Why Might Women Justify Dating Violence? The Role of Men's Sexual Objectification of Their Romantic Partners Within Heterosexual Relationships

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Abstract

Men's partner-sexual objectification has been linked to increased self-objectification and diminished well-being in women. Some recent findings have also demonstrated that men's partner-sexual objectification is related to increased violence in the relationship. However, mechanisms driving this association remain unexplored. In the present research, we collected data on women and men involved in heterosexual romantic relationships and investigated the associations between men's partner-sexual objectification, women's self-objectification, and both partners' attitudes toward dating violence. Study 1 ($N = 171$ heterosexual couples) provided first evidence for

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the link between men's partner-sexual objectification and their attitudes toward dating violence. Furthermore, men's attitudes toward dating violence mediated the relationship between sexual objectification of their partners and women's attitudes toward dating violence. These results were replicated in Study 2 (*N*=235 heterosexual couples). Findings of this study also revealed that, along with men's attitudes toward dating violence, women's self-objectification acted as a mediating mechanism linking experiences of being sexually objectified by the romantic partner and attitudes toward dating violence in women. Implications of our findings for the issue of dating violence are discussed.

Sexual objectification—the reduction of a person's value to their body or sexual body parts (Bartky, 1990)—affects perceptions, cognitions, and attitudes toward the objectified targets (e.g., Ruzzante et al., 2022) and causes numerous negative consequences for the victims (e.g., Roberts et al., 2017). Indeed, objectified targets, mostly women, are denied morality, mind, warmth, and competence (e.g., Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Loughnan et al., 2010), and they are elaborated similarly to real objects (Vaes et al., 2019), even at a cognitive level (see Bernard et al., 2020 for a recent review; see also Andrighetto et al., 2019). Thus, when sexual objectification occurs, targets are dehumanized and perceived as not (or less) worthy of moral treatment. In the same direction, recent literature found that sexual objectification might have negative outcomes also within heterosexual romantic relationships (e.g., Ramsey et al., 2017). For example, it has been demonstrated that men's objectified perceptions of their romantic partners are negatively associated with women's perceived quality of their romantic relationships and life (Pecini et al., 2022; Sáez, Alonso-Ferres, et al., 2019).

Within close relationships, partner violence represents one of the most pervasive forms of aggressiveness toward women. In fact, approximately one-third of women aged 15 years and over have suffered some form of physical or sexual violence from current or previous partners during their lifetime (Devries et al., 2013), and the latter percentage increases to 40% when considering psychological violence (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Notably, violence is also considered as one of the most

damaging consequences of sexual objectification (Gervais & Eagan, 2017). Thus, with a focus on heterosexual romantic relationships, the present research sought to investigate the relationships between men's sexual objectification of their romantic partners (i.e., partner-sexual objectification) and attitudes toward dating violence against women within the romantic couple.

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

According to objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), sexual objectification facilitates the use of violence toward women and "provides the foundation for men's aggression against women" (Gervais & Eagan, 2017, p. 228). Sexual objectification can be understood as a form of denial of humanity to the victims, and sexually objectified targets are perceived as lacking dignity and moral respect (see Vaes et al., 2014, for a review). Several studies provided support for the link between sexual objectification and harmful attitudes (e.g., Vasquez et al., 2017), including negative perceptions of victims of intimate partner violence (Cheeseborough et al., 2020), and lower intentions to help objectified women who experienced violence (Gramazio et al., 2021). For example, Gervais et al. (2014) found that sexual objectification in a sample of men was related to self-reported sexual violence toward women. Furthermore, research also displayed that men with higher tendencies to sexually objectify were more likely to report a greater acceptance of violence toward women. For instance, in their research, Rudman and Mescher (2012) found that implicitly reducing a woman to an object was associated with greater intentions to engage in sexual harassment and rape toward objectified targets and with more negative attitudes toward victims of sexual violence. Similarly, Seabrook et al. (2019) found that sexual objectification mediated the link between media exposure and rape myths acceptance. Additionally, albeit few in numbers, existing literature on sexual objectification in romantic relationships suggests that men's partner-sexual objectification contributes to violence perpetration toward the partner (Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015), and one key mechanism explaining this relationship is perceiving that partner as not fully human (Saez et al., 2022).

The body of work discussed above presents initial evidence that there is some relationship between partner-sexual objectification and violence perpetration and attitudes, even in the domain of romantic relationships. However, there has been no research conducted on the generalization process, specifically whether men who engage in partner-sexual objectification may be more likely to endorse violence against women as a group. In addition, in our research, we

chose to focus on a particular type of violence against women, namely dating violence, which refers to the intentional psychological, physical, or sexual harm perpetrated by a current or former dating partner (Teten et al., 2009). We have, for the first time, investigated the potential link between men's partner-sexual objectification and attitudes toward dating violence against women. Specifically, based on the literature mentioned above, we hypothesized that partner-sexual objectification would be related to more positive attitudes toward dating violence against women in men (Hypothesis 1).

Going a step further from the existing literature, we also examined whether men's attitudes toward dating violence would be associated with those of their partners. Indeed, research demonstrated that there are several reasons why, within the context of romantic relationships, attitudes can be transmitted from one partner to the other. For example, in romantic relationships, partners tend to align their values (Alio et al., 2011; Davis & Rusbult, 2001)—or directly ask their partner to change their values—especially when they are perceived to be relevant to the internal functioning of the relationship (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Using a longitudinal and dyadic approach, Kalmijn (2005) found that women and men in romantic relationships aligned their gender-role attitudes concerning the appropriate role of men and women in the society.

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

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

The Female Targets Perspective: Self-Objectification and Attitudes Toward Gender Violence

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

A wide amount of research demonstrated that self-objectification is linked directly and indirectly to several negative outcomes such as body shame, eating disorder, decreased personal a relational satisfaction, and impaired cognitive and physical performances (see Roberts et al., 2017, for a review). Although underdeveloped, other research suggests that, along with intraindividual and interpersonal consequences, self-objectification may also increase women's acceptance of gender inequalities (e.g., Calogero & Tylka, 2014; Fox et al., 2015; but see De Wilde et al., 2020). In fact, perpetuating the existing gender-role norms in the sexual objectification system, women are valued for their physical attractiveness, while men are typically considered for their agency and performance (Choma & Prusaczyk, 2018; Zurbriggen, 2013). Women who objectify themselves are more vigilant about their bodies and display compensatory behaviors (e.g., wearing make-up and/or revealing clothing) to satisfy the sexual objectification system (Calogero, 2013), supporting their inferior position compared to men in the society. Confirming this claim, Calogero (2013) showed that women who self-objectify were more likely to accept gender inequalities and less willing to protest for women's rights (see also Calogero et al., 2017). Furthermore, self-objectification has been associated with endorsing an objectifying view of women (Harsey & Zurbriggen, 2021). The link between self-objectification and acceptance of women's discrimination also extends to the justification of rape myths (Fox et al., 2015) and decreased ability to refuse unwanted sex from the partner (Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015; Sáez, Alonso-Ferres, et al., 2019).

However, no prior research has specifically investigated the relationship between self-objectification in women and attitudes toward dating violence. According to feminist theories, gender violence allows men to control and dominate women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979), and it is strongly related to traditional views of women's roles. We reasoned that women who self-objectify, hence, interiorize the oppression, might display more positive attitudes toward dating violence. Thus, in our research, we investigated whether self-objectification in women would be positively associated with their attitudes toward

dating violence (Hypothesis 3a). Furthermore, self-objectification is the primary consequence of objectifying experiences even in the context of romantic relationships (Pecini et al., 2022; Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015; Strelan & Pagoudis, 2018; but see Mahar et al., 2020) and represents the key mechanism linking experiences of sexual objectification to negative outcomes (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Thus, we tested whether self-objectification mediated the link between men's partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 3b).

The Current Research

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

> Hypothesis 1 (Studies 1 and 2): men's partner-sexual objectification would be positively associated with their attitudes toward dating violence.
>
> Hypothesis 2 (Studies 1 and 2): men's attitudes toward dating violence would be related to those of their (female) partners (Hypothesis 2a) and mediated the link between partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 2b).
>
> Hypothesis 3 (Study 2): self-objectification in women would be related to more positive attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 3a) and explain the relationship between men's partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 3b).

The research was approved by the ethical commission of the first author's Institution. Databases for all the studies can be found at: https://osf.io/c3fqx/?view_only=c9f3540402524aa2b8df30ed0a343639. Sample sizes were determined before any data analysis using G*Power tool version 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007).

Study 1

Study 1 aimed at providing the first evidence of our hypotheses. By collecting data from both the members of heterosexual couples, in this study, we investigated whether men's partner-sexual objectification would be related to more positive attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 1) and whether men's attitudes toward dating violence were related to those of their partners (Hypothesis

2a). Furthermore, we tested whether men's attitudes toward dating violence would explain the relationship between partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 2b). To rule out alternative explanations to our hypotheses, we conducted further analyses by including participants' age and relationship length as covariates. Detailed results of these analyses are reported in the Supplemental material file which can be accessed at: https://osf.io/c3fqx/?view_only=c9f3540402524aa2b8df30ed0a343639.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A priori power analysis indicated that a sample of approximately 160 participants was required to conduct a multiple regression with two predictors, allowing a power of 0.80 to detect a medium to small effect size ($f^2 = 0.06$).

One hundred and seventy-one heterosexual couples have been enrolled in the study. The average relationship length was 109.38 months ($SD = 139.31$), corresponding approximately to 9 years. Regarding the type of relationship, 70.18% of participants declared being in a relationship and 29.82% of participants declared being married. For women, age ranged from 18 to 76 years ($M_{age} = 31.18$, $SD = 14.04$), and for men, from 18 to 75 years ($M_{age} = 33.59$, $SD = 14.94$).

The recruitment process took place in Italy. Research assistants utilized a snowball sampling method to find participants, reaching out to them through word of mouth and messages on social networks. Inclusion criteria required participants to be of legal age and engaged in a heterosexual relationship. In addition, the participation of both members of the couple was required for their inclusion in the study.

Participants were invited to complete an online survey. In the first part of the survey, aims, procedures, and informed consent were introduced. We provided couples with instructions to create their own code for matching partners while maintaining anonymity (for a detailed description of the matching procedure, see the Supplemental material file). Furthermore, participants were instructed to fill out the questionnaires independently and not to share their answers with their partners until they had completed the study. In the second part, participants provided some demographic information and filled out a series of scales. Specifically, female participants completed the attitudes toward dating violence scale, whereas male participants also responded to a measure of partner-sexual objectification. In the third and final part, participants were fully debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures

Measures presented to participants are reported below. The order of presentation of the scales and the order of items within each measure were randomized across participants.

Men's Measures

Partner-Sexual Objectification. Men's tendencies to sexually objectify their partners were measured with an adapted version of the Self-Objectification Questionnaire (SOQ; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998). In the original SOQ, participants are asked to rank 10 body attributes from the most (1) to the least (10) important to their physical self-concept. Attributes are balanced so that five refer to body appearance (e.g., "Measures," "Weight") and five to body competence (e.g., "Coordination," "Health"). In this version of the SOQ, participants ranked the importance of the attributes referring to their romantic partners (see Strelan & Pagoudis, 2018, for a similar procedure). Instructions presented to participants were the following: "In this section, you will be asked to complete a task concerned with your perceptions of your partner. Listed below are 10 different attributes. Your task is to rank the importance of these attributes when thinking about your partner. To complete this task, please drag the attributes and rank them from the most important (1) to the least important (10)." We then derived a final index by subtracting the sum of the appearance-based features from the sum of the competence-based characteristics. The higher the index, the greater the tendency of men to sexually objectify their partners.

Attitudes Toward Dating Violence. Acceptance of dating violence against women was measured using the 39 items ($\alpha = .93$) of the Male Dating Violence Scale (AMDV) developed by Price et al. (1999). Participants indicated their agreement with the statements on a scale ranging from 1 ("*Strongly disagree*") to 7 ("*Strongly agree*"). The AMDV comprises three subscales assessing men's psychological (e.g., "A girl should ask her boyfriend first before going out with her friends"), physical (e.g., "Some girls deserve to be slapped by their boyfriends"), and sexual (e.g., "When guys get really excited, they cannot stop themselves from having sex") violence against the female partner. As we were interested in investigating the relationship between men's partner-sexual objectification and acceptance of dating violence regardless of the type of violence, all items were averaged to form a composite score, with higher scores denoting greater acceptance of dating violence. Furthermore, given the characteristics of the sample included in the present research, we reworded items by replacing the terms "boyfriend(s)"

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations. Study 1 (*N* = 171).

Variable	1	2	3
1. Men's partner-sexual objectification	—		
2. Men's attitudes toward dating violence	.26[**]	—	
3. Women's attitudes toward dating violence	.10	.72[***]	—
Mean	−8.15	2.03	1.73
SD	10.91	.69	.66

Note. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

and "girlfriend(s)" with "partner(s)," and the terms "boy(s)" and "girl(s)" with "man" or "men" and "woman" or "women," respectively.

Women's Measures
   Attitudes Toward Dating Violence. Women were presented with the same measure by Price et al. (1999), which was used for the male sample to capture their justification of dating violence (α = .88).
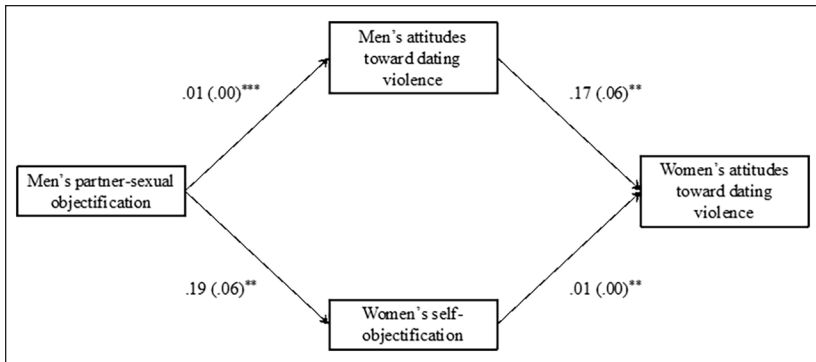
Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations can be found in Table 1. As can be seen, men's partner-sexual objectification correlated with their attitudes toward dating violence. In turn, men's attitudes toward dating violence were associated with women's attitudes. No significant correlations emerged between men's partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence.

Mediation Analysis

To test our hypotheses, we performed a mediation model using PROCESS macro for the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS; Model 4; Hayes, 2013); bootstrapping procedures (5,000 resamples) were used to test the significance of the indirect effects. In the model, men's partner-sexual objectification was the independent variable, men's attitudes toward dating violence the mediator, and women's attitudes toward dating violence the criterion variable.
   The model explained approximately 7% and 52% of the variance in men's and women's attitudes toward dating violence, respectively. Beta coefficients and standard errors are reported in Figure 1. Findings confirmed the hypothesized relationships, showing that men's partner-sexual objectification was

Figure 1. Results of the regression analysis. Study 1 (*N*=171).
Note. Only significant relationships are displayed.
**p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

positively associated with their attitudes toward dating violence, *B*=0.02, *SE* ≈ 0.00, *p*=.001, which in turn were related to more positive attitudes toward dating violence in their female partners, *B*=0.70, *SE*=0.05, *p* < .001. No direct relationship was found between men's partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence, *B*=−0.01, *SE* ≈ 0.00, *p*=.089. Furthermore, since the 95% confidence interval (CI) did not include the 0, bootstrapping analysis confirmed the mediation effect of men's attitudes toward dating violence, mean effect=0.012, *SE* ≈ 0.00, 95% CI [0.0055, 0.0185].

Importantly, these results remained significant when controlling for participants' age and relationship length (see the Supplemental material file for results of regression analyses with covariates included). We found no significant associations between these covariates and participants' attitudes toward dating violence, *p*'s > .685.[1]

Results of Study 1 provided support for Hypothesis 1. Specifically, we found that men who placed more importance on their partners' physical appearance rather than their competence were more likely to justify dating violence against women. Furthermore, confirming Hypothesis 2a, results showed that male and female partners' attitudes toward dating violence were correlated. Hence, men who justified dating violence more tended to be in relationships with women who also held more permissive attitudes toward dating violence. More importantly, we found that men's attitudes toward dating violence mediated the relationship between men's sexual objectification of their partners and those partners' attitudes toward dating violence, providing support for Hypothesis 2b.

Study 2

In Study 2, we aimed to achieve two primary goals. First, to strengthen the validity and robustness of our results, we sought to replicate the findings of Study 1. Hence, we investigated whether men's partner-sexual objectification would be related to their attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 1) and whether men's attitudes toward dating violence correlated with those of their partners (Hypothesis 2a). Furthermore, we verified whether men's attitudes toward dating violence explained the relationship between partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 2b). Second, to extend the findings of Study 1, we tested two additional hypotheses. Specifically, we examined whether self-objectification in women would be positively associated with their attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 3a) and whether self-objectification mediated the relationship between men's partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence (Hypothesis 3b). As in Study 1, we tested our hypotheses by controlling for the effects of participants' age and relationship length.

Method

Participants and Procedure

For the determination of the sample for Study 2, the smallest effect size that emerged in Study 1 ($f^2 = 0.08$) has been considered resulting in 139 participants (with a power of 0.80 for multiple regression with three predictors). However, in a more conservative way, the final sample has been increased to allow a smaller effect size ($f^2 = 0.05$), and a total of 235 heterosexual couples have been recruited.

The procedure, inclusion criteria, and couples' scores matching strategy were similar to those used in Study 1.

Mean relationship length was 73.79 months ($SD = 104.29$), corresponding to roughly 6 years. 83.98% of participants declared being in a relationship, and 17.02% of participants declared being married. Men's age ranged from 19 to 80 years ($M_{age} = 29.37$, $SD = 11.92$) and women's age from 18 to 75 years ($M_{age} = 27.67$, $SD = 11.71$).

Measures

Measures included in the survey are reported below. As in Study 1, both the order of presentation of the questionnaires and the order of items within each scale were randomized across participants.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations. Study 2 ($N = 235$).

Variable	I	2	3	4
1. Men's partner-sexual objectification	—			
2. Men's attitudes toward dating violence	.28***	—		
3. Women's self-objectification	.22**	.16*	—	
4. Women's attitudes toward dating violence	.13*	.24***	.24***	—
Mean	−3.84	3.39	−9.40	3.29
SD	11.80	.32	10.33	.28

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Men's Measures

Partner-Sexual Objectification. Men's partner-sexual objectification was assessed with the adapted version of the SOQ (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998) used in Study 1.

Attitudes Toward Dating Violence. Participants were presented with the AMDV by Price et al. (1999) used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .93$).

Women's Measures

Self-Objectification. To assess self-objectification, participants were invited to complete the SOQ (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998), in which they were asked to rank 10 body parts from the most (1) to the least (10) important to their physical self-concept. Five attributes refer to appearance-based features (e.g., "Measures," "Weight"), while the remaining five characteristics were physical competence-based features (e.g., "Physical coordination," "Health"). The final index was computed by subtracting the sum of the appearance-based features from the sum of the competence-based features, with higher scores denoting greater self-objectification.

Attitudes Toward Dating Violence. Participants completed the AMDV (Price et al., 1999; $\alpha = .93$).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations are reported in Table 2. Men's partner-sexual objectification was positively correlated with both men's and women's attitudes toward dating violence and women's self-objectification; positive correlations also emerged between men's attitudes toward dating violence, women's self-objectification, and women's attitudes toward dating violence.
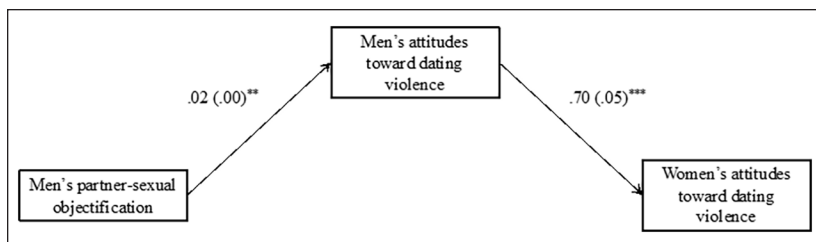
Figure 2. Results of the regression analysis. Study 2 (*N* = 235).
Note. Only significant relationships are displayed.
**p < .01. ***p < .001.

Mediation Analysis

To verify our hypotheses, we tested a parallel mediation model using PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4; Hayes, 2013). Specifically, men's partner-sexual objectification was the independent variable, men's attitudes toward dating violence and women's self-objectification the parallel mediators, and women's attitudes toward dating violence the criterion variable. The model explained approximately 5% and 8% variance in women's self-objectification and men's attitudes toward dating violence, respectively, and 10% variance in women's attitudes toward dating violence. As can be seen in Figure 2, results showed significant positive associations between men's partner-sexual objectification and men's attitudes toward dating violence, $B = 0.01$, $SE \approx 0.00$, $p < .001$, and between men's partner-sexual objectification and women's self-objectification, $B = 0.19$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .001$. In turn, men's attitudes toward dating violence, $B = 0.17$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .003$, and women's self-objectification, $B = 0.01$, $SE \approx 0.00$, $p = .002$, were positively related to women's attitudes toward dating violence. Finally, the association of men's partner-sexual objectification with women's attitudes toward dating violence did not reach significance, $B = 0.00$, $SE \approx 0.00$, $p = .608$. Bootstrapping analysis (5,000 resamples) confirmed the significance of both the indirect effects, namely, the path from men's partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence via the indirect effect of men's attitudes toward dating violence, mean effect = 0.001, $SE \approx 0.00$, 95% CI [0.0003, 0.0021], and the path mediated by women's self-objectification, mean effect = 0.001, $SE \approx 0.00$, [0.0002, 0.0028].

Notably, results remained significant when controlling for participants' age and length of the relationship (results of regression analyses with covariates included are reported in the Supplemental material file). Among

these variables, only the relationship between men's age and women's self-objectification was found to be statistically significant, $B = -0.43$, $SE = 0.22$, $p = .050$. None of the other relationships reached statistical significance, p's > .060.[2]

General Discussion

Across two studies, we showed that within the context of heterosexual relationships and considering both partners' perceptions, men's partner-sexual objectification was related to women's attitudes toward dating violence via the indirect effect of men's attitudes toward dating violence and women's self-objectification.

These results strengthen and expand sexual objectification literature in several directions. First, this is the first evidence that men's partner-sexual objectification and women's self-objectification are associated with increased acceptance of dating violence that we are aware of. Specifically, we found that men who gave greater importance to their partners' physical appearance over their competence reported more positive attitudes toward dating violence against women. This result is in line with the literature suggesting that sexual objectification facilitates the justification and perpetuation of violence against women (e.g., Gervais et al., 2014). One reason explaining the relationship between men's partner-sexual objectification and their attitudes toward dating violence is that sexual objectification alters the beholder's perception of the victims' moral treatment (e.g., Vasquez et al., 2018). In fact, by giving more importance to partners' physical appearance, men may undervalue other characteristics of their partners, such as their personality or human qualities (e.g., Vaes et al., 2011). Like the moral disengagement process (Bandura, 1999), holding warped perceptions (i.e., denial of humanity) of the victims facilitates detrimental acts toward them. Furthermore, it is worth noting that we found a relationship between sexually objectifying the romantic partner and attitudes toward dating violence against women as a group. This finding may be explained by the possibility that attitudes and perceptions toward the partner, categorized as a woman, may be generalized to women in general. Since this is the first study of its kind, future research could further investigate the variables underlying this link. On the women's side, a similar process has been observed. That is, we found that self-objectification in women was associated with their attitudes toward dating violence. An explanation for this result is that perceiving the self as detached from humanity may lead to accepting gender violence (i.e., immoral actions). However, different from the male counterpart, in the latter case, violence is directed toward the self, thus, it is linked to endorsing counterproductive

behaviors that damage women. The link between self-objectification and attitudes toward dating violence may also be due to the status differences between men (high status) and women (low status) in society. In fact, on the one hand, men show higher attitudes toward inequality. For example, in the political domain, Pratto et al. (1997) found that men endorsed pro-equality policies (i.e., public daycare) less than women. On the other hand, studies found that women may deny being victims of discrimination to justify their subordinate position. In this direction, a large cross-national study found that women refusing gender-based injustice showed higher subjective well-being compared to women acknowledging inequalities (Napier et al., 2020). Similarly, Chapleau and Oswald (2014), considering both men and women participants in the United States, found that gender-specific system justification (i.e., the perception that the society is fair) was associated with greater violence acceptance (i.e., rape myths) and less resentment toward injustice. As self-objectification leads to interiorizing the oppression (Calogero, 2013), it may be that women who scored higher in self-objectifying behaviors were more likely to accept men's dating violence as a normalized pattern for relationships and suffer from it (Crapolicchio et al., 2022). However, as this is the first known research investigating the link between self-objectification and attitudes toward dating violence, future research is needed to identify the underlying mechanisms explaining this relationship. Furthermore, one of the major contributions of this study is that we found the relationship between men's partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence to be mediated by men's attitudes toward dating violence and women's self-objectification. Specifically, in line with prior literature (e.g., Hammond et al., 2016d), our data showed that gender-based attitudes of men and women correlated. In addition, we showed that men's attitudes toward dating violence explained the link between partner-sexual objectification and women's attitudes toward dating violence. Strengthening the results of prior studies, we provided support for the relation regarding attitudes toward gender discrimination in romantic relationships. In fact, along with other forms of mild discrimination (e.g., benevolent sexism; Hammond et al., 2016), our results showed that positive attitudes toward violence might be transmitted from one partner to the other and, specifically, from men to women. Regarding self-objectification, it emerged that negative self-perceptions in women mediated the relationship between men's partner-sexual objectification and their attitudes toward dating violence. Specifically, in line with the existing literature (Pecini et al., 2022; Strelan & Pagoudis, 2018), we found that men's partner-sexual objectification and women's self-objectification correlated. Furthermore, self-objectification emerged as the underlying mechanism

explaining the relationship between being sexually objectified by the romantic partner and acceptance of dating violence in women.

Despite the relevance of our results, there are some limitations to note which could guide future work. A first limitation is due to the correlational nature of our studies, which prevents any causal conclusion on the relationship between constructs. Thus, future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to establish the causal relationships between the constructs examined in our study. A further limitation of our study is that the majority of participants were from Italy. Although literature replicated objectification processes in different contexts (e.g., Cheeseborough et al., 2020), it is important to include individuals from diverse cultures (e.g., non-Western) and backgrounds (e.g., sexual orientations, socioeconomic status) to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, self-objectification is conceived as a multifaceted construct (Karsay, 2020). In our research, we only considered a cognitive component of self-objectification, namely, valuing appearance over competence. Future investigations should consider other components of self-objectification, including its behavioral (e.g., body self-monitoring) and emotional (e.g., body shame) manifestations.

To conclude, our findings suggested that men's partner-sexual objectification in heterosexual romantic relationships is associated with both men's and women's attitudes toward dating violence directly and indirectly, implying that consequences of sexual objectification extend beyond individual levels.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. To strengthen the reliability of the findings, we ran an alternative model with partner-sexual objectification as the independent variable, women's attitudes toward dating violence as the mediator, and men's attitudes toward dating violence as the dependent variable. Results revealed that men's partner-sexual objectification was not associated with women's attitudes toward dating violence. In contrast, women's attitudes toward dating violence were positively associated with those of their partners. Furthermore, the association between men's partner-sexual objectification and men's attitudes toward dating violence was found to be significant. The indirect effect was nonsignificant, mean effect = 0.004, $SE \approx 0.00$, 95% CI [−0.0015, 0.0106].

2. As for Study 1, to increase the validity of our results, we tested an alternative model by inverting men's attitudes toward dating violence with women's attitudes toward dating violence. Results revealed that men's partner-sexual objectification was related to increased self-objectification and attitudes toward dating violence in women. In turn, women's attitudes toward dating violence, but not self-objectification, were associated with men's attitudes toward dating violence. A direct association emerged between men's partner-sexual objectification and their attitudes toward dating violence. Furthermore, the indirect effect of women's attitudes toward dating violence was nonsignificant, mean effect = 0.001, $SE \approx 0.00$, 95% CI [−0.0001, 0.0019]. Similarly, the path mediated by self-objectification did not reach significance, mean effect = 0.000, $SE \approx 0.00$, [−0.0004, 0.0014].

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