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Sanctioning resistance to sexual objectification:

An integrative system justification perspective

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This manuscript is the <u>accepted version</u> of the paper.

The final definitive version of this paper has been published in:

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Abstract

Sexual objectification is a harmful cultural practice that perpetuates gender inequality and warrants serious attention. The purpose of the present article is to describe an integrated theoretical approach for promoting resistance to the system of sexual objectification. We draw from system justification and objectification theories to propose a two-arm approach that would harness the system justification motive and adjust the lens of self-objectification in order to facilitate social change. We suggest that it is necessary to frame a rejection of the system of sexual objectification as the way to preserve the societal status quo rather than as a threat to it. Further, we argue that it is critical to alter and expand the self-objectified lens through which many women come to view themselves in order to reduce their dependence on the system that constructs and sustains that lens. Although we recognize that multiple approaches and perspectives are needed, we argue that a disruption of the system at its ideological roots is essential to ultimately transcend sexual objectification as a cultural practice.

Keywords: sexual objectification, system justification, social motivation, gender inequality, sexism, gender role, status quo, self-objectification, social justice

Sanctioning and stimulating resistance to sexual objectification:

An integrative system justification perspective

Sexual objectification is a ubiquitous and especially insidious form of sexism that perpetuates gender inequality and warrants serious attention. According to the United Nations (1995), a cultural practice is considered harmful to women if the practice: (a) is harmful to the health of women and girls, (b) arises from material power differences between the sexes, (c) is for the benefit of men, (d) creates stereotypes which thwart the opportunities of girls and women, and (e) is justified by tradition. Sexual objectification meets these criteria for a harmful cultural practice, yet men *and* women justify and promote its occurrence. The purpose of the present article is to describe an integrated theoretical approach that would point toward ways of resisting and disrupting the system of sexual objectification.

Sexual Objectification

Sexual objectification is characterized by the fragmentation of a person into a collection of sexual parts and/or sexual functions (Bartky, 1990). When sexually objectified, a person is no longer perceived as a whole and integrated human being, but as lacking in depth and a unique subjectivity, existing in one dimension for the pleasure of others (Nussbaum, 1995). Everyday environments present recurrent opportunities for women to encounter varying degrees and forms of sexual objectification (Brownmiller, 1975; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Jeffreys, 2005; MacKinnon, 1989; Nielsen, 2002). Situational encounters that constitute sexual objectification include gazing or leering at women's bodies, sexual commentary directed toward women, whistling or honking at women, taking unsolicited photographs of women's bodies, exposure to sexualized media imagery and pornography, sexual harassment, and sexual violence (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991; Gardner, 1980; Kozee, Tylka, Augustus-Horvath, & Denchik, 2007; Macmillan, Nierobisz, & Welsh, 2000; Murnen &

Smolak, 2000; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Increasingly sexual objectification occurs on-line as often as it does off-line via sexting, instant messenger, email, video games, Facebook and other social networking sites, and virtual reality. Although some of these experiences are more common than others, their recurrence in the lives of women and men implies that both genders are regularly reminded (even if only momentarily) of women's position as sex object.

Consequences of Sexual Objectification

Scholars have documented that when objectified, women are stripped of agency and competence (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009), dehumanized (Loughnan et al., 2010), and more likely to be the targets of sexual aggression (Rudman & Mescher, 2012). Moreover, women tend to behave with less social agency under objectifying conditions (Calogero, 2013a; Saguy, Quinn, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2010), report more negative self-evaluations (Calogero, 2004; Tylka & Sabik, 2010), perform worse on concurrent cognitive tasks (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Gervais, Vescio, & Allen, 2011), and report higher levels of mental health risk and self-injurious behavior (Carr & Szymanski, 2011; Muehlenkamp, Swanson, & Brausch, 2005; Tiggemann & Williams, 2012).

The sexual objectification of women also hurts men. When socialized to view girls and women as sexual objects, boys and men learn to value women primarily in accordance with their sexual functioning for the gratification of male desire (Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2006). This perception and treatment of women undermines interpersonal intimacy and relationship satisfaction for both men and women (Kimmel, 2008; Levy; 2005; Tolman, Spencer, Rosen-Reynoso, & Porche, 2003; Zurbriggen, Ramsey, & Jaworski, 2011). For example, regular use of pornography and cybersex by men has been linked to erectile dysfunction, infidelity, marital distress, and divorce (Manning, 2006; Schneider, 2003), thus potentially impacting families and not only the individual men and women involved. Further, women are more likely to feel angry toward men and distrust or even fear them as a result of

sexual objectification (Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010; Fisher & Sloan, 2003; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997), which interferes with developing and sustaining positive interpersonal relationships between women and men. We acknowledge that men, especially particular subgroups such as gay men of color, encounter sexual objectification (Teunis, 2007). These experiences lie within the purview of this proposal, but outside the scope of this article, which necessarily is limited to the sexual objectification of individuals living in female bodies. The sexual objectification of men warrants the same serious consideration; however we would argue that the perspective put forward here for challenging the sexual of objectification of girls and women is applicable to the experience of boys and men.

Sexual Objectification as a System

Observations on the sexual objectification of women are not new, but little has been said about what we can do about it. In 2010, the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, led by Eileen Zurbriggen and colleagues, concluded with a number of recommendations for counteracting the influence of sexualization through research, practice, education and training, public policy, and public awareness. This report is one of the few published documents to consider how we might disrupt objectifying and overtly sexualizing practices (see also, Zurbriggen & Roberts, 2013). We aim to build on these efforts by identifying alternative ways to challenge sexual objectification.

In this paper, we argue that a fundamental tendency to defend and support the *system of sexual objectification* keeps it in place, and that disrupting ideological support for it is essential to change it. The framework put forward here is that sexual objectification is a system—a structured set of social arrangements that prescribe particular and interdependent roles and behaviors to men and women that reinforce the gender hierarchy. Women are positioned in specific ways in this system relative to men that reflect their subordinate and disadvantaged status, effectively keeping them in *their* place. Beyond a benign communication of sexual interest, sexual objectification signals women's decorative status, positioning them as the

target of the evaluation and available for sexual consumption. This system is seamlessly woven into the wider social landscape that women traverse every day and they cannot simply "opt out of" it (Henley, 1997; Jeffreys, 2005; Kaschak, 1992). Given that women cannot readily exit the system, yet are the most disadvantaged by it, they likely view themselves as more dependent on the system and less able to escape it (Kay & Friesen, 2011).

The system of sexual objectification is legitimized and sustained by some deeply entrenched cultural patterns. First, the ubiquitous and normative representation and treatment of girls and women as sexual objects within media, interpersonal encounters, and the wider cultural landscape has rendered it both "inevitable" and "natural." Second, the sexual objectification of women is a highly profitable industry. Third, the sexual objectification of women is intricately tied to compulsory heterosexual masculinity and femininity—which means that changing practices of sexual objectification would require disentangling such practices from what it means to be a man or woman in westernized cultures. Fourth, despite the costs, men and women glean personal, social, and economic advantages from it. Finally, women become complicit in their own sexual objectification. These patterns are largely invisible in their perpetuation of gender inequality, the subordination of women, and the vilification of men. Taken together, under these social conditions, girls and women learn that their value is highly dependent on the degree to which they complement and compliment men through their availability for sexual objectification, bolstering their psychological investment in a system that subordinates them.

In this paper, we propose that an ideological defense of the status quo underlies these complex patterns and social conditions. In particular, we highlight the motivation to defend the system of sexual objectification and the internalization of sexual objectification on the part of women as key ideological operators of this system, which work in concert to sustain sexually objectifying practices. We draw from system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004) and objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) to situate

sexual objectification as part of the gender status quo and position ideological defense for

sexual objectification as the central target for change (for review, see Calogero, 2013b).

Disrupting the Motivation to Defend the System of Sexual Objectification

Denial of the problems and inequities embedded in a system is a fundamental obstacle

to change. In order to disrupt the system of sexual objectification, the harmful consequences of

sexually objectifying practices must be acknowledged and eradicating the system must be

endorsed. However, a challenge to the system of sexual objectification is threatening—and

therein lies the rub. People typically respond to threats to the status quo with increased defense

of the system (Jost et al., 2010; Kay & Friesen, 2011). According to system justification theory,

people are generally motivated to defend, bolster, and justify the status quo (i.e., existing

economic, social, and political arrangements and institutions), and this occurs even when these

social arrangements maintain group inequalities and preserve prejudicial treatment (Jost et al.,

2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost & Kay, 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003). For example, when the

system is threatened, men tend to prefer women who embody traditional gender roles and

stereotypically feminine traits (Lau, Kay, & Spencer, 2008), which keeps the system of sexual

objectification in place by further encouraging women's compliance with the dominant

heterosexual script. In short, when system justification is high, social change is unlikely (Jost

et al., 2012).

It seems that although people do care about justice and experience moral outrage in the

face of injustice, the motivation to justify the way things are weakens the charge of that

outrage (Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Wakslak, Jost, Tyler, & Chen, 2007). In the case of sexual

objectification, dominant cultural beliefs about the essential nature of sexual objectification,

dominance of the male gaze, and the belief that women enjoy being objectified provide the

ideological fuel that legitimizes the system of sexual objectification and reduces distress over it.

A primary aim of our approach is to harness the system justification motive so that it works in

the service of eradicating sexually objectifying practices instead of perpetuating them. Critical

to this approach is to frame a challenge to the system of sexual objectification in a non-threatening and legitimate way in order to garner support for it.

Harnessing the System Justification Motive

In order to harness the system justification motive, we must be sensitive to the contexts in which system justification is most likely to occur. Kay and Friesen (2011) articulated four specific conditions under which system justification is heightened, including system threat, system dependence, system inescapability, and low personal control. In order to disrupt support for the system of sexual objectification, our strategies must take into account these conditions and alter them in order to fully engage people in a rejection of the system. First, the threat experienced in the face of challenges to the system must be defused and/or redirected to avoid further entrenchment in the system (e.g., Kay et al., 2009). Second, the system needs to be viewed as one that can be escaped, both physically and psychologically where possible, to circumvent people's reluctance to challenge those systems in which they must continue to participate (e.g., Laurin, Shepherd, & Kay, 2010). Third, people must also perceive themselves as operating independent of the system, at least to some degree, such that their outcomes are not wholly dependent on that system being sustained (e.g., Kay et al., 2009). Finally, people must feel that they have some degree of personal control over their circumstances to avoid the phenomenon of "compensatory control" whereby people overly rely on social systems as a means of feeling in control (Kay, Whitson, Gaucher, & Galinsky, 2009).

One set of research studies in particular inspired our thinking about novel ways to address resistance to changing sexually objectifying practices. In their insightful research on resistance to environmentalism, Feygina, Jost, and Goldsmith (2010) harnessed the system justification motive in such a way as to encourage pro-environmental behavior, instead of system justification serving as an obstacle to change. Specifically, Feygina et al. were able to demonstrate that people endorsed pro-environmental behavior when it was characterized as upholding the status quo and preserving societal values and way of life—a characterization

they described as *system sanctioned change*. By exposing participants to the message that

"being pro-environmental" is needed to preserve the American way of life and protect the

country's natural resources, these researchers linked the values of environmentalism to the

values of patriotism and preservation of the societal status quo. In this case, the resistance to

pro-environmental behavior was framed as the threat to the system, rather than the changes that

would be required to create a more environmentally conscious and friendly society. Under this

reframing, people were motivated to defend an environmentally conscious system as opposed

to a status quo that is harming the natural environment and the people dependent on it.

Along these lines, it may be possible to reframe messages about sexual objectification

so that they work with system justification motivation instead of against it. By framing change

to the system of sexual objectification as both necessary and in line with societal values and

goals, it may be possible to override the tendency to resist change to the status quo. The goal of

this alternative framing is to reduce the threat to the status quo that a challenge to the system of

sexual objectification would predictably produce. Instead, cultural practices of sexual

objectification are positioned as the threat to the system. The crux of the system sanctioned

approach for disrupting sexual objectification is to encourage people to perceive eradicating

sexual objectification as sanctioned by the very system they wish to defend and preserve.

Framing a rejection of sexual objectification as endorsed by and for the betterment of the

broader society might sanction such a system shift and provide a new avenue for

delegitimizing the system of sexual objectification.

A related avenue for harnessing the system justification motive comes from research on

the anticipatory rationalization of the status quo (Kay, Jimenez, & Jost, 2002). Among people

with high motivational involvement, Kay et al. demonstrated that people tend to rationalize

(and find more desirable) outcomes to the extent that those outcomes are anticipated to occur.

Framing the disruption and eradication of sexually objectifying practices as inevitable (or

already happening) may increase the extent to which people rationalize and defend such

changes in anticipation of those outcomes reflecting the status quo. Due to the extent to which sexual objectification permeates daily life, and its links to both social rewards and social costs for women and men, we imagine that people, on average, would experience high motivational involvement in the outcomes associated with the system of sexual objectification, which appears to be critical for making these anticipatory rationalizations. This strategy might reflect one way in which even the most resistant individuals might be motivated to rationalize and support impending changes to the system. Moreover, this strategy presents the system of sexual objectification as escapable because the change is described as already happening and very likely to happen, thus discouraging people from taking the mindset that they simply need to make the best out of a bad situation—their situation can actually be changed.

Altering minimal aspects of the environment might work to harness the system justification motive and help erode support for the system of sexual objectification. We can create and communicate brief messages that describe the sexual objectification of girls and women as destructive (not constructive) to society and how it threatens to subvert our way of life. Some messages might target the commercialization and commodification of women's bodies in the media—and the money made at the expense of health, well being, and integrity for girls, women, boys, and men. For example, we might summarize evidence underscoring the fact that objectified imagery does not sell more products, an argument put forward by advertisers, but it does incur psychological harm to the viewers of it (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004). Other messages might target the sexualization of young girls. We might position the sexualized portrayals of adolescent girls in the media (Merskin, 2004) or the clothing sold for toddlers with slogans such as "Future Porn Star" as inviting adults to view children sexually, inconsistent with the provision of safe environments for children, and fueling violence toward women (Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002; Rudman & Mescher, 2012). Still other messages might communicate the negative impact of consuming pornographic imagery for men, including premature ejaculation and erectile dysfunction (Schneider, 2003). Moreover, it

would seem vital to communicate the difference between being sexualized and the embodiment of healthy sexuality and sexual behavior per se (APA, 2010), with the latter being undermined under sexually objectifying conditions for both men and women.

Critically, the content of these messages must include the idea that disrupting (and not sustaining) the system of sexual objectification is compatible with our concerns as a society about the treatment of other human beings as less than fully human and worthy of respect. All of these examples point toward ways in which we might be able to align the values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness with a rejection of the sexually objectifying practices that thwart these pursuits for all people. Presenting sexual objectification as the threat to the system that we need to defend against, and the eradication of sexual objectification as inevitable and already happening might help to harness the system justification motive in a way that would actually facilitate social change around sexual objectification. This framework could be delivered in the form of experimental and field studies to test their effectiveness in reducing ideological support for the system of sexual objectification across diverse sample and contexts.

Disrupting the Internalization of Sexual Objectification

To disrupt the system of sexual objectification, we also need to consider what it means to be made into a sexual object. System justification theorists argue that people come to view themselves, as members of particular groups, in the same way that the culture views and portrays them (Jost, Pelham, & Caravallo, 2002). Thus, we also call on objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) to deconstruct the lens of sexual objectification. The theory argues that repetitive and systematic encounters of sexual objectification eventually lead girls and women to internalize the sexual objectification, or self-objectify. The adoption of this particular cultural lens encourages women to view their bodies primarily in terms of their sexual value and attractiveness to others, rather than on their value and function for the self. A large body of research has confirmed that, once in place, self-objectification is associated with a variety of negative consequences among women, including impairments to intrapersonal,

interpersonal, cognitive, physical, and mental health functions (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 2011; Moradi & Huang, 2008; Tiggemann & Williams, 2012).

Despite the negative impact at an individual level, this self-objectified lens garners women's compliance with sexual objectification. Investment in appearance as the means to self-worth and social status brings women in line with the system, which motivates them to work harder in the service of that system (Calogero & Jost, 2011). It stands to reason that if women come to depend on their appearance for power and status, they would be less likely to challenge the status quo that produces those power arrangements, perhaps because they view the arrangements as fair and necessary (Calogero, 2013a). At a cultural level, we are steeped in the pageantry, sensationalism, and recompense associated with sexually objectifying imagery and behavior, which coaxes girls and women into appropriating their own sexual objectification. Indeed, some women report pleasure and feel a sense of power from being positively evaluated in objectifying environments (Moffitt & Szymanski, 2011). However, the positive effects seem to be short-lived and ultimately self-objectification is disempowering and debilitating for women (Calogero, 2013b). This investment does not elevate women's status relative to men because the self-objectification remains in the service of a patriarchal system. Thus, although not good for women in the long run, self-objectification serves as a palliative in the short-term by legitimizing and naturalizing women's lower social standing in the gender hierarchy. Parents, teachers, coaches, peers, and any community members who wish to advocate for girls and women must communicate awareness and education about the harm of self-objectification more consistently.

We also wish to point out that men are also dependent on the system of sexual objectification. Their advantaged location within this system allows them to regulate women's bodies and exert social control, thus providing social rewards and opportunities men might be reluctant to give up. Further, the performance of traditional heterosexual masculinity requires the sexual objectification of women as a marker of manhood (Kimmel, 2008; Zurbriggen,

2010). To not engage in sexual objectification presumes there is something "wrong" with those men and social penalties may be dolled out. This prescription for men's behavior is not always hostile but often takes benevolent forms; thus, both women and men often will not detect it as problematic. The gendered cultural lens through which men come to view themselves must also be adjusted in a non-threatening way. Men's dependence on the system of sexual objectification, albeit different, needs to be undone and reframed. For the sake of space, we limit our attention to women's dependence with respect to their own self-objectification, but this restricted focus is not meant to diminish the importance or complexity of challenging this particular context under which men are also more likely to support sexual objectification.

That said, part of eradicating the system of sexual objectification must involve changing the self-objectified lens through which girls and women come to view themselves as a result of living in a sexually objectifying cultural milieu. We argue that disentangling the sexually objectifying gaze from women's subjectivity and disrupting their dependence on the system of sexual objectification is necessary to weaken and ultimately dismantle it. Helping girls and women identify sexual objectification as a threat to themselves and society (e.g., the rampant sexualization of girls) encourages them to adopt a *contextualization schema* (Tylka & Augustus-Horvath, 2011). If we actively help girls and women to (a) articulate and discuss the ill effects of sexual objectification and (b) develop a schema to contextualize it, then they will be less likely to self-objectify and more likely to pinpoint instances in which sexual objectification harms others and society at large. A contextualization schema entails a girl or woman placing appropriate blame on the threatening cultural conditions that facilitate sexual objectification rather than internalizing the instance of sexual objectification and blaming herself. A girl or woman who has a contextualization schema acknowledges that, in the face of a sexually objectifying situation, "my discomfort is a reflection of the person (or media) objectifying me rather than an indication of my worth." In this way, girls and women learn to identify the myriad of sexual objectifying situations (because they are often covert) and

develop scripts for how to handle interpersonal sexually objectifying encounters.

Developing a contextualization schema is a form of system-sanctioned change, in that the threat is put back on sexual objectification itself and the societal conditions in which it is rooted. The system of sexual objectification is positioned as the problem undermining health, well-being, and safety. This reframing should help defuse the threat of social change instead of serving as the threat the girls and women wish to buffer themselves against. Adjusting the self-objectified lens and developing a contextualization schema for sexual objectification also represent ways to address system dependence and the sense of low personal control, which contribute to greater support for the existing system, even when confronted with the significant harm inflicted on its participants. By expanding self and identity beyond appearance and sexual object, girls and women should become aware of other ways to glean social rewards and secure status. By shifting investment away from appearance and toward abilities, aspirations, and achievements, girls and women should come to view themselves as less dependent on the system of sexual objectification to define their value and self-worth. Providing girls and women with specific actions that can be taken in the face of sexual objectification is necessary to instill a greater sense of personal control over these largely uncontrolled and uncontrollable situations.

Likewise, providing boys and men with specific actions that they can partake in when they witness sexual objectification would provide them with a greater sense of personal control over these situations as well. These actions could be modeled after the Men's Program (Foubert, 2005), an effective rape prevention program based on the premise that men's lasting attitude and behavior change will occur if the message maintains their existing self-perceptions (i.e., that they are not potential rapists) and they are motivated to hear it, able to understand it, and perceive it as relevant to them. The program raises awareness of behaviors that threaten society by promoting the acceptability of sexual assault (e.g., rape jokes). This approach further promotes system-sanctioned change by identifying the threat to the system as male

violence and not the change to traditional masculinity identities, which would be required to reduce sexual objectification. Tailoring this approach to focus on the wider scope of sexual objectification might help men develop more empathy for women who are targets of sexual objectification and to know how to take action against it.

Once contextualized, it might be possible to adjust the self-objectified lens, but caution is warranted here. We cannot begin to strip away a deeply constructed identity without offering an alternative self-perspective to try on and examine. Instead of a focus on how their bodies may appear to others or be used for the pleasure of others, especially in the service of boys and men, girls' and women's attention should be expanded to embrace a multi-dimensional self-perspective, including a focus on competence, bodily functionality, embodiment, authenticity, individuality, achievement, and sexual desire and pleasure. Exploration of these alternatives may provide girls and women with more options from which to choose how to be *more authentic* within a cultural context that narrowly defines and packages the female body and behavior. Indeed, these adjustments and expansions are critical for reducing self-objectification, but also for reducing women's perceived dependence on the system of sexual objectification and the perceived lack of control over such circumstances. Alternative lenses must be provided through which to direct and channel their energies, efforts, and needs, especially within an environment that will continue to be saturated with opportunities for sexual objectification for some time. The earlier we can intervene on behalf of girls and women to disrupt the internalization of the sexually objectifying gaze the more thorough the disruption of the system of sexual objectification.

In addition to increasing awareness of alternative and multiple identities among girls and women, it is critical to think more carefully about how the category of gender intersects with other social identities in the context of sexual objectification. At the moment, gender is at the center of the examination of sexual objectification, whereas other equally critical social identities (e.g., racial ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, ableness, religion, age) remain

in the margins. This central positioning of gender seems logical to the extent that gender most readily marks for us the power relations embedded in sexual objectification dynamics, but we now know this narrow perspective is insufficient for understanding the reality of sexual objectification in people's actual lives (see Shields, 2008). The form that sexual objectification takes, how it functions, and who it impacts varies across intersections of social identities as well as cultural settings and conditions (Hill & Fischer, 2008; Moradi & Rottenstein, 2007; Tolaymat & Moradi, 2011; World Health Organization, 2005). Keeping this intersectional perspective in mind, we still propose that a fundamental defense of whatever those sexually objectifying practices entail lies at the heart of resistance to dismantling them. Therefore, bringing these forms of intersectionality into the center of our investigations of sexual objectification as a system is essential to fully illuminate which women and which men are most vulnerable to sexual objectification as well as most resistant to changing it.

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that alternative depictions of women and men as more than mere bodies are necessary to disrupt the system of sexual objectification. This alterative imagery must communicate a less objectifying and more embodying representation of people's talents and abilities, thereby changing the toxic media landscape that is part of the sexually objectifying status quo, especially in regard to the portrayal of women. Importantly, these images would also need to be paired with the message that perpetuating sexually objectifying imagery is destructive to our social system—destructive to raising healthy boys and girls, achieving greater intimacy and satisfaction within our relationships, and diverting attention from parenting, partnering, and/or productivity in our lives. Again, encouraging people to perceive non-objectifying media as constructive for building and sustaining societal values and goals might harness the system justification motive in such a way as to facilitate actions toward endorsing and creating non-objectifying environments. Media literacy programs, for example, could be further tailored to harness the system justification motive in the ways described above, potentially maximizing their

effectiveness and directly engaging with those conditions that heighten people's resistance to change.

Concluding Remarks

Outcries over the injustices, inequities, and harm perpetuated and sustained by sexual objectification are not uncommon and continue to gain momentum across lay and scientific communities. Despite these outcries, however, the sexual objectification of women remains a normalized feature of the cultural status quo. In this paper, we propose a two-arm approach that would harness the system justification motive and adjust the lens of self-objectification in order to facilitate change. We suggest that it is necessary to frame a rejection of the system of sexual objectification as the way to preserve the societal status quo rather than as a threat to it. Further, we argue that it is critical to alter and expand the self-objectified lens through which many women come to view themselves in order to reduce their dependence on the system that constructs and sustains that lens. We do not presume that this approach is *the* solution or antidote to eradicating the system of sexual objectification. What is clear to us at this point is that to ultimately transcend sexual objectification, we must disrupt the system at its ideological roots, thereby working with the system justification motive instead of against it to facilitate large-scale social change.

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