexual versus sexual minority) and race and ethnicity (White women versus Women of Color). This may have masked important differences in key variables such as body appreciation, self-objectification, and sexual assertiveness among sexual minority women and Women of Color, and especially among sexual minority Women of Color. Future research needs to examine how self-objectification and body appreciation impact sexual assertiveness by racial and ethnic group and sexual orientation.

Moreover, the order of the survey items was not randomized in this study. Although all the questionnaires generally addresses attitudes toward the body, specific measures may have produced carryover effects. Therefore, we cannot rule out order effects. In addition to randomizing the order in which participants answer survey questions, future researchers should use a stronger priming manipulation to elicit self-objectification based on activation of the "sex object" schema in their participants. Our results indicate that our manipulation was not strong enough to overcome any self-objectification participants were experiencing based on appearance concerns, which may have been heightening by the self-reflective nature of the pre-manipulation survey questions.

Finally, although we proposed and tested a model based on findings from past research, alternative models may fit the data equally as well. Our model did not explain approximately half of the variance in women's sexual assertiveness. Future studies should examine the effects of other factors on sexual agency, including relationship status and internalization of cultural appearance ideals. This work might elucidate more about mechanisms through which self-objectification and body appreciation influence sexual assertiveness. If the findings of the current

study were replicated through longitudinal design studies with more diverse samples of women, researchers could consider interventions that might educate women about objectification and combat its adverse effects by cultivating an appreciation of their bodies.

Interestingly, Neelen (2018) found that feminist beliefs were positively related to sexual satisfaction. This relationship was mediated by both positive body image and sexual assertiveness. The mediating role of positive body image in the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction was independent of sexual assertiveness. These results further indicate that having a positive body image may have important implications for women's sexual health. We might speculate that the relationships between positive body image and positive sexual health outcomes observed in the current study, as well as by Neelen (2018), at least partly result from women who appreciate their bodies more being more attentive to the needs, signals, and sensations of their bodies in general. Therefore, body appreciation might focus women's attention inward, helping them appreciate their needs and sensations in sexual contexts as well. This explanation merits further investigation, especially among more sexually and ethnically diverse samples of women.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations of the current research, our results indicate that using objectification theory as a framework for understanding women's body image may be of use clinically as it helps to identify sociocultural factors that influence women's risk for psychological disorders. Further, our results indicate unique contributions of body appreciation to women's sexual agency. Specifically, women who appreciate their bodies more are more likely to be sexually assertive. These findings demonstrate important factors for assessment in clinical settings and also suggest targets for intervention. In practice, clinicians may be able to

help women who present with body image concerns (in the context of sexual activity or otherwise) challenge the unattainable standards of beauty they may have internalized and cultivate an appreciation of their bodies based on physical competence, rather than simply appearance. Addressing women's concerns about their bodies may increase their ability to act agentically in sexual situations and improve their overall psychological well-being.

References

Altabe, M., & Thompson, J. K. (1993). Body image changes during early adulthood. *The International Journal of Eating Disorders*, *13*(3), 323–328.

Alvy, L. M. (2013). Do lesbian women have a better body image? Comparisons with heterosexual women and model of lesbian-specific factors. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2013.06.002

Andrew, R., Tiggemann, M., & Clark, L. (2016). Positive body image and young women's health: Implications for sun protection, cancer screening, weight loss and alcohol consumption behaviours. *Journal of Health Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105314520814

Apt, C., Hurlbert, D. F., & Powell, D. (1993). Men with hypoactive sexual desire disorder: The role of interpersonal dependency and assertiveness. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*. https://doi.org/10.1080/01614576.1993.11074074

Avalos, L., Tylka, T. L., & Wood-Barcalow, N. (2005). The Body Appreciation Scale: Development and psychometric evaluation. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2005.06.002

Basabas, M. C., Greaves, L., Barlow, F. K., & Sibley, C. G. (2019). Sexual Orientation Moderates the Effect of Gender on Body Satisfaction: Results From a National Probability Sample. *Journal of Sex Research*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1667947

Boislard P., M.-A., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2011). Sexual Subjectivity, Relationship Status and Quality, and Same-sex Sexual Experience among Emerging Adult Females. *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.5539/jedp.v1n1p54

Bouchard, L., & Humphreys, T. P. (2019). Asserting sexual (dis)interest: How do women's

capabilities differ? *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, *28*(2), 226–241. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2019-0012

Breines, J. G., Crocker, J., & Garcia, J. A. (2008). Self-objectification and well-being in women's daily lives. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167207313727

Brown, L. S. (1987). Lesbians, weight and eating: New analyses and perspectives. In *Lesbian psychologies: Explorations and challenges* (pp. 294–309). Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Calogero, R. M. (2012). Objectification theory, self-objectification, and body image. In *Encyclopedia of Body Image and Human Appearance*. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-384925-0.00091-2

Calogero, Rachel M. (2013). Objects Don't Object: Evidence That Self-Objectification Disrupts Women's Social Activism. *Psychological Science*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612452574

Calogero, Rachel M., & Thompson, J. K. (2009). Potential implications of the objectification of women's bodies for women's sexual satisfaction. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2009.01.001

Cary, K. M., Maas, M. K., & Nuttall, A. K. (2020). Self-objectification, sexual subjectivity, and identity exploration among emerging adult women. *Self and Identity*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2020.1772358

Cash, T. F., & Smolak, L. (2011). Body image. A Handbook of Science, Practice and Prevention. In *Body Image : A Handbook of Science, Practice and Prevention*. https://doi.org/10.1007/SpringerReference_223404

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). Sexual Health.

Cherkasskaya, E., & Rosario, M. (2019). The Relational and Bodily Experiences Theory of Sexual Desire in Women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1212-9

Claudat, K., & Warren, C. S. (2014). Self-objectification, body self-consciousness during sexual activities, and sexual satisfaction in college women. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.07.006

Claudat, K., Warren, C. S., & Durette, R. T. (2012). The relationships between body surveillance, body shame, and contextual body concern during sexual activities in ethnically diverse female college students. *Body Image*, *9*(4), 448–454. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2012.05.007

Curtin, N., Ward, L. M., Merriwether, A., & Caruthers, A. (2011). Femininity ideology and sexual health in young women: A focus on sexual knowledge, embodiment, and agency. *International Journal of Sexual Health*. https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2010.524694

Darden, M. C., Ehman, A. C., Lair, E. C., & Gross, A. M. (2019). Sexual Compliance: Examining the Relationships Among Sexual Want, Sexual Consent, and Sexual Assertiveness. *Sexuality & Culture*, *23*(1), 220–235. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-018-9551-1

Engeln-Maddox, R., Miller, S. A., & Doyle, D. M. (2011). Tests of Objectification Theory in Gay, Lesbian, and Heterosexual Community Samples: Mixed Evidence for Proposed Pathways. *Sex Roles*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9958-8

Evans, P., & McCONNELL, A. (2010). Do Racial Minorities Respond in the Same Way to Mainstream Beauty Standards? Social Comparison Processes in Asian, Black, and White

Women. *Self and Identity*, *April-June*, 153–167. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309030

Franz, M. R., DiLillo, D., & Gervais, S. J. (2016). Sexual objectification and sexual assault: Do self-objectification and sexual assertiveness account for the link? *Psychology of Violence*, *6*(2), 262–270. https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000015

Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997). Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00108.x

Grower, P., & Ward, L. M. (2018). Examining the unique contribution of body appreciation to heterosexual women's sexual agency. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.09.003

Halliwell, E. (2013). The impact of thin idealized media images on body satisfaction: Does body appreciation protect women from negative effects? *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2013.07.004

Hazzard, V. M., Schaefer, L. M., Schaumberg, K., Bardone-Cone, A. M., Frederick, D. A., Klump, K. L., … Thompson, J. K. (2019). Testing the Tripartite Influence Model among heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian women. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.07.001

He, J., Sun, S., Lin, Z., & Fan, X. (2020). Body dissatisfaction and sexual orientations: A quantitative synthesis of 30 years research findings. *Clinical Psychology Review*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2020.101896

Higgins, J. A., Mullinax, M., Trussell, J., Kenneth Davidson, J., & Moore, N. B. (2011). Sexual satisfaction and sexual health among university students in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300154

Hill, M. S., & Fischer, A. R. (2008). Examining objectification theory: Lesbian and heterosexual women's experiences with sexual- and self-objectification. *Counseling Psychologist*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000007301669

Horne, S., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2006). The female sexual subjectivity inventory: Development and validation of a multidimensional inventory for late adolescents and emerging adults. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2006.00276.x

Hurlbert, D. F. (1991). The role of assertiveness in female sexuality: A comparative study between sexually assertive and sexually nonassertive women. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00926239108404342

Kahalon, R., Shnabel, N., & Becker, J. C. (2018a). Experimental studies on state self-objectification: A review and an integrative process model. *Frontiers in Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01268

Kahalon, R., Shnabel, N., & Becker, J. C. (2018b). Positive stereotypes, negative outcomes: Reminders of the positive components of complementary gender stereotypes impair performance in counter-stereotypical tasks. *British Journal of Social Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12240

Kilpela, L. S., Becker, C. B., Wesley, N., & Stewart, T. (2015). Body Image in Adult Women: Moving Beyond the Younger Years. *Advances in Eating Disorders (Abingdon, England)*, *3*(2), 144–164. https://doi.org/10.1080/21662630.2015.1012728

Kling, J., Kwakkenbos, L., Diedrichs, P. C., Rumsey, N., Frisén, A., Brandão, M. P., … Fitzgerald, A. (2019). Systematic review of body image measures. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.06.006

Koss, M. P., Bailey, J. A., Yuan, N. P., Herrera, V. M., & Lichter, E. L. (2003). Depression and PTSD in survivors of male violence: Research and training initiatives to facilitate recovery. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *27*(2), 130–142. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-6402.00093

Kozee, H. B., & Tylka, T. L. (2006). A test of objectification theory with Lesbian women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2006.00310.x

Littleton, H., Breitkopf, C. R., & Berenson, A. (2005). Body image and risky sexual behaviors: An investigation in a tri-ethnic sample. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2005.02.003

Manago, A. M., Monique Ward, L., Lemm, K. M., Reed, L., & Seabrook, R. (2015). Facebook involvement, objectified body consciousness, body shame, and sexual assertiveness in college women and men. *Sex Roles*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0441-1

Martin, K. A. (2018). *Puberty, sexuality and the self: Girls and boys at adolescence*. *Puberty, Sexuality and the Self: Girls and Boys at Adolescence*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315538853

Masters, W. H., & Johnson, V. E. (1970). *Human sexual inadequacy* (First). Boston: Little, Brown.

McKinley, N. M., & Hyde, J. S. (1996). The objectified body consciousness scale development and validation. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1996.tb00467.x

Meana, M., & Nunnink, S. E. (2006). Gender differences in the content of cognitive distraction during sex. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *43*(1), 59–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490609552299

Meyer, C., Blissett, J., & Oldfield, C. (2001). Sexual orientation and eating psychopathology:

The role of masculinity and femininity. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*. https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.1024

Moradi, B., & Huang, Y. P. (2008). Objectification theory and psychology of women: A decade of advances and future directions. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2008.00452.x

Moreno-Domínguez, S., Raposo, T., & Elipe, P. (2019). Body image and sexual satisfaction: Differences among heterosexual, bisexual and lesbian women. *Frontiers in Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00903

Morrison, M. A., Morrison, T. G., & Sager, C. L. (2004). Does body satisfaction differ between gay men and lesbian women and heterosexual men and women? A meta-analytic review. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2004.01.002

Neelen, A. A. . (2018). *Feminist beliefs and sexual satisfaction in women: The mediating role of positive body image and sexual assertiveness*. University Utrecht. Retrieved from http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/367043

Noll, S. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (1998). A mediational model linking self-objectification, body shame, and disordered eating. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1998.tb00181.x

Parent, M. C., & Moradi, B. (2015). Self-Objectification and Condom Use Self-Efficacy in Women University Students. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0384-1

Peplau, L. A., Frederick, D. A., Yee, C., Maisel, N., Lever, J., & Ghavami, N. (2009). Body image satisfaction in heterosexual, gay, and lesbian adults. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-008-9378-1

Pierce, A. P., & Hurlbert, M. K. (1999). Test-retest reliability of the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*. https://doi.org/10.2466/pms.1999.88.1.31

RAINN. (2020). Campus Sexual Violence: Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence

Ramseyer Winter, V. (2017). Toward a Relational Understanding of Objectification, Body Image, and Preventive Sexual Health. *The Journal of Sex Research, 54*(3), 341–350. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2016.1190807

Ramseyer Winter, V., Gillen, M. M., & Kennedy, A. K. (2018). Associations Between Body Appreciation and Comfort Communicating About Sex: A Brief Report. *Health Communication*. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2016.1255845

Ramseyer Winter, V., Satinsky, S., & Jozkowski, K. N. (2015). Does Women's Body Appreciation Differ by Sexual Orientation? A Brief Report. *Journal of Bisexuality*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2014.999903

Register, J. D., Katrevich, A. V., Aruguete, M. a. S., & Edman, J. L. (2015). Effects of self-objectification on self-reported eating pathology and depression. *American Journal of Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.5406/amerjpsyc.128.1.0107

Satinsky, S., Reece, M., Dennis, B., Sanders, S., & Bardzell, S. (2012). An assessment of body appreciation and its relationship to sexual function in women. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2011.09.007

Schooler, D., Ward, L. M., Merriwether, A., & Caruthers, A. S. (2005). Cycles of shame: Menstrual shame, body shame, and sexual decision-making. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *42*(4), 324–334. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490509552288

Sheeran, P., Abraham, C., & Orbell, S. (1999). Psychosocial Correlates of Heterosexual Condom

Use: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.125.1.90

Slater, A., & Tiggemann, M. (2010). Body image and disordered eating in adolescent girls and boys: A test of objectification theory. *Sex Roles*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9794-2

Soulliard, Z. A., & Vander Wal, J. S. (2019). Validation of the Body Appreciation Scale-2 and relationships to eating behaviors and health among sexual minorities. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.09.003

Steele, S. M., Belvy, L., Veldhuis, C. B., Martin, K., Nisi, R., & Hughes, T. L. (2019). Femininity, masculinity, and body image in a community-based sample of lesbian and bisexual women. *Women and Health*. https://doi.org/10.1080/03630242.2019.1567645

Szymanski, D. M., Moffitt, L. B., & Carr, E. R. (2010). Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research 1ψ7. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *39*(1), 6–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000010378402

Tylka, T. L., & Wood-Barcalow, N. L. (2015). The body appreciation scale-2: Item refinement and psychometric evaluation. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.09.006

Ussher, J. M. (2005). V. The meaning of sexual desire: Experiences of heterosexual and lesbian girls. *Feminism and Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353505049700

Ussher, J. M., & Mooney-Somers, J. (2000). Negotiating desire and sexual subjectivity: Narratives of young lesbian avengers. *Sexualities*. https://doi.org/10.1177/136346000003002005

Vazquez-Pacheco, R. (2005). Ken Chu You Don't See Yourself. In E. H. Kim, M. Machida, & S. Mizota (Authors), *Fresh talk, daring gazes: Conversations on Asian American art* (pp. 99-101). University of California Press.

Wiederman, M. W. (2000). Women's body image self-consciousness during physical intimacy with a partner. *Journal of Sex Research*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490009552021

Winn, L., & Cornelius, R. (2020). Self-Objectification and Cognitive Performance: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Frontiers in Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00020

Winter, V. R., Danforth, L. K., Landor, A., & Pevehouse-Pfeiffer, D. (2019). Toward an Understanding of Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Body Image among Women. *Social Work Research*, *43*(2), 69–80. https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/svy033

Woertman, L., & van den Brink, F. (2012). Body Image and Female Sexual Functioning and Behavior: A Review. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *49*(2–3), 184–211. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.658586

Appendix

Consent Form
Bates College Department/Program of Psychology

Title of the Study: Body appreciation, sexual agency, and internalizing objectification in college-age women

Researcher Name(s): Shelby Cronkhite, scronkhi@bates.edu, Advisor: Kathryn Low, klow@bates.edu

The general purpose of this research is to investigate the association between body image and women's behavior in sexual relationships. Participants in this study will be asked to answer questions concerning how they feel about their bodies and how they feel during sexual encounters with others or themselves. Findings from this study will be used for a student thesis and may be presented at a research conference in the future.

I understand that:

A. My participation in this study will take approximately 40 minutes. I agree to complete the study in one sitting.
B. Occasionally, when participants complete surveys about sexual behavior, body image or sexual agency, they may feel mild distress.
C. There are no expected benefits associated with my participation.
D. I will be compensated for participating in this study with 1 participation credit for psychology courses.
E. My participation is voluntary, and I may discontinue participation in the study at any time by closing the survey. My refusal to participate will not result in any penalty. I can also refuse to answer any question at any time.
F. Some aspects of the study purpose/procedures may be withheld from me until its end. What the investigators hope to learn from this study, the specific nature of and reasons for the procedures employed, and those aspects of my behavior that have been recorded for measurement purposes will all be fully explained to me at the end of the study
G. My responses will be recorded anonymously, and I cannot be identified by my responses.

Click "I consent" to indicate that you are 18 years of age or older, you have read and understand your rights, and that you consent to participate in this online research study.

Debriefing Form
Bates College Department/Program of Psychology

Title of the Study: Body appreciation, sexual agency, and internalizing objectification in college-age women

Researcher Name(s): Shelby Cronkhite, scronkhi@bates.edu, Advisor: Kathryn Low, klow@bates.edu

Thank you for participating in this research study. We are conducting this study to understand how appreciation for one's body can impact a person's sexual choices and feelings. We also want to understand how thinking about oneself as an object can influence one's feelings about their body, and sexual situations. Our main research questions are: Is body appreciation a protective factor against the negative effects of self-objectification? Does state self-objectification based on appearance and/ or safety concerns cause changes in sexual feelings and behavior?

While participating in this study, you answered questions about your body, sexual feelings and behaviors, and wrote a brief description about an experience you had. After the writing exercise, you were asked some of the same questions again. This was intentional so that we could understand if the writing exercise changed your answers to the questions. We expect to find that positive feelings about one's body are positively related to agency in sexual contexts, and that feeling objectified by another person is negatively related to agency in sexual contexts.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please feel free to ask us questions in person, or contact us using the email address(es) above. If you would like to learn more about body appreciation or sexual agency we recommend the following:

Grower, P., & Ward, L. M. (2018). Examining the unique contribution of body appreciation to heterosexual women's sexual agency. *Body Image*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.09.003If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Bates College Institutional Review Board (irb@bates.edu).

If you are in distress or need help, please refer to the following resources:

For Bates students:

Health Services: Call (207)786-6199, email healthservices@bates.edu
CAPS: Call (207)786-6200, email CAPS@bates.edu
To speak to a crisis counselor 24/7 call (207)786-6200 and dial "0" at the prompt.

National:

National Eating Disorders Association Helpline: Call or text (800)931-2237
National Sexual Assault Hotline: Call 1-800-656-4673

Thank you again for participating!