

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN BODY IMAGE ISSUES AND WOMEN'S SEXUAL FUNCTIONING THROUGH THE LENS OF THE OBJECTIFICATION THEORY

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Introduction: Physical appearance is a major component of human sexuality. Body image is associated with females' sexual functioning; and poor body image is strongly related to sexual functioning problems (SFP). SFP are becoming more pervasive throughout Western culture. Objectification Theory (OT) provides a framework for understanding how sociocultural pressure is translated into psychological risk factors that promote body concerns and SFP. Previous research indicated that the core constructs of OT (body monitoring, body shame and appearance anxiety) predicted higher self-consciousness, which according to a recent review of 57 empirical studies, interferes with sexual responses and experiences during sexual activity.

Objectives: The central purpose of the current study was to build upon the extant literature by incorporating internalization of the norms for body shape and weight portrayed by the media and self-consciousness during sexual activity into the OT model. Thus, we aimed to examine a more comprehensive model of women's SFP (i.e., lacking interest in sex, inability to achieve orgasm, trouble achieving or maintaining an adequate lubrication) grounded in OT.

Methods: Data were analysed from 391 sexually active Italian college women ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.9$) using latent variable structural equation modeling approach.

Results. Internalization of media ideals led to body surveillance, which was related to body shame and appearance anxiety. The latter were related to self-consciousness during sexual activity, which in turn strongly women's SFP.

Conclusions: The study points to the role of body-image attitudes in sexual functioning and suggests that OT provides a useful framework to identify predictors of women's SFP.