

Sex Objects: How Self-Objectification Undermines Political Efficacy and Engagement

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Abstract

Research has shown that women are significantly less politically engaged than men at both the mass and elite levels (Bennett and Bennett 1989; Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Lawless and Fox 2010; Pruysers and Blais 2014). More recent scholarship has found that structural factors and standard predictors of political behavior no longer sufficiently explain this persistent gap in engagement (Atkeson and Rapoport 2003; Preece 2016; Wen 2013). In the present study, we take a novel approach to exploring the discrepancy in men and women's political engagement. We posit that self-objectification, a psychological mechanism more commonly found in women, undermines engagement. When women self-objectify, their cognitive resources are significantly diminished and they fail to see themselves as agents of change. We conduct two separate survey studies on diverse populations. Overall, we find a negative association between trait self-objectification and political engagement.

Keywords: Political Engagement; Self-Objectification; Political Efficacy; Gender and Politics; Objectification Theory; Survey Research

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“The sexual objectification of women produces a duality in feminine consciousness. The gaze of the Other is internalized so that I myself become at once seer and seen, appraiser and the thing appraised.”

-Sandra Lee Bartky

Women are objectified in popular culture, the media and in the political sphere (Galdi, Maass, and Cadinu 2014; Heflick and Goldenberg 2009; Lanis and Covell 1995; Schooler 2015). The objectification of the female has become normalized in American society. According to Objectification Theory, this persistent objectification leads to a phenomenon known as *self-objectification*, which occurs when individuals internalize observer’s perspectives of their physical bodies (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Psychologists have documented the adverse effects that self-objectification can have on a woman’s mental health, cognitive functioning, and self-efficacy (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, and Twenge 1998; Gapinski, Brownell, and LaFrance 2003; Noll and Fredrickson 1998; Roberts and Gettman 2004).

Using the theoretical framework of Objectification Theory, we explore whether or not the consequences of self-objectification extend to the political sphere. In particular, we look at the well-established gender gap in political engagement. Extant research has found that women are less engaged in politics at both the mass and elite levels (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Lawless and Fox 2010; Pruysers and Blais 2014; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997). Despite the fact that women vote at the same rates as men, they consistently report being less interested in politics, are less knowledgeable, express their political attitudes less than men, and are less politically efficacious (Beckwith 1986; Bennett and Bennett 1989; Delli Carpini and Keeter 2005; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Preece 2016; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997). Men and women diverge sharply in their confidence to comprehend politics, and women are more likely

to believe that politics is too complicated for them to understand (Gidengil, Giles, and Thomas 2008; Pruysers and Blais 2014).

The present study takes a novel approach to exploring the discrepancy in men and women's political engagement. We go beyond measuring standard predictors of political behavior to posit that self-objectification, a psychological mechanism found in higher levels in women, undermines political engagement. If self-objectification undermines women's motivation to engage in politics, this will aid us in understanding persistent gender inequalities in politics and how to best address them. Overall, our results support the notion that state self-objectification negatively correlates with various measures of engagement. In Study 1, state self-objectification was negatively related to political interest, internal political efficacy, and political information-seeking behavior for women in the sample, but not men. In Study 2, state self-objectification was negatively related to internal political efficacy, although there was no evidence of differential effects for women. These findings underscore the relevance of the sexual objectification of the body in the media, popular culture, and in the political sphere, to political outcomes. They also highlight the importance of psychological explanations for the gender gap in political engagement.

Objectification Theory

The notion of objectification has been discussed by many feminist theorists writing from a social constructivist perspective. Simone de Beauvoir, Sandra Bartky, and Iris Marion Young all discussed the objectification of the female body (Bartky 1990; de Beauvoir 1949; Young 1980). Ultimately, a formal theory of objectification was developed to understand the consequences of living in a culture that sexually objectifies women (Fredrickson and Roberts

1997). Objectification theory posits that women are often treated as simply bodies or body parts, and that bodies exist for the consumption and pleasure of others. Seen from this perspective, the crux of objectification is the degradation or even elimination of another's agency and personhood.

Essentially, Objectification Theory serves as a framework for understanding the experience of women in a cultural context where the female body is objectified.² Objectifying portrayals of women are a form of dehumanization and often these portrayals show women's body parts as interchangeable with objects or disembodied entirely (Schooler 2015). Research suggests that viewing sexually objectifying images of women activates cognitive processes associated with objects as opposed to the cognitive processes reserved for thinking about humans (Bernard, Gervais, Campomizzi, and Klein 2012; Cikara Eberhardt, and Fiske 2011). Furthermore, exposure to these objectifying portrayals of women has been associated with negative consequences such as the acceptance of interpersonal violence and harassment towards women (Aubrey, Hopper, and Mbure 2011; Galdi et al. 2014; Wright and Tokunaga 2016), rape myth acceptance (Lanis and Covell 1995), and subscription to masculine gender norms (Galdi et al. 2014).

Objectification can have further damaging effects on the hearts and minds of women. One of these effects is *self*-objectification. When women self-objectify, they internalize observers' perspectives of their physical bodies. As Quinn et al. (2006, pg. 59) state, "Being in a state of self-objectification signifies that a person has moved from a subjective sense of self as agent to a sense of self as object." The insidiousness of self-objectification is that it can pervade every aspect of a woman's life, including her mental health, cognitive functioning, and self-

² This is not to imply that men cannot ever be subject to objectification. However, women's bodies tend to be objectified significantly more in most cultural contexts.

efficacy. Scholars have found that self-objectification can contribute to a host of mental health issues, including anxiety and depression (Huebner and Fredrickson 1999).

Self-objectification is both a stable trait and a context-dependent state (Fredrickson et al. 1998). “Trait” self-objectification is a person’s overall propensity to see themselves as objects. This type of self-objectification is cultivated over a lifetime and remains relatively stable. Context-dependent or “state” self-objectification can happen in any situation where physical appearance is made salient. This could occur when an objectifying ad is viewed, when a person is subject to street harassment, or even upon receiving an appearance-based compliment.

The tangible effects of self-objectification are far-reaching and varied. Women who are higher self-objectifiers are more likely to express interest in cosmetic surgery (Calogero, Pina, and Sutton 2014), narrow their social presence (Saguy, Quinn, Dovidio, and Pratto 2010), and even engage in self-harm (Erchull, Liss, and Lichiello 2013). Some studies have found that inducing women to self-objectify negatively impacts cognitive performance on challenging tasks (Fredrickson et al. 1998).

The Connection Between Self-Objectification and Political Engagement

There are several reasons why the negative consequences of self-objectification may indeed extend to the political sphere. We argue that the consequences of self-objectification that could affect political behavior fall into three categories; 1) motivational and cognitive consequences, 2) affective and psychological consequences, and 3) the overall internalization of the self as an object. When women self-objectify their cognitive resources are significantly diminished (Fredrickson et al. 1998; Gapinski 2003; Gay and Castano 2010). They display decreased intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Gapinski 2003). Self-

objectification has been shown to disrupt flow, primarily via increased appearance monitoring or body surveillance.³ This refers to the impulse to chronically monitor physical appearance in anticipation of evaluation (McKinley and Hyde 1996). We posit that these consequences of self-objectification are incompatible with political engagement. In particular, we are interested in whether or not decreased overall self-efficacy due to self-objectification would also lead to decreased internal political efficacy. Internal political efficacy involves having the knowledge that one can understand politics and therefore confidently participate in politics. Furthermore, decreased motivation, self-esteem, cognitive resources all seem incongruous with not only political efficacy, but participation in politics generally.

In terms of psychological and affective consequences, self-objectification is associated with increased anxiety, depression, and negative feelings (Gapinski et al. 2003; Huebner and Fredrickson 1999). The relationship between emotions and political participation, information-seeking, and attitude change is nuanced (Huddy, Mason, and Aaroe 2015; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000; Clifford and Jerit 2018). Some studies have found that anxiety, as a response to perceived threat, can actually increase political engagement, particularly political information-seeking (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Gadarian and Albertson 2014; Valentino et al. 2008). However, other research finds that anxiety can be politically demobilizing (Valentino et al. 2011). Depression, via somatic problems and feelings of apathy, is also associated with decreased political participation (Ojeda 2015).

Finally, by definition, self-objectification involves viewing the self through an objectified lens. Women who are high self-objectifiers have incorporated their physical beauty as a central part of their self-concept. Researchers have found that self-objectification is related to self-

³ In positive psychology, flow is a state of total immersion in a particular activity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988).

sexualization (Liss, Erchull, and Ramsey 2011), or the equating of one's self with his or her own sexuality. Women who are high self-objectifiers tend to view beauty and physical looks as a type of social "currency" (Calogero et al. 2017). We posit that if one's self-worth and self-concept are rooted so deeply in their physical appearance; it is unlikely that they would channel their energy into politics.

The mechanism that links self-objectification and political engagement is multi-faceted. There are cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social consequences that could all theoretically link the objectification of the self to decreased political engagement. We propose that it is the combination of all of these factors that disrupts women's propensity to involve themselves in the political sphere. Figure 1 displays our proposed theoretical model.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

Recent research on self-objectification and women's political consciousness lends support for our theory (Calogero 2013; Calogero 2017; Calogero, Tylka, Donnelly, McGetrick, and Leger 2017). Calogero (2013) finds that greater trait self-objectification was related to gender-specific system justification and less engagement in gender-based social activism. In other words, women who are high self-objectifiers were more likely to be content with the status quo in terms of gender relations and less likely to engage in efforts to improve the status of women. Similarly, Calogero, Tylka, Donnelly, McGetrick, and Leger (2017) find that the belief that beauty is a type of "currency," self-objectification, and support for the gender status quo were negatively related to gender-based activism. Indeed, women's adoption of an objectified view of the self is encouraged and validated by sexist ideologies that advocate for traditional

gender roles (Calogero and Jost 2011). All of this research indicates that there is a relationship between self-objectification and political consciousness and activism as it relates to gender-based attitudes.

We extend the extant research by exploring whether or not self-objectification undermines political engagement generally. Research has already shown that self-objectification is associated with less engagement in gender-based activism. This finding is certainly consequential, but concluding that self-objectification undermines all political engagement, regardless of the domain, would be even more far-reaching. Moreover, virtually all of this research excludes men from their sampling frame. The literature suggests that self-objectification is more common in women than it is in men (Fredrickson et al. 1998). Furthermore, there is some evidence that even when men display similar levels of self-objectification as women, they do not suffer the same negative psychological consequences (Roberts and Gettman 2004). However, do the differential effects of self-objectification extend to the political sphere? Given the research that demonstrates that self-objectification tends to have its most detrimental effects on women, we hypothesize the following:

H1: Women who are high trait self-objectifiers will display lower levels of political engagement than women who are low trait self-objectifiers and men who are high and low self-objectifiers.

Calogero (2013) finds that greater self-objectification leads to more support for the gender status quo, which ultimately decreases support for collective action. She reasons that self-objectification acts as a “dominant cultural lens through which women come to view themselves, and through which they perpetuate their own disadvantaged state” (p. 313). She measures support for the status quo with a measure of gender-specific system justification. Building on this

finding, we test whether or not social dominance orientation, a concept related to system justification, is related to self-objectification and mediates the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement. Social dominance orientation measures individual differences in preferences for group-based hierarchy. More specifically, it is a personality trait that measures support for the dominance of particular groups over others based on factors such as race, religion, nationality, and gender (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). Whereas system justification relates more to resistance to social change, social dominance orientation can be conceptualized as the acceptance of inequality. If high self-objectifiers place their own value primarily in their physical appearance or as sex objects, they may be more likely to accept inequalities and develop a preference for group-based hierarchies (even ones that disadvantage them). We already know that women who are high self-objectifiers tend to be more content with the gender status quo which impacts their propensity to engage in collective action to improve their status. It is also plausible that these women begin to actively support group-based hierarchies and feel that they are justified and preferable. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2: Social dominance orientation mediates the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement in women.

Virtually no studies in political science have explored the role of self-objectification in shaping political outcomes. However, the extensive literature in psychology outlines a broad array of negative outcomes, both psychological, physical, and behavioral, that extend from chronic self-objectification. Given the consequences outlined above and the research on self-objectification and gender-based collective action, we propose that self-objectification may have an impact on overall political engagement and in particular, may undermine women's interest, efficacy, and participation in politics. This in turn will shed light on the gender gap in political

engagement that structural factors and standard predictors of political behavior no longer adequately explain.

Research Design

Samples

To investigate the relationship between trait self-objectification and political engagement, we conducted two large-sample survey studies. The first sample was recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk in the Spring of 2017. A total of 260 respondents were recruited and 4 were dropped for completing less than 50% of the survey instrument. All respondents were over the age of 18 and lived in the United States. Participants ranged from age 19 to age 78 ($M=34.5$, $SD=11.1$), and over 60% of the sample had a bachelor's degree or higher. Out of the 260 participants, 55.9% identified as white, 10.2% as black, 5.7% as Hispanic, 22.4% as Asian, and 5.7% as more than one race. The median reported yearly income was \$35,000 to \$64,999. Participants were compensated \$1.00 for completing the ten-minute study. While the sample was quite diverse, it is younger, more educated, and more liberal than the United States population. While this limits external validity somewhat, MTurk samples tend to be more representative than in-person convenience samples (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012).

Our second sample was recruited via the survey recruitment platform, Prolific in the Fall of 2019. All hypotheses were pre-registered on Open Science Framework⁴. A total of 450 respondents completed the survey on "Self-Efficacy and Cognition" and 4 of the surveys were sent back because the participant completed it in under the minimum allocated time of 3

⁴ https://osf.io/7qx8y/?view_only=3af1f76727bb401ba762e9ed32da426d

minutes.⁵ Participants were paid \$2.16 for completing the study, which was in line with Prolific's ethical payment standards. The benefit of using Prolific is that they have algorithms in place to fairly allocate study spaces, decreasing the issue of utilizing non-naïve participants (Chandler et al. 2015). All participants were living in the United States and were between the ages of 18 and 80 ($M=34.6$, $SD=13.1$). The majority of participants (54.8%) had a bachelor's degree or higher and the median income was between \$35,000 and \$64,999. In terms of race, 75.3% of the sample identified as white, 6.6% identified as black, 7.5% as Asian, 5.8% as Latino/s or Hispanic, 0.7% as Native American, and 4.2% self-described.

Although both studies consist of primarily the same survey measures, we analyze the samples separately. We include models with the pooled data in the Appendix.

Self-Objectification

To measure trait self-objectification we used 16-items from the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley and Hyde 1996). Two of three eight-item sub-scales were included; 1) body surveillance, and 2) body shame.⁶ This scale was derived from feminist theory and is designed to measure the behaviors and attitudes that contribute to women's negative body experience (McKinley and Hyde 1996). This measure captures one's tendency to view their own bodies as outside observers and to constantly monitor compliance with cultural beauty standards. It is important to note that although the scale was conceptualized to measure women's negative body experience, all of the questions are written in a gender-neutral way. The body surveillance sub-scale includes statements like, "I rarely compare how I look with how other people look,"

⁵ An a priori power analysis calculated for a relatively small effect size (.05), $\alpha=.05$, and $\beta=0.95$ renders a suggested total sample size of at least 436.

⁶ Following Moradi and Varnes's (2017) research on the factor structure of the OBCS, we only utilized the Body Surveillance and Body Shame sub-scales. In their analysis, they found that the factor loadings for the Control Beliefs items were low, indicating that these items were poor measures of the Control Beliefs factor. The Control Beliefs Scale also yielded a theory-inconsistent negative correlation with the Body Surveillance factor and the Body Shame factor, as well as a low Cronbach's alpha.

and “I am more concerned with what my body can do than how it looks.” The body shame subscale includes statements such as “I feel like I must be a bad person when I don't look as good as I could,” and “I would be ashamed for people to know what I really weigh.” Response categories were on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with a “not applicable” option. Not applicable responses were treated as missing values, and appropriate items were reverse coded such that higher scores indicated higher levels of body surveillance and body shame. Strong psychometric properties on the OBCS has been demonstrated in a number of studies on several different samples (Chen and Russo 2010; McKinley and Hyde 1996; Moradi and Varnes 2017). The scale displayed a high level of reliability across both studies (Study 1: Cronbach's Alpha=.86; Study 2: Cronbah's Alpha=.90). A mean composite score was generated by averaging responses across all 16-items (Study 1: M=3.8, SD=1.0; Study 2: M=3.8, SD=1.1).

Political Engagement and Participation

In both studies we measured internal political efficacy using four standard items from the National Election Study developed by Niemi, Craig, and Mattei (1991). These items include statements like “I consider myself to be well-qualified to participate in politics,” and “I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.” Response categories were on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Items were coded such that higher values indicated a more efficacious answer. The items show high levels of reliability (Study 1: Cronbach's Alpha=.80; Study 2: Cronbach's Alpha= .81). A mean composite score was generated by averaging responses across all items (Study 1: M=4.6, SD=1.2; Study 2: M=4.7, SD=1.3). Political interest was measured with two items tapping interest in both political campaigns and current events. Respondents were asked, “Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you have been very much interested,

somewhat interested, or not much interested in the political campaigns this year?” and “Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?” Items were coded such that higher values indicated more interest and a mean composite score was generated by taking the average across the two items (Study 1: $M=2.7$, $SD=.68$; Study 2: $M=2.6$, $SD=.75$).

In Study 1, we included a measure of political information-seeking behavior. Participants were required to read a brief news article.⁷ They were then asked how likely they would be to look for more information related to the story, or to read another news story about related issues if they encountered one. The information-seeking question was measured on a 7-point scale from “extremely likely” to “extremely unlikely.” This measure gets at one’s propensity to not only be interested in politics, but to actively seek out more political information. In Study 2, we included a measure of political participation using four dichotomous questions about engaging in various acts of political participation within the past year (signing an online petition, attending a public rally or demonstration, donating money to a political campaign or cause, and posting on social media about an issue that matters to you). We created a summated rating scale that ranged from 0 to 4 ($M=1.5$, $SD=1.2$).

Social Dominance Orientation

In Study 2, social dominance orientation was measured with 7-items reflecting preference for group-based hierarchy and tolerance of inequality. Participants indicated the degree to which they agreed with statements like, “Some groups of people are simply not equal to others.”,

⁷ The article involved a discussion of a Texas legislative session on sanctuary cities, and a bill that would ban them and punish local governments that do not comply with the law.

“Some people are just more worthy than others.”, and “This country would be better off if we cared less about how equal all people were.” Items were coded such that higher values indicated more SDO and a mean composite score was generated by taking the average across the seven items ($M=2.5$, $SD=1.4$).

Controls

Any study interested in the political engagement as an outcome must account for a variety of variables that are known to influence engagement. For example, those who are older, wealthier, more educated, and white tend to participate in politics at higher levels (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1993). In both Studies 1 and 2 we controlled for age, education, ideology, gender, and race. Age was measured in years, education was coded on a scale of 1 through 5, 1 being “less than a high school diploma,” and 5 being “post-college degree.” Ideology was coded on a scale of 1 through 6, 1 being “very liberal” and 6 being “very conservative.” Race was dummy coded such that 1=white and 0=non-white. Gender was coded dichotomously such that 1=women and 0=men.

Results

Study 1

To investigate the relationship between trait self-objectification and political engagement, a total of three OLS regression models were estimated.⁸ Full regression results can be found below in Table 1. We included our key independent variables of gender and the composite score from the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale items, as well as the interaction between the two. We looked at the impact of these variables, as well as a set of controls on political interest,

⁸ Models without the controls can be found in Table 1 in the Appendix.

information-seeking behavior, and efficacy. These results test the first hypothesis of the article that self-objectification will have a negative impact on political engagement for women. Based on this hypothesis and the theoretical framework detailed earlier, we would expect to see a significant negative effect of the interaction term on political engagement. We find strong support for this hypothesis.⁹

In all three models, the interaction between gender and self-objectification is negative and statistically significant. In other words, for only those who identify as women, self-objectification has a negative impact on political engagement. These findings are better displayed in Figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 displays the predicted effect of self-objectification on interest and political information-seeking. We see that for women, as self-objectification increases, both interest and information-seeking decrease. For men, as self-objectification increases, political interest and information-seeking increase, although this increase is not statistically significant. The effect of gender on information-seeking actually shows that women are significantly more likely to seek information than men. Women who are the lowest self-objectifiers are more likely than women who are high self-objectifiers, as well as men who are both high and low self-objectifiers, to seek information. However, in line with Hypothesis 1, women who are high self-objectifiers are the least likely to seek out political information.

Figure 3 displays a similar pattern for internal political efficacy. For men, self-objectification has no impact on political efficacy and if anything, the relationship is trending in the positive direction. For women, as self-objectification increases, internal political efficacy significantly decreases. Women who are low self-objectifiers are approximately 1.5 times more efficacious than women who are high self-objectifiers. These results also support Hypothesis 1.

⁹ Additionally, we ran t-tests to see if there were gender differences in mean levels of self-objectification. In line with extant literature, women were significantly higher self-objectifiers than men (Study 1: $p < .01$; Study 2: $p < .001$).

Self-objectification has a significant impact on political engagement and that impact is moderated by gender.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

Study 2

In Study 2, we test Hypothesis 1 with a different and larger sample. We also extend our analysis to explore whether or not self-objectification impacts political participation. We estimated three OLS regression models. Results are displayed in Table 2. Again, we included our key independent variables of gender and the composite score from the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale items, as well as the interaction between the two. We controlled for age, education, ideology, and race. In line with Hypothesis 1, we expect to see a significant negative effect of the interaction term on political engagement. We find no significant interaction between gender and trait self-objectification on political interest and political participation. Contrary to Study 1, we find a significant interaction between gender and trait self-objectification for internal political efficacy, but the sign is in the opposite direction. Figure 4 shows the predicted effect of self-objectification on efficacy. For men in this sample, we actually see a negative effect of self-

objectification on internal political efficacy. The almost completely flat blue line for women shows that there is almost no effect.

Although we do not find support for Hypothesis 1 in this study, we do find that there is an overall negative impact of self-objectification on internal political efficacy. Figure 5 shows the effect of trait self-objectification on internal political efficacy. Although the effect sizes are small, higher self-objectifiers are less efficacious than lower self-objectifiers.

[TABLE 2 HERE]

[FIGURE 4 HERE]

[FIGURE 5 HERE]

Finally, to test our second hypothesis that social dominance orientation mediates the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement in women, a series of regression analyses were conducted. We used the “mediate” package in R (Tingley, Yamamoto, Hirose, Keele, & Imai 2014) to estimate average causal mediation effects (ACME), average direct effects (ADE), and total effects. Results from the mediation models are in the Appendix. We find no support for the hypothesis that social dominance orientation mediates the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement.

Implications and Conclusion

There is a wealth of research that has examined the effects of self-objectification on women’s behaviors, mental health, and cognitive functioning. These extensive findings about the

negative impacts of self-objectification on women led us to theorize that perhaps these negative effects extend into the political realm and can partially explain the well-known gender gap in political engagement. More recently, scholars have put forth psychological explanations for the gap in engagement. For example, one reason that women may be less engaged is that they lack the confidence to fully participate in politics (Preece 2016). Building off of this notion, we posited that self-objectification is one such psychological mechanism found in higher levels in women, that undermines their engagement in politics.

The results from this study are mixed, but ultimately provide evidence that there is a link between trait self-objectification and political engagement. In both Study 1 and Study 2, we found that trait self-objectification was associated with decreased engagement. In Study 1, this relationship was moderated by gender. Women with higher levels of self-objectification were less politically efficacious, interested, and had a lower propensity to seek political information than women with lower levels of self-objectification, as well as men who are both high and low self-objectifiers. These findings are consistent with the research on self-objectification and decreased gender-based collective action. Women who are higher trait self-objectifiers are less likely to engage in politics than women who are low trait self-objectifiers, as well as men who are low and high self-objectifiers. In Study 2, we found no significant interaction between gender and self-objectification in two of our models, and in one model we found a significant interaction that was not consistent with our hypothesis. Women with higher levels of self-objectification were actually slightly more political efficacious. However, self-objectification had an independent negative effect on political efficacy. These findings indicate that perhaps in the domain of politics, the negative consequences of self-objectification can extend to men as well.

There are of course limitations to this study. Due to the observational nature of this work, we cannot be completely confident that the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement is causal. In the future it would be fruitful to further explore the potential mechanisms linking self-objectification with political engagement and participation. Although the findings across the two studies presented here are mixed, we take this as preliminary evidence of a link between self-objectification and political engagement. Results from Study 1 indicate that self-objectification tends to have its most detrimental impacts on women. This is in line with the research on women's mental health, self-evaluation, physical health, and behavioral outcomes, as well as the research on self-objectification's effect on gender based social activism (Calogero 2013).

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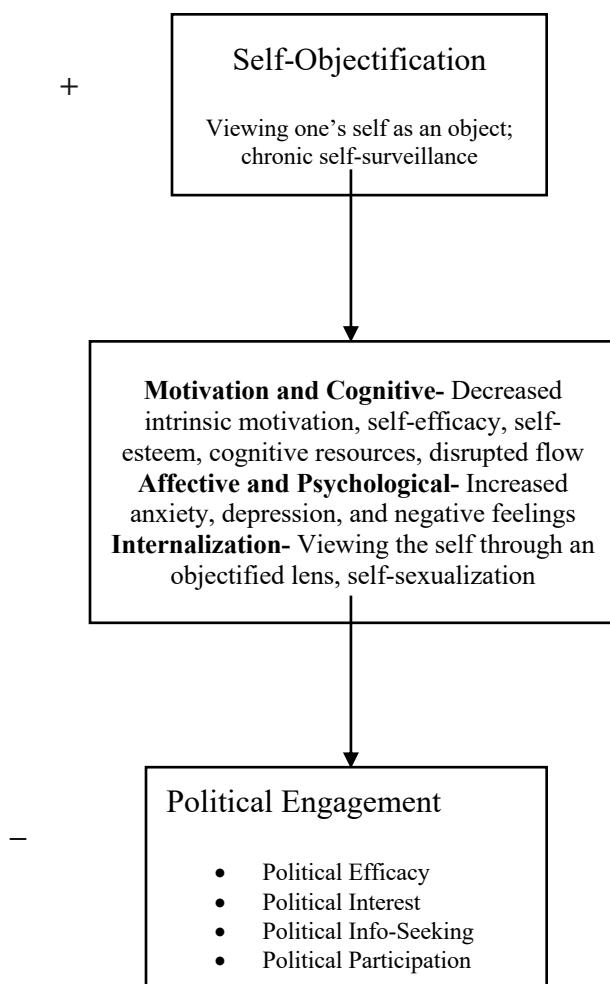
Figure 1: Proposed Model

Figure 2: Effect of Self-Objectification on Interest (left) and Information-Seeking (right), by Gender

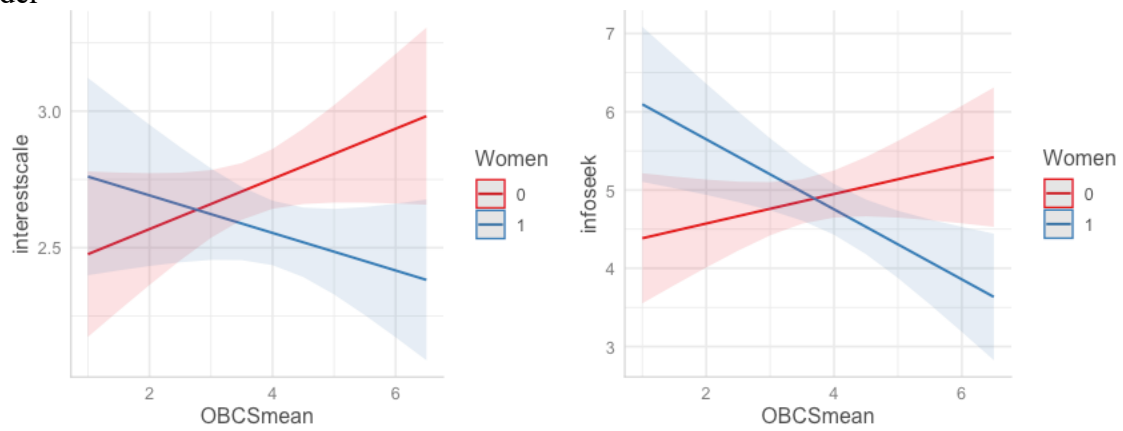


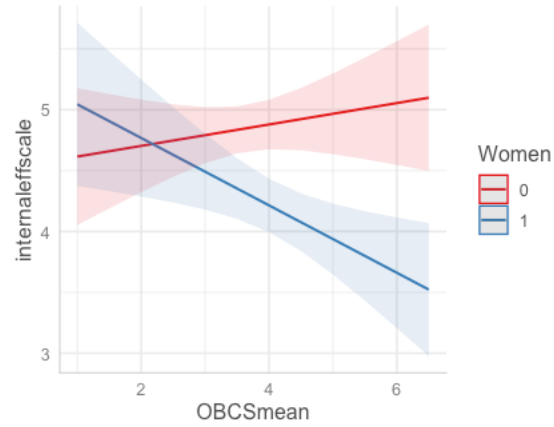
Figure 3: Predicted Internal Political Efficacy by Gender

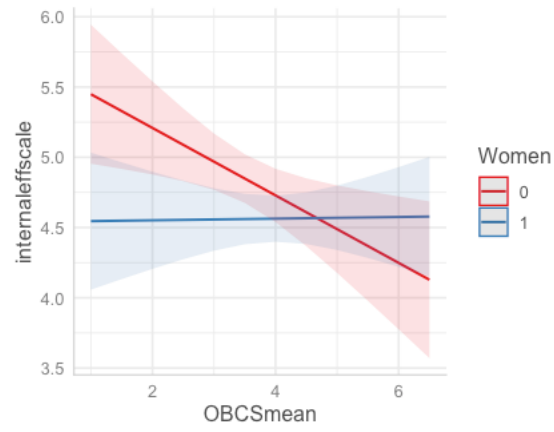
Figure 4: Predicted Internal Political Efficacy by Gender

Figure 5: Predicted Effect of Self-Objectification on Internal Political Efficacy

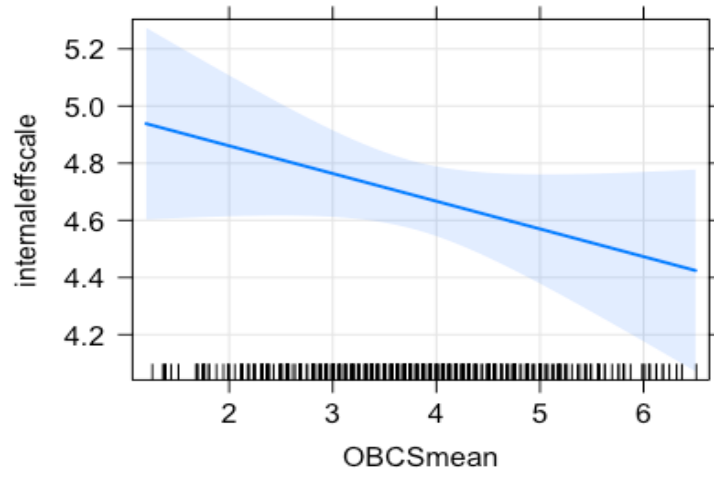


Table 1: Study 1 OLS Regression Results

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Political Interest	Information-Seeking	Internal Efficacy
Gender (1=women)	0.404 (0.310)	2.348*** (0.853)	0.822 (0.573)
Self-Objectification	0.081 (0.055)	0.188 (0.151)	0.091 (0.101)
Age	0.021*** (0.004)	-0.005 (0.010)	0.011 (0.007)
Education	0.067 (0.047)	0.261** (0.129)	0.340*** (0.087)
Ideology	-0.027 (0.030)	-0.068 (0.082)	-0.060 (0.055)
Race (1=White)	0.145* (0.082)	0.069 (0.226)	0.074 (0.152)
Gender*Self-Object	-0.151* (0.078)	-0.636*** (0.213)	-0.369** (0.143)
Constant	1.443*** (0.313)	3.586*** (0.863)	3.012*** (0.579)
Observations	256	254	256
R ²	0.175	0.060	0.167
Adjusted R ²	0.152	0.033	0.143
Residual Std. Error	0.622 (df = 248)	1.706 (df = 246)	1.150 (df = 248)
F Statistic	7.518*** (df = 7; 248)	2.247** (df = 7; 246)	7.079*** (df = 7; 248)
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Table 2: Study 2 OLS Regression Results

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Political Interest	Internal Political Efficacy	Political Participation
Gender (women=1)	-0.471* (0.254)	-1.149** (0.457)	0.596 (0.428)
Self-Objectification	-0.043 (0.051)	-0.240*** (0.092)	0.080 (0.086)
Age	0.013*** (0.003)	0.008 (0.005)	-0.005 (0.005)
Education	0.102*** (0.036)	0.229*** (0.066)	0.065 (0.061)
Ideology	-0.117*** (0.027)	-0.068 (0.049)	-0.215*** (0.046)
Race (1=white)	0.217*** (0.080)	0.417*** (0.144)	0.095 (0.134)
Gender*Self-Object	0.101 (0.065)	0.246** (0.118)	-0.091 (0.110)
Constant	2.141*** (0.265)	4.463*** (0.477)	1.547*** (0.447)
Observations	446	446	446
R ²	0.137	0.097	0.077
Adjusted R ²	0.123	0.083	0.062
Residual Std. Error (df = 438)	0.705	1.270	1.189
F Statistic (df = 7; 438)	9.920***	6.720***	5.218***

Note:

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Appendix

Study 1 Recruitment Information

Between June 21st and June 28th of 2017, 260 male and female respondents living in the United States were recruited via the survey recruitment platform, Amazon Mechanical Turk. The Internet panel was recruited to participate in a study about “body image, demographic information, and gender attitudes.” Participants were compensated \$1.00 for completing the 10-minute survey.

Study 2 Recruitment Information

Our second sample was recruited via the survey recruitment platform, Prolific on Sept. 15, 2019. The pre-analysis plan for this study was pre-registered on Open Science Framework. A total of 450 respondents completed the survey on “Self-Efficacy and Cognition.” Participants were paid \$2.16 for completing the study.

Table A1: Study 1 Demographics

	Overall (n=257)
Gender	
Women	111 (43.2%)
Men	146 (56.8%)
Age	
Mean (SD)	34.8 (11.2)
Median [Min, Max]	32.0 [19.0, 78.0]
Missing	1 (0.4%)
Race	
White	143 (55.6%)
Non-White	112 (43.6%)
Missing	2 (0.8%)
Education	
Less than H.S.	2 (0.8%)
H.S. Grad	18 (7.0%)
Some College	81 (31.5%)
College Grad	116 (45.1%)
Post-College Grad	40 (15.6%)
Ideology	
Very Liberal	32 (12.5%)
Liberal	68 (26.5%)
Somewhat Liberal	70 (27.2%)
Somewhat Conservative	50 (19.5%)
Conservative	26 (10.1%)
Very Conservative	11 (4.3%)

Table A2: Study 2 Demographics

	Overall (n=453)
Gender	
Women	234 (51.7%)
Men	212 (46.8%)
Missing	7 (1.5%)
Age	
Mean (SD)	34.6 (13.1)
Median [Min, Max]	31.0 [18.0, 80.0]
Race	
White	341 (75.3%)
Non-White	112 (24.7%)
Education	
Less than H.S.	7 (1.5%)
H.S. Grad	50 (11.0%)
Some College	148 (32.7%)
College Grad	170 (37.5%)
Post-College Grad	78 (17.2%)
Ideology	
Very Liberal	77 (17.0%)
Liberal	138 (30.5%)
Somewhat Liberal	115 (25.4%)
Somewhat Conservative	80 (17.7%)
Conservative	34 (7.5%)
Very Conservative	9 (2.0%)

Table A3: Regression Results (Study 1)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Political Interest	Information-Seeking	Internal Efficacy
Gender (1=women)	0.440 (0.333)	2.244*** (0.849)	0.863 (0.593)
Self-Objectification	0.013 (0.057)	0.198 (0.147)	0.082 (0.102)
Gender*Self-Object	-0.131 (0.083)	-0.618*** (0.212)	-0.364** (0.148)
Constant	2.647*** (0.217)	4.192*** (0.556)	4.528*** (0.387)
Observations	259	257	259
R ²	0.019	0.039	0.081
Adjusted R ²	0.008	0.027	0.070
Residual Std. Error	0.673 (df = 255)	1.710 (df = 253)	1.200 (df = 255)
F Statistic	1.658 (df = 3; 255)	3.386** (df = 3; 253)	7.514*** (df = 3; 255)
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Table A4: Regression Results (Study 2)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Political Interest	Internal Efficacy	Political Participation
Gender (1=women)	-0.378 (0.269)	-1.087** (0.469)	0.620 (0.437)
Self-Objectification	-0.110** (0.053)	-0.307*** (0.092)	0.099 (0.086)
Gender*Self-Object	0.107 (0.069)	0.261** (0.121)	-0.085 (0.113)
Constant	2.971*** (0.197)	5.877*** (0.344)	1.000*** (0.320)
Observations	446	446	446
R ²	0.010	0.029	0.020

Adjusted R ²	0.003	0.022	0.013
Residual Std. Error (df = 442)	0.752	1.311	1.220
F Statistic (df = 3; 442)	1.430	4.394***	3.024**

Note:

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Figure A1: Mediation Analysis (Internal Political Efficacy)

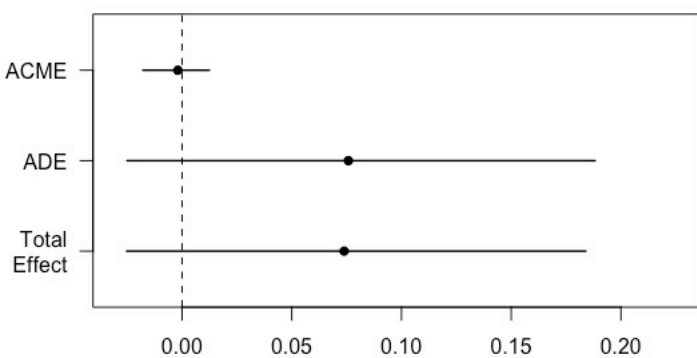


Figure A2: Mediation Analysis (Political Participation)

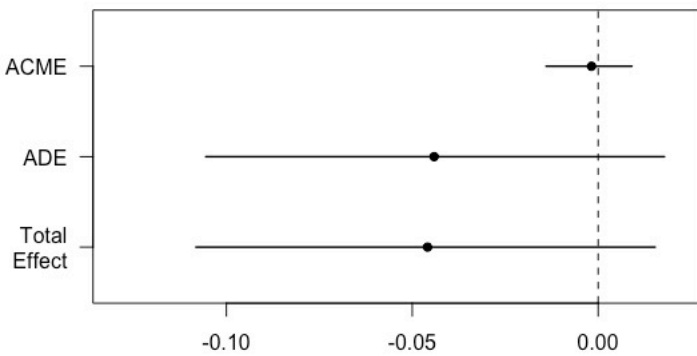


Figure A3: Mediation Analysis (Political Interest)