USING OBJECTIFICATION THEORY TO INTERPRET THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG

SELF-SCHEMAS, COGNITIVE DISTRACTION, AND SEXUAL SATISFACTION

IN EMERGING ADULT WOMEN

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

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In Partial Fulfillment
for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major Department:
Human Development Family Science
Option: Couple and Family Therapy

September 2013

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this ***disquisition*** complies with
North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards
for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The sexual objectification of women is prevalent in Western culture, and researching how this impacts sexual satisfaction is important. This study used objectification theory to explore how cognitive distraction may be associated with the sexual satisfaction of 271 emerging adult women. Cognitive distraction was assessed as occurring as a result of negative sexual and appearance self-schemas. Relationships among appearance self-schemas, sexual self-schemas, cognitive distraction, and sexual satisfaction were assessed with two mediation models that used bivariate and multiple regressions. Hierarchical multiple regression was used to explore the influence of relationship status on how sexual and appearance self-schemas were associated with sexual satisfaction. Results indicated significant relationships between sexual satisfaction and both appearance and sexual self-schemas, which were at least partially mediated by cognitive distraction regardless of a woman's relationship status. This study has important implications for education, theory development, and therapy.

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INTRODUCTION

The reciprocal relationship between an individual and her environment can be seen quite clearly when exploring the role our society plays in how a woman thinks of herself as a sexual person. There are many aspects of being that can influence a woman's sexual life, including environmental and relational context concerns (Meana & Nunnink, 2006) and personal beliefs about one's body (Calogero & Thompson, 2009). This paper focused mainly on the latter from the lens of objectification theory in the hopes to determine how sexual and appearance self-schemas, as well as cognitive distraction, are associated with emerging adult women's sexual satisfaction. Because sexuality is a significant part of human experience, it is essential to research how cultural context can impact a woman's experiences. More specifically, exploring how a young woman feels about herself and her body is important because these feelings can help shape her relationships and sexual experiences throughout life (Sprecher, 2002).

Emerging Adulthood

The ages of 18 to 25 make up a period of life known as emerging adulthood, which is separate and distinct from adolescence preceding it or young adulthood following it (Arnett, 2006). It is a period of development based on identity exploration, personal instability, a focus on the self, a feeling of being in-between, and a time of possibilities (Arnett, 2006). These factors allow the individual to try out different possibilities with education, employment, and relationships to see what types of commitments are appropriate in the young adulthood life period (Arnett, 2006; Tanner, 2006). With a vast array of acceptable options for emerging adults, they are still searching for their identities and may experience a sense of instability related to their personal beliefs and focuses.

Emerging adulthood opportunities, such as dating, having sexual experiences, or living together, provide a context for an individual to explore her sexuality within (Kaestle & Halpern, 2007). This time in life has a probability of including a first relational sexual experience. As people age they may see sexual activity in a relationship to be more acceptable, as Patrick, Maggs, and Aba (2007) discovered in their sample of emerging adults in a college setting. Forty-five percent of their sample reported never having sex at freshman orientation, while that number decreased to 28% at the sample's first spring semester. On the campus where our research was conducted, 29.1% of the female participants asked reported that they had never had consensual sexual intercourse (Amy Stichman, personal communication, September 21, 2012). Research has suggested that the increase in sexual activity at this time during the college years may be based on ideas of what it means to be an adult, including sexual activity (Byno, Mullis, & Mullis, 2009). Increase in sexual activity during emerging adulthood can also be related to changing sexual attitudes, as the sexual attitudes of emerging adults tend to become more open-minded and less judgmental during the college years (Lefkowitz & Gillen, 2006). Specifically, Byno, Mullis, and Mullis (2009) noted a significant connection between positive sexual attitudes and frequency of sexual behaviors, including intercourse and oral sex, in their sample of emerging adult women.

Arnett (2006) makes it a point to note that, while college students tend to be participants in studies reported in the literature, there is often not an appropriate developmental framework in place to examine the contexts that influence a majority of these individuals. Tanner (2006) noted the reciprocal nature between the individual and her context in this period of life in that women get feedback and messages from society telling them what is appropriate and not at this period in their life, including in romantic relationships. Therefore, we need to investigate how sexuality

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impacts women in this time of life with an understanding of the unique experiences that may be impacting them, including decision making, a time to focus on one's self, and clarifying one's identity (Arnett, 2006).

Objectification

Objectification theory was first posited by Frederickson and Roberts (1997) as a way to understand the increased levels of mental health diagnoses for disorders such as unipolar depression, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorders in women. These scholars put forth objectification theory as a way of interpreting the experiences of women in Western culture, a culture that places a large emphasis on appearance, especially unrealistic expectations related to body size (Jung & Lennon, 2003). One way of defining objectification is "the experiences of being treated *as a body* (or collection of body parts) valued predominantly for its use to (or consumption by) others" (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 174, italics in original). These authors also explain objectification as a body treated as a separate entity or a social construction that is seen without considering the person as a whole, indicating that a person is a just a body to be used, without acknowledgement of feelings or emotions.

Szymanski and Henning (2007) list cultural practices that are used to sexually objectify women, including the representation of women and girls in the media, the accepted use of a sexual gaze used by some men, and sexual violence. The representation of women and girls in the media can be described as limiting and stereotyped, with a focus on appearance and sexuality, rather than thoughts and accomplishments, leading to a cultural story of women with much information lacking. The male sexual gaze is the socially sanctioned evaluation of a woman's body in a deniable and nearly imperceptible way that removes control of women's

bodies from them. Lastly, sexual violence can be discussed as a way of asserting control to keep women in a subordinate position (Smolak & Murnen, 2011).

Objectification leads to problems for women both overtly, within a culture in which women are viewed as subordinate, and covertly, dealing with the internalization of interpersonal experiences. In the former, Western culture places the needs and characteristics of men above those of women, a practice termed patriarchy (Silverstein, 2003). Patriarchy is visible in activities and beliefs that vary for men and women, including the disproportionate amount of childcare and housework that women do compared to men and the sexual double standards that women and men are held to, such as men being labeled "manly" and women being labeled "sluts" for having an active sex life. This double standard impacts women's lives by being overworked and feeling sexual shame for normative and healthy interactions. Women are constantly on the lookout for how they will be perceived, while actually holding little control over that perception (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). After receiving objectifying treatment for just being female, women gradually internalize this perspective, termed self-objectification. As women learn through personal interaction and larger societal messages, such as media, that their value is based on their bodies and not on their minds, actions, or accomplishments, they are progressively socialized to "internalize an observer's perspective of their physical self" (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001, p. 244). They learn that they need to focus on what makes them important and valuable, their bodies and how they are being perceived. Taking this perspective may decrease the awareness that a person has of her internal body states and can increase feelings of shame and anxiety regarding the body (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001).

Frederickson and Roberts (1997) theorized that objectification, and self-objectification in turn, would impact a woman's negative psychological being, including increased anxiety about

how her body looks and is evaluated, decreased awareness of internal bodily states, increased body shame, and increased physical safety concerns. Szymanski, Moffitt, and Carr (2011) further noted the importance of examining the ways that external objectification experiences impact women. Such research has shown that self-objectification, stemming from external objectification experiences, was related to higher rates of body guilt, self-surveillance, appearance anxiety, and body shame, as well as lower rates of sexual functioning, self-esteem, and life satisfaction (Calogero & Pina, 20011; Calogero & Thompson, 2009; Mercurio & Landry, 2008; Szymanski & Henning, 2007). As women in the emerging adulthood period of life are typically intensifying their involvement in romantic endeavors (Arnett, 2006; Fadjukoff, Kokko, & Pulkkinen, 2007), it is important to explore their relational sense of self during this time. There are cultural messages abounding that describe the type of lover and partner a woman should be, possibly putting her relationship sense of self above that of who she truly knows herself to be. Cultural objectification may target women in this age group more harshly than others, as these women are over 18 and have more purchasing power, so advertisements may explicitly target them. This relational sense of self, impacted by objectification, can be influenced by the relationship a woman has with her own body.

In order to be ready for external evaluations of appearance, it is likely that women are self-checking to be prepared for comments or critiques (Calogero & Pina, 2011). This incessant self-evaluation, often termed habitual body monitoring, can be described as the examination of one's physical body as someone else may be seeing it, or scrutinizing it before someone else has the chance (Szymanski & Henning, 2007). These authors further explore the thought that the appearance anxiety that results from self-evaluation indicating that one does not match up to the thin ideal, or the cultural preference for being physically slim, can be used to explain the mental

health diagnoses that impact women, such as eating disorders and depression. This self-evaluation is harmful, according to Frederickson and Roberts (2007), because of the potential to have everyday thoughts and actions interrupted by questions of physical attractiveness, intruding on time and energy that could have been spent more productively.

How a woman views herself can regulate how she reacts and feels in different situations (Cyranowski & Andersen, 1998). Thinking of this from an objectification standpoint, if a woman sees herself as an object existing for someone else's pleasure, she may be less inclined to be concerned about her own satisfaction with sex. If the messages from society show women concerned with sex, but not necessarily satisfaction, a woman may not be aware of how to discuss satisfaction with a partner, possibly leading to feelings of powerlessness. If these messages are concerned with physical appearance, a woman may see herself as an ornament to be admired and may put her attention on enhancing what she believes others see as important about her: her appearance.

Related to views of self, objectification of women can have many influences. It can lead to the overtaking of a woman's real knowledge of her own abilities and body by an outside, cultural standard perspective. This experience could be explored as stemming from the permitted evaluation of a woman's body, in that it is up for evaluation at nearly all times, by nearly all people. Clearly, the objectification of women can affect how she views herself in terms of both appearance and sexuality, and it is therefore essential to explore how objectification works to impact these aspects of women.

Self-Schemas

Individuals have ideas about who they are as people, including beliefs about skills, values, and typical courses of action, termed *schemas* in the professional literature. Schemas are

"cognitive generalizations of the self derived from past experience" that "organize experience and action" with "content reflected in implicit rules, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that determine the substance of thought, emotion, and behavior" (Cash & Labarge, 1996, p. 38). Individuals place varying levels of importance on different aspects of the self, creating distinct ways that information is processed (Cash & Labarge, 1996). For instance, as shown in a sample of female adolescents, an individual may experience high levels of body dissatisfaction only if she places greater importance on her appearance (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2002). Individuals can also have both positive and negative views of themselves. A woman can view herself in a positive way related to a certain construct and thus have a positive self-schema related to that construct; alternatively, a woman can view herself in a negative way, leading to a negative view of self related to that construct. This paper will focus on two specific types of self-schemas, sexual and appearance.

Sexual. Sexual self-schemas are "cognitive generalizations about sexual aspects of oneself…derived from past experience, [that] manifest in current experience, [and are] influential in the processing of sexually relevant social information, and guide sexual behavior" (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994, p. 1079). They are the ways a woman thinks about who she is as a sexual being and how she can be in relationships. How a woman feels about herself in sexual situations may impact the way she is able to actually be in those situations (Calogero & Thompson, 2009). For example, if a woman has a belief that she is lacking in her ability to perform oral sex, she may avoid situations with her partner that lead to oral sex. One reason for this may be because of the congruence she sees or does not see in her traits and the ones she believes her partner to desire (Donaghue, 2009).

Because of the relational nature of sexual relationships, one's sexual self-schema may be influenced by a partner's assumed beliefs (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994). If a woman feels that she is or is not living up to her partner's expectations, even if these expectations have not been spoken about explicitly, it may impact the way she feels about herself in those sexual situations. For example, if a young woman were to assume that her heterosexual male partner was interested in her because of her breast size, even if this was never discussed, she may feel more confident in herself sexually than if her breasts were smaller. As research has indicated that sexual self-schemas in young adult women are related to both past and current experiences (Wiederman & Hurst, 1997), these messages may have built up over time and across partners. Andersen and Cyranowski's (1994) research indicated that the self-views of undergraduate women with negative self-schemas were shown to be defined by other individuals when compared with women holding positive self-schemas. The next logical step of consideration is when or in what situations women may be concerning themselves with what their partner, who is influenced by society, may be thinking about them.

Sexual self-schemas could impact sexual satisfaction through the sexual choices one makes. As reported in a sample of college-aged women, if a woman was to view herself as sexually assertive it could influence the choice she makes in terms of a partner and in terms of voicing wishes and concerns during sexual activity, possibly leading to a higher degree of sexual satisfaction (Lindgren, Schacht, Mullins, & Blayney, 2011). Sexual self-efficacy, or the belief in one's sexual abilities, was found to mediate the relationship between negative sexual self-schemas and negative sexual adjustment in a sample of women ages 18-29 (Reissing, Laliberté, & Davis, 2005). Levels of sexual self-esteem were found to be positively correlated with levels of sexual satisfaction in college-aged women, indicating that when one has a positive view of

herself sexually, levels of sexual satisfaction are likely to be higher (Calogero & Thompson, 2009).

Appearance. Appearance self-schemas are cognitive organizations related to appearance that classify and determine the processing of information one receives regarding the self (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2002). Women can gather information about how a body should be from the media, and such messages place unrealistic expectations on them as women (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2002; Jung & Lennon, 2003). When women get the message from society that they should fit the thin ideal, but then their body does not allow for that to happen, a negative appearance self-schema may take form. Using an objectification theory framework, one can see that when body parts are singled out for inspection and correction, an individual is not seen as a whole person (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Women's sustained attention to their physical bodies has been construed as vanity or self-absorption in many arenas, but feminist thought points to body monitoring as a survival strategy in a culture that places a large emphasis on physical appearance (Roberts & Waters, 2004). It is a survival strategy in the sense that a woman is already prepared for negative evaluations of her appearance as she is aware that, culturally, she does not fit the norm.

The theoretical position that appearance self-self-schemas can be impacted by society and then can influence an individual person has been supported in research. Jung and Lennon (2003) found that women aged 18-28 who placed more value on appearance-related information self-reported lower levels of body image and self-esteem while reporting less positive general affect. In another study, watching television commercials with appearance-related content increased appearance self-schema activation as well as anger and body dissatisfaction and decreased levels of confidence in high-school aged respondents (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2002). One can see

how appearance self-schemas can have an impact on how a woman views herself, especially her physical body. One way that it may impact her views of her physical body may be related to sexual activities. Donaghue (2009) noted that "the physical and embodied aspects of sex and sexuality make it particularly relevant to consider the ways in which women's representations of their sexual selves are associated with their more general representations of their bodies" (p. 38).

Appearance self-schemas may impact sexual satisfaction through how the individual feels she can be in relationships. Body shame was found to be a significant predictor of sexual self-consciousness in heterosexual women (Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007). These authors explore self-spectatoring, or focusing on oneself during sexual activity, as a possible reason for sexual problems, including difficulty with arousal, pleasure, and orgasm. This type of spectatoring is not on one's feelings and emotions related to the activity, but on how one may be exhibiting flaws or be being perceived (Meana & Nunnink, 2006). This attention to perceived negatives related to one's appearance take away cognitive resources from enjoying the sexual activity that is occurring with a partner, ultimately impacting the level of satisfaction she is able to experience.

As sexual and appearance self-schemas are cognitive representations present in one's mind, it is important to examine what else may be occurring cognitively while those self-schemas are primed. One way in which self-schemas can impact sexual satisfaction is by way of cognitive distraction.

Cognitive Distraction

Cognitive distraction during sexual activity is attention to nonsexual thoughts, including thoughts diverging from the physical and emotional experiences one is currently engaging in (Meana & Nunnink, 2006). Self-spectatoring, or the act of focusing on oneself during an

activity, can impact the thoughts one has during sexual activity (Meana & Nunnink, 2006; Wiederman, 2001). If one is focused on the self and has a negative self-schema related to appearance or sexuality, that self-focus may lead to distraction away from the sexual activity. Alternatively, if one's self-schema is positive in those arenas, the self-spectatorship may be increasing the levels of arousal one is experiencing (Meana & Nunnink, 2006). Using objectification theory, it is logical to posit that women may consider sexual performance and attractiveness to be synonymous (Dove & Wiederman, 2000; Meana & Nunnink, 2006). Sexual performance may be considered poor when a woman does not feel that she matches up to the cultural idea of what makes a woman sexy. This thought or idea may distract women who believe that it is how they look that is stimulating, not what they do.

Meana and Nunnink (2006) reported that the strongest predictors of appearance-based cognitive distraction during sexual activity for college women were negative body image, psychological distress, and not being in a relationship. These findings make sense when examined through an objectification theory lens, as women may equate physical attractiveness and sexual performance. If women are occupied by thoughts of their physical body, they use up cognitive resources that may otherwise be focused on the physical and emotional experiences they are having (Roberts & Waters, 2004).

Dove and Wiederman (2000) noted a negative relationship for young adult women between the level of cognitive distraction a woman experiences and the satisfaction she gleans from sexual experiences, as well as her sexual esteem, consistent number of orgasms, and a higher rate of pretending to orgasm. Using an objectification theory framework, this finding highlights the idea of women thinking of themselves as sexual objects, undeserving or incapable of feeling pleasure. In related research, Pujols, Seal, and Meston (2010) reported high rates of

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sexual satisfaction in young women when a low frequency of appearance-based distracting thoughts was present. It is important to explore sexual satisfaction related to the thoughts a woman has, as women may be focused more on thoughts rather than on physical feelings during sexual activity when compared with men (Cuntim & Nobre, 2011).

Sexual Satisfaction

Sexual satisfaction can be described as experiencing subjective and pleasurable emotions and physical feelings regarding sexual activity. Calogero and Thompson (2009) posited that "women's sexual self-esteem varies as a function of women's self-objectification" (p. 146). This is important to consider as how a woman feels about herself in sexual situations may impact the way she is able to be in those situations. How a woman is able to be in a relationship or situation may, in turn, have an effect on the amount of satisfaction she is able to achieve. Pujols and colleagues (2010) note that sexual satisfaction is not merely the absence of sexual difficulties, but is a multi-faceted concept including sexual desire, physiological concerns, and sexual functioning. Part of this is a woman's understanding of herself as a sexual being, or her sexual self-schema.

Sexual satisfaction has been found to be related to higher rates of psychological well being, positive self-regard and overall relationship quality, and may be helpful in developing an array of positive sexual experiences to build future sexual relationships on (Davison, Bell, LaChina, Holden, & Davis, 2009; Higgins, Mullinax, Trussell, Kenneth, & Moore, 2011; Sprecher, 2002). It is important to consider the rates of satisfaction that women, particularly those in emerging adulthood, glean from sexual experiences as this satisfaction can create a foundation for future sexual relationships and influence how she sees herself as a sexual being, her sexual self-schema. Levels of sexual satisfaction may also create a set of experiences that

combat the objectification that a woman can experience in her daily life, possibly creating a space to improve sexual and appearance self-schemas, leading to increases to sexual satisfaction.

Young women report high rates of sexual satisfaction when high rates of body-esteem and a low frequency of appearance-based distracting thoughts are present (Pujols et al., 2010). This underscores the relationship that is present between a woman's feelings about her own body, the distraction she experiences during sexual activity, and the amount of satisfaction she is able to glean from experiences regarding her body. Calogero and Thompson (2009) explored sexual satisfaction through the lens of objectification theory related to body shame and sexual self-esteem and espoused the need for more research into how cultural experiences impact a woman's sexual experiences and satisfaction. This current study extended previous literature, adding cognitive distraction as a mediator and specifying emerging adulthood as a target population to include a developmental component to enhance understanding. Clearly, these constructs are related, yet little research has explored the connections between them, especially during emerging adulthood.

PRESENT STUDY

Previously discussed research has indicated relationships between sexual and appearance self-schemas and sexual satisfaction, as well as between cognitive distraction and sexual satisfaction. Research has yet to examine the combination of these constructs, as well as the processes by which they interact. With theoretical support from objectification theory regarding these relationships, we expected that an emerging adult woman's ratings of sexual and appearance self-schemas would be associated with her cognitive distraction during sexual activity, in turn being connected to her levels of sexual satisfaction. More specifically, we examined if cognitive distraction mediates, or explains, the relationship between a woman's self-schemas and her sexual satisfaction. First, we expected that women with negative sexual self-schemas would have higher levels of cognitive distraction, and lower levels of sexual satisfaction. Similarly, we expected that women with negative appearance self-schemas, or more investment in appearance, would have higher levels of cognitive distraction, and lower levels of sexual satisfaction.

For women, the cultural message is that satisfying sexual relationships should occur only in the context of a committed relationship, like a marriage. Women who have sexual relationships outside of marriage, satisfying or not, are often called disparaging names and their morals are called into question, so guilt may often be present in those interactions (Higgins et al., 2011). Also, as a woman who is currently in a relationship is logically expected to be more comfortable with her partner than one who is not in a relationship, she may be more contented with her body in sexual situations. Higher levels of self-entitlement to sexual pleasure, self-efficacy, and sexual self-reflection were reported by participants who were in a steady romantic relationship at two comparison times when compared with participants who were single or in

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relationship only at one comparison time (Zimmer-Gembeck, Ducat, & Boislard-Pepin, 2011). Thus, we examined if relational status moderates, or influences, the relationship between a woman's self-schemas and her sexual satisfaction. We expected that women who are single would have the strongest connection between positive self-schemas and higher levels of sexual satisfaction, followed by those who are cohabitating/engaged, and then those who are married/partnered.

Most research assumes that participants are heterosexual, often not discussing the experiences of lesbian or bisexual women. In fact, much of the research previously cited did not specify the sexual orientation of the participants. This study sought to be more inclusive by including all sexual orientations in our sample. Research has indicated that similar factors are related to sexual satisfaction in lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual women, including relationship satisfaction and social support (Henderson, Lehavot, & Simoni, 2009). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) posited that women's accumulating experiences of objectification impact how they can be sexually, and it would be logical to apply this idea to women of all sexual orientations. As sexual orientation is often not discernible from physical appearance, and because heteronormative Western culture tends to assume heterosexuality for all (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005), it is likely that women experience similar levels of self-image concerns and objectification regardless of sexual orientation. This thought is also supported by previous research that indicated no significant difference in experience of self-objectification between lesbian and heterosexual women (Hill & Fischer, 2008). Thus, we believed that it is empirically and theoretically sound to include all women, including those who identify as heterosexual, lesbian, and bisexual, in our sample.

METHOD

Participants

As part of a larger study relating to body image and sexual activity, information was gathered from a subsample of 271 female college students aged 18 to 25 who had engaged in self-reported sexual activity. The full sample from the large study included 505 women with complete data. The 271 participants utilized in this study were selected based on age and having engaged in sexual activity at least once in the past six months. A vast majority of these participants were undergraduate students (91%). The mean age of the sample was 20.84 (SD = 1.79). The majority of the sample identified as Caucasian (96%), with 2% of the sample indicating Asian American and 2% indicating other. Relating to sexual orientation, 94% reported to be straight, with 5% reporting to be bisexual and less than 1% lesbian. Sixty percent of the sample identified themselves to be single, with 6% reporting relationship status to be married, 9% engaged, and 13% partnered. Ten percent of the participants indicated that they were in a cohabitating relationship. There were no divorced or remarried participants in this sample. As relational status was procured from a list that allowed more than one option to be selected, participants may be both engaged or partnered and living in a cohabitation situation.

Procedure

Potential participants were informed of this study through both email and in-class invitations at a university in the Upper Midwest. They were provided with an Internet link including informed consent documents followed by questionnaires related to body image, disordered eating, sexual attitudes, and sexual activity. The participants were then offered the chance to win a flat screen LCD television, a $50 gift card to a university bookstore, a $50 gift

card to a department store, or a $50 gift card to a local restaurant. The website for the incentive prizes was separate from the questionnaires, as to protect participant confidentiality.

Measures

        Sexual self-schemas. The Sexual Self-Schema Scale, which consists of 26 questions, was administered to assess participants' understanding and perceptions of their sexual selves (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994). The response options ranged from 0 (*not at all descriptive of me*) to 6 (*extremely descriptive of me*). Higher scores indicated a positive sexual self-schema, and lower scores indicated a negative sexual self-schema. This scale asked each participant to rate herself based on words like "uninhibited," "timid," "loving," or "cautious." Although the instructions in this study for this survey did not explicitly ask participants to consider their sexual selves, the scale was embedded in a larger body of other surveys related to sexuality, making its intentions clear. Andersen and Cyranowski (1994) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .82, and a two-week test-retest reliability score of .91. They also provided evidence of construct validity in being correlated (*r* = .24) with sexual activities in one's lifetime. Reissing, Laliberté, and Davis (2005) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .80 in a sample of heterosexual women aged 18-29. Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the present study was .76. (See Appendix A for complete scale.)

        Appearance self-schemas. To assess levels of appearance self-schemas, or perception of self related to physical appearance, participants completed the 14-item Appearance Schemas Inventory (ASI) (Cash & Labarge, 1996). The response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicated a higher importance placed on physical appearance. Sample questions include "I should do whatever I can to always look my best" and "By controlling my appearance, I can control many of the social and emotional events in my

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life." The ASI had a Cronbach's alpha of .84 in a sample of college-aged women (Cash & Labarge, 1996). Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2002) also found that the ASI had a Cronbach's alpha of .82 in their sample of high school females. Construct validity was supported by Labarge, Cash, and Brown (1998) when they noted a positive correlation between higher ASI scores and a larger percentage of appearance-related words called during a Stroop task ($r = .20$). Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the present study was .90. (See Appendix B for complete scale.)

Cognitive distraction. The Cognitive Distraction Scale, a 20-item questionnaire, was used to measure levels of cognitive distraction during sexual activity based on both appearance and performance (Dove & Wiederman, 2000). Although this scale is comprised of two factors, the original authors indicated that the data were to be analyzed as a whole because the appearance factor only accounted for 6.8% of the variance (Dove & Wiederman, 2000). The response options ranged from 1 (*always*) to 6 (*never*). Responses were reverse-coded such that higher scores indicated a higher occurrence of cognitive distraction. Sample questions include "During sexual activity, I am worried about how my body looks to my partner" and "It is difficult *not* to think about whether my movements during sexual activity are pleasing to my partner." Meana and Nunnink (2006) reported an internal consistency coefficient of .94, a relationship between the appearance and performance scales at $r = .64$ in a sample of college students with sexual experience, and a significant negative relationship at $r = -.50$ between satisfaction and performance distraction which demonstrates evidence of construct validity. Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the present study was .97. (See Appendix C for complete scale.)

Sexual satisfaction. Lastly, to measure satisfaction with sexual activity, the Sexual Satisfaction Scale, a 3-item questionnaire, was provided to participants (Dove & Wiederman,

2000). The response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Higher scores

indicated a higher level of sexual satisfaction. Sample questions are, "Overall, how pleasurable

have your sexual experiences with a partner(s) been for you?" and "All things considered, how

satisfied are you with the ways your body has responded during sexual activity with a

partner(s)?" Dove and Wiederman (2000) reported an internal consistency coefficient of .91.

Calogero and Thompson (2009) reported that sexual satisfaction, measured by the Sexual

Satisfaction Scale, was significantly negatively correlated with internalization ($r = -.33$) and

body surveillance ($r = -.50$) in a sample of college-aged women, demonstrating evidence of

construct validity. Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the present study was .87. (See Appendix D

for complete scale.)

Analysis Plan

The analyses of these data attempted to determine if cognitive distraction mediated, or

explained, the relationship between a woman's self-schemas and her sexual satisfaction.

Relationships among the constructs of appearance self-schemas, sexual self-schemas, cognitive

distraction during sexual activity, and sexual satisfaction were assessed using a mediation model

with bivariate and multiple regressions First, we used bivariate linear regression to examine the

direct effects between both sexual and appearance self-schemas and sexual satisfaction. Next,

we examined the relationships between self-schemas and cognitive distraction. Third, we

assessed the relationship between cognitive distraction and sexual satisfaction. Lastly, we used

multiple linear regression to examine the connections between self-schemas and cognitive

distraction in regards to sexual satisfaction. Baron and Kenny (1986) describe a mediating

variable, say cognitive distraction, as one that "accounts for the relation between the predictor

[appearance or sexual self-schemas] and the criterion [sexual satisfaction]" (p. 1176). Figure 1

depicts how we expected sexual self-schemas to impact a woman's sexual satisfaction by way of cognitive distraction during sexual activity. Figure 2 represents this same idea with appearance self-schemas taking place of sexual self-schemas.

A moderation model, shown in Figures 3 and 4, was tested using hierarchical multiple regression to explore how relationship status (e.g., single, engaged or cohabitating, and married or partnered) influenced the relationship between the two types of self-schemas and sexual satisfaction. Baron and Kenny (1986) explain a moderator as a variable, say relationship status, that influences the relationship between an independent variable, sexual or appearance self-schemas, and a dependent variable, sexual satisfaction. To test the moderation hypothesis, a linear regression was run to assess the independent predictions that sexual self-schemas and relationship status would have on sexual satisfaction. If those analyses were significant, a regression analysis was conducted on the relationship between the interaction of sexual self-schemas and relationship status on sexual satisfaction. Another moderation was run with appearance self-schemas taking the place of sexual self-schemas.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Sixty-one percent of the sample reported to be single, 6% married, 9% engaged, 13% partnered, and 11% cohabitating. The average score on the Sexual Self-Schema Scale was 65.2 ($SD = 14.6$). The highest score one could get on the Sexual Self-Schema Scale is 156, indicating a slightly more negative than positive overall sexual self-schema. On the Appearance Schema Inventory, the mean score was 36.21 ($SD = 10.48$). The highest possible score on this scale is 70, indicating that the importance these respondents placed on appearance was moderate. The average level of cognitive distraction was 48.19 ($SD = 19.87$) with the highest possible score being 120. This indicates that the sample, overall, experienced moderate to low levels of cognitive distraction. Finally, the average level of sexual satisfaction was 12.02 ($SD = 2.65$) with a highest possible score of 15, indicating a high level of sexual satisfaction among participants.

Model Testing

A mediation analysis was conducted to assess whether the relationship between sexual self-schemas and sexual satisfaction could be explained by cognitive distraction. First, our analyses revealed that the relationship between sexual self-schemas and sexual satisfaction was significant ($\beta = .40$, $p < .05$), indicating a direct effect. Next, the relationship between sexual self-schemas and cognitive distraction was found to be significant, $\beta = -.30$, $p < .05$, as was the relationship between cognitive distraction and sexual satisfaction, $\beta = -.45$, $p < .05$. Lastly, when both the predictor (sexual self-schemas) and mediator (cognitive distraction) were regressed on sexual satisfaction, we saw evidence of partial mediation. This means that the direct effect of

sexual self-schemas on sexual satisfaction remained significant, albeit reduced in value, $\beta = .29$, $p < .05$. See Table 1 for complete regression results.

A second mediation analysis was then conducted to assess whether the relationship between appearance self-schemas and sexual satisfaction was mediated by cognitive distraction. First, our analysis indicated that the direct effect of appearance self-schemas on sexual satisfaction was significant, $\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$. Next, the relationship between appearance self-schemas and cognitive distraction was also found to be significant, $\beta = .47$, $p < .05$, as was the relationship between cognitive distraction and sexual satisfaction, $\beta = -.45$, $p < .05$. Lastly, when both the predictor (appearance self-schemas) and mediator (cognitive distraction) were regressed on sexual satisfaction, we saw evidence of full mediation. This indicates that the relationship between appearance self-schemas and sexual satisfaction can be fully explained by cognitive distraction, as the relationship with appearance self-schemas was no longer significant, $\beta = .11$, $p > .05$. See Table 2 for complete regression results.

A moderation analysis was conducted to assess whether relationship status (e.g., single, engaged or cohabitating, and married or partnered) moderated the connection between sexual self-schemas and sexual satisfaction. In this model, we saw no evidence of moderation, as the interaction of relationship status and sexual self-schema was not significantly associated with sexual satisfaction, $\beta = .14$, $p > .05$. See Table 3 for complete regression results.

A second moderation analysis was then conducted to assess whether relationship status moderated the relationship between appearance self-schemas and sexual satisfaction. In this model we also saw no evidence of moderation, as the interaction of appearance self-schemas and relationship status was not significant, $\beta = -.11$, $p > .05$. See Table 4 for complete regression results.

DISCUSSION

This study used objectification theory to explore how sexual and appearance schemas may be influencing the sexual satisfaction of emerging adult women through cognitive distraction. These concepts are important to investigate as sexuality is a significant part of human experience that can have far-reaching benefits. Benefits could include personal discovery, relationship satisfaction, and the possibility for improving body confidence (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994; Byers, 2005). Also, research on how one's cultural context can impact these experiences is an essential piece worth exploration. Exploring ways that women's sexual lives are impacted is vital to furthering both a personal and cultural understanding of human sexuality. Research on women's sexuality, including cognitive distraction and self-perceptions of physical appearance and sexual functioning, is important to expand to pursue a greater depth of knowledge in these areas. Our study is the first that we know of to include all of these variables and to assess them using a mediation framework. Descriptions of the study findings, limitations and strengths, as well as the implications of the results will be explored in the following sections.

Sexual Self-Schemas

We expected that women who reported negative sexual self-schemas would experience higher levels of cognitive distraction, and lower levels of sexual satisfaction. First, we found that sexual self-schemas were positively related to sexual satisfaction, such that more positive levels of sexual self-schemas were associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction. The significant positive relationship between sexual self-schemas and sexual satisfaction makes theoretical sense, as one who feels better about herself sexually would be able to enjoy sexual activity at a higher level than a woman who may not have a positive sexual self-schema. Our findings are similar to those from Calogero and Thompson (2009), who found that internalization of media

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appearance ideals led to lower rates of sexual self-esteem and satisfaction. Viewed through an objectification theory lens, women with more positive sexual self-schemas may have learned to evaluate themselves outside of cultural standards and see their worth based on their own guidelines. This freedom from cultural restraints may allow a woman to formulate her own criteria for a successful or pleasurable sexual experience and provide her the space to evaluate her experiences away from the dominant cultural message. This purposeful detachment from cultural standards may be a specific action women could take to decrease their levels of objectification (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997) and comparisons with their partner's perceived sexual hopes (Donaghue, 2009).

Second, we found that cognitive distraction partially mediated this relationship such that negative sexual self-schemas were related to greater cognitive distraction, which was then related to lower levels of sexual satisfaction, thereby supporting our first hypothesis. The significant relationships between negative sexual self-schemas, higher rates of cognitive distraction, and lower rates of sexual satisfaction indicate that as a woman's views about herself as a sexual being turn negative, her rates of cognitive distraction increase, leading to a decrease in her sexual satisfaction. These results are consistent with previous research by Dove and Wiederman (2000) who found a significant negative relationship between cognitive distraction and sexual satisfaction.

When interpreting the significant findings using objectification theory, a woman with a negative sexual self-schema may see herself as an object existing for someone else's pleasure, leading her to mentally disengage from the act as to monitor her own body and how her partner may be viewing it. Following the pathway of our findings, this disengagement would then lead to lower levels of sexual satisfaction. Extending research by Szymanski and Henning (2007)

where self-objectification was connected with habitual body monitoring, increased body share, and increased appearance anxiety, the cultural encouragement of cognitive distraction during sexual activity may be a cultural practice used to objectify women. The encouragement of women to be passive recipients of sexual activity may disempower women to accept what they are given and not ask for or demand more, ultimately leading to lower levels of sexual satisfaction.

Despite evidence of partial mediation, it is worth noting that sexual self-schemas still had a significant association with sexual satisfaction, even after cognitive distraction was considered. Thus, cognitive distraction can only partially explain the connection between sexual schemas and satisfaction. This finding makes theoretical sense, as sexual self-schemas are the ways women understand themselves as sexual beings (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994). This far-reaching concept can permeate every aspect of sexual activity, from engaging in flirtation, initiating sexual behaviors, and experiencing pleasure during those behaviors. How a woman sees herself during these activities is so powerful for her future satisfaction that actions of cognitive distraction are not able to fully explain how the relationship happens.

Appearance Self-Schemas

We also expected that women who reported a greater investment in appearance self-schemas would experience higher levels of cognitive distraction, and lower levels of sexual satisfaction. First, we found that appearance self-schemas and sexual satisfaction were negatively related, such that higher investment in appearance self-schemas was indeed associated with lower sexual satisfaction scores. This is an interesting finding, indicating that the more important a women finds her appearance to be, the less sexually satisfied she tends to be. Research by Sanchez and Kiefer (2007) indicated that high levels of body shame were found to

be significant predictors of sexual self-consciousness in heterosexual women. This prior research along with our current findings inform the inference that women who place high levels of importance on physical appearance, particularly if they perceive their appearance to need improvement, may have difficulty experiencing sexual satisfaction.

Second, we found that cognitive distraction fully mediated this relationship such that higher investment in appearance was related to greater cognitive distraction, which was then related to lower levels of sexual satisfaction. Theoretically, it is logical to assert that those who place a high importance on appearance self-schemas would be concerned with cultural messages about what is and is not beautiful (Szymanski & Henning, 2007). The importance of these messages, according to our findings, leads to cognitive distraction and lower levels of sexual satisfaction. When one places a high level of importance on what is considered culturally beautiful, she may face challenges when forming her own definition of what is beautiful or desirable. When women are faced with comparing their bodies to the cultural standard, there is no safe or healthy way for them to transform their bodies to fit the unattainable thin cultural mold set by digitally altered media (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). It appears that this concern may be so salient that it is coming into focus during sexual activity, keeping women from fully experiencing their sexual potential. The self-surveillance perpetuated by objectification demands a woman's consciousness and mental energy be focused on how she is not measuring up to cultural standards (Calogero & Thompson, 2009).

The negative relationship between cognitive distraction and sexual satisfaction has been documented in prior research (Dove & Wiederman, 2000; Pujols et al., 2010). These results are also consistent with those of Meana and Nunnink, (2006), who found that one of the strongest predictors of appearance-based cognitive distraction during sexual activity for college women

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was negative body image. The relationship has also been supported by theoretical arguments (e.g., Roberts & Waters, 2004), stressing the connection between the thoughts one has that may take over cognitive space that could be used more constructively.

The finding that cognitive distraction fully mediated the link between appearance self-schemas and sexual satisfaction is important to discuss further. This signifies the importance and salient nature that cognitive distraction has in emerging adult women's sexual experiences. Reasons why cognitive distraction powerfully impacts women who maintain a focus on their appearance during sexual activity could be varied. An explanation that seems most logical would be that women who have been socialized to focus on their bodies as their most important aspect of self have not expanded this to internal states of being as well as external.

The Role of Relationship Status

Regarding relationship status, we expected that women who identify as single would have the strongest connection between positive sexual and appearance self-schemas and higher levels of sexual satisfaction, followed by those who are cohabitating/engaged, and then those who are married/partnered. This hypothesis was not supported by the data, indicating that these constructs operate similarly in emerging adult women regardless of their relationship status. We suspected that the connection that partners form in relationships would provide a buffer for women who receive many cultural messages about how they should look and how they should be in sexual experiences. This buffering idea was not supported, and this finding highlights the pervasive nature of objectification, ultimately affecting women's self-schemas and cognitive distraction. This finding is especially important as it signifies that, regardless of relationship status, all emerging adult women are subject to objectification and its negative impacts.

Previous literature has been varied in response to questions concerning relationship status and sexual satisfaction, (Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007; Sprecher, 2002; Steer & Tiggemann, 2008) indicating an unclear consensus regarding how relationship status impacts sexual satisfaction. Our study assists in determining what the true nature of these connections are, which is important as relationship status in the emerging adult period of life can play a large role in development, health, and well-being. Considering the impact of the developmental period (e.g., emerging adulthood) along with the knowledge of added oppression that women face based on patriarchy (Silverstein, 2003), our finding highlights the intense pressures that can be placed upon all women.

Related to sexual orientation, a small number of our participants identified as bisexual or lesbian. Gaining greater participation from women of all sexual orientations, including those who identify as asexual, would be important to assess how objectification is differently experienced. Previous research has indicated no significant difference in levels of self-objectification between lesbian and heterosexual women (Hill & Fischer, 2008), but gaining a wider picture of experiences would be important to strengthen research.

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of this study is that our sample was comprised solely of college students, and their experiences may be different from emerging adults who are not currently in a university setting as cohort differences and available experiences may be disparate (Arnett, 2006). Examples of these differences include priorities (i.e., financial security vs. educational goals), opportunities (i.e., fewer opportunities for mixed-sex interaction and sexual exploration), and experiences (i.e., immediate employment vs. university lifestyle). Another sample limitation

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was the homogeneity of this sample, including the fact that nearly all of the women were white and heterosexual.

The positionality of the majority of participants was a reflection of the racial make-up of the region the study was conducted in, but it would be important to gather information to assess the impact race may have on these constructs. Exploring how race impacts experiences of sexual objectification is essential to gain a clear picture of women's lives (Watson, Robinson, Dispenza, & Nazari, 2012). It appears that the intersection of racism and sexism provides an atmosphere where objectifying experiences may be felt differently than for those of the dominant racial group (Watson, 2012). Previous research has indicated that African-American women may experience higher levels of self-esteem and positive body image when compared to their Caucasian counterparts (Molloy & Herzberger, 1998). Different cultural groups may have different standards of beauty when compared to Western expectations. Thus, having a different ethnic make up may change the results of this study, as participants may have based their appearance and sexual self-schemas on non-Western standards.

Regarding methodology, as with any self-report research, there may have been a self-selection bias based on who chose to participate in the study. It is possible that those who had strong feelings regarding body image or sexual activity may have been more likely to take the survey than those who did not have strong feelings. Also, participant answers may have been influenced by a wish to appear socially desirable. This could have been expressed as wanting to appear sexually experienced so their answers had an impact on the research or as underreporting sexual activity to fit the cultural story of women as chaste and pure. Another limitation may be that this study did not explicitly assess for levels of self-objectification, but rather used the theory as a framework for understanding for why schemas impact sexual satisfaction through cognitive

distraction.   While answering the questions, the participants may not have been specifically thinking of their experiences in terms of objectification. Lastly, it is important to remember that all findings are correlational in nature and causal relationships cannot be inferred due to a lack of longitudinal data. Because all measurements were provided at a single point in time, truly ordered effects could not be determined in this study. We encourage future researchers to replicate our findings using longitudinal data.

Future research should include non-student emerging adults to compare what influence being a member of a university may have. Future research should also examine how appearance and sexual self-schemas impact men to compare how culture impacts these groups differently. Similarly, qualitative research focused on participants' self-reports on these constructs could further enhance theoretical understanding. While this study included lesbian and bisexual women in the data, it would be important to conduct research focused on this population to determine if they do experience self-objectification in the same way as heterosexual women. Another important opportunity for future research would be getting information from both partners to assess self- and other-report on these constructs. Examining the self-schemas of individual who have never engaged in sexual activity would also provide information on how the constructs discussed in this study operate. Lastly, focusing on obtaining a diverse sample would be important to assess for how race and social class impact a woman's self-schemas and sexual satisfaction.

Implications

These findings provide support for the idea that how a woman feels about herself sexually and appearance-wise has an impact on her sexual satisfaction through cognitive distraction. We chose to view these ideas through objectification theory, or the idea first

presented by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) that posits women are seen, and come to see themselves, as objects to be evaluated and used. This understanding can lead to many implications for the lives of women, specifically related to education, theory development, and use in therapeutic conversations.

First, educating girls and women about the effects of media and unrealistic body types presented may be a way to promote positive sexual and appearance self-schemas. Research by O'Dea (2004) suggested a particular focus on self-esteem and self-acceptance including work on individuality and stress management. This education could easily occur in either a school-based or community-based setting. This education should also be provided to young men so they are aware of the unrealistic and modified images being presented to them so they can make a conscious choice about body types they uphold as desirable. Men could also receive education on how a person's worth is not defined by the shape and size of her body. Also, as women tend to be more relationally focused, it would be important to encourage and inform women on how to focus more fully on the feelings and emotions they are experiencing during sexual activity rather than have concerns about their partner's experience take over.

These educational opportunities are ever-present in both formal and informal settings. Formal settings include schools, treatment centers, and in marketing campaigns. Research has indicated that support from surrounding influences (i.e., schools or families) may be helpful in programs being successful (O'Dea & Abraham, 2000). For example, previous research has indicated that family beliefs and messages are positively related to emerging adult women's beliefs regarding sexual activity (Byno, Mullis, & Mullis, 2009). This highlights the impact that family can have on a woman's sexual self-schema. Informal settings include discussions of family values, in women's interaction with other women, and in pointing out objectification of

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women often. School settings that include a comprehensive sexual education component may also provide assistance in the form of factual information about how sexual processes occur.

While it may be easier to discuss the sexual objectification in the media as it is more removed from personal experience, it is also essential that discussions be conducted regarding sexual expectations and the meaning of sexual activity. Promoting positive sexual and appearance self-schemas could be done through self-esteem workshops focused on body positivity and sexual acceptance. Mindfulness education may be provided to increase rates of sexual satisfaction or internal states (Brotto, Krychman, & Jacobson, 2008; Roberts & Waters, 2004). Lastly, sexual satisfaction could be discussed through many avenues, including self-worth and being deserving of pleasure (Mercurio & Landry, 2008), relational work with couples to increase trust and intimacy in relationships (Keystone & Carolan, 1998), and as part of sexual education classes to age-appropriate groups (Impett & Tolman, 2006).

Second, theory development is an essential part of research, particularly with a construct as pervasive as objectification. The results of our study support the positions of objectification theory in how women receive cultural messages and how they influence women's ability to see themselves. This was seen in the high rates of cognitive distraction during sexual activity and interaction between schemas and sexual satisfaction. Our research also advances literature in areas of emerging adulthood. As previously discussed, this time of life is based on exploration of self and environment to determine future life paths (Arnett, 2006; Tanner, 2006). The findings from this study add definition to the emerging adulthood literature in that relationship status during this time of life does not provide the buffer from cultural pressures regarding sexuality and appearance that one may expect. This research expands on the idea that utilizing a

developmental framework is important to assess how particular life struggles may be impacting certain age groups and their sexual well-being.

Lastly, it would be important for therapists to have an understanding about these constructs. For example, in work with couples, it would be beneficial for therapists to explore the objectification that partners do on both a conscious and unconscious level. While working with individuals, it would also be vital that clinicians assess the impact of cultural messages on one's sense of self. Therapists can easily incorporate discussions of societal influence into their clinical goals and the theories that guide them. For any work with persons seeking help regarding sexual concerns, it would be essential for the therapist to utilize a feminist framework to not further stigmatize the individual (Keystone & Carolan, 1998). This feminist framework encourages therapists to enter conversations without expectations as to where the client is at regarding sexual experiences and understanding. Entering these discussions with an open mind is imperative to encourage women to accept and love themselves as sexual beings and with human bodies.

Bringing sexual satisfaction, cognitive distraction, and sexual or appearance self-schemas to light with discussion could improve sexual relationships and communication between partners. When enhancing a woman's ability to share her desires and hopes for sexual relationships, it is clear that a feminist framework is necessary (Bieschke, Perez, & DeBord, 2007). This feminist framework assists clinicians in examining women's experiences while taking larger social structures into account (Walters, Carter, Papp, & Silverstein, 1988). Feminist therapy focused on the experience of sexual activity and self during the activity would likely focus on increasing knowledge of internal states using mindfulness techniques and connection with values that the individual finds important in her life. This would allow the woman a chance to set her own

standards on what a successful sexual experience is and how she would like to express her desires and pleasure.

Conclusion

This study provided support for the idea that a woman's experience of sexual satisfaction is impacted by her sexual and appearance self-schemas but not by her relationship status. The relationship between both sexual and appearance self-schemas and sexual satisfaction was mediated by cognitive distraction. Viewed through objectification theory, these findings suggest that education and consciousness-raising about the effects of objectification on thoughts about the self could be helpful for individuals and couples, specifically for improving sexual satisfaction. Research on this topic is essential to help women in exploring what affects them and their life experiences, in gaining knowledge about themselves and their bodies, and ultimately improving their body and sexual experiences.

Table 1

Regression Results for the Mediating Effects of Cognitive Distraction on the Relationship Between Sexual Self-Schemas and Sexual Satisfaction

Model	B	Standard Error	β
Model 1			
Outcome: Sexual Satisfaction			
Predictor: Sexual Self-Schemas	.07	.01	.40*
Model 2			
Outcome: Cognitive Distraction			
Predictor: Sexual Self-Schemas	-.41	.08	-.30*
Model 3			
Outcome: Sexual Satisfaction			
Predictor: Cognitive Distraction	-.06	.01	-.45*
Model 4			
Outcome: Sexual Satisfaction			
Predictor: Sexual Self-Schemas	.05	.01	.29*
Mediator: Cognitive Distraction	-.05	.01	-.36*

*$p < .05$.

Table 2

Regression Results for the Mediating Effects of Cognitive Distraction on the Relationship
Between Appearance Self-Schemas and Sexual Satisfaction

Model	B	Standard Error	β
Model 1			
Outcome: Sexual Satisfaction			
Predictor: Appearance Self-Schemas	-.03	.02	-.11*
Model 2			
Outcome: Cognitive Distraction			
Predictor: Appearance Self-Schemas	.88	.10	.47*
Model 3			
Outcome: Sexual Satisfaction			
Predictor: Cognitive Distraction	-.06	.01	-.45*
Model 4			
Outcome: Sexual Satisfaction			
Predictor: Appearance Self-Schemas	.03	.02	.11
Mediator: Cognitive Distraction	-.07	.01	-.50*

*$p < .05$.

Table 3

Regression Results for the Moderating Effects of Relationship Status on the Relationship Between Sexual Self-Schemas and Sexual Satisfaction

Step and Variable	B	Standard Error	β
Step 1			
Relationship Status	.11	.10	.06
Sexual Self-Schemas	1.10	.15	.42*
Step 2			
Relationship Status x Schemas	.17	.12	.14

* p < .05.

Table 4

Regression Results for the Moderating Effects of Relationship Status on the Relationship Between Appearance Self-Schemas and Sexual Satisfaction

Step and Variable	B	Standard Error	β
Step 1			
Relationship Status	.16	.11	.09
Appearance Self-Schemas	-.30	.16	-.11
Step 2			
Relationship Status x Schemas	-.05	.11	-.05

a) Direct Effects Model
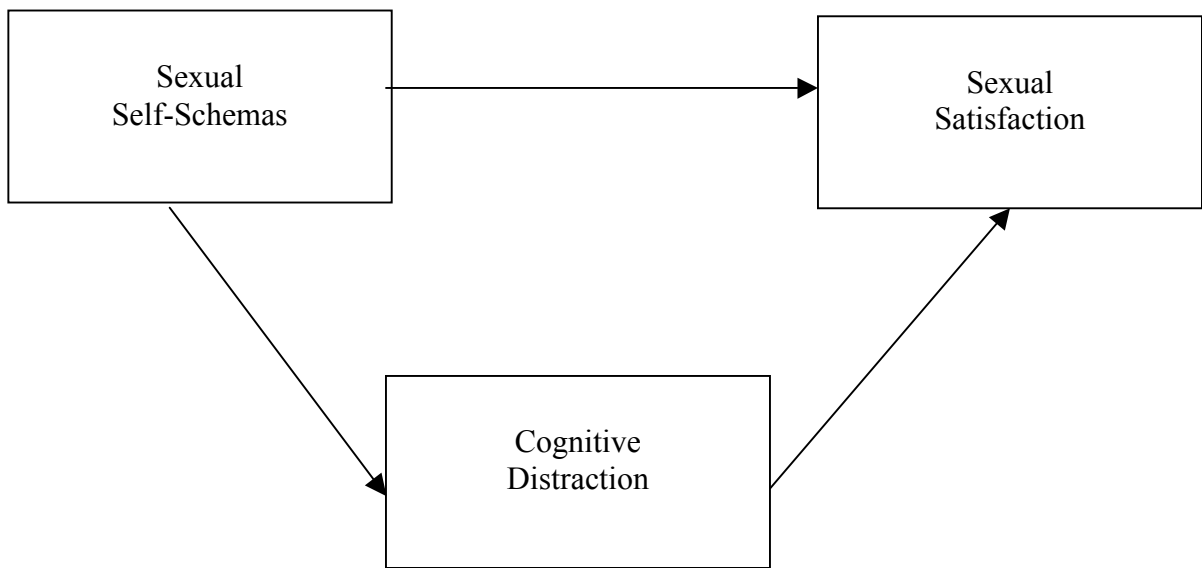
b) Mediation Model

Figure 1. Models investigating whether cognitive distraction mediates the relationship between sexual self-schemas and sexual satisfaction

a) Direct Effects Model
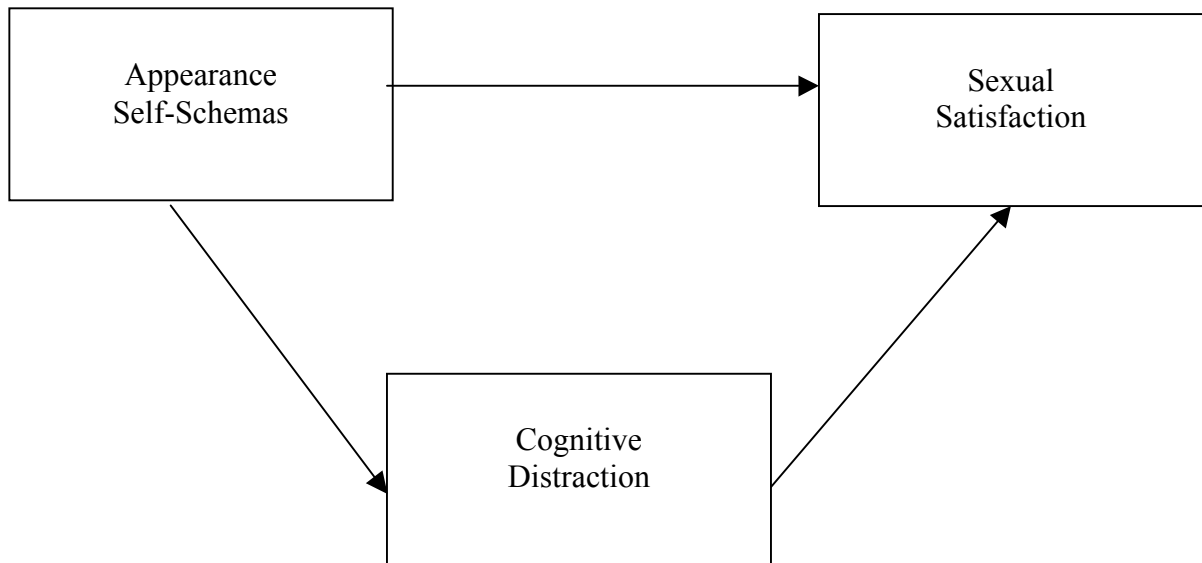
b) Mediation Model

Figure 2. Models investigating whether cognitive distraction mediates the relationship between appearance self-schemas and sexual satisfaction

Figure 3. Model investigating whether relationship status moderates the relationship between sexual self-schemas and sexual satisfaction

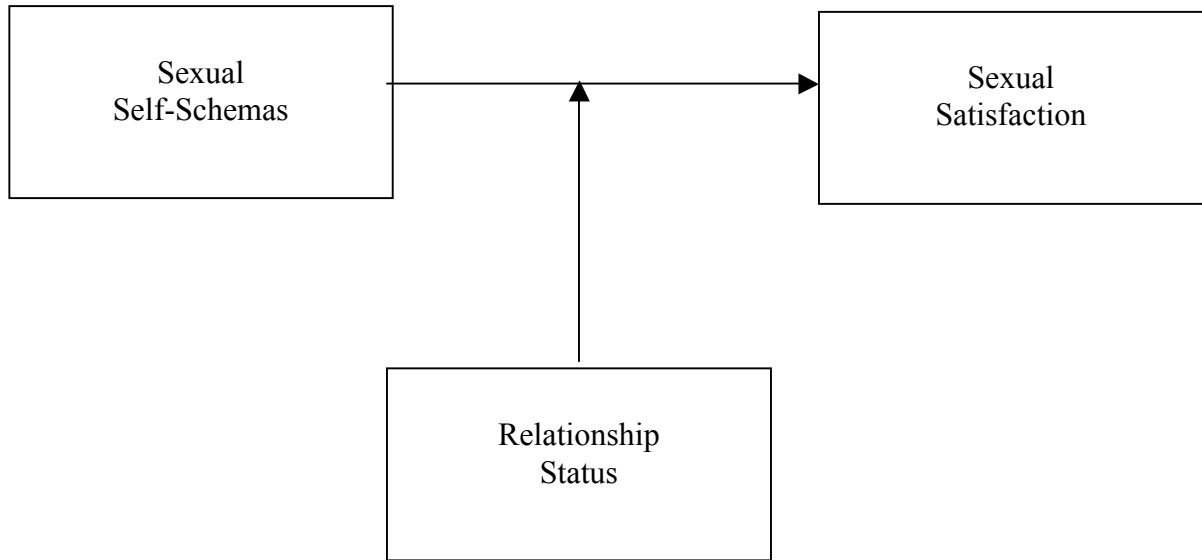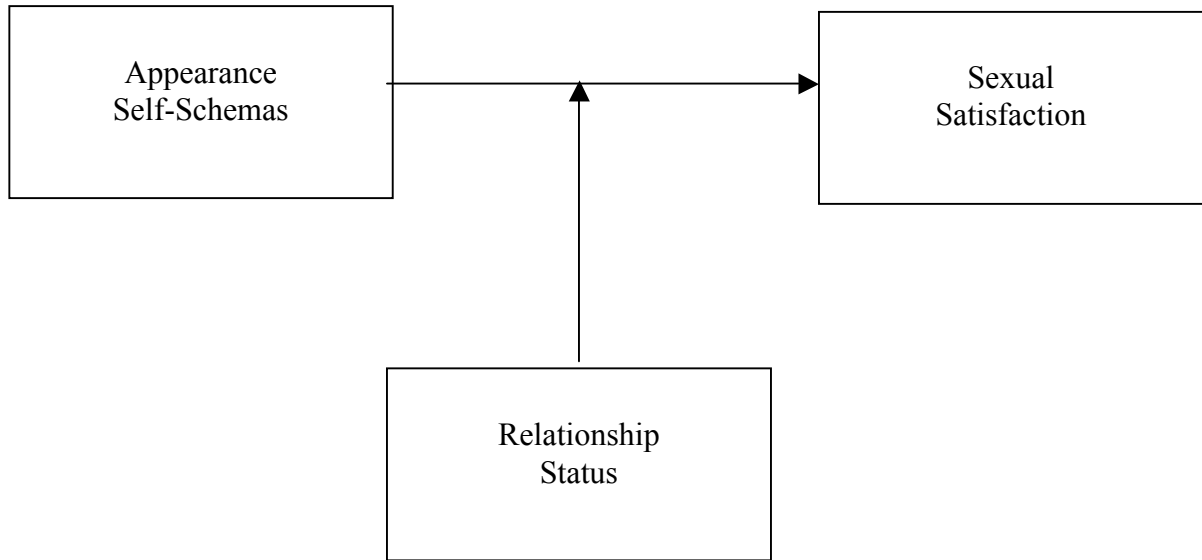*Figure 4.* Model investigating whether relationship status moderates the relationship between appearance self-schemas and sexual satisfaction

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APPENDIX A: SEXUAL SELF-SCHEMA SCALE

Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994

Please circle the answer that best reflects to what extent each term describes you.

	Not at all descriptive of me	Rarely descriptive of me	A little descriptive of me	Somewhat descriptive of me	Often descriptive of me	Very descriptive of me	Extremely descriptive of me
1. uninhibited	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. cautious	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. loving	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. open-minded	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. timid	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. frank	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. stimulating	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. experienced	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. direct	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. broad-minded	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. arousable	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. self-conscious	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. straightforward	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. casual	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. prudent	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. embarrassed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. outspoken	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. romantic	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. sympathetic	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Not at all descriptive of me	Rarely descriptive of me	A little descriptive of me	Somewhat descriptive of me	Often descriptive of me	Very descriptive of me	Extremely descriptive of me
20. conservative	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. passionate	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. inexperienced	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. warm	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. unromantic	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. revealing	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. feeling	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX B: APPEARANCE SCHEMAS INVENTORY (ASI)

Cash & Labarge, 1996
Please circle the answer that best indicates to what extent you agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree
1) What I look like is an important part of who I am.	1	2	3	4	5
2) What's wrong with my appearance is one of the first things that people will notice about me.	1	2	3	4	5
3) One's outward physical appearance is a sign of the character of the inner person.	1	2	3	4	5
4) If I could look just as I wish, my life would be much happier.	1	2	3	4	5
5) If people knew how I *really* look, they would like me less.	1	2	3	4	5
6) By controlling my appearance, I can control many of the social and emotional events in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
7) My appearance is responsible for much of what has happened to me in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
8) I should do whatever I can to always look my best.	1	2	3	4	5
9) Aging will make me less attractive.	1	2	3	4	5
10) To be feminine, a woman must be as pretty as possible.	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
11) The media's messages in our society make it impossible for me to be satisfied with my appearance.	1	2	3	4	5
12) The only way I could ever like my looks would be to change what I look like.	1	2	3	4	5
13) Attractive people have it all.	1	2	3	4	5
14) Homely people have a hard time finding happiness.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C: COGNITIVE DISTRACTION SCALE

Dove & Wiederman, 2000
Please circle the answer that best fits how often you agree with each statement. Consider "sex" to refer to your definition of sex.

	Always	Usually	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. During sexual activity, I am worried about how my body looks to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. While engaged in sexual activity, I worry that my partner is *not* enjoying the way I am touching his/her body.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. During sexual activity, I worry the whole time that my partner will get turned off by seeing my body without clothes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. It is difficult *not* to think about whether my movements during sexual activity are pleasing to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I can only quit worrying about how my body looks to my partner if it is dark during sexual activity.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I am usually worried about my partner's satisfaction with my actions while engaged in sexual activity.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. During sexual activity, it is difficult *not* to think about how unattractive my body is.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I often worry about the way I am behaving toward my partner during sexual activity.	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Always	Usually	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
9. It is difficult to enjoy sex because of my concerns over how appealing my body is to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. During sexual interactions, I am concerned that my level of activity is *not* satisfying my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. While nude in front of a partner, I can't help but think about how unattractive my body is.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. While engaged in sexual activity with a partner, I think too much about the way I am moving.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. During sexual activity, I am distracted by thoughts about how I look to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Thoughts about whether my actions are satisfying my partner distract me during sexual activity.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. If the lights are on during sexual activity, I worry too much about how appealing my body is to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. During sexual activity, I think too much about whether my partner is happy with the way I am touching his/her body.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. During sexual activity, I can focus on my pleasure much more if I am in a position such that my partner cannot see my body.	1	2	3	4	5	6

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	Always	Usually	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
18. While engaged in sexual activity, I am distracted by thoughts regarding what my partner thinks about my behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. I can only quit worrying about how my body looks to my partner if there are covers over my body during sexual activity.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. Overall, during sexual activity, I am distracted by thoughts about my sexual performance.	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX D: SEXUAL SATISFACTION SCALE

Dove & Wiederman, 2000

Please circle the answer that best indicates your level of agreement with each statement.
Consider "sex" to refer to your definition of sex.

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Very much
1. In general, how satisfied are you with the quality of the sexual experiences you have had with a partner(s)?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Overall, how pleasurable have your sexual experiences with a partner(s) been for you?	1	2	3	4	5
3. All things considered, how satisfied are you with the ways your body has responded during sexual activity with a partner(s)?	1	2	3	4	5