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

Claire M. Gothreau
Center for American Women and Politics
Rutgers University
claire.gothreau@rutgers.edu
[Twitter: @claire_gothreau](https://twitter.com/claire_gothreau)

Word Count: 9,882

Abstract

Women are significantly less politically engaged than men at both the mass and elite levels. More recent scholarship has found that structural factors and standard predictors of political behavior no longer sufficiently explain this persistent gap in engagement. In the present study, I take a novel approach to exploring the discrepancy in men and women's political engagement and participation. I ask: Does self-objectification, the internalization of observer's perspectives of our physical bodies, undermine political engagement and in part, drive the gender gap in engagement? I argue that the cognitive, motivational, and affective correlates of self-objectification work to decrease political engagement and participation. I conduct two separate survey studies on diverse populations. Overall, I find a negative association between trait self-objectification and political engagement. These findings highlight the relevance of objectification and its cognitive and psychological correlates to the study of political engagement.

“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

Introduction

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 women’s bodies is a hallmark of American society and culture. According to Objectification Theory, this persistent objectification leads to a phenomenon known as *self-objectification*, which occurs when individuals internalize observers’ perspectives of their physical bodies (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Self-objectification happens when the objectifying gaze, often the male gaze, is turned inward and individuals begin to see themselves as objects for instrumental use. The process of self-objectification typically involves a high degree of self-surveillance (Calogero 2013). 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, I first asked the question: Is self-objectification correlated with political behavior? I argued that the established correlates of self-objectification suggest a negative relationship between self-objectification and political engagement and participation. Secondly, is this relationship conditional on gender, given the 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). This

gender gap exists in the U.S. context, as well as in many other parts of the world (Carreras 2018; Coffé and Dilli 2015; Espinal and Zhao 2015, Liu forthcoming). Given the evidence that women self-objectify at higher levels than men (Moradi and Huang 2008) and that self-objectification is ultimately a gendered perspective of the self that is validated by feminine beauty culture, I suggested that self-objectification may - in part - drive the gender gap in engagement. Finally, I tested the hypothesis that social dominance orientation (SDO), a measure of individual differences in preferences for group-based hierarchy, mediates the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement.

With data from two survey studies, I analyzed the relationship between gender, trait self-objectification, and political engagement, with the intent to shed light on the possible mechanisms by which self-objectification impacts political behavior. This study makes two contributions to the literature on gender and politics. First, it extends the existing work on gender and political engagement by going beyond measures of standard predictors of political behavior that no longer adequately explain the gap in men and women's levels of political engagement and participation. The findings highlight the importance of psychological explanations in understanding gender gaps and inform how to best address these gaps. Secondly, I demonstrate the relevance of objectification to politics. Although feminist political theorists have long acknowledged the political nature of objectification and self-objectification, I build on that work and show an empirical relationship between self-objectification and political behavior. The results suggest that pervasive objectification, something many would categorize as “non-political,” can impact how people engage in the political sphere.

Ultimately, these results support the notion that trait self-objectification negatively correlates with various measures of political engagement. In Study 1, trait self-objectification

was negatively related to political interest, internal political efficacy, and political information-seeking behavior for women in the sample, but not for men. In Study 2, trait self-objectification was negatively related to internal political efficacy, although there was no evidence of differential effects for women and no evidence of social dominance orientation as a mediator in the relationship between self-objectification and engagement. These findings underscore the relevance of the sexual objectification in the media, popular culture, and in the political sphere, to political outcomes. This work also demonstrates to those interested in promoting gender equality, the need to think broadly about the lived experiences of women and how those experiences impact 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 women's bodies (Bartky 1990; de Beauvoir 1949; Young 1980). 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 bodies or body parts that exist for the consumption and pleasure of others. Objectifying portrayals of women often show women's body parts as interchangeable with objects or disembodied entirely (Schooler 2015). Furthermore, objectification is a form of dehumanization. According to Fiske (2009, p. 32), "Considering another person as fully human requires appreciating the other's mind (intent, thoughts, and feelings)." The crux of objectification is the degradation or even elimination of another's agency and personhood.

Objectification is a ubiquitous phenomenon and a significant body of research has documented that women and girls are the targets of sexual objectification at higher rates than men and boys (American Psychological Association 2007; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, and Ferguson 2001). To varying capacities, television, magazines, and online pornography all contribute to the objectification of women. Mass media in particular, is one of the largest purveyors of objectifying portrayals of women (Feltman and Szymanski 2017; Krassas, Blauwkamp, and Wesselink 2001; Ramsey and Horan 2018; Stankiewicz and Rosselli 2008). Increasingly, social media operates as a site of objectifying imagery, although in contrast to mass media, much of this content is user-generated (Bell, Cassarly, and Dunbar 2018). Exposure to objectifying portrayals of women is associated with the acceptance of interpersonal violence and harassment towards women (Wright and Tokunaga 2016), rape myth acceptance (Lanis and Covell 1995), subscription to masculine gender norms (Galdi et al. 2014), as well as an array of negative consequences for the women and girls who are the direct targets of objectification (American Psychological Association 2007).

Another effect of pervasive objectification 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." Self-objectification is characterized by chronic body monitoring and self-surveillance, or a preoccupation with how one's body appears to others. Self-objectification is both a stable trait and a context-dependent state (Fredrickson et al. 1998). "Trait" self-objectification refers to a person's overall propensity to see themselves as an object. This type of self-objectification is cultivated over a lifetime and remains relatively stable. Context-dependent or "state" self-objectification can occur in any situation

where physical appearance is made salient, such as viewing an objectifying ad, being subject to street harassment, or even upon receiving an appearance-based compliment.

Due to the more prevalent objectifying cultural messages and treatment that women are subject to, they tend to be higher self-objectifiers than men, and even when men are high self-objectifiers, they often do not experience the same maladaptive correlates that women do (Moradi and Huang 2008). Women who are high self-objectifiers have incorporated their physical beauty as a central part of their self-concept. Often this belief is driven by feminine beauty culture, or the socially constructed notion that for women, physical attractiveness is an extremely important asset. Self-objectification is closely related to self-sexualization (Liss, Erchull, and Ramsey 2011), or the equating of one's self with his or her own sexuality. Often women who are high self-objectifiers tend to view beauty and physical looks as a type of social "currency" or something that will benefit them more than other skills or talents (Calogero et al. 2017). The practice of viewing one's self through an objectified lens involves the internalization of feminine beauty standards, as well as the more active component of chronic self-surveillance in which women vigilantly monitor their appearance.

Extant research in psychology has primarily focused on maladaptive mental health and cognitive correlates on self-objectification. However, some work has addressed the potential for self-objectification to dampen gender-based activist efforts. Calogero (2013) finds that greater self-objectification leads to more support for the gender status quo, which ultimately decreases support for gender-based collective action. 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 and for the types of feminine beauty standards that keep women heavily invested in their physical appearance (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. Whether or not this relationship extends to typical political participation and engagement activities is less understood.

The Connection Between Self-Objectification and Political Engagement

The tangible effects of self-objectification are far-reaching and varied, although the vast majority of this work is outside the scope of politics. However, several important correlates of self-objectification lead to the hypothesis that there is a correlation between self-objectification and various measures of political engagement and participation. The mechanisms that connect trait self-objectification to political behavior fall into two categories: 1) Motivational and Cognitive and 2) Affective and Psychological. I predicted that self-objectification, via these mechanisms, would be negatively correlated with political engagement and participation.

Within the category of motivational and cognitive correlates of self-objectification, there are several key findings that support the notion that self-objectification is negatively correlated with political engagement. First, when women self-objectify, their cognitive and attentional resources are significantly diminished (Fredrickson et al. 1998; Gapinski et al. 2003; Gay and Castano 2010; Quinn et al. 2006). In a similar vein, self-objectification has been shown to also disrupt flow, primarily via increased appearance monitoring or the impulse to chronically

monitor physical appearance in anticipation of evaluation (McKinley and Hyde 1996). In positive psychology, flow is a state of total immersion in a particular activity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988). The political psychology literature demonstrates that cognition, which involves effortful psychological processes, is a component of political attitude formation and engagement (Cacioppo et al. 1996; Lieberman, Schreiber, and Ochsner 2003; Westbrook and Braver 2015). Engaging in politics is an effortful behavior that is contingent on the availability of cognitive resources. Cognitive resources are finite and if self-objectification increases cognitive load and drains those finite resources, it could impact one's ability to engage in other cognitively taxing activities such as engaging in politics.

Self-objectification has also been associated with decreased self-efficacy and self-esteem (Adams et al. 2017; Choma et al. 2010; Gapinski et al. 2003). Self-efficacy, one's belief in their own ability to succeed in any given task, has been linked to political outcomes such as political interest and participation, with more efficacious individuals displaying higher levels of interest and participation (Preece 2016; Solhaug 2006). People tend to avoid tasks at which they believe they will not succeed at. Greater self-esteem and self-confidence are other assets associated with higher levels of political interest, attention, and efficacy. Recent work finds strong evidence that the gender gap in self-confidence mediates the relationship between gender and political engagement, partially driving the gender gap (Wolak 2020). This suggests that because self-objectification is associated with lower self-esteem and self-confidence, self-objectification will also be associated with lower levels of political engagement.

In terms of psychological and affective correlates, self-objectification is related to increased anxiety, depression, and negative feelings (Gapinski et al. 2003; Huebner and Fredrickson 1999), emotions that have a nuanced relationship with political participation and

engagement (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000; Clifford and Jerit 2018). For example, 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 purports that anxiety can be politically demobilizing, particularly in the context of more costly acts of political participation, as it can trigger withdrawal and aversion to risk (Valentino et al. 2011). Anxiety can also result in worse cognitive function in terms of recalling politically relevant facts (Huddy et al. 2005). There is also evidence that depression, via somatic problems and feelings of apathy, can undermine political participation (Ojeda 2015). Overall, impaired health and psychological functioning are negatively related to engagement in politics (Pacheco and Fletcher 2015). A wealth of evidence in psychology links self-objectification to many negative mental health outcomes. Via this psychological and affective pathway, I anticipated a negative relationship between self-objectification and political engagement.

Decades of political science research has uncovered the many predictors of political behavior. This work has established that there is a gender gap in political engagement, with women displaying less political interest, efficacy, and propensity to engage in many political acts beyond voting (Burns et al. 2001; Lawless and Fox 2010; Preece 2016; Pruyssers and Blais 2014; Verba et al. 1997). Similar gender gaps in political activity exist outside of western societies as well. Women in Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa participate in politics at lower rates than their male counterparts (Barnes and Burchard 2012; Carreras 2018; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Liu forthcoming). Structural factors such as access to resources and integration into the workforce, as well as the gender disparity in the demands of family life, explain some of

this gap. However, recent evidence suggests that much of this gap is driven by psychological factors and the gendered way in which women engage in politics (Atkeson and Rapoport 2003; Preece 2016; Wen 2013; Wolak 2020). Women approach politics with a “gendered psyche” (Lawless and Fox 2010), providing foundational evidence that self-objectification could be one factor that contributes to the gendered way in which women engage in political life.

Hypotheses

To summarize the relevant literature, self-objectification is correlated with several cognitive, motivational, affective, and psychological factors that are incompatible, based on extant research, with high levels of political engagement and participation. There is a clear connection between self-objectification and engagement in gender-based activism (Calogero 2017; Calogero et al. 2017). This finding is 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 the 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, I hypothesized 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. The reasoning is 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). Support for the status quo is measured with gender-specific system justification. Building on this finding, I tested 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 captures 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). 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. Likely this would dampen any effort to engage in politics at all because women who

are high self-objectifiers see nothing problematic with existing social inequalities. Therefore, I 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 correlates, motivational and cognitive as well as psychological and affective, that extend from chronic self-objectification. Given these correlates outlined above and the research on self-objectification and gender-based collective action, I posit that self-objectification may have an impact on overall political engagement and in particular, may undermine women's interest, efficacy, and participation in politics.

Research Design

Samples

To investigate the relationship between trait self-objectification and political engagement, I conducted two large-sample survey studies. The first sample was recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk in mid-June of 2017. A total of 260 respondents were recruited and 4 were dropped for completing less than 50% of the survey instrument. 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).

The second sample was recruited via the survey recruitment platform Prolific in mid-September of 2019. All hypotheses were pre-registered on Open Science Framework¹. 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 minutes.² 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 ($M=34.6$, $SD=13.1$).

Although both studies consist of primarily the same survey measures, I analyze the samples separately. The models with pooled data are included in the Appendix.

Self-Objectification

To measure trait self-objectification I 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.³ 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

¹ https://osf.io/7qx8y/?view_only=3af1f76727bb401ba762e9ed32da426d

² 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.

³ Following Moradi and Varnes’s (2017) research on the factor structure of the OBCS, I 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.

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,” and “I am more concerned with what my body can do than how it looks.” The body shame sub-scale 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 for the OBCS have 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: Cronbach'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, measured internal political efficacy was measured using four standard items from the American National Election Study (ANES) 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, I included a measure of political information-seeking behavior where participants were required to read a brief news article.⁴ 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 taps one’s propensity to not only be interested in politics, but to actively seek out more political information. In Study 2, Political participation was measured 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). I created a summated rating scale that ranged from 0 to 4 ($M=1.5$, $SD=1.2$).

Social Dominance Orientation

⁴ 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.

In Study 2, social dominance orientation was measured with 7 items reflecting preferences 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.”, “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, I 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.⁵ Full regression results can be found

⁵ Models without the controls can be found in Table 1 in the Appendix.

below in Table 1. Additionally, I 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: $p < .001$). The key independent variables of gender and the composite score from the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale items, as well as the interaction between the two were included in all of the models. I looked at the impact of these variables, as well as a set of controls on political interest, 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, there should be a significant negative effect of the interaction term on political engagement. I found strong support for this hypothesis.

In all three models, the interaction between gender and self-objectification was negative and statistically significant. In other words, for only those who identify as women, self-objectification had a negative impact on political engagement. These differential effects are better displayed in Figures 1 and 2. Marginal effects were calculated using the equations from the models in Table 1 with continuous control variables set to their means and factors set to their reference categories. Figure 1 displays the predicted effect of self-objectification on interest and political information-seeking. For women, as self-objectification increased, both interest and information-seeking decreased. The effect of gender on political information-seeking indicated that women were significantly more likely to seek information than men. Women who were the lowest self-objectifiers were more likely than women who were high self-objectifiers, as well as men who were both high and low self-objectifiers, to seek information. However, in line with Hypothesis 1, women who were high self-objectifiers were the least likely to seek out political information. With respect to the control variables, age and race were significant predictors of

political interest, with older individuals and whites expressing higher levels of interest. Education had a positive and significant effect on information-seeking.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

Figure 2 displays a similar pattern for internal political efficacy. For men, self-objectification had no impact on political efficacy and if anything, the relationship is trending in the positive direction. For women, as self-objectification increased, internal political efficacy significantly decreased. Women who were low self-objectifiers were approximately 1.5 times more efficacious than women who were high self-objectifiers. These results also supported Hypothesis 1. Self-objectification had a significant impact on political engagement and that impact was moderated by gender. Education also had a positive and significant relationship to internal efficacy, which is expected given extant literature.

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

Study 2

In Study 2, I tested Hypothesis 1 with a different and larger sample. The analysis was extended to explore whether or not self-objectification impacts political participation as well as interest and efficacy. Additionally, I tested the second hypothesis that social dominance orientation mediates the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement and participation.

Three OLS regression models were estimated with results displayed in Table 2. Again, the key independent variables are gender and the compositive score from the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale items, as well as the interaction between the two. I controlled for age, education, ideology, and race. In line with Hypothesis 1, I expected to see a significant negative effect of the interaction term on political engagement. There was no significant interaction between gender and trait self-objectification on political interest and political participation. Contrary to Study 1, there was a significant, positive interaction between gender and trait self-objectification for internal political efficacy. Figure 3 shows the predicted effect of self-objectification on efficacy. Marginal effects were calculated using the equations from the models in Table 2 with continuous control variables set to their means and factors set to their reference categories. For men in this sample, there was actually a negative effect of self-objectification on internal political efficacy. The almost completely flat blue line for women shows that there was no effect. In the regression models, age was a positive and significant predictor of political interest. Education and race were significant predictors of both interest and efficacy, with white and more educated individuals displaying higher levels of interest and efficacy. Ideology was significantly related to interest and participation with more conservative individuals reporting lower levels of interest and participation.

Although there was not support for Hypothesis 1 in this study, there was an overall negative impact of self-objectification on internal political efficacy. Figure 4 shows the predicted effect of trait self-objectification on internal political efficacy. Although the effect sizes are small, higher self-objectifiers were less efficacious than lower self-objectifiers.

[TABLE 2 HERE]

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

[FIGURE 4 HERE]

Finally, to test the second hypothesis that social dominance orientation mediates the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement, a series of regression analyses were conducted. The standard procedure for conducting a mediational analysis is a four-step method in which a series of linear regressions models are fitted to ultimately estimate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables controlling for the mediational variable (Baron and Kenny 1986). Full mediation would occur if the effect of self-objectification on political engagement reduces to zero with the inclusion of social dominance orientation. Partial mediation would occur if the effect of self-objectification is reduced with the inclusion of social dominance orientation. Using the “mediate” package in R (Tingley et al. 2014), I estimated average causal mediation effects (ACME), average direct effects (ADE), and total effects.⁶ The ACME is the indirect effect of social dominance orientation on political engagement and participation and thus indicates whether the mediation effect is significant. I found no support for the hypothesis that social dominance orientation mediates the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement. The average causal mediation effect was indistinguishable from zero in all three mediation analyses. Results from the mediation models are in the Appendix.

Implications and Conclusions

⁶ This package uses a bootstrapping method (Preacher and Hayes 2004) to address power limitations of the commonly used Sobel Test.

There is a wealth of research that has examined the effects of self-objectification on women's behaviors, mental health, and cognitive functioning. The extensive findings about the negative impacts of self-objectification on women provide theoretical grounding for the notion that these effects may extend into the political sphere and can partially explain the well-established gender gap in political engagement. The results from this study are mixed, but ultimately provide evidence of a link between trait self-objectification and political engagement. In both Study 1 and Study 2, I 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 (Calogero 2013). Women who were higher trait self-objectifiers were less likely to engage in politics than women who were low trait self-objectifiers, as well as men who were low and high self-objectifiers. In Study 2, there was no significant interaction between gender and self-objectification when it came to political interest or participation. There was a significant interaction between gender and self-objectification that was inconsistent with my hypothesis when the outcome was internal political efficacy. Examined further, this significant interaction was driven by a negative relationship between self-objectification and efficacy among men in the sample. Although notably, the majority of men across different levels of self-objectification had higher levels of efficacy than women.

The results in Study 1 support the notion that gender moderates the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement. This finding is consistent with the hypotheses, as

well as the extant self-objectification literature that finds that self-objectification tends to have its most detrimental impact on women. It is also consistent with research on the “gendered psyche” as a contributor to the gender gap in engagement (Lawless and Fox 2010). However, results from Study 2 suggest that self-objectification negatively correlates with engagement for men as well. Although this finding was inconsistent with the initial hypothesis, it is in line with research on the growing prevalence of the objectification of men’s bodies in Western societies, which has, in turn, increased body image issues and self-objectification among men (Daniel, Bridges, Martens 2014; Johnson, McCreary, and Mills 2007; Moradi and Huang 2008). Some researchers have found that greater self-objectification among men is associated with lower self-esteem (Lowery et al. 2005; Strelan and Hargreaves 2005). Study 2 reveals that although men tend to have lower levels of self-objectification and higher levels of internal political efficacy than women, self-objectification may still undermine men’s engagement. Taken together, this evidence is suggestive of a relationship between self-objectification and political engagement, although the mixed results indicate that the relationship between gender, self-objectification, and political engagement needs to be further explored.

Additionally, I found null results when the dependent variable was political participation. Although it is speculative, this is perhaps evidence that self-objectification tends to correlate with measures of psychological engagement with politics, such as interest and efficacy, more so than with political acts. However, it is important to note that these psychological measures of engagement have “downstream” effects on political participation, meaning decreased interest and efficacy can lower one’s propensity to participate (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Wolak 2020). I also found no support for the hypothesis that social dominance orientation mediates the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement. This null relationship does

not align with Calogero's (2013) finding that gender system justification mediates the relationship between self-objectification and gender-based political activism. However, it's important to note that system justification and social dominance orientation, though related, are two different measures. System justification, particularly as it relates to the gender status quo, may more directly impact political activism and engagement. System justification is a measure of resistance to social change whereas social dominance orientation measures acceptance of inequality and preference for group-based hierarchies. Furthermore, the outcome that Calogero (2013) was interested in was gender-based political activism. She finds evidence that self-objectification is part of a wider pattern of support for the status quo of gender relations. Logically, this leads to a decrease in propensity to engage in political efforts to increase gender equality. In this study, I tested the notion that perhaps self-objectification leads to a broader acceptance of inequalities and group-based hierarchies that blunts political engagement regardless of domain. I find no support for this hypothesis. This indicates that the mechanism at work may be less about an acceptance of inequalities or group-based hierarchies, at least in the domain of political engagement.

This study contributes to the increasing amount of literature on psychological predictors of political engagement. It also extends our understanding of how gendered socialization impacts the different ways in which men and women engage in politics. Recent work supports the notion that women approach politics with a gendered perspective of the self. For example, women's lower self-efficacy and self-confidence can manifest in gender gaps in political engagement (Preece 2016; Wolak 2020). Evidence presented here suggests that part of what contributes to the "gendered psyche" is the prevalence of objectification in our culture. Objectification is something that has been problematized in feminist theory work and psychology research for

years. This study sheds new light on the tangible and far-reaching impacts that objectification may have in political life. Results here suggest that if people see themselves as objects for instrumental use rather than agentic and autonomous individuals, they are less likely to engage in political life. Future work on objectification in politics could explore the role of self-objectification in hindering women from running for office, or even more broadly, how objectification might impact evaluations of women in politics. The results of Study 2 also point to the importance of including men and perhaps other more comprehensive measures of gender identity in these studies.

There are of course limitations to this study. Due to the observational nature of this work, I cannot be completely confident that the relationship between self-objectification and political engagement is causal. In the future, it would be fruitful to do experimental work that explores the connection between state self-objectification and political engagement. Furthermore, I suggest that the motivational, cognitive, affective, and psychological correlates of self-objectification drive the connection between self-objectification and political engagement. There are strong theoretical reasons for this hypothesis, but future work should further investigate the mechanisms or pathways that link self-objectification and political engagement. In addition, it would be beneficial to understand more about the intersection of race, gender, and self-objectification and how those intersections might matter for the relationship between self-objectification and political outcomes. Much of the work on self-objectification has centered on the experiences of white women. However, the antecedents of self-objectification for Black women in particular are different than the antecedents for white women (Watson, Robinson, Dispenza, & Nazari 2012). It is important to conduct work that explores differential impacts of self-objectification across race

as well as across culture contexts where feminine beauty culture and levels of objectification might differ.

The findings presented here builds on previous work that finds that self-objectification can disrupt women's social activism in the domain of gender equality (Calogero 2013). I find evidence that self-objectification may actually contribute to women eschewing politics all together, not just in the domain of gender-based political action. This can inform the way we approach closing gender gaps in political engagement. For example, it gives us insight into the way feminine beauty culture can play a role in women's political socialization and perhaps dampen women's interest in politics. This is particularly compelling given the rise of choice feminism and its emphasis on women being free to make their own individual choices opposed to a focus on collective action (Ferguson 2010). Popular feminist discourse in this vein purports that when women actively choose to objectify themselves, it can be empowering. This notion is also promoted consumer culture that often commodifies women's bodies and then markets that as empowerment (Levy 2006). Those interested in closing gender gaps need to consider feminine beauty culture and the ubiquity of objectification as a part of the gendered political socialization that leads to these gaps.

References

- Adams, K.E., Tayler, J.M., Calogero, R., & Lee, J. (2017). Exploring the relationship between appearance-contingent self-worth and self-esteem: The roles of self-objectification and appearance anxiety. *Body Image*, 23, 176-182. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2017.10.004
- American Psychological Association. (2007). *Report of the APA Task Force on the sexualization of girls*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization_report_summary.pdf
- Atkeson, L.R., & Rapoport, R. B. (2003). The more things change the more they stay the same: Examining gender differences in political attitude expression, 1952-2000. *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 67(4), 495-521.
- Barnes, T.D. & Burchard, S.M. (2012). “Engendering” politics: The impact of descriptive representation on women’s political engagement in sub-saharan Africa. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(7), 767-790.
- Baron R. M. & Kenny, D.A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51(6), 1173–1182.
- Bartky, S. L. (1990). *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York and London: Routledge Press.
- de Beauvoir, S. (1989). *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Bell, B. T., Cassarly, J. A., & Dunbar, L. (2018). Selfie-objectification: Self-objectification and positive feedbacks (“likes”) are associated with frequency of posting sexually objectifying self-images on social media.” *Body Image*, 26, 83-89.
- Bennett, L.L.M. & Bennett, S.E. (1989). Enduring gender differences in political interest. *American Politics Quarterly*, 17(1), 105–122. doi:10.1177/1532673x8901700106
- Berinsky, Adam J., Huber, G. A., & Lenz, G. S. (2012). Evaluating online labor markets for experimental research: Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. *Political Analysis*, 20(3). 351-368.
- Brader, T., Valentino, N., & Suhay, E. (2008). What Triggers Public Opposition to Immigration? Anxiety, Group Cues, and Immigration Threat. *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(4), 959-978.
- Burns, N., Schlozman, K. & Verba, S. (2001). *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Cacioppo, J. T., Petty, R. E., Feinstein, J. A., & Jarvis, W. B. G. (1996). Dispositional differences in cognitive motivation: The life and times of individuals varying in need for cognition. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119(2), 197–253.
- Calogero, R.M., & Jost, J.T. (2011). Self-subjugation among women: Sexist ideology, self-objectification, and the buffering function of the need to avoid closure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100, 11-228.
- Calogero, R. M. (2013). Objects don't object: Evidence that self-objectification disrupts women's social activism. *Psychological Science* 24(3), 312-318.
- Calogero, R. M., Tylka, T. L., Donnelly, L. C., McGetrick, A. & Leger, A. M. (2017). Trappings of femininity: A test of the "beauty as currency" hypothesis in shaping college women's gender activism. *Body Image* 21, 66-70.
- Calogero, R. M. (2017). "Political consciousness and gender collective action: A case and place for self-objectification." In A.L. Bos and M.C. Schneider (Eds.), *The Political Psychology of Women in U.S. Politics*. (pg. 93-110). New York: Routledge.
- Carreras, M. (2018). Why no gender gap in electoral participation? A civic duty explanation. *Electoral Studies*, 52, 36-45.
- Chandler J., Mueller P., Paolacci G. (2014). Nonnaïveté among Amazon Mechanical Turk workers: Consequences and solutions for behavioral researchers. *Behavioral Research Methods*, 46(1), 112-130
- Chen, F. F., & Russo, N. F. (2010). Measurement invariance and the role of body consciousness in depressive symptoms. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 34, 405–417.
- Choma, B.L, Visser, B.A., Pozzebon, J.A., Bogaert, A.F., Busseri, M.A., & Sadava, S.W. (2010). Self-objectification, self-esteem, and gender: Testing a moderated mediation model. *Sex Roles*, 63(9), 645-656.
- Clifford, S., & Jerit, J. (2018). Disgust, anxiety, and political learning in the face of threat. *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(2), 266-279.
- Coffé, H. & Dilli, S. (2015). The gender gap in political participation in Muslim-majority countries. *International Political Science Review*, 36(5), 526-544.
- Csikszentmihályi, M. (1988). "The flow experience and its significance for human psychology." In Csikszentmihályi, M. (Ed.), *Optimal experience: psychological studies of flow in consciousness*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 15–35.
- Daniel, S., Bridges, S. K., & Martens, M. P. (2014). The development and validation of the Male Assessment of Self-Objectification (MASO). *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 15(1), 78–89.

Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter S. (1996). *What Americans know about politics and why it matters*. Yale University Press.

Desposato, S., & Norrander, B. (2009). The gender gap in Latin America: Contextual and individual influences on gender and political participation. *British Journal of Political Science*, 39(1), 141-162.

Espinal, R. & Zhau, S. (2015). Gender gaps in civic and political participation in Latin America. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 57(1), 123-138.

Feltman, C.E. & Szymanski, D.M. (2017). Instagram use and self-objectification: The roles of internalization, comparison, appearance, commentary, and feminism. *Sex Roles*, 78(5-6), 311-324.

Ferguson, M. (2010). Choice feminism and the fear of politics. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(1), 247-253.

Fiske, S. T. (2009). From dehumanization and objectification to rehumanization: Neuroimaging studies on the building blocks of empathy. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1167(1), 31-34.

Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. (1997). "Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21(2), 173-206.

Fredrickson, B. L., Roberts, T., Noll, S.M., Quinn, D.M., & Twenge, J.M. (1998). The swimsuit becomes you: Sex differences in self-objectification, restrained eating, and math performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75(1), 269-284.

Gadarian, S., & Albertson, B. (2014). Anxiety, immigration, and the search for information. *Political Psychology*, 35(2), 133-164.

Galdi, S., Maass, A. & Cadinu, M. (2014). Objectifying media: Their effect on gender role norms and sexual harassment of women." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 38(3): 398-413.

Gapinski, K., Brownell, K. & LaFrance, M. (2003). Body objectification and "fat talk": Effects on emotion, motivation, and cognitive performance." *Sex Roles* 48(9), 377-388.

Gay, R. K. & Castano, E. (2010). My body or my mind: The impact of state and trait objectification on women's cognitive resources." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40(5), 695-703.

Hlavac, M. (2018). Stargazer: Well-formatted regression and summary statistics tables. R package version 5.2.2. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=stargazer>

- Heflick, N. A., & Goldenberg, J. L. (2009). Objectifying sarah palin: Evidence that objectification causes women to be perceived as less competent and less fully human. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45(3), 598–601.
- Huddy, L., Feldman, S., Taber, C., & Lahav, G. (2005). Threat, anxiety, and support of anti-terrorism policies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(3), 610-625.
- Huddy, L., Mason, L., & Aarøe, L. (2015). Expressive Partisanship: Campaign Involvement, Political Emotion, and Partisan Identity. *American Political Science Review*, 109(1), 1-17. doi:10.1017/S0003055414000604
- Huebner, D. M. & Fredrickson, B.L. (1999). Gender differences in memory perspectives: Evidence for self-objectification in women. *Sex Roles* 41(5), 459-467.
- Johnson, P. J., McCreary, D. R., & Mills, J. S. (2007). Effects of exposure to objectified male and female media images on men's psychological well-being. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 8(2), 95–102.
- Krassas, N.R., Blauwkamp, J.M., & Wesselink, P. (2001). Boxing Helena and corseting Eunice: Sexual rhetoric in Cosmopolitan and Playboy magazines. *Sex Roles*, 44(11), 751-771.
- Lanis, K., & Covell, K. (1995). Images of women in advertisements: Effects on attitudes related to sexual aggression. *Sex roles*, 32(9-10), 639–649.
- Lawless, J. L., & Fox, R. L. (2010). *It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levy, A. (2006). *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. New York, NY: Press.
- Lieberman, M.D., Schreiber, D., & Ochsner, K.N. (2003). Is political cognition like riding a bicycle? How cognitive neuroscience can inform research on political thinking. *Political Psychology*, 24(4), 681-704.
- Liss, M., Erchull, M. J., & Ramsey, L. R. (2010). Empowering or oppressing? Development and exploration of the enjoyment of sexualization scale. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(1), 55–68. doi:10.1177/0146167210386119
- Liu, S.S. (2020). Gender gaps in political participation in Asia. *International Political Science Review*. doi:[10.1177/0192512120935517](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120935517)
- Lowery, S.E., Kurpius, S.E.R., Befort, C., Blanks, E.H., Sollenberger, S., Nicpon, M.F., Huser, L. (2005). Body image, self-esteem, and health-related behaviors among male and female first year college students. *Journal of College Student Development* 46(6), 612-623.

- Marcus, G.E., Neuman, R.W., & MacKuen. (2000). *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment*. University of Chicago Press.
- McKinley, N. M., & Hyde, J. S. (1996). The objectified body consciousness scale development and validation. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 20(2), 181-215.
- Moradi, B., & Huang, Y. (2008). Objectification theory and psychology of women: A decade of advances and future directions. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 32, 377–398. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-6402.2008.00452.x.
- Moradi, B., & Varnes, J. R. (2017). Structure of the objectified body consciousness scale: Reevaluated 20 years later.” *Sex Roles* 77 (5-6), 325-337.
- Niemi, R. G., Craig S. C, & Mattei, F. (1991). Measuring internal political efficacy in the 1988 National Election Study. *American Political Science Review* 85(4), 1407-1413.
- Noll, S. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (1998). A mediational model linking self-objectification, body shame, and disordered eating. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 22 (4), 623-636.
- Ojeda, C. (2015). Depression and political participation. *Social Science Quarterly*, 96(5), 1226-1243.
- Pacheco, J., & Fletcher, J. (2015). Incorporating health into studies of political behavior: Evidence for turnout and partisanship. *Political Research Quarterly*, 68(1), 104-116.
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2004). SPSS and SAS procedures for estimating indirect effects in simple mediation models. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 36, 717-731.
- Preece, J. R. (2016). Mind the gender gap: An experiment on the influence of self-efficacy on political interest. *Politics & Gender*, 12(01), 198–217. doi:10.1017/s1743923x15000628
- Pruysers, S., & Blais, J. (2014). Anything women can do men can do better: An experiment examining the effects of stereotype threat on political knowledge and efficacy. *The Social Science Journal*, 51(3), 341–349. doi:10.1016/j.soscij.2014.05.005
- Quinn, D. M., Kallen R. W., Twenge, J. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2006). The disruptive effect of self-objectification on performance. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 30(1), 59-64.
- Ramsey, L.R. & Horan, A.L. (2018). Picture this: Women’s self-sexualization in photos on social media. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 133, 85-90.
- Roberts, T., & Gettman, J. (2004). Mere exposure: Gender differences in the negative effects of priming a state of self-objectification.” *Sex Roles* 51 (1), 17-27.

- Schooler, D. (2015). The woman next to me: Pairing powerful and objectifying representations of women. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 15(1), 198-212.
- Sidanius, J. & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Solhaug, T. (2006). Knowledge and self-efficacy as predictors of political participation and civic attitudes: With relevance for educational practice. *Policy Futures in Education*, 4(3), 265–278. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2006.4.3.265>
- Stankiewicz, J.M. & Rosselli, F. (2008). Women as sex objects and victims in print advertisements. *Sex Roles*, 58(7), 579-589.
- Strelan, P., & Hargreaves, D. (2005). Women who objectify other women: The vicious circle of objectification? *Sex Roles*, 52(9-10), 707–712.
- Swim, J. K., Hyers, L. L., Cohen, L. L., & Ferguson, M. J. (2001). Everyday sexism: Evidence for its incidence, nature, and psychological impact from three daily diary studies. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57, 31-53. doi:10.1111/0022-4537.00200
- Tingley, D., Yamamoto, T., Hirose, K., Keele, L., & Imai, K. (2014). Mediation: R package for causal mediation analysis.
- Valentino, N., Brader, T., Groenendyk, E., Gregorowicz, K., & Hutchings, V. (2011). Election night's alright for fighting: The role of emotions in political participation. *The Journal of Politics*, 73(1), 156-170.
- Valentino, N., Hutchings, V., Banks, A., & Davis, A. (2008). Is a worried citizen a good citizen? Emotions, political information seeking, and learning via the Internet. *Political Psychology*, 29(2), 247-273.
- Lawless, J. L., & Fox, R. L. (2010). *It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Verba, S. & Nie, N.H. (1972). *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*. University of Chicago Press.
- Verba, S., Schlozman, K., Brady, H., & Nie, N. (1993). Race, ethnicity and political resources: Participation in the United States. *British Journal of Political Science*, 23(4), 453-497.
- Verba, S., Burns, N. & Schlozman, K. L. (1997). Knowing and caring about politics: Gender and political engagement. *The Journal of Politics* 59(4), 1051–72.
- Watson, L. B., Robinson, D., Dispenza, F., & Nazari, N. (2012). African American women's sexual objectification experiences: A qualitative study. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 36(4), 458–475.

Wen, N., Xiaoming, H., & George, C. (2013). Gender and political participation: news consumption, political efficacy and interpersonal communication. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 19(4), 124–149. doi:10.1080/12259276.2013.11666168

Westbrook, A. & Braver, T.S. (2015). Cognitive effort: A neuroeconomic approach. *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience*, 15(2), 395-415.

Wolak, J. (2020). Self-confidence and gender gaps in political interest, attention, and efficacy. *Journal of Politics*, 82(4), <https://doi.org/10.1086/708644>

Wright, P. J., & Tokunaga, R. S. (2016). Men's objectifying media consumption, objectification of women, and attitudes supportive of violence against women. *Archives of sexual behavior*, 45(4), 955–964.

Young, I. M. (1980). Throwing like a girl: A phenomenology of feminine body comportment motility and spatiality. *Human Studies* 3(1), 137-156.

Figure 1: Effect of Self-Objectification on Interest (left) and Information-Seeking (right), by Gender

Figure 2: Predicted Internal Political Efficacy by Gender

Figure 3: Predicted Internal Political Efficacy by Gender

Figure 4: 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)

Note:

*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. 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.

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. 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.

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)

Table A.5: Pooled Models

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Political Interest		Internal Efficacy	
Gender(1=Women)	-0.079 (0.210)	-0.173 (0.198)	-0.353 (0.371)	-0.443 (0.360)
Self-Objectification	-0.054 (0.040)	0.011 (0.038)	-0.152** (0.070)	-0.104 (0.070)
Age		0.015*** (0.002)		0.009** (0.004)
Education		0.101*** (0.029)		0.273*** (0.052)
Ideology		-0.086*** (0.020)		-0.077** (0.037)
Race (1=white)		0.168*** (0.057)		0.269*** (0.104)
GenderXSelf-Object	0.017 (0.053)	0.013 (0.050)	0.025 (0.094)	0.018 (0.092)
Constant	2.820*** (0.148)	1.872*** (0.204)	5.349*** (0.262)	3.960*** (0.371)
Observations	703	700	703	700
R ²	0.005	0.129	0.026	0.095
Adjusted R ²	0.0005	0.121	0.022	0.086
Residual Std. Error	0.726 (df = 699)	0.681 (df = 692)	1.284 (df = 699)	1.241 (df = 692)
F Statistic	1.107 (df = 3; 699)	14.701*** (df = 7; 692)	6.297*** (df = 3; 699)	10.429*** (df = 7; 692)

Note:

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

Table A.6: Study 1 Robustness Checks (Ordered Logistic Regressions)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Political Interest	Information Seeking	Internal Efficacy
Gender (1=Women)	1.423 (0.951)	2.754*** (0.985)	1.624* (0.946)
Self-Objectification	0.256 (0.159)	0.164 (0.166)	0.150 (0.158)
Age	0.072*** (0.012)	-0.001 (0.011)	0.019* (0.010)
Education	0.207 (0.141)	0.220 (0.142)	0.551*** (0.140)
Ideology	-0.107 (0.087)	-0.099 (0.088)	-0.119 (0.087)
Race (1=White)	0.401 (0.244)	0.097 (0.237)	0.107 (0.234)
GenderXSelf-Object	-0.481** (0.237)	-0.721*** (0.243)	-0.632*** (0.240)
Observations	254	254	254

Note:

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

Table A.7: Study 2 Robustness Checks (Ordered Logistic Regressions)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Political Interest	Internal Efficacy	Political Participation
Gender (1=Women)	-1.192* (0.669)	-1.969*** (0.649)	0.954 (0.653)
Self-Objectification	-0.166 (0.134)	-0.435*** (0.130)	0.118 (0.138)
Age	0.033*** (0.008)	0.012* (0.007)	-0.006 (0.007)
Education	0.244*** (0.092)	0.302*** (0.090)	0.087 (0.093)
Ideology	-0.314*** (0.072)	-0.088 (0.069)	-0.342*** (0.072)
Race (1=White)	0.528** (0.206)	0.517*** (0.200)	0.130 (0.201)
GenderXSelf-Object	0.256 (0.170)	0.448*** (0.166)	-0.140 (0.169)
Observations	446	446	446

Note:

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