

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

Why Do Women Justify Dating Violence?

The Role of Attitudes Toward Violence and Women's Self-objectification

Abstract

Men's partner-sexual objectification has been linked to increased self-objectification and diminished well-being in women. Some recent findings also demonstrated that partner-sexual objectification may be related to increased violence in the relationship. However, mechanisms driving this association remain unexplored. In the present research, we collected data on women and men involved in romantic relationships and investigated the associations between men's partner-sexual objectification, women's self-objectification, and both partners' attitudes toward dating violence. Study 1 ($N = 171$ heterosexual couples) provided first evidence for the link between men's partner-sexual objectification and their acceptance of dating violence. Furthermore, men's acceptance of violence also mediated the relationship between their sexual objectification toward the partner and women's attitudes toward dating violence. These results were replicated in Study 2 ($N = 235$ heterosexual couples). Moreover, results of this study displayed that, along with men's attitudes toward dating violence, women's self-objectification may act as a mediating mechanism linking experiences of being sexually objectified by the romantic partner and attitudes toward dating violence in women. Practical and theoretical implications of our findings are discussed.

Keywords: Dating violence, Perceptions of domestic violence, Predicting domestic violence

Sexual objectification – the reduction of a person’s value to their body or sexual body parts (Bartky, 1990) – affects perceptions, cognitions, and attitudes toward the objectified target. Indeed, victims of such a process, mostly women, are denied moral patiency, mind, warmth, and competence (Heflick & Goldemberg, 2009; Loughnan et al., 2010) and they are elaborated similarly to real objects (Vaes et al., 2019), even at a cognitive level (see Bernard et al., 2020 for a recent review; see also Andrighetto et al., 2019). Thus, when sexual objectification occurs, targets are dehumanized and perceived as not (or less) worthy of moral treatment.

Rather than being sporadic, women undergo sexual objectification experiences (e.g., body-related comments and visual inspections, sexual harassment) almost every day and in different social contexts (see Roberts et al., 2018, for a review) including romantic relationships (e.g., Mahar et al., 2020; Sáez et al., 2019; Strelan & Pagoudis, 2018).

According to Nussbaum (1999), romantic relationships represent an arena in which sexual objectification may act as a positive mechanism for both the individual and the couple’s satisfaction. Although this claim has found no empirical support so far, it is true that context plays a central role in defining the valence of sexual objectification experiences (Gervais et al., 2020). For example, Meltzer (2020) found that when male partners (vs. male strangers) draw attention to women’s sexuality and physical appearance, those women report higher appearance esteem and, subsequently, higher self-esteem. However, the research on sexual objectification conducted so far revealed that, even in the context of intimate relationships, this process has a number of negative effects. Zurbriggen and colleagues (2011), for example, found that the tendency to objectify the romantic partner (partner-sexual objectification) was associated with decreased satisfaction for the relationship and (for men) for the sexual life (see also Sáez et al., 2020). In the same vein, Mahar and colleagues (2019) found that partner-sexual objectification was associated with lowered commitment and

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

relationship satisfaction and higher quality alternatives to the relationship. Recent research by Pecini and colleagues (2022) also demonstrated that partner-sexual objectification affects women's well-being more broadly, hindering their satisfaction with life through enhanced body self-monitoring and body shame.

Despite the context in which this process occurs, it is no surprising that research consistently found a relationship between sexual objectification and perpetration of and attitudes toward violence against women. Indeed, sexual objectification has been described as a precursor of violence as sexual objectification alters the victim's perception. As displayed above, the objectified target is dehumanized, and the implications of their dehumanization are severe (Loughnan et al., 2013; Rudman & Mescher, 2012). A work by Gervais and colleagues (2014), for example, revealed that sexual objectification explained the relationship between alcohol use and aggression toward women in a sample of men. In the context of romantic relationships, Ramsey and Hoyt (2015) found that men who sexually objectify their romantic partners also reported greater sexual pressure and sexual coercion against them. In another work by Sáez and colleagues (2020), partner-sexual objectification was related to more frequent perpetration of coercive behaviors.

Integrating prior research on sexual objectification in romantic relationships, in the current research we focused on the link between partner-sexual objectification and the justification of dating violence. Specifically, through two studies, we investigated the link between men's partner-sexual objectification, women's self-objectification, and both partners' attitudes toward dating violence.

The Men's Perspective: Sexual Objectification and Attitudes Toward Gender Violence

According to Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), sexual objectification facilitates the use of violence toward women and "provides the foundation for men's aggression against women" (Gervais & Eagan, 2017, p. 228). Sexual objectification

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

can be understood as a form of denial of humanity to the victims, and sexually objectified targets are perceived as lacking dignity and moral respect (see Vaes et al., 2013, for a review).

A bunch of studies provided support for the link between sexual objectification and harmful attitudes (e.g., Vasquez et al., 2018), including negative perceptions of victims of intimate partner violence (Cheeseborough et al., 2020) and lower intentions to help objectified women who experienced violence (Gramazio et al., 2021). Gervais and colleagues (2014), for example, found that sexual objectification in a sample of men was related to self-reported sexual violence toward women. In a study with adolescents, Vasquez and colleagues (2017) showed that the perception of girls as objects was associated with more frequent aggression toward them. Furthermore, research also displayed that men with higher tendencies to sexually objectify were more likely to report greater acceptance of violence toward women. For example, in their research, Rudman and Mescher (2012) found that implicitly reducing a woman to an object was associated with greater intentions to engage in sexual harassment and rape toward objectified targets and more negative attitudes toward victims of sexual violence. Similarly, Seabrook and colleagues (2019) found that sexual objectification mediated the link between media exposure and rape myths acceptance. Additionally, albeit few in numbers, existing literature on sexual objectification in romantic relationships suggests that men's partner-sexual objectification contributes to physical and psychological violence perpetuation toward the partner, and one key mechanism explaining this relationship is not perceiving men's romantic partner as fully human (Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015; Sáez et al., 2020).

The body of work discussed above presents initial evidence that there is some relationship between sexual objectification and violence perpetrations and attitudes, even in the domain of romantic relationships. On the other side, no research investigated the

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

generalization process, namely, whether partner-sexual objectification may be associated to violence endorsement against women *in general*. What is known so far is that partner-sexual objectification is associated with a number of negative consequences for women's health, and individual and relational well-being. However, it is also possible that perceptions toward the partner are associated to negative attitudes toward women *in general*. Presently, we focused on attitudes toward a specific form of violence against women, namely dating violence, which refers to the intentional psychological, physical, or sexual harm perpetrated by a current or former dating partner (Teten et al., 2009), and investigated for the first time its association with partner-sexual objectification.

Based on the literature mentioned above, we hypothesized that partner-sexual objectification would be related to a higher justification of dating violence against women in men (Hypothesis 1).

Going a step further from existing literature, we also examined whether men's attitudes toward dating violence would be related to those of their partners. Indeed, research demonstrated that there are several reasons why, within the context of romantic relationships, attitudes can be transmitted from one partner to the other. For example, in romantic relationships, partners tend to align their values (Davis & Rusbult, 2001) – or directly ask their partner to change their values – especially when they are perceived to be relevant to the internal functioning of the relationship (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Kalmijn (2005) used a longitudinal and dyadic approach and found that women and men in romantic relationships aligned their sex-role attitudes concerning the appropriate role of men and women in society. Regarding gender discrimination acceptance, some research shows that men more than women justify gender violence in the context of romantic relationships (Alio et al., 2011) and hold a traditional view of women (Kalmijn, 2003). In addition, socio-cultural norms lead women to believe that their position is subordinate to their partners, giving men the right to

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

punish them whenever they perceive it necessary (Lawoko, 2008). Although we did not investigate the causal relationship between men's and women's attitudes due to the correlational design of our research, we expected that men's attitudes toward dating violence would shape those of their female partners and not vice versa. When considering sexism transmission between partners, Hammond and Cross (2016) displayed that women (but not men) endorsed benevolent sexism more strongly over time when they perceived that their spouses endorsed benevolent sexism. The explanation for these results lies in the fact that men's benevolent sexism increases women's perceptions of relationship security and perceived care which, in turn, contribute to the alignment of attitudes. As gender violence is considered one of the most extreme manifestations of sexism (Fernández-Antelo et al., 2020), we expected to find a similar relationship going from men's attitudes toward dating violence to women's attitudes.

Literature demonstrated that in romantic relationships, men justify more than women the use of violence (Alio et al., 2011) and that women endorse more than men adverse forms of gender prejudice. de Lemus and collaborators (2010), for example, showed that heterosexual relationship experiences (i.e., the involvement in a romantic relationship) were positively related to sexism endorsement in a sample of young women. More recently, Mastari and colleagues (2019) found that women involved in a relationship show more sexism than single women. Thus, it is possible to assume that also dating violence attitudes may be influenced within the dyad; that is, gender discrimination may be transmitted from men to women.

That being said, along with our first hypothesis concerning the link between partner-sexual objectification and men's attitudes, we also anticipated that men's justification of dating violence would be associated with their female partners' attitudes (Hypothesis 2a), and

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

that men's dating violence justification would mediate the relationship between partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 2b).

The Female Targets Perspective: Self-objectification and Attitudes toward Gender Violence

The primary consequence for women who encounter sexual objectification is the experience of a negative form of self-perception named self-objectification (Karsay, 2020). When they self-objectify, women reduce their value to that of sexual objects giving more importance to appearance-based attributes than other qualities and believing their physical appearance can represent the self (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

A wide amount of research demonstrated that self-objectification is linked directly and indirectly to several negative outcomes such as body shame, disorder eating, decreased personal a relational satisfaction, and impaired cognitive and physical performances (see Roberts et al., 2018, for a review). Although underdeveloped, other research suggests that, along with intraindividual and interpersonal consequences, self-objectification may also increase women's acceptance of gender inequalities (e.g., , Calogero & Tylka, 2014; Fox et al., 2015; but see de Wilde et al., 2020). In fact, perpetuating the existing gender-role norms, in the sexual objectification system, women are valued for their physical attractiveness while men are typically considered for their agency and performance (Choma & Prusaczyk, 2018; Zurbriggen, 2013). Women who objectify themselves are more vigilant about their bodies and display compensatory behaviors (e.g., wearing make-up, and/or revealing clothing) to satisfy the sexual objectification system (Calogero, 2013), supporting their inferior position compared to men in the society. Confirming this claim, Calogero (2013) showed that women who self-objectify were more likely to accept gender inequalities and less willing to protest for women's rights (see also Calogero, 2017). Furthermore, self-objectification has been

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

associated with endorsing an objectifying view of women (Harsey & Zurbriggen, 2020). The link between self-objectification and acceptance of women's discrimination also extends to the justification of rape myths (Fox et al., 2015) and decreased ability to refuse unwanted sex from the partner (Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015; Sáez et al., 2019).

However, no prior research has specifically investigated the relationship between self-objectification in women and acceptance of dating violence. According to feminist theories, gender violence allows men to control and dominate women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979), and it is strongly related to traditional views of women's roles. We reasoned that women who self-objectify, hence, interiorize the oppression, might display greater acceptance of dating violence. Thus, in our research, we investigated whether self-objectification in women would be related to greater justification of dating violence (Hypothesis 3a). Furthermore, self-objectification is the primary consequence of objectifying experiences even in the context of romantic relationships (Pecini et al., 2022; Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015; Strelan & Pagoudis, 2018; but see Mahar et al., 2019) and represents the key mechanism linking experiences of sexual objectification to negative outcomes; thus, we tested whether self-objectification mediated the link between partner-sexual objectification and women's justification of dating violence (Hypothesis 3b).

The Current Research

The aim of the present research was to investigate relationships between men's partner-sexual objectification, women's self-objectification, and both partners' attitudes toward dating violence. Based on the empirical evidence outlined above, we derived the following hypotheses:

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

Hypothesis 1: men's partner-sexual objectification would be associated with higher justification of dating violence.

Hypothesis 2: men's attitudes toward dating violence would be related to those of their (female) partners (Hypothesis 2a) and mediated the link between partner-sexual objectification and women's justification of dating violence (Hypothesis 2b).

Hypothesis 3: self-objectification in women would be related to greater acceptance of dating violence (Hypothesis 3a) and would explain the relationship between partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 3b).

The research was approved by the ethical commission of the first author's Institution.

Database for all the studies can be found at:

https://osf.io/sa3hk/?view_only=39755a7a21f64bf0979b703210f01bfe. Sample sizes were determined before any data analysis using G*Power tool (Faul et al., 2007).

Study 1

Study 1 aimed at providing first evidence of our hypotheses. By collecting data from both the members of heterosexual couples, in this study, we investigated whether men's partner-sexual objectification would be related to increased dating violence justification and whether men's attitudes toward dating violence were related to those of their partners. Furthermore, we tested whether men's justification of dating violence would explain the relationship between partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence.

Method

Participants and Procedure

An a priori power analysis indicated that a sample of approximately 160 participants was required to conduct a multiple regression with two predictors, allowing a power of .80 to detect a medium to small effect size ($f^2 = .06$).

One hundred and seventy-one heterosexual couples have been enrolled in the study. The average relationship length was 105.78 months, corresponding approximately to nine years; regarding the type of relation, 70.2% of participants declared being in a relationship, 29.8% declared to be married. For women, age ranged from 18 to 76 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 31.18$, $SD = 14.04$), for men, from 18 to 75 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 33.59$, $SD = 14.94$).

The survey was administered online by trained researchers. In the first part, aims, procedures, and the informed consent were introduced. In the second part, after providing some demographic information, women participants completed the attitudes toward dating violence scale; men participants also responded to a measure of partner-sexual objectification; in the third and final part, participants were fully debriefed and thanked for the participation.

Measures

Men's measures

Partner-sexual objectification. Men's tendencies to sexually objectify their partners were measured with an adapted version of the Self-Objectification Questionnaire (SOQ; Fredrickson et al., 1998). In the original SOQ, participants are asked to rank 10 body attributes from the most (1) to the least (10) important to their physical self-concept. Attributes are balanced so that 5 refer to body-appearance (e.g., "Measures", "Weight") and 5 to body-competence (e.g., "Coordination", "Health"). In this version of the SOQ, participants rank the importance of the attributes referring to their romantic partners (see also Strelan & Pagoudis 2018, for the same procedure). We then derived a final index by subtracting the

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

sum of the appearance-based features from the sum of the competence-based characteristics.

The higher the index, the greater the tendency of men to objectify their partners.

Attitudes toward dating violence. Acceptance of dating violence against women was measured using the 39 items ($\alpha = .93$) of the Male Dating Violence Scale [AMDV] developed by Price and colleagues (1999). Examples of items are: “A girl should ask her boyfriend first before going out with her friends”; “Some girls deserve to be slapped by their boyfriends”; “When guys get really excited, they cannot stop themselves from having sex”. Originally, the AMDV comprises three subscales assessing men’s psychological, physical, and sexual violence against the (female) partner. As we were interested in investigating the relationship between partner-sexual objectification and acceptance of dating violence in general, all items were averaged to form a composite score, with higher scores denoting greater acceptance of dating psychological, physical, and sexual violence. Participants indicated their agreement with the statements on a scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly agree”). Given the characteristics of the sample included in the present research, we reworded items by replacing the terms “boyfriend(s)” and “girlfriend(s)” with “partner(s)” and the terms “boy(s)” and “girl(s)” with “man” or “men” and “woman” or “women” respectively.

Women’s measures

Attitudes toward dating violence. Women were presented with the same measure by Price and colleagues (1999) used for the male sample to capture acceptance of dating violence against the partner ($\alpha = .88$).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations can be found in Table 1. As can be seen from the table, partner-sexual objectification moderately correlated with men's attitudes toward dating violence. In turn, men’s attitudes toward dating violence positively correlated with

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

women's attitudes. No significant correlations emerged between partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence.

Mediation analysis

To test hypotheses 1 and 2, a multiple regression mediation model was tested using the macro PROCESS for SPSS (Model = 4; Hayes, 2013); bootstrapping procedures (5,000 resamples) were used for testing the significance of the indirect effects. In the hypothesized model, partner-sexual objectification represented the independent variable, men's attitude toward dating violence was the mediator, and women's attitude toward dating violence was the criterion variable. Results are reported in Table 2 and Figure 1. Findings confirmed the hypothesized model, showing a significant path from partner-sexual objectification to women's attitudes toward dating violence via the indirect effect of men's attitudes toward dating violence; in addition, no direct effect emerged from the independent to the dependent variable. Since the 95% confidence interval did not include the 0, bootstrapping analysis showed the mediation effect of men's attitudes toward dating violence, *mean effect* = .0115 (*SE* $\approx$.00), 95% CI [0.0055, 0.0189]. Results remained significant also when controlling for the age of both partners, relationship length, and domestic partnership (present vs. not present).

We ran an alternative model with partner-sexual objectification as the independent variable, women's attitudes toward dating violence as the mediator, and men's attitudes toward dating violence as the dependent variable. Results revealed that partner-sexual objectification was not associated to women's attitudes toward dating violence. The indirect effect turned out being non-significant.

To conclude, Study 1 confirmed Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2a, and Hypothesis 2b.

Study 2

Method

Participants and Procedure

For the determination of the sample for Study 2, the smallest effect size that emerged in Study 1 ($f^2 = .08$) has been considered resulting in 139 participants (with a power of .80 for multiple regression with three predictors). However, in a more conservative way, the final sample has been increased to allow a smaller effect size ($f^2 = .05$).

Participants were 235 heterosexual couples. Mean relationship length was 97.25 (i.e., roughly eight years), and the 83% declared being in a relationship and 17% being married. Considering age, as in Study 1, men's age ranged from 19 to 80 ($M_{\text{age}} = 29.37$, $SD = 11.92$), and women's age from 18 to 75, ($M_{\text{age}} = 27.67$, $SD = 11.71$).

The same procedure of Study 1 has been followed.

Measures

The same measures of Study 1 were included with the addition of the self-objectification scale completed by women participants.

Men's measures

Partner-sexual objectification. We measured men's partner-sexual objectification with the adapted version of the Self-Objectification Questionnaire (SOQ; Fredrickson et al., 1998) employed in Study 1.

Attitudes toward dating violence. The same measure by Price and colleagues (1999) used in Study 1 was presented to participants ($\alpha = .93$).

Women's measures

Self-objectification. Women were presented with the Self-objectification Questionnaire (Fredrickson et al., 1998) and asked to rank from the most (1) to the least (10) important to their physical self-concept 10 body attributes. Five attributes refer to physical observable appearance-based features (e.g., “Measures”, “Weight”), while the remaining 5 characteristics were physical non-observable competence-based features (e.g., “Physical coordination”, “Health”). A final index was computed by subtracting the sum of the appearance-based features from the mean of the competence-based characteristics, with higher scores indicating greater self-objectification.

Attitudes toward dating violence. The 39 items of the AMDV (Price et al., 1999) were presented to participants ($\alpha = .93$).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations are reported in Table 3. Partner-sexual objectification was positively correlated with all the variables, weakly with both men’s and women’s attitudes toward dating violence and moderately with women’s self-objectification; weak positive correlations also emerged between men’s attitudes toward dating violence, women’s self-objectification and women’s attitudes toward dating violence.

Mediation analysis

A double parallel mediation model using PROCESS macro for SPSS (model = 4, Hayes, 2013) has been tested. Specifically, partner-sexual objectification was the exogenous variable, men’s attitudes toward dating violence and women’s self-objectification were the mediators, and women’s attitudes toward dating violence was the criterion variable. As can be seen from Table 4 and Figure 2, results showed significant positive associations between the independent variable and the two mediating measures; in turn, both mediators were

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

related to increased justification of dating violence held by women. Finally, the direct effect of partner-sexual objectification on the dependent variable turned out to be non-significant. Bootstrapping analysis (5,000 resamples) confirmed the significance of both the indirect effects, namely, the path from partner-objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence via the indirect effect of women's self-objectification, *mean effect* = .0013, *SE* $\approx$.00, 95% CI [0.0028, 0.0002], and the path mediated by men's attitudes toward dating violence, *mean effect* = .11, *SE* $\approx$.00, 95% CI [0.0021, 0.0003]. Results remain significant when we controlled for participant's age, length of the relationship, and domestic partnership (present vs. not present).

As for Study 1, we tested an alternative model by inverting men's attitudes toward dating violence with women's attitudes toward dating violence. In this case, the indirect effect via the women's attitudes toward dating violence turned out to be significant; vice versa, the path mediated by self-objectification was not significant.

To conclude, Study 2 replicated the findings of Study 1, confirming Hypotheses 1, 2a, and 2b; in addition, extending previous findings, both Hypothesis 3a and Hypothesis 3b were corroborated by the data.

General Discussion

In two studies, we consistently showed that within the context of heterosexual relationships and considering both partners' perceptions, partner-sexual objectification is related to woman's attitudes toward dating violence via the indirect effect of man's attitudes toward dating violence (Studies 1 & 2) and woman's self-objectification (Study 2).

The current research strengthens and expands the literature on sexual objectification in several directions. First, to the best of our knowledge, it represents the first evidence that men's partner-sexual objectification (Hypothesis 1) and women's self-objectification

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

(Hypothesis 3a) are associated with increased acceptance of dating violence. Specifically, we found that men who gave greater importance to the physical appearance versus competence of the partner reported more positive attitudes toward dating violence against women. This result is in line with literature suggesting that sexual objectification facilitates the justification and perpetuation of violence against victims (e.g., Gervais et al., 2014).

It is worth noting that we found a relationship between sexual objectifying *the romantic partner* and attitudes toward dating violence against women *in general*. This result may be because, since the partner is categorized as a woman, the same attitudes and perception toward her may be generalized to women in general. Thus, considering the specific (female) partner as a sexual object emerged as related to higher justification of dating violence against women in general.

Beyond the generalization from the partner to women in general, another interesting result is represented by the relation we found between partner-sexual objectification and negative behavioral tendencies (i.e., dating violence justification). One reason explaining this relationship is that sexual objectification alters the beholder's perception of the victims' moral treatment (e.g., Vasquez et al., 2018). In fact, by giving more importance to partners' physical appearance, men may undervalue other characteristics of their partners, such as their personality or human qualities (e.g., Vaes et al., 2011). Similar to the moral disengagement process (Bandura, 1999), holding warped perceptions (i.e., denial of humanity) of the victims facilitates detrimental acts toward them. Thus, since sexual objectification is strongly connected to dehumanization (e.g., Loughnan et al., 2010; Morris et al., 2018; Wollast et al., 2018) and dating violence is a form of immoral behavior, it is likely that sexually objectifying the partner leads the male partner to be more prone to justify the gender violence. Future research could investigate further the role of dehumanization in explaining this link.

On the women's side, a similar process has been observed. That is, we found that self-devaluation (i.e., self-objectification) was associated with positive attitudes toward dating violence. A possible explanation for this result is that perceiving the self as detached from humanity may lead to accepting gender violence (i.e., immoral actions). However, differently from the male counterpart, in the latter case, violence is directed toward the self, thus it is linked to endorsing counterproductive behaviors that damage women. These results may also be due to the status differences between men (high status) and women (low status) in society. In fact, on the one hand, men show higher attitudes toward inequality. For example, in the political domain, Pratto and colleagues (1997) found that men endorsed pro-equality policies (i.e., public daycare) less than women. On the other hand, studies found that women may deny being victims of discrimination in order to justify their subordinate position. In this direction, a large cross-national study found that women refusing gender-based injustice showed higher subjective well-being compared to women acknowledging inequalities (Napier et al., 2020). Similarly, Chapleau and Oswald (2014), considering both men and women participants in the United States, found that gender-specific system justification (i.e., the perception that the society is fair) was associated with greater violence acceptance (i.e., rape myths) and less resentment toward injustice. As self-objectification leads to interiorizing the oppression (Calogero, 2013), it may be that women who score higher in self-objectifying behaviors were more likely to accept men's dating violence as a normalized pattern for relationships. However, as this is the first known research investigating the link between self-objectification and acceptance of dating violence, future research is needed to identify the underlying mechanisms explaining this relationship.

Furthermore, one of the major contributions of this study is that we found the relationship between men's partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence to be mediated by men's attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 2b;

Studies 1 & 2) and women's self-objectification (Hypothesis 3b; Study 2). Specifically, in line with prior literature (e.g., Hammond & Cross, 2016), our data showed that gender-based attitudes of men and women correlated (Hypothesis 2a). In addition, we showed that men's attitudes toward gender violence explained the link between partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes. Strengthening the results of prior studies, we provided support for the relation regarding attitudes toward gender discrimination in romantic relationships. In fact, along with other forms of mild discrimination (e.g., benevolent sexism; Hammond & Cross, 2016), our results showed that positive attitudes toward violence might be transmitted from one partner to the other, and, specifically, from men to women. However, alternative models (see alternative model for Study 2) also revealed another possible relationship among our variables, namely, the association between partner-sexual objectification and men's attitudes toward dating violence via women's attitudes. This result indicates a possible bidirectional relationship between men's and women's attitudes toward dating violence. Complete results for the alternative model are reported in the Supplementary material file of the article. This finding illustrates the need for further experimental and longitudinal research to establish causal relationship between men's and women's attitudes transmission within romantic relationships.

Regarding self-objectification, it emerged that negative self-perceptions in women mediated the relationship between men's partner-sexual objectification and their attitudes toward dating violence. Specifically, in line with the existing literature (Pecini et al., 2022; Strelan & Pagoudis, 2018), we found that men's partner-sexual objectification and women's self-objectification correlated. Furthermore, self-objectification emerged as the underlying mechanism explaining the relationship between being sexually objectified by the romantic partner and acceptance of dating violence in women.

Despite the relevance of our results, there are some limitations to note. A first limitation is due to the correlational nature of our studies which prevents any causal conclusion on the relationship between constructs. A further limitation is that in the two studies, the samples were composed mainly of Italian participants. Although literature replicated objectification processes in different contexts (e.g., Cheeseborough et al., 2020) it is also important to consider individuals from different cultures (e.g., non-Western) or in different conditions (e.g., sexual orientations, socio-economic status) to reach a broader understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, self-objectification is conceived as a multifaceted construct (Karsay, 2020). In our research, we only considered a cognitive component of self-objectification, namely, valuing appearance over competence. Other components of self-objectification should be considered by future investigations, including its behavioral (e.g., body self-monitoring) and emotional (e.g., body shame) manifestations.

To conclude, our results revealed that implications of partner-sexual objectification in romantic relationships extend beyond intraindividual consequences, shaping men's and women's attitudes toward dating violence directly (men's attitudes) and indirectly (women's attitudes).

References

- Alio, A. P., Clayton, H. B., Garba, M., Mbah, A. K., Daley, E., & Salihu, H. M. (2011). Spousal Concordance in Attitudes Toward Violence and Reported Physical Abuse in African Couples. *Alio et al. Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 26(14), 2790–2810. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260510390951>
- Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of personality. In D. Cervone & Y. Shoda (Eds.), *The coherence of personality: Social-cognitive bases of consistency, variability, and organization* (pp. 185–241). Guilford Press.

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

Bartky, S. (1990). *Femininity and oppression*. New York: Routledge, 2(2), 0.

Calogero, R. M. (2013). Objects Don't Object: Evidence That Self-Objectification Disrupts

Women's Social Activism. *Psychological Science*, 24(3), 312–318.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612452574>

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.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2017.02.008>

Calogero, R., & Tylka, T. L. (2014). Sanctioning resistance to sexual objectification: An

integrative system justification perspective. *Journal of Social Issues*, 70(4), 763–778.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12090>

Chapleau, K. M., & Oswald, D. L. (2014). A System Justification View of Sexual Violence:

Legitimizing Gender Inequality and Reduced Moral Outrage Are Connected to

Greater Rape Myth Acceptance.

[Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1080/15299732.2014.867573](http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1080/15299732.2014.867573), 15(2), 204–218.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2014.867573>

Cheeseborough, T., Overstreet, N., & Ward, L. M. (n.d.). *Interpersonal Sexual*

Objectification, Jezebel Stereotype Endorsement, and Justification of Intimate

Partner Violence Toward Women. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684319896345>

Choma, B. L., & Prusaczyk, E. (2018). The Effects of System Justifying Beliefs on Skin-

Tone Surveillance, Skin-Color Dissatisfaction, and Skin-Bleaching Behavior.

Psychology of Women Quarterly, 42(2), 162–177.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684317747845>

Davis, J. L., & Rusbult, C. E. (2001). Attitude alignment in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81(1), 65–84. [https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.1.65)

3514.81.1.65

de Lemus, S., Moya, M., & Glick, P. (2010). When Contact Correlates with Prejudice:

Adolescents' Romantic Relationship Experience Predicts Greater Benevolent

Sexism in Boys and Hostile Sexism in Girls. *Sex Roles*, 63(3), 214–225.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/S11199-010-9786-2/TABLES/3>

de Wilde, M., Casini, A., Bernard, P., Wollast, R., Klein, O., & Demoulin, S. (2020). Two

Preregistered Direct Replications of “Objects Don’t Object: Evidence That Self-

Objectification Disrupts Women’s Social Activism.” *Psychological Science*, 31(2),

214–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797619896273>

Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R. (1979). *Violence against wives: A case against the*

patriarchy (pp. 179-206). New York: Free Press.

Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A. G., & Buchner, A. (2007). G*Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences.

Behavior Research Methods 2007 39:2, 39(2), 175–191.

<https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03193146>

Fernández-Antelo, I., Cuadrado-Gordillo, I., & Parra, G. M. M. (2020). Synergy between

Acceptance of Violence and Sexist Attitudes as a Dating Violence Risk Factor.

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17(14),

E5209–E5209. <https://doi.org/10.3390/IJERPH17145209>

Fox, J., Ralston, R. A., Cooper, C. K., & Jones, K. A. (2015). Sexualized Avatars Lead to

Women’s Self-Objectification and Acceptance of Rape Myths. *Psychology of*

Women Quarterly, 39(3), 349–362. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684314553578>

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

- Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997). Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21(2), 173–206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00108.x>
- Fredrickson, B. L., Roberts, T.-A., Noll, S. M., Quinn, D. M., & Twenge, J. M. (1998). That swimsuit becomes you: Sex differences in self-objectification, restrained eating, and math performance. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Vol. 75, Issue 1).
- Gervais, S. J., & Eagan, S. (2017). Sexual objectification: The common thread connecting myriad forms of sexual violence against women. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 87(3), 226–232. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000257>
- Gervais, S. J., DiLillo, D., & McChargue, D. (2014). Understanding the link between men's alcohol use and sexual violence perpetration: The mediating role of sexual objectification. *Psychology of Violence*, 4(2), 156–169. <https://doi.org/10.1037/A0033840>
- Gervais, S. J., Sáez, G., Riemer, A. R., & Klein, O. (2020). The Social Interaction Model of Objectification: A process model of goal-based objectifying exchanges between men and women. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 59(1), 248–283. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12339>
- Gracia, E., Lila, M., & Santirso, F. A. (2020). Attitudes Toward Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the European Union: A Systematic Review. In *European Psychologist* (Vol. 25, Issue 2, pp. 104–121). Hogrefe Publishing GmbH. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000392>
- Gramazio, S., Cadinu, M., Pagliaro, S., & Pacilli, M. G. (2021). Sexualization of Sexual Harassment Victims Reduces Bystanders' Help: The Mediating Role of Attribution

of Immorality and Blame. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36, 13–14.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518816326>

Hammond, M. D., & Cross, E. J. (2016). Internalizing sexism within close relationships:

Perceptions of intimate partners' benevolent sexism promote women's endorsement of benevolent sexism. *Article in Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000043>

Harsey, S. J., & Zurbriggen, E. L. (2020). Men and women's self-objectification, objectification of women, and sexist beliefs.

Https://Doi.Org/10.1080/15298868.2020.1784263, 20(7), 861–868.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2020.1784263>

Hayes, A. F. (2013). Mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis. *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach edn*. New York: Guilford Publications, 1, 20.

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.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JESP.2009.02.008>

Kalmijn, M. (2003). Country differences in sex-role attitudes: Cultural and economic explanations. In *The cultural diversity of European Unity* (pp. 311-337). Brill.

Kalmijn, M. (2005). Attitude alignment in marriage and cohabitation: The case of sex-role attitudes. *Personal Relationships*, 12(4), 521–535. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1475-6811.2005.00129.X>

Karsay, K. (2020). Objectification. In *The International Encyclopedia of Media Psychology* (pp. 1–9). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119011071.iemp0141>

Kelley, H. H., & Thibaut, J. W. (1978). *Interpersonal relations: A theory of interdependence*. New York: Wiley.

Lawoko, S. (2008). Predictors of attitudes toward intimate partner violence: A comparative study of men in Zambia and Kenya. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23(8), 1056–1074. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260507313972>

Loughnan, S., Haslam, N., Murnane, T., Vaes, J., Reynolds, C., & Suitner, C. (2010). Objectification leads to depersonalization: The denial of mind and moral concern to objectified others. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 40(5), 709–717. <https://doi.org/10.1002/EJSP.755>

Loughnan, S., Pina, A., Vasquez, E. A., & Puvia, E. (2013). Sexual Objectification Increases Rape Victim Blame and Decreases Perceived Suffering: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684313485718>, 37(4), 455–461. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684313485718>

Mahar, E. A., Webster, G. D., & Markey, P. M. (2020). Partner–objectification in romantic relationships: A dyadic approach. *Personal Relationships*, 27(1), 4–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12303>

Mastari, L., Spruyt, B., & Siongers, J. (2019). Benevolent and Hostile Sexism in Social Spheres: The Impact of Parents, School and Romance on Belgian Adolescents' Sexist Attitudes. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 4, 47. <https://doi.org/10.3389/FSOC.2019.00047/BIBTEX>

Meltzer, A. L. (2020). Women Can Benefit From Sexual and Physical Valuation in the Context of a Romantic Relationship. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 46(2), 243–257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167219854443>

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

Morris, K. L., Goldenberg, J., & Boyd, P. (2018). Women as Animals, Women as Objects:

Evidence for Two Forms of Objectification. *Personality and Social Psychology*

Bulletin, 44(9), 1302–1314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167218765739>

Napier, J. L., Suppes, A., & Bettinsoli, M. L. (2020). Denial of gender discrimination is

associated with better subjective well-being among women: A system justification

account. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 50(6), 1191–1209.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/EJSP.2702>

Nussbaum, M. C. (1995). Objectification. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 24(4), 249–291.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1088-4963.1995.TB00032.X>

Pecini, C., Di Bernardo, G. A., Crapolicchio, E., Stathi, S., Vezzali, L., & Andrighetto, L.

(2022). Stop looking at me! Associations between men's partner-objectification and

women's self-objectification, body shame and life satisfaction in romantic

relationships. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2627>

Pratto, F., Stallworth, L. M., Sidanius, J., & Siers, B. (1997). The Gender Gap in

Occupational Role Attainment: A Social Dominance Approach. *Journal of*

Personality and Social Psychology, 72(1), 37–53. [https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.1.37)

[3514.72.1.37](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.1.37)

Price, E. L., Byers, E. A., Belliveau, N., Bonner, R., Caron, B., Doiron, D., Greenough, J.,

Guerette-Breau, A., Hicks, L., Landry, A., Lavoie, B., Layden-Oreto, M., Legere, L.,

Lemieux, S., Lirette, M., Maillet, G., McMullin, C., & Moore, R. (1999). The

Attitudes Towards Dating Violence Scales: Development and Initial Validation. In

Journal of Family Violence (Vol. 14, Issue 4).

- Ramsey, L. R., & Hoyt, T. (2015). The object of desire: How being objectified creates sexual pressure for women in heterosexual relationships. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 39(2), 151–170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684314544679>
- Roberts, T.-A., Calogero, R. M., & Gervais, S. J. (2017). Objectification theory: Continuing contributions to feminist psychology. *APA Handbook of the Psychology of Women: History, Theory, and Battlegrounds (Vol. 1).*, 249–271. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000059-013>
- Rudman, L. A., & Mescher, K. (2012). Of Animals and Objects: Men's Implicit Dehumanization of Women and Likelihood of Sexual Aggression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(6), 734–746. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167212436401>
- Sáez, G., Alonso-Ferres, M., Garrido-Macías, M., Valor-Segura, I., & Expósito, F. (2019). The Detrimental Effect of Sexual Objectification on Targets' and Perpetrators' Sexual Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Sexual Coercion. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2748. <https://doi.org/10.3389/FPSYG.2019.02748/BIBTEX>
- Sáez, G., Alonso-Ferres, M., Garrido-Macías, M., Valor-Segura, I., & Expósito, F. (2019). The detrimental effect of sexual objectification on targets' and perpetrators' sexual satisfaction: The mediating role of sexual coercion. *Frontiers in psychology*, 10, 2748. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02748>
- Sáez, G., Riemer, A. R., Brock, R. L., & Gervais, S. J. (2019). Objectification in heterosexual romantic relationships: Examining relationship satisfaction of female objectification recipients and male objectifying perpetrators. *Sex Roles*, 81(5), 370–384. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0990-9>
- Sáez, G., Riemer, A. R., Brock, R. L., & Gervais, S. J. (2020). The role of interpersonal sexual objectification in heterosexual intimate partner violence from perspectives of

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

perceivers and targets. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 0886260520922348.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520922348>

Seabrook, R. C., Ward, L. M., & Giaccardi, S. (2019). Less than human? Media use, objectification of women, and men's acceptance of sexual aggression. *Psychology of Violence*, 9(5), 536–545. <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000198>

Strelan, P., & Pagoudis, S. (2018). Birds of a feather flock together: The interpersonal process of objectification within intimate heterosexual relationships. *Sex Roles*, 79(1–2), 72–82. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0851-y>

Teten, A. L., Ball, B., Valle, L. A., Noonan, R., & Rosenbluth, B. (2009). Considerations for the Definition, Measurement, Consequences, and Prevention of Dating Violence Victimization among Adolescent Girls. *Https://Home.Liebertpub.Com/Jwh*, 18(7), 923–927. <https://doi.org/10.1089/JWH.2009.1515>

Vaes, J., Cristoforetti, G., Ruzzante, D., Cogoni, C., & Mazza, V. (2019). Assessing neural responses towards objectified human targets and objects to identify processes of sexual objectification that go beyond the metaphor. *Scientific Reports 2019 9:1*, 9(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-42928-x>

Vaes, J., Loughnan, S., & Puvia, E. (2013). The inhuman body: When sexual objectification becomes dehumanizing. In *Humanness and dehumanization* (pp. 194-212). Psychology Press.

Vaes, J., Paladino, P., & Puvia, E. (2011). Are sexualized women complete human beings? Why men and women dehumanize sexually objectified women. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 41(6), 774–785. <https://doi.org/10.1002/EJSP.824>

Vasquez, E. A., Ball, L., Loughnan, S., & Pina, A. (2018). The object of my aggression: Sexual objectification increases physical aggression toward women. *Aggressive Behavior*, 44(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/AB.21719>

Partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence

- Vasquez, E. A., Osinnowo, K., Pina, A., Ball, L., & Bell, C. (2017). The sexual objectification of girls and aggression towards them in gang and non-gang affiliated youth. *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1080/1068316X.2016.1269902*, 23(5), 459–471. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2016.1269902>
- Wollast, R., Puvia, E., Bernard, P., Tevichapong, P., & Klein, O. (2018). How sexual objectification generates dehumanization in Western and Eastern cultures: A comparison between Belgium and Thailand. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*, 77(2), 69–82. <https://doi.org/10.1024/1421-0185/a000209>
- Zurbriggen, E. L. (2013). Objectification, self-objectification, and societal change. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 1(1), 188–215. <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v1i1.94>
- Zurbriggen, E. L., Ramsey, L. R., & Jaworski, B. K. (2011). Self- and Partner-objectification in Romantic Relationships: Associations with Media Consumption and Relationship Satisfaction. *Sex Roles*, 64(7–8), 449–462. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9933-4>