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The impact of self-objectification on political efficacy: does self-image affect feelings of political adequacy

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THE IMPACT OF SELF-OBJECTIFICATION ON POLITICAL EFFICACY:
DOES SELF-IMAGE AFFECT FEELINGS OF POLITICAL ADEQUACY

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors with Distinction

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Abstract

The phenomenon of self-objectification develops from the internalization of the objectification of the human body by the individual, occurring most prevalently among women, and results in a host of negative psychological effects (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Among these effects are increased body surveillance, disrupting one's ability to achieve peak states of motivation, and body shame. It is possible, then, that feelings of inadequacy, as a result, affect other realms of life, including an individual's orientation toward the political world. To test this proposition, I conducted an original online survey (N=948) to determine if higher rates of self-objectification, utilizing measures for body surveillance and body shame, negatively affect internal and external political efficacy. Importantly, I control for a number of demographic measures, including gender, to test whether significant subgroup differences exist. Results suggest increased body surveillance and body shame negatively and significantly affect internal political efficacy among both men and women, but the negative effects of self-objectification on the internal political efficacy rates of women are greater than that of men. Further, in analyzing the impact of self-objectification on external political efficacy, body shame negatively affects the external political efficacy of women but not men. I conclude by discussing how the effects of self-objectification are not isolated to feelings of oneself, but may extend to other aspects of daily life, including the political and economic.

Introduction

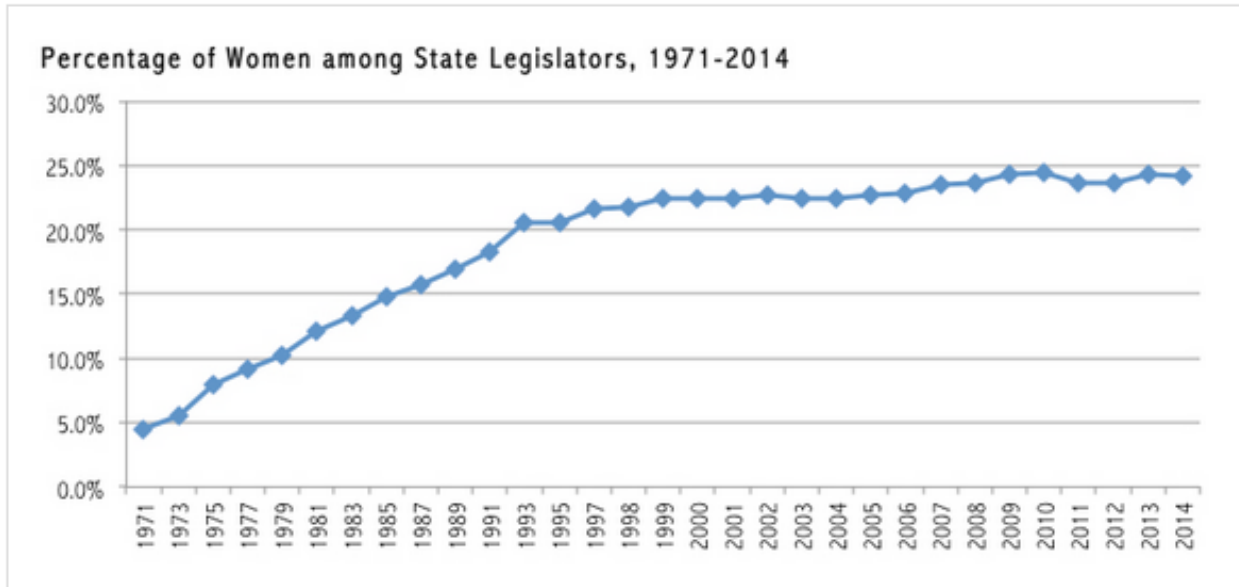
The phenomenon of self-objectification is the act of seeing oneself as an object of desire for others, rather than through intrinsic individual qualities (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Fredrickson and Roberts note the mass media's sexualization of the human body, particularly the female body, as a contributing factor to this effect (1997). Corresponding with the rise of third-wave feminism, which promotes women's sexualization as a source of power (Heldman & Wade, 2011) and the rise of the internet in the 1990s, which created a greater medium for the circulation of sexualized portrayals of the female body, the proportion of women elected to statewide office stagnated in the 1990s, in comparison to the sharp increases in statewide female elected officials during the 1970s and 1980s. It seems plausible that the increasing prevalence of self-objectification has stimulated increased feelings of inadequacy among women related to their appearance, and these negative feelings about oneself may affect other realms of life, including self-perceptions regarding individual importance and capability in a democratic society, or internal and external political efficacy. If this is true, it may serve as a valid explanation as to why the number of women elected to public office has generally not increased over the last two decades, if fewer women are running due to increased feelings of inadequacy or unimportance.

Literature Review

From the 1970s through the late 1990s, a greater number of women ran and were elected to public office than in years prior. In examining state legislatures in 1971, roughly 4.5 percent of state legislators were female. This number grew to 21.6 percent by 1997 (CAWP, 1999), but growth leveled off and increased by only 2.1 percent over the next 16 years to 23.7 percent of seats in state legislatures in 2013 (NCSL, 2013). Table 1 illustrates the increase and subsequent leveling

off of women in state legislatures from 1971-2014 (CAWP, Women in State Legislatures 2015, 2014).

Table 1: Women in State Legislatures (CAWP, 2014)



Corresponding to this increase and subsequent leveling off of growth in the percentage of women in state legislatures, a third wave of feminism emerged in the mid-1990s that focused on female sexual liberation, with the idea that women derive power from their status as a sexual object. This has led to the acceptance of the objectification of the female body, including the objectification of female political candidates. Beyond this, the rise of the internet occurred during the 1990s, creating a correlation between its rise, the rise of third-wave feminism, and the leveling-off of the increasing percentage of women in state legislatures (Heldman & Wade, 2011). In understanding this underrepresentation and stagnation of growth of female elected officials, it is important to consider the justification for this occurrence.

Research investigating the gender gap in politics indicates that, of well-qualified potential candidates, females are less likely than males to consider running for office (Lawless & Fox, 2004).

This research cited negative self-perceptions of qualifications and ability to win as a justification for this difference between genders. In understanding that women feel they are less qualified to run for office than their male counterparts, it is possible that these feelings of political inadequacy are the result of self-objectification. The growing phenomenon of the objectification of women in popular culture has become internalized, resulting in self-objectification, and this internalization may cause feelings of political inadequacy, namely, a reduction in internal and external political efficacy rates among women.

Self-objectification is the act of seeing oneself as an object of consumption to be evaluated by others, rather than through non-observable characteristics (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Sexual objectification can occur among males and females, but it occurs with much greater frequency among females (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998). Some blame consumerist American culture for objectifying women, which, in turn, leads to the internalization of the objectification, resulting in self-objectification. Today, American popular culture promotes sexualized messages, exhibited predominantly through the mass media, and these messages are reiterated in personal day-to-day encounters (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998).

The media and self-objectification have a significant relationship. According to Fredrickson and Roberts:

Making matters worse, the mass media's proliferation of sexualized images of the female body is fast and thorough. Confrontations with these images, then, are virtually unavoidable in American culture. In sum, the sexual objectification of the female body has clearly permeated our cultural milieu; it is likely to affect most girls and women to some degree, no matter who their actual social contacts may be. (1997)

Because of the media's role in society today, nearly all Americans are exposed to sexual objectification, and the internalization of these ideals leads to self-objectification. Beyond this, the

media objectifies women at a much higher rate than men. In a study determining the face-ism index for a given gender, researchers compiled published American photographs in various publications and assigned a proportional number to the face-to-body ratio in each photograph. The study determined that the face-ism index for men was a .65 face-to-body ratio, whereas it was merely .45 for women. This illustrates that women are more often portrayed by their body, whereas men are more often portrayed by their face (Archer, Iritani, Kimes, & Barrios, 1983).

There are many negative psychological effects associated with self-objectification, including shame, anxiety, and interference with motivation and internal awareness (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Self-objectification leads to shame when one continually seeks to “correct” their body. This is especially true for females, with standards of beauty so high within popular culture, that they are virtually unattainable. For example, the minority of women in America are overweight, yet the majority report that they feel as though they are overweight, illustrating that there is a disconnect between the standards of appearance women hold for themselves and the reality of the situation (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998). These unrealistic standards of beauty lead to shame, as the individuals who seek these standards are disappointed in their inability to achieve them.

Anxiety is additionally associated with self-objectification. The emphasis on bodily appearance in assessing self-worth over intrinsic qualities leads to anxiety, especially in women. There is a constant concern regarding how one appears and how others perceive this appearance. This worry contributes to anxiety, as it causes the individual to constantly monitor their appearance rather than focus on the task at hand (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Increased anxiety and shame can interfere in achieving peak motivational states. Csikszentmihalyi discusses his concept of flow theory as, “when a person’s body or mind is

stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile” (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). If one is self-conscious, according to Csikszentmihalyi, they are not capable of reaching this state of flow, as focus is not entirely directed toward the task at hand. With self-objectification, one is often concerned with their external appearance and others’ perceptions thereof, and as previously discussed, this disproportionately affects women. According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), “...by limiting women’s chances to initiate and maintain peak motivational states, the habitual body monitoring encouraged by a culture that objectifies the female body may reduce women’s quality of life.” By rendering an individual incapable of reaching peak states of flow, self-objectification degrades the individual’s ability to reach their fullest potential.

Self-objectification is the concept of seeing oneself as an object, rather than evaluating oneself based on intrinsic factors. The media plays a significant role in the process of objectification, and objectifying concepts can become internalized, causing an individual to self-objectify. There are many negative effects associated with self-objectification, including shame, anxiety, and an inability to reach a state of flow, all of which can diminish an individual’s quality of life. Understanding how these negative aspects of self-objectification affect an individual may lead one to question the effects of self-objectification on political efficacy.

Research on self-objectification and political efficacy has largely taken place independently, despite overlapping constructs relating to individual self-worth. It is possible that the objectification of women, which can lead to self-objectification, has negatively influenced political efficacy rates. Further exploration into the impact of the phenomenon of self-objectification on political efficacy, which indicates feelings of political adequacy, is necessary in understanding the justification for the gender gap in the political sphere.

Political efficacy is one's belief that they have the ability to influence the political system in a democratic society (Forrest & Weseley, 2007). Political efficacy is important because it correlates with the likelihood of political participation and provides a method to measure the legitimacy of a governmental institution (Atkeson & Carrillo, 2007). If individuals, particularly women, experience higher rates of self-objectification, and feelings of inadequacy result from this phenomenon, it may explain why the number of women in statewide elected office has increased only slightly over the past two decades, as women may be less likely to run for office if they do not feel they possess adequate skills to do so or generally feel that their voice does not matter, due to heightened body surveillance and shame.

There are two types of political efficacy measures: internal and external. Internal political efficacy is one's perceived ability to understand and participate in politics. External political efficacy is one's perception of the responsiveness of a governmental institution to the demands of the individual (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). Internal political efficacy corresponds more directly with feelings of political adequacy, while external political efficacy measures an individual's perception of a government's concern for them as an individual. Both measures help determine feelings of self-worth within the political realm.

Past research indicates that higher levels of political efficacy increase an individual's likelihood of voting. Similarly, political apathy is correlated with low levels of political efficacy (Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998). Measuring political efficacy, then, becomes important in determining the likelihood of political participation of an individual and is thus related to individual perceptions of political adequacy.

Political efficacy is also important in determining institutional validity. If citizens in a democracy have low political efficacy rates, one must question the governance in that system.

Democracies are designed to be representative of the desires of the electorate, and if individuals do not feel that their voice matters within the electorate, the legitimacy of the democracy in question is at risk. Low political efficacy rates among an electorate may lead to governmental instability and a multitude of economic problems, including responding to only a subset of the electorate, which may not represent all interests of the citizenry (see, for example, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). Considering this, a measurement of political efficacy among members of a democratic society may be a valid method in determining a democratic government's validity (Atkeson & Carrillo, 2007).

While the media plays a role in self-objectification, it also serves as an actor in determining individual political efficacy. Research shows that individuals who partake in information-rich media have higher levels of political efficacy than those who do not (Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998). On the other hand, consumption of new media has been found to increase political cynicism levels, which, in turn, leads to lower political efficacy rates (Fu, Mou, Miller, & Jalette, 2011). In considering the increased prevalence of new media stemming from the rise of the internet in the 1990s, it is possible that there may be a correlation between reduced political efficacy rates and the increasing prevalence of self-objectification, stemming from the increasing sexualization and commodification of the human body as well as the increasing prevalence of images with unrealistic and unattainable portrayals of the human body, especially the female body. Because the phenomenon of self-objectification enhances personal perceptions of inadequacy, these feelings may affect other aspects of life, including an individual's opinion of their qualifications to participate in politics, as well as their perception of their importance in the eyes of a governmental institution.

In understanding the significance of political efficacy and the negative consequences associated with the phenomenon of self-objectification, determining whether there is a relationship between the two could prove valuable. If the increasing prevalence of self-objectification is negatively affecting political efficacy rates, especially among women, it may be damaging to the reduction of the gender gap in politics, as feelings of inadequacy related to appearance could affect feelings of political adequacy as well.

Hypothesis

In understanding the internalization of the objectification of the human body by those experiencing the phenomenon of self-objectification, as well as the negative consequences associated with this effect, it is possible that individuals experiencing different levels of self-objectification could have an altered view of their perceived importance in the political system, in turn affecting their personal political efficacy level. Based on the negative consequences of self-objectification, the hypothesis for this research is as follows: Higher rates of self-objectification, using the measures of body surveillance and body shame, are associated with lower levels of both internal and external political efficacy.

Data and Methodology

Participants

This study surveyed 948 American participants. They were recruited utilizing Amazon Mechanical Turk and compensated \$.25 for their participation in the study. The demographics of the sample population may be found in Table 1. As shown within Table 1, 65.1 percent of respondents were male, while 34.7 percent were female. The greatest proportion of people

surveyed were 25 to 34 years of age, with 77.3 percent of respondents falling within the age range of 18 to 34. Education level varied significantly, with 36.2 percent of respondents' highest level of education concluding with high school, while 13.8 percent held associate's degrees, 38.4 percent held bachelor's degrees, 9.5 percent held master's or professional degrees, and 1.8 percent reported having their doctorate. The majority of respondents, at 63.7 percent, had an annual income of less than \$40,000 per year, with 27.7 percent reporting an annual income of \$40,000 to \$80,000. Only 8.3 percent of the sample reported an annual income greater than \$80,000. See chart labeled "Participant Demographics" in the Appendix for more information regarding the demographics of the sample population.

Measures

Participants completed surveys to analyze self-objectification and political efficacy levels. These surveys included demographic information, a series of questions adapted from the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale, and questions determining internal and external political efficacy, taken from the American National Election Study surveys of political efficacy. The survey included 20 total questions: eight questions recorded demographic information, two questions recorded governmental involvement and correspondence with elected officials, four questions measured body surveillance, four questions measured body shame, and the final three questions measured political efficacy. The time necessary to complete the survey was roughly five minutes. A copy of the materials presented to participants may be found in the Appendix.

Independent Variable: Self-Objectification, as Determined by the OBCS.¹ Self-objectification was determined utilizing a modified version of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS) (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). The OBCS measures three aspects of self-objectification: surveillance, body shame, and control.

Body Surveillance. The surveillance aspect of the OBCS is associated with seeing oneself as perceived externally by others. This surveillance is utilized by the individual in an effort to adhere to societal norms and reduce negative judgments from others. However, internalized surveillance has the ability to disrupt an individual from achieving peak motivational states of flow (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Increased body surveillance can have negative implications, as it may reduce an individual's ability to focus on others aspects of daily life beyond appearance. Without the ability to reach peak motivational states, it is possible that individual political efficacy could be negatively affected, as the individual has less ability to focus on the bigger picture beyond personal appearance.

This study measured surveillance using four questions adapted from the OBCS. These questions focused on the frequency of comparing oneself to others, thought regarding appearance, worry about how one looks in their clothing, and concern regarding others' perception of one's appearance. All four of these questions are tested measures of body surveillance, which is a

¹ *Control Beliefs*

The final variable measured by the OBCS is control beliefs. Control beliefs are associated with one's belief that they have the ability to control their appearance. A feeling of being in control does have psychological benefits; however, higher control beliefs may also be associated with negative behaviors, such as restricted eating (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Because control beliefs are most associated with the ability to manipulate appearance and do not necessarily serve as an indicator of one's internalized feelings of objectification, they were excluded from this study, as one cannot utilize this measure to draw an accurate interpretation as to its effect on internal and external political efficacy levels.

component of self-objectification (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). The exact questions utilized may be found in the Appendix.

In the dataset analyzing these aspects of self-objectification, these questions are coded as “compare_others,” “think_appearance,” “worry_clothes,” and “worry_others.”

Body Shame. Body shame is associated with the concept of comparing oneself to others. Body shame occurs when individuals feel as though they do not measure up to cultural standards of appearance, which are often determined by the media or other forms of popular culture. Body shame, when internalized, can translate into negative feelings of self-worth. These negative feelings regarding oneself, then, could affect political efficacy, as it alters an individual’s perceived adequacy within society. If an individual feels inadequate in general, this may affect personal perceptions of adequacy in all aspects of life.

For this study, body shame was determined utilizing four questions adapted from the OBCS. These questions tested for the amount of shame an individual feels if they have not made an effort to look their best, do not look as good as they believe they could, if others knew their weight, and if they were not the size they believe they should be. These measures were tested and validated in the creation of the OBCS (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Again, the exact questions utilized for this measure may be found in the Appendix.

In the dataset analyzing these aspects of self-objectification, these questions are coded as “look_good,” “make_effort,” “knew_weight,” and “not_size.”

Dependent Variables: Internal and External Political Efficacy, as Determined by the NES. The National Election Study (NES) was developed by the Center for Political Studies (CPS) in 1952. The original CPS political efficacy measures were not designed to differentiate between internal and external political efficacy, as those concepts were not fully conceptualized until the 1970s (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). As such, the original survey questions from the CPS have been categorized to better reflect the data the questions aim to measure.

Internal Political Efficacy. The original NES survey question, “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on,” also referred to as “COMPLEX,” has been established as a valid measure of internal political efficacy (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990). As such, this study utilizes this question to measure the internal political efficacy of respondents.

External Political Efficacy. The original CPS survey question, “Public officials don't care much what people like me think,” also referred to as “NOCARE,” is a valid measure of external political efficacy (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). For this reason, this study utilizes this question to measure the external political efficacy of respondents.

Data and Analysis

Respondents answered questions by selecting the response they felt most closely matched their personal feelings regarding each given question. In analyzing the results, the responses to all questions were converted to numeric variables, on a scale from one to four. Lower numeric values correspond to low levels of self-objectification and low levels of political efficacy, while numeric

values closer to four are indicative of greater levels of self-objectification, as well as greater levels of political efficacy. In terms of the hypothesis for this research, if the hypothesis proves true, individuals with numeric values closer to four for measures of self-objectification will exhibit numeric values closer to one for measures of political efficacy, indicating an inverse relationship between the phenomena.

Placing the collected data into a correlation matrix provides a preliminary approach to understanding the results. Table 2 contains the responses to the eight self-objectification questions (compare_others, think_appearance, worry_clothes, worry_others, look_good, make_effort, knew_weight, not_size), as they correlate with the measures of internal and external political efficacy (COMPLEX, NOCARE).

The results shown within Table 2 display the relationship between each question measuring body surveillance and body shame, the two measures of self-objectification utilized in this research, as they correlate with the measures of internal and external political efficacy. Table 2 demonstrates that while the eight measures of self-objectification are generally negatively correlated with political efficacy, there are clear differences by the form of political efficacy measured. All eight measures are negatively and significantly correlated with internal political efficacy, but this is not the case for external political efficacy, where the relationship is significant for only two of the eight self-objectification measures, utilizing the measures of body surveillance and shame. Further, of the significant results for the relationship between the self-objectification and the external political efficacy measures, the relationship is relatively weak in comparison to the relationship between the self-objectification and internal political efficacy measures.

Table 2: Self-Objectification Measures as Correlated with Measures of Political Efficacy

			Int. Efficacy	Ext. Efficacy
B O D Y S U R V E I L L A N C E	“compare_others”	Pearson Correlation	-.151**	.011
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.738
		N	938	942
	“think_appearance”	Pearson Correlation	-.112**	-.023
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.483
		N	939	943
	“worry_clothes”	Pearson Correlation	-.137**	-.008
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.816
		N	937	941
	“worry_others”	Pearson Correlation	-.135**	-.035
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.284
		N	932	936
B O D Y S H A M E	“look_good”	Pearson Correlation	-.145**	-.106**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001
		N	941	945
	“make_effort”	Pearson Correlation	-.136**	-.056
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.088
		N	938	942
	“knew_weight”	Pearson Correlation	-.151**	-.080*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.014
		N	940	944
	“not_size”	Pearson Correlation	-.151**	-.048
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.138
		N	935	938

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Increased body surveillance has a slight, but insignificant, negative relationship with measures of external political efficacy. As shown in Table 2, there is a slight overall negative correlation between the external political efficacy variable and three out of four of the first four measures of self-objectification, which measure the surveillance aspect of the phenomenon, but none of these correlations are significant.

Conversely, increased body surveillance does have a significant negative relationship with measures of internal political efficacy. As indicated by the results presented in Table 2, there is a negative correlation between the internal political efficacy variable and all of the first four measures of self-objectification ($p < .05$), which measure the surveillance aspect of the phenomenon.

The components of body shame all show a negative relationship with measures of external political efficacy. In consideration of the data displayed in Table 2, there is a slight negative correlation between the external political efficacy variable and all of the last four measures of self-objectification, which measure the shame aspect of the phenomenon. However, only two of these correlations are significant ($p < .05$), indicating that the relationship is relatively weak.

At the same time, increased body shame does have a significant negative relationship with measures of internal political efficacy. In looking to the measures provided in Table 2, there is a negative correlation between the internal political efficacy variable and all of the last four measures of self-objectification, which measure the shame aspect of the phenomenon. Further, all of the correlations between measures of body shame and internal political efficacy are significant at the .01 level, indicating a very strong relationship between the two measures.

The responses to the self-objectification questions were next categorized into two groups—body surveillance and body shame—by calculating average scores for each of the participants for

each category. Collapsing the eight measures into two groups allows for a general interpretation of the results and has been done in previous research (see McKinley and Hyde, 1996). The surveillance variable includes the average of the scores for “compare_others,” “think_appearance,” “worry_clothes,” and “worry_others.” The shame variable includes the average of the scores for “look_good,” “make_effort,” “knew_weight,” and “not_size.” In using the average scores for each of these categories, broader comparisons may be made utilizing the data. McKinley and Hyde (1996) also combine each set of four variables into the two specified groups indicated above. For this experiment, collapsing the eight variables into the two groups is also supported statistically. The Cronbach’s Alpha is 0.81 for the surveillance group and 0.74 for the shame group, indicating the four measures are internally consistent within each group, further justifying their categorization.

Using the two group measures, Table 3 evaluates differences in self-objectification measures by gender. This analysis is important because it validates the background information regarding the frequency of the phenomenon of self-objectification by gender. As shown, the data in this research corresponds to previous research indicating the increased frequency of the phenomenon of self-objectification among females.

Table 3: Differences in Objectification Measures by Gender

Gender		Surveillance_Score	Shame_Score
Male	Mean	2.1783	1.8473
	N	600	604
	Std. Deviation	.53417	.56845
Female	Mean	2.3333	2.1023
	N	324	325
	Std. Deviation	.57320	.63047
Total	Mean	2.2327	1.9365
	N	924	929
	Std. Deviation	.55284	.60295

As shown in Table 3, female participants scored higher on measures of self-objectification than male participants ($p < .01$). The mean body surveillance score for males was 2.18, while the mean score for females was 2.33, a difference of .15. Further, the mean body shame score for males was 1.85, while the mean score for females was 2.10, a difference of .25. These results indicate that females more consciously monitor their experience and are significantly more likely to feel shame regarding their body's appearance than their male counterparts. Understanding this difference in responses between male and female participants is important, because if self-objectification negatively affects political efficacy rates, it is more damaging for females than males based on these results, as females experience the phenomenon of self-objectification at higher rates than males.

The final analysis of the data utilizes correlations between the measures of self-objectification and political efficacy by gender. This data can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Self-Objectification Correlations to Political Efficacy Measures by Gender

Gender			Internal Political Efficacy	External Political Efficacy
Male	Surveillance_Score	Pearson Correlation	-.151**	-.002
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.951
		N	596	600
	Shame_Score	Pearson Correlation	-.166**	-.058
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.152
		N	601	604
Female	Surveillance_Score	Pearson Correlation	-.198**	-.054
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.334
		N	324	324
	Shame_Score	Pearson Correlation	-.244**	-.184**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001
		N	325	325

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In categorizing this data by gender, using Table 4, there is no correlation between the surveillance measure and the external political efficacy measure for males. Further, there is a slight negative correlation between the surveillance measure and the external political efficacy measure for females, but it is not significant. This indicates that increased surveillance does not have a significant impact on external political efficacy, for neither males nor females. The hypothesis that increased self-objectification, for the measure of body surveillance, negatively affects external political efficacy does not hold under further analysis.

In further analyzing the impact of the increased body surveillance by gender, as presented in Table 4, there is a significant negative correlation between the surveillance measure and the internal political efficacy measure for both males and females, but the effect is more substantial

for females than males. The hypothesis that increased self-objectification, for the measure of body surveillance, negatively affects internal political efficacy holds true upon analysis of the findings of this study, and it affects females more greatly than males.

In using Table 4 to determine the impact of the measure of body shame by gender, there is a slight negative correlation between the shame measure and the external political efficacy measure for males, but it is not significant. Conversely, there is a strong, significant, negative correlation between the shame measure and the external political efficacy measure for females. This indicates that increased body shame does have a significant negative impact on external political efficacy for females but not for males. The hypothesis that increased self-objectification, for the measure of body shame, negatively affects external political efficacy holds partially true under further analysis, as it is true for females but not males.

There is also a significant negative correlation between the shame measure and the internal political efficacy measure for both males and females. The hypothesis that increased self-objectification, for the measure of body shame, negatively affects internal political efficacy holds true upon further analysis, and it affects females more significantly than males.

In reviewing the findings of this study, the hypothesis that self-objectification negatively affects political efficacy, holds true for some, but not all measures. There are four primary areas of comparison: the impact of increased body surveillance on external political efficacy, the impact of increased body surveillance on internal political efficacy, the impact of increased body shame on external political efficacy, and the impact of increased body shame on internal political efficacy. Of these areas of comparison, the hypothesis holds true for the negative impact of both aspects of self-objectification on feelings of internal political efficacy. Conversely, the hypothesis is rejected for the effect of increased body surveillance on external political efficacy, while it holds partially

true for the implications of increased body shame on feelings of external political efficacy, as it is true for females but not males.

Discussion

This research is significant because it sheds new light on the negative effects of self-objectification. Prior research, cited in earlier portions of this analysis, discusses the damaging psychological effects caused by self-objectification, and this study indicates that these negative effects extend into the political realm.

Increased body surveillance did not have a significant negative correlation with external political efficacy, indicating that, generally, an individual who experiences increased self-monitoring of their appearance does not have a reduced perception of public officials' interest in addressing their individual concerns. This result shows that increased self-monitoring does not distract an individual to such an extent that they have an altered perception of their significance in the eyes of their governmental institution, which is important in maintaining government validity.

Conversely, increased body shame did have a significant negative correlation with external political efficacy for women. This illustrates the negative consequences of feeling shame regarding one's appearance, as the internalization of shame causes a reduction in perceived individual importance to a governing body. Because the results of this portion of the study affected women but not men, light is also shed on the more substantial negative impact of self-objectification on women's perceptions of their importance within society.

This result is problematic, as it can damage the validity of a governmental institution within a democratic society. Lower levels of external political efficacy correspond more greatly with a reduced likelihood of political participation than lower levels of internal political efficacy (Pollock,

1983). If women feel a heightened sense of shame regarding the appearance of their body, it negatively affects their feelings of external political efficacy, which, in turn, reduces their likelihood of participating in the political process. This is particularly concerning, as there may be a portion of females within the citizenry that do not participate in the political process, due to increased levels of shame regarding their bodily appearance.

A further conclusion resulting from this phenomenon may be drawn about the number of women running for and being elected to public office. The emergence of the third wave of feminism in the 1990s, which focused on female sexual liberation, but led to increased objectification of the female body, ultimately may be to blame for the stagnation in the number of women elected to public offices (Heldman & Wade, 2011). The findings in this research echo this idea, as, if the third wave of feminism has increased body shame, particularly among women, and increased body shame reduces external political efficacy, which, in turn, reduces the likelihood of political participation, then the stagnation in the increase of female elected officials may be due to consequences associated with the emergence of the third wave of feminism, along with the increase in consumption of new media associated with the rise of the internet. This is incredibly concerning, as a movement associated with female empowerment may be having the opposite effect in the political realm.

The research presented within this study also found that increased body surveillance and body shame negatively affect feelings of internal political efficacy for both males and females. This effect was stronger for the measure of body shame, and it affected women more significantly than men. Further, as the findings in Table 3 indicate, the frequency of self-objectification is more common in females than males, which is echoed by scholarship on the phenomenon of self-objectification.

The negative consequences of the phenomenon of self-objectification on internal political efficacy is of particular concern, as increased body surveillance and body shame negatively affect individual feelings of self-worth within the political realm. This illustrates the concept that feelings of inadequacy related to personal body image can translate into feelings of inadequacy in other areas of life, demonstrated by the negative correlation between measures of self-objectification and internal political efficacy.

The implications of the reduction of internal and external political efficacy due to increased body shame, as well as the reduction of internal political efficacy related to increased body surveillance, are significant. Considering that women feel the effects of self-objectification more substantially than men, it affects their perception of their role in a democratic society. It may discourage them from running for office, or even participating in politics. Previous research indicates that there is a negative correlation between political efficacy and political apathy (Pinkleton & Austin, 2004). In understanding this concept, it is apparent that reduced political efficacy results in increased apathy regarding politics. People who are apathetic are less likely to participate in politics, and this is especially problematic in light of the findings within this study, as women experience the phenomenon of self-objectification, and, in turn, the negative consequences associated with the phenomenon, more significantly than men, indicating they are less likely to participate in politics as a result of the negative implications of increased body surveillance and body shame.

If an entire portion of a society fails to participate in a democratic governmental institution because their personal feelings of self-worth are reduced, that society is not democratic by definition. Democracies, by nature, are intended to represent the interests of those within the society, but if a portion of society does not believe their government cares about them or that

politics is too complicated for them to understand, their lack of input into the political system will cause the government to be unresponsive to their needs, further encouraging feelings of inadequacy.

Additionally, if women experience the phenomenon of self-objectification more prominently than men, as this study indicates, then they are less likely to participate in the political process. This idea is reinforced by findings related to female perceptions of their qualifications to hold public office. According to findings by Lawless and Fox (2004), "...[M]en are roughly two thirds more likely than women to assess themselves as 'qualified' or 'very qualified' to run for office. Women...are twice as likely as men to rate themselves 'not at all qualified.'" Women, generally, do not see themselves as qualified to run for office significantly more frequently than men. This is likely due to a reduction in internal political efficacy due to the increased phenomena of body surveillance and body shame they experience. If women have reduced internal political efficacy, they are less likely to see themselves as qualified political candidates and are less likely to participate in the political process as a candidate.

Research by Atkeson and Carrillo (2007) indicated that descriptive representation improves external political efficacy rates for both males and females. In essence, an elected body that is demographically similar to the population it represents will result in increased feelings of government responsiveness to individual concerns. In the democratic republic political system, high external political efficacy rates are incredibly important, as they determine the validity of the governmental institution, as democratic governmental bodies derive their authority from the people they serve.

With this in consideration, if fewer women run for office due to feelings of inadequacy, stemming from reduced internal political efficacy as a result of the phenomenon of self-

objectification, reaching parity within a governmental institution will not be possible in the near future. Because women represent roughly half of the population, descriptive representation would call for a similar ratio in governmental institutions, but it is substantially less in American politics today. This is concerning, as reduced internal political efficacy rates among women discourage their participation in politics, and their reduced participation lowers political efficacy rates among both males and females. For this reason, the result of the internalization of objectification is harmful to the function of society as a whole, as it damages the validity of the governing body by reducing external political efficacy rates across the population.

Beyond the consequence of reducing governmental validity through a reduction in external political efficacy as it pertains to a failure to achieve descriptive representation, a shortage of women running for office additionally damages other young women's perceptions of their ability to run for public positions. Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006) determined that, through the role model effect, an increase of females running for office positively affects young women's personal perceptions of political adequacy through the encouragement of discussions regarding female political involvement in the home. These discussions alter the socialization patterns of girls and young women and encourage a positive mindset regarding the capability of female leadership in politics, as well as their own competency to pursue a career in politics. Because the phenomenon of self-objectification reduces feelings of political adequacy more substantially among females than males, resulting in fewer women pursuing the attainment of public office, these discussions are not occurring within the family unit at as great of frequency as they would if more women were running for public office. This is problematic, as less women running for elected positions reduces the frequency of conversations regarding female capability in the political realm within

family unit, which, in turn, further limits female political involvement by failing to instill feelings of political adequacy within potential future female political leaders.

Conclusion

The results of this study establish the negative relationship between the phenomenon of self-objectification and political efficacy. These findings indicate that individuals who experience the effects of self-objectification, namely heightened body surveillance and body shame, have reduced internal political efficacy rates, resulting in feelings of political inadequacy. Self-objectification affects women more significantly than men, and the negative impact of self-objectification on internal political efficacy has more damaging effects on feelings of political adequacy in women than in men. The variable of body shame further corresponds to reduced external political efficacy, negatively affecting feelings of importance in the eyes of governmental institutions, especially among women, which is damaging to the validity of governing bodies.

Overall, women experience self-objectification and the negative effects thereof at higher rates than men, resulting in less women believing they are qualified to run for and hold public office. The implications of fewer females running for office has negative consequences for the role model effect for girls and young women, resulting in fewer conversations within the family unit regarding women's capability as political leaders, negatively impacting the perceptions of young women's personal views regarding their own leadership capabilities. Further, fewer women running for public offices hinders efforts toward establishing gender parity in political leadership and reinforces the unrepresentative demographic nature of current political leadership in America. Governing bodies that are demographically similar to the public they represent, also referred to as descriptive representation, result in higher external political efficacy rates among the electorate

than their unrepresentative counterparts. As the external political efficacy rates of an electorate are indicative of the validity of a governmental institution, this adds to the problematic nature of self-objectification and the negative implications associated with it. Overall, the negative consequences of the phenomenon of self-objectification are more damaging than indicated by previous research, as its impact negatively affects the function of democracy as a whole, not just the individuals directly affected by the phenomenon.

With this in consideration, efforts to reduce the commodification and objectification of the human body, particularly the female body, should be made, as it is damaging to the validity of governmental institutions by negatively affecting feelings of political adequacy, predominantly among women, which results in fewer women running for and holding public office. Without efforts to reduce the phenomenon of self-objectification and improve feelings of political adequacy among women, it will not be possible to achieve gender parity in the political realm, resulting in the continuation of gender inequality in society and reduced democratic governmental validity.

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Appendix

Materials Presented to Participants

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study on the relationship between self-objectification and political efficacy. This information, when collected, will contribute to a greater understanding of the worth men and women assign to their role in society and may provide insight as to why a greater percentage of men than women serve as elected officials.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question. Clicking on the link below implies that you have been presented with information about this study and consent to take part in the research.

The answers you provide will be recorded anonymously and kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties. There are no foreseeable risks to you as a participant in this project. Your participation is extremely valued, and you will be compensated \$.25 for your completion of the survey.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact us at (319) 273-6047 or Christopher.Larimer@uni.edu. If we are not available when you call, please leave a message, and your call will be returned as soon as possible. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research project, please contact the University of Northern Iowa Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at (319) 273-6148 or by e-mail at osp@uni.edu.

Thank you for your help. We appreciate your cooperation.

Survey Questions

1. How old are you?

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65 or older

2. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other (If comfortable, please specify):

3. What is your highest level of education?

High school diploma

Associate's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Master's or Advanced Degree

Doctorate

4. What is your approximate average annual income?

Less than \$40,000

\$40,000 to \$80,000

\$80,000 to \$120,000

Greater than \$120,000

5. Have you ever served in government, whether as an elected official, an appointed position, or as support staff?

Yes

No

5b. If yes, in what capacity? _____

5c. If yes, what was your experience like on a scale of 1-7, with 1 being very positive and 7 being very negative? _____

6. Do you know anyone, whether a family member or close friend, who have ever served in government, whether as an elected official, an appointed position, or as support staff?

Yes

No

6a. If yes, in what capacity? _____

7. Have you ever contacted an elected official (e.g. mail, email, phone call, etc.)?

Yes

No

8. Are you a:

Registered Democrat

Registered Republican

No Party

Not Registered

Other

9. In terms of political views, do you consider yourself liberal, conservative, or somewhere in between?

Liberal

Moderate leaning liberal

Moderate

Moderate leaning conservative

Conservative

10. How often do you...?

-compare how you look with other people, including celebrities?

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

-think about your appearance during the day?

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

-worry about whether the clothes you wear make you look good?

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

-worry about how you look to other people?

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

11. How unhappy would you be...

-if you did not look as good as you feel you could?

Extremely unhappy

Very Unhappy

Moderately Unhappy

Not Unhappy

-if you did not make an effort to look your best?

Extremely unhappy

Very Unhappy

Moderately Unhappy

Not Unhappy

-if people knew how much you weigh?

Extremely unhappy

Very Unhappy

Moderately Unhappy

Not Unhappy

-if you were not the size you feel you should be?

Extremely unhappy

Very Unhappy

Moderately Unhappy

Not Unhappy

12. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

-"Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on."

Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Disagree

-"Public officials don't care much what people like me think."

Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Disagree

-“People like me don't have any say about what the government does.”

Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Disagree

Questions Measuring Body Surveillance

-How often do you compare how you look with other people, including celebrities?

(compare_others)

-How often do you think about your appearance during the day? (think_appearance)

-How often do you worry about whether the clothes you wear make you look good?

(worry_clothes)

-How often do you worry about how you look to other people? (worry_others)

Questions Measuring Body Shame

-How unhappy would you be if you did not look as good as you feel you could? (look_good)

-How unhappy would you be if you did not make an effort to look your best? (make_effort)

-How unhappy would you be if people knew how much you weigh? (knew_weight)

-How unhappy would you be if you were not the size you feel you should be? (not_size)

Participant Demographics

	Frequency	Percentage
GENDER		
Female	329	34.7
Male	617	65.1
Other	2	.2
 AGE		
18-24	330	34.8
25-34	403	42.5
35-44	131	13.8
45-54	48	5.1
55-64	30	3.2
65 or older	4	.4
 HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION		
High School Diploma	343	36.2
Associate's Degree	131	13.8
Bachelor's Degree	364	38.4
Master's or Advanced Degree	90	9.5
Doctorate	17	1.8
 AVERAGE ANNUAL INCOME		
Less than \$40,000	604	63.7
\$40,000 to \$80,000	263	27.7
\$80,000 to \$120,000	54	5.7
Greater than \$120,000	25	2.6

This Study by: Victoria Hurst

Entitled: The Impact of Self-Objectification on Political Efficacy:
Does Self Image Affect Feelings of Political Adequacy?

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the Designation
University Honors with Distinction.

12-22-2014

Date

Dr. Chris Larimer, Honors Thesis Advisor

12/22/14

Date

Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program