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SEXUAL FLUIDITY AND THE EFFECTS OF THE MALE GAZE

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Abstract

The present study researched the effects of objectification on sexual fluidity. It is proposed that if women who identified as heterosexual were objectified then they would respond to attractiveness ratings in a typically homosexual manner. Social distance was also tested to determine the degrees of contact participants would be willing to engage in with a photo of a woman. Participants were female college-aged students, typically freshmen. Participants engaged in either a “gaze” condition or a “no gaze” condition (the control condition). In the “gaze” condition the experimenter objectified participants in order to determine the effects on attractiveness ratings as well as social distance measures. The results showed that for each measure, there was no significant difference between the gaze and no gaze control condition. The attractiveness ratings were relatively consistent between each condition and in some cases the no gaze condition was likely to rate females as more attractive than the gaze condition. The social distance scale indicated that in both conditions, participants were not likely to flirt or hook up with another female. Thus, it is likely that objectification of women leads to an atmosphere of overall negativity and lower ratings of attractiveness in comparison to a no gaze control condition. Further research should be done to specifically determine the effects of objectification on conservative behaviors of women.

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Introduction

Sexuality is a taboo topic for many that young adults are exposed to frequently in contemporary society. The phenomenon of sexuality is continuously in the limelight of popular media. The boundary lines between heterosexuality and homosexuality have become blurred for women specifically. A recent trend for young heterosexually identified white women is to engage in sexual contact with other women. This phenomenon has been exploited by media trends such as 'Girls Gone Wild.' This video consists of college women who are sexually intimate with other women spontaneously in front of a camera. These women typically tell the producers that they have never engaged in sexual contact with women before, but perform this behavior for the fame or simply a performance (Levy, 2005). Thus, it is common to find two heterosexual women passionately kissing one another and dancing in intimate ways late at night at clubs or parties. This is displayed in the media on award shows such as the infamous Britney Spears and Madonna kiss on the MTV music awards. In a culture where many flinch to see two men engaging in sexual contact, women are cheered on by the opposite sex when sexual interaction occurs. The current study seeks to examine potential explanations for the ironic social phenomenon of sexual intimacy among heterosexually identified women.

The goal of the present study is to explore the possibility that same sex intimate contact among heterosexual women is a phenomenon which occurs when women are objectified, rather than a reflection of women having more flexible sexual identities. As suggested by Fredrickson (1997), objectification leads to less salient identities and less self-esteem, making women more susceptible to engage in more fluid behaviors. Thus, objectification can lead to a greater likelihood of heterosexual females initiating intimate contact with other women.

To examine this possibility and to derive testable hypotheses, I review theory and research on sexual fluidity, or the notion that sexual orientation is not a rigid definition. More specifically, sexual fluidity is the idea that attraction for both genders can occur and therefore, sexual contact with both sexes arises when sexual orientation is not salient. Within the context of my considerations of sexual fluidity, I define the concepts of sexual orientation and sexual behavior. Then I review theory and research on sexual objectification, which is the idea of reducing an individual to specific sexual body parts.

Sexual Fluidity, Sexual Orientation, and Sexual Behavior

Women in contemporary society have less rigid societal norms regarding physical intimacy compared to males. For example, within same sex friendship in Western cultures, it is common for females to hug and kiss friends of the same sex on the cheek, whereas for men this behavior is not acceptable for a heterosexual male. Men face more difficult consequences if they engage in same sex physical intimacy, such as labels, peer rejection, and physical violence (Herek, 1998). Females, it has been suggested, have more fluid sexual roles than men, allowing them to be attracted or intimate with the same sex regardless of perceived sexual orientation. Additionally, women do not experience threat to femininity if attracted to the same sex (Diamond, 2003). To articulate this perspective, I first define and differentiate sexual identity, sexual orientation and sexual behavior. I then consider male sexual desire and fantasy, to provide a back drop for thinking about the meaning of same sex contact between women openly identified as heterosexual. Sexual orientation, sexual identity and sexual behavior are less rigid terms when applied to women in comparison to males.

Sexual identity, sexual orientation, and sexual behavior are important concepts to understand when considering differences in rigidity between sexes regarding these terms. I define each, below.

Sexual identity refers to the degree to which an individual feels an association with a sexual-orientation based group. These groups typically consist of “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” “heterosexual” (Diamond, 2003) or transgendered. One may also have a sexual orientation as a transgendered person. Sexual identity closely relates to self concept in relation to sexual preferences. For example, if a male is interested in women then his sexual identity would be considered heterosexual.

By contrast, sexual orientation is the tendency to be sexually attracted to males and/or females (Diamond, 2003). This is identified by the individual and is dependent on his or her own conception of sexual attraction. Importantly, women may differ between their sexual orientation and sexual identity. A woman may self-identify as heterosexual (sexual identity) but may feel sexual attraction to both men and women (sexual orientation). Thus, the lines become blurred when differentiating between sexual orientation and sexual identity because they are highly subjective.

Sexual identity and sexual orientation are both similar and different concepts that are important to distinguish. In both concepts, the individual defines sexual identity and sexual orientation. More specifically, both of these terms are fairly subjective from person to person. However, sexual identity is an association with a particular group whereas sexual orientation is a felt attraction to a specific sex. Therefore, these concepts are important to distinguish in regards to the current research.

Sexual behavior, also known as sexual contact is another crucial component to the fluidity of women's sexuality. Sexual behavior is measured by the amount of sexual contact with a particular person; however it is typically measured by self-report rather than actually observing individuals' sexual intimacy. Certain aspects of self-report are fairly objective such as, "I kissed her," but can also be subjective such as, "I hooked up with her." The term "hooking up" can mean very different behaviors to different people, thus measuring sexual behavior becomes fairly subjective.

In contrast to sexual identity and sexual orientation, sexual contact focuses on behaviors rather than cognitions about sexuality. Sexual contact is actual physical actions with a partner. These actions are typically sexual in content such as heavy kissing and intimate contact.

An important point for the present theory and research is that individuals' sexual orientation and sexual identity may differ from one another, as noted above, but also each may differ from sexual contact. For example, women may identify as heterosexual but on occasion behave intimately with another woman. In fact, 'heteroflexibility' is a term that refers to the enjoyment of a heterosexual lifestyle but with openness to experimentation with the same sex. 'Heteroflexible' individuals disagree with the binary categories between heterosexual and homosexual and do not fit in the bisexual category (Essig, 2000). Overall, the term 'heteroflexibility' allow women who are heterosexual the ability to explore same sex contact without compromising sexual identity as heterosexual. 'Heteroflexibility' creates an atmosphere of social acceptance for females to be intimate with the same sex but in addition, the male gaze creates a pressure to consider interactions with the same sex.

Motivations: External and Internal

Heterosexual women who partake in sexual activities with other women may be motivated by both internal and/or external reasons. On the one hand, females may want to experiment with other women and are motivated by personal satisfaction. On the other hand, women may engage in sexual behavior with other women to please others, especially males. External motivations can consist of pressures from friends and/or males, attention and intoxication. The male gaze and objectification is an important contribution to the pressure aspect of external motivations.

Motivations to engage in sexual contact with other women depend on situational variables such as the male gaze and personal motivations. Sexual fluidity is not the only motivator for women to engage in sexual behaviors with the same sex. Rather, it can also be the internalization of the male gaze and male sexual desire. The male gaze is the idea that women believe men are constantly observing women. In turn, women proceed to behave in mannerisms to impress men under the male gaze.

Women are exposed frequently to the male gaze and messages regarding female-female eroticism. Men are depicted as finding same sex contact appealing especially when women identify as heterosexual, and are thus available to men (Diamond, 2005). As a result of the media, findings have indicated that men are less likely than heterosexual women to rate same-sex attraction and engage in sexual behaviors with the same sex. (e.g., Lauman, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). Females may engage in sexual contact with same-sex partners due to the associated pressures of desires to entice males.

The Objectification of Women and the Male Gaze

Objectification is the reduction of individuals to sexualized body parts. In contemporary society, women are often objectified in covert and overt ways. The media fuels objectification of women by placing emphasis on sexualized body parts and the thin ideal. The male gaze, as noted above, also contributes to objectification because women may feel a sense of pressure to self-objectify if they believe that they are under the male gaze.

Male objectification can lead to many negative effects on females, including self-objectification in which women reduce themselves to sexualized beings (Fredrickson, 1997). For example, Tiggemann (2001) suggests that women become anxious when their body is exposed in a mirror. More specifically, if women imagined themselves in particular body focused domains such as dressing rooms, they were more likely to express dissatisfaction with their bodies versus a control group that did not imagine body focused domains (Tiggemann, 2001). In present culture, females are treated as objects in many domains and risk the negative outcomes with self-objectification. There are many problems that arise due to male objectification such as eating disorders, self-objectification and body dissatisfaction. (Fredrickson, 1997)

The male gaze is a concept that furthers objectification by the anticipation of a male observer in public situations. Calogero (2004) demonstrated the difference between male gaze over female gaze indicating that women feel more threatened in the presence of a male. Calogero (2004) operationalized threat based on a social physique anxiety scale and body shame scale. The study showed prior to actual conversation with males, women had already experienced heightened body shame and social physique anxiety due to the perceived male gaze. Interestingly, the male gaze was not salient because participants engaged in a phone conversation

with a male however results still showed increase threat even without the physical presence of a male.

Women may internalize objectification, thus leading to a disconnect between personal desires and desires of the opposite sex. Females experience objectification in many ways during each day either by men or by the media. For example, men may be caught staring at a woman's breasts on occasion. Women may then self-sexualize in an unconscious manner in an attempt to satisfy the male gaze and stereotypical ideals of attractiveness. Furthermore, women may spend more time grooming and appearing highly sexualized in order to please the male observers. Females may not recognize or speak out in outrage when men are objectifying them. This may be due to the fact that objectification has become a norm in contemporary society. If women internalize the male gaze, they may be more likely to engage in behaviors that they know men find attractive. Thus, women's internalization of the male gaze could potentially lead to a disconnect with the self which may be responsible for engaging in same sex contact.

The present study researched the effects of objectification on sexual fluidity. More specifically, we predicted that if heterosexually identified women were objectified then they would respond higher to attractiveness ratings of females. Social distance was also tested to determine the degrees of contact. More specifically, participants rated likelihood of particular behaviors with a photograph of a highly attractive woman.

Hypotheses

The goal of the present work is to examine the possibility that objectified, heterosexual women may engage in more fluid sexual behaviors with other women. More specifically, we predict that when under the male gaze, heterosexual women will report greater attraction to other

women and more comfort with physically intimate acts (e.g., flirtation and sex). Since this phenomenon is seen mainly in middle class white females, the internalization of the male gaze would be seen greater in these particular subjects. Participants in a no gaze, control condition, who do not experience any objectification, are not expected to rate females as attractive or respond in agreement to sexual contact with the same sex.

Method

Participants

Participants were 49 women, who were undergraduates at the Pennsylvania State University. Participants volunteered for the study to receive course credit for psychology courses and were told at the time of enrollment that the study was about face perception and liking. Out of all of the women, 26 of the participants partook in the “gaze condition” and 23 participants partook in the “no gaze” condition. The majority of the participants (57.8%) were college freshmen and 82.2 percent were white students. Participants that demonstrated suspicion of hypotheses were taken under consideration during data analyses and only forty-three women were used in the results.

Procedure

When the participants arrived at the lab, they were greeted by a male experimenter. The experimenter was dressed in jeans and a white button down shirt with a black tie. This uniform ensured a perception of a power differential between the participant and the experimenter. The participants were asked to wait outside for a few moments while the experimenter set up for the study. Participants read and signed a consent statement while they were waiting for the experimenter. Each participant was given two copies of the informed consent, one for their

records and the other for the experimenter to keep on file. After two or three minutes, the experimenter returned and led the participant to the lab and directed her to a specific seat next to a computer.

During the experimental session, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and then answer questions during a brief interview with the experimenter. While the participants completed these tasks, the behavior of the experimenter was altered to create two conditions.

The two conditions were: an experimental condition (gaze) and a control condition (no gaze). In the no gaze, control condition the male experimenter made eye contact or looked at his clip board at all times. In addition, while the participants were rating the attractiveness of men and women in a series of images, the experimenter left participants alone to work. By contrast, in the gaze condition, male experimenters objectified the female participants. The experimenter first made eye contact and then gazed from the participant's eyes to hips and back up, which took approximately one second. This occurred once at the beginning of the study after the participants signed a consent statement, then while the experimenter explained the study purpose, and also during the interview.

After answering the demographic questions, participants began a brief interview segment. During the interview, the participant was seated in a chair that was situated two feet away from the experimenter. After the participant answered each of five questions, the experimenter wrote down her responses, said "Okay," and moved on to the next question. In the no gaze condition, participant made eye contact while talking to the participants and looked at his clip board while writing. By contrast, in the gaze condition the experimenter moved his eyes from the

participants' eyes to her chest and back up for one second. This occurred three times during the interview portion: before and after asking the first, third, and last question.

At the end of the interview, participants turned to face the computer and were asked to rate the attractiveness of a series of male and female faces. In the no gaze condition, participants were left alone to rate the images. In the gaze condition, the experimenter stood behind and to one side of the participant, making it possible to see over the participants' shoulder. After the participant rated roughly ten photos, the experimenter walked to the edge of the room, while remaining on her periphery. After thirty seconds, the experimenter walked slowly back to the previous position.

After rating the 40 images, participants were asked to look at a final image of a woman who was rated as highly attractive by an independent sample of participants during pilot testing. While looking at the women, participants were asked to imagine an interaction with the woman and to complete a modified social distance scale (see Appendix B). This scale consisted of items such as, "I would flirt with this person," and "I would have sex with this person." In both conditions, the participant rated a 5x7 photograph of the same highly attractive woman. In the control, no gaze condition, the experimenter told the participant that the selection of the picture was purely random and that she should choose a sealed envelope from a box, which contained numerous pictures of both men and women. In reality, the sealed envelopes only consisted of photographs of the same woman. By contrast, in the gaze condition, the experimenter told the participant that he would "hand pick" the picture she rated. He then looked through a series of pictures, smiled, and said, "I'm curious to know how you will rate her" as he handed the picture to the participant. Similar to the control condition, when the experimenter handpicked the photograph, he was simply searching through photographs of the same woman, however, the

participant was under the impression that he was selecting through many different photographs of men and women.

Two male experimenters ran this study throughout its entirety and were trained a month in advance. Since this is a high impact study, experimenters met once a week for a month to run through the study with the researchers. It is important to remain consistent between the two experimenters to minimize the chance of error. The experimenters' role was essential in determining the outcome of the study. Therefore, the experimenters were experts on the study by the time participants signed up.

Dependent Measures

Attractiveness Ratings: Participants viewed and responded to images of 18 men and 22 women. These images were displayed on the computer and participants rated the attractiveness of each person on four dimensions using 7-point scales (endpoints: 1="strongly disagree" to 7="strongly agree"). These attributes consisted of beautiful, cute, hot, and sexy. We averaged across each participant's 22 ratings of beauty ($\alpha=0.90$), cute ($\alpha=0.87$), sexy ($\alpha=0.93$) and hot ($\alpha=0.92$) to create dependent variables.

Social Distance Scale: The social distance scale measures the distance (and closeness) that people prefer in interactions with another. As noted, the photo of a highly attractive female, who was rated the most attractive woman in the pilot study, was used in order to assess whether women would interact with an attractive female. Once again a seven-point scale was used ranking the likelihood of contact. These items included statements such as "I would flirt with this person" and "I would have sex with this person."

The social distance scale consisted of nine items that varied from minimal closeness to more sexualized interactions. The nine items were submitted to a principle components factor analysis using a varimax rotation. Three factors emerged with eigenvalues of greater than 1.0. Four items loaded on the first factor, including: “If they smiled at me I would smile back,” “I would stand close to this person,” “I would dance close to this person,” and “I would facebook or give my phone number to this person.” We averaged across ratings on these items to create a physical closeness variable, $\alpha=0.72$. Three items loaded on the second factor: “I would flirt with this person,” “I would make out with this person at the party or club,” and “I would grind on this person.” I averaged across ratings on these items to create a flirtation index, $\alpha=0.67$. Lastly, two items loaded on the third factor: “I would go home with this person,” and “I would have sex with this person.” A hook-up variable was created, after averaging across ratings. The hook up variable consisted of a relatively small positive correlation between condition and hooking up (0.22).

Results

Not all participants were included in analyses due to suspicion of the participants to the hypotheses. Out of the forty-nine participants only forty-three were used in analyses, indicating that six of the participants were coded as suspicious.

Attractiveness Ratings

Beauty, cute, sexy, and hot ratings were submitted to a one-way gaze condition Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The F -ratio, p -values, partial eta squares, and means corresponding to each condition are reported in Table 1. No significant effects emerged from these analyses, all $F_s < 1$.

Table 1: ANOVA and Means of Ratings of Beauty, Cute, Hot, and Sexy for the Gaze and No Gaze Conditions.

Variable	<i>F</i> -ratio df=1,43	<i>p</i> -value	Partial Eta Squared, η_p^2	Mean No Gaze Condition	Mean Gaze Condition
Beauty	0.50	0.48	0.01	4.06	3.93
Cute	0.02	0.89	0.00	4.03	4.01
Hot	0.14	0.71	0.00	3.29	3.36
Sexy	0.01	0.91	0.00	3.17	3.20

No significant difference between conditions is noticeable for each rating. The no gaze condition rated cute ($M=4.03$) and beautiful ($M=4.06$) more frequently than the gaze condition ($M=4.01$, $M=3.93$ respectively). The gaze condition, however, rated hot ($M=3.36$) and sexy ($M=3.20$) more frequently than the no gaze condition ($M=3.29$, $M=3.17$ respectively).

The photos used in the attractiveness ratings were previously used in a pilot study for assessing attractiveness levels per photo. For the purpose of this study, different photos indicated different levels of attractiveness. The photo used for the social distance scale was used in the

pilot data and had a mean attractiveness level of 4.91 out of a 7 point scale. In fact, the woman used for the social distance ratings was the woman rated as most attractive by an independent sample of pilot testing participants.

Social Distance

Physical closeness, flirtation and hookup measures were submitted to a one-way gaze condition ANOVA. These analyses produced a single effect that approached significance; there was a marginally significant main effect of condition on flirtation, $F(1,43)=3.223$, $p>.080$, $\eta_p^2=.073$. Importantly, however, this effect was driven by a pattern that was opposite that which was predicted. Women in the no gaze condition ($M=1.85$) reported greater intention to flirt with other women than women in the gaze condition ($M=1.33$). In addition, the parallel effect on physical closeness and intent to hookup did not approach significance, $F_s<1.5$, $p>.23$, the means on these variables were opposite of the predicted pattern, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: ANOVA and Means for Ratings on Closeness, Flirtation, and Hook-up in the Gaze and no Gaze Condition.

Variable	<i>F</i> -ratio df=1,43	<i>p</i> -value	Partial Eta Squared, η_p^2	Mean No Gaze Condition	Mean Gaze Condition
Closeness	1.22	0.28	0.03	4.46	4.00
Flirtation	3.22	0.08	0.07	1.85	1.33

Hook-up	2.11	0.15	0.05	1.10	1.33
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Although the closeness and hook-up variable were not significant, each variable demonstrated minor differences among means. In the closeness variable, participants in the no gaze condition ($M=4.46$) rated higher likelihood of closeness than the gaze condition ($M=4.00$). Whereas, for the hook-up variable, the gaze condition ($M=1.33$) rated higher likelihood of hooking up than the no gaze condition ($M=1.10$).

Exploratory Analyses

Contrary to predictions that women in the gaze condition would rate women as more attractive, no significant difference between conditions occurred. On reflection, we wondered whether differences in attractiveness levels (high, low) would affect results between conditions instead. To examine this we created the following variables: “sexy high,” “sexy low,” “hot high,” “hot low,” “beauty high,” “beauty low,” “cute high,” and “cute low.” Ratings on beauty, cute, hot and sexy were each submitted to separate attractiveness (high, low) by gaze condition (gaze, no gaze) mixed model ANOVAs. In each analysis, attractiveness was a within-in participants variable, and gaze condition was a between participants variable. Results from each of these four analyses are presented below.

Beautiful. A significant main effect of attractiveness was found, $F(1,43)=55.63$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.56$. Highly attractive women ($M=4.38$) were rated higher than moderately attractive women ($M=3.61$). A moderately significant interaction was shown between attractiveness and condition (gaze, no gaze), $F(1,43)=3.11$, $p<.085$, $\eta_p^2=.07$. This interaction is displayed on Table 3.

Table 3: Interaction Between Attractiveness and Condition for Beauty Ratings.

Condition	Highly Attractive	Moderately Attractive
No Gaze	4.53 ^a	3.58 ^b
Gaze	4.23 ^a	3.64 ^b

^a=no significant difference between gaze and no gaze for highly attractive photographs.

^b=no significant difference between gaze and no gaze for moderately attractive photographs.

As noted in the table above, there is a statistically significant difference between attractiveness and the no gaze condition, $F(1,21)=33.58$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.62$, as well as the gaze condition, $F(1,22)=21.48$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.49$. It can be noted that overall, highly attractive females are rated higher by the no gaze condition ($M=4.53$) in contrast to the gaze condition ($M=4.23$). Moderately attractive females, however, are rated higher by the gaze condition ($M=3.64$) than the no gaze condition ($M=3.58$). No significant difference occurred between highly attractive $F(1,43)=2.33$, $p<.14$, $\eta_p^2=.05$, and moderately attractive, $F(1,43)=0.09$, $p<.77$, $\eta_p^2=.01$, on condition (gaze, no gaze).

Cute. One significant main effect was found on the level of attractiveness, $F(1,43)=61.65$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.59$. This indicates that highly attractive women ($M=4.38$) were rated higher than moderately attractive women ($M=3.68$). No significant interactions were found for this analysis between attractiveness and condition (gaze, no gaze).

Hot. Two significant effects emerged from the analysis regarding hot ratings. A significant main effect of attractiveness was seen, $F(1,43)=70.77$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.62$. Highly attractive women were rated higher ($M=3.79$) than less attractive women ($M=2.91$). There was

also a significant interaction between attractiveness and the gaze or no gaze condition, $F(1,43)=5.05, p<.03, \eta_p^2=.11$. The interactions are shown on Table 4.

Table 4: Interaction Between Attractiveness and Condition for Hot Ratings.

Condition	Highly Attractive	Moderately Attractive
No Gaze	3.87 ^a	2.76 ^b
Gaze	3.70 ^a	3.05 ^b

^a=no significant difference between gaze and no gaze for highly attractive photographs.

^b=no significant difference between gaze and no gaze for moderately attractive photographs.

For ratings of hot, highly attractive women were rated on average higher in the no gaze condition ($M=3.87$) in comparison to the gaze condition ($M=3.70$). By contrast, ratings of hot for moderately attractive women were higher in the gaze condition ($M=3.05$) than the no gaze condition ($M=2.76$). Overall, there was a significant difference between gaze, $F(1,22)=25.26, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.53$, and no gaze, $F(1,21)=44.77, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.68$, between the highly attractive and moderately attractive photographs in the interaction. In contrast, there was not a significant difference between highly attractive, $F(1, 43)=0.69, p<.41, \eta_p^2=.02$, and moderately attractive, $F(1, 43)=1.88, p<.18, \eta_p^2=.04$, photos on the condition (gaze, no gaze). This is noted by the superscripts in Table 4.

Sexy. Two significant effects emerged from this analysis. First, there was a significant main effect of attractiveness, $F(1,47)=56.54, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.55$. Not surprisingly, highly attractive women ($M=3.53$) were rated as sexier than moderately attractive women ($M=2.79$). Second, there was a significant interaction between target attractiveness and gaze condition, $F(1,47)=5.44, p<.03, \eta_p^2=.11$. The means for these interactions are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Interaction Between Attractiveness and Condition on Sexy Ratings.

Condition	Highly Attractive	Moderately Attractive
No Gaze	3.69 ^a	2.72 ^b
Gaze	3.38 ^a	2.87 ^b

^a=no significant difference between gaze and no gaze for highly attractive photographs.

^b=no significant difference between gaze and no gaze for moderately attractive photographs.

Similar to ratings of beauty and hot, ratings of sexy demonstrated an interaction between attractiveness and condition. There is a significant difference from high attractiveness to moderately attractive for the gaze condition, $F(1,22)=19.55$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.44$, and the no gaze condition, $F(1,21)=35.07$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.62$. Highly attractive women were rated higher in the no gaze condition ($M=3.69$) in comparison to the gaze condition ($M=3.38$). In contrast, moderately attractive women were rated higher in the gaze condition ($M=2.87$) rather than the no gaze condition ($M=2.72$). There was no significant difference between highly attractive, $F(1, 43)=0.86$, $p<.36$, $\eta_p^2=.02$, and moderately attractive photographs, $F(1, 43)=1.22$, $p<.28$, $\eta_p^2=.03$, on the gaze or no gaze condition as noted by the superscripts.

Discussion

The influence of objectification and the male gaze in this study did not lead to more fluid female responses. In contrast to predictions, women did not rate other women significantly higher than women in the no gaze condition. In regards to social distance, a similar result occurred where no statistical significance between conditions was displayed. Subjects did not rate interactions radically higher in the gaze condition in comparison to the no gaze condition. Thus, the results of this experiment were not consistent with hypotheses.

The social distance scale resulted in opposite results from hypotheses. Participants in the no gaze condition were more likely to indicate a higher likelihood of interaction with a highly attractive woman than the gaze condition. Both the no gaze and gaze condition rated a low likelihood of hooking up with the highly attractive woman. This indicates that women who are under the impression that they are being watched by a male observer will indicate less interaction than women who are not being observed. They may feel highly uncomfortable answering questions about being intimate with another woman, leading participants to rate more conservatively. The likelihood for interaction in regards to hooking up with another woman in general does not differ by condition (no gaze, gaze).

The attractiveness ratings differed in means for the conditions and the various attractiveness labels. Cute and beautiful ratings had a higher average mean in the no gaze condition ($M=4.03$, $M=4.06$, respectively) than the gaze condition ($M=4.01$, $M=3.93$ respectively). On the other hand, hot and sexy ratings were higher in the gaze condition ($M=3.36$, $M=3.20$, respectively) than the no gaze condition ($M=3.29$, $M=3.17$ respectively). Although these means were not statistically significant, it is interesting that it is possible that when placed in a situation involving objectification, women who are objectified may then continue the objectification process on other women. This idea was looked at during exploratory analyses of results for attractiveness ratings.

In the exploratory analyses for attractiveness ratings, it was shown that highly attractive females were rated significantly higher than moderately attractive females. More importantly, the interactions between condition and attractiveness showed some trends among condition. In ratings such as hot, sexy, and beautiful, women rated highly attractive females on average higher in the no gaze condition in comparison to the gaze condition. By contrast, ratings of hot, sexy,

and beautiful for moderately attractive women were higher in the gaze condition than the no gaze condition. There are two implications for these results. I discuss the importance of these findings below.

The exploratory analyses indicate two different possibilities among both highly attractive women and moderately attractive women. Women in the gaze condition may recognize a highly attractive woman as hot, sexy, or beautiful, however the participant may not be comfortable enough to rate the picture as such due to the male gaze. The participant in the gaze condition most likely feels a low level of comfort and may question about validity of the experimenter. Women in the gaze condition probably did not want to give the experimenter encouragement to objectify them and thus responded fairly conservatively for highly attractive women. This is also noted above in the social distance responses, as many women in the gaze condition rated a lower likelihood of contact with a female than in the no gaze condition. Participants were most likely anxious and uncomfortable with the experiment and thus rated attractiveness levels and social distance measures accordingly.

By contrast however, it was noted that moderately attractive women in fact were rated higher for the gaze condition in comparison to the no gaze condition. This creates the potential for the opposite trend with attractiveness ratings. Since women in the gaze condition are experiencing objectification, the participants may in turn objectify other women as well because of the atmosphere of the experiment. The base rate for attractiveness therefore may be higher in the objectification condition indicating that the gaze condition induces a sentiment of sexualizing all photos, including moderately attractive women. The no gaze participants do not witness any objectification thus a sexualized environment did not influence ratings of moderately attractive women.

Sexual fluidity as it relates to the male gaze is a difficult concept to empirically study in a lab. The setting for the experiment does not replicate the exact locations that this behavior occurs. The effects of the male gaze on sexuality are mainly witnessed late at night at parties or clubs. The social distance scale did include a paragraph including a statement about the interaction, i.e. the participant was told she was at a party with the female depicted and the pictured female has been flirting with the participant. However, this statement unfortunately does not tap into the exact sentiments felt late night at parties. Intoxication is a major component of sexual fluidity and influence of the male gaze that cannot be ethically studied in a lab. Thus, results may be different than predictions due to the lack of authentic setting.

Another aspect of this experiment that could have influenced the results is the role of the experimenter. Although objectification has several negative consequences on females overall well-being (see introduction), women may be flattered by the idea that a male is attracted to their bodies. However, if the participants do not perceive the experimenter as attractive, they may be less likely to be impressed by the objectification. Thus, they may respond in more conservative ways because of the lack of sexual interest in the male experimenter. Future research is important to determine the effects of objectification and conservative responses of heterosexually identified women.

The male gaze and sexual fluidity are important concepts to study as heterosexually identified females display more same sex contact to appease men's sexual desires. Although hypotheses for this experiment were not supported, a different approach can be taken to study the effects of the objectified environment on females' responses to other women. In conclusion, the effects of the male gaze are unclear despite predictions supported by sexual fluidity.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: ATTRACTIVENESS RATINGS

Instructions: For this portion of the study, we are interested in people's "snap judgments" or quick impression of others. That is, how they feel about a person simply by looking at him/her for a moment. Next you will see a series of pictures of both men and women paired with an adjective. For each picture, please indicate the extent to which the adjective describes your impression of the person in the picture. For example, you might see a picture of a man or woman along with the word "cute" and would then indicate whether cute describes your impression of the person. Please use the scale provided to indicate your agreement with whether each adjective describes your impression of the person in the picture.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

Beautiful

Cute

Hot

Sexy

Rated Pictures: All of the following images were in a standard size and in random order.





ACADEMIC VITA

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EDUCATION

- The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802
The Schreyer Honors College
Bachelor of Science in Psychology, Neuroscience Option.
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Study Abroad, University of Seville, SPAIN Summer 2009
Cumulative GPA: 3.83/4.0
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- Conard High School, West Hartford, CT Fall 2002-Spring 2006

HONORS/AWARDS

- Dean's List Fall 2006-Spring 2008
- Schreyer Honors Scholar Fall 2008-Present

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- Honors Thesis Fall 2009-Present
"Sexual fluidity and the effects of the male gaze", under the supervision of
Dr. Theresa Vescio.
- Independent research Fall 2008
"Gender differences in attitudes toward body image", under the
supervision of Dr. Theresa Vescio.

ACTIVITIES

- Penn State Ski Team Fall 2006-Spring 2009
- Circle K (Kiwanis International), member Fall 2007-Present
Homecoming Co-chair person Fall 2008
THON Chairperson Fall 2009-Present

THON is IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon, a yearlong effort to raise funds for children affected by cancer.

- Penn State Relay for Life, participant Spring 2008
- Sigma Alpha Pi: Society of Leadership and Success, member Fall 2007-Present
- Psi Chi: National Honors Society of Psychology, member Fall 2009-Present

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

- Patient registration, patient representative, instrumental in initiating electronic medical records.
- Office of Dermatology, Jennifer Pennoyer, M.D. 2006-2008
Summer
Bloomfield, CT

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

- After-school mentoring for children at risk for abuse and failure. 2005-2006
Y-US Inc, Hartford, CT
- Half-way house advocate for recently incarcerated women. Summer 2008
St. Catherine's Place, Hartford, CT

SKILLS

- Fluent in speaking, writing and reading Spanish.