Stop Looking at Me!

Associations Between Men's Partner-objectification and Women's Self-objectification, Body Shame and Life Satisfaction in Romantic Relationships.

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Abstract

A growing amount of empirical evidence shows that sexual objectification can be elicited within the context of romantic relationships, leading to adverse consequences for women's well-being. However, most of this research assessed women's self-reported perception of being objectified by the romantic partner, while scant and not converging research has considered men's objectifying perceptions toward their romantic partners. Furthermore, little is known about the underlying mechanisms through which partner-objectification is associated with negative consequences for women. To fill these gaps, we involved a sample of heterosexual couples (N = 196) and investigated whether men's partner-objectification would be related to women's self-objectification (in terms of self-surveillance) and, in turn, their body shame. Further, we examined whether self-objectification and body shame mediated the relation between men's partner-objectification and women's undermined life satisfaction. Confirming our hypotheses, serial mediation analyses showed that partner-objectification was associated with life satisfaction in women via the indirect effect of self-objectification and body shame.

Implications of these findings for literature on sexual objectification and relationship satisfaction are discussed. Please refer to the Supplementary Material section to find this article's Community and Social Impact Statement.

Keywords: romantic relationships; sexual objectification; self-objectification; body shame; life satisfaction.

Introduction

Sexual objectification, i.e., the reduction of a person to their body or sexual body parts (Bartky, 1990), is one of the most pervasive forms of gender discrimination (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Indeed, sexual objectification is a gendered process in which women are subject to the male's gaze (e.g., Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005), although men are not exempt from such treatment (Loughnan & Pacilli, 2014). This socio-cultural attitude to perceive and evaluate women based on their physical appearance – rather on their skills or personhood – is still deeply rooted in western societies. Holland and colleagues (2017), for example, found that women experience sexual objectification almost 3-4 times per week on average and observe other women's sexual objectification 9-10 times on average.

According to objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), a consequence of such an attitude is that women come to self-objectify; that is, they internalize this perspective and perceive themselves as passive objects, giving exclusive value to their sexualized body parts. Far from being harmless, self-objectification is associated with a wide range of adverse outcomes such as depression, sexual dysfunction, and various forms of disordered eating (see Roberts et al., 2018, for a review). In addition, literature demonstrated that self-objectification also affects general indicators of well-being, including satisfaction with life (Mercurio & Landry, 2008), and that this relationship occurs via increased body shame (Choma et al., 2010; Mercurio & Landry, 2008).

More recent literature is also suggesting that self-objectification may occur because of interpersonal experiences of sexual objectification (see Gervais et al., 2020, for a review). That is, converging evidence revealed that, within interpersonal relationships, men's objectifying gaze (i.e., visual inspection of women's body and sexual body parts) leads women to deleterious consequences, including self-objectifying behaviors and perceptions (e.g., Calogero, 2004; Garcia et al., 2016; Gervais et al., 2011). Importantly, these studies focused on the effects of objectifying behaviors stemming from strangers or acquaintances, while research on sexual objectification, and its consequences, from significant others (e.g., the romantic partner) remains scarce.

To contribute to the literature on sexual objectification in the context of significant relationships, the present research has three main aims: examining the relationship between men's tendency to sexually objectify their romantic partners (i.e., partner-objectification) and women's self-objectifying behavior and perceptions; investigating the association between men's partner-objectification and women's life satisfaction; finally, testing the mediating mechanisms in the latter relation.

Sexual Objectification within Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships represent one of the most influential social interactions (e.g., Kamp Dush et al., 2008; Lavner & Bradbury, 2010) for human beings and are fundamental for their happiness and well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Weidmann et al., 2016). However, specific characteristics of the relationship may have positive or negative effects on individuals, including their satisfaction with life (see Proulx et al., 2007, for a review). In particular, the partner's perceptions toward the other and the relationship are essential in determining individuals' satisfaction with their own life (Schimmack et al., 2002).

Putting objectification in the latter framework, recent literature has demonstrated that sexual objectification may also arise within close romantic relationships. In other words, it is possible that men's negative perceptions of women at large may also extend to their partners (e.g., Riemer et al., 2020; Zurbriggen et al., 2011). Specifically, romantic relationships are a relevant site for studying the process of sexual objectification. In fact, objectification theory states that sexual objectification experiences occur whenever women's physical appearance is made salient and emphasized (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This is the case also in the context of romantic relationships, where physical appearance is an intrinsic element ruling the romantic approach and relationship (Feingold, 1990). In this direction, Sanchez and Broccoli (2008) demonstrated the automatic link between romantic relationships and self-objectification. Specifically, they found that priming women with words related to romantic relationships (vs. neutral words) increased their self-objectification. Furthermore, subsequent research revealed a connection between the perception of being sexually

objectified by the romantic partner and women's tendency to adopt a third-person view of one's own body (i.e., to self-objectify; Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015; Ramsey et al., 2017).

However, a crucial limitation of these studies is represented by the fact that men's partner-objectification has been assessed as a partner's meta-perception (i.e., beliefs about how we are seen by others), that is, by detecting women's feelings of being objectified by the partner. For example, in the aforementioned studies (Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015; Ramsey et al., 2017), women were asked to evaluate the extent to which their partner surveyed their bodies and tested the relationship of such perceptions with women's self-objectification. On the one hand, meta-perceptions are important indicators of one's attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Gruttenirink & Meaister, 2021; Pavetich & Stathi, 2020); on the other hand, however, they are likely affected by a priori attitudes toward their partner, cognitive biases or self-enhancement motives (e.g., Sedikides & Gregg, 2008) and, thus, they cannot be considered as a fully reliable indicator of partner's tendency to objectify.

To integrate and expand this previous literature, in the present research, we assessed the men's self-reported tendencies to objectify the partner – rather than women's meta-perceptions – and tested the relation with women's self-objectification. More specifically, we followed the operationalization of partner-objectification used in previous studies (e.g., Strelan & Pagoudis, 2018) and investigated the extent to which men evaluated their romantic partners based on their physical appearance over other qualities. To the best of our knowledge, this research gap has so far been addressed in only a few previous studies with mixed results. Riemer and colleagues (2020) experimentally investigated whether men's focus on their partners' appearance would predict greater self-objectification in women, showing that women whose partners sexually objectified them reported greater self-objectification than women whose partners did not focus on their body. Similarly, Strelan and Pagoudis (2018) found that the more an individual within a relationship objectifies their partner, giving more importance to their physical appearance than competence, the more likely the partner self-objectifies. However, these results have not been replicated by Mahar and colleagues (2020), which found that the tendency to sexually objectify the partner in terms of

monitoring their body was not related to that partner's self-objectification. Thus, this research leaves a primary research question open: are men's self-reported tendencies to sexually objectify their partner linked to increased self-objectification in women?

In the present work we attempted to address this question. Further, we explored whether a possible heightened women's self-objectification due to men's partner-objectification would be an important psychological mechanism triggering broader processes, specifically involving decreased women's life satisfaction through increased feelings of body shame.

Mediating Processes: Self-objectification and Body Shame

According to objectification theorists (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996), self-objectification represents the tendency of viewing the own body from the point of view of an external (male) observer. Concretely, the key component of such a process of internalization is the exacerbated women's tendency to monitor their bodies (see Calogero et al., 2011, for a review). This process of internalization is related to several negative consequences, such as reduced self-esteem (e.g., Choma et al., 2010; Fiissel & Lafreniere, 2006; Strelan et al., 2003), increased eating disorders (see Schaefer et al., 2018 for a meta-analysis), and worsened mental health (e.g., Hanna et al., 2017).

Importantly, some scholars argued that self-surveilling the body may not be inherently dangerous (DeVille et al., 2015) and that negative consequences associated with self-objectification occurs through increased body shame, a negative emotion that women feel in relation to the self when cultural standards of beauty are not met (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). In this regard, correlational and experimental research (e.g., Baildon et al., 2021; Greenleaf, 2005; Kipela et al., 2019; Mehak et al., 2018; Pila et al., 2021; Schaefer et al., 2018) consistently revealed that self-objectification in terms of heightened body-surveillance is strictly related to increased body shame. Of particular interest to our research, Mercurio and Landry (2008) found that self-objectification was associated with decreased life satisfaction, and this relationship was mediated by increased body shame and, in turn, reduced self-esteem. Similarly, Choma and collaborators (2010) found a

negative association between self-surveillance and self-esteem via increased body shame. Thus, women who self-objectify by monitoring their bodies were more likely to report lower confidence in self-worth, and greater body shame accounted for this relationship.

To expand the understanding of this crucial link, in our research we verified whether women's self-objectification in terms of body surveillance and the consequent body shame would be associated with broader consequences for women's life, i.e., their undermined life satisfaction. We elected to focus on this relevant outcome as, on the one hand, it is the core of the cognitive evaluation of the quality of one's own life (Pavot & Diener, 2008) and, on the other hand, vast research has demonstrated that it is deeply affected by dynamic and attitudes featuring the romantic relationship. For example, effective communication or positive attributions between the partners positively influence the evaluation of their own lives (Robertson et al., 2018; Shek, 1995). In the same vein, Kamp Dush and colleagues (2008) reported that being in a happy marriage across time was associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms. However, research has not yet explored the role of sexually objectifying dynamics within romantic relationships in shaping women's life satisfaction. Since the nature of such dyadic relation and the central role played by the partner (i.e., the relevance of their perceptions and attitudes), it is likely that men's partner-objectification may play a critical role in women's life satisfaction through the mediating mechanisms of women's self-objectification and, in turn, increased body shame.

The Present Research

As above mentioned, we planned this research to fulfill three main goals: a) clarifying the link between men's partner-objectification and women's self-objectification within heterosexual romantic couples by detecting actual men's perceptions rather than women's meta-perceptions; b) verifying whether men's partner-objectification would trigger a psychological process among women leading to a decreased satisfaction in their own lives; c) investigating whether self-objectification and body shame represent significant mechanisms involved in the relation between men's partner-objectification and women's life satisfaction.

Basing on these goals, we derived the following hypotheses:

- Partner-objectification would be positively related to women's self-objectification (H1a) and body shame (H1b);
- Partner-objectification would be negatively related to women's life satisfaction (H2);
- Self-objectification and body shame would serially mediate the latter relation (H3).

In doing so, we gathered self-report data by considering both the partners of heterosexual romantic relationships. Further, our hypothesized patterns were controlled for several variables to rule out alternative explanations to our hypotheses. In particular, following prior research in this area (e.g., Mahar et al., 2020, Meltzer et al., 2020), we controlled for the age of both partners, women's Body Mass Index [BMI], and relationship length. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that these variables may affect personal well-being and satisfaction (e.g., Bookwala & Boyar, 2008; Gorchoff et al., 2008; Orth et al., 2012; Sheets, 2014).

Method

Participants and Procedure

197 heterosexual couples were recruited through snowball sampling by research assistants via messages on social networks and word of mouth. Initial participants were recruited through research assistants' friendship networks. As one couple reported being in a relationship for less than a month, it was removed from the analyses (see Meltzer et al., 2020 for a similar procedure). Thus, our final sample consisted of 196 heterosexual couples. The mean relationship length was 84.58 (*SD* = 109.13) months (i.e., approximately 9 years). Most of the participants (*N* = 153 couples) were engaged in a relationship, while 43 couples identified themselves as married.

Participants' age ranged from 18 to 80 years-old (*M* = 29.78, *SD* = 11.18) for women and from 18 to 86 years-old (*M* = 31.82, *SD* = 11.95) for men, with men being older than their partners, $t(195) = -8.61$, $p < .001$. Over 85% of the sample was European. Additional information about participants' broad ethnic category is reported in the supplementary material file (https://osf.io/azw6s/?view_only=0c772598ce23474e9b454bb8294d4417). Mean women's BMI

(computed with the formula weight (kg) / [height (m)]^2) was 21.73 (*SD* = 3.20), ranging from 15.94 to 38.97.

A sensitivity power analysis conducted with G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) estimated the minimum effect size that could be detected at a given power level for this obtained sample size (*N* = 196). The sensitivity power analysis under standard criteria ($\alpha = .05$, 80% power) suggests that the sample allows for adequate power to detect a small ($f^2 = .02$) to medium ($f^2 = .15$) effect size ($f^2 = .072$) for each hypothesized path between our critical variables.

Before completing the survey, participants were first informed about the aim and the procedure of the research and asked to provide their consent form. After being enrolled in the study, participants were asked to complete an online survey presented as an investigation of perceptions in romantic relationships. In order to both guarantee anonymity and match partners within dyads, each couple was provided with a personal code by researchers.

First, participants were asked to provide some demographic information such as their gender, age, relationship status, and length of their current relationship. After providing that information, men responded to a measure of partner sexual objectification. Women were asked to report their weight and height. Next, they were provided with measures of self-objectification (i.e., body self-surveillance), body shame, and life satisfaction. At the end of the survey, participants were fully debriefed and thanked for their participation. Women's self-esteem was also assessed for explorative purposes. Additional analyses with this variable are reported in the supplementary materials.

Measures

Men's measures.

Partner-objectification: To capture men's tendencies to sexually objectify their partners, participants answered an adapted version of the Self-Objectification Questionnaire (SOQ; Fredrickson et al., 1998). Participants were asked to evaluate the importance of 10 body attributes. Attributes were balanced so that 5 refer to body appearance (e.g., "Measures", "Weight") and 5 to

body competence (e.g., “Coordination”, “Health”). In this version of the SOQ, participants evaluated the importance of the attributes referring to their romantic partners. A similar adaptation of the SOQ has also been used by Strelan and Pagoudis (2018) to investigate partner objectification and by Strelan and Hargreaves (2005) to measure other-objectification. Given the fact that reliability estimates are inappropriate for the SOQ due to its rank format, in which participants rank the importance of each trait from the most important to the least, in the present research participants were asked to evaluate the importance of the 10 body attributes from 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*very important*).

We obtained a final index by calculating the mean for the body appearance (alpha = .86) and competence attributes (alpha = .79) separately, and then computing the difference score. The total sexual objectification scores could range from -4 to +4, with higher scores denoting greater men’s partner-objectification (for a similar procedure see, Gurung & Chrouser, 2007; Rousseau et al., 2019).

Women's measures. Unless otherwise specified, all items had a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Self-objectification. Following prior research (e.g., Andrew et al., 2016, Cohen et al., 2017; Nabi, 2009), women’s tendency to self-objectify was assessed using the body self-surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS; McKinley & Hyde, 1996) which captures behaviors related to self-objectification (Calogero, 2012). The subscale comprised 8 items to measure the extent to which women engaged in body self-monitoring behaviors (e.g., “During the day, I think about how I look many times”; “I often worry about whether the clothes I am wearing make me look good”; alpha = .80). Mean scores were calculated to estimate body self-surveillance, with higher scores denoting higher self-objectification in women.

Body Shame. We administered the body shame subscale of the OBCS (McKinley & Hyde, 1996), which comprised 8 items assessing the extent to which participants feel negative emotions toward their bodies (e.g., “I would be ashamed for people to know what I really weigh”; “When I

can't control my weight, I feel like something must be wrong with me"; alpha = .89). Mean scores were calculated to estimate women's body shame, with higher scores reflecting greater shame for the body in women.

Life Satisfaction. To assess women's satisfaction with their life, we used the 5 items (e.g., "I am satisfied with my life"; "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal"; alpha = .93) from the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), which captures participants' satisfaction with life as a whole. Items were then averaged to form a composite score, with higher scores denoting greater life satisfaction in women.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Descriptive statistics and correlation for the main variables are reported in Table 1.

[Table 1 here]

As can be seen, men's tendency to sexually objectify their romantic partners was associated with body self-surveillance and body shame. Specifically, the higher men evaluated their partners' physical appearance over their competence, the more likely were women to monitor and be ashamed of their bodies. Next, self-surveillance and body shame were positively and highly correlated, suggesting that women who were more likely to survey their appearance also reported greater body concerns. Men's partner-objectification was not significantly correlated with women's life satisfaction, although the correlation coefficient was in the expected direction. This denotes that partner-objectification was not directly related to that partner's life satisfaction. Finally, both body self-surveillance and body shame significantly correlated with life satisfaction.

Mediation analysis

In order to verify our main hypotheses, we ran a serial mediation analysis using PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013; Model 6). Indirect effects were tested with bootstrapping analysis with 5,000

resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence interval. Men's tendency to sexually objectify was our IV, body self-surveillance and body shame were included as the serial mediator variables, and life satisfaction was the DV. Further, age of both partners, relationship length (expressed in months) and women's BMI were entered as covariates. Unstandardized and standardized coefficients of the tested mediational model are reported in Table 2.

[Table 2 here]

As shown, the model explained about 21% of the variance in life satisfaction in women. Confirming H1a, results revealed that men's tendency to sexually objectify their partners was related to both self-surveillance and (marginally) body shame (H1b). In addition, body self-surveillance was related to increased body shame, which, in turn, was negatively associated with women's life satisfaction; self-objectification was negatively related to women's life satisfaction. The direct link between men's tendency to sexually objectify and women's life satisfaction did not reach significance, indicating that H2 was not confirmed. Conversely, the indirect effect of men's tendency to sexually objectify their partners on women's life satisfaction via self-objectification and body shame was significant, *Mean estimate* = -.006, *SE* ≈ *.00*, *CI* [-.0173; -.0003], denoting that sexual objectification stemmed from the romantic partner undermined life satisfaction in women through enhanced self-surveillance and body shame. In addition, the path from partner-objectification to life satisfaction via the indirect effect of self-objectification was significant *Mean estimate* = -.015, *SE* = .01, *CI* [-.0335; -.0030]. Thus, data provided support for H3.

Importantly, these results remained significant when controlling for the considered covariates. Of these, only women's BMI displayed a positive relationship with body shame.

Alternative models

To strengthen our hypotheses and the tested model, we ruled out a series of alternative models in which the independent, dependent, and serial mediator variables were placed at different

levels. In the first one (Alternative model 1), we considered women's self-objectification as the IV, body shame and partner-objectification as the serial mediators, and life satisfaction as the DV. Results for this alternative model showed that the indirect effect was not significant, *Mean estimate* ≈ .00, *SE* = .01, *CI* [-.0145, .0204], suggesting that women's self-objectifying perceptions and body shame are not a significant source in shaping men's objectifying perceptions. In the second alternative model (Alternative model 2), life satisfaction was entered as the IV, self-objectification and body shame were the serial mediators, and partner-objectification was the DV. Similar to the previous alternative model, data for this model revealed that the indirect effect was non-significant, *Mean estimate* = -.12, *SE* = .08, *CI* [-.2990, .0087], thus indicating that it did not fit our data well and that women's life satisfaction is not a significant antecedent of their self-objectification and body shame. Finally, in the third model (Alternative model 3), we inverted mediators. That is, we considered women's body shame as the first-level mediator and their self-objectification as the second-level one. In this case, indirect effects emerged as significant, *Mean estimate* = -.01, *SE* = .01, *CI* [-.0224, -.0032], indicating a possible bidirectional relationship between women's self-objectification and body shame as the crucial psychological mechanism underlying the link between partner-objectification and women's satisfaction with life. Complete results for these alternative models are reported in the supplementary materials of the article.

General Discussion

Decades of literature reported that women's experiences of being sexually objectified enhance their self-objectification, which is, in turn, associated with negative consequences, such as body shame and curbed well-being. More recent research has also revealed that women's perceptions of being sexually objectified by their own partner is a further source of their self-objectification (e.g., Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015; Ramsey et al., 2017; Sáez et al., 2019). Expanding this line of research, in the present study we tested whether partner-objectification – assessed in men – would be related to women's self-objectification in terms of body self-surveillance and body shame. Furthermore, we also examined whether partner-objectification would be related to women's life

satisfaction and whether this relationship would be serially mediated by self-surveillance and body shame.

In line with our hypothesis (H1), results revealed that women whose partners focused more on their appearance rather than their competence were more likely to objectify themselves in terms of increased self-monitor behaviors of their body and to display greater body concerns. Importantly, this evidence disambiguates contrasting results about the link between men's partner-objectification and women's self-objectification by revealing that this link robustly occurs also when men's objectifying perceptions are considered, rather than mere women's meta-perceptions. In fact, in testing this relationship and unlike most previous research (e.g., Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015; Ramsey et al., 2017; Sáez et al., 2019), we relied on men's self-reported (vs. women's self-perceived) partner-objectification.

In line with the findings by Strelan and Pagoudis (2018), we found that partner-objectification is associated with *that* partner self-objectification. However, it is to note that Mahar and colleagues (2020) did not find this relationship when considering both partners as well. One possible explanation of this contrasting evidence may be due to the different measures employed to assess partner-objectification. Similar to Strelan and Pagoudis (2018), we captured partner-objectification using an adapted version of the SOQ (Fredrickson et al., 1998), while Mahar and colleagues (2020) adapted the Surveillance subscale of the OBCS (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Consequently, it is possible that these two measures tap different aspects of partner-objectification. Specifically, it is plausible to imagine that women's self-objectification is more related to the importance attributed to body features (as assessed with the SOQ) rather than a consequence of men's concerns toward women's body (as assessed with the OBCS).

Although research examining self-perceptions of being objectified is of utmost importance in shedding light on the relations between sexual objectification and well-being, gathering data from both the partners allowed us to examine the associations between men's perceptions and women's self-objectification. Our findings are also consistent with sexual objectification theorists' claim

(Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) that experiences of sexual objectification stemming from different contexts (including close relationships) increase self-objectifying behaviors and perceptions. Thus, from a theoretical point of view, our findings support the theory revealing that objectifying experiences may also arise within interpersonal encounters and enhance women's self-objectification (see Gervais et al., 2020, for a review).

Regarding the associations between partner-objectification and women's well-being, our data clearly showed that the relationship between men's tendency to sexually objectify their romantic partner was indirectly related to partner's life satisfaction via the serial mediation of self-objectification and body shame. Thus, from our data, it emerged that partner-objectification did not represent a mechanism acting independently in influencing women's well-being (i.e., satisfaction with life) but that it primarily affects women's self-perceptions that, in turn, affect their life satisfaction. These findings, hence, confirmed and extended literature showing that self-objectification (and body shame) represents a central process influencing women's well-being.

Notably, the alternative models that we conducted provided us with further confirmations and insights about our findings. In particular, the fact that the reverse link from women's self-objectification to partner-objectification was not significant (see the results for the Alternative model 1) suggests that self-objectification mainly represents the result of (partner's) objectifying perceptions. In contrast, objectifying perceptions are not affected by women's self-objectifying perceptions or behaviors. Further, in the Alternative model 3, we found that body shame may also precede self-objectification, at least in terms of self-surveillance, in explaining the relationship between partner-objectification and women's satisfaction with life. This latter result may somewhat integrate and expand the link between self-objectification and body shame. So far and consistent with our hypotheses, body shame has always been seen as a crucial outcome of self-objectification (see in particular Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), and correlational and experimental research provides support for this claim (see Roberts et al., 2018 for a review). However, it is plausible to think of a bidirectional relationship between these two constructs, in which greater feelings of

shame for their own body could lead to increased women's self-objectifying behaviors, as in a vicious circle. Despite the potential relevance of these insights, it is noteworthy that they are drawn from cross-sectional evidence and that, thus, need to be further investigated through experimental or longitudinal design.

To sum up, our findings clearly highlight that the role of men's partner-objectification should not be underestimated when examining women's well-being since it may ignite negative self-perceptions in women that, in turn, negatively affect their satisfaction with life. Indeed, through sexual objectification (e.g., comments, objectifying gazes), women learn that their appearance is the most important indicator of their worth to others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Thinking about the body as capable of representing the self may put women at a greater risk of experiencing body shame and being dissatisfied with life as a whole.

Limitations

Despite the relevance of the present findings, we note some limitations that could guide future research.

First, since we employed a correlational design to investigate relationships among variables, the results cannot imply causal interpretations. For instance, the association between men's partner-objectification and body self-surveillance in women does not necessarily mean that being objectified by the romantic partner increases body self-monitoring behaviors, as the direction of these associations cannot be determined. It may also be that women who frequently focus on their bodies often bring more attention to their physical appearance, including their partners' attention. In other words, women's self-objectification may lead their partners to objectify them. Therefore, future experimental and longitudinal research is necessary to isolate causal relationships among variables.

Furthermore, because we asked women to report their weight and height before presenting our critical measures, this could have affected the data by priming women to body concerns before

they completed the other measures. Thus, future work should consider asking for this kind of information at the end of the survey to avoid influencing potential participants' answers.

Finally, in the current work, we focused on self-objectification in terms of body self-surveillance and its link with body shame. However, manifestations of self-objectification are not limited to the intrapersonal domain but also influence interpersonal behaviors (e.g., Saguy et al., 2010). For example, self-objectification is associated with less free will in women (Baldissarri et al., 2019) and less communication of their desires and needs (Sáez et al., 2020), which may be particularly relevant in the domain of romantic relationships. Thus, future work should consider further correlates of self-objectification to provide a better understanding of the sexual objectification process in romantic relationships.

Practical Implications

Professionals (e.g., clinicians, school professionals, psychologists) involved in relationship-oriented issues could benefit from our results. We demonstrated that individuals who are evaluated mostly for their physical appearance by their romantic partner are more likely to engage in self-objectifying behaviors and perceptions. Importantly, the consequences of partner- and self-objectification are, overall, negative and hinder personal and relational well-being. Thus, our results stress that especially professionals in services for schools and adolescents should strive for increasing individuals' awareness of objectifying behaviors to prevent or limit their consequences. Moreover, some research showed that people higher in self-objectification tend to look for partners with a greater tendency to sexually objectify, confirming the vicious cycle of sexual objectification (Strelan & Pagoudis, 2018). Thus, professionals should be particularly sensitive in recognizing the self-perpetuating nature of sexual objectification in romantic relationships.

Closely related to the implications above, we believe that our findings could also provide experts in the field of communication (e.g., social media managers) with important insights to promote messages highlighting the centrality of non-physical, affective, and cognitive features in creating and maintaining a romantic bond.

Conclusions

To conclude, the findings of our research emphasize the importance of examining men's sexual objectification of their partners in the context of romantic relationships. Our results suggest that, although partner-objectification and women's life satisfaction were not directly related, partner-objectification may put women at risk of being dissatisfied with their lives by exacerbating negative self-perceptions and attitudes toward the body (i.e., body self-surveillance and body shame).

Investigating the interpersonal nature of sexual objectification in romantic relationships is highly relevant for theoretical and practical reasons: it is indeed evident based on current empirical findings that the sources of sexual objectification are various and not confined to societal messages coming, for instance, from the media. Examining different possible sources can increase awareness about this phenomenon preventing its adverse outcomes.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations for study variables (N = 196 women, N = 196 men)

Variable	*M* (*SD*)	1	2	3	4
1. Partner-objectification[a]	-3.81 (4.63)	–			
2. Self-objectification[b]	4.24 (1.07)	.23**	–		
3. Body shame[b]	3.76 (1.35)	.25***	.62***	–	
4. Life satisfaction[b]	4.59 (1.25)	-.09	-.43***	-.37***	–

Note. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. [a] indicates variable assessed in men. [b] indicates variable assessed in women. The response scale ranged from -4 to +4 for men's tendency to sexually objectify and from 1 to 7 for all scales.

Table 2. Results of regression analyses *(N* = 196 women, *N* = 196 men*). Unstandardized (standard errors in parentheses) and standardized* regression coefficients are reported.

Predictors	**Dependent Variables**								
	Self-objectification			**Body Shame**			**Life Satisfaction[b]**		
	B	***ß***	***p***	***B***	***ß***	***p***	***B***	***ß***	***p***
Partner-objectification[a]	.04 (.02)*	.18	.016	.02 (.01)	.10	.104	≈ .00 (.02)	≈ .00	.926
Self-objectification[b]	–	–		.76 (.07)***	.60***	.001	-.35 (.10)***	-.30	.001
Body shame[b]	–	–		–	–		-.18 (.08)*	-.20	.025
Women's age	-.01 (.01)	-.15	.237	≈ -.00 (.01)	.01	.960	-.01 (.01)	-.09	.444
Men's age	.01 (.01)	.06	.419	≈ -.00 (.01)	-.02	.683	≈ -.00 (.01)	-.03	.625
Relationship length	≈ -.00 (.00)	-.11	.386	≈ -.00 (.00)	-.04	.683	≈ .00 (.00)	.12	.312
BMI[b]	≈ .00 (.02)	.02	.841	.10 (.03)***	.23	.001	.02 (.03)	.07	.359
R^2	.10			.44			.21		
F^2	.11			.79			.27		
F	4.43***		.001	25.23***		.001	7.12***		.001
df	(5,190)			(6,189)			(7,188)		

Note. [a] indicates variable assessed in men. [b] indicates variable assessed in women. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$