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Self-Objectification, Self-Valuation, and Bodily Self-Concept: An Examination of Women's Experiences in a Post-Feminist Society

Madeleine Holmes

Otterbein University, Madeleine_holmes@hotmail.com

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SELF-OBJECTIFICATION, SELF-VALUATION, AND PHYSICAL SELF-CONCEPT: A
QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF WOMEN'S BODILY EXPERIENCES IN POST-FEMINIST
SOCIETY

Otterbein University
Department of Psychology and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
Westerville, Ohio 43081
Madeleine Holmes

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
graduation with Honors

Dr. Michele Acker
Project Advisor

Advisor's Signature

Dr. Tammy Birk
Second Reader

Second Reader's Signature

Louise Captein
Honors Representative

Honors Rep's Signature

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Abstract

Objectification is a central concept in feminist theories surrounding the oppression of women. When objectification occurs, a woman is perceived and treated as a body or a collection of body parts for others to evaluate or utilize for their own pleasure (Bartky, 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1998). Research has shown that women socialized in patriarchal cultures internalize their objectification with negative psychological consequences (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson, et al., 1998). This study explored the subjective experiences of women in the context of a culture that generally perpetuates a post-feminist sensibility. Six women participated in semi-structured interviews with questions regarding self-objectification, physical activity, self-valuation, self-efficacy and the experience of having a female gendered body.

Results demonstrated that the women in the sample experienced self-objectification and an awareness of being observed, strove for physical attractiveness and had conflicting values regarding the function and appearance of their bodies. Evidence of self-objectification also manifested as a lack of or complication of self-efficacy in terms of physical activity and how they were evaluated within a specific activities subculture. The participants also displayed mental processes of positive and negative self-talk similar to that of individuals with anxiety disorders. These systems of positive and negative self-talk were generally active in during the women's self-evaluation of their appearances.

The narratives provided in this study demonstrate the pervasiveness of objectification, and the negative effects as documented by previous studies, and provides support for theories regarding the status of women's subjectivity within an oppressive culture.

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Self-Objectification, Self-Valuation, and Physical Self-Concept: A Qualitative Examination
of Women's Bodily Experiences In Post-Feminist Society

In patriarchal western societies, power and gender are intertwined in complex, subtle processes. The association of masculinity with dominance and power is accompanied by the systematic oppression and objectification, or 'othering' of that which is female and feminine (de Beauvoir, 1952; Einspahr, 2010; Rubin, 1975). Thus it is impossible to understand the lived experiences of women without considering how gender exists in particular contexts, and how the experience of having a gender is shaped by an individual's culture and environment. Many gendered experiences are so pervasive that they go largely unexamined by the larger society. "A culture has a global character; hence, the limits of my culture are the limits of my world. The subordination of women, then, because it is so pervasive a feature of my culture, will (if uncontested) appear to be natural—and because it is natural, unalterable" (Bartky, 1990; 2008, p. 54).

Thus, in these cultures, women have distinct experiences as a result of their gender and subordinated status. Many of these experiences are connected to simply having a body that is feminized or assigned a feminine gender. That is, the reality of having a body to which others assign a feminine gender constructs social and contextual experiences that many women will have over the course of their lives (Hill & Fischer, 2008). One such experience is a denial of women's subjectivity and personhood (Bartky, 1990; 2008; de Beauvoir, 1952; Bordo, 1993).

Post-feminism informs women of their supposed subjectivity and personhood while neglecting to address the oppression and objectification many women still

experience. So women are left in conflict and ambiguity—striving for full human subjectivity under the guise of an equal society while being reduced to one-dimensional objects largely evaluated on the basis of their external appearances. “A woman is neither the product of her circumstances (a victim) nor the producer of her world (a powerful female), but rather she is both” (Dunn, 1998).

After feminist gains in the 1970's and 80's, postfeminist thought began to emerge as a backlash to the dramatic shifts in western politics and societal norms. A new understanding of feminism had emerged—one that assumed most important or necessary work to achieve institutional, societal change has been completed. Now, according to post-feminist sensibility, each woman only has to draw on the available resources and her own strength and determination to succeed. (Gill, 2007). In post-feminist society, the concept of collective action is replaced by the concept of individual problem solving, though many women still face daily instances of oppression and discrimination.

Western media, and the realities of the American economy, communicate a message of independence and subjectivity to women—that they can and should work, that they can be bosses and managers, that higher education is feasible—and popular culture manufactures a picture of equality, or at least one that suggests equality is within reach. This picture of equality fails to address the oppressive systems, biases, and stereotypes that still exist for women—and it also fails dramatically in its portrayal of intersectional oppression—women of color, disabled women, queer women, and

women with low socioeconomic status suffer in different ways than privileged white women.

Subjectivity can be understood as the inverse to objectification. A subjective being is one that has a sense of self, a sense of humanity, and a sense of power and agency. A subject has a sense of bodily self, or a physical self-concept, but a subject's bodily self does not comprise her entire sense of self or self-worth. Furthermore, a subject's bodily self contributes to her senses of agency and autonomy, and efficacy. Subjectivity is largely a philosophical concept, but psychological theories of wellbeing generally emphasize autonomy and environmental mastery as critical for positive mental health and development throughout the human lifespan (Ryff, 1995). Ryff defined environmental mastery as having a sense of control over one's environment, and a sense of competence in regards to the creation and management of contexts and external situations. High autonomy was characterized by feelings of self-determination and independence and by a tendency to evaluate one's self by one's own standards (Ryff, 1995).

Objectification

In contraposition, we have the experience of being objectified, of being outside the self. Objectification is a central concept in feminist theories surrounding the oppression of women. When objectification occurs, a woman is perceived and treated as a body or a collection of body parts for others (especially men) to evaluate or utilize for their own pleasure. According to Bartky (1990), sexual objectification occurs when a woman's body, body parts, or sexuality are seen as capable of representing her full personhood. In effect, she is no longer a full, subjective, complex being, but an object

for the use and evaluation of others. A person cannot be understood as fully human if they are perceived as fragmented, and an objectified woman's identity becomes inseparable from her appearance. Sexual objectification extends beyond mere sexual situations and into other areas of women's lives (Bartky, 1990).

Production of sexualizing and objectifying images is constant and virtually unavoidable for a Western woman who spends any time in public space or consumes mainstream media (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Gill, 2006). Advertisements often objectify women by portraying them as solely body parts, or as replacements for actual objects. Showing women's body parts as opposed to the whole objectifies women by suggesting that a woman's body parts are capable of representing her, and by omitting her face, arguably the most subjective part of the human body as it is the source of verbal communication, and also the eyes, which humans attend to when identifying emotion (Killing Us Softly, 2010). The effects of depicting women as fragmented body parts can be shown in women's self concepts—women are more likely to have physical self-concepts comprised of multiple body parts than men, who tend to conceptualize their bodies as unified wholes (Halliwel & Dittmar, 2003). Women are also depicted in advertisements as sexually available for the consumer and the male gaze, and media plays a large role in women's internalization of western standards of attractiveness by perpetuating enhanced, altered, and generally unattainable images of beauty (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012). Depictions of feminine sexuality are especially exemplary of post-feminist failings. Women are now left in the cross section of sexual exploitation and sexual empowerment, portrayed as agentic sexual subjects who seek

and enjoy sex on their own terms, and even derive power from their sexuality. Yet overt sexuality is also wielded as a tool to engage in victim blaming in cases of sexual assault, and many depictions of female sexuality are still derivative of male fantasies (Gill, 2006).

For many women, the male gaze, and unwanted public attention is a frequently experienced form of sexual objectification (Hill & Fischer, 2008). The gaze of the other serves to draw women's attention to their bodies, specifically to the parts of their bodies that are sexualized by the media and society. Women are significantly more aware of being observed when inhabiting public space than men are, and even mere anticipation of the male gaze is linked to higher levels of appearance anxiety and body monitoring (Hill & Fischer, 2008; Calogero, 2004). Socialized to expect the constant observation and evaluation of others, women learn to evaluate themselves from the perspective of the observer (Bartky, 1990; 2008).

It must always be noted that not all women experience oppression or objectification in the same way. However, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) proposed that having a perceivably female-sexed or gendered body causes one to be particularly vulnerable to objectification.

Self-objectification

Objectification theory explores the experience of having a female-gendered body in a sociocultural context and attempts to identify the risk factors associated with having an objectified body. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) propose that women who are socialized in a patriarchal society internalize their own objectification and begin to deny themselves subjectivity and develop self-concepts in which they are bodies that exist for others (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997). Essentially, they proposed that being regularly

evaluated and observed in the capacity of an object could lead to an internalization of the objectifying external perspective, an effect which they coined self-objectification. The level of exposure to sexually objectifying media content is correlated with the degree to which women self-objectify, and also to the degree they internalize societally established standards of attractiveness (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012).

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) proposed that self-objectification fosters extreme self-consciousness and habitual body monitoring and that habitual body monitoring can interrupt streams of consciousness or focus. Habitual body monitoring is a form self-evaluation that consists of constant assessment and monitoring of the appearance of one's body. Previous studies have provided support for Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) claims that self-objectification leads to the development of habitual body monitoring in women (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998), and that habitual body monitoring disrupts women's abilities to perform cognitive tasks by draining attentional and mental resources (Fredrickson et. al., 1998).

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) also identified other negative side effects of self-objectification such as increased shame and anxiety in regards to appearance, a decrease or interruption of peak motivational states, and decreased awareness of internal bodily states. Subsequent research has identified links between self-objectification and negative mental and emotional consequences. Tiggemann and Williams (2011) found that self-objectification led to self-surveillance, which then led to body shame and appearance anxiety. Body shame and appearance anxiety then led to a lack of internal awareness and flow. Disordered eating was also highly correlated with

self-objectification, self-surveillance, and low internal awareness (Tiggeman & Williams, 2011). Similarly, Fredrickson et al. (1998) found that women in a state of self-objectification were more likely to engage in restrained eating habits due to increased feelings of body shame.

Breines, Crocker, and Garcia (2008) studied how self-objectification affected women's sense of well-being and daily lives. In a state of self-objectification, women are more likely to engage in ego involvement, during which they are absorbed with bolstering their self-worth or self-image. As self-objectification emphasizes the value placed on women's appearance, women may seek to bolster their self-worth by increasing their perceived attractiveness (Breines, Crocker, & Garcia, 2008).

Consequently, women who are conventionally attractive or embody idealized conceptions of beauty may experience self-objectification as positive in some regard (Breines, Crocker & Garcia, 2008). Still, this momentary boost in positive affect does not negate numerous negative effects associated with self-objectification, as they found it was also linked to decreased well-being as defined by expression of one's true self, feelings of vitality, engagement in the present, and presence of positive affect (Breines, Crocker, & Garcia, 2008).

The body can be understood as oriented in an environment, and it was this relation between the subject (the body) and the world with which Iris Marion Young was concerned in her essay on female body comportment (1980). Young theorized that women conceive of their bodies as things as opposed to capacities. While a subject conceives of her environment as open to her mastery and malleable to her will and

intentions, an objectified individual conceives of herself as the other in an environment of subjects with a potential mastery over her, the object.

It is a widely accepted fact that most women have less muscle mass, gain muscle at lower rates, and are generally weaker than most men. While this may be a biological reality to an extent, the frailty and weakness of women is not often contested or challenged, even among feminist circles. In fact, feminist efforts concerning the liberation of women and feminine people have tended to focus on the psychological and intellectual equality of women and have left any physical liberation out of their activism, politics, or theories (Gill, 2006).

In consideration of the physical aspect of gender oppression, one can easily draw conclusions between feminine passivity and a cultivation of weakness, as well as masculine dominance and a cultivation of strength. Some feminist theorists have called for the full empowerment of women in mind and body, and if we operate under the assumption that a full human being has integrated and cooperative physical and intellectual selves—then the empowerment of women in both these aspects is not only important, but also necessary to effectively diminish or abolish gender oppression (Roth & Basow, 2004). The benefit of physical empowerment to women is not only demonstrated in theory—studies show that women who participate in physical activities experiences higher levels of self-efficacy and confidence (Roth & Basow, 2004).

Feminine beauty ideals not only emphasize thinness and petite body size, but also weakness. Heteronormative standards of beauty assume that the feminine is opposite to the masculine and thus the ideal feminine woman is weaker than the ideal

masculine, strong, dominant man. The very existence of male dominance is rationalized by the assertion that men are naturally stronger and more physically powerful. Dworkin (2001) found that many women weightlifters set limits in their own muscle gain so they would not become too large and thus unattractive. Although demonstrating muscle mass and strength was essential to their career, these women still limited themselves to adhere to conventional beauty standards.

Young considered the socio-cultural factors that affect the way women occupy and move through physical space. Women, Young observed, have different styles of body movement and tend to occupy space in a different way than men. For example the term "throwing like a girl" typically refers to a style of throwing in which the whole body is not engaged. Rather, the body is relatively immobile, only the arm is in motion. A more effective way of throwing a ball involves the entire body. This hesitation to engage the entire body in movement is reflected in other ways that women move and take up space (Young, 1980).

Young's theory that the internalization of objectifying sociocultural messages affects the way women and girls inhabit their physical bodies and their senses of bodily awareness shares many theoretical elements with objectification theory. Fredrickson and Harrison (2005) attempted to test Young's (1980) theory of feminine body comportment in conjunction with self-objectification. Among adolescent girls, they found that higher rates of self-objectification predicted poorer motor performance, as measured by throwing a ball. Gender differences in spatial awareness and 3D rotation skills tend to emerge with age from elementary school, which could mean that the way

women occupy space changes as they become more gendered (Rivers & Barnett, 2011; Young, 1980).

Beyond physical abilities, there is also the concept of body awareness. Previous studies have identified agency and body ownership as important factors in understanding and having a sense of bodily self (Tsakaris, Prabhu & Haggard, 2006). Proprioception is a psychological concept that encompasses the feeling of ownership an individual has for their body. The Rubber Hand Illusion (RHI) is a technique used to measure the proprioceptive sense of one's body by using visual and tactile stimulation to create an illusion that a rubber hand is one's own. The participant's own hand is hidden from sight while the rubber and real hands are simultaneously touched or brushed in identical ways. The effectiveness of the illusion can be measured by how much the participants proprioceptive sense of their own hand drifts towards the rubber hand (Botnivick & Cohen, 1998). One study of the RHI demonstrated that active movement creates a sense of bodily coherence, while passive movement results in a fragmented bodily concept that is associated with individual body parts rather than the whole (Tsakiris, Prabhu & Haggard, 2006). Elaborating on this finding, a body that engages in self-generated movement and action is experienced with a greater sense of ownership and coherence or wholeness than a body that engages passively with the surrounding environment. Bodily self-concepts are constructed with both sensory and motor sensation and awareness. Perceiving one's own body with a conceptual emphasis on movement and function versus a conceptual emphasis on external evaluation, appearance, and passivity, could affect the amount of ownership one feels for one's

body. Essentially, humans tend to experience a stronger sense of ownership over their own bodies when it is engaged in purposeful motion as opposed to passive movement or no movement at all.

Women with eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia tend to have a perception of their bodies as larger than they are in reality, and individuals with these perceptual judgment errors also tend to be more susceptible to the Rubber Hand Illusion (Mussap & Salton, 2006). During the RHI, visual and tactile sensory information alters the individual's previously established perception of their body. So individuals with unstable body image, like those with distorted perceptions of their size, are more susceptible to the illusion because their body image is less likely to hold up against conflicting sensory information. Mussap and Salton (2006) also found that the link between distorted body image and susceptibility to the RHI was mediated by the individual's level of internalization, which refers to the degree to which an individual bases their evaluation of their own appearance on sociocultural standards of attractiveness, and which is also an integral factor in the process of self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Self-objectification is also associated with lower levels of interoceptive awareness, a psychological concept that encompasses internal bodily awareness and ability to identify emotional states (Ainley & Tsakiris, 2013). Having and identifying internal states is a key factor in the experience of a subjective being—over evaluation of one's external appearance detracts from one's ability to be subjective. Self-

objectification not only effects the way women perceive themselves as subjects, but their ability to have the experiences and emotions of a subject.

These studies surrounding proprioception and interoception have shown that bodily self-concept can be manipulated. Thus it is reasonable to believe that there are other experiences that could affect or change how people conceive of their bodily selves and experience bodily ownership. Extending this idea further, it is possible that the socialization of women in physically oppressive sociocultural environments could change not only the how women will engage in physical use of their bodies, but also aspects of their physical self-concept such as bodily ownership.

As Roth and Basow (2004) argued in their essay about physical liberation, physical self-concept is important to the formation of an integrated self-concept. Women can't be full subjects with unstable bodily self-concepts or with a lack of agency and bodily ownership—both of which are affected by engagement in physical movement and internalization of sociocultural standards of beauty. Women who self-objectify tend to perceive themselves as objects that exist for the sexual pleasure and evaluation of others. As shown in studies about proprioception, bodies in motion tend to be experienced with more agency and ownership. Thus, women who engage in active movement or active use of their bodies may benefit from increased senses of bodily ownership and agency. Yet, as discussed in Young's (1980) essay, objectified women often feel uncomfortable taking up space or engaging in physical activity, and feminine beauty standards tend to emphasize passivity and weakness (Roth & Basow, 2004).

Young (1980) theorized that women also do not view themselves as capable of achieving certain physical tasks, especially those that require strength, like lifting or carrying heavy items. This lack of physical self-efficacy in regards to physical tasks is referred to as inhibited intentionality, which can be understood as a tendency to simultaneously attempt to achieve a task, while doubting one's own capability. As a result of women's inhibited intentionality, women fail to engage their bodies correctly when attempting to execute these tasks. Conversely, uninhibited intentionality occurs when a goal or intention is concurrently unified with action. "We feel as though we must have our attention directed upon our body to make sure it is doing what we wish it to do, rather than paying attention to what we want to do through our bodies" (Young, 1980). That is, Young believed that women do not trust their bodies to perform physical tasks; rather they must consciously attend to the task and hope that their bodies cooperate. This reflects a lack of physical self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's own ability to attain goals or create certain outcomes (Bandura, 1997). One study found that female college students tend to be less physically active than male college students, and males tend to spend more minutes engaging in vigorous activity than women do when physical activity does occur. Additionally, women were more motivated to exercise by weight management and appearance than men who were generally motivated by strength, endurance and other performance related reasons. Men also displayed higher levels of physical activity self-efficacy than the women. Essentially, men felt more confident in their ability to perform

physical activities under challenging conditions and to make time for physical activity despite temporal obstacles (Pauline, 2013).

Thus we see that western patriarchal culture affects women in distinct ways, and that the impact of self-objectification, and other mechanisms of psychological and physical oppression are far reaching. Although theorists have discussed these issues and empirical studies have documented them, there is little work that looks at these experiences in a subjective way from the perspectives of the women. The very nature of traditional psychological research is objectifying in that it reduces lived experiences to quantitative data. A feminist approach to psychological research of women and gender oppression necessitates the evaluation of subjective narratives and women's perspectives.

Current Study

This study aimed to focus on the lived experiences of young Western women, specifically in regards to self-objectification, physical activity, and the experience of having a femininely gendered body. While Iris Young made thoughtfully considered observations about feminine body comportment, and several studies have investigated self-objectification among women, few studies have asked women to speak freely about their experience of their body in movement and in space. The study also examines the individual woman's experience of her body in different contexts and situations.

Considering the studies and theories reviewed thus far, I hypothesized that the women in this study would experience self-objectification and awareness of being observed, which would negatively influence their perspective of themselves as subjects, their senses of agency, bodily autonomy and ownership, and their senses of mastery

over their environments. I thought that the women would be likely to strive for perceived physical attractiveness, and that feeling unattractive would have a significant effect on their senses of self. Evidence of self-objectification was also expected to manifest as a lack of or complication of self-efficacy in terms of physical activity. I expected the women to express conflicting feelings and thoughts about the worth and value of their bodies in general due to the pervasive post-feminist cultural attitudes. Physical activity levels were expected to be a factor in the women's bodily experiences as well. The research questions were intentionally open-ended to allow for an exploration and emergence of concepts or experiences not accounted for in the background research.

Although it was expected that women would have different experiences as a result of their varied activities and other factors, there was also an expectation that they would have some shared experiences based on their shared status as a subordinated group. Of course some shared experiences would also result from shared racial, economic, and class statuses—for instance their shared access to higher education.

Method

Participants

Six women recruited from a Midwestern liberal arts school, ranging in age from 20 to 22 years, participated in the study. The women were from different majors with Theatre, Dance, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Athletic Training and Communications represented. In terms of activity level, two of the participants were dancers who performed frequently, two were active members of sports teams, one engaged in regular physical activity, and the last engaged in little physical activity. These

students were selected to achieve a varied representation of activities and perspectives in relation to the physical body.

Measures

In order to place the interviews in the context of previous work on self-objectification, three surveys were administered to measure each participant's levels of self-objectification and body consciousness. The surveys are included in Appendix B. The Self-Objectification Questionnaire (SOQ; Noll & Fredrickson 1998), asks respondents to rank 10 bodily characteristics pertaining to physical appearance or physical competence on a 0 to 9 Likert scale, with higher numbers representing more impact. This is an example of the typical question: "When considering your physical self-concept what rank do you assign to physical coordination?"

The Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS; McKinley and Hyde, 1996) was developed to assess the degree to which individuals view their bodies as an external observer, experience feelings of body shame, and possess beliefs about whether or not they have control over their bodies. Participants responded to a set of 24 items on a 7-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "1-strongly disagree" to "7-strongly agree". Higher scores represent more objectification. For example, an item on this scale is "I rarely think about how I look".

The Scale of Body Connection (SBC) designed by Price and Thompson (2007), measures the level of bodily disconnect and awareness an individual experiences. Participants respond to a set of 20 items on a 5-point Likert scale regarding awareness of bodily sensation and engagement, ranging from "0-not at all" to "4-all of the time".

An example item would be: "If there is tension on my body, I am aware of the tension."

On this scale, a *lower* score reflects a greater sense of disconnect from the body.

The participants also participated in a semi-structured interview developed specifically for the study to further explore the subjective experiences of having a female gendered body and to understand how individual women conceptualize their bodily selves in relation to external observers' perspectives. Questions were developed from the literature discussed in the introduction, focusing on emergent themes and considering how and where these themes may have manifested in women's experiences. Participants were asked questions regarding the kinds of physical activities they participated in and how they felt about their bodies during those activities and other times. Participants were also asked questions about their perceived capabilities, their motivations and how or why they valued their bodies. Participants were asked to consider how they felt in public spaces and whether they felt conscious of being watched or evaluated. It was structured to allow for open discussion and participants were invited to speak about any issues related to the interview content, regardless of what they had been specifically asked to discuss. Some examples of interview questions are below; the complete set of interview questions is in Appendix C.

- When you (exercise/dance/engage in hobby) do you think about how you look/do you think about people watching you?
- Is being physically strong important to you? Why or why not? Do you feel that you have control over your level of physical strength?
- Describe what physical confidence means to you. Does your physical confidence remain relatively stable day to day?

Procedure

IRB approval was obtained before beginning research, and is included in Appendix A. Participants were recruited by word of mouth, and interviews were conducted in university psychology research labs. Before beginning interviews, participants gave full, informed consent to the researcher. Participants were given the surveys, and then began the interview. Although participation was voluntary, participants were given \$25 Visa gift cards as compensation for their time. All interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and were audio recorded and then transcribed by an external transcription service company. Transcripts were then anonymized and the names of the participants were changed. In total, the transcripts were 230 pages. Independent coders then analyzed the transcripts for important themes and trends, and the interview transcripts were organized in terms of the relevant themes.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 displays the total scores for each of the women on the three objectification scales. These are listed in Table 1. There was a range of scores, with a median score for the OBCS of 96; and a median score of 53.5 for the SBC.

Participant	OBCS	SBC	SOQ	Activity Level
Catherine	98	49	-9.00	High
Brittney	103	63	-5.00	High
Jordan	85	66	-17.00	Medium
Tara	116	41	11.00	Low
Phoebe	94	53	-13.00	High
Marta	91	54	-15.00	High

Based on the coder's examination of the narratives four major themes emerged from the interviews: objectification and awareness of observation, self-efficacy, self-valuation of the body, and development of confidence and self-esteem.

Objectification and Awareness of Observation

Awareness and maintenance of attractiveness

Objectification theory proposes that women may seek to enhance their level of physical attractiveness to access the rewards and resources afforded to sexually attractive women in a patriarchal society (Breines, Crocker & Garcia, 2008; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Self-objectification is not a conscious mechanism, rather it occurs through a process of internalization. Thus women who seek to increase their level of

attractiveness due to this implicit influence will likely rationalize their efforts as the result of other motives.

The women in this study generally expressed some comfort with adhering to less rigorous standards of attractiveness—for example, many of them said they had no issues entering public spaces without makeup or in what they perceived as less typically attractive clothing like sweatpants, pajamas or athletic clothing—though most of the participants still engaged in grooming or fitness behaviors directed at increasing their attractiveness. It is important to note that all the women in this study fulfilled to some extent white European standards of attractiveness, which was likely a factor in their response to objectification and their feelings about their appearance in general. While the women did not express a strong desire to increase their physical attractiveness, they did seem to have anxiety surrounding the possibility of becoming *less* attractive, or of being perceived as unattractive by others, which suggests that they were on some level aware of the potential negative consequences they might experience should they fail to maintain their current statuses.

Catherine, an athlete on a competitive sports team, experienced anxiety about others' perceptions of her attractiveness; "I always find myself worrying about how people look at me. If they think I'm pretty or have a good body, or just stupid stuff, but it's just something that I worry about. I can't really help it." She also felt motivated to increase her physical attractiveness when she saw images of conventionally attractive women. "Just looking at pictures [on Pinterest], it's like 'Dang, I want to look like that.' So I just go to the gym or do a workout at home." Her experience is an illustration of

other research that found consumption of sexually objectifying media is correlated with the rate of self-objectification, and appearance anxiety (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012).

Brittney, a dancer, worried about maintaining her thin body type, and her resulting need to monitor her weight. "I've caught myself doing this whenever I stand on a scale, I am really conscious of the numbers. Even if it's like a slight fluctuation, I get panicky about it and have to talk myself into being calm because my weight fluctuates dramatically. I mean not like you wouldn't, people wouldn't notice looking at me, but it will be like anywhere from 110 to 120, and I like being closer to 110 even though my healthy weight would be 115/120 with more to spare." While Brittney is clearly aware that small fluctuations in weight do not affect her appearance, she feels a lot of anxiety about the possibility of weight gain and she feels compelled to maintain a lower weight than necessary. This also exemplifies research studies that find women exercise not for strength, but for weight control (e.g., Pauline, 2013).

Other participants were not concerned about their weight or bodily appearance, but instead their presentation in regards to the clothes and makeup they were wearing. "I feel better about myself when I'm in nicer clothes and have makeup on and have my hair done versus when I'm just in sweatpants and...I just don't feel that good about myself when I'm wearing sweatpants and my hair tied up and things like that" (Jordan).

This question of awareness of attractiveness was a unique factor for the dancers, as their level of physical attractiveness, or their adherence to a specific set of physical criteria, actually has a very direct impact on their economic and professional status.

Both the dancers were very aware of this reality, in part because their professors had explicitly vocalized it on several occasions.

Both the dancers were acutely aware of how their body's appearances affected their marketability. They felt particularly pressured to maintain the physical features that increased their desirability in the industry, and viewed certain features or characteristics as professional advantages. For Brittney, her small size was a distinguishing feature that had been noted by faculty in the department and others throughout her life. "If you're little... I've always had that weird thing since I'm naturally tiny, I now feel like people comment on that a lot. A lot of people do, 'Oh you're so small' or 'Oh, you're so little' or 'I can't believe how tiny you are'. This year I felt a lot of pressure to remain that. Oh, that's an asset of mine that I'm so tiny naturally, that I'm so small." Brittney received positive feedback from departmental faculty in her performance programs that reinforced her size as an asset to her in the industry, for the roles she could play, and ease with which she could be lifted by other dancers.

Both the dancers described periods of time throughout college when they had adopted disordered eating habits. They both said they had trouble finding time to eat during busy days or during a show when they were rehearsing often. "My schedule was all physical classes, and I just didn't have time to eat enough. I wasn't eating enough, it wasn't an intentional thing. It was an accident" (Brittney). While both participants said these periods of disordered eating were not intentional, and simply a result of busy schedules, they both placed a great deal of importance on thinness. It is likely that these periods of disordered eating somewhat reflected their desires to maintain their thin

body types, not solely hectic schedules (e.g., Fredrickson et al. 1998; Tiggeman & Williams, 2011).

Phoebe, also a dancer, was deeply concerned about her weight and the size of her body. Having studied ballet since a very young age, she had spent a large majority of her life as part of a culture that emphasized extreme control and perfection in technique and appearance. During adolescence, she restricted her eating and spent long hours practicing, trying to perfect her dancing style and achieve the ideal body type. She felt her legs in particular were too large, and still feels insecurity surrounding the size of her legs. Though she adopted healthier eating habits in high school, her anxiety regarding her size, food, and appearance are still prevalent. "With this show, specifically, I've spent a lot of time looking at the mirror making sure my costume is together, this and that. It's definitely body check every day...Definitely, I'm spending a lot more time thinking about my body that I normally do just because I'm in that situation a lot more. Really, when I'm not in front of a mirror, I'm not really thinking about it, unless I have eaten something really bad like a giant cake and I'm like 'Oh god, I feel so horrible about myself'." Fredrickson et al.'s (1998) study found that women who tried bathing suits on in a mirror (thereby triggering a state of self-objectification) were more likely to engage in restrained eating. The fact that the performers were conscious of the critical observation of teachers and peers consistently in their classes and performances likely also played a factor in their restrained eating habits, as did the amount of time they spent looking at themselves in mirrors during dance class and before shows.

The emergence of negative feelings and thoughts about their physical appearance having eaten what they considered to be a fattening or unhealthy meal was not unique to the performers. Nearly every participant identified this as the time they felt the worst about their bodies, most likely because consuming “unhealthy” food caused their anxiety about weight gain—and therefore decreased attractiveness—to increase. Weight gain in particular was a significant worry for the participants, as feminine beauty standards emphasize smallness and the occupation of less space. A study by Ingrid Steenhuis (2008) found that within a sample of college aged women, a significant majority felt mild or strong feelings of guilt after eating throughout the day. Jean Kilbourne discusses this love-hate-guilt relationship with food as perpetuated in the media in her film *Killing us Softly 4* (2010).

Awareness of observation

While both the sports players and the dancers felt that their performances or games were not affected by the observation of others, all participants expressed a notable awareness of the being watched and evaluated at other times as well.

Marta (another competitive athlete) felt that she was aware of people watching her often, “I’m actually probably pretty aware. I feel like I’m aware a lot, maybe more than I should be.” She felt she was often aware of observation during parties, walking around her college campus or other settings when surrounded by her peers. “Like are people looking at your hair? I don’t know. Let’s say I was dressed, like I put effort into my appearance that day, what are people thinking of it? It honestly could be like a split second thought.”

Tara, who was the least active participant and also demonstrated the highest scores on the objectification measures, felt highly conscious of being looked at when she entered spaces in which she felt physically or socially anomalous. "When you go in and attention is diverted to you like you don't belong there. Everybody in there is the same. It's very homogeneous. All the girls look the same and all the guys look the same. There's an obvious protocol of what should happen and where you should go and it's just not accessible to people that don't immediately fit that". She also felt that certain social situations facilitated observation and sexual evaluation, particularly of women, and she was more aware of being looked at during these times. "There's a lot of gazing happening. It's all looking at parties. It's not meant for conversations."

Brittney was very aware of other people looking at her, and had both positive and negative experiences surrounding being watched, particularly from the perspective of a performer. She felt that she likely attracted extra attention to herself because of her tendency to perform, but at other times she was aware of being looked at even when she was not intending to attract attention. "Or walking to class, I'm always aware of people, or in my head, they're looking at me but they probably aren't. In class, sometimes I'll get really self-conscious like if I raise my hand too much or something".

These experiences with being watched and gazed at testify to the ubiquity of the male gaze and the constant scrutiny of feminized bodies. Contextual factors may affect women's feelings about being looked at, but the gaze persists regardless of women's reaction to it (Calogero, 2004; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Hill & Fischer, 2008).

Response to objectification

As previously discussed, women who fit dominant cultural standards of attractiveness may experience self-objectification states as positive in some regard (Breines, Crocker & Garcia, 2008). Some participants responded positively to certain aspects of objectification, when they felt sexually attractive or validated. For example Phoebe, who described an instance when sexualized attention from men made her feel desirable; "It makes you feel good...like I went to the bar with my boyfriend and his friends the other day and it was like karaoke night and it was...I was literally the only girl there. All these guys were buying me shots like hanging out and it's fun. It feels good."

Describing whether being aware of others watching her is positive or negative; Brittney seemed to feel that it was dependent on the status or role of the observer. "I would say negative when it's people that I'm intimidated by. A lot of times the really athletic people on campus intimidate me. Some of the sorority people intimidate me... This sounds bad, but if it's boys being 'oh they're so fun and flirty', then it's a positive fueler." Here, Brittney describes a similar reaction to Phoebe, when receiving sexualized attention from men, though only in certain contexts. If the gaze or attention is from groups or individuals that cause her discomfort or that she finds intimidating, the attention or observation is not received positively. "I think those times are when you just get unwanted attention. I can think of parties at Otterbein, and I don't party very much but every once in a while I'll go and I can think of there was an experience where a boy put his arms around me and I was just like, oh, I don't want that, like get away. He just didn't get it and that scares me or worries me". These forms of 'unwanted attention' like sexual advances from strangers or street harassment caused Brittney to

feel unsafe, and distressingly aware of her vulnerability as an objectified body. "Yeah, it makes you feel used and appreciated for the wrong way, and in a bad way. Not like I'm little, I'm proud, but small like they could hurt you and take away something." Brittney's feelings of vulnerability and fear were not unfounded, as sexual objectification of women fosters cultural understanding as women as objects that ought to be sexually available, and Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) theorized that this cultural objectification of women makes violence against women more likely. Pornography and other sexualizing media often reinforces male dominance and male perceptions of women as sexual objects, and men who consume these kinds of sexualizing media have been shown to hold more violent and objectifying attitudes towards women (Hernandez, 2011).

Feeling watched and objectified also felt like unwanted attention to Tara. The sensation of being looked at, or feeling 'the gaze' caused to her to feel that she was occupying too much space. "I just want to be smaller. I want to be less easily seen. I don't necessarily want to be physically prettier. That doesn't matter to me at that particular moment. I just want to be invisible or smaller so I'm not noticeable". This sentiment is one that is reinforced by dominant cultural norms that encourage women to take up less space, and advertisements that are constructed to make women feel they ought to be smaller and "cut them down to size" (Killing Us Softly, 2010; Roth & Basow, 2004; Young, 1980).

Positive reactions to objectification in certain situations resulted from reinforcement of the women's worth and value as attractive objects, while negative

reactions resulted from an awareness of their lack of subjectivity and autonomic control over their own bodies. As objectified women are not perceived as full subjects, their humanity and agency is less likely to be respected (Bartky, 1990;2008; Beauvoir, 1953; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), as evidenced by the instances of street harassment described by the women and the feelings of discomfort they felt when they sensed the male gaze (Calogero, 2004; Fredrickson et al., 1998).

Self-efficacy

Discussing their preferred activities, all the participants displayed high levels of confidence and positive feelings surrounding their abilities. Catherine, in particular, described her experience playing in games as an escape from other worries and stresses in her life. The dancers experienced similar sensations of intense focus during performances. Jordan described her experience with her physical activity in terms that suggest she experiences a sense of focus, and a removal from external distractions. "It just gives me that time to think about what's going on... I reflect on everything that's going on. I don't know, it makes me feel like I'm good at something." Marta articulated what seemed to be a similar experience, although more surrounding the feeling of being part of a team.

Several of the participants described feelings of accomplishment when they completed a physical task. In particular, those who participated in athletics or dance said they often formed goals to accomplish during sports practices or trainings, and were motivated to meet those goals because they were able to anticipate the feeling of accomplishment they would experience after completion. "Every time I [achieve a

physical goal], I'll be so happy the rest of the day. For that aspect, just feeling accomplished, and you're achieving something, it's something I feel that I'm a good at, so that makes me feel good" (Marta). Self-efficacy is an important factor in motivation and in taking action. That is, the anticipation that they would feel a sense of satisfaction when they completed their tasks motivated the girls to continue engaging in them (Bandura, 1997). Clearly they would not be able to anticipate a sense of satisfaction if they did not believe that they would be capable of accomplishing the tasks.

After their preferred activities, Brittney and Jordan noted increased feelings of strength. Participants Brittney, Jordan and Phoebe also expressed a sense of increased productivity, and general positive self-regard after engaging in a physical activity that they enjoyed. "Now dance is more of a celebration...When I took a class yesterday I felt so accomplished at the end of it because I was like 'Oh my gosh' I can't believe my body can do this'" (Phoebe). Marta communicated a similar sense of increased wellbeing after physical activity. "Yeah, I mean, workouts naturally release endorphins, so I scientifically feel better. I do feel better after I sweat. I feel more relaxed and healthy." Most participants who engaged in some form of physical activity felt better about their bodies if they felt they were generally being healthy and treating their bodies well, though each participant had different thoughts about what constituted healthy behavior.

The experience of playing a game, and engaging in competitive physical activity even alleviated some of Tara's anxiety about her appearance. "I just remember not feeling good at the beginning of the game with my body, like being a little bit more self-conscious at the beginning, but once we started playing, especially if we got a win, by

the end I just didn't care. A lot of that stress was totally alleviated just off of the adrenaline of having a good play or a good win."

A high level of self-efficacy was communicated by most of the participants when they were discussing their preferred activities, or activities with which they had enduring experiences. Surprisingly, in other activities their level of self-efficacy was relatively low, especially if the activity was generally practiced within what was seen as a different culture, regardless of the necessary skillset. For example, both dancers believed they were very physically coordinated, but they felt uncomfortable playing sports, especially those that involved throwing or catching balls. They did not express confidence that the proficiency in bodily control, agility, and stamina they had achieved in dance would translate to sports. "I feel strong for my size. I couldn't go throw a football, or run two miles, but not necessarily things I would want to do. The show I'm in right now has really, really... The whole thing is a stamina test. There's this one number in particular where it's just cardio for six minutes. In rehearsal we would have to run it over and over to build up stamina" (Brittney). Although Brittney describes a high level of endurance and fitness, she still feels her athleticism would be inadequate if applied to other kinds of activities. The same participant also said that she often felt intimidated by the sports teams and athletic people on campus, particularly athletic men, which suggests she may not be comfortable with spaces or activities that she perceives as centered on sports and sports players. Phoebe also felt apprehension about the gym, a space she felt was geared towards sports players "I sort of don't really know what to do. I know what to do. I know how to use a treadmill and an elliptical, I know how to lift

weights. I just feel out of place. I just feel like it's not my domain." Phoebe's uneasiness at the gym may be indicative of an underlying assumption that athletic culture is exclusively masculine, thus her fitness and coordination are more naturally suited for dance which is considered much more feminine by the dominant culture. "My coordination as a dancer is like really awesome. I can do that but coordination with catching things or throwing things is just like not good. Not good. I'm like this stereotypical girl." Phoebe's feelings surrounding culturally masculine spaces supports the theoretical concept that the socialization of women in physically oppressive sociocultural environments can effect how women engage in physical use of their bodies, and also aspects of their physical self-concept (Dworkin, 2001; Fredrickson & Harrison, 2005; Mussap & Salton, 2006; Young, 1980).

Tara played volleyball in high school and felt that she had worked hard and possessed natural ability that made her a skilled player. She chose not to participate in college sports for various reasons, one of which was a negative experience she had within volleyball culture, which she felt was hostile towards women who didn't fit certain standards of conventional attractiveness. "I feel like when your body is atypical in a certain setting, because I don't think my body is socially atypical, but in athletics the eye's just more drawn to that and you stick out a little more. I didn't want that attention coming into college when I was already anxious about it." In general, Tara felt more acceptance in academic and intellectual realms, so she chose to focus wholly on academics in college. While she expressed a sense of self-efficacy in sports and academics, the cultural factors and appearance based expectations associated with

volleyball affected her desire to engage in physical activity. Although she had experience with physical activity in high school and felt that she was capable of performing physical tasks, Tara felt a strong aversion towards the gym and athletic people, particularly athletic males whom she often felt did not respect her. "I'm so scared of the gym. I have absolutely no interest in being there at all just because it's not for people that aren't in shape, it's for people that are in shape." Tara's experiences with volleyball and her aversion to the gym are both demonstrative of the effect of objectification and the evaluation of feminized bodies (Hill & Fischer, 2008). In both cases, the objectification of what she felt was an un-athletic body became factors in her right to belong in those cultures and spaces. As an objectified body, her value was reduced to her external appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), and because her appearance was not one of a highly fit athlete she felt the space was inhabitable. She also felt unwelcome and uncomfortable within male athletic culture, particularly as someone who associated much of her worth with her intellect (something she felt was devalued within masculine athletic cultures). Her objectified status disrupted even the relatively high level of self-efficacy she felt as an athlete in high school.

Catherine felt confident in her ability to play her sport, and she also felt a sense of pride for the hard work she had done during high school and college to improve her skills as a player. However, she repeatedly expressed a desire to be stronger, so she could complete workouts more easily and feel better about herself when working out in front of her teammates. This participant felt that she was much weaker than her

teammates, and this was most evident to her during workouts in the presence of her teammates and other athletes when she could easily make comparisons.

Despite participation in sports throughout most of her life, and having three years of experience with training and workouts for her college team, Catherine felt feelings of anxiety and incompetence surrounding strength training, particularly when she felt she was being observed. "I've never liked to work out alone because I feel awkward, like people are judging me like, 'she doesn't even know what she's doing and stuff'." She communicated this worry that people perceived her as incompetent during her workouts several times, particularly strength workouts such as weight lifting. While she knew what exercises to do and how to do them, she performed fewer strength workouts than her teammates because of these concerns. She seemed to feel that because other girls had more experience than her (they participated in weight training with their high school teams), they appeared more competent and less out of place in those particular spaces. Catherine felt intimidated by this aspect of athletic culture despite her experience; possibly because exercise for the purpose of building strength is considered a masculine pursuit and the spaces in which these activities take place reflect masculine dominance and preference (e.g. Young, 1980; Pauline, 2013).

Self-valuation of Body

During conversation surrounding the value and function of their physical bodies, there were several emergent themes that directed the conversations and the answers the women provided; value to one's self, value of the function of the body, and value to others. Senses of environmental mastery (or control over one's environment), and

autonomy (or feelings of control over one's self) are critical for the psychological wellbeing of humans (Ryff, 1995), and essential characteristics of a subjective person (Young, 1980). Thus, the orientation of women's bodies in their environment, women's relations to their environment, and the value women place in the function of their bodies are important when considering the subjectivity of women.

The dancers both emphatically understood their bodies as their instruments and tools that allowed them to create and perform, and they valued this aspect of their bodies very strongly. They also observed the value their bodies had to their performance department in terms of casting and producing shows, in the sense that each of them had specific physical attributes that would suit certain roles and character types.

Most of the women found value in their body's facilitation of the activities they enjoyed, and in the ability to explore new places and have novel experiences. They also felt that their bodies were valuable in their social facilitation. That is, they felt that their bodies allowed them to care for others in physical ways and engage in physical interaction.

When asked about strength, many of the women answered in terms of an emotional or mental type of strength as opposed to a physical type. While some of them said that physical strength was important to them, it was generally for the purpose of performing better in their sport, with the exception of some responses that identified strength as important should they want to be capable of certain forms of physical independence, for example being able to move their belongings to new houses or

apartments. None of the participants identified strength as an important factor in their ability to enact their will or objectives onto their external environment. For example, none of the participants identified strength as a source of power, or a mode through which they could achieve goals or obtain something they wanted.

These responses in regards to valuation of the body are consistent with Young's (1980) theory that women conceive of their bodies as objects (in other words they self-objectify), and thus do not perceive their environment as open to their mastery or malleable to their will. Rather, they conceive of themselves as objects within the environment that others (the subjects) can enact their will upon.

Some of the participants had conflicting feelings in relation to their own physical strength. Phoebe was critical about the appearance of her legs, which she felt were too large for her own aesthetic sense and by the standards of ballet. "I'm just always insecure about my legs. I know that I'm still appreciative for them because there's such a vehicle there. They help to achieve the things that I want to achieve and I have... They give me so much power". While she recognized that having strong leg muscles increased her ability to dance and perform, she struggled to accept the size of them.

Catherine felt a similar sense of ambiguity regarding her desire for what she considered attractively sized legs and strength. As a competitive sports player, having strong legs would be an asset to both herself and her team. "I want to be strong but I don't think that I need to have big huge bulky legs."

This conflict between the women's desire for strength and their desire to conform to standards of attractiveness reflects the conflict between the patriarchal

society's valuation of women's bodies over women's agentic physical functioning. The women are experiencing this conflict on a personal level because they have internalized the objectifying preoccupation with women's appearances (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), beauty standards that emphasize smallness, and gender norms that emphasize frailty and passivity (Roth & Basow, 2004). Yet they also experience a sense of fulfillment through accomplishment in their physical activities and they want to continue their development as physical competitors or performers. If one considers the results of RHI studies that show agency and body ownership both increase in individuals during movement versus passive stimulation (Tsakiris, Prabhu & Haggard, 2006), it's logical to expect that involvement in physical activities could affect women's senses of agency and bodily ownership—both of which are reduced by objectification and self-objectification (Breines, Crocker, & Garcia, 2008; Fredrickson & Harrison, 2005; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). However, the highest level of activity represented neither the highest, nor the lowest scores in the measures of self-objectification and body consciousness. The conflict they felt in regards to their valuation of strength and appearance also exemplifies the force and pervasiveness of objectification. This conflicting value between strength and appearance is also an example of the effect of the post-feminist sensibility on women's self-concept (Gill, 2007). Women have the opportunity to play in sports, are encouraged to enjoy physical activity, and the women in this study recognized their physical skill sets. Yet they still experience objectification and an internalization of cultural norms that discourage muscularity (Roth & Basow, 2004).

*Development of Confidence and Self-Esteem**Negative and positive self-talk*

Nearly all of the participants spoke about systems of positive and negative self-talk. Self-talk, or 'private speech' is essentially a process of conversing with one's self. Higher rates of negative self-talk are often symptomatic of depression and anxiety (Brinthead, Hein & Kramer, 2009). For the majority of the participants, these 'voices' or thoughts occurred during times of physical challenge like a sports practice or dance rehearsal. These thoughts also manifested when the women were conscious of being looked at or they felt they were being evaluated.

These instances of negative self-talk were consciously challenged by most of the participants, a skill that had been deliberately developed over time and required practice. Catherine described the negative voice as "a little guy in my head" that said discouraging things during workouts or physical challenges, especially regarding the difficulty of the challenge or whether completing the challenge would be beneficial to her. She seemed to feel that she had little control over the emergence of the "little guy" but identified the positive voice as more representative of herself. According to the participant, her positive side prevailed the majority of the time and she completed her workouts. Brittney described the presence of positive and negative self-talk as "little games like that you just have to stomp out of your brain", which seemed to engage her in a lot of comparison of physical appearance with her and other dancers in her department. "Yeah it's like critical thing of like, 'sure, I wish I could have the legs, legs as

big as my arm, but that's just really'... It's unrealistic. It's like a fight that you have with yourself in your head" (Phoebe).

For all the participants it was important for them to distinguish between their selves—the positive voices or thoughts—and the negativity that was somewhat out of their control and comprised of culturally objectifying messages regarding appearance related concerns. That is, the participants discussed a dissociation they felt with their brains or minds in a manner that was very similar to the way individuals with anxiety practice a disassociation between their selves and their anxious thoughts (Brozovich, Goldin, Lee, Jazaieri, Heimberg & Gross, 2015). This similarity between the women's self-talk and coping mechanisms employed by individuals with anxiety disorders is an important demonstration of the persistent and overwhelming ways that preoccupation with appearance and habitual body monitoring manifest. The dissociation exhibited by the women between their selves and the negative self-talk is also another example of the how post-feminist sensibility affects women's senses of bodily selves. Post-feminist sensibility assumes that structural and institutional equality has been mostly achieved, and disseminates a message of subjectivity and personhood while failing to effectively acknowledge the forms of oppression and objectification that many women still experience (Gill, 2007). One aspect of this failure is a notable absence of tools and strategies for navigating toxic cultures and environments. The women in this study adapted self-talk strategies to contend with their self-objectification and internalization, but the majority of them were not able to evaluate the negativity or the overall necessity for self-talk within a larger cultural context of their own oppression. Rather,

the negativity seemed to manifest from some unidentified place in their consciousness. A culture that denies the oppression of women that still clearly exists further complicates and exacerbates the forms of psychological oppression women experience, and places the onus on each individual woman to free their selves from their own objectification.

Increase in confidence through adolescence and young adulthood

Every participant described changes in confidence that took place during their transition from adolescence to young adulthood. These changes were framed in a context of continual development and growth that the women were still engaged in at the time of the interviews.

Ryff's (1995) study on psychological wellbeing found that feelings of environmental mastery and autonomy increased throughout young adulthood, though self-acceptance did not change significantly through out the lifespan. Tiggemann and Lynch (2001) studied body image and body satisfaction in women and found that body dissatisfaction remains relatively stable throughout life, but the amount of importance women place on their appearance decreases throughout adulthood.

Jordan described a change that was conscious and that informed by choices, as opposed to a change that occurred naturally with age. "I think it's a choice as well. I think again when I got older and had that weird confidence shift I just decided not to be over-critical of myself and things like that. I used to do that a lot, but now if I catch myself looking in the mirror thinking 'I don't like this, I don't like this', I just walk away and it's just a waste of time" (Jordan).

The participants were able to identify changes in their self-talk since adolescence, as they learned how to combat their negative thoughts, “the issue is still there but how it resonates in my life is so different. I think then I would do the classic stand in front of the mirror and point out what’s wrong with me. I don’t do that anymore” (Tara). However the participants still struggled with negative self-talk often and felt that they had to make a conscious effort to maintain sufficient levels of positive self-talk. “Now there’s always those bad days where you’re just well crap, I suck at everything, and everyone’s watching, and I hate it, and I can’t do this, and you just want to cry. I think more often than not, those are becoming more and more rare” (Brittney).

The changes in self-confidence and levels of anxiety about appearance were generally proposed by the women as conscious changes that occurred over time as they inhibited their tendencies to engage in negative self-talk. The women also felt that they were still in the process of development, and that they were striving towards more positive body images and positive self-talk. These narratives of development suggest that overcoming objectifying or damaging cultural messages is a timely process that requires enduring effort on the behalf of the individual, and that even conscious efforts to gain more positive body image are insufficient to fully counteract internalization of objectification and societal standards of attractiveness.

Conclusions

Considering previous research regarding objectification, it is clear each woman in this study experienced some level of self-objectification, and that objectification affects women’s sense of subjectivity, their physical realities and their bodily self-concepts.

While this study was not designed to be widely generalizable, the women's experiences surrounding their bodily self-concepts and objectification are exemplary of some larger cultural trends and issues women currently face in regards to their oppression.

Due to the small size and demographic composition of the sample this study is limited in its generalizability, and is only indicative of a small population of white, educated, cissexual women—a population that is unfortunately overstudied while other groups are neglected. Further subjective research is necessary to explore the unique experiences and oppression that women of color, queer women, transgender women, disabled women, and women without access to education experience. In particular, very little research is available on physical empowerment and disabled women, and transgender women as well—both populations deserve attention from the research community.

Throughout the narratives, there was a trend of internalization of dominant cultural standards of attractiveness, and of gender norms that emphasized smallness, and frailty. The participants also expressed anxiety surrounding their appearance and an implicit awareness of the consequences of becoming less attractive in a culture that places emphasized value on women's appearances.

Other evidence of anxiety-like symptoms was shown in the women's tendencies to engage in positive and negative self-talk regarding their appearance, being looked at, and other's perceptions of their attractiveness.

Objectification and resulting self-objectification, by nature of what it entails, necessitates a detraction of women's subjectivity. According to a study by Cawood

(1999), higher levels of preoccupation with appearance and poorer body image were linked to underdeveloped identities. This study does not aim to critically examine whether these participants had fully formed identities, but one can assume that an objectified person is unlikely to develop an integrated, cohesive identity at the same rate as a subjective person, in part due to their preoccupation with their appearance. This concept can be related to feminist theory about physical liberation and a fully integrated subjective self. (Bartky, 1990;2008, Roth & Basow, 2004; Young, 1980).

As Roth and Basow (2004) argued in their essay about physical liberation, physical self-concept is important to the formation of an integrated self-concept, full subjectivity is impossible with unstable bodily self-concepts or with a lack of agency and bodily ownership. One aspect of Tara's relation to her physical body illustrates this lack of integrated self-concept. "Yeah, in the sense that I try not to put myself in any situation where I'm out of control of my body. Sometimes it almost feels more like a disconnect. I'm doing it, and I know that I'm moving and I'm existing and all this stuff but my head space and my physical space don't always feel like it's the same person. I'll see a picture of myself or something and I'll be like, 'Oh.' It takes a moment of recognition for me to realize that I reside here".

The cultural climate surrounding physical activity was important to the women in this study in that it affected their feelings of self-efficacy and the likelihood they would participate in certain activities—if the culture was objectifying or overly associated with masculinity, strength, and dominance the women did not express strong desires to participate or express feelings of competence surrounding the activity.

An important theme was the conflict between subjectivity and objectivity as evidenced by how the women valued their bodies and their systems of positive and negative self-talk. This conflict between subjectivity and objectivity is the result of a culture that denies and obscures the reality of existing oppression. Post-feminism charges each individual woman with her own liberation from psychological and physical oppression—a task that is likely impossible, and the effort of which consumes vast amounts of cognitive resources. By failing to acknowledge oppression, post-feminist sensibility fosters ignorance and misunderstanding as to why women have experiences related to self-objectification and objectification, the impacts of which are significant.

It is not sufficient for women to combat self-objectification solely with attention to intellectual liberation. Rather it is important that they perceive their bodies as functional tools with which they can exercise mastery over their environments—whether they engage in physical activity or not. Feminist efforts to improve women's wellbeing make concerted efforts to foster feelings of women's self-worth that are not contingent on their appearance, and to increase women's senses of subjectivity. It seems that in these efforts, physical self-concepts are disregarded—as if women either value their intellectual and mental selves or they value their physical appearance.

The establishment of safe spaces for women and young women is an important step in the effort to combat harmful patriarchal societies. While participation in physical activities and internal confidence building can help individual women resist toxic cultural messages, far too many cognitive resources are directed toward this resistance, and every young woman in this study expressed difficulty with self-acceptance.

The subjective experiences of these women has provided some information about the kinds of spaces that must be made available—while it must be remembered that not every woman is able bodied or interested in physical movement—physical engagement proved to be a positive experience for most of the participants. Most importantly, these spaces must provide body positive reinforcement.

Ultimately however, more cultural and societal shifts must take place if the abolishment of gender oppression is to be realized. It is not the intent of this study to task women with the responsibility of liberating themselves, even if such a task were possible.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
OTTERBEIN UNIVERSITY

- Original Review
- Continuing Review
- Five-Year Review
- Amendment

ACTION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

With regard to the employment of human subjects in the proposed research:

HS # 14/15-105

Acker & Holmes: Self-Objectification and Body Connectedness

THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD HAS TAKEN THE FOLLOWING ACTION:

- Approved
- Disapproved
- Approved with Stipulations*
- Waiver of Written Consent Granted
- Deferred

*Stipulations stated by the IRB have been met by the investigator and, therefore, the protocol is APPROVED.

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to retain a copy of each signed consent form for at least four (4) years beyond the termination of the subject's participation in the proposed activity. Should the principal investigator leave the college, signed consent forms are to be transferred to the Institutional Review Board for the required retention period. This application has been approved for the period of one year. You are reminded that you must promptly report any problems to the IRB, and that no procedural changes may be made without prior review and approval. You are also reminded that the identity of the research participants must be kept confidential.

Date: 23 June 2015

Signed: [Signature]
Chairperson

Appendix B

Surveys

Objectified Body Consciousness Scale

Question	<i>(Strongly Disagree)</i> <i>(Strongly Agree)</i>						
1. I rarely think about how I look.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I think it is more important that my clothes are comfortable than whether they look good on me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I think more about how my body feels than how my body looks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I rarely compare how I look with how other people look.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. During the day, I think about how I look many times.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I often worry about whether the clothes I am wearing make me look good.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I rarely worry about how I look to other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I am more concerned with what my body can do than than how it looks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. When I can't control my weight, I feel like something must be wrong with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I feel ashamed of myself when I haven't made the effort to look my best.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I feel like I must be a bad person when I don't look as good as I could.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I would be ashamed for people to know what I really weigh.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

13. I never worry that something is wrong with me when I am not exercising as much as I should.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. When I'm not exercising enough, I question whether I am a good enough person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Even when I can't control my weight, I think I'm an okay person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. When I'm not the size I think I should be, I feel ashamed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. I think a person is pretty much stuck with the looks they are born with.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. A large part of being in shape is having that kind of body in the first place.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I think a person can look pretty much how they want to if they are willing to work at it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. I really don't think I have much control over how my body looks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. I think a person's weight is mostly determined by the genes they are born with.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. It doesn't matter how hard I try to change my weight, it's probably always going to be about the same.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. I can weigh what I'm supposed to when I try hard enough.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. The shape you are in depends mostly on your genes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The Self-Objectification Questionnaire

We are interested in how people think about their bodies. The questions below identify 10 different body attributes. We would like you to *rank order* these body attributes from that which has the *greatest impact* on your physical self-concept (rank this a “9”), to that which has the *least impact* on your physical self-concept (rank this a “0”).

Note: It does not matter *how* you describe yourself in terms of each attribute. For example, fitness level can have a great impact on your physical self-concept regardless of whether you consider yourself to be physically fit, not physically fit, or any level in between.

Please first consider all attributes simultaneously, and record your rank ordering by writing the ranks in the rightmost column.

IMPORTANT: Do Not Assign The Same Rank To More Than One Attribute!

- 9 = greatest impact
- 8 = next greatest impact
- .
- .
- 1 = next to least impact
- 0 = least impact

When considering your *physical self-concept* . . .

1. . . . what rank do you assign to *physical coordination*? _____
2. . . . what rank do you assign to *health*? _____
3. . . . what rank do you assign to *weight*? _____
4. . . . what rank do you assign to *strength*? _____
5. . . . what rank do you assign to *sex appeal*? _____
6. . . . what rank do you assign to *physical attractiveness*? _____
7. . . . what rank do you assign to *energy level (e.g., stamina)*? _____
8. . . . what rank do you assign to *firm/sculpted muscles*? _____
9. . . . what rank do you assign to *physical fitness level*? _____
10. . . . what rank do you assign to *measurements (e.g., chest, waist, hips)*? _____

Scale of Body Connection

Study Number: _____ Date: _____

Instructions:

	Not at all 0	A little bit 1	Some of the time 2	Most of the time 3	All of the time 4
1. If there is tension in my body, I am aware of the tension					
2. It is difficult for me to identify my emotions					
3. I notice that my breathing becomes shallow when I am nervous					
4. I notice my emotional response to caring touch					
5. My body feels frozen, as though numb, during uncomfortable situations					
6. I notice how my body changes when I am angry					
7. I feel like I am looking at my body from outside of my body					
8. I am aware of internal sensation during sexual activity					
9. I can feel my breath travel through my body when I exhale deeply					
10. I feel separated from my body					
11. It is hard for me to express certain emotions					
12. I take cues from my body to help me understand how I feel					
13. When I am physically uncomfortable, I think about what might have caused the discomfort					
14. I listen for information from my body about my emotional state					
15. When I am stressed, I notice the stress in my body					
16. I distract myself from feelings of physical discomfort					
17. When I am tense, I take note of where the tension is located in my body					
18. I notice that my body feels different after a peaceful experience					
19. I feel separated from my body when I am engaged in sexual activity					
20. It is difficult for me to pay attention to my emotions					

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Example of script:

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete three questionnaires, an open interview with me. You are free to withdraw from any portion of the interview or questionnaires at anytime without penalty. You can also refuse to answer any question presented by the questionnaires or myself without penalty. I will be asking about some personal and private experiences, which may be uncomfortable for you. Your anonymity and the anonymity of anyone you speak about in your interview will be protected. You will only be identified with a numerical ID after the interview is complete. Only my supervisor, the transcriptionist, and I will hear the recordings, and/or see the transcripts of this interview.

To thank you for your participation in this study, you will be rewarded one \$25 visa gift card. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? (Address questions or concerns). Please don't hesitate to ask me if any have any questions that you think of during the interview.

(Present consent form). Now I'm going to ask you to sign this consent form, which gives us permission to use the interview in our study, and confirms that you're at least 18.

(Give surveys).

Now we're going to begin the interview portion. Some of the questions I ask you may seem a little strange, because I'm trying to understand your lived experience, not simply factual information about you, I'm interested in understanding multiple dynamics of your experience. Please speak freely, I'm asking for your personal thoughts and feelings. You may say things you haven't previously thought of, and that's okay. Try to answer the questions as fully and elaborately as you feel comfortable with. There are no wrong answers to any of the questions I will ask you.

Describe yourself physically

- What is your age, major, and year, and hometown?
- Do you have any siblings? Gender of the siblings? What were some of your favorite games to play as a child?
- Do you participate in extra-curriculars or do you have any hobbies?
- Do you participate in physical activities like sports? Or dance? What do you like and dislike about sports/dance? Describe your experience with this activity.
 - What motivates you to..?
 - How confident are you in your ability to...?
- Do you workout? What motivates you to workout?

- How do you feel about your body before and after those activities? How do you feel or think about your body during those activities?
- When you (exercise/dance/engage in hobby) do you think about how you look/do you think about people watching you?
- Has there ever been a time when you have felt in some way limited by your body? If so, please describe. Do you feel that generally, your body is able to accomplish whatever tasks you want it to?
- Can you think of any physical characteristics that make it more difficult for you to achieve physical tasks?
- Are there things you aren't physically capable of, that you'd like to be?
- Can you think of a time when you overcame a physical challenge? Please describe.
- In regards to your athleticism (strength, agility, stamina), do you think hard work or natural ability is more important?
- Is being physically strong important to you? Why or why not? Do you feel that you have control over your level of physical strength?
- Would you describe yourself as physically coordinated? Why or why not? Do you feel that you have control over your level of physical coordination?
- How often do you run into objects with your body or perform other unintentional physical acts?
- Do you ever think about your body, and if so how do you think about it? When do you think about it? Describe the thoughts that you have and the setting.
- Is it important for you to look a certain way when you're in a public space?
- When are you most aware of the way your body feels physically?
- I'll list some emotional states, and if you can, describe some of the physical reactions you experience? (examples are nervousness, fear, sadness, anger)
- How often are you aware that other people are looking at you? When are you aware of other people looking at you? How do you feel about your body at those times?
- When and where do you feel safest, when do you feel the least safe?
- When do you feel strongest, when do you feel weakest?
- Generally do you feel that you have a sense of control over your body? When do you feel most in control of your body?
- What makes your body valuable to you? To others?
- Describe what physical confidence means to you. Does your physical confidence remain relatively stable day to day?
- When you're in public do you ever notice that you're taking up more space than you need? How do you feel about that?
- When and where do you feel most at home in your body? Are there times when you feel uncomfortable in your body?
- Is there a part of your body that is most expressive of "you", of who you are?
- Has there ever been a time when a change in your appearance made you feel more or less like yourself?

- Has there ever been a time when a change in your physical ability or physical activity made you feel more or less like yourself?
- Describe the importance you place on the following three factors: what your body can do, how your body looks, and how your body feels.
- Is there a part of your body you like the most? The least? Describe why.
- If you could change something about your body, what would you change? Or would you change nothing?
- If you could change your body as a whole, would you change it?
- Can you think about some times when your body was complimented or criticized?
- Can you think of some times when you really liked your body? Describe the context, time, etc.
- Can you think of some times when you really disliked your body? Describe the context, time, etc.
- Do you have positive feelings about your body that don't result from your appearance?