

Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research

The Counseling Psychologist
39(1) 6–38

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DOI: 10.1177/0011000010378402

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Abstract

Objectification theory provides an important framework for understanding, researching, and intervening to improve women's lives in a sociocultural context that sexually objectifies the female body and equates a woman's worth with her body's appearance and sexual functions. The purpose of this Major Contribution is to advance theory, research, practice, and training related to the sexual objectification of women. The purpose of this article is to introduce readers to objectification theory and related research, extend objectification theory to our understanding of women's substance use and/or abuse and immersed forms of sexual objectification via sexually objectifying environments, and provide an overview of this Major Contribution on Sexual Objectification of Women.

Keywords

sexual objectification, sexual assault, self-objectification, feminism, substance abuse


Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) provides a framework for understanding the experience of being female in a sociocultural context that sexually objectifies the female body. Objectification theory has become an

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important organizing perspective for a great deal of research within feminist and counseling psychology and fits well within the multicultural-feminist and social justice missions of counseling psychology. These missions encourage psychologists to understand the ways that contextual factors, such as sexual objectification (SO), impact women's lives and the problems that they bring to therapy, as well as how they manage, cope with, and resist these SO experiences (American Psychological Association [APA], 2007a). In addition, they encourage psychologists to examine issues of diversity and oppression under patriarchy at micro-social (i.e., interpersonal) and macro-social levels (i.e., environmental and institutional levels) and to advocate for social justice for exploited women and communities (Speight & Vera, 2004). The purpose of this Major Contribution is to build on objectification theory and Moradi and Huang's (2008) recent review of the empirical research by advancing theory, research, practice, and training related to the SO of women.

This Major Contribution on Sexual Objectification consists of four articles. In this first article, we provide an overview of objectification theory and related research. Next, we extend objectification theory by demonstrating how it might be useful in understanding women's substance use and/or abuse and recognizing immersed forms of SO via sexually objectifying environments. The second article (Carr & Szymanski, 2011 [this issue]) presents the results of a quantitative study examining some of our theorized relations between SO and women's substance abuse, whereas the third article (Moffitt & Szymanski, 2011 [this issue]) presents the results of a qualitative study exploring in depth the experiences and coping strategies of women who work in sexually objectifying environments. Finally, given the widespread prevalence of the SO of women in U.S. culture, and the documented potential negative effects it can have on females, it is important that psychologists know how to integrate this information in their work with women and in their training of future psychologists. Given counseling psychology's social justice mission, psychologists also need to be know how they can engage in social justice advocacy aimed at challenging and eradicating the SO of women at individual, interpersonal, organizational, institutional, policy, and sociocultural levels (APA, 2007a; Speight & Vera, 2004). Thus, the fourth article (Szymanski, Carr, & Moffitt, 2011 [this issue]) provides clinical suggestions for psychologists working with clients on issues related to SO and implications for psychologist training.

Sexual Objectification Theory

Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) postulates that many women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use

by others. SO occurs when a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire (Bartky, 1990). Objectification theory posits that SO of females is likely to contribute to mental health problems that disproportionately affect women (i.e., eating disorders, depression, and sexual dysfunction) via two main paths. The first path is direct and overt and involves SO experiences. The second path is indirect and subtle and involves women's internalization of SO experiences or self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) asserted that women to varying degrees internalize this outsider view and begin to self-objectify by treating themselves as an object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance. Self-objectification manifests in a greater emphasis placed on one's appearance attributes (rather than competence-based attributes) and in how frequently a woman watches her appearance and experiences her body according to how it looks (McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998). Objectification theory also posits a mediation model that may explain how self-objectification leads to women's mental health risks via negative psychological outcomes. More specifically, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) postulated that self-objectification can increase women's anxiety about physical appearance (i.e., fear about when and how one's body will be looked at and evaluated); reduce opportunities for peak motivational states or flow; diminish awareness of internal bodily sensations (e.g., hunger, sexual arousal, stomach contractions); increase women's opportunities for body shame (i.e., the emotion that results from measuring oneself against a cultural standard and coming up short); and increase women's anxiety about their physical safety (e.g., fears about being raped), which in turn can lead to disordered eating, depression, and sexual dysfunction (see Figure 1).

Research examining women's internalization of SO via self-objectification has flourished and supported many of the theoretical tenets of objectification theory (for a thorough and critical review, see Moradi & Huang, 2008). However, research focusing on external SO experiences and their theorized negative outcomes within tests of objectification theory have been relatively limited (Kozee, Tylka, Augustus-Horvath, & Denchik, 2007; Moradi & Huang, 2008). Given that women's external SO experiences are a core (but underdeveloped) part of objectification theory and research, it is important to articulate the varying ways that external SO manifests, develop theory concerning these experiences, and include their theorized direct and indirect roles within tests of objectification theory. In addition, although Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) acknowledged that external and internalized SO are likely to be influenced by race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social class, further

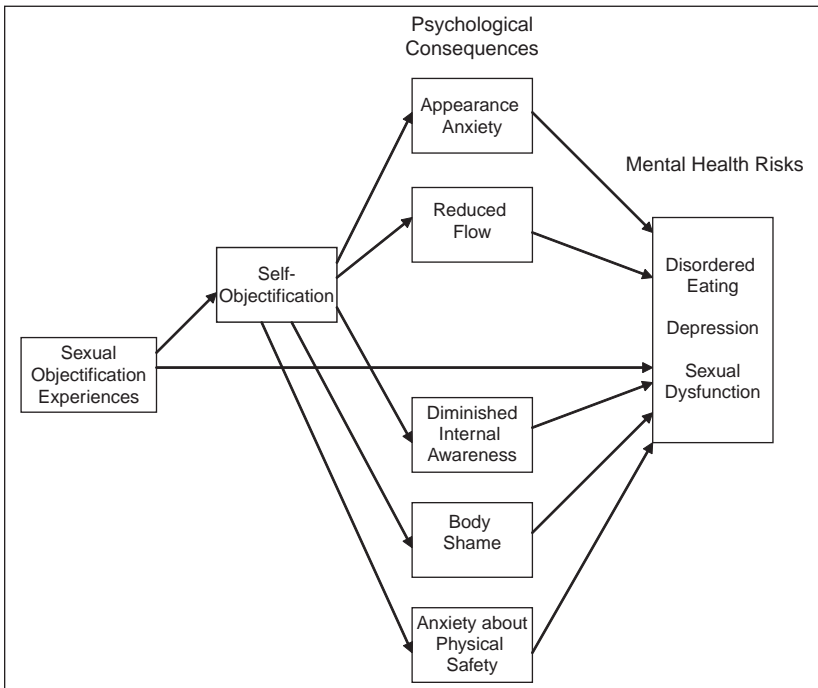


Figure 1. Model of key objectification theory tenets

elaboration of how external and internalized SO may intersect with women's other sociocultural identities is needed. Thus, in this article, we provide an overview of objectification theory–related research with particular attention paid to identifying various forms of external SO at multiple levels of analysis (e.g., cultural, interpersonal, and immersed or environmental/situation-specific forms) and to intersections of external and internalized SO with diverse sociocultural identities. We conclude with a summary of important gaps that exist in the current literature. Then, we address two of these gaps by extending objectification theory to our understanding of women's substance use and/or abuse and immersed forms of SO via sexually objectifying environments.

Overview of Sexual Objectification Research

As shown in Figure 1, objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) posits that external SO can negatively influence women's mental health and

their internalization of SO via self-objectification. Evidence for the SO of women can be found practically everywhere, from the media, to women's interpersonal experiences, to specific environments and subcultures within U.S. culture where the sexualization of women is cultivated and culturally condoned. For example, the APA's (2007b) review of studies examining depictions of women in the media including commercials, prime-time television programs, movies, music lyrics and videos, magazines, advertising, sports media, video games, and Internet sites revealed that women more often than men are depicted in sexualizing and objectified manners (e.g., wearing revealing and provocative clothing, portrayed in ways that emphasize their body parts and sexual readiness, serving as decorative objects). In addition, women portrayed in the media are frequently the target of men's sexist comments (e.g., use of deprecating words to describe women), sexual remarks (e.g., comments about women's body parts), and behaviors (e.g., ogling, leering, catcalling, harassment).

This SO often intersects with women's other sociocultural identities, such as sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and social class, to form unique sets of media portrayals and experiences for subgroups of women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). For example, lesbian and/or same-sex female relationships have become increasingly sexualized, exploited, and used in the media to target some male fantasies of being involved sexually with two or more women at the same time. In addition, the sexual exploitation and victimization of African American women from the days of slavery to the present has led to media images and stereotypes of Black women as sexual aggressors and sexual savages (Greene, 1994; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004). In contrast, Asian American women are often portrayed in the media as sexually subservient, childlike, and exotic (Root, 1995). Furthermore, women in lower social class positions are often considered gross, overly sexed, untamed, crude, and deserving of sexual exploitation and aggression (Pharr, 1988; Smith, 2008).

Research also indicates that the media often depicts a narrow and often unattainable standard of women's physical beauty and links this standard with a woman's sexiness and worth (APA, 2007b). Exposure to sexually objectifying media has been related to greater importance of beauty and appearance in defining an individual's own self-worth as well as in defining the value of females in general among African American adolescent girls (Gordon, 2008) and to self-objectification, body shame, appearance anxiety, internalization of cultural standards of beauty, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating symptoms among predominately White women (for a review, see Moradi & Huang, 2008).

Turning to women's interpersonal experiences, research indicates that being sexually objectified is a regular occurrence for many women in the United States. For example, in a series of daily diary studies, Swim and her colleagues (Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001) found that 94% of undergraduate women reported experiencing unwanted objectifying sexual comments and behaviors at least once over a semester, women reported more SO experiences than men, and SO emerged as a unique factor of daily experiences of sexism. Other researchers have also found that SO experiences are common among other samples of women (Hill & Fischer, 2008; Kozee & Tylka, 2006; Kozee et al., 2007; Moradi, Dirks, & Matteson, 2005). Similar levels of interpersonal SO experiences have been reported by White and racial/ethnic minority women (for a review, see Moradi & Huang, 2008), as well as heterosexual and sexual minority women (Hill & Fischer, 2008; Kozee et al., 2007). In addition, women's self-reported experiences of SO have been empirically linked to adverse psychological outcomes, including self-objectification, habitual body monitoring, body shame, internalization of the thin ideal, lowered interoceptive awareness, and disordered eating among both lesbian and heterosexual women (Hill & Fischer, 2008; Kozee & Tylka, 2006; Kozee et al., 2007; Moradi, Dirks, & Matteson, 2005).

In addition to these everyday commonplace forms of SO, many women also experience more extreme forms of SO via actual sexual victimization (i.e., rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). For example, research indicates that one in four women have been victims of rape or attempted rape, and more than half of college women have experienced some type of sexual victimization (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; White, Donat, & Bondurant, 2001). Females' self-reported experiences of sexual victimization are related to more self-objectification and body shame (Lindberg, Grabe, & Hyde, 2007) and adverse psychological outcomes, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (for reviews, see Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gefand, & Magley, 1997; Koss, Bailey, Yuan, Herrera, & Lichter, 2003). The intersections of gender with other sociocultural identities may place some subgroups of women at increased risk. For example, several studies have found that sexual minority women report more experiences of sexual assault in adulthood than their heterosexual peers and that the majority of perpetrators are male (Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchaine, 2005; Moracco, Runyan, Bowling, & Earp, 2007; Tjaden, Thoeness, & Allison, 1999). In addition, some of these sexual victimization experiences are related directly to heterosexist bias (Szymanski, 2005; Szymanski & Balsam, in press). Furthermore, when examined concurrently, experiences of unwanted sexually objectifying comments and behaviors along with traditional gender role

stereotyping and prejudice and experiences of heterosexist events are both positive, unique, and additive predictors of lesbian and bisexual women's psychological distress (Szymanski & Owens, 2009). Thus, minority women's experiences of SO and victimization occur against a backdrop of other forms of oppression, which may influence both their risk and response to SO as well as compound to negatively affect their mental health.

Many women also experience immersed forms of SO that occur when women are part of situations, environments, and subcultures where the SO of women is encouraged and promoted. For example, certain situations that accentuate awareness of observers' perspectives on women's bodies, such as ballet dancing, beauty pageants, modeling, and cheerleading, are likely to enhance SO (Slater & Tiggemann, 2002). In addition, many women work in environments whose main purpose is to offer explicit targets for men to objectify them and that reward them for treating themselves as sexual objects (e.g., exotic dancing and cocktail waitressing). Downs, James, and Cowan's (2006) study comparing exotic dancers with college women revealed that exotic dancers reported more body surveillance, greater prioritizing of body attractiveness over physical competence, and less relationship satisfaction, suggesting that SO does not affect all women equally. However, research on these immersed forms of SO is scant. Little attention has been paid to increasing our understanding of specific environments where SO of women is promoted or to understanding women's experiences in these contexts.

Turning to women's internalization of cultural SO via self-objectification, objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) postulates that self-objectification will be related to various psychological consequences, and these psychological consequences will mediate the relationship between self-objectification and disordered eating, depression, and sexual dysfunction (see Figure 1). Supporting this tenet, Moradi and Huang's (2008) review of the research revealed that self-objectification has been found to be related to lower internal bodily awareness, more disconnection from bodily functions, decreased flow states, difficulties in task performance, increased body shame, more appearance anxiety, and both eating disorder and depressive symptoms among racial/ethnically diverse groups of women. In addition, consistent support has been found for the mediating role of body shame in the self-objectification–disordered eating and depression links, mixed or limited support has been found for the mediating roles of appearance anxiety and awareness of internal bodily sensations in the self-objectification–disordered eating link, mixed support has been found for the mediating role of flow experiences in the self-objectification–depression link, no support has been found for the mediating role of flow experiences in the self-objectification–disordered

eating link, and no support has been found for the mediating role of awareness of internal bodily sensations in the self-objectification–depression link. Furthermore, self-objectification has been found to be related to broader psychosocial constructs, including poorer self-esteem, lower life satisfaction, less relationship satisfaction, lower levels of global well-being, risk-taking, self-harm, and negative attitudes toward breastfeeding (Breines, Crocker, & Garcia, 2008; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008; Mercurio & Landry, 2008; Moradi & Huang, 2008).

Internalized SO may intersect with other forms of oppression, such as heterosexism, ableism, and racism. For example, the intersections of self-objectification and internalized heterosexism may encourage some lesbians to (a) devalue homosexuality and place superior value on heterosexuality and its corresponding notions of what it means to be a woman, (b) be somewhat public about their sexual orientation but pass through assuming heterosexual behavior and dress as determined by male standards of female beauty to be socially acceptable or a good/model lesbian, and/or (c) criticize other lesbians who have a “butch” or unfeminine appearance (Szymanski & Chung, 2001). Supporting these notions, Haines et al. (2008) found that more internalized heterosexism was related to more self-objectification among lesbians, and self-objectification partially mediated the relations between internalized heterosexism and negative eating attitudes and depressive symptoms. Similarly, other research has supported the importance of including group-specific experiences within tests of objectification theory. For example, Moradi and Rottenstein (2007) found that among deaf women, participants who reported more tension and conflict between deaf and hearing cultures and identities reported experiencing more internalization of U.S. mainstream culture beauty ideals and greater disordered eating.

The internalization of messages concerning racialized SO may lead some women of color to see their sexuality as one of few assets (Thomas et al., 2004). Relatedly, internalized racism may influence the ways in which self-objectification is experienced. For example, some racial/ethnic minority women may idealize the White female beauty image that is often promoted in the media and wish to alter their physical appearance to try to attain these ideals (e.g., coloring or straightening their hair; using cosmetics to achieve a lighter skin tone; dieting, exercising, and/or undergoing plastic surgery to change their body features, shape, and/or size; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Greene, 1994; Thomas et al., 2004). In addition, culture-specific forms of self-objectification may be important to consider. For example, Buchannan, Fischer, Tokar, and Yoder (2008) found that higher levels of skin tone monitoring

were related to higher levels of body shame and skin tone dissatisfaction among African American women.

In sum, objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) provides a useful model for understanding how sociocultural factors may influence women's psychological problems and mental health risks. Research testing objectification theory has supported many of its theoretical tenets. However, gaps in theory and research exist. As we indicated above, more attention is needed on external manifestations of SO within objectification theory and related research.

Thus, in this article, we demonstrate how increased attention to manifestations of external SO, along with its internalized form, within the objectification theory framework can be useful for understanding and researching women's substance use and/or abuse. In addition, we extend objectification theory to our understanding of immersed forms of SO by proposing and describing a number of specific attributes of an environment that encourages and deepens SO, therefore constituting a *sexually objectifying environment*.

Existing research examining objectification theory tenets has largely used convenience samples of White, heterosexual, upper middle class, undergraduate women (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Thus, the use of random samples and diverse samples is warranted. In addition, examinations of how culture influences the experience and manifestation of external and internalized SO among women of color, sexual minority women, women from varying social classes, and women with disabilities are needed. Similarly, more research is needed attending to the potentially additive (e.g., concurrent links of SO and Racism), interactive (e.g., $SO \times \text{Racism}$), intersectional (e.g., ethgendered SO or the ways SO is fused with racism), and unique subgroup-specific (e.g., SO within racial/ethnic minority communities versus SO within the dominant White communities) links of external and internalized SO to the mental health of women who experience multiple forms of oppression (e.g., African American women; Moradi & Subich, 2003; Warner, 2008).

Most research on objectification theory has focused on disordered eating as the outcome variable (Szymanski & Henning, 2007); thus, more research is needed on depression and sexual dysfunction. In addition, tenets of objectification theory, such as the mediating role of anxiety about physical safety in the SO-mental health links, have not yet been examined. Longitudinal research is necessary to establish that external SO is the root cause of internalized SO and that both forms of SO have deleterious consequences for women (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Important areas of study include the stability of SO

over time, factors that increase or decrease SO, and the impact of varying levels of SO on psychological consequences and mental health risks.

Although objectification theory posits a mediation or causal model, examination of moderators in the external and internalized SO–mental health links is encouraged. Moderators help us understand when and how relations between two variables arise (Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004). Research on potential moderators, such as personality, resilience, cognitive ability, self-esteem, social support, coping styles and strategies, attachment styles, family dysfunction, feminist identity, involvement in feminist activism, adherence to cultural values, acculturation, racial socialization, racial identity, sexual minority identity, identity salience, and level of identification with or support from communities of color and/or sexual minority communities, which might intensify or buffer the link between external and internalized SO and psychosocial health among diverse groups of women, is needed. Research examining the effectiveness of preventive and remedial interventions designed to reduce external and internalized SO and their potential negative effects is also warranted (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Finally, research suggests that objectification theory may be a useful framework for conceptualizing and examining other aspects of women’s mental, psychosocial, and relational well-being (Breines et al., 2008; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008; Mercurio & Landry, 2008; Moradi & Huang, 2008); thus, extensions of objectification theory beyond disordered eating, depression, and sexual dysfunction are encouraged. As such, in the next section, we extend objectification theory to understanding women’s substance use and/or abuse.

Extending Objectification Theory to Understanding Women’s Substance Use and/or Abuse

Objectification theory may be useful in helping to explain how gendered experiences contribute to women’s substance use and/or abuse (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and for understanding the co-occurrence of substance abuse with both unipolar depression and disordered eating (Allgower, Wardle, & Steptoe, 2001; Kubik, Lytle, Birnbaum, Murray, & Perry, 2003; Pesa, Cowdery, Westerfield, & Wang, 1997; Stice, Burton, & Shaw, 2004). Drawing from objectification theory, we postulate that SO may be a risk factor for substance use and/or abuse in women via exposure to sexually objectifying media; the internalization of media and cultural standards that link a woman’s thinness, beauty, and sexiness with substance use; and interpersonal experiences of SO.

Exposure to Sexually Objectifying Media and Internalization of Cultural Messages

One way that SO might affect a woman's propensity to use and/or abuse substances is through exposure to sexually objectifying media, which pair women's sexuality and appearance with substance use. For example, a Bulgarian Apauna beer commercial features a large-breasted woman wearing a revealing top that shows her midriff and a miniskirt that reveals the majority of her lower body. The woman walks into a bar and orders a beer. The bartender hands her a bottle opener, but she rolls her eyes at it and puts the beer underneath her shirt next to her breasts and twists the bottle, opening it. The ad also depicts men in the bar entranced in complete adoration of her because they think she opened it somehow with her gigantic breasts. Then she pulls out a long necklace from her immense cleavage, to show a bottle opener. Relatedly, in 2003, a Miller Lite commercial, labeled "Catfight," was aired that featured two buxom women wrestling in wet concrete (Chura, 2003). Numerous alcohol advertisers have used ads like these to sell their products. For example, C. Hall and Crum (1994) examined the use of camera shots of men and women's body parts in different brands of 59 beer commercials. They found that women appeared less in beer commercials than men, but their bodily exposure was greater. In addition, there was a 49% likelihood that a commercial had at least one camera shot focused on a woman's chest, but men had only a 24% chance. There were also no male crotch shots, but female crotch shots appeared in five ads. Another important finding was that the majority of women appeared in either swimwear or leisure wear, whereas the men often appeared in work clothes. Commercials like these are direct instances of SO that women may be subjected to any time they turn on their television. In addition to commercials, other forms of media such as movies and music videos (for media critiques see Jhally, 2007; Katz & Kilbourne, 2004), communicate to women that if they engage in substance use they will be hot, sexy, and both admired and desired by men. These types of media also influence a woman in what her place is in the world—to be an object or decoration for men to admire—and this is connected with the intake of substances (Bem, 1993).

For decades, tobacco advertisements have been aimed at women to promote use in order to maintain thinness and promote sexiness. For example, cigarettes called Lucky Strikes used the slogan, "reach for a Lucky instead [of a sweet]." During this campaign period, the sales increased threefold in this company due to capturing the female market (Boyd, 1996–1997). Relatedly, Virginia Slims aired a commercial in which a thin woman was depicted

wearing a bathing suit and said, “When we’re wearing a swimsuit there’s no such thing as constructive criticism.” The ad seems to be promoting that the way to stay slim and be sexy is by smoking the product Virginia Slims. Because cigarette smoking is an appetite suppressant, many women use smoking to help control their weight (Pomerleau, Berman, Gritz, Marks, & Goeters, 1994). Societal pressures for thinness, belief that smoking is a good method to control weight, and exposure to tobacco ads that promote women’s cigarette use to attain sexiness and thinness have been shown to increase the odds of being a smoker among undergraduate women (Zucker et al., 2001; Zucker & Landry, 2007). In addition to cigarettes, many young women are using other substances, including the nonmedical use of steroids, to be thin and maintain low body fat (U.S. Congress, 2005). Thus, it seems that many young women may be actually abusing substances to maintain cultural standards of beauty and behavior.

Research has shown that advertising promises its viewers a fantasy—if you drink this beer or smoke this cigarette, you will be more attractive to others and engage in more fun (Miller, 1992). Promises by advertisers are ideals of sex appeal, sexual esteem, sensuality, and sexual attractiveness from the use of a certain product (Lambiase & Reichert, 2003). Sexually objectifying cultural messages suggest that by engaging in substance use, women will increase their likelihood of being involved with a good-looking man. Thus, heterosexual women may also use and/or abuse substances to gain attention from men and to get into and/or maintain romantic relationships. Supporting this notion, research indicates that girls and women are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol as a way to be accepted in their interpersonal relationships (Gomberg, 1996). In addition, female addicts are more likely to have a partner who abuses substances than males. For example, research indicates that one-third to one-half of addicted women live with an addicted man (McCaul & Svikiks, 1999).

Interpersonal Experiences of Sexual Objectification

SO experiences, as well as other types of oppressive events, have been shown to be different from generic stressors because they are unique, socio-culturally based, long-lasting, and cause excess stress (Landrine & Klonoff, 1997; Meyer, 2003). Experiencing SO, as well as other forms of sexist events, requires more adaptation than that needed for generic stressors experienced by all people and demands that an individual use coping strategies to manage the extra stress associated with these oppressive environmental stimuli, which can negatively influence psychosocial health (Clark, Anderson,

Clark, & Williams, 1999). In addition, stress from SO stems from relatively stable underlying patriarchal social structures, institutions, and processes beyond the individual rather than from individual conditions or events that characterize generic stressors or biological characteristics of an individual (Meyer, 2003). Thus, living in a culture that sexually objectifies the female body creates a steady stream of anxiety-provoking events that force women to keep constant vigilance over both their physical safety and their appearance with very little control over these experiences (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Oppressive events or living in an environment that is filled with such stimuli have been theorized to be risk factors for substance abuse problems (Zucker & Landry, 2007). Clark et al. (1999) postulated that individuals who deal with oppressive events may have feelings of anger and depression, which may then lead to coping via use of alcohol or other substances to manage these feelings. Furthermore, Zucker and Landry (2007) posited that women may cope with experiences of sexism by using substances as a numbing mechanism. Relatedly, Jacobson (1986) postulated that women may smoke, and perhaps use other substances, to cope with being undervalued and underpaid and because they fear that if they express their feelings they will come off as unfeminine.

Research shows that women who self-reported more sexist events (which included SO experiences) in a daily diary had more feelings of anger and depression (Swim et al., 2001). In addition, studies reveal that sexist discrimination (i.e., being treated unfairly because of being a woman) is related to psychological distress above and beyond major and minor generic stressful life events (Landrine, Klonoff, Gibbs, Manning, & Lund, 1995) and may account for gender differences in anxious, depressive, and somatic symptoms (Klonoff, Landrine, & Campell, 2000). Furthermore, using alcohol as a way to cope with life was moderately correlated with alcohol-related problems among undergraduates (Martens, Rocha, Martin, & Serrao, 2008). Thus, using and/or abusing substances may be one way that women choose to cope with the excess stress associated with SO and other experiences of sexism. Supporting this notion, Zucker and Landry (2007) found a positive relationship between self-reported experiences of sexist discrimination and binge drinking and smoking quantity. Other studies have found that women who work in male-dominated environments are more likely to use substances than those who do not (Columbia University, 1996), and workplace sexual harassment is related to women's substance abuse, particularly alcohol (Davis & Wood, 1999; Rospenda, 2002). Finally, girls' experiences of extreme forms of SO, including childhood and adolescent sexual victimization, predict use of alcohol, nicotine, and illicit drugs (Moran, Vuchinich, & Hall, 2004;

Thompson, Arias, Basile, & Desai, 2002), as well as major depression and substance abuse/dependence comorbidity and post-traumatic stress and substance abuse/dependence comorbidity after controlling for demographics, family alcohol abuse, and family drug abuse (Kilpatrick et al., 2003). Relatedly, Streicher-Bremer's (2001) qualitative study found that women who had experienced sexual abuse, prostitution, and rape connected these gendered experiences to their substance abuse of heroin.

For women with more than one minority status, interpersonal experiences of SO may compound, interact with, and/or intersect with their experiences of other forms of oppression to influence substance use and/or abuse (Moradi & Subich, 2003). For example, given the links between lesbians' experience of sexual orientation-based hate crime victimization and higher levels of alcohol and drug abuse (Descamps, Rothblum, Bradford, & Ryan, 2000), it could be that heterosexist events along with SO experiences have separate and direct links to sexual minority women's substance use/abuse. In addition to these theorized direct effects on substance use and/or abuse, heterosexist events may interact with and magnify the impact of SO experiences, which may predict substance use and/or abuse (Landrine, Klonoff, Alcaraz, Scott, & Wilkins, 1995). Finally, intersections of oppression, such as experiences of racialized SO for women of color, may influence substance use and/or abuse (Collins, 1991).

Co-Occurrence of Depression, Disordered Eating, and Substance Abuse

Objectification theory may also help explain the co-occurrence of depression and disordered eating with substance abuse among women. Stice et al. (2004) identified four routes that could give rise to this comorbidity. First, depression and/or disordered eating might be risk factors for substance abuse. Thus, in addition to the direct effects theorized above, SO may influence women's substance abuse indirectly in that it is mediated by several objectification theory variables. Although Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) identified six potential mediators (i.e., self-objectification, body shame, appearance anxiety, insensitivity to bodily cues, opportunities for peak motivational states or flow, and anxiety about physical safety) of the SO experiences-depression/disordered eating links, only self-objectification and body shame have been consistently empirically supported in the literature (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Thus, it may be that SO experiences lead to self-objectification, which contributes to body shame, which leads to depression and/or disordered eating and results in substance abuse.

Second, substance abuse might be a risk factor for depression and/or disordered eating. Thus, it may be that SO experiences are related indirectly to depression and/or disordered eating via self-objectification and body shame, as well as indirectly via substance abuse. That is, SO experiences lead to more self-objectification, which leads to more body shame, which results in depression and/or disordered eating; and SO experiences lead to more substance abuse, which in turn leads to more depression and/or disordered eating. Third, reciprocal effects might occur in which depression and/or disordered eating increase the risk of substance abuse, and substance abuse increases the risk of depression and/or disordered eating. Fourth, there is no evidence of temporal precedence between depression and/or disordered eating and substance abuse, but they share common risk factors, such as experiences of internalized, interpersonal, and cultural SO (Stice et al., 2004). Thus, objectification theory provides a framework for investigating how and why depression and disordered eating are correlated with substance abuse among women. Testing theorized mediation models using cross-sectional data is typically a first step in teasing out these relationships. Results of these studies can provide the foundation for testing theorized mediation models using longitudinal data, which often require more money and resources to execute. In addition, longitudinal cross-lagged models with preferably four data points can provide information about the strength of the temporal relationships between the variables (Martens & Haase, 2006). Next, we demonstrate the importance of understanding immersed forms of SO.

Extending Objectification Theory to Understanding Immersed Forms of Sexual Objectification

Research has highlighted the potential for variable experiences of SO, and environment is clearly one potential cause for these differences. Thus, it is important to identify and understand the specific attributes of an environment that encourage and deepen SO, thereby constituting a *sexually objectifying environment* (SOE). This is an important step in beginning to understand immersed forms of SO and how they differ from everyday forms of SO. In addition, it sets the stage for future research investigating women's experiences and responses to these types of SO.

Drawing from feminist, vocational, and organizational psychology, we assert that the core criteria for SOEs are ones in which (a) traditional gender roles exist, (b) a high probability of male contact exists (physically speaking,

a male-dominated environment), (c) women typically hold less power than men in that environment, (d) a high degree of attention is drawn to sexual/physical attributes of women's bodies, and (e) there is the approval and acknowledgement of male gaze. We also identify some supplementary factors that may contribute to the creation of an SOE, including the presence of alcohol, the regulated encouragement of sexualization (i.e., flirting, smiling), and/or the promotion of competition between women. Next, we use the Hooters chain of restaurants (Hooters of America, 2006) to serve as a general example of an SOE. Finally, we provide directions for future research related to SOEs.

Core Criteria for Sexually Objectifying Environments

The first criterion for an SOE is the existence of traditional gender roles. Gender roles are the set of behaviors, personality attributes, self-concepts, and expectations organized according to cultural definitions and prescriptions of masculinity and femininity (Gutek, 1985; Worell & Remer, 2003). Defined in a traditional manner, men's gender roles are oriented towards competency, achievement, and agency and include traits such as independence, aggression, competitiveness, rationality, problem solving, and objectivity (Bakan, 1966; Parsons & Bales, 1955). In addition, traditional gender role socialization encourages many men to be powerful, controlling, and dominant; see women as sex objects; view sex as a conquest; and believe that women are their property (Worell & Remer, 2003). Alternately, women's traditional gender roles tend to be relationally and expressively oriented and include characteristics such as nurturance, emotionality, passivity, dependence, and harmony (Bem, 1993). In addition, traditional gender role socialization encourages many women to be submissive to men and fulfill their needs and wants, seek men's protection, and accept responsibility for limiting and controlling men's sexual behavior (Worell & Remer, 2003). Thus, the existence of traditional gender roles in an environment is likely to contribute to attitudes and behaviors that allow for and normalize the SO of women.

Specific to the workplace, Gutek (1985) used the term *gender role spillover* to refer to the carryover of these traditional gender roles into work environments where they are irrelevant or inappropriate. This phenomenon is more likely to occur when gender role is more salient than work role and/or gender ratios are highly skewed, because under many circumstances, individuals use gender role stereotypes to guide behavior, especially in male-female interactions (Gutek, 1985; Gutek & Morasch, 1992). In particular, gender-role spillover occurs when women (more than men in similar occupational

roles) are expected to project their sexuality through behavior, appearance, or dress (Gutek & Morasch, 1982). When gender role spillover occurs, the effects may be magnified when women hold jobs where one aspect is reminiscent of a sex object (i.e., cocktail waitress). In this position, women are likely to be targets of unwanted sexual attention but may (inaccurately) attribute the way they are treated to their job rather than to their gender (Unger, 2001). A dynamic is then set up where men are expected to take the role of sexual initiator. One potential outcome is a sexualized work environment where sexual remarks, seductive clothing, and sexual advances are tolerated and encouraged (Gutek, Cohen, & Konrad, 1990).

Also contributing to an SOE is a disproportionately greater number of men than women present. Consistent with the enactment of traditional gender roles described above, research demonstrates that men are more likely than women to perceive the world in sexual terms and to mistake friendliness for seduction (Abbey, 1982; Edmondson & Conger, 1995; Henningsen, 2004; Saal, Johnson, & Weber, 1989). Other research has alternately suggested that men are able to discriminate between sexually interested and friendly behavior (Shotland & Craig, 1988) but continues to confirm that men perceive more situations in general as sexually oriented than do women. Researchers attribute this to differences in perceptual thresholds of sexual intent (women are more likely to judge sexually interested behavior as friendly, and men are more likely to judge friendly behavior as sexually interested). In other words, men are able to discriminate but have poor judgment (Shotland & Craig, 1988). Furthermore, although most misperceptions of sexual intent are quickly resolved, they have been linked to men's perpetration of sexual assault and sexual harassment (Abbey, McAuslan, & Ross, 1998). It is also important to note that individual variables serve as mediators of men's misperceptions, such as hostile masculinity, interpersonal sex, and drinking in dating and sexual situations (Jacques-Tiura, Abbey, Parkhill, & Zawacki, 2007; Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991).

Male-dominated environments have also been shown to be more sexualized than female-dominated environments (Gutek, 1985). Taking an organizational perspective, Gutek et al. (1990) proposed the contact hypothesis, which states that women who have a lot of contact with men at work will report more nonharassing sexual behavior, more sexual harassment, and a more sexualized work environment than women who have little interaction with men at their job. Supporting this hypothesis, Gruber (1998) found that the extent of contact with men was a key predictor of incidence of harassment, number of different types of harassment, sexual comments, sexual categorical remarks, and sexual materials for women. Thus, contact with men

may serve as a mediator between women and SO: Frequent contact with men may create a more sexualized environment, which in turn allows for more SO experiences.

A pervasive lack of power among women is a third criterion to be met by SOEs. Power at the environmental or organizational level has been conceptualized as an extension of societal power into the workplace (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). At the societal level, U.S. mainstream culture is patriarchal, which means that it is male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered (Johnson, 2005). As a system, patriarchy is pervasive, ingrained, invisible, and all-encompassing, making it powerful in structuring our experiences. As a woman attempts to effect some sort of change (e.g., by feminist action), others may react negatively, which serves to maintain the status quo (a phenomenon termed “backlash”; for an extensive review, see Faludi, 1991). Due to patriarchy, women clearly are in positions of less power. Extending into the workplace, patriarchy influences the structure of occupations within an organization (from high status to low status), the relationships of influence between individuals (essentially, who fits where), and who has access to certain organizational resources. Thus, an SOE is an environment where women occupy low-status positions, have a relatively small amount of influence (in any number of spheres), and do not have access to certain organizational or environmental resources.

A fourth contextual element in SOEs is women’s bodies “on display.” In their proposal of objectification theory, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) suggested that wearing baggy clothing may be a strategy used by women to avoid SO as it conceals their physique. Such loose-fitting clothes obscure the body and assist women in “opting out of the objectification limelight,” whereas wearing tight and revealing clothing that shows off the body serves to place women squarely within the “objectification limelight.” Environments where women are required, often by specifications of a uniform, to reveal and emphasize their bodies are clearly sexually objectifying. Additionally, wearing tight or revealing clothing may facilitate self-objectification, as women constantly review their appearance and the fit of their clothing in the surrounding mirrors (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2005). Supporting this notion, Prichard and Tiggemann (2005) found that women in fitness centers who wore tight and fitted exercise clothing (gym tops and gym pants) placed greater emphasis on their appearance attributes and engaged in more habitual body monitoring than women who wore looser clothing (T-shirts and sweatpants). Relatedly, Strelan, Mehaffey, and Tiggemann (2003) found that the attention focused on women’s bodies in fitness centers leads women to self-objectify more.

The final core criterion for an environment to be sexually objectifying is the acknowledgement and approval of male gaze in that setting. As Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) asserted, “The most subtle and deniable way sexualized evaluation is enacted—and arguably the most ubiquitous—is through gaze, or visual inspection of the body” (p. 175). Quinn (2002) reframed sexual gaze as “girl watching,” a specific, yet subtle, form of sexual harassment that cannot be avoided and is not under women’s control. According to Quinn, girl watching is a “targeted tactic of power” where men use gaze to demonstrate their right to physically and sexually evaluate women. The activity serves as a form of playing a game among some men; however, the targeted woman is generally understood to be an object, rather than a player, in the game. Thus, from a male point of view, “acts such as girl watching are simply games played with objects: women’s bodies” (Quinn, 2002, p. 398). The effects of male gaze on women may be intensified by the accompaniment of sexually evaluative commentary (Allen, 1984). Two other manifestations of objectifying gaze that may be present in an SOE are the inclusion of visual media showing interpersonal encounters (i.e., men looking at women in advertisements) and visual media depicting women’s bodies and body parts (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

It is important to acknowledge that these core criteria do not stand alone but rather interact with one another. For example, it is not simply the presence of men that leads to SO but men whose behaviors, attributes, and self-concepts are organized around cultural gender ideals, who have a degree of strength and influence over women in the environment, and who are encouraged to visually evaluate women. In a manner of speaking, each criterion tends to elevate the others to a new level that contributes to SO. Also, across SOEs there may be differing degrees of each criterion and/or idiosyncratic nuances that create qualitative differences.

Supplementary Criteria for Sexually Objectifying Environments

In addition to the core criteria described above, there are likely a large number of additional factors that contribute to an SOE. Although it is not within the scope of this article to identify each of these potential criteria, the three that were previously mentioned—the presence/consumption of alcohol, regulated encouragement of sexualization (e.g., smiling, flirting), and competition between women—seem salient. Alcohol has long been linked to men’s SO of women (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997) and has been suggested to be both a precipitant of and an excuse for sexually aggressive behavior by men

(Richardson & Hammock, 1991). Perpetrator alcohol consumption is associated with increased sexual violence and physical aggression (Breck & Ullman, 2001, 2002). There is also extensive research highlighting the interaction between alcohol and the role of male peer support in sexual assaults, as drinking tends to be a shared activity (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).

In addition to alcohol, the regulated encouragement of sexualization, such as smiling, flirting, or suggestive touching, may contribute to SOEs. Flirting is often considered a code of conduct for social interactions. Yelvington (1996) proposed that flirting, which alternates between making promises and being elusive, is designed to indicate possible sexual interest in another person and also serves as a way of attracting interest to oneself. However, flirting leaves ample room for interpretation, as individuals do not know the exact intentions of the person who is flirting or even necessarily their own intentions when engaged in flirting. Finally, competition between women may be another factor contributing to an SOE. As previously discussed, self-objectification, a consequence of SO, involves the externalization of perspective and value regarding one's own body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Similarly, as a result of competition, research has shown that feelings of self-worth become increasingly dependent on external sources of evaluation (Kohn, 1987; Norem-Hebeisen & Johnson, 1981). Feminist theory also highlights that women are taught to be competitors against other women for beauty (Wolf, 1991), and women are told to compete for things that are supposedly important to them, one of which is "men" (Lukas, 2008) or, rather, male attention, male resources, or, more broadly, association with male power.

Hooters as an Example of a Sexually Objectifying Environment

There are a large number of settings that meet the aforementioned criteria for an SOE; however, to fully illustrate this phenomenon, we use the Hooters chain of restaurants to serve as a general example. First, it is important to note that although waitressing has been generally considered to be a form of "doing gender" and often involves interactions that lead to objectification (E. Hall, 1993; LaPointe, 1992), not all waitressing occurs in objectifying environments, and waitressing may involve little to no objectification depending on the context.

Hooters restaurants clearly uphold traditional gender roles as the restaurants' waitstaffs are exclusively female, a right legally gained in a 1997 class action settlement (Hooters of America, 2006). Waitressing has long been considered a traditionally female role. Waitressing was found to be one of

only six jobs in 1995 with a workforce at least 70% female, the others being secretary, bookkeeper, nurse, cashier, and elementary school teacher (Lips, 1997). Furthermore, in 2003, research revealed that 77% of servers were female (National Restaurant Association Education Foundation, 2003); and as recently as 2007, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that 74% of individuals with the occupational title of waiter/waitress were female. Restaurants often frame service work as “women’s work,” and most service jobs could be considered an extension of their tasks at home (i.e., nurturing, cleaning, housekeeping, and waiting) or an expression of their femininity (E. Hall, 1993).

Whereas the waitstaff at Hooters is exclusively female, a majority of customers, approximately 68%, are male (Hooters of America, 2006). Another criterion of an SOE, a high probability of male contact, is therefore also met. Due to the fact that Hooters waitresses are exclusively female, the third criterion of an SOE, women’s lack of power, is also met. Retail service work in general is often considered precarious due to high flexibility, poor pay, lack of benefits, and low levels of protection (Hughes & Tadic, 1998). From a broader perspective, the cult of the customer and quality customer service have become increasingly important in retail industries. Thus, how the customer “feels” is important and leads to profitability (Du Gay & Salaman, 1992), thereby giving customers a great deal more power than those who wait on them.

Not only does this environment enforce traditional gender roles and provide women with less power, there is a heavy emphasis on women’s physical appearance. LaPointe (1992) pointed out that dressing waitresses in uniforms to highlight their physical attributes is a common practice; however, Hooters provides an example of uniforms that can easily be argued to be more revealing than is “common,” and those uniforms are strictly regulated. The Hooters Girls required uniforms, consisting of orange shorts, Hooters tanks or T-shirts, pantyhose, and white shoes and socks, clearly emphasize their bodies and de-emphasize their human individuality. According to Hooters of America (2006), “the element of female sex appeal is prevalent in the restaurants,” and “sex appeal is legal and it sells.” Hooters marketing strategies emphasize the Hooters Girl and her sex appeal, the Hooters business motto accurately capturing this: “You can sell the sizzle, but you have to deliver the steak.” In this unique environment, women’s bodies are openly viewed as objects, tools of their trade, as the corporation asserts that “Hooters Girls have the same right to use their natural female sex appeal to earn a living as do super models Cindy Crawford and Naomi Campbell.”

Hooters also provides an excellent example of an environment that acknowledges and approves of male gaze. The most obvious form of male gaze is the

direct interpersonal staring at or looking at the waitresses, a practice heavily encouraged by the previously discussed combination of primarily male clientele and unevenly stacked power dynamics. Additionally, Hooters restaurants display numerous posters and photographs of the scantily clad Hooters Girls. A dangerous line may be crossed, as men who stare at these images of women may be more inclined to feel as though the real women serving them are simply poster girls coming to life rather than “real” women. Hooters creates a number of other products (i.e., magazines and calendars) and events (e.g., frequent swimsuit competitions between waitresses) in which the sole focus is to stare at and evaluate women.

Although we use the Hooters restaurant chain to illustrate an SOE, there are many other restaurants that meet our criteria, such as Hustler Bar & Grille, Knockers, Cheerleader’s, Melons, Mugs ’n Jugs, Bleachers’s, Zoomerz, Show-Me’s, and Fraternity House. In addition, other nonrestaurant environments, such as many cheerleading environments (cf. Bettis & Adams, 2003; Dallas Cowboys, 2007; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001; Wann, Waddill, & Dunham, 2004), also meet the criteria of an SOE that highlights traditional gender roles; focuses on the women’s physical appearance; is demographically male-dominated; provides cheerleaders with little, if any, power; and elicits male gaze.

Sexually Objectifying Environments:

Directions for Future Research

Now that we have identified the criteria for SOEs, future research is needed to more fully understand these immersed forms of SO. For example, research might identify factors that contribute to women’s choosing a role in SOEs; to describe women’s experiences in these contexts; to identify coping strategies that women use in navigating SOEs; and to identify and describe contextual, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors that influence these women’s experiences. Future research might also compare women who are part of SOEs with women who are not to see if the two groups differ on objectification theory constructs. Given some research evidence suggesting that organizational status may be a protective factor for workplace sexual harassment (cf. Buchanan, Settles, & Woods, 2008), research might examine if women with higher statuses (managers, vice presidents) in SOEs experience these environments differently and/or report less SO than women with lower statuses (waitresses, administrative assistants).

Investigations are also needed to examine how women’s various sociocultural identities influence experiences of SOEs such as race, ethnicity, sexual

orientation, religious affiliation, disability, and/or social class. For example, how does a woman of color perceive SOEs where the majority of persons are also racial/ethnic minorities compared to SOEs that are predominantly White? How does racism within SOEs influence racial/ethnic minority women's experiences? In what ways do women from the southern United States navigate SOEs differently from women from other geographic areas, given norms for politeness in the South? Or, how do lesbians experience relationships with other women and men in SOEs? Future research could also focus on the men who are a part of SOEs, including their experiences in SOEs, factors contributing towards their sexually objectifying behaviors in SOEs, and the effects of spending varying amounts of time in SOEs.

Finally, we would like to note two particularly salient qualifications and offer related suggestions for future research. First, we propose that SOEs, as outlined in this article, are intended to apply to women's unique experiences. However, we recognize that research shows that men and masculinity are increasingly also subjected to SO, in ways both similar and dissimilar from women (Bordo, 1999; Hebl, King, & Lin, 2004; Kilbourne, 1999; Rohlinger, 2002; Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005a). For example, the erotic male is increasingly becoming the standard depiction of masculinity (Rohlinger, 2002), the "drive for muscularity" a more commonplace phenomenon among men and boys (Edwards & Launder, 2000; McCreary & Sasse, 2000; Morrison, Morrison, & Hopkins, 2003), and the level of body image investment for men a more intense pursuit (Luciano, 2001). Given these uniquely masculine ideals, it follows that the criteria that would serve to create SOEs for men are dissimilar (at least partially) from the ones presented here for women. Future research might work towards identifying these criteria and exploring men's subsequent experiences.

The second qualification is to acknowledge that women themselves may contribute towards SOEs in distinct ways (beyond adherence to traditional gender roles as previously recognized in the core criteria). Women also objectify women, though not to the extent that men objectify women (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005b). It is also likely that the means through which women enact SO on other women take much more subtle forms, because in this case SO occurs between members of a systematically oppressed group, and women may subsequently experience ambivalence when imposing it on other women. One example of women objectifying women discreetly could be the manner in which women speak to one another. Bearman, Korobov, and Thorne (2009) found that women with high internalized sexism acted this out between one another by assertions of incompetence, general ignorance claims, competitive banter, construction of women as competitors, construction of women as

objects, and invalidation and derogation. Women objectifying women could also take the form of “gender policing” (a term originally coined in reference to state violence towards transgender persons), comments/suggestions, glances, and other behaviors that communicate the belief and prescriptive attitudes that women should conform to sexually objectified ideals. Clearly, to properly address women’s own contribution to SOEs, a great deal more research is first needed to explore the ways women objectify other women, how women perceive SO by women, and how women experience and are affected by SO by women.

In conclusion, objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) provides an important framework for understanding, researching, and intervening to improve women’s lives in a sociocultural context that sexually objectifies the female body and equates a woman’s worth with her body’s appearance and sexual functions. Our Major Contribution builds on Fredrickson and Robert’s (1997) work by advancing theory, research, practice, and training related to the SO of women.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

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