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MAKING THE POLITICAL PERSONAL:  
INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN FEMINIST BELIEFS AND SEXUAL  
ASSERTIVENESS

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MAKING THE POLITICAL PERSONAL: INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN FEMINIST BELIEFS AND SEXUAL ASSERTIVENESS

by

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B.A., Kalamazoo College, 2002  
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A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctorate of Philosophy Degree

Department of Psychology  
in the Graduate School  
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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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May 14, 2012

## **AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF**

KATE MILLER HAGADONE, for the DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY degree in PSYCHOLOGY, presented on May 14, 2012, at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

**TITLE: MAKING THE POLITICAL PERSONAL: INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMINIST BELIEFS AND SEXUAL ASSERTIVENESS**

**MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Ann R. Fischer**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, by examining three potential mediators of that relationship: self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing. Cross-sectional survey data were collected via online survey from 188 women. Results from correlational analyses indicated that active commitment to feminist beliefs was significantly related to lower levels of self-objectification and self-silencing and higher levels of empowered entitlement, but was not related to sexual assertiveness. Identification with nonfeminist beliefs (passive acceptance of sexism) was significantly related to higher levels of self-objectification and self-silencing and decreased empowered entitlement, as well as lower levels of sexual assertiveness. Baron and Kenny's (1986) regression approach was used to explore potential mediators of the relationship between identification with nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. In individual regression analyses, self-silencing fully mediated the relationship between identification with nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. Regression analyses examining empowered entitlement as a mediator approached significance and analyses examining self-objectification as mediator were non-significant.

An integrative analysis utilizing Preacher and Hayes' (2008) method for evaluating indirect effects in multiple mediator models was used to further explore the impact of all three mediator variables and two covariates (age and education level) on the relationship between

nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. The overall model accounted for a significant portion of the variance in sexual assertiveness and the total indirect effect of nonfeminist beliefs on sexual assertiveness through the set of mediators was significant, whereas the direct effect of nonfeminist beliefs on sexual assertiveness was not significant, indicating that, after controlling for covariates, the set of three mediators together (self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing) fully mediated the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. However, self-silencing appeared to contribute the only unique significant mediation in the model, accounting for approximately 84% of the total indirect effect. Unique indirect effects for self-objectification and empowered entitlement were not significant. Implications for understanding the relationship between identification with nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness and directions for future research are discussed.

## **DEDICATION**

To my grandmothers: B. Yvonne (Knapp) Miller (1925–2008) who taught me to be discerning and to appreciate beauty in the world, and Barbara (Osborne) Hagadone Kloet (1928-2011), who showed me how to be a strong and smart woman. I am lucky to have known you both.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This review aims to provide a theoretical and research-based framework for the present study. The goals of the present study were to explore the relationship between sexual assertiveness and feminist identity among heterosexual adult women and to examine potential mediators of this relationship. Sexual assertiveness is the ability to openly and directly communicate one's needs and desires within a sexual encounter. An examination of variables related to sexual assertiveness is important because sexual assertiveness has been linked to many beneficial outcomes and avoidance of negative outcomes. Lower levels of sexual assertiveness have been associated with risky sexual behavior (e.g., not discussing sexual relationship history with a partner, not using barrier protection such as condoms), increased self-consciousness during sexual encounters, and increased experiences of sexual victimization. (Macy, Nurius, & Norris, 2006; Quina, Harlow, Morokoff, Burkholder, & Dieter, 2000; Zamboni, Crawford, & Williams, 2000). In contrast, higher levels of sexual assertiveness have been linked with increased relationship and sexual satisfaction (Apt, Hurlbert, Pierce, & White, 1996; MacNeil & Byers, 2009).

However, behaving in sexually assertive ways may be particularly difficult to women due to a variety of factors. One barrier to sexual assertiveness for women may include traditional gender stereotypes associated with the patriarchal culture of the United States which emphasize a submissive, passive sexual role for women (e.g., Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). This may be especially true in heterosexual encounters in which the male partner is expected to play a powerful, active role in the relationship. Another barrier women may experience is concern with actual or perceived threats of negative consequences if they choose to go against the traditional

passive sexual role. Women tend to be judged more negatively than men for their sexual behaviors, especially if those behaviors deviate from the culturally acceptable norms. Gentry (1998) notes that women may be judged according to a sexual double standard, where behaviors that are deemed acceptable for men are seen as unacceptable or immoral for women, such as having multiple sexual partners, higher levels of sexual activity, or casual sexual encounters. If a woman assertively states her sexual needs or even brings her own contraception to a sexual encounter, she may be seen as deviant or unfeminine (e.g., Hynie & Lydon, 1995). Given the traditional gender role stereotypes for women and taboo against talking about sexual needs and desires – even with other women – for fear of negative consequences, it is not surprising that women may also have few positive alternative models available on how to be sexually assertive (Tolman, 2002). In the absence of positive models, women may rely instead on popular culture images that tend to reinforce traditional passive gender stereotypes for women (Stevens Aubrey, 2004).

Thus, although having higher levels of sexual assertiveness has been associated with beneficial and important outcomes, it may be difficult for women in particular to be sexually assertive within their relationships. However, a lower sense of sexual assertiveness is not inevitable for women. For example, Twenge (2001) examined six decades of research on women's assertiveness levels and found social change appeared to have had a profound effect on women's self-reported assertiveness levels. Twenge identified several broad social changes that accompanied the observed increase in women's average self-reported assertiveness, including employment outside the home, later age at first marriage, and higher educational attainment for women. Many of these changes related to challenging traditional U.S. cultural stereotypes for women and were aims of the second wave feminist movement, and one the third wave feminist

movement has sought to implement in the daily lives of women (Baumgardner & Richards, 2010; Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). Understanding the sociocultural changes that are positively associated with women's assertiveness levels may lead to an understanding of other processes underlying women's sexual assertiveness. Identification with feminist beliefs may be one avenue by which women are able to increase their level of sexual assertiveness.

Identification with feminist beliefs may aid women in challenging barriers to sexual assertiveness in at least three ways: by allowing them a critical lens through which to analyze traditional gender stereotypes for women and men, allowing them a means of challenging culturally prescribed behaviors, and offering models for new ways of interacting within intimate heterosexual encounters. Researchers have found that individuals who identify with feminist beliefs or have had specific training in feminism report an increased critical awareness of sexism and the socially-constructed nature of cultural stereotypes and behaviors for men and women (e.g., Fischer & Good, 1994; Worell, Stilwell, Oakley & Robinson, 1999). In increasing their awareness of these stereotypes as socially constructed rather than fixed entities, women who identify as feminist may then be able to challenge these beliefs within their relationships. In contrast with traditional cultural models of sexuality that tend to divide men and women into active and passive roles, respectively, feminist models of sexuality may provide a framework for more egalitarian alternatives in sexual encounters, wherein both partners are able to be active sexual subjects and assert and discuss their needs and desires equally (e.g., Jackson & Cram, 2003). Indeed, when compared with women with low or no identification with feminist beliefs, women who report holding higher levels of feminist beliefs also report positive feelings about their own sexuality, significantly less support for the sexual double standard, increased self-

advocacy in sexual encounters, and higher levels of condom-use self-efficacy (Bay-Cheng & Zucker, 2007; Schick, Zucker, & Bay-Cheng, 2008).

However, it may be that rather than directly impacting women's level of sexual assertiveness, feminist beliefs may lead to a series of change processes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, which then impact sexual assertiveness. Yoder, Perry, and Saal (2007) noted that the relationship between feminist beliefs and positive outcomes such as sexual assertiveness is poorly understood and warrants further examination. The present study examined potential mediators of the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness. Based on a study of the theoretical literature, self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing were chosen to be examined as potential mediators of the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness.

Objectification theory is based on the idea that women are viewed as sexual objects within U.S. culture and are evaluated primarily based on their appearance (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Rather than being seen as individuals with their own needs, desires and boundaries, women may be seen as primarily physical bodies, their value assessed by the benefit they may pose as a sex object to an outside observer. Women may develop and internalize a critical self-awareness in response to this pressure to define their value as a passive sexual object (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). This self-objectification may lead a woman to engage in body monitoring, continually assessing and being concerned with how she may appear to an outside observer. Thus, a woman who has high levels of self-objectification may have difficulty being sexually assertive in heterosexual encounters because she may have internalized this view of herself as a passive sexual object, rather than an active subject.

Given that sexual encounters intimately involve one's body, it is unsurprising that negative feelings about one's body have been associated with negative sexual experiences. Researchers have found that negative relationships with one's body (including negative body image, self-consciousness during sex, and self-objectification) have been associated with emotional disengagement during sex, decreased sexual self-esteem, decreased sexual satisfaction, increased engagement in risky sexual behaviors, increased endorsement of a sexual double standard, as well as lower levels of sexual assertiveness specifically (Dove & Wiederman, 2000; Gillen, Lefkowitz, & Shearer, 2006; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether & Caruthers, 2005; Wiederman, 2000; Yamamiya, Cash, & Thompson, 2006).

Holding feminist beliefs may help decrease a woman's self-objectification, thus increasing her sexual assertiveness. An exploration of past research yields three primary ways in which feminist beliefs may affect women's relationships with their bodies (Murnen & Smolak, 2009; Rubin, Nemeroff, & Russo, 2004). These include (1) offering a critical lens through which women may identify negative cultural messages about women's objectification; (2) providing a way of re-interpreting and reframing those negative cultural messages, and (3) offering ways of actively resisting sexist cultural messages, such as celebrating body diversity and engaging in activism with other women. Indeed, higher levels of feminist identity have been associated with decreased body dissatisfaction, increased body satisfaction, and decreased body anxiety (Peterson, Grippo, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2008; Sabik & Tylka, 2006; Snyder & Hasbrouck, 1996). However, others have found mixed results in examining the relationship between feminist beliefs and body image (e.g., Ojerholm & Rothblum, 1999; Tiggemann & Stevens, 1998). Further research exploring the relationship between holding feminist beliefs and self-objectification is needed. The present study sought to explicate this relationship by exploring the potential

mediating role of self-objectification in the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness.

Empowered entitlement is a second potential mediator variable that was explored. Empowered entitlement, a positive, non-narcissistic form of entitlement, encompasses one's beliefs about what she or he feels she or he deserves and can expect from others (Nadkarni et al., 2005). It may motivate individuals to insist on fair treatment to obtain what they deserve. Women who are low in empowered entitlement may not feel they deserve to assert their needs and desires in sexual encounters or may not feel they can expect to have their needs met. However, having an increased sense of entitlement may help women to assert themselves in heterosexual relationships. Nadkarni et al. (2005) found that women with higher levels of empowered entitlement indicated higher levels of decision-making power within their romantic relationships than women with lower levels of entitlement. Kahn (2001) found that higher levels of empowered entitlement were associated with increased sexual assertiveness and satisfaction.

Having a strong sense of entitlement may be difficult for women in U.S. culture, however. In general, women report lower levels of entitlement than men in many major areas of life, including employment, academics, relationships, and within the home (Bylsma & Major, 1994; Ciani, et al., 2008; McGann & Steil, 2006; Travis, 2006). However, this lower sense of entitlement is not inevitable. Indeed, researchers have found that when women's status is raised under manipulated experimental conditions, their sense of entitlement increases and the impact of their subordinate status within U.S. patriarchal culture is reduced (Hogue & Yoder, 2003). When women feel their contributions and voice are valuable, their sense of entitlement may increase. Holding feminist beliefs may help women to question their power-down status in U.S. culture and place increased value on their needs and desires, thus helping to increase their levels

of sexual assertiveness. By developing an increased sense of status and entitlement, women who hold feminist beliefs may be empowered to challenge cultural norms that pressure them to accept less than their male partner (Jost, 1997).

Despite the promising research on the potential relationship of empowered entitlement with sexual assertiveness and feminist beliefs, the research examining these relationships is very limited. The present study aimed to fill in the gaps in the current literature by providing a more nuanced picture of the relationship between these variables, and the potential role of empowered entitlement in mediating the relationship between sexual assertiveness and identification with feminist beliefs in particular.

Women's sexual assertiveness may also be impacted by their level of self-silencing. Self-silencing is a concept developed by Jack (1991) to describe the active process of censoring one's thoughts, opinions, and ideas within an intimate relationship in order to avoid conflict and attempt to maintain the relationship. It is important to note the cultural context for self-silencing theory; it may be that self-silencing is considered more pathological in individualistic cultures that place the needs of the individual first than in collectivistic cultures where self-silencing behaviors may be more normative and encouraged (Leung & Stephan, 2001).

In general, this silencing of one's own viewpoint to prioritize that of others may lead to a devaluing of and disconnection from one's own views and desires. Specifically, a woman may discount her own needs and desires around sexual encounters, particularly if she fears negative consequences from her partner in going against the traditionally passive cultural role for women (e.g., Tolman, 2002). Therefore, if a woman engages in self-silencing, she may be less likely to assert herself in sexual encounters. Self-silencing has been associated with less assertive responding to a partner's sexual aggression, lower sexual body esteem, higher sexual self-

consciousness, lower levels of deservingness to sexual pleasure, less sexual self-efficacy, as well as lower levels of sexual assertiveness (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006; Jacobs & Thomlison, 2009; Macy et al., 2006; Schembri & Evans, 2008).

The passive, submissive cultural behaviors that women are pressured to engage in within U.S. culture are likely to encourage self-silencing and make sexual assertiveness difficult. Women may feel they have no alternative to self-silencing within interpersonal relationships. Any frustration or distress that they may feel as a result of repressing their needs and desires may be understood to be a personal flaw, rather than a natural result of cultural pressures to self-silence. Holding feminist beliefs may help women to understand their experience within the context of patriarchal culture, rather than an individual failing. Researchers have found that women who indicate higher levels of feminist identity also note lower levels of self-silencing, whereas women who endorse traditional female gender stereotypes report engaging in more self-silencing (Witte & Sherman, 2002). Thus, in seeking to explore potential mediators of the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness, self-silencing emerged as a promising candidate. However, the direct research examining the relationship of feminist beliefs with self-silencing and the connection that relationship may have to sexual assertiveness is limited. The present research sought to contribute uniquely to the existing literature by exploring the potential mediating role of self-silencing in the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness.

In summary, past research has suggested a positive relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness. Additionally, data on the associations between these variables and self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing, respectively, was encouraging for exploring these variables as potential mediators. However, given the association between lower

sexual assertiveness and negative outcomes, there is a clear need to continue research in this area. Although past research has been suggestive of a positive association between sexual assertiveness and identification with feminist beliefs and a negative association between sexual assertiveness and endorsement of traditional gender stereotypes, a good understanding of this relationship is still lacking. The first objective of the present study was to examine the association between sexual assertiveness and feminist identity.

The present study aimed to further contribute to the current literature by examining potential mediators of that relationship. The second goal was to explore the role of self-objectification as a potential mediator in the relationship between sexual assertiveness and feminist identity. Past research has been suggestive of a negative association between self-objectification and feminist identity and a negative link between self-objectification and sexual assertiveness. However, the present study contributes uniquely to the literature by directly exploring self-objectification as a potential mediator of the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness. A third aim of the present study was to investigate the potential mediating effects of empowered entitlement on the relationship between sexual assertiveness and feminist identity. A fourth purpose was to study self-silencing as a potential mediating variable in the relationship between feminist identity and self-silencing.

In sum, the goal of the present research was to further explore the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness and to examine potential mediators of that relationship. Given the connection between higher levels of sexual assertiveness and beneficial outcomes for women, a deeper understanding of the variables that may be positively related with sexual assertiveness is important. Ultimately, our increased understanding of these associations may

help to develop ways of increasing women's sexual assertiveness to aid them in establishing healthier and more positive sexual relationships.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The ability to ask for one's needs to be met in sexual encounters is a crucial component of sexual health (e.g., Livingston, Testa, & VanZile-Tamsen, 2007; Quina et al., 2000). The ability to be assert oneself in sexual encounters has been linked with many beneficial outcomes, including increased use of safe-sex behaviors (e.g., talking with partner about their sexual history, using barrier protection such as condoms), fewer experiences of sexual victimization, decreased self-consciousness during sexual encounters, and increased relationship and sexual satisfaction (MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Macy, Nurius, & Norris, 2006, Quina, et al., 2000; Zamboni et al., 2000)

However, women may have a more difficult time being sexually assertive in heterosexual encounters than men, due to a variety of factors. Barriers to women's sexual assertiveness may include traditional cultural stereotypes within the patriarchal culture of the United States which emphasize a powerful, active sexual role for men, and a submissive, passive role for women (e.g., Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). Women may fear or experience negative repercussions or judgments related to going against the traditional paradigm, and may lack alternative models for positive, assertive sexuality which may further dissuade them from being assertive (e.g., Jackson & Cram, 2003; Tolman, 2002).

Whereas traditional cultural views on women's sexuality may serve to silence women, pathologize and minimize their experiences, and isolate them, connection with feminist beliefs may lead to a recognition of the cultural pressures to behave specific ways, an honoring and normalizing of individual experiences, and an opportunity to obtain support within a collective

community (Crawford & Unger, 2004). Feminist scholarship may offer alternative models for women's sexuality, including an emphasis on encouraging and honoring women's own voices of their sexual experiences (e.g., Kleinplatz, 2001). This may allow women to have a more embodied experience of their sexuality, rather than one of self-objectification; to have the ability to verbalize their needs openly in interpersonal relationships, rather than feeling a need to silence themselves, and to feel more entitled to their needs and experiences. This, in turn, may allow women a greater ability to assert themselves within sexual encounters.

Despite the benefits of being sexually assertive for women, and the potentially beneficial relationship between holding feminist beliefs and demonstrating sexual assertiveness, there has been little exploration of this relationship (Yoder, Perry, & Saal, 2007). Further examination of the relationship between holding feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, as well as potential mediators of that relationship, is important to our understanding of women's well-being. This review of the literature explores the concept of sexual assertiveness, barriers to sexual assertiveness in women, and how feminist beliefs may reduce these barriers and help women to be more assertive in (hetero)sexual relationships. This relationship between sexual assertiveness and feminist beliefs will be explored, as will potential mediators of that relationship, including self-objectification, entitlement, and self-silencing.

### **Sexual Assertiveness**

Assertiveness is the ability to stand up for one's self without violating or denying the rights of others. The right to be assertive is often conceived as a fundamental right of every individual to express her or his values, needs, desires, or opinions openly. This is particularly true in individualistic cultures, where the focus is placed on obtaining the greatest benefit for the individual and may be somewhat less emphasized in collectivistic cultures, where the focus is on

the needs of the group over the individual (Leung & Stephan, 2001)<sup>1</sup>. Assertiveness is a learned skill that involves direct and honest interpersonal communication that is neither aggressive nor passive (Alberti & Emmons, 2008; Bishop, 2006; Rakos, 1991<sup>2</sup>).

In the realm of sexuality, assertiveness constitutes the ability to clearly state one's desires, needs, and wants with regards to sexual situations, decisions, and choices in the pursuit of sexual autonomy<sup>3</sup> (e.g., Greene & Faulkner, 2005). This is based on the cultural assumption that "individuals 'own' or have rights over their bodies and their sexuality and are never under a social obligation to let someone touch their body (except in the social convention of the handshake) or to touch another person sexually" (Morokoff, et al., 1997, p. 791). Thus, this "right" may be expressed by refusing or initiating aspects of the sexual experience.

However, being sexually assertive may be more difficult for women in the U.S. than it is for men. There tend to be substantially more barriers to being sexually assertive for women, while in U.S. culture, it is generally seen as normative for a male partner in a heterosexual couple to be sexually assertive (e.g., Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1996). Being sexually assertive can be an important skill for women to have, for a variety of reasons.

The ability to be sexually assertive is important for women because it has been associated with important outcomes. One important outcome includes reducing women's health risk. In their study of a diverse group of 816 community women, Quina et al. (2000) found that increased levels of sexual assertiveness were related to reduced HIV risk behaviors. In another study, Zamboni et al. (2000) examined general and sexual communication and general and sexual

---

<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, there is some evidence that gender is a stronger predictor of variables such as voicing opinions and

<sup>2</sup> See Rakos, 1991 for a review on the assertiveness literature.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to distinguish that sexual assertiveness from another similar research topic, sexual- or contraceptive self-efficacy. Although they are related bodies of literature, sexual assertiveness, rather than self-efficacy, will be the specific focus of this research. For more information on contraceptive self-efficacy, see Levinson's research (Levinson, 1986, 1995).

assertiveness as potential predictors of lifetime (male) condom use in heterosexual encounters among 227 undergraduate college students. The researchers found that out of all of these variables, sexual assertiveness emerged as the best predictor of safe sex behavior, and specifically, the best predictor of lifetime condom use for heterosexual intercourse. Zamboni et al. also found that higher levels of sexual assertiveness were correlated with increased sexual communication but were not correlated with general interpersonal communication. Given that sexual assertiveness emerged as the best predictor of safe-sex behavior, this may indicate that a specific sexual assertiveness may be more important in sexual situations than general assertiveness and communication skills.

Several studies (e.g., Testa & Dermen, 1999) have found an inverse link between level of sexual assertiveness and experiences of sexual victimization. For example, Livingston, et al. (2007) found that women with a history of sexual victimization tended to have low sexual assertiveness and women with low sexual assertiveness were at greater risk for future sexual victimization. Additionally, in their qualitative study of 14 Pakeha<sup>4</sup> women, Gavey and McPhillips (1999) identified a theme of “paralyzing passivity” in the interviews in which the women did not initiate or insist on using protection during heterosexual intercourse even when they had a previous traumatic experience which ended with an unplanned pregnancy, or when they knew their partner engaged in risky sexual behavior and was at high risk for sexually-transmitted infections. Thus, increased sexual assertiveness may be a way of being a more active subject in sexual encounters, including asking for one’s needs to be met with regard to safe-sex behaviors and assertively stating what one does and does not want as a part of his or her sexual experience.

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<sup>4</sup> New Zealanders of European descent

Macy et al. (2006) explored factors that may serve as barriers to assertive responses such as verbal declarations and physical resistance when women experienced sexual aggression by a male assailant. Among the 202 college women they studied, the researchers found that women who reported higher levels of sexual assertiveness indicated significantly lower levels of several identified barriers such as self-consciousness during the incident, concerns about harming the relationship, and an emotional response of sadness. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are times when it may not be safe for an individual to be sexually assertive, such as in some cases of sexual assault or domestic violence (e.g., Whyte, 2006). Additionally, whereas correlations of sexual assault and sexual aggression with women's levels of sexual assertiveness may lead some to conclude that that women's behavior may be associated with the outcome of a rape, it must be noted that survivors of sexual assault are never to blame for unwanted sexual coercion or rape; the perpetrator is always responsible for the action taken. In this research study, the focus will be on women's levels of sexual assertiveness in situations in which it is possible to behave assertively without the threat of violence.

Increased sexual assertiveness may not only be associated with a lower risk of negative consequences, but may have positive benefits as well. In their study, Apt et al. (1996) compared data from 235 female nurses on a variety of measures examining relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and psychosocial well-being. The researchers found that higher levels of sexual assertiveness among participants were associated with higher scores on a sexual satisfaction measure. In another study of 104 heterosexual couples in long-term relationships (average relationship length = 14.5 years), MacNeil and Byers (2009) found that increased disclosure of sexual needs and desires was associated with increased personal sexual satisfaction and greater relationship satisfaction. Katz and Tirone (2009) also found that within the 193 undergraduate

women in heterosexual relationships that they studied, sexually compliant women expressed less satisfaction in their relationships, whereas women who were “non-compliant” expressed higher levels of relationship well-being. Thus, in addition to being associated with decreased negative consequences, sexual assertiveness appears to be related to increased beneficial outcomes for women, including higher levels of sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction and well-being.

Indeed, as Crawford and Unger (2004) note, being sexually assertive is not only a way for women to avoid sexually transmitted infections and unwanted sex, but is also a way for women to be able to affirmatively state their needs and desires around sex. Culturally, however, much of the emphasis in sexual relationships is on male pleasure rather than female pleasure. Simply valuing women’s pleasure in itself is seen as a cultural taboo in the U.S. (Tolman, 2002). Cultural beliefs such as these may have a big impact on women’s ability to be sexually assertive in relationships and may be one of the factors impeding women’s assertive responding in heterosexual encounters.

### **Barriers to Sexual Assertiveness**

Being sexually assertive may be difficult for women in the U.S. for a number of reasons. Barriers may include *traditional gender paradigms* for women within a patriarchal culture which prescribe a passive, objectified gendered role as the “natural” role for women within sexual encounters (Jackson & Scott, 1996; Kappeler, 1996; Lorber, 1999; Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). Other barriers may include the *threat of negative repercussions or judgments*, such as encountered in the sexual double standard (Gentry, 1998; Jackson & Cram, 2003) and *lack of alternative models* for positive female sexual assertiveness (Tolman, 2002). Each barrier is discussed below.

**Traditional gender paradigms.** Cordes (2000) notes that girls and women in U.S. culture are still often more rewarded for being agreeable and obedient, rather than for being assertive. Traditional (hetero)sexual paradigms within U.S. culture often place the women in a passive role within heterosexual intimacy, and the male in an active, assertive role (e.g., Jackson & Cram, 2003; Kleinplatz, 2001). Thus, being sexually assertive violates traditional cultural gender paradigms for women in U.S. culture (Mahalik, et al., 2005).

Crawford and Unger (2004) note that within the research on women's sexuality, the main focus has been on the "dangerous and uncontrollable urges of boys and men," while "girls and women are assigned the role of keeping everything under control" (p. 279). Indeed, this social myth that men's sexuality is uncontrollable whereas women's is controllable often is justified by a belief in the innate biological differences between men and women. This cultural view may lead to difficulty challenging gendered sexual roles because differences are seen as "innate" or "biologically determined", rather than culturally-determined. Jackson (1996) notes that in "classifying the version of sexuality in our own society as 'natural,' typically masculine and feminine forms of sexuality are assumed to be part of the natural order of things and not therefore open to negotiation" (p. 63).

Tolman and Diamond (2001) note that much research on male and female sexuality has assumed women have "naturally" weaker sex drives, without exploring the sociocultural factors on men and women's expressions of sexuality. Even when women's "weaker" sex drives are addressed within the medical and pharmaceutical fields, they are labeled as problems with a solely physiological cause, which may be ameliorated by some sort of medical intervention or medication (Allina, 2001; Tiefer, 2002). This view pathologizes women's experience of sex, and may lead women to feel like they are personally defective if they have any sort of sexual

“problems” in an intimate relationship. Additionally, it minimizes and ignores complex sociocultural and relational factors that can significantly impact one’s experience of sexuality (Allina, 2001). This may lead women to silence their thoughts or opinions in heterosexual encounters, fearing that those concerns may be signs of individual pathology rather than cultural factors.

It is difficult – and perhaps impossible – to accurately assess the actual biological effects on sexuality within U.S. culture, because the cultural influences are many-layered and any analysis of biological sexuality would include the cultural context in which it was analyzed. As Tolman and Diamond (2001) note, “there is no such thing as a ‘culture-free’ or ‘context-free’ experience of sexual desire” (p. 39). Different accounts of beliefs about the “biology” of sexuality historically and in cultures around the world serve as examples of this, and foils to the U.S. view of biological determinism (e.g., Poovey, 1996; Oakley, 1996). However, this view of women as “naturally” passive and men as “naturally” assertive or aggressive may serve as an invisible barrier around women’s expression of their sexual needs and desires, placing pressure on them to behave a specific way if they want to be seen as “normal” women (Tolman & Diamond, 2001). This view may also serve to further isolate women who may have difficulties being sexual or who have an experience that does not fit with cultural norms. They may see their experiences as being a personal problem, rather than one rooted in a sociocultural system that labels any experiences outside the cultural norm as pathological.

Research has found that women who endorsed greater investment in traditional female roles reported less sexual assertiveness and increased sexual compliance (e.g., Katz & Tirone, 2009). In an in-depth qualitative research study with 14 New Zealand women of European descent, Gavey and McPhillips (1999) found that some of the women’s identities centered on a

belief in “the discourse of heterosexual romance” (p. 365). The authors describe this as a discourse between a couple that is driven by traditional roles wherein the man takes responsibility for making choices for both partners, and the woman plays a passive role. In two of the interviews in particular, Gavey and McPhillips (1999) found that the women did not request to use contraceptive protection (in this case, condoms) during sex, despite having made a rational decision to use protection prior to the encounter, because the male partner did not suggest the use himself. Women and girls may feel pressured to go along with a male partner’s wishes, and disregard their own needs and desires for fear of negative consequences of not fitting cultural norms for appropriate female sexuality (Tolman, 2002). Ultimately, these cultural pressures may lead to decreased sexual assertiveness for women.

**The threat of negative consequences.** If a woman does not follow the traditional sexual roles for female sexuality, she may fear or experience a range of negative consequences or repercussions (e.g., Jackson & Cram, 2003; Muehlenhard & McCoy, 1991; Tolman, 2002). The mere risk of these repercussions alone may serve as a strong deterrent to being sexually assertive. Women may be judged differently –and often more negatively – than men for their sexual behaviors (whether actual or perceived) if those behaviors fall outside of traditional cultural views of what is acceptable. In accordance with this sexual double standard, having (or being perceived to have) multiple sexual partners, higher levels of sexual activity, and sexual encounters outside of committed relationships is often seen as acceptable for men, but not for women (Gentry, 1998). A woman may be perceived to be violating this standard if she is aware of her own sexual desires or preferences or if she appears prepared for a sexual encounter (e.g., by bringing birth control), regardless of how much sexual experience she may actually possess.

Thus, a woman who is sexually assertive may be perceived as violating the sexual double standard simply because she is assertive.

Although there has been some debate as to whether the sexual double standard still exists (e.g., Marks & Fraley, 2005), the majority of research on the subject supports the view that it continues to exist (e.g., Jonason & Marks, 2009; Kreager & Staff, 2009). Milhausen and Herold (1999) found that 95% of the 174 undergraduate women they surveyed indicated that they “definitely” or “probably” believed a sexual double standard existed; 93% “definitely” or “probably” agreed that men with several sexual partners were judged less negatively than women with several sex partners. Regardless of the actual chance of experiencing those negative consequences, women’s belief in the sexual double standard and fear of negative consequences may continue to impact their behavior in sexual relationships (Hynie & Lydon, 1995).

Research findings have suggested that women who “betray” (or who are perceived to have betrayed) culturally-prescribed gender roles by demonstrating sexual agency or by having higher-than-average levels of sexual activity are seen more negatively than women who conform to these roles. In a study of 254 undergraduate students (143 women and 111 men), Gentry (1998) had participants evaluate descriptions of men and women based on their relationship status and level of sexual activity. Women who were described as more sexually active than average were seen by both men and women as characteristically distinct from women who were less sexually active, whereas men were not described differently based on their sexual activity levels. Additionally, the women in the study rated women with below-average levels of sexual activity as more physically and socially appealing than women with average or above-average levels of sexual activity, whereas women rated men with high levels of sexual activity as the most appealing.

In a similar study, Hynie and Lydon (1995) had 57 undergraduate women rate three different scenarios, in which a woman provided a condom in a heterosexual encounter, one in which a man provided a condom, and another in which the couple engaged in unprotected sex. Compared to the scenario in which the man provided the condom, the woman providing the condom was rated as “less appropriate” and “less nice”, and it was hypothesized that her partner would judge her more negatively than if he provided the condom. Indeed, the situation in which the couple engaged in unprotected sex was rated more positively than the situation in which the woman provided the condom! The authors note that this may be indicative of the strong pressure for women to appear “sexually modest”, and that being prepared for a sexual encounter may violate the traditional gender paradigm that women be a passive, virginal participant in intimate encounters. As these studies suggest, level of sexual activity and degree of preparedness may be defining for a woman in ways that they are not for a man.

The sexual double standard may have a profound negative impact on women’s comfort level with communicating assertively in relationships. Greene and Faulkner (2005) examined attitudes about the sexual double standard among 698 heterosexual couples (1396 individuals) between 18 and 30 years old, with an average length of relationship of two years. The researchers found that couples who indicated agreement with traditional attitudes toward sexuality and greater belief in the sexual double standard indicated decreased sexual communication compared with those who had less traditional attitudes. They also found, perhaps unsurprisingly given the cultural barriers to women’s assertiveness, that women indicated feeling less efficacious in their ability to influence sexual behavior in their relationships than men did.

Although the sexual double standard may appear less restrictive than it was in the past, some researchers hypothesize that rather than disappearing, the sexual double standard is being

expressed in new, more subtle ways (e.g., Crawford & Popp, 2003; Levy, 2005). In her book, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, Levy (2005) provides a comprehensive discussion of these more subtle expressions of the sexual double standard. Levy explores the development of a female “raunch culture” over the last several years, with women being encouraged to flaunt their sexuality and go to strip clubs – to be more “like men” – i.e., to be more active participants in exploring their own sexuality and becoming the observer, rather than the object, of the sexual gaze. However, as Levy asserts, this “female raunch culture”, in which women appear to be encouraged to be sexual as men, is misleading. Within this paradigm, a woman’s sexual power still comes from men’s approval of her sexual expression. Women may be permitted “freer” sexual behaviors, but within the specific confines that those behaviors being observed by men and for the enjoyment of men. While women are “empowered” to be able to dress or behave in a sexually-provocative manner, inequality still exists, as heterosexual males are generally not pressured to engage in this same level of self-objectifying behavior in order to be seen as sexually powerful. Rather than a truly a liberalized sexuality, the “female raunch culture” provides instead another form of a limited role. For this new “liberated” form of sexuality to truly be empowering and liberating, women should be given the opportunity to say no as well as yes to expressing themselves in a sexually assertive way and be able to express themselves sexually in the ways that they choose without facing negative repercussions. We must examine whether women are still rewarded if what they ask for does not take men’s pleasure into consideration. In this type of “liberated” sexuality, men are still the ones controlling the gaze – they retain the role of subject, and women the role of object (Levy, 2005).

Because traditional gender roles – and even more “modern” ones, as Levy (2005) describes – place women in the position of passive objects in heterosexual encounters, agentic,

sexually assertive women may be seen as strange or outside the norm. Assertive women may be stereotyped as unfeminine, pathologically “insatiable” or unclean. This is represented in the plentiful examples of slurs for women who engage in sexuality outside of the traditional norms, who enjoy having sex, or who may have sex with multiple partners – including “slut”, “whore”, “tramp”, “cougar” and many more (e.g., Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001; Jackson & Cram, 2003). Women and girls who are sexually agentic may be seen as “bad girls”, whereas women and girls who behave in more passive, traditional roles or appear more virginal may be seen as “good girls” (e.g., Tolman, 2002). Stephens and Phillips (2003) note that women who reject the traditional patriarchal sexual roles are often labeled “dykes”, whether they identify as lesbian or not, reinforcing the concept that moving outside the traditional sexual scripts is “non-normative” for heterosexual females. Women and girls may feel pressured to disconnect from their own experiences of their sexuality for fear of negative consequences of not fitting cultural norms for appropriate female sexuality (Tolman, 2002). Being sexually assertive is likely to be difficult under these pressures.

Although stereotypes about women who behave outside of traditional cultural norms are likely to impact all women, women of color may be judged even more harshly by mainstream culture than Euro-American women are in this respect. They may be seen as “primitive”, “exotic”, or animalistic if they are sexually assertive or openly discuss their sexual desires (e.g., Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Tolman, 2002). For example, African American women’s sexual scripts also tend to form from a complex interaction of gender and racial/ethnic stereotypes. African American women tend to be stereotyped in popular culture as exotic, untamed, hypersexual, and immoral (Stephens & Few, 2007; Stokes, 2007). Asian American women are another group for whom sexual roles may be made more complex by the intersection of

race/ethnicity and gender. Asian women tend to be seen as ultra-feminine, exotic, submissive, and demure within U.S. culture (Lee & Vaught, 2003). For these women, sexual submissiveness may be connected with issues of race and cultural acceptance. Thus, for ethnic minority women, sexual roles may discourage women's sexual assertiveness in ways related to not only their gender, but their race/ethnicity as well.

Thus, women may avoid being sexually assertive out of fear of judgment or being stereotyped by peers or loved ones. In their study of a diverse group of 816 community women, Quina et al. (2000) found that women's sense of interpersonal power in heterosexual relationships was positively related to their sexual assertiveness around about sexual desires, such that women who expressed more fear of negative partner response and less sexual power in relationships also indicated lower levels of sexual assertiveness.

**Lack of alternative models.** Because of this fear of judgment about their sexuality, women and girls from all cultural-ethnic backgrounds may also avoid talking with each other about their sexual experiences, needs, and desires (Tolman, 2002). In the absence of role model or peer support, girls and women may rely on popular culture images to inform them about women's expected behavior in sexual encounters. Unfortunately, traditional paradigms are often reinforced in the mainstream media. In examining the emotional, social, and physical consequences of sexual behavior in prime-time television dramas, Stevens Aubrey (2004) found women initiated sexual contact significantly less frequently than men (39.6% versus 60.4%, respectively), and that in scenes in which female characters did initiate sexual contact, negative consequences occurred significantly more often, for both the male and the female characters. In another study of viewers of reality dating television programs (RDPs), Zurbriggen and Morgan

(2006) found that amount of RDPs watched was positively correlated with endorsement of the sexual double standard and beliefs that males are sex-driven.

Thus, women may not speak openly about their sexual needs, desires, or frustrations, for fear of the judgment and backlash that they believe they may receive from peers or loved ones. Instead of speaking with others who may have had similar experiences that may or may not fit with traditional patriarchal culture, women may seek out information on what is “correct” from popular culture sources, such as the mainstream media, which is likely to reinforce traditional roles (e.g., Stevens Aubrey, 2004). Obtaining information in this limited way is likely to reinforce the idea for women that they are alone in their experiences – whether positive and negative – when those experiences fall outside traditional gender roles and social myths (Tolman, 2002). This may lead women to further disconnect with their own sexual needs and wants, and to look to popular culture images and their partners to direct their behaviors in sexual encounters, which may then lead to decreased sexual assertiveness.

### **Summary and Critique: Sexual Assertiveness**

Being sexually assertive is related to positive outcomes for women, and avoidance of negative outcomes (e.g., Testa & Dermen, 1999; Zamboni et al., 2000). As illustrated by the literature reviewed above, sexually assertive behavior has been linked to decreased health risk from sexually transmitted infections, decreased risk of unwanted pregnancy, decreased sexual victimization, increased assertive response to sexual aggression, increased sexual communication, and increased sexual and relationship satisfaction. However, there are many barriers to being sexually assertive for women, including traditional, passive gender roles, the threat of negative repercussions, and lack of positive assertive role models (Jackson & Cram, 2003; Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001; Tolman, 2002). Although much of the research

has examined the existence of these barriers, little research has examined what may be done to help women overcome these barriers. Thus, an exploration of the factors that may facilitate women's sexual assertiveness is needed. Given the cultural pressures and barriers to women's assertiveness – especially ones that may seem subtle – it is important to examine tools and ways of resistance that would allow women to counteract these pressures and give them a way to assert themselves sexually in a variety of ways.

### **Increasing Sexual Assertiveness: Exploring the Role of Feminist Beliefs**

Although there are substantial barriers to women's sexual assertiveness, the passive role in sexual encounters need not be an inevitable one. Indeed, research on women's general assertiveness demonstrates that self-reports of assertiveness have shown a general increase over the past few decades (Twenge, 2001). In her meta-analysis on women's assertiveness, Twenge (2001) found that social change appeared to have had a profound effect on women's self-reported assertiveness levels. She reported that women's assertiveness scores “increased from 1931 to 1945, decreased from 1946 to 1967, and increased from 1968 to 1993” (p. 133).

Specifically, Twenge (2001) noted that the assertiveness levels were positively correlated with a variety of social change indicators, such as a higher level of women's educational attainment, employment outside of the home, and a later age of first marriage. Thus, sociocultural changes that led to an increase in women's status and a change in women's roles may have become integrated into women's personalities and led to a collective increase in women's levels of assertiveness. In understanding more about the factors surrounding women's level of sexual assertiveness, one might understand how social or attitudinal changes may relate to an increase in sexual assertiveness. Developing feminist beliefs may be one avenue that provides individuals with an increased understanding of cultural factors (e.g., traditional gender

roles, belief in innate biological differences, objectification of women's bodies, the sexual double standard) that affect their sexual assertiveness, and may, in turn, provide them with alternative, and perhaps more assertive, ways of interacting in heterosexual relationships.

### **Feminist Beliefs**

Feminist theory posits that U.S. culture is built around a patriarchal society, where men and masculinity are valued more than women and femininity. Author and feminist theorist bell hooks defines feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (hooks, 2000a, p. 1). Feminist theory offers an alternate way of looking at mainstream U.S. culture, and exploring the ways that men and women are treated differently within that culture.

Researchers of feminist theory explore how, as a result of the patriarchal system, men are often endowed with certain privileges and power that women may not be, because they are women (e.g., Crawford & Unger, 2004). One realm in which men and women differ in terms of interpersonal power is in intimate heterosexual relationships (e.g., Quina, Harlow, Morokoff, & Saxon, 1997). In order for women to be sexually assertive, the underlying power inequities between men and women within the U.S. patriarchal culture must be addressed. Because women's sexual freedom is necessarily tied to reproductive rights, the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s focused in part on women's reproductive rights and ensuring access to safe, effective birth control and the right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy for all women (Levy, 2005; Paludi, 1998).

Women in the U.S. now arguably have access to birth control, although it is important to note that full access is not available to all women, in large part because of stigma around sexuality. Barriers to obtaining good quality, consistent birth control may include lack of financial support or insurance coverage (many insurance plans do not provide sufficient

contraceptive coverage), judgment from others or lack of confidentiality, especially in towns with small social networks, and lack of access to adequate information, among other barriers (Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 2005; Tolman, 2002). However, overall despite improved access to birth control in more recent years, power differences between men and women may still continue to impact communication in (hetero)sexual encounters. As explored previously, traditional gender roles, cultural myths about inherent differences between men and women, and fear of negative repercussions may serve as barriers to women's power in interpersonal relationships and relate to a decreased ability to be sexually assertive (e.g., Greene & Faulkner, 2005; Quina et al., 2000). Understanding these social myths, stereotypes, and cultural pressures for what they are is an important aspect of being able to challenge them. This is difficult to do, however, because social myths are not generally seen as myths, but are instead understood to be "just the way things are," invisible fibers in the cultural cloth. As Tolman and Diamond (2001) note, "[t]o the extent that we perceive our desires as fundamentally 'natural' and context-independent, this is only because the sociocultural forces that shape our subjective experiences of sexuality are largely invisible to us" (p. 39).

Feminist beliefs may allow an individual a way of "seeing" these invisible fibers, providing means for an individual to question what it is she or he believes in and where those thoughts and beliefs originated from, instead of simply accepting those beliefs as the only reality. Challenging these traditional beliefs about women's sexuality and the way that sexuality is expressed has been a focus of the third wave feminist movement of the late twentieth century. The third wave movement has sought to address and normalize the concerns of women from a diverse set of backgrounds, including ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and sexual orientation, challenging traditional paradigms about what is acceptable in terms of expressed

identity, including sexual identity (Baumgardner & Drake, 2010). In this way, modern feminist theory may provide women with a way of moving from a place of unaware acceptance of mainstream (hetero)sexual scripts to a place of awareness of the constructed nature of these scripts and acknowledgment that this is only one of many options for ways of being.

In their foundational work on feminist identity, Downing and Roush (1985) hypothesized that women may develop feminist identity in stages, starting from a place of *passive acceptance*, or reflexive agreement with traditional cultural roles and inequalities. In this stage, women may be unlikely to challenge traditional roles about heterosexual relationships, and may thus be unlikely to be sexually assertive. The authors theorized that women may then go through a *revelation* stage in which they experience a group of “crises” or experiences of strong cognitive dissonance, in which they begin to question their previous acceptance of traditional patriarchal culture. Introduction to feminist beliefs may precipitate this cognitive dissonance experience, and may help lead into a stage of *embeddedness-emanation*, which may include strict adherence to feminist beliefs, mistrust of culture, and strengthening a developing feminist identity. Downing and Roush theorized that women may experience two further stages in their feminist identity development: *synthesis*, or fuller development of their feminist identity and a more nuanced, individual assessment of men and the world, and finally, *active commitment*, or having a secure feminist identity and translating that identity into active behaviors, such as working toward societal change toward eliminating oppression. Women in the active commitment stage may be particularly inclined toward more sexually assertive behavior, as their now-solidified feminist beliefs are translated into action in their relationships with others and with the world. More recent analyses have suggested that after one experiences a “revelation” which challenges his or her initial passive acceptance of sexism, individuals may cycle through the latter three stages or

“dimensions” (embeddedness-emanation, synthesis, and active commitment), rather than moving linearly through them (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1997; Yoder et al., 2007).

Women may develop a feminist identity through any number of means or experiences. hooks (2000a) describes the consciousness-raising groups that occurred during the early second wave feminist movement in the U.S. as one such experience. hooks noted that the critical elements in these groups included “an analysis of sexism, strategies for challenging patriarchy, and new models of social interaction” (p. 19). Thus, identification with feminist beliefs may help women to challenge barriers to sexual assertiveness in at least three ways, as detailed below: by allowing for *critical analysis of traditional gender paradigms*, offering ways of *challenging culturally-prescribed behaviors*, and *providing alternative models* for ways of being assertive in relationships.

### **Analyzing Traditional Gender Paradigms**

Research results have been consistent with hooks’ (2000a) observations that exposure to feminist beliefs may lead to an increased identification with those beliefs and an increased awareness of the socially-constructed nature of culture and the role sexism plays. In their study of 635 undergraduate students, Fischer and Good (1994) found that individuals who identify with feminist beliefs tend to be more observant and aware of the existence of gender-based discrimination than those who do not identify with these beliefs. Worell et al. (1999) studied 101 graduate students in psychology, comparing attitudes between individuals in a training program focused on feminist principles (e.g., “recognition of the politics of gender and the oppression of women,” p. 799) and individuals in training programs without that focus. The researchers found that graduate students who experienced feminist training endorsed more social constructionist beliefs and increased self-identification as a feminist.

Other studies have reaffirmed these findings. Yoder et al. (2007) studied 120 undergraduate students in a psychology of women class and found students increased their awareness of sexism and their self-identification with feminist beliefs after taking the course. At the end of the semester, students also indicated increased belief in the culturally-constructed nature of views about men and women's differences, and endorsed decreased belief in biological explanations of gender differences. This study provides support for the idea that feminist beliefs may help women to challenge social myths that center around innate, "natural" differences between men and women that may be used to perpetuate power differences in sexual encounters.

In another study of 165 college students (124 women and 41 men), Harris, Melaas, and Rodacker (1999) found that not only did students generally express more liberal attitudes toward acceptable gendered behaviors after taking a women's studies course, but they also appeared to experience an increased sense of personal control over their lives. Liss, O'Connor, Morosky, and Crawford (2001) found that among the 233 college women they studied, women who endorsed feminist beliefs were less likely to endorse less belief in meritocracy (i.e., the belief that people receive what they earn/deserve equally, without interference of sexism or racism). Perhaps paradoxically, it is likely that learning about feminist concepts such as the existence and impact of sexism may help women to have a greater sense of control by increasing their awareness of what they cannot control. In this way, women who do not endorse feminist beliefs may believe difficulties they experience with being sexually assertive are because of some personal flaw or wrongdoing, whereas women who hold feminist beliefs may be better able to situate their experiences in the cultural context of inequity between men and women in the sexual realm (Jackson & Cram, 2003).

Increased identification with feminist beliefs may help individuals, and women in particular, to understand their experiences in a different light, as existing within a patriarchal socio-cultural structure. Feminist consciousness may allow women to see their individual struggles with not fitting mainstream gender paradigm as something other than a personal weakness or failing, allowing them to question the messages that say they have to behave in a particular way in the first place. Individuals may then be better able to understand the pressures they experience to be or act a certain way, which may allow them to feel they have more personal control to choose to engage in behavior consistent with cultural pressures or not. This increased sense of control may help women feel able to be more assertive in sexual relationships as well (e.g., Quina et al., 1997). Thus, critically analyzing gender stereotypes and expectations may help women to challenge these barriers to sexual assertiveness.

### **Challenging Culturally-Prescribed Behaviors and Developing New Ways of Interaction**

Because traditional, culturally-prescribed gender paradigms place women in a passive, objectified position within sexual encounters, these paradigms may serve as barriers to women's sexual assertiveness (e.g., Mahalik, et al., 2005). Women who identify with traditional cultural models rather than with feminist beliefs may see the patriarchal culture as the norm and not question the pattern of behavior that is socially-expected of them in heterosexual interactions (McNamara & Rickard, 1989). In understanding traditional heterosexual stereotypes for what they are, individuals may then begin to consider alternatives. A feminist perspective may offer women an alternative to the traditional gender expectations that place women in a passive role, and may offer a way of challenging the sexual double standard (e.g., Yoder et al., 2007). Feminist beliefs may offer a ground for resistance if women receive negative backlash for behaving in a sexually assertive manner. It may allow women to see this backlash as based in the

cultural context, rather than as a personal reaction that pressures them to change their behavior accordingly (Jackson & Cram, 2003). Identification with feminist beliefs may offer women a way of seeing their sexuality, and their ability to be sexually assertive, in a positive light, rather than a negative, shameful one. By grounding their sexual experiences within a shared cultural perspective, as opposed to an isolated individual experience, women may be better able to critique the pressures they may experience to be passive and to silence their sexual desires and needs. These critiques may therefore enable them to be more assertive if they engage in intimate heterosexual encounters (Jackson & Cram, 2003; Tolman, 2002).

Traditional, mainstream gender paradigms in sexual encounters between men and women are not fixed entities and may be affected by a variety of factors, which may, in turn, be influenced by feminist beliefs. Identification with feminist beliefs is associated with decreased endorsement of the sexual double standard and increased positive feelings about one's sexuality. In a study of 342 female undergraduate students, Bay-Cheng and Zucker (2007) explored the connection between the participants' feminist identification and their attitudes about sex. They divided feminist identification into three categories: feminist (i.e., agreed with feminist values and self-identified as feminist), egalitarian (i.e., agreed with feminist values but did not self-identify as feminists), and nonfeminists (i.e., disagreed with one or more feminist values and did not self-identify as feminist). The researchers found that participants in the feminist group reported more erotophilia (positive responses and feelings toward sexuality) and significantly less support for the sexual double standard than either egalitarians or non-feminists (Bay-Cheng & Zucker, 2007).

In another study using the same population, Schick et al. (2008) further examined the relationship between feminist identity and sexual well-being among 424 female college students.

Higher levels of feminism were associated with increased self-efficacy in using male condoms during heterosexual encounters. Women who endorsed higher levels of feminist beliefs also reported a higher sense of sexual subjectivity (i.e., a self-awareness of and willingness to advocate for to one's sexual needs or desires). This higher sense of sexual subjectivity is important because it is suggestive of a switch from traditional models of (hetero)sexuality that place women in the role of sexual object, rather than subject (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). A subjective experience of their own sexuality allows women to have an embodied, grounded experience of their sexual needs and desires. It may allow them to go from worrying about pleasing their male partner and internalizing the male gaze (i.e., seeing themselves as they believe their male partner sees them), to being active subjects in the encounter, and being more in touch with how they feel and what they want, allowing them to be more assertive (Kappeler, 1996).

In her interviews with young women, Tolman (2002) found that the young women rarely spontaneously discussed their own desires, but instead discussed what they felt was expected of them by their social or family culture, or by their partners. However, it is essential for women to be connected to their own experience of desire in order to be able to assert that desire within an intimate encounter (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006). Thus, feminist beliefs may help women to challenge the traditional paradigm of woman as a passive sexual object, and offer an alternative model of connecting with one's own subjective experiences, allowing for greater sexual assertiveness within intimate encounters.

Whereas identification with feminist beliefs has been related to positive outcomes in intimate relationships, passive acceptance of sexism (i.e., identification as nonfeminist) has been found to be related to decreased satisfaction in romantic relationships, increased risky sexual

behaviors, and negative psychological outcomes. In their study of 211 college women, Mahalik, et al. (2005) found that lack of identification with feminist beliefs was correlated with endorsement of traditional passive gender paradigms in relationships, including endorsement with the sexual double standard and fear of negative repercussions of violating that standard (e.g., fear of being labeled a “slut”), as indicated by higher scores on the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory. Yoder et al. (2007) surveyed 165 undergraduate college women and found that women who endorsed agreement with traditional patriarchal beliefs and gender role expectations (i.e., those that lacked a robust feminist identity) reported lower levels of sexual assertiveness in intimate relationships. Thus, whereas passive acceptance of traditional roles may be related to lower levels of assertiveness, identification with feminist beliefs may offer a practical, conveyable place of resistance to challenge traditional sexual roles that encourage passivity and offer support for a new model of assertive, embodied sexuality.

### **Feminist Identity and Sexual Assertiveness: Exploring the Relationship**

As research has demonstrated, feminist beliefs may allow for an increased awareness of gendered sexual paradigms, as well as a means of challenging those paradigms, possibly leading to increase sexual assertiveness in intimate heterosexual encounters (e.g., Schick et al., 2008; Tolman, 2002; Yoder et al., 2007). However, it is likely that rather than solely a direct relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, feminist beliefs may lead to changes in other processes, which may then impact sexual assertiveness. Other researchers have also indicated a need for further investigation to extricate the details of the relationship between feminism and positive outcomes, such as sexual assertiveness (e.g., Yoder et al., 2007). In addition to exploring the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual

assertiveness, the current study explored potential mediators of that relationship, including self-objectification, entitlement, and self-silencing.

### **Potential Mediating Variables**

#### **Self-Objectification**

One way in which feminist beliefs may have a positive impact on sexual assertiveness is by improving women's body image and decreasing self-objectification specifically. Self-objectification is a concept based on years of theory and research related the idea that women are viewed as sexual objects in U.S. culture and are evaluated based on their appearance as assessed by an outside viewer (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Rather than being seen as a whole individual with their own needs, boundaries, and desires, women are often viewed primarily as a physical body, or as parts of a body, that may be of use or benefit for another person (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In U.S. culture, women are more likely than men to be evaluated as passive objects, rather than active subjects, and thus their physical appearance is seen as more of a part of their identity than it is for a man (Sinclair, 2006). Research has demonstrated that particularly for heterosexual women, thinner women are more likely to be perceived as being more sexually desirable than larger women are, whereas heterosexual men's body size is not significantly correlated with others' ratings of their sexual desirability (Legenbauer et al., 2009; Regan, 1996). It is unsurprising, then, that women are more likely than men to experience weight and body dissatisfaction, tend to diet more, and exhibit higher rates of eating disorders (e.g., McKinley, 2006a; O'Connor, Simmons, & Cooper, 2002; Phillips, 1998).

Objectification theory may explain these differences. As Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) note, "objectification theory posits that girls and women are typically acculturated to internalize an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves" (p. 173). This may lead

women to engage in continual body monitoring to try to assess how they may appear to an outside observer – in essence, a woman may come to view herself as an object. This view of oneself as an object is likely to be incompatible with developing a subjective consciousness based on her internal awareness and experience.

Self-objectification has been found to be negatively related to women's body esteem and to be positively related to the drive for thinness and negative eating attitudes (Hurt, et al., 2007, McKinley, 2006b). As one would expect according to objectification theory, women indicate lower levels of body esteem and higher levels of body surveillance than their male counterparts do, and these differences persist over time (McKinley, 2006a; McKinley, 1998). However, McKinley (1998) found that when self-objectification is statistically controlled, gender differences in body esteem are no longer significant, lending strength to the theory that self-objectification accounts for a part of women's decreased body image in this culture.

**Self-objectification and sexual assertiveness.** Viewing oneself from an outside observer point of view and worrying one is not meeting appearance standards may disrupt an individual's attention and connection with his or her internal self, which has been related to a decreased focus in one's own internal experience of his or her body (McKinley, 2006b; Sinclair, 2006). Because sexual interactions intimately involve one's body, this disruption may have a profound effect on a woman's sexual experience, including her ability to be comfortable in a situation in which she is physically exposed and to assess how something feels for her. Tolman (2002) observed this in her interviews with young women: the women rarely spontaneously spoke about their own needs and desires, but instead, focused on what their partners desired in sexual encounters, or what behaviors were judged as "acceptable" by their peers. Indeed, Yamamiya et al. (2006) found that negative body image during sexual encounters was significantly correlated with emotional

disengagement during sex, and others have demonstrated that increased self-consciousness is associated with greater cognitive distraction during sexual encounters, which is related to decreased sexual self-esteem and satisfaction for women (Dove & Weiderman, 2000). In this way, self-objectification may disrupt women's sexual functioning, including abilities to be sexually assertive.

Dissatisfaction with one's body and negative body image can have a negative effect a multitude of sexual variables, especially for women. Researchers have found that women with lower body image are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors and are more likely to endorse a belief in the sexual double standard (Gillen et al., 2006; Schooler et al., 2005). Additionally, individuals with increased body dissatisfaction, including perceived decreased attractiveness over time, tend to experience less sexual desire, arousal, orgasm, and enjoyment (Cash, Maikkula, & Yamamiya, 2004; Koch, Mansfield, Thureau, & Carey, 2005). Self-objectification has specifically been found to be significantly negatively correlated with sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem, as well as greater self-consciousness during sex and decreased sexual desire, arousal, orgasm and satisfaction (Calogero & Thompson, 2009; Steer & Tiggeman, 2008). Alternatively, positive body image has been found to be related to higher levels of sexual esteem, increased comfort initiating sex, as well as increased sexual activity and orgasm, and greater comfort with their body during sex (Ackard, Kearney-Cooke & Peterson, 2000; Wiederman & Hurst, 1998). It is unsurprising, then that positive body image and decreased self-objectification are related to increased sexual assertiveness for women (e.g., Schooler et al., 2005).

In his study of 209 college women, Wiederman (2000) found that women's self-reported body image self-consciousness was significantly negatively correlated with their reported sexual

assertiveness, as well as other related variables, including sexual esteem (i.e., view of self as good sexual partner). Yamamiya et al. (2006) found similar results in their study of 384 college women; poorer body image during sexual encounters was correlated with decreased sexual assertiveness and decreased confidence in sexual abilities. General dissatisfaction with appearance was also associated with decreased sexual assertiveness and confidence, as well as decreased self-efficacy around refusing sex if so desired.

Weaver and Byers' (2006) study of 214 heterosexual college women reinforced this connection. The researchers found that women who reported higher levels of body image dissatisfaction and dysphoria also indicated lower levels of sexual assertiveness as well as lower sexual esteem and indicated higher levels of sexual anxiety. Interestingly, this was found irrespective of women's body mass index (BMI), indicating that body dissatisfaction and dysphoria, regardless of actual body size, was a predictor of decreased sexual assertiveness. Thus, having a heightened awareness of how one's body appears to others and being dissatisfied with or ashamed of one's body can potentially lead to decreased sexual functioning, and decreased sexual assertiveness specifically.

**Self-objectification and feminist beliefs.** Feminist beliefs may offer women a different cultural lens through which they may analyze expectations about their appearance, therefore serving as a protective factor against developing a negative relationship with one's body. They may offer a way of celebrating a variety of body shapes and sizes, challenge the narrow definition of acceptable sizes, and place less emphasis on physical appearance as a measure of self-worth (e.g., Dionne, Davis, Fox, and Gurevich, 1995; hooks, 2000b). Whereas greater investment in traditional gender paradigms have been associated with poorer body image and more negative appearance evaluations (Cash, Ancis, & Strachan, 1997), feminist beliefs may

provide an alternative model to traditional cultural messages about appearance and may allow women a way of challenging those messages.

In examining the research, three specific ways in which feminist beliefs may affect women's relationship with their bodies emerge (Murnen & Smolak, 2009; Rubin et al., 2004). First, feminist beliefs can serve as a protective factor for women by allowing women to identify and critically analyze negative cultural messages about body image, weight and appearance. Secondly, these beliefs provide an alternative way of interpreting and reframing negative cultural messages about how women should appear. This is essential, as women who internalize media ideals for thinness and appearance tend to express higher levels of self-objectification and body dissatisfaction (Calogero & Thompson, 2009; Myers & Crowther, 2007). Higher levels of feminist identity appear to serve as a "filter" between the receipt of cultural and media messages and thin-ideal internalization. In a study of 195 female undergraduates, Myers and Crowther (2007) found that women who held feminist beliefs reported less internalization of the thin ideal, despite also reporting exposure to media promoting thinness. This reinforces other research data indicating that self-identification as a feminist is significantly related to decreased endorsement of traditional feminine appearance and thinness norms, whereas passive acceptance of traditional gender stereotypes are significantly correlated with the desire to be thinner (Hurt, et al., 2007; Snyder & Hasbrouck, 1996).

A third way feminist beliefs may serve as a protective factor is in providing women with a way of actively engaging in behaviors to resist sexist messages and cultural ideals (Murnen & Smolak, 2009; Rubin et al., 2004). Rubin, et al. identified several resistance strategies from the qualitative interviews they engaged in with 25 self-identified feminist women. These feminist strategies of resistance include celebrating body diversity, cognitively challenging negative

cultural messages, engaging in activism with other women, and employing “strategies that promote agency and reclaim the body from the objectifying gaze” (Rubin et al., p. 30), such as enjoying one’s body for what it can do (versus how it appears) and developing interests and feelings of mastery in areas other than appearance. Feminist beliefs may also aid in encouraging women to shift from an external focus of their appearance to an internal experience of their bodies and to care for and connect to their bodies with a sensual and sexual focus (Srebnik & Saltzberg, 1994). In this way, feminist beliefs may be related to improved body image, decreased self-objectification, and may lead to increased sexual assertiveness.

Even brief feminist interventions appear to boost women’s body esteem, regardless of women’s initial identification with feminist beliefs. Peterson, Tantleff-Dunn, and Bedwell (2006) randomly assigned 154 undergraduate women to one of three conditions: a 15-minute feminist intervention focusing on an exploration of feminist theory, relevant research, and feminist views on body image; a 15-minute psychoeducational intervention focusing on socio-cultural interpretations and representations of body image, or a control group that included no intervention. After the intervention, participants in the feminist intervention, but not in the other two groups, reported higher levels of feminist identity and satisfaction with their physical appearance than they did prior to the intervention. Thus, feminist beliefs are learnable, and may help women to critically analyze, reframe, and actively resist cultural messages about how they should appear. It is no surprise, then, that increased feminist identity has been linked with positive body image-related outcomes for women, such as increased positive evaluations of one’s physical appearance, decreased body dissatisfaction and eating disordered behavior, less internalization of sociocultural attitudes about appearance, and decreased anxiety about body areas and features (Peterson et al., 2008; Snyder & Hasbrouck, 1996; Sabik & Tylka, 2006).

Despite these findings, some researchers have failed to find a significant direct relationship between feminist beliefs and body dissatisfaction (e.g., Cash et al., 1997; Fingeret & Gleaves, 2004). Some have found partial relationships; Tiggemann and Stevens (1998) found that feminist identity was related to significantly less weight concern, but only for women between the ages of 30 to 49 years old, not for those younger or older. Ojerholm and Rothblum (1999) found that women who self-identified as feminist indicated less negative views of fat individuals, but self-identification was not significantly related to personal body image. Dionne et al. (1995) found that body satisfaction was positively correlated with specific feminist attitudes about physical appearance but not with general feminist identification. In their meta-analysis of 26 studies on the relationship between feminist identity and body image, Murnen and Smolak (2009) found that higher levels of identification with feminist beliefs were associated most strongly with reduced body shame (a component of self-objectification) and less internalization of media ideals. They also found weaker negative associations connecting feminist identity with drive for thinness and eating disorder symptomology.

Thus, the relationship between a woman's feminist beliefs and her relationship with her body, including sexual assertiveness, is likely a complex one and one that merits further research. It may be that self-objectification specifically, rather than general body image, may help explicate this relationship. Hurt et al. (2007) found that for the 281 community women they studied, body surveillance and body shame (concepts parallel to self-objectification, measured by McKinley & Shibley Hyde's (1996) Objectified Body Consciousness Scale) served as a mediating variable in the relationship between feminist identity and negative eating attitudes. That is, increased feminist identity was directly and significantly correlated with decreased levels of body surveillance, which then predicted negative eating attitudes.

**Summary and critique: Self-objectification, feminist identity, and sexual assertiveness.** Although some of the research findings on the relationship between feminist identity and body image have been mixed, there is evidence that identification with feminist beliefs predicts more positive evaluations of one's body and may directly predict reduced self-objectification. Indeed, as Hurt et al.'s (2007) found above, self-objectification can serve as a mediating variable between feminist identity and beneficial outcomes for women. Given that negative body image and self-objectification may be related to decreased sexual assertiveness (e.g., Weaver & Byers, 2006; Yamamiya et al., 2006), it seems important to examine if self-objectification serves as a mediator between feminist identity and another beneficial outcome, sexual assertiveness. Feminist beliefs may lead to a decrease in body shame and surveillance for women, which may lead to a more embodied awareness of their own sexual desire and their role as active subjects in sexual encounters, able to assert their own preferences and needs in the sexual realm. The present research sought to further examine the relationship between feminist identity, self-objectification, and sexual assertiveness by exploring the following hypothesis:

*Self-objectification will partially mediate the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, accounting for a portion of the shared variance between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. Identification with feminist beliefs will predict reduced self-objectification, which in turn, will predict increased sexual assertiveness. Further, the magnitude of the link between feminist identification and sexual assertiveness will decrease when level of self-objectification is controlled.*

## **Empowered Entitlement**

Another factor that may affect a woman's sexual assertiveness is her level of entitlement around her rights and power within a sexual encounter. If she has a strong sense of entitlement, she may be more likely to feel able to assert her ideas, needs, desires, and feel that they are legitimate. Additionally, if she has a low sense of entitlement, she may feel like she does not deserve pleasure, which may make it difficult to access and assert her needs and desires around sex.

Traditionally in the realm of psychopathology-focused theory and research, a strong sense of entitlement has been associated with narcissism, or a pathological sense of deserving special rights (e.g., Twenge & Campbell, 2009). However, Nadkarni et al., (2005) differentiate between narcissistic entitlement, which they term narcissistic expectations/self-promotion (NESP), and a healthy sense of deserving one's basic rights, which they term self-reliance/self-assurance (SRSA). Indeed, Nadkarni et al. found only a weak relationship between NESP and SRSA, and others have failed to find a relationship between the two concepts at all (e.g., McGann, 2000, Kahn, 2001). This study focuses on SRSA, which Kahn (2001) terms "empowered entitlement". This form of entitlement "comprises a set of attitudes about what persons believe they have a right to and can expect from others both as individuals and as members of social groups" (Nadkarni et al., 2005, p.26).

It is important to note that entitlement levels and how entitlement is viewed may vary according to one's cultural background and the values of that culture around individual rights. Entitlement within relationships may be more likely to be a valued construct within individualistic cultures that put a priority on the rights of the individual over the rights of the group, versus collectivistic cultures that place a higher value on the benefit to the group over the

individual (e.g., Leung & Stephan, 2001). Because of this, consideration of the potential limitations in the ability to extrapolate research on entitlement across cultural orientations is needed.

However, there is some evidence that gender is a stronger predictor of attitudes than collectivistic versus individualistic cultural orientation (Lee, Beckert, & Goodrich, 2010). In their study of 781 rural and urban Taiwanese high school students, Lee, Beckert, and Goodrich compared levels of cognitive autonomy between participants with an individualistic versus a collectivistic cultural orientation. The researchers found that being female predicted decreased cognitive autonomy scores (comprised evaluative thinking, voicing opinions, decision making, self-assessing, and comparative validation subscales) over and above cultural orientation.

Indeed, much of the existing research on entitlement demonstrates that women experience less empowered entitlement overall than men do (e.g., Ciani, Summers, & Easter, 2008). If women experience less of this “feature motivating and legitimizing the behavior required to resist unfair treatment and to achieve one’s due” (Nadkarni et al., 2005, p. 28), they may be less likely to resist cultural or interpersonal messages suggesting that their sexual needs and desires are less important than men’s are, which may lead to lower levels of sexual assertiveness.

**Entitlement in women.** Because of women’s power-down status within U.S. culture, women’s sense of entitlement – what they can expect as a member of the female social group – tends to be less than men’s (Kahn, 2001). Research in this area has consistently demonstrated women’s lower sense of entitlement in the realms of pay for work, academics, relationships, and home life (Bylsma & Major, 1994; Ciani, et al., 2008; McGann & Steil, 2006; Travis, 2006). In their study of 405 undergraduate students, Nadkarni et al. (2005) found that women had

significantly lower overall general entitlement scores, and specifically, lower empowered entitlement scores than men. No difference was found between NESP (narcissistic expectations/self-promotion) scores, suggesting that the difference between men and women's entitlement levels relates to women feeling less entitled overall than men to one's basic rights, rather than special privileges. This is consistent with social psychology theories that women are conditioned to experience lower levels of entitlement than men (e.g., Henslin, 2002).

Much of the research on women's entitlement focuses on how much monetary compensation to which women feel they are entitled. Research has consistently demonstrated that women pay themselves significantly less than men do, for completing the same task with the same level of competency (e.g., Bylsma & Major, 1994; Hogue & Yoder, 2003; Jost, 1997; Major, 1989). This depressed entitlement effect holds true even when they report that they feel they were paid fairly, that they acknowledge that they completed the same level and amount of work (Jost, 1997). In addition to depressed entitlement around pay for work, women may also experience depressed entitlement levels in the academic arena as well. Ciani et al. (2008) examined levels of academic entitlement – that is, feeling deserving of receiving accommodations and special treatment, and/or feeling deserving of disagreeing and debating with a professor over a grade – among 1229 undergraduate students. They found that women reported significantly less entitlement expectations than men, and that these differences persisted from the beginning of a semester to the end.

**Entitlement and sexual assertiveness.** Raising women's sense of empowered entitlement may be important for helping women achieve equity in several arenas, including sexual encounters. Higher levels of entitlement may help women feel more empowered to make decisions in the sexual realm. Nadkarni et al. (2005) found that among the 405 undergraduate

students they studied, decision-making say within the relationship was positively correlated with empowered entitlement levels. Although women reported lower levels of entitlement and decision-making say than men overall, women with higher levels of entitlement reported more decision-making say than women with lower levels. This fits with Kahn's (2001) findings on the relationship between sexual assertiveness and entitlement. Kahn studied 104 community women and found that empowered entitlement was significantly positively correlated with levels of sexual assertiveness and sexual satisfaction. She notes, "Entitlement may be a driving force which gives women the motivation to obtain their own sexual needs in a society which is not yet comfortable with viewing women as sexual subjects with their own wealth of independent sexual strivings" (Kahn, 2001; p. 7-8).

**Power, status, and feminism: Increasing women's sense of entitlement.** There is some evidence that this lowered sense of entitlement relates to women's experiences of decreased power and status in U.S. culture. Indeed, entitlement is defined in part as what one can expect to receive, so women's lower pay entitlement makes sense; women continue to earn at least 20% less than men do for equal work (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2010). However, when women's status is raised, they tend to pay themselves more. In their study of 180 undergraduate students (90 women and 90 men), Hogue and Yoder (2003) found that the depressed entitlement effect in women disappeared under manipulated experimental conditions in which women had a specifically higher status (i.e., women were touted as having higher verbal reasoning abilities that would benefit them in the task over men). When women's status was experimentally raised higher than men's, they paid themselves *equivalent* to what men paid themselves. Men paid themselves the same in both conditions, the control condition and the condition in which women had higher status. Hogue and Yoder theorize that raising women's status then put them equal

with the higher status and entitlement conferred to men simply by being male. Thus, women's lower sense of entitlement can be increased – when women's contributions were legitimized and more highly valued, and their subordinate cultural status rendered nil, they felt an increased sense of pay entitlement.

Because entitlement relates to women's power and rights in society, feminists have long focused on empowering women and helping them increase their sense of entitlement. Yoder and Kahn (1992) note that feminist scholars' focus on entitlement has emphasized interventions giving "power-to" individuals (i.e., *empowered entitlement*) rather than a "power-over" (narcissistic or dominant) focus. Feminist scholars have pointed out that within a patriarchal society, men's rights and traditionally masculine interests tend to be valued over those of women. This undervaluing of the feminine may have an impact on women's well-being and sense of entitlement within that culture (e.g., Travis, 2006).

Jost (1997) theorizes that one of the main explanations for women's decreased sense of entitlement is that they have internalized the cultural oppression and discrimination they have experienced. Women may seek to reduce the cognitive dissonance they experience in unfairly receiving less power and status by lowering their expectations and creating justifications for this discrepancy. These justifications, which are often readily provided by mainstream culture, include stereotyped beliefs that women are less intelligent than men, that they are less hardworking or creative and thus deserve less compensation, that they are less ambitious, more "delicate", or are "naturally" better at housework or being empathetic and putting others' needs before their own (Crawford & Unger, 2004; Worell & Remer, 2003). These stereotypes put the onus for the problem on the individual, rather than on inequities in the culture. If a woman feels she has done less work, or lower quality work, then she feels justified in getting less pay, and

does not feel entitled to more. If she feels attached to the caregiver role, and feels that she receives value from putting others' needs first, then she is unlikely to feel entitled to her own needs, especially if they conflict with others (McGann & Steil, 2006).

Feminist beliefs may increase an individual's awareness of these cultural inequities, and help an individual to shift the focus from internalized bias to the sociocultural structures that perpetuate women's oppression and lower status. As seen in Hogue and Yoder's (2003) research above, when women's status was increased, the depressed pay entitlement effect disappeared, and they paid themselves equal to their male counterparts. Feminist beliefs may be one way of increasing women's perceived status above the status given to them by mainstream U.S. society, thus increasing their entitlement. Therefore, a woman may feel empowered to challenge, rather than accept, cultural norms that say she must accept less than her male counterpart (Jost, 1997). Indeed, Peterson et al. (2008) found that feminist identity positively predicted empowerment levels; this sense of empowerment may then help women to feel a higher sense of entitlement for their needs and desires.

Feminist beliefs may also help women to challenge other pressures and artifacts of the patriarchal mainstream U.S. culture. For example, another reason women may feel entitled to less than men is because of the tendency for women to base what they feel they can expect on what their peers – other women – ask for or receive, rather than on what anyone, male or female, may receive (Bylsma & Major, 1994; McGann & Steil, 2006). This women-only comparison group is problematic, as what other women ask for or receive may be also based on unjust internalized cultural biases, as noted above. However, feminist scholarship has a long history of focusing on increasing individuals' awareness around differential treatment and outcomes for men and women and of helping women question what they are told they may expect from society

versus what they may truly want or deserve (e.g., De Beauvoir, 1952; Faludi, 1991; Gilligan, 1993; Valenti, 2007). Feminist scholarship has also provided alternative models for women's entitlement and accounts celebrating women who demonstrate high levels of empowered entitlement, including entitlement around sexual encounters (e.g., Findlen, 2001; Friedman & Valenti, 2008; Gilman, 2001; hooks, 2000b). Thus, feminist beliefs may help women develop a higher sense of entitlement by increasing their awareness of these factors, and empowering them to ask for the same outcomes as their male (higher status) counterparts, or for what they truly want or deserve.

**Summary and critique: Empowered entitlement, feminism, and sexual assertiveness.** As a group, U.S. women tend to be at risk for experiencing lower levels of entitlement in school, at work, and in the home (e.g., Ciani, et al, 2008; Travis, 2006). Feminist scholars have hypothesized that this is likely due to the power differences that exist between men and women within the patriarchal culture. However, this lower sense of entitlement is not inevitable; developing feminist beliefs may be one way of increasing women's entitlement (Hogue & Yoder, 2003). Identification with feminist beliefs may help improve women's awareness around unjust treatment, empower them to feel entitled to better treatment and fairer outcomes, and provide models of what this may look like (Jost, 1997). This increased entitlement may then positively impact sexual assertiveness in turn, as a woman who feels entitled to have her sexual needs and desires met is much more likely to assert them (e.g., Kahn, 2001). However, further research is needed to explore and verify this relationship. Although feminist identity has been positively linked to the related concept of empowerment (Peterson et al., 2008), research has not linked it to entitlement and only one study (Kahn, 2001) has linked entitlement to sexual assertiveness. The current research sought to expand the understanding of the

relationship among identification with feminist beliefs, empowered entitlement, and sexual assertiveness by examining the following hypothesis:

*Empowered entitlement will partially mediate the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, accounting for a portion of the shared variance between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. Identification with feminist beliefs will predict increased empowered entitlement, which in turn, will predict increased sexual assertiveness. Further, the magnitude of the link between feminist identification and sexual assertiveness will decrease when level of empowered entitlement is controlled.*

### **Self-Silencing**

Women's ability to be sexually assertive may also be impeded by the amount of self-silencing they do. Self-silencing, a concept developed by Jack (1991), is an active process of censoring one's thoughts, opinions, and ideas, especially when those ideas may conflict with an intimate partner, often as a way of attempting to maintain an intimate relationship. Silencing the self may lead to a devaluing of one's emotions and experiences over time, as one continually puts one's partner's desires first. Thoughts, opinions, and ideas about needs and desires within sexual encounters may be included in those that a woman actively silences, especially given cultural pressures such as concerns about negative evaluation if she goes against traditional U.S. cultural paradigms indicating women should hold a passive role in sexual encounters (e.g., Tolman, 2002). A woman who tends to self-silence may fear that stating her own sexual needs and desires openly may threaten her relationship, particularly if her desires conflict with those of her male partner. Thus, women who engage in regular self-silencing behaviors may be less likely

to openly assert themselves in sexual encounters, whereas women who engage in little or no self-silencing may be expected to be able to assert themselves more openly.

Jack (1991) conceived of self-silencing as a specific set of beliefs an individual holds regarding how one should behave and express one's self in order to maintain an intimate relationships. According to self-silencing theory, some individuals, and women in particular, may believe that expressing themselves openly will be unacceptable or threatening to their partners. Thus, the woman may engage in relationship-maintaining behaviors related to one of four self-silencing schemas: 1) *externalized perception of self*, or placing importance on others' perceptions over one's own internal experience; 2) *care as self-sacrifice*, or putting others' needs before one's own to maintain connection; 3) *silencing the self*, the amount of self-censoring one engages in to evade conflict, and 4) *divided self*, being outwardly compliant while feeling anger internally (Jack, 1991; Remen, Chambless, & Rodebaugh, 2002). Although men may operate out of these schemas as well, women may be more likely to do so due to women's specific cultural upbringing in a patriarchal society.

Jack and Dill (1992) noted that these schemas tend to be more prevalent for women because they likely develop as a way of women attempting to fit into the norms of feminine behavior that are expected of them by society. Traditional gender paradigms within mainstream U.S. culture encourage women to define their identity and self-esteem according to their close relationships. Thus, if these relationships fail, women's self concept may be negatively affected (Cramer & Thoms, 2003). In an attempt to maintain this connectedness with a valued other, and thus attempt to preserve one's self-esteem, a woman may engage in silencing her own views and putting the other's needs and desires first. This may lead the woman to behave in a compliant,

supplicating way in the relationship, which is likely to inhibit sexual assertiveness (Jacobs & Thomlison, 2009).

Research suggests that it is unlikely that women and girls naturally start out behaving in passive, self-silencing ways, and more likely that these patterns develop out of cultural training and pressure from others. In her work with high school girls and young adults, vanDaalen-Smith (2008) observed that the young women did not necessarily initially use self-silencing as a relationship management technique, but began to do so after repeated, and at times, extreme experiences of being silenced and “brought into line” by others. To further explore her initial observations, vanDaalen-Smith engaged a group of volunteers from the community to participate in focus groups discussing their experiences with anger. The author observed a pattern in how these community women, aged 14 to 24, and the nine women with whom she conducted in-depth follow-up interviews learned to self-silence. The young women initially had an experience (or multiple experiences) of having their rights denied or of being oppressed, to which they responded with a healthy anger response. The young women then typically received a strong, negative reaction to this expression of emotion – they were pathologized, criticized, told to silence themselves, or experienced others’ withdrawal of friendship and affection. These women were censured for behaving outside of the acceptable feminine behavior: their behavior was not seen as “nice”, agreeable, compliant, they were not putting others’ viewpoints above their own experience, and they were expressing “negative” emotions (Jack, 1999). From here, the young women reported disconnecting from their own emotional experience, silencing their own emotional needs and desires, and becoming more outwardly compliant.

It is important to consider the cultural context for self-silencing theory; it may be that self-silencing is considered more normative in collectivistic cultures that place a higher value on

group cohesion than in individualistic cultures where it may be seen as more pathological (Leung & Stephan, 2001). Gratch, Bassett, & Attra (1995) found a significant relationship between individuals' ethnic identity and their scores on Jack's (1991) Silencing the Self Scale (STSS) among the 604 African American, Asian, Caucasian, and Hispanic men and women they studied, with Asian participants reporting the highest level of self-silencing. However, as predicted by Jack's STSS model, the researchers also found a significant positive relationship between depression and the STSS for all participants, irrespective of ethnic identity.

Other research has suggested that holding collectivistic values specifically, irrespective of ethnic self-identity, may be more influential in terms of the effects of self-silencing. In a study of 66 U.S. women with significant relationship histories including domestic abuse, Barclay (2004) found that a collectivistic values orientation, but not ethnic/racial identification, was a significant predictor of STSS scores. In a study examining the experiences of 302 Turkish women, Kurtiş (2010) found results consistent with the hypothesis that self-silencing may not have the same negative impact in a more collectivistic cultural setting which emphasizes an interdependent self-concept. Specifically, Kurtiş found no relationship between two specific STSS subscales (Care as Self-Sacrifice and Self-Silencing) and depression. The two other subscales, Externalized Self-Perception and Divided Self, were significantly correlated with higher levels of depression, however. Given the mixed results regarding the cultural validity of the conceptual model of self-silencing, results from the STSS should be interpreted with caution, especially for individuals who operate from a collectivistic cultural orientation.

**Negative consequences of self-silencing.** This transition into a compliant, "well-behaved" woman can come with a price. In general, self-silencing has been associated with many negative symptoms, including higher levels depression, lower levels of self-esteem, poorer

global communication within relationships, body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, self-criticism, feelings of powerlessness, loneliness and continued involvement in abusive relationships (Besser, Flett, & Davis, 2003; Craver, 2000; Harper, Dickson, & Welsh, 2006; Harper & Welsh, 2007; Jacobs & Thomlison, 2009; Morrison, & Sheahan, 2009).

**Self-silencing and sexual assertiveness.** In addition these negative symptoms, higher levels of self-silencing are also correlated with poorer outcomes for women in sexual encounters. A core belief underlying self-silencing behavior is the fear of losing the relationship if one openly states one's needs and desires (Jack, 1991). Thus, women may be less likely to be sexually assertive in a relationship if they fear that being assertive may negatively affect the relationship. In this case, they may choose to put maintaining peace in the relationship ahead of their own needs or desires. In their study of 202 undergraduate college women, Macy et al. (2006) found that positive relationship expectancies (i.e., wanting to protect and maintain a relationship) were related to less assertive responding to partners' sexual aggression. If women feel like they need to suppress their thoughts or desires and comply with the traditional sexual scripts in their romantic relationships, then it seems likely that they may struggle with behaving assertively in the sexual realm as well, especially if it goes against traditional gender paradigms – thus, risking disrupting the status quo – to speak out.

It is unsurprising, then, that self-silencing has been found to be negatively correlated with measures of sexual subjectivity – that is, playing an active, subjective role in sexual encounters. Researchers Horne and Zimmer-Gembeck (2006) examined sexual subjectivity and self-silencing among 449 young women from Australia (aged 16 to 20; university students and seniors in high school). The authors found that self-silencing was significantly negatively correlated with a measure of sexual subjectivity, as well as specific aspects of sexual

subjectivity, including sexual body-esteem, deservingness of sexual pleasure from self and from a partner, and self-efficacy in achieving sexual pleasure. The authors observe that women who engage in self-silencing may be less likely to resist or reject the patriarchal standards for women that discourage sexual agency and direct sexual communication.

In another study, Schembri and Evans (2008) surveyed a mix of 225 women between the ages of 18 and 63 who either attended an Australian university or who lived in the community surrounding the university. They found that self silencing was significantly correlated with self-consciousness during sexual encounters for the women in the study. The authors summarized that when women engaged in self-silencing as a way to attempt to meet their partners' perceived needs, this correlated with negative consequences such as increased self-consciousness and greater fear of partners' rejection. Thus, when women engage in higher levels of self-silencing behavior, they may also experience greater self-consciousness during sex, feel less deserving of having their sexual needs met, feel less confident in their ability to enjoy sexual encounters, and may be less sexually assertive overall.

Indeed, Jacobs and Thomlison (2009) found a significant negative correlation between self-silencing and sexual assertiveness in their study of a group of 572 ethnically-diverse community women (ages 50-93). In their regression analysis, the researchers also found that self-silencing was a significant independent predictor of less use of safe-sex behaviors above and beyond self-esteem, sensation seeking, and HIV stigma. Similar to the findings by Macy et al. (2006) above, Jacobs and Thomlison hypothesize that one of the reasons women may be less sexually assertive is because of fears of losing the relationship if they were to assert their needs or concerns about safe-sex behaviors. Jacobs and Thomlison also hypothesize that the pressure for women to self-silence is likely greatly impacted by cultural factors such as women's power-

down status in U.S. patriarchal culture, possible economic dependency on male partners, the greater role of successful relationships in women's self-concept, fears of being alone, or fears of abuse or violent retaliation for communicating directly.

**Self-silencing in women.** The impact of such cultural factors may help explain why self-silencing in women appears to be related to greater negative symptomology than self-silencing in men does. This discrepancy suggests there may be different reasons for men's self-silencing versus women's. Indeed, several studies have happened upon a surprising finding: men were reporting *higher* self-silencing scores on Jack's (1991) Silencing the Self Scale (STSS) than women were (e.g., Cramer & Thoms, 2003; Ussher & Perz, 2010; Whiffen, Foot, & Thompson, 2007). However, even when women indicate lower levels of self-silencing than men, women's self-silencing is still more strongly associated with negative outcomes than men's. In a study examining self-silencing and relational variables among 211 adolescent couples (aged 17-22), Harper and Welsh (2007) found self-silencing was significantly and negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction for the young women, but not the young men. In their study of self-silencing among 484 informal caregivers in Australia (155 men and 329 women), Ussher and Perz (2010) found that women reported significantly greater negative psychological impact in the form of depression and anxiety than men did. Whiffen et al. (2007) found that among the 115 couples in their community sample, women's levels of depression were correlated with their level of self-silencing, whereas men's were not. Although much of the research on self-silencing is done with a female-only population, making gender comparisons difficult, none of the research that does include both genders indicates that men reported higher levels of distress, such as depression, anxiety, or relationship dissatisfaction.

Even men's tendency to report higher self-silencing scores than women appears to confirm rather than refute the impact of traditional paradigms about gender and power. Whereas women are hypothesized to self-silence in order to maintain connections and to appear compliant, men appear to self-silence in order to maintain power and individuality in a relationship. In their study involving 187 female and 169 male undergraduate students, Remen et al. (2002) found that whereas Jack's (1991) original four-factor Silencing the Self scale structure fit for women, it did not fit for men. Although the men's responses did result in a four-factor solution, it did not reflect Jack's original four factors, but instead appeared to be tapping into an avoidance of intimacy in order to secure independence and establish a position of power. The researchers found that men's results especially did not fit with the "Divided Self" schema, but rather reflected a new factor, which they labeled "Autonomy/Concealment". The factor was labeled thusly because the authors found that the scale items that loaded onto this factor for men were reflective of a need to maintain self-sufficiency and prioritize one's own needs above others', as well as a desire to obscure one's true feelings in order to maintain independence and conceal undesirable aspects of one's self from a partner.

Cramer and Thoms' (2003) study of 227 male and 598 female college students found similar results. These researchers also found that the four-subscale model of self-silencing (as measured by Jack's (1991) Silencing the Self Scale) fit for women, but not for men. The men's results were indicated a three-factor solution, with the Divided Self and External Self-Perception scales collapsing into one factor. Again, the scale items that loaded on this collapsed factor appeared to indicate men's use of self-silencing as a way of withdrawing their emotional investment in a relationship to protect themselves from criticism or perceived criticism, and as a way of asserting their power and individuality by denying their partners access to their emotional

world. The men's results in these two studies contrast to the motivations that generally underlie women's reasons for self-silencing, which appear to be to minimize conflict in the relationship, appease one's partner, and maintain an emotional connection.

**Feminism and self-silencing.** The culturally-prescribed behaviors that women are expected to conform to within U.S. culture reinforce self-silencing, making sexually assertive behavior difficult. U.S. women are often encouraged to silence their responses and desires, particularly if they may potentially upset or disturb another person; this may be especially true in collectivistic cultures that value the collective group over the individual (e.g., Kleinplatz, 2001; Tolman, 2002). These culturally-prescribed behaviors may then reinforce a pattern of a woman continually suppressing her true feelings and minimizing what she would like to do for the sake of not disturbing the status quo, perhaps even to the point of no longer knowing what she wants (Tolman, 2002).

Women may not choose to engage in these traditional paradigms willingly, but feel they need to play them because of cultural pressures and expectancies, as vanDaalen-Smith (2008) observed in her study of the impact of young women's silencing experiences, above. Some women may also feel there are no other alternatives to the current mainstream, socially-constructed gender paradigms they participate in – and indeed, may not even be aware that they are participating in this paradigm, but rather simply living the life they have been given (Jack, 2001). They may feel that their dissatisfactions are personal problems, rather than a result of social inequities and patriarchal cultural structures (Besser et al., 2003; Ussher, 2003). Whiffen, et al. found that among their community sample of 115 couples, self-silencing significantly mediated the relationship between relationship conflict and individuals' reports of depression, such that the association between relationship conflict and depressive symptoms could be partly

accounted for by individuals' levels of self-silencing. The strength of the mediation effect of self-silencing on relationship between relationship conflict and depressive symptomology was stronger for women than for men. The authors found that women in the study, more so than the men, tended to take personal responsibility for marital conflict, viewing the conflict as a personal failing, rather than a co-created aspect of being in an intimate relationship.

Holding feminist beliefs may help women to view their experiences of self-silencing within relationships through a different lens. hooks (2000a) notes the importance of feminist consciousness-raising – becoming aware of the invisible fabric of culture and its influence – in order to begin to challenge traditional patriarchal culture. In her original in-depth qualitative study on self-silencing, Jack (1991) noted the importance of “naming” one’s experience of what is going on in order to stop self-silencing and end its deleterious effects. Naming or labeling one’s experiences may provide validation for an individual’s personal experience and aid the person in reducing self-blame or shame for the experience and framing their experiences within a specific cultural context instead. Feminist theorists have long seen the value in the process of naming the structures that are in place and pointing out inequalities in the treatment of men and women along a range of different experiences, from power in interpersonal relationships to power in the workplace, among others (Crawford & Unger, 2004).

Thus, holding feminist beliefs may allow women to begin to challenge the beliefs that underlie self-silencing. Researchers Witte and Sherman (2002) note “...patriarchal social values and traditional gender roles prescribe a feminine role imperative for women to become submissive and pleasing to their boyfriends or husbands” (p. 1075). Witte and Sherman observe, however, that not all women demonstrate the same levels of self-silencing or adherence to these

roles. They cite the feminist movement as playing a part in helping women embrace alternatives to traditional gender paradigms.

Witte and Sherman (2002) explored the relationship between self-silencing and feminist identity development among 92 college women. The authors utilized Downing and Roush's (1985) model of feminist identity development, reviewed earlier in this chapter. Witte and Sherman explored the associations between levels of self-silencing and the different feminist identity stages of *passive acceptance*, *revelation*, *embeddedness-emanation*, and *synthesis* (the authors omitted the final subscale, *active commitment*). Witte and Sherman found that women who endorsed acceptance of traditional feminine cultural paradigms (*passive acceptance*) had higher levels of self-silencing, even after controlling for level of depression. Transitioning between rejection of traditional gender paradigms and acceptance of a feminist identity (*embeddedness-emanation*) was not correlated with self-silencing and feminist identity. Synthesis, associated with a solidification of feminist identity, was *negatively* correlated with self-silencing. Again, there were no results for the final stage of development, Active Commitment, as it was not included in the study. Given these results, endorsement of traditional stereotypical paradigms for women appears to be connected with higher levels of self-silencing, whereas endorsement of feminist identity is associated with reduced self-silencing.

Feminist beliefs may then provide women with alternatives to the self-silencing schemas of externalized self-perception, care as self-sacrifice, silencing the self, and divided self. The feminist movement and feminist scholarship are built on the premise of challenging patriarchal culture and working towards equality for men and women (Crawford & Unger, 2004). Thus, in terms of developing equality in relationships, feminist beliefs may help women to increase their awareness of their own needs and desires, rather than minimize them, and to value their needs

even when they conflict with others. Identification with feminist beliefs may also encourage women to develop more direct, assertive ways of communicating with partners as a form of communication that is their inherent right, rather than something associated with being a “bad girl” (hooks, 2000a). Developing feminist beliefs may also help women to create a more coherent sense of self (minimizing the divided self aspect of self-silencing), as they are encouraged to name their experiences as real and valid, value those experiences, and state their needs openly, minimizing the contrast between their internal and external self. Therefore, women may be able to view the gendered process of self-silencing as a part of traditional patriarchal U.S. culture, rather than one of the only options available to them in relationships. In other words, holding feminist beliefs may serve as a protective factor against self-silencing, thus enabling women to be more sexually assertive in heterosexual relationships.

**Summary and critique: Self-silencing.** Researchers Harper and Welsh (2007) have noted that “self-silencing among females may inhibit positive conflict resolution necessary for healthy, intimate relationships, and, ultimately, affect the quality of these relationships” (pg. 110). Despite the potential for identification with feminist beliefs to help alleviate self-silencing behaviors, there is little research examining the relationship between these variables. Given the numerous negative effects of self-silencing on women, including decreased sexual assertiveness, further exploration of the link among these variables and the potential mediating role of self-silencing in the relationship between feminism and sexual assertiveness is needed. Self-silencing may play an essential role in the relationship between feminism and sexual assertiveness, such that the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness may depend on levels of self-silencing. To this end, the present study examined the following hypothesis:

*Self-silencing will partially mediate the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, accounting for a portion of the shared variance between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. Identification with feminist beliefs will predict reduced self-silencing, which in turn, will predict increased sexual assertiveness. Further, the magnitude of the link between feminist identification and sexual assertiveness will decrease when level of self-silencing is controlled.*

### **Summary: Toward the Current Study**

In summary, the research examining the relationship between one's feminist identity and one's level of sexual assertiveness is limited, although the data suggest that a relationship may exist. As research has demonstrated, feminist beliefs may allow for an increased awareness of gendered sexual paradigms, as well as a means of challenging those paradigms, possibly leading to increase sexual assertiveness in intimate heterosexual encounters (e.g., Schick et al., 2008; Tolman, 2002; Yoder et al., 2007). Research data on the potential mediating effects of self-objectification, entitlement, and self-silencing on the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness is also lacking. Despite limited research on the relationship of sexual assertiveness with feminist identity and the potential impact of self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing on this relationship, some encouraging data suggest that feminist identity may have a positive relationship with sexual assertiveness, and that there may be a negative connection between identification with feminist beliefs and self-objectification and self-silencing, and a positive connection between feminist beliefs and empowered entitlement, variables which may in turn relate to sexual assertiveness. A strong backing of correlational data suggests a negative relationship between sexual assertiveness and negative health outcomes, such as risk of sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancy, sexual victimization, and a

positive association between sexual assertiveness and beneficial outcomes such as an increased assertive response to sexual aggression, increased sexual communication, and increased sexual and relationship satisfaction (e.g., MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Macy et al., 2006; Zamboni et al., 2000). Given these associations with and potential implications for women's psychological and physical well-being, it seems important to continue to examine sexual assertiveness and variables that may be positive related to it. The current study was designed to add unique and beneficial information to further the understanding of this important area of research.

### **The Current Study**

Yoder et al. (2007) have indicated a need for further research investigating the details of the relationship between feminism and women's sexuality. One of the primary goals of the current study was to explore the relationship between level of identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness.

A second goal of the current study was to examine the relationship between holding feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness in more detail by examining potential intervening variables which may clarify the relationship between sexual assertiveness and feminist identity. Rather than their being a direct link between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness, feminist identity was hypothesized to predict an intervening variable which then predicts increased sexual assertiveness. These potential intervening variables, or mediator variables, were hypothesized to explain a significant part of the variance in the relationship between sexual assertiveness and feminist identity, such that the relationship between sexual assertiveness and feminist identity would decrease or disappear when one of the mediators was entered into the model. The potential mediators examined in the current study included self-objectification, entitlement, and self-silencing.

Understanding the intricacies of the relationship between these variables may eventually aid in the development of interventions to increase women's sexual assertiveness, such as seeking ways to cultivate their identification with feminist beliefs with a specific focus on how those beliefs may decrease their levels of self-objectification and self-silencing, and increase sense of positive entitlement. To this end, the present study examined the following specific hypotheses:

H1: *There will be a significant positive relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and individuals' level of sexual assertiveness, such that feminist identity will predict level of sexual assertiveness.*

H2: *Self-objectification will partially mediate the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, such that the magnitude of the link between feminist identification and sexual assertiveness will decrease when level of self-objectification is controlled.*

H3: *Empowered entitlement will partially mediate the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, such that the magnitude of the link between feminist identification and sexual assertiveness will decrease when level of empowered entitlement is controlled.*

H4: *Self-silencing will partially mediate the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, such that the magnitude of the link between feminist identification and sexual assertiveness will decrease when level of self-silencing is controlled.*

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Participants

Participants were informed that they needed to meet the following criteria to be eligible for study participation: (1) identify as female, (2) were at least 18 years old, and (3) had sexual relationships with at least one male partner within the past year. Participants did not need to identify as heterosexual to participate in the study.

#### Demographics

There were 188 participants in the current study that met full eligibility criteria out of the 265 participants that started the survey. The average participant age was 32.31 years of age ( $SD = 8.25$ , range = 18 – 63). The majority of participants self-identified as White or European American (84%); 3.7% identified as Asian or Asian American, 3.2% identified as Latina or Hispanic; 2.7% identified as Bi-racial/Bi-ethnic/Multiracial/Multi-ethnic; 1.6% identified as African American or Black; 1.1% identified as “American”, and 3.7% did not specify their ethnicity. In terms of education, 0.5% had completed some high school; 1.1% had completed a high school degree (or equivalent); 33.5% of participants had completed a Bachelor’s degree, 13.9% had completed some college but no degree; 2.1% had completed a two-year degree, and 49% had completed a graduate or professional degree (specifically, master’s degree: 33%; doctoral degree: 9.6%; professional degree: 6.4%).

The majority of respondents (80.9%) self-identified as heterosexual or mostly heterosexual; 13.3% identified as bisexual, 3.2% self-identified as “queer”, 1.1% identified as “Other” and 1.6% did not indicate a sexual orientation. The majority of participants (95.7%) indicated that they were currently in a relationship with a male partner; 1.1% indicated they were

currently in a relationship with a female partner; 1.1% indicated “other” for their partners’ gender, and 2.1% did not report a partner’s gender. In terms of relationship status, 83.5% identified as being in a relationship (i.e., a dating relationship: 17%; a member of an unmarried couple/long-term relationship: 16.5%; a marriage/civil union: 50%). Eleven percent of respondents indicated that they were not currently in a relationship (single: 8.5%; divorced: 1.6%; separated: 0.5%; widowed, 0.5%), 4.3% responded “Other”, and 1.1% chose not to respond regarding their current relationship status.

### **Procedure**

This research study utilized a cross-sectional design using self-report survey measures to examine how the main constructs of feminist identity and sexual assertiveness are related, as well as to examine how other variables (self-silencing, self-objectification, and entitlement) may mediate the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness.

Participants were recruited to participate in the study via two main methods: internet posting and word-of-mouth recruitment initiated by this researcher and her colleagues. For the internet posting method, announcements were posted on this researcher’s social media (Facebook) page.

For the second recruitment method, word-of-mouth, the primary investigator solicited several of her professional colleagues to distribute the introduction to the study and link to the research website to their contacts. The majority of participants reported hearing about the research study via social media (Facebook; 65.1%); 30.7% reported hearing about the study via email from a colleague; 3.7% reported hearing about the study via a posting on an email listserv, and 0.5% did not indicate where they heard about the study. For both recruitment methods, potential participants received an announcement introducing the researcher, describing the

purposes of the study, providing contact information for the Human Subjects Committee, and providing the link to the research website. Recipients were encouraged to complete the questionnaires, as well as to pass the link along to others that may be interested. After the initial email, one follow up reminder email was sent six weeks later. In the initial and subsequent emails, participants were given the option to opt out of any future mailings. See Appendix A for a copy of this information.

### **Instruments**

All participants were directed to the website [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) to complete the research materials. At this research website, they were presented with a consent form with a brief description of the study, including guidelines for inclusion in the study, and the webpage they were redirected to if they did not meet the inclusion criteria (See Appendix B). Participants were then directed to the set of questionnaires and attendant informational content, including: (1) the *Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness* (HISA; Hurlbert, 1991; Appendix C), (2) the *Passive Acceptance* and *Active Commitment* subscales of the *Feminist Identity Composite* (FIC; Fischer et al., 2000; Appendix D), (3) the *Women of Color* subscale of the *Feminist Perspectives Scale* (FPS-WoC; Henley, Meng, O'Brien, McCarthy, & Sockloskie, 1998; Appendix E) (4) the *Body Surveillance* subscale of the *Objectified Body Consciousness Scale* (OBCS-BSS; McKinley & Shibley Hyde, 1996; Appendix F), (5) the *Silencing the Self Scale* (STSS; Jack, & Dill 1992; Appendix G), (6) the *Empowered Entitlement subscale* of the *Entitlement Attitudes Scale* (EE-EAS; Nadkarni, 1994; Nadkarni, Steil, Malone, & Sagrestano, 2005; Appendix H), (7) a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix I), (8) a fuller description of the study and debriefing information (see Appendix J) to read after participants complete the questionnaires, and (9) an optional raffle entry (see Appendix K). Four additional items relating to feminist identity,

including the one-item statement, “I am a feminist” to which participants indicated the degree of their agreement (Moradi, Fischer, Hill, Jome, & Blum, 2000) and Zucker’s (2004) three-item Cardinal Feminist Beliefs scale, were also included in the online surveys, but this data was not a part of the current project.

### **Sexual Assertiveness**

Participants’ level of sexual assertiveness was assessed using the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (HISA; Hurlbert, 1991). An individual’s score on the HISA is based on her responses to 25 scale items that tap into the respondent’s behaviors, thoughts, and emotions regarding communication and comfort within intimate heterosexual encounters. Individuals rate their responses to each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Never*, 5 = *All of the time*<sup>5</sup>). Sample items include, “It is easy for me to discuss sex with my partner” (reverse-scored) and “It is hard for me to say no even when I do not want sex.” In the present study, participants’ average scale score was used for analyses, with higher scores indicating lower levels of sexual assertiveness. The majority (99%) of participants in the current study indicated they were considering past or present male partners when completing the survey and the remaining 1% indicated consideration of both male and female partners.

The HISA was found to have a test-retest reliability of 0.85 over a four-week period in Pierce and Hurlbert’s (1999) study of 100 clinical and nonclinical individuals ( $\alpha = 0.88$  for the 54 nonclinical nursing staff group, and 0.83 for the 46 members of an outpatient marital therapy group, respectively). Hurlbert (1991), in his study of 129 married women and 65 female college students, found internal consistency reliability alpha of 0.915. Others have found similarly high alphas; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, and Caruthers (2005) found an alpha of 0.92 among 199

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<sup>5</sup> Hurlbert (1991) originally scored the measure on a 0-4 point scale, with 0 = Always and 4 = Never. The response method was altered for the present study for clarity and ease of analysis, without affecting the statistical properties of the measure.

female undergraduate students between the ages of 17 to 23; Wiederman (2000) and Weaver and Byers (2006) found internal consistency alphas of 0.87 and 0.82, respectively, in their studies with similar populations of college women. An alpha of 0.92 was obtained in the present study. Hurlbert (1991) also found high convergent validity (0.825) when comparing results on the HISA to the Gambrill-Richey Assertion Inventory (developed by Gambrill & Richey, 1975).

### **Identification with Feminist Beliefs**

To examine individuals' identification with feminist beliefs, participants completed the Feminist Identity Composite (FIC; Fischer et al., 2000) and the Women of Color subscale of the Feminist Perspectives Scale (FPS-WoC, Henley et al., 1998). The FIC is a measure of feminist identity compiled by Fischer et al. (2000) and based on Downing and Roush's (1985) original model of feminist identity development. Fischer et al. created this 33-item composite measure utilizing two other scales based on Downing and Roush's model, the Feminist Identity Scale (FIS; Rickard, 1989) and the Feminist Identity Development Scale (FIDS; Bargad & Hyde, 1991). Individuals' responses on the FIC measure their agreement with statements corresponding to different stages of Downing and Roush's (1985) feminist identity development model. Thus, the scale consists of five subscales which correspond to attitudes and beliefs reflecting the five stages of Downing and Roush's model: *passive acceptance*, *revelation*, *embeddedness-emanation*, *synthesis*, and *active commitment*. Respondents are asked to indicate the degree to which they agree with each item on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Individuals' responses to subscale items are averaged to obtain their subscale score. Higher subscale scores indicate attitudes and beliefs consistent with greater identification with that particular stage of feminist identity development.

Since the introduction of Downing and Roush's (1985) original model, some researchers have questioned whether or not feminist identity truly develops in a linear manner or whether it better reflects different sets of attitudes toward feminism and culture (e.g., Moradi & Subich, 2002, Yoder et al., 2007). Given the goals of the present study, the Passive Acceptance and Active Commitment subscales best represent the attitudes best reflecting the conceptualization of feminist attitudes and beliefs established in Chapters I and II of the current study.

Downing and Roush (1985) originally conceptualized the Passive Acceptance stage as one in which women may be unlikely to challenge traditional patriarchal gender paradigms and sexist treatment; they may feel that existing within the traditional gender paradigms is advantageous. Passive acceptance scale items on the FIC include "I like being a traditional female" and "One thing I especially like about being a woman is that men will offer me their seat on a crowded bus or open doors for me because I am a woman."

The Active Commitment stage lies at the other end of Downing and Roush's model. The authors conceptualized this stage as being characterized by an individual holding a secure feminist identity which she utilizes to actively engage in work toward eliminating sexist oppression. Examples from the Active Commitment subscale of the FIC include "I care very deeply about men and women having equal opportunities in all respects" and "I am willing to make certain sacrifices to effect change in this society in order to create a nonsexist, peaceful place where all people have equal opportunities."

Research on the other subscales of the Downing and Roush (1985) model has indicated mixed results. The two middle stages, Revelation and Embeddedness-Emanation, appear to represent a transition between passive endorsement of patriarchal cultural norms and a fully-realized feminist identity. Like many transition phases, these stages have been found to be

correlated with increased distress and negative outcomes at times, as individuals become painfully aware of the sexism and unfair treatment that they have been subjected to and may feel angry or troubled about this realization, but may not yet know how they will eventually cope with this newly-revealed world (e.g., Fischer & Good, 1994).

The Synthesis subscale has yielded especially mixed results; some research data suggests that many individuals endorse the Synthesis scale, to the point where it does not appear to discern between different attitudes about feminist identity (e.g., Erchull et al., 2009; Liss et al., 2001). Additionally, the connection between the Synthesis stage and one's feminist identity appears unclear. In their study of a group of 629 diverse women between the ages of 18 to 25 years of age, Liss and Erchull (2010) found that women's self-labeling as a feminist was not associated with their Synthesis scores as may be expected and that Synthesis scores instead appeared to correlate positively with some indicators of feminist identity (e.g., reporting sexist events) but correlate negatively with others (e.g., working together with other women toward social change). Thus, for the current study, the Passive Acceptance and Active Commitment subscales of the Feminist Identity Composite (FIC; Fischer et al., 2000) were used to represent individuals' identification with feminist beliefs.

With regards to internal consistency and structural validity, Moradi and Subich (2002) recommend using the FIC over the other two instruments based on Downing and Roush's (1985) model, the FIDS or FIDS. In their study of 245 women at a large Midwestern university (159 undergraduate students and 86 faculty and staff) comparing the FIC, FIS, and the FIDS, Moradi and Subich (2002) found internal consistency alphas for the FIC subscales to range from 0.73 – 0.84, whereas ranges for the FIS and FIDS were 0.67 - 0.80 and 0.52 – 0.79, respectively. In a study of the FIC with 316 women (203 college students and 92 nonstudent community

members), Fischer et al. (2000) found similar internal consistency alphas of 0.71 – 0.86. Concerning structural validity, Fischer et al. (2000) found that the FIC model provided a strong fit for the data utilizing several different fit indices (e.g., *NNFI* = 0.95; *SRMR* = 0.046), whereas Moradi and Subich found fit indices which were less strong but which the authors interpreted to be in the acceptable range (e.g., *NNFI* = 0.87; *SRMR* = 0.067).

For the Passive Acceptance and Active Commitment subscales specifically, Peterson et al. (2006) found internal consistency alphas of 0.77 for Passive Acceptance and 0.82 for Active Commitment among the 160 female college students they studied. Other researchers have found internal consistency alphas for the Passive Acceptance subscale of 0.74 – 0.75 and alphas for the Active Commitment subscale of 0.77 – 0.81 (Fischer et al., 2000; Moradi & Subich, 2002; Peterson et al., 2006). In the present study, an alpha of 0.85 was obtained for the Active Commitment subscale, and an alpha of 0.80 was obtained for the Passive Acceptance subscale. Fischer et al. (2000) found high convergent validity for the FIC in relation to with a measure of perceived sexist discrimination (Schedule of Sexist Events; SSE). As expected, Passive Acceptance scores were significantly negatively correlated with SSE (i.e., possibly representing denial of experiences of sexism), and Active Commitment scores were significantly positively correlated with SSE.

The Feminist Perspectives Scale (FPS, Henley et al., 1998) is a 60 item scale developed to measure a diverse range of feminist viewpoints as well as conservatism. The five 10-item subscales include Liberal Feminist, Radical Feminist, Socialist Feminist, Cultural Feminist, and Women of Color, as well as a 10-item Conservative subscale. The Women of Color subscale (WoC) of the FPS was used in the current study. This subscale is designed to measure a feminist political perspective that emphasizes the importance of addressing racial and ethnic oppression

as well as oppression based on gender (Henley et al., 1998). Mainstream, Euro-American feminist theory has often been critiqued for an overemphasis on issues concerning middle-class, Euro-American women and ignoring perspectives and concerns of people of color (e.g., hooks, 2000b; Moradi & DeBlaere, 2010). The FPS-WoC subscale was included to address a diversity of feminist perspectives that may not be covered in the FIC.

Respondents indicated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the ten scale items on a seven point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree”; 7 = “Strongly Agree”). Sample items include “Racism and sexism make double the oppression for women of color in the work environment” and “Much of the talk about power for women overlooks the need to empower people of all races and colors first.”

In terms of reliability: Henley et al. (1998) found a Cronbach alpha of .88-.92 for the entire scale (not including the Conservative subscale). The researchers obtained a two-week test-retest correlation of .91, and a four-week test-retest correlation of .86. For the WoC subscale, Henley et al. (1998) obtained two week and four week test-retest correlations of .85 and .80, respectively. Alphas for the WoC subscale have ranged from .77-.88 (Henley, 1998; Liss et al., 2004). In the current study, an alpha of 0.88 was obtained for the subscale. In terms of validity, Henley et al. (1998) found the overall FPS score and the WoC subscale were significantly positively correlated with degree of feminist self-identification and number of women’s studies courses completed; they also found the scale scores were significantly negatively correlated with self-identification with political conservatism ( $p < .05$ ).

In addition to the FPS-WoC and FIC Passive Acceptance and Active Commitment subscales, measurement of identification of feminist beliefs was also assessed by asking participants to respond to four additional questions regarding identification with feminist beliefs

(See Appendix I). First, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which agreed with the single item, “I am a feminist” by selecting a response on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree (Moradi et al., 2000). Next, participants were also asked to respond via yes/no format to three “cardinal beliefs of feminists” developed by Zucker (2004). The list of cardinal beliefs consists of three items: “Girls and women have not been treated as well as boys and men in our society”, “Women and men should be paid equally for the same work”, and “Women’s unpaid work should be more socially valued.” The cardinal beliefs were developed as a grouping measure, rather than a scale (Zucker, 2004). These items were not used in formal hypothesis testing but were examined to provide additional context for understanding women’s attitudes and beliefs related to feminism.

### **Self-Silencing**

Self-silencing was measured using the Silencing the Self Scale (STSS, Jack & Dill, 1992), a 31-item scale that examines women’s beliefs about intimate relationships and beliefs about their ability to express themselves in those relationships. Participants rate their responses on a 5-point scale, to indicate how much they agree or disagree with a particular item (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The scale consists of four subscales, *Externalized Self-Perception*, *Care as Self-Sacrifice*, *Silencing the Self*, and *Divided Self*. Sample items and their subscales include, “When I make decisions, other people’s thoughts and opinions influence me more than my own thoughts and opinions” (*Externalized Self-Perception*), “In a close relationship I don’t usually care what we do, as long as the other person is happy” (*Care as Self-Sacrifice*), “I speak my feelings with my partner, even when it leads to problems or disagreements” (*Silencing the Self*; reverse scored), and “I feel I have to act in a certain way to please my partner” (*Divided Self*). Independent exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses

have established these four separate subscales for women (Cramer & Thoms, 2003; Remen, Chambless, & Rodebaugh, 2002). Higher scores on each subscale, as well as higher scores overall, indicate more self-silencing in intimate relationships. In the current research study, participants' overall mean STSS score was used in the analysis.

Jack and Dill (1992) found internal consistency alpha coefficients for the overall scale (including all scale items) ranging from 0.86 to 0.94, over three diverse samples (new mothers who abused cocaine during pregnancy, individuals in a battered women's shelter, and female college students; 473 participants total). The researchers also found a test-retest reliability range of 0.88 to 0.93 among the college student sample over a two week period. In another study using the STSS as part of a study of a diverse group of 394 Canadian women, Piran and Cormier (2005) found a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91 for the full scale (including all items). However, subsequent research has found that two items, items 1 and 11, have failed to load on any of the subscales and thus these items were dropped in the present study, as has been recommended (e.g., Cramer & Thoms, 2003; Whiffen, Foot, & Thompson, 2007). In the present study, an alpha of 0.92 was obtained for the full scale, omitting items 1 and 11.

Research regarding the cultural validity of the STSS has been mixed. Some researchers have posited that the self-silencing model may fit better with an individualistic cultural orientation, where the needs of an individual are valued over the needs of the group, than with a collectivistic cultural orientation in which the needs of the group are emphasized over the individual's needs (Leung & Stephan, 2001). In general, the research has confirmed that women tend to engage in self-silencing behavior more than men, irrespective of cultural factors. In their meta-analysis of thirty-six studies, Holt and DeVore (2005) found female gender was a greater predictor of higher levels of self-silencing behavior than collectivistic/individualistic cultural

orientation. Other studies have found similar results (e.g., Lee, Becker, & Goodrich, 2010). However, given the mixed results regarding the cultural validity of the STSS, results of the STSS should be interpreted with caution, especially for individuals who operate from a collectivistic cultural orientation.

### **Self-Objectification**

Self-objectification was measured using the Body Surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (BSS-OBCS; McKinley & Hyde, 1996), as has been suggested by previous research (Hill & Fischer, 2008; Tiggemann & Slater, 2001). The Body Surveillance subscale is an eight-item scale that examines the rater's body image, exploring how an individual views herself and the degree to which she examines herself as if from an outside perspective.

Participants respond on a 7-point Likert scale, from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Higher overall scores are indicative of higher levels of self-objectification. Sample items for the subscale include, "During the day, I think about how I look many times", and "I rarely think about how I look" (reverse scored). In their study of 502 young women (mean age = 18.86 years) and 151 middle-aged women (mean age = 46.32 years) McKinley and Hyde (1996) found internal consistency alphas for the Surveillance subscale of 0.76 – 0.79. John and Ebbeck (2008) found an alpha coefficient of 0.83 for the Surveillance subscale in their study of 231 female college students. In the current study, an alpha of 0.87 was obtained for the surveillance subscale.

### **Empowered Entitlement**

The Entitlement Attitudes Scale (EAS), developed by Nadkarni and colleagues (Nadkarni, 1994; Nadkarni et al., 2005) is a 17-item scale that examines an individual's sense of

personal entitlement. In a study of 302 undergraduate and graduate students (aged 16 – 53 years), Nadkarni et al. found that factor analysis of the scale revealed two distinct factors, *Self-reliance/Self-assurance*, or “Empowered Entitlement”, and *Narcissistic Expectations/Self-Promotion*, or “Narcissistic Entitlement” (Nadkarni et al., 2005; Kahn, 2001). Items (nine in total) that loaded onto the *Empowered Entitlement* factor tended to reflect aspects of “healthy entitlement” pertaining to the belief that one’s basic rights should be respected. Items on the *Narcissistic Entitlement* subscale (eight items) tended to reflect the more pathological aspects of entitlement, i.e., demanding one’s own desires be met regardless of the needs or rights of others. Nadkarni et al. (2005) found a weak relationship between the two factors. However, in her study of 104 heterosexual married women (aged 25 – 40), Kahn (2001) found the factors to be unrelated, supporting the bi-dimensional construct view of the EAS. As this study examined an empowerment-focused sense of entitlement, the 9-item Empowered Entitlement subscale (EAS-EE) was used.

Participants’ responses are rated on a 7-point scale. For the first three items on the Empowered Entitlement subscale, participants indicate how much they agree with each item, from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7); for the remaining six items, individuals note how often an item is true for them, from *never* (1) to *always* (7). Scores were averaged, with higher scores indicating greater levels of empowered entitlement. Sample items include, “I am more optimistic about other people’s success than I am about my own” (reverse scored) and “I don’t have the courage to stand up for myself when someone infringes on my rights” (reverse scored). In their study of the scale, Nadkarni et al. (2005) found internal consistency reliability coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.78 for the EAS-EE. Kahn (2001) found an internal

consistency alpha of 0.86 for the EAS-EE subscale. In the present study, an alpha of 0.83 was obtained.

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

Participants were given a demographic questionnaire exploring how they self-identify on criteria such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of education completed, sexual orientation, and current relationship status. This questionnaire was used to verify that the individual met criteria for study participation, as well as assessing the diversity of the sample.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Examining the Data

Prior to data analysis, respondents' data was examined to ensure participants met eligibility criteria, to observe any missing data, and to ensure that data met assumptions of linearity and normality. Out of 265 individuals who started the online survey, 77 cases were deleted. Of these, eight failed to meet eligibility criteria; one did not agree to the consent form; 34 participants did not complete any of the questionnaires, and an additional 34 cases were deleted due to attrition (i.e., completed only some of the questionnaires, but not the entire set of questionnaires; 27 of these 34 stopped after the first two surveys measuring sexual assertiveness and self-objectification).

Within the remaining 188 participants, some individuals were missing small amounts of data (e.g., failed to complete one item on a particular scale or indicated the item choice "prefer not to answer"). For this missing data, individual mean imputation (IMI) was used. For missing items on a scale, a participant's mean score on the other (completed) scale items was imputed for the missing item. This is consistent with research suggesting that IMI is an effective way of handling missing data (e.g., Downy & King, 1998; Shrive, Stuart, Quan, & Ghali, 2006). IMI was used a total of 32 times (out of the total 18, 238 questionnaire data points for the 188 participants). For all participants, a subscale score was then obtained by calculating the mean of their scores on each subscale.

Data was examined for skewness and kurtosis to ensure that it met assumptions of normality. Visual inspection revealed that data for all main variables met assumptions for linearity, and all variables excepting sexual assertiveness and self-silencing met assumptions for

normality ( $ps > .05$  for all skewness and kurtosis statistics). Data for sexual assertiveness and self-silencing were positively skewed (skewness of 3.12 and 3.30, respectively; both  $ps < .05$ ), and were thus transformed using a square root transformation as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). After this transformation, the data for these two variables met assumptions for normality (skewness of 1.38 and 1.72, respectively; both  $ps > .05$ ).

## **Data Analysis**

### **Descriptive Statistics and Correlational Data**

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all main variables, including identification with feminist beliefs (FIC-AC, FIC-PA, FPS-WoC), sexual assertiveness, self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing are reported in Table 1. Respondents' mean scores and standard deviations in this study were roughly consistent with those found in previous research. As expected, all three measures of identification with feminist beliefs (FIC-PA, FIC-AC, and FPS-WoC) were significantly correlated with each other ( $ps < .01$ ). Sexual assertiveness was significantly correlated with all three proposed mediator variables (self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing;  $ps < .01$ ). All three mediators were significantly correlated with one another in the expected directions (all  $ps < .01$ ). Self-silencing and self-objectification were significantly positively correlated, self-objectification and empowered entitlement were significantly negatively correlated and self-silencing was notably negatively correlated with empowered entitlement ( $r = -.693, p < .01$ ). In terms of the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, FIC-PA (Passive Acceptance) was significantly positively correlated with sexual assertiveness ( $r = .17, p = .023$ ). Higher scores on the Passive Acceptance subscale predicted lower levels of sexual assertiveness<sup>6</sup>. This passive acceptance of traditional sexist paradigms can be conceptualized as identification with

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<sup>6</sup> Higher scores on the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness indicate lower levels of sexual assertiveness.

*nonfeminist* beliefs. The two other measures of feminist beliefs, FIC-AC (Active Commitment) and FPS-WoC (Women of Color) were not significantly correlated with sexual assertiveness ( $r = -.08$  and  $.08$ , respectively; both  $ps > .05$ ; see Table 1).

As shown in Table 1, participants' age was significantly correlated with a number of variables, such that older age predicted higher levels of nonfeminist beliefs;  $p < .05$ ), lower levels of agreement with the FPS-WoC (Women of Color subscale of the Feminist Perspectives Scale;  $p < .01$ ), higher levels of empowered entitlement ( $p < .01$ ), and lower levels of self-objectification ( $p < .05$ ). These correlations are all in the expected direction based on previous research. Interestingly, however, participants' highest level of education completed was significantly correlated with their sexual assertiveness scores, indicating that higher levels of education predicted lower levels of sexual assertiveness ( $p < .01$ ). See Integrative Analyses, below, for a discussion on the potential impact of education level on the current hypothesized mediation model.

Correlational analyses were not run by reported sociorace due to small numbers of participants identifying with an ethnicity other than European-American (i.e., African American, Asian, Hispanic, Bi-ethnic/Multi-ethnic). However, mean scores and standard deviations grouped by reported sociorace are presented in Table 2.

### **Hypothesis Testing: Relationship between Sexual Assertiveness and Identification with Feminist Beliefs**

*Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant positive relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and individuals' level of sexual assertiveness, such that feminist identity will predict level of sexual assertiveness.*

Correlation analyses were performed to assess the relationship between individuals' identification with feminist beliefs and levels of sexual assertiveness (Hypothesis 1). As indicated above, data were partially consistent with Hypothesis 1 in that one measure of identification with feminist beliefs, FIC-PA (Passive Acceptance), or an identification with nonfeminist attitudes and beliefs, was significantly positively correlated with sexual assertiveness score ( $r = .17, p = .023$ ). It is important to note that sexual assertiveness scores were reverse-scored in this study specifically. Thus, higher scores on the FIC-PA (Passive Acceptance) subscale predicted *lower* levels of sexual assertiveness. The response scale on the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (HISA) was reversed in this study in order to increase the clarity of the response scale for participants and for ease of analysis of results. Thus, throughout the study, higher sexual assertiveness scores indicate lower levels of sexual assertiveness. No relationship was found between the two other measures of identification with feminist beliefs, FIC-Active Commitment and FPS-Women of Color, and level of sexual assertiveness ( $r = -.08$  and  $.08$ , respectively; both  $ps > .05$ ; see Table 1).

### **Hypothesis Testing: Proposed Mediator Variables**

Baron and Kenny's (1986) regression approach was utilized to examine mediation. Three sets of multiple regression analyses were conducted to assess the potential mediating effects of *self-objectification*, *self-silencing*, and *empowered entitlement* on the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness (Hypotheses 2-4, respectively; Baron & Kenny, 1986; Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004). The initial step in Baron and Kenny's approach is to examine the connection between the predictor and criterion (i.e., feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness in this case) to determine if there is a relationship to mediate. Because a significant correlation between sexual assertiveness and FIC-AC (Active Commitment) and FPS-WoC (Women of

Color) was not found, these measures of feminist beliefs were not included in subsequent mediation analyses. Therefore, FIC-PA (Passive Acceptance), conceptualized as identification with nonfeminist beliefs, was the sole measure of feminist identity used below.

*Hypothesis 2: Self-objectification will partially mediate the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, such that the magnitude of the link between feminist identification and sexual assertiveness will decrease when level of self-objectification is controlled.*

To test Hypothesis 2, regression analyses were performed to examine the mediating effect of self-objectification on the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness. In the first step, sexual assertiveness was entered as the criterion variable and nonfeminist beliefs (FIC-PA) was entered as the predictor variable. Nonfeminist beliefs accounted for significant variance in sexual assertiveness (Adjusted  $R^2 = .025$ ,  $F(1, 186) = 5.819$ ,  $p = .017$ ; see Table 3). Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the regression coefficient for nonfeminist beliefs was significant ( $\beta = .174$ ,  $t = 2.41$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

In the second regression, nonfeminist beliefs was entered as the predictor variable and self-objectification (the first proposed mediator) was entered as the criterion variable. Nonfeminist beliefs accounted for significant variance in self-objectification (Adjusted  $R^2 = .022$ ,  $F(1, 186) = 5.111$ ,  $p = .025$ ; see Table 3). As expected, the regression coefficient for nonfeminist beliefs was significant ( $\beta = .164$ ,  $t = 2.261$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

For the third regression, nonfeminist beliefs and self-objectification were entered as simultaneous predictors in the regression equation and sexual assertiveness was entered as the criterion variable. The overall model was significant (Adjusted  $R^2 = .050$ ,  $F(2, 185) = 5.91$ ,  $p = .003$ ). The effect of self-objectification was significant ( $\beta = .175$ ,  $t = 2.42$ ,  $p = .017$ ), but the

significant initial relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness also remained significant even after controlling for the effects of self-objectification ( $\beta = .146, t = 2.02, p = .045$ ), which is inconsistent with the model of mediation proposed in Hypothesis 2.

In lieu of Sobel testing, nonparametric bootstrapping analyses were utilized to provide more robust data on the mediating role of self-objectification on the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, as recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008). In bootstrapped analyses, mediation is considered significant if the 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effect do not include zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Results from mediation analyses based on 1000 bootstrapped samples using bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals demonstrated that when self-objectification was entered into the model, the indirect effect of nonfeminist beliefs on sexual assertiveness via self-objectification was not significant (IE=.0074, S.E.=0.0055, lower 95% CI = -.0005, upper 95% CI = .0207). Thus, the results of the bootstrapped analyses provide further data suggesting that self-objectification does not mediate the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness.

*Hypothesis 3: Empowered entitlement will partially mediate the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, such that the magnitude of the link between feminist identification and sexual assertiveness will decrease when level of empowered entitlement is controlled.*

To test the third hypothesis, a second set of regression analyses was performed to examine the mediating effect of empowered entitlement on the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. The first step in the set of regressions, regressing sexual assertiveness scores on nonfeminist beliefs, was identical to the first step performed to test Hypothesis 2, and thus was not repeated (see H2 above, and Table 4 for results).

In the second regression, nonfeminist beliefs was entered as the predictor variable and empowered entitlement (the second proposed mediator) was entered as the criterion variable. Nonfeminist beliefs accounted for significant variance in empowered entitlement (Adjusted  $R^2 = .016$ ,  $F(1, 186) = 4.033$ ,  $p = .046$ ; see Table 4). As predicted, the regression coefficient for nonfeminist beliefs was significant ( $\beta = -.146$ ,  $t = -2.01$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

For the third regression, nonfeminist beliefs and empowered entitlement were entered as simultaneous predictors in the regression equation and sexual assertiveness was entered as the criterion variable. The overall model was significant (Adjusted  $R^2 = .177$ ,  $F(2, 185) = 21.17$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). The significant initial relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness became non-significant after controlling for the effects of empowered entitlement ( $\beta = .116$ ,  $t = 1.73$ ,  $p = .085$ ). While controlling for nonfeminist beliefs, the effect of empowered entitlement remained significant ( $\beta = -.399$ ,  $t = -5.95$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

As with Hypothesis 2, nonparametric bootstrapping analyses were utilized to further examine the mediating role of empowered entitlement on the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Results from mediation analyses based on 1000 bootstrapped samples using bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals demonstrated that when empowered entitlement was entered into the model, the indirect effect of nonfeminist beliefs on sexual assertiveness via empowered entitlement was technically significant (IE = .0151, S.E. = 0.0087, lower 95% CI = .0001, upper 95% CI = .0341), although the lower limit for the confidence interval was very close to 0. Thus, although the initial regression results were suggestive of mediation, the more conservative bootstrapping results suggest that the mediating effect of empowered entitlement approaches significance, but is more conservatively considered not significant.

*Hypothesis 4: Self-silencing will partially mediate the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, such that the magnitude of the link between feminist identification and sexual assertiveness will decrease when level of self-silencing is controlled.*

To test the fourth hypothesis, another set of regression analyses was performed to examine the mediating effect of self-silencing on the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. As with Hypothesis 3, the regression of sexual assertiveness scores on nonfeminist beliefs (Step 1) was identical to the first step in testing Hypothesis 2 (see H2 above, and Table 5).

In the second regression, nonfeminist beliefs was entered as the predictor variable and self-silencing (the third proposed mediator) was entered as the criterion variable. Nonfeminist beliefs accounted for significant variance in self-silencing (Adjusted  $R^2 = .067$ ,  $F(1, 186) = 14.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ; see Table 5 for regression data for this model). As predicted, the regression coefficient for nonfeminist beliefs was significant ( $\beta = .267$ ,  $t = 3.77$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

For the third regression, nonfeminist beliefs and self-objectification were entered as simultaneous predictors in the regression equation and sexual assertiveness was entered as the criterion variable. The overall model was significant (Adjusted  $R^2 = .251$ ,  $F(2, 185) = 32.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Consistent with the hypothesis, the significant initial relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness became non-significant after controlling for the effects of self-silencing ( $\beta = .042$ ,  $t = 0.64$ ,  $p = .526$ ). While controlling for nonfeminist beliefs, the effect of self-silencing remained significant, ( $\beta = .497$ ,  $t = 7.57$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Nonparametric bootstrapping analyses were performed to gather more robust data on the mediating role of self-silencing on the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual

assertiveness (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Results from mediation analyses based on 1000 bootstrapped samples using bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals demonstrated that when self-silencing was entered into the model, the indirect effect of nonfeminist beliefs on sexual assertiveness via self-silencing was significant ( $IE=.0344$ ,  $S.E.=0.0092$ , lower 95% CI = .0183, upper 95% CI = .0547). Because the confidence interval does not include zero, mediation is considered significant (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Thus, the results of the bootstrapping analysis provide further data suggesting that self-silencing mediates the relationship between sexual assertiveness and nonfeminist beliefs.

### **Integrative Analysis**

In addition to these individual mediation analyses, an integrative analysis was conducted to explore (1) whether the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness remains significantly different from zero when all three mediator variables (self-objectification, self-silencing, and empowered entitlement) and covariates were also included jointly in the regression equation and (2) which mediators accounted for unique variance in the nonfeminist beliefs-sexual assertiveness link, above and beyond the others. Preacher and Hayes' (2008) method for evaluating indirect effects in multiple mediator models was used. In addition to the three proposed mediator variables, participant age and education were entered into the model as covariates, to control for the potential effects of these variables on the model. These two demographic variables were included because they correlated significantly with some of the main study variables (see Table 1). Within this model, an effect is considered significant at  $p < .05$  if the 95% confidence interval does not include zero.

The overall model accounted for a significant portion of the variance in sexual assertiveness (Adjusted  $R^2 = .318$ ,  $F(6, 181) = 15.53$ ,  $p < .0001$ ; see Table 6). Analyses based on

1000 bootstrapped samples using bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals demonstrated that controlling for the effects of age (coefficient = -.002, S.E. = .0015,  $t = -1.304$ ,  $p = .194$ ) and education level (coefficient = .0965, S.E. = .0223,  $t = 4.324$ ,  $p < .0001$ ), the total *indirect* effect of nonfeminist beliefs on sexual assertiveness through the set of mediators was significant (total indirect effect = .0394, S.E. = .0108, lower 95% CI = .0211, upper 95% CI = .0646). However, the *direct* effect of nonfeminist beliefs on sexual assertiveness was not significant ( $B = .0269$ , S.E. = 0.017,  $t = 1.57$ ,  $p = .1183$ ).

Thus, after controlling for covariates (age and education level), the set of three mediators together (self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing) fully mediated the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. Specifically, when all three mediators were considered simultaneously, self-silencing appeared to contribute the only unique significant mediation in the model (bootstrapped indirect effect = .0329; S.E. = .0098; lower 95% CI = .0178, upper 95% CI = .0591), accounting for approximately 84% of the total indirect effect. Unique indirect effects for self-objectification and empowered entitlement were not significant (for self-objectification, bootstrapped indirect effect = .0027, S.E. = .0045, lower 95% CI = -.0051, upper 95% CI = .0145; for empowered entitlement, bootstrapped indirect effect = .0038, S.E. = .0059; upper 95% CI = .0198 and lower 95% CI = -.0060).

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The goals of the present study were to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness via exploring potential mediators of that relationship. Exploring factors that impact women's sexual assertiveness is vital because the ability to be sexually assertive is associated with many important outcomes for women. Individuals who report higher levels of sexual assertiveness also report higher levels of relationship and sexual satisfaction, lower incidence of risky sexual behavior, decreased experience of sexual victimization, and decreased self-consciousness during sexual encounters (e.g., Apt, et al., 1996; MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Macy et al., 2006; Quina et al., 2000; Zamboni et al., 2000). Despite these benefits related with being sexually assertive, several barriers exist for women behaving in sexually assertive ways. For example, traditional gender stereotypes within the patriarchal U.S. culture often model a submissive, passive sexual role for women, and some women may avoid behaving in sexually assertive ways out of fear of negative repercussions for behaving in ways that contradict these stereotypes (e.g., Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001; Tolman, 2002).

Previous research on the association between identification with feminist identity and sexual assertiveness has been limited. However, data has suggested that holding feminist beliefs is associated with beneficial sexual outcomes for women, including greater condom use self-efficacy, increased sexual subjectivity, more positive feelings about one's sexuality, and decreased endorsement of the sexual double standard (Bay-Cheng and Zucker, 2007; Schick et al., 2008). Alternatively, passive acceptance of sexism (i.e., identification as nonfeminist) has been found to be related to decreased satisfaction in romantic relationships, increased risky

sexual behaviors, as well as lower levels of sexual assertiveness specifically (Mahalik et al., 2005; Yoder et al., 2007) However, others have noted that the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness is poorly understood and further examination is needed (Yoder et al., 2007). Thus, the present research study sought to contribute to the existing literature by examining in greater detail potential mediators of the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, including self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing.

As predicted, the findings of the current study indicate that individuals who hold nonfeminist beliefs (i.e., who endorse traditional gender stereotypes and sexist beliefs associated with the passive acceptance stage of Downing and Roush's (1985) model of feminist identity development) report significantly lower levels of sexual assertiveness. Self-silencing emerged as a significant mediator of the relationship between passive acceptance and sexual assertiveness, and the empowered entitlement mediational model approached significance. Self-objectification was not found to significantly mediate the relationship between identification with nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. Contrary to hypotheses, two other measures of identification with feminist beliefs were not found to be significantly correlated with sexual assertiveness. When all three proposed mediators (self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing) were entered into the model, using age and education level as covariates, a significant indirect effect was demonstrated for self-silencing, above and beyond the effects of the other potential mediators. These results are discussed in detail below.

### **Feminist Identity and Sexual Assertiveness**

In Downing and Roush's (1985) original feminist identity development model, they conceptualized the initial stage as one of *passive acceptance*, or reflexive agreement with

traditional cultural roles and inequalities. They hypothesized that women in this stage of nonfeminist identification may be unlikely to challenge traditional stereotypes about heterosexual relationships. In the present study, passive acceptance attitudes were conceptualized more simply as attitudes, rather than as markers of a clearly delineated "stage." These nonfeminist attitudes and beliefs significantly predicted lower levels of sexual assertiveness. This result echoes data from previous research which has linked nonfeminist beliefs to decreased satisfaction in romantic relationships, increased risky sexual behaviors, and negative psychological outcomes (e.g., Mahalik et al., 2005; Yoder et al., 2007). Given that traditional gender paradigms of (hetero)sexual encounters place women in a passive role and men in an active, initiating role, it makes sense that women who identify with traditional gender paradigms would report less active, assertive behavior in sexual encounters (e.g., Mahalik et al., 2005; Tolman & Diamond, 2001).

Although the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness was significant, no significant relationship was found between sexual assertiveness and the two other measures of feminist beliefs, Active Commitment (from the Feminist Identity Composite; Fischer et al.(2000), also based on Downing & Roush's model) and the Women of Color subscale for the Feminist Perspectives Scale (Henley et al., 1998). These results replicated those of Yoder et al. (2007) in their study examining the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness. The researchers found *nonfeminist* beliefs were significantly correlated with sexual assertiveness levels, whereas more active identification with feminist beliefs was not. It is interesting that holding feminist beliefs did not appear to predict increased sexually assertive behavior in women as was expected. However, it may be that whether or not holding feminist beliefs leads to positive change in sexual assertiveness levels, passively accepting stereotypical

beliefs may be more detrimental. Although the current data are cross-sectional and unable to directly address issues of causality, as Yoder et al. state, “with regard to intimate and sexual roles, [the pattern of results] argues there is something bad coming from passively accepting or denying sexism” (p. 371).

### **Self-Objectification**

Self-objectification, or viewing one’s self critically as if from an outside observer’s perspective, has been associated with a range of negative outcomes for women in particular, including decreased body esteem, increased drive for thinness and negative eating attitudes (Hurt, et al., 2007, McKinley, 2006a, 2006b). Specifically, self-objectification and other negative relationships with one’s body have been associated with a range of negative sexual outcomes for women, including increased emotional disengagement during sex, increased risky sexual behaviors, greater endorsement of the sexual double standard, decreased sexual self-esteem and satisfaction, less sexual desire, arousal, orgasm, and enjoyment, and lower levels of sexual assertiveness (e.g., Cash, et al. 2004; Dove & Weiderman, 2000; Gillen et al., 2006; Koch, et al., 2005; Schooler et al., 2005; Yamamiya et al., 2006).

As with these previous studies, the present study found a significant relationship between degree of self-objectification and level of sexual assertiveness. In addition to these results on the relationship between self-objectification and sexual assertiveness, the present study found that identification with nonfeminist beliefs was associated with higher levels of self-objectification, whereas active commitment to feminist beliefs was significantly related to lower levels of self-objectification.

Thus, the results of the current study provide further evidence of the association between identification with feminist beliefs and positive outcomes for women, as well as the connection

between nonfeminist beliefs and negative outcomes. This data fits with others' findings that holding feminist beliefs is associated with decreased body dissatisfaction and eating disordered behavior, less internalization of sociocultural attitudes about appearance, decreased anxiety about body features and improved body esteem (e.g., Hurt, et al., 2007; Myers & Crowther, 2007; Peterson, et al., 2006; Snyder & Hasbrouck, 1996).

Although self-objectification was significantly related to feminist and nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, it was not found to be a mediator of the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness in the present study as was predicted. It may be that reducing one's self-objectification is not a means through which feminist identity impacts sexual assertiveness. Some of the previous research on self-objectification has yielded mixed results, particularly the research addressing the link between feminist identity and self-objectification (e.g., Cash et al., 1997; Fingeret & Gleaves, 2004; Murnen & Smolak, 2009; Ojerholm & Rothblum, 1999; Tiggemann & Stevens, 1998). These mixed findings appear to suggest that the relationship between a woman's feminist beliefs and her personal views regarding her own body, including its impact on sexual assertiveness, is likely a complex one, and one that warrants future examination.

### **Empowered Entitlement**

Empowered entitlement is a non-narcissistic, constructive form of entitlement that allows individuals to have a healthy sense of deserving their basic rights. Previous research in the area of empowered entitlement has been limited, and very little research has been done examining the relationship between empowered entitlement and sexual assertiveness or feminist identity. Given the barriers for women to assert themselves in the sexual realm within the traditional gender paradigm, having a sense that one deserves to have her basic rights met would seem important in

order to challenge this paradigm (e.g., Tolman & Diamond, 2001). However, only one previous study has linked empowered entitlement to sexual assertiveness (Kahn, 2001). Consistent with the results of that previous study, the present research found that increased levels of empowered entitlement were significantly related to higher levels of sexual assertiveness.

Additionally, the present study contributed uniquely to the understanding of the relationship between empowered entitlement and feminist identity. Previous research has found that feminist identity has been positively linked to the related concept of empowerment (Peterson et al., 2008), but not to empowered entitlement itself. In the present study, participants with higher reported levels of empowered entitlement had significantly higher levels of active commitment to feminist beliefs and lower levels of identification with nonfeminist beliefs.

The mediational role of empowered entitlement in the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness is somewhat unclear. The initial results of the present study demonstrated that empowered entitlement significantly mediated the relationship between nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. However, more conservative analyses suggest that the mediational role may not be significant. Given these results and limited research in this area, further examination of the effect of empowered entitlement on the relationship between sexual assertiveness and identification with nonfeminist beliefs is needed to have a better understanding of this relationship.

### **Self-Silencing**

Self-silencing is conceptualized as an active process of suppressing one's thoughts, opinions, and ideas within an intimate relationship in order to avoid conflict and to maintain the relationship (Jack, 1991). Self-silencing has potentially negative repercussions for one's ability to assert oneself in sexual encounters. Even if a woman is aware of her own sexual needs and

desires, she may discount them, particularly if she fears negative consequences from her partner in going against the traditionally passive cultural role for women (e.g., Tolman, 2002). Self-silencing has been associated with several negative outcomes, including higher sexual self-consciousness, lower sexual body esteem, lower levels of deservingness to sexual pleasure, less sexual self-efficacy, as well as lower levels of sexual assertiveness (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006; Jacobs & Thomlison, 2009; Macy et al., 2006; Schembri & Evans, 2008). Results from the present study lend support to these previous findings: higher levels of self-silencing significantly predicted lower levels of sexual assertiveness.

Additionally, active commitment to feminist beliefs predicted lower levels of self-silencing, whereas nonfeminist beliefs predicted higher levels of self-silencing, which replicates Witte and Sherman's (2002) findings of this relationship between feminist and nonfeminist identity and self-silencing. Moreover, self-silencing emerged as a significant mediator in the relationship between nonfeminist identity and sexual assertiveness, such that the significant initial relationship between nonfeminist identity and sexual assertiveness became non-significant after controlling for the effects of self-silencing. Thus, it is possible that a nonfeminist identity may impact a woman's ability to be sexually assertive by impacting her level of self-silencing. This is consistent with the conceptual model of passive acceptance of traditional gender paradigms leading to a woman suppressing her true thoughts and desires for the sake of not disturbing the status quo – perhaps because she does not question that status quo – even to the point of no longer knowing what she wants in a sexual encounter (e.g., Tolman, 2002).

### **The Overall Model: Integrative Analyses**

When all three mediators (self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing) were entered into the proposed mediational model, they fully mediated the relationship

between identification with nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. In sum total, the model – including age and education level as covariates – explained 32% of the variance in sexual assertiveness. However, self-silencing continued to contribute the only unique significant mediation in the model, accounting for a substantial part of the total indirect effect, providing further evidence that self-silencing plays an important role in the relationship between these two main variables. Thus, even though self-silencing and empowered entitlement in particular appeared to be fairly related in the initial correlational analyses, the variables all appear to play different roles in the overall mediational model.

It is also important to note that the participants in the present study were a highly educated group, many of whom held advanced degrees. However, even after controlling for education level and age, self-silencing remained a significant mediator of the relationship between identification with nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness, suggesting that these results may be applicable to more general populations of women as well.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Previous research examining the relationship between feminist identity and level of sexual assertiveness has been limited. The research which has been done has not looked at the ways in which identification with feminist beliefs may potentially impact beneficial sexual outcomes (e.g., Mahalik et al., 2005; Yoder et al., 2007). The present study adds substantial depth to the understanding of this relationship by examining potential mediators (self-objectification, empowered entitlement, and self-silencing) of the association between these two variables.

This study may also offer preliminary directions for means of developing an individual's ability to be sexually assertive. This is important given the association between low levels of

sexual assertiveness and negative outcomes such as increased incidence of risky sexual behavior, increased experiences of sexual victimization, increased self-consciousness during sexual encounters, and lower levels of relationship and sexual satisfaction (e.g., Apt, et al., 1996; MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Macy et al., 2006; Quina et al., 2000; Zamboni et al., 2000). It may be that passive acceptance of traditional sexist gender paradigms is especially detrimental to one's level of sexual assertiveness, more so than the potential benefit holding active feminist beliefs.

Traditional gender paradigms offer fairly rigid roles for men and women in (hetero)sexual encounters – for men, that role is one of actor, initiator, and seasoned expert, and for women, it is a complex role of both passively following of their partner's lead, while also quietly and carefully negotiating the encounter to avoid her behavior being labeled either prudish or promiscuous (e.g., Jackson & Cram, 2003; Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). This role offers little room for asserting one's own sexual needs and desires – or even room for being *aware* of them, which may greatly limit a woman's ability to have a positive, healthy, or enjoyable sexual encounter. Perhaps a variety of alternative paradigms, whether actively feminist or not, may offer a way of resisting this limiting traditional manner of interacting in (hetero)sexual encounters. Thus, continuing to find ways to challenge this passive acceptance of traditional sexual paradigms for women, as well as further examination of self-silencing behavior within this context, seems important in order to understand the impact on sexual assertiveness and potentially improve women's sexual well-being.

In addition to these findings, the results of the current study also provide further evidence of the association between identification with feminist beliefs and positive outcomes for women, including, as well as lower levels of self-objectification, higher levels of empowered entitlement, and lower levels of self-silencing. The data also provide support of connection between

nonfeminist beliefs and negative outcomes on these variables. Continuing to explore ways in which feminist and nonfeminist beliefs may impact individuals is important work for continuing to improve individuals' sexual relationships as well as their overall well-being.

As with any study, this study exhibited limitations that may be improved upon by future research. Because participants were recruited online and the data were collected online, it is difficult to calculate an accurate response rate. Attrition was fairly substantial (approximately sixty-eight participants who started the questionnaires did not complete them), likely due to the length of the online questionnaire. Additionally, the recruitment method may have led to bias in the sample. Participants were able to self-select for the study from email postings and from postings on social networking sites. Thus, individuals were likely affected in their decision to take and complete the study by a variety of personal and professional variables. For example, they may have been more likely to complete the questionnaire if they knew the researcher or the researcher's colleague that recruited them or if they felt completing the research study was important, et cetera. Additionally, the recruitment method likely attracted a substantial number of the researcher's colleagues and acquaintances, many of whom may share identity variables (e.g., ethnicity, feminist identification, education level) with the researcher. Some of these variables may account for the fact that, although study participants were relatively diverse in terms of age and sexual orientation (especially given the study's selection criteria regarding having had a sexual relationship with a male in the past year), they were fairly homogenous in terms of ethnicity, with a majority of participants identifying as European American, as does this researcher.

Similarly, the participants' level of educational attainment was skewed, with nearly half identifying as having completed a graduate or professional degree. It seems likely that

individuals that are in or have completed graduate school – and who may have recently completed a graduate research project themselves – may be more likely to want to help others in similar situations by completing a dissertation research survey than those that have not recently done so. It is also likely that the researcher’s peer group is similarly skewed in terms of education level, although an attempt was made to contact colleagues who may be able to recruit individuals with a diversity of educational backgrounds. The homogeneity of the respondents’ education levels, however, may be masking some differences in the relationships between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness that may actually be present in a more educationally-diverse population. Additionally, the makeup of the current sample may account for the positively skewed responses for the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness and the Silencing the Self Scale. Overall, the population appeared to have higher levels of sexual assertiveness than the scale average and slightly lower levels of self-silencing. It is important to keep in mind that these factors may limit the ability to generalize the study results to the general U.S. female population.

Because this was a correlational study, the results of this study do not demonstrate causation. Additionally, the Baron and Kenny (1986) method of testing mediation is dependent on the way the model is set up based on the theoretical grounding. Thus, obtaining a statistically significant result supportive of mediation does not indicate a directional or causal relationship between the variables (e.g., Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Indeed, the mediator variable of note, self-silencing, was significantly correlated with sexual assertiveness. It is difficult to tell with the structure of this study if this is because these concepts affect each other in some way or if they both share some underlying process or construct (e.g., might low sexual assertiveness be a type of self-silencing?). They were set up as conceptually distinct in this study because they appear to be theoretically related, yet non-redundant, entities. Sexual assertiveness addresses individuals’

ability to be autonomous in terms of their sexual self-concept, to be aware of and clearly state their own sexual preferences, and to have those needs be known, whereas self-silencing addresses the active subjugation of one's needs for the sake of avoiding conflict in one's relationship (Jack, 1991; Livingston, et al., 2007).

Self-silencing was also highly negatively correlated with level of empowered entitlement. The two concepts differ theoretically; whereas self-silencing emphasizes the subjugation of one's needs to avoid conflict, empowered entitlement encompasses one's sense of what she or he deserves and can expect from others. It may be that if an individual has a low sense of empowered entitlement, she or he may also suppress his or her needs in close relationship. Some of the items in the Silencing the Self Scale and the Empowered Entitlement subscale of the Entitlement Attitudes Scale also appear to be similar as well (e.g., STSS: "I think it's better to keep my feelings to myself when they do conflict with my partner's" and EE-EAS (reverse scored): "I hesitate to assert my preference or opinions over someone else's"). However, in the present study, self-silencing and empowered entitlement appear to tap into somewhat different concepts, as self-silencing mediated the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness whereas empowered entitlement did not.

Another limitation of the present study was due to lack of a strong measure for assessing feminist identity, as well as the diverse range of existing feminist identities, something that has become an increasing focus in the Third Wave feminist movement (e.g., radical feminist, lesbian feminist, womanist/woman of color feminism, eco-feminist; see Baumgardner & Richards, 2010). The Downing and Roush (1985) model of feminist identity development, on which the FIC (Fischer et al., 2000) is based, has been criticized for focusing on the perspectives of middle-class, European-American women, and the model's applicability for women of ethnic

backgrounds other than European-American has been called into question (e.g., Flores, Carrubba, & Good, 2006; Moradi, Subich, & Phillips, 2002). Conscientious efforts were made to utilize reliable measures that would assess a variety of feminist viewpoints, including the use of the Feminist Perspectives Scale – Women of Color subscale (FPS-WoC; Henley et al., 1998). However, at the time the data was collected for this study, the FPS-WoC scale was already twelve years old. As many others have noted, it is difficult to measure feminist identity due to continually evolving socio-political definitions of what it means to be feminist (e.g., Hamilton, 2003; Frieze & McHugh, 1998).

Additionally, some researchers have called the cultural validity of the Silencing the Self Scale (Jack, 1991) into question for members of collectivistic cultures in particular. Specifically, some researchers have theorized that self-silencing may not have as negative an impact for individuals in which a collectivistic culture is the norm. Thus, the results of this scale should be interpreted with some cautious awareness (e.g., Leung & Stephan, 2001). Indeed, the very few participants who identified as being Asian or Asian-American – a cultural identity which tends to correlate with a more collectivistic orientation – also endorsed higher average scores on self-silencing than individuals who identified with other sociorace groups. (See chapters II and III for a fuller discussion of the literature on self-silencing and collectivistic cultures.)

In terms of other aspects of cultural validity, it is interesting to note speculatively that the very few participants who identified as “Black/African-American”, as well as the very few who identified as “Multi-Racial/Multi-ethnic/Bi-racial/Bi-ethnic” endorsed higher scores on the Women of Color subscale of the Feminist Perspectives Scale than individuals who identified with other sociorace groups. These are informal observations about the data, not formal hypothesis tests, given the extremely small subsample sizes, which prevent formal inference.

This may be because of a specific question on the Women of Color subscale addressing the experiences of women who identify as African American. Among other individuals who reported a specific sociorace, individuals who identified as “European American/ White/Western European/Caucasian” and those very few that identified as “American” scored lower, on average, than individuals who reported any other sociorace. Although future research with larger group sizes is warranted, it may be that these differences exist because the participants of color may have a greater awareness of the intersection of sociorace- and gender-based discrimination and are likely to have been more impacted by it than individuals identifying as European-American (e.g., Laird & Niskodé-Dossett, 2010).

### **Directions for the Future**

This study provides several interesting jumping-off points for future research. Because this was a cross-sectional design using correlational analyses, it does not imply directionality or causation. Future explorations of these concepts may include an intervention to aid women in reducing their self-silencing behaviors and examine whether or not it increases their level of sexual assertiveness. Data from such an exploration could have implications for how sexual assertiveness may be developed and directly encouraged as well, which could have a beneficial impact on women’s overall sexual well-being.

Additionally, future research may continue to explore the relationships between self-objectification and empowered entitlement with feminist identity and sexual assertiveness. In the present study, both self-objectification and empowered entitlement were found to be significantly related to both nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness individually, but neither played a mediational role. A better understanding of the relationship between these variables may also aid in understanding how women’s level of sexual assertiveness may be developed and

encouraged. Not all women respond to cultural messages about self-objectification the same way, and obtaining data on how women resist messages about self-objectification would likely be beneficial in aiding others who may tend to internalize these messages. To this end, qualitative interview research with women may help explicate these processes and the ways in which women relate to their bodies, their needs and desires, and their partners on a practical, quotidian level.

Several other research findings in the present study lend themselves to future inquiry as well. For example, highest education level achieved was found to be significantly positively related to sexual assertiveness. The previous research examining this relationship has been somewhat mixed; some have found assertiveness is positively correlated with educational achievement (e.g., Twenge, 2001), whereas others have found no relationship between assertiveness variables and academic achievement (e.g., Lufi, Parish-Plass, & Cohen, 2003). Research on education level and sexual assertiveness specifically is very limited; this may be an interesting avenue to pursue. Past research has demonstrated a positive link between endorsement of feminist beliefs and higher completed education level (e.g., Buysse, 2000; Dauphinais, Barkan, & Cohn, 1992). Perhaps higher education allows women to challenge the traditional gender paradigms and act in ways that differ from stereotypical gender expectations, including being more assertive in their sexual relationships. Future research may wish to explore this relationship in depth to see what potential underlying mechanisms might be at play, and if and how those underlying mechanisms may inform our understanding of sexual assertiveness and ways it may could be improved. Especially given the homogeneity of the education levels among the current study respondents, it seems important to examine the relationship between

education level and sexual assertiveness – and indeed, the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness – with a more educationally-diverse population.

Overall, additional research exploring the hypotheses presented in this study with other populations seems beneficial. For example, it would be helpful to examine the mediating role of self-silencing in individuals with a collectivistic cultural orientation versus an individualistic orientation to see what differences, if any, exist along this dimension. Previous research in this area has yielded mixed results on the relationship; however, some data suggest that self-silencing may not have a negative impact for individuals with a collectivistic cultural orientation in the same way that it might for individuals with an individualistic orientation (e.g., Kurtiş, 2010). It would be interesting to notice whether self-silencing would still mediate the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness and whether or not sexual assertiveness would still be associated with negative outcomes in general for women who may have a collectivistic cultural orientation. Collectivistic orientation was not measured in the current study, so it is possible that women in this sample held a range of orientations.

It would also be helpful to repeat this research with women who identify as bisexual and women who identify as lesbian/queer, to examine if the traditional gender role paradigm impacts sexual encounters for that group in the same way. In the present study, the vast majority of respondents (over 95%) reported their current partner's gender as male. This is unsurprising given the study inclusion criteria that individuals had to have had a sexual relationship with a male partner in the past year. However, it would be interesting to examine the current research hypotheses – perhaps particularly via qualitative methods – with women who report having female partners, to see how this may impact the relationship between identification with feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness as well as the mediational role of self-silencing. It may be that

women who are in relationships with female partners are more readily able to act in ways outside of the traditional paradigm of female non-assertiveness given that they may be less likely to expect their female partner to play the stereotypically male role of active initiator and the fact that, simply by virtue of same-gender partnering, they are already stepping out of traditional roles.

Given that the demographic composition of the present study was largely European-American, future research examining the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness for a more ethnically-diverse population would be helpful. For some women of color, the intersection of mainstream sexist and racist paradigms may create a greater sense of pressure to behave in ways that conform to minimize activation of stereotypes. For example, it may be useful to examine the impact of the multiple oppressions of sociorace and gender for women who identify as African American. Behaving in ways that contradict traditional sexual paradigms for women may have particular consequences for African American women, who have been stereotyped in popular culture as exotic, untamed, hypersexual, and immoral (Stephens & Few, 2007; Stokes, 2007). Additionally, research has suggested that African American women are more likely than women of other ethnicities to be held responsible by others for being raped and are less likely to report being raped (e.g., Donovan & Williams, 2002). Given these barriers to free and assertive sexual expression, behaving in sexually assertive ways may be more difficult for African American women in particular.

### **Conclusions**

One need only glance at recent news headlines to observe that mainstream U.S. culture still represents a hostile environment for women's sexuality. Recent politicized discussions on mandated funding for contraceptive coverage have led to an increased condemnation of women's

sexuality and a reinforcement of the sexual double standard (e.g., Romero, 2012). This condemnation culminated in a three-day series of highly negative commentary by extremely popular radio host Rush Limbaugh, who made over 53 separate misogynistic remarks directed at a female law student who testified at a House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee in favor of a mandate that employers provide coverage for contraceptives as part of health coverage (Geiger, 2012). This widely-heard commentary involved gender-specific name-calling and repeated attempts to humiliate the student for having sex. Women are still continually given the message from mainstream culture that asserting their needs and desires in sexual encounters is unacceptable because they are female.

Given this climate, it is unsurprising that acceptance of mainstream culture's version of female sexuality – that is, endorsement of nonfeminist beliefs – is associated with lower levels of sexual assertiveness. This relationship between identification with nonfeminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness is mediated by women's self-silencing and censorship. Interestingly, however, more active, direct identification with feminist beliefs do not appear to be associated with sexual assertiveness. More data is needed to continue to understand this relationship between sexual assertiveness and feminist beliefs, as well as potential mediators of that relationship. It is also interesting that empowered entitlement and self-objectification, while related to feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness separately, do not appear to mediate the relationship between feminist beliefs and sexual assertiveness. Given the negative impact low sexual assertiveness can have on a woman's sexual health and well-being, it is important to examine all of the factors that may contribute to this pattern of behavior in order to continue to explore ways of allowing women to challenge this traditional paradigm and find ways to fully express their needs and desires in their relationships.

**Table 1**

*Means, Standard Deviations, Internal Consistency Reliabilities, and Intercorrelations for All Major Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Sexual Assertiveness		<b>.174*</b> <i>.166*</i>	<b>-.081</b> <i>-.078</i>	<b>.083</b> <i>.083</i>	<b>.508**</b> <i>.513**</i>	<b>-.416**</b> <i>-.423**</i>	<b>.199**</b> <i>.199**</i>	<b>-.112</b> <i>-.124</i>	<b>.196**</b> <i>.189**</i>
2. Feminist Beliefs: Passive Acceptance			<b>-.550**</b> <i>-.487**</i>		<b>.267**</b> <i>.250**</i>	<b>-.146*</b> <i>.164*</i>	<b>.164*</b> <i>.166*</i>	<b>.166*</b> <i>.166*</i>	<b>-.179*</b> <i>-.179*</i>
3. Feminist Beliefs: Active Commitment				<b>.501**</b> <i>.501**</i>	<b>-.171*</b> <i>-.161*</i>	<b>.138*</b> <i>.138*</i>	<b>-.138*</b> <i>-.138*</i>	<b>-.014</b> <i>-.014</i>	<b>.125</b> <i>.125</i>
4. Feminist Beliefs: Women of Color					<b>-.086</b> <i>-.075</i>	<b>.004</b> <i>.004</i>	<b>.021</b> <i>.021</i>	<b>-.145*</b> <i>-.145*</i>	<b>.118</b> <i>.118</i>
5. Self-Silencing						<b>-.693**</b> <i>-.689**</i>	<b>.272**</b> <i>.266**</i>	<b>-.133</b> <i>-.141</i>	<b>-.100</b> <i>-.103</i>
6. Empowered Entitlement							<b>-.230**</b> <i>-.230**</i>	<b>.202**</b> <i>.202**</i>	<b>-.008</b> <i>-.008</i>
7. Self-Objectification								<b>-.224**</b> <i>-.224**</i>	<b>-.060</b> <i>-.060</i>
8. Age									<b>.140</b> <i>.140</i>
9. Highest Education Level Completed <sup>7</sup>									<b>.140</b> <i>.140</i>
<i>M</i>	2.24	2.22	3.79	5.12	2.25	4.31	4.41	32.31	n/a
<i>S.D.</i>	0.57	0.73	0.68	1.10	0.65	1.11	1.18	8.25	n/a
Possible Range	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-7	1-5	1-7	1-7	n/a	1-3
Actual Range	1.08- 3.76	1.00- 4.43	2.00- 5.00	1.70- 7.00	1.03- 4.14	1.33- 6.44	1.38-7	18-63	1-3
Cronbach $\alpha$	.919	.801	.845	.887	.922	.833	.865	n/a	n/a

*Notes.*  $N = 188$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . Higher scores indicate higher levels of the named construct, with the exception of sexual assertiveness (SA), in which higher scores indicate lower levels of SA. **Bold** numbers indicate correlations for transformed (square root) SA and self-silencing (SS) variables and *italicized* numbers indicate non-transformed variable correlations.

<sup>7</sup> Education Level Completed was recoded from original ordinal data into three categories: 1 = Some HS or HS degree; 2 = Some College, 2 yr/Vocational/Tech Degree, or Bachelor's Degree; 3 = Graduate Degree (Master's Degree, Doctoral Degree, Professional Degree). Presented for exploratory informational purposes only.

**Table 2***Means and Standard Deviations for All Major Variables by Ethnicity*

Reported Ethnicity/Sociorace		Sexual Assertiveness	Feminist Beliefs: Passive Acceptance	Feminist Beliefs: Active Commitment	Feminist Beliefs: Women of Color	Self-Silencing	Empowered Entitlement	Self- Objectification
Asian /Asian American/ Asian Indian/Japanese/ Chinese- American ( <i>N</i> = 7)	<i>M</i> <i>S.D.</i>	2.57 0.66	2.61 0.34	3.67 0.72	5.93 0.97	2.45 0.75	3.63 1.00	4.41 1.26
Black/African-American ( <i>N</i> = 3)	<i>M</i> <i>S.D.</i>	2.23 0.72	2.52 1.09	4.62 0.22	6.10 0.40	2.32 0.89	4.41 1.48	5.64 0.53
European American/ White/ Western European/Caucasian ( <i>N</i> = 158)	<i>M</i> <i>S.D.</i>	2.23 0.54	2.24 0.75	3.75 0.68	5.06 1.05	2.24 0.64	4.35 1.08	4.38 1.15
Hispanic/Mexican/Chicana ( <i>N</i> = 6)	<i>M</i> <i>S.D.</i>	2.45 0.21	1.83 0.33	3.86 0.86	5.85 0.68	2.33 0.85	4.44 0.99	5.54 0.93
Multi-Racial/Multi-ethnic/Bi- racial/Bi-ethnic ( <i>N</i> = 5)	<i>M</i> <i>S.D.</i>	2.18 1.18	1.60 0.21	4.26 0.55	6.12 0.64	2.07 0.86	4.18 1.72	3.68 1.35
Other/“American” ( <i>N</i> = 2)	<i>M</i> <i>S.D.</i>	1.70 0.65	2.64 0.10	3.71 0.40	3.85 0.21	2.48 0.68	4.39 0.71	5.00 0.35
No Ethnicity Reported ( <i>N</i> = 7)	<i>M</i> <i>S.D.</i>	2.23 0.76	1.82 0.60	4.08 0.70	4.40 1.87	2.13 0.67	4.10 1.59	3.95 1.63

*Notes.* Total *N* = 188. Higher scores indicate higher levels of the named construct, with the exception of sexual assertiveness (SA), in which higher scores indicate lower levels of SA. SA and self-silencing scores are for non-transformed variables.

**Table 3**

*Multiple Regressions Testing Mediating Effects of Self-Objectification on Relationship between Sexual Assertiveness and Identification with Feminist Beliefs (N = 188)*

B&K Step:	Criterion	Predictor	$\beta$	$t$	over-all $R^2$	$F$	df	B	SE B	Bootstrapped 95% CI
Step 1	Sexual Assertiveness	FIC-PA	.174	2.412*	<b>.025</b> .030	5.819*	1, 186	.045	.019	0.007, 0.082
Step 2	Self-Objectification	FIC-PA	.164	2.261*	<b>.022</b> .027	5.111*	1, 186	.265	.117	-0.012, 0.537
Step 3	Sexual Assertiveness	FIC-PA	.146	2.015*				.038	.019	-0.003, 0.077
		Self-Objectification	.175	2.418*	<b>.050</b> .060	5.908**	2, 185	.028	.012	0.004, 0.051

Notes. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . Adjusted  $R^2$  is in **bold**.

**Table 4**

*Multiple Regressions Testing Mediating Effects of Empowered Entitlement on Relationship between Sexual Assertiveness and Identification with Feminist Beliefs (N = 188)*

B&K Step:	Criterion	Predictor	$\beta$	$t$	over-all $R^2$	$F$	df	B	SE B	Bootstrapped 95% CI
Step 1	Sexual Assertiveness	FIC-PA	.174	2.412*	<b>.025</b> .030	5.819*	1, 186	.045	.019	0.007, 0.082
Step 2	Empowered Entitlement	FIC-PA	-.146	-2.008*	<b>.016</b> .021	4.033*	1, 186	-.223	.111	-0.471, 0.023
Step 3	Sexual Assertiveness	FIC-PA	.116	1.731				.030	.017	-0.007, 0.064
		Empowered Entitlement	-.399	-5.953**	<b>.177</b> .186	21.168**	2, 185	-.068	.011	-0.092, -0.044

Notes. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . Adjusted  $R^2$  is in **bold**.

**Table 5**

*Multiple Regressions Testing Mediating Effects of Self-Silencing on Relationship between Sexual Assertiveness and Identification with Feminist Beliefs (N = 188)*

B&K Step:	Criterion	Predictor	$\beta$	$t$	overall $R^2$	$F$	df	B	SE B	Bootstrapped 95% CI
Step 1	Sexual Assertiveness	FIC-PA	.174	2.412*	<b>.025</b> .030	5.819*	1, 186	.045	.019	0.007, 0.082
Step 2	Self-Silencing	FIC-PA	.267	3.774**	<b>.066</b> .071	14.244**	1, 186	.078	.021	0.037, 0.119
Step 3	Sexual Assertiveness	FIC-PA	.042	0.635				.011	.017	-0.023, 0.044
		Self-Silencing	.497	7.567**	<b>.251</b> .260	32.416**	2, 185	.439	.058	0.325, 0.554

Notes. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . Adjusted  $R^2$  is in **bold**.

**Table 6***Integrative Analyses: Bootstrapping for Indirect Effects of Overall Multiple Mediator Model*

Model Summary	
	Overall $R^2$ <b>.318</b>
	.334
	$F$ 15.529**
	df 6, 181
Direct effect: Feminist Beliefs (FIC-PA) on Sexual Assertiveness	
	B .0269
	SE .017
	$t$ 1.570
	$p$ .118
Bootstrapped Indirect Effects	
TOTAL	Effect .0394
	SE .0108
	Bootstrapped 95% CI 0.021, 0.065
Self-Objectification	Effect .0027
	SE .0045
	Bootstrapped 95% CI -0.005, 0.015
Empowered Entitlement	Effect .0038
	SE .0059
	Bootstrapped 95% CI -0.006, 0.020
Self-Silencing	Effect .0329
	SE .0098
	Bootstrapped 95% CI 0.018, 0.060
Covariates	
Age	B -.0020
	SE .0015
	$t$ -1.304
	$p$ .194
Education Level	B .0965
	SE .0223
	$t$ 4.324**
	$p$ .0001

Notes.  $N = 188$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . Adjusted  $R^2$  is in **bold**. Model includes covariates Age and Educational Level.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### SOLICITATION EMAIL ANNOUNCEMENT & FOLLOW-UP

#### **Email Sent to Colleagues & Posted on Social Media Website, Time 1:**

From: Kate M. Hagadone

Subject: Research Request: Survey on Women's Relationships & Social Attitudes

Dear [Colleague]:

I am writing to ask if you might be willing to help me complete the data collection for my final dissertation project examining women's attitudes and behaviors in sexual relationships and other related social attitudes. If you're able, could you please read and forward the following email to any colleagues, students, friends, or acquaintances that may be eligible or interested to participate in the research? (Criteria for inclusion in the study include: (a) identifying as female, (b) being at least 18 years of age, and (c) have had a sexual relationship with a male partner in the past year.)

I will send out two reminder emails in the next few weeks, so please let me know if you'd prefer not to receive any further emails from me about the survey. Thank you for your help and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Regards,

Kate M. Hagadone, M.A.

Ph.D. Candidate in Counseling Psychology

Southern Illinois University - Carbondale

[kate.hagadone@gmail.com](mailto:kate.hagadone@gmail.com)

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*[Participant Solicitation Email was pasted here; see below.]*

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#### **Email Sent to Colleagues & Posted on Social Media Website, Time 2:**

From: Kate M. Hagadone

Subject: Research Request: Survey on Women's Relationships & Social Attitudes

Dear [Colleague]:

A few weeks ago, I sent out an email asking for your help in forwarding a description of my dissertation research study on women's attitudes and behaviors in sexual relationships and other related social attitudes to any colleagues, students, or peers that you thought might be interested in completing the survey. Thank you for all of your help in assisting me with my research. I am currently in the process of collecting data from more participants for the study and am writing to inquire if you would continue to pass along the following announcement (below) to any colleagues or peers that may be eligible for the study. Again, to participate in the study, individuals need to: (a) identify as female, (b) be at least 18 years of age, and (c) have had a sexual relationship with a male partner in the past year.)

Thank you again for your help. One final reminder email may be sent out after this one. If you wish to be removed from any future mailings, please let me know by contacting me at <kate.hagadone@gmail.com>.

Regards,

Kate M. Hagadone, M.A.  
 Ph.D. Candidate in Counseling Psychology  
 Southern Illinois University - Carbondale  
[kate.hagadone@gmail.com](mailto:kate.hagadone@gmail.com)

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*[Participant Solicitation Email was pasted here; see below.]*

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### **Participant Solicitation Email**

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student in the Department of Psychology at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. I am currently gathering data for a research study on women's attitudes and behaviors in sexual relationships and am inviting you to participate in this questionnaire. I am studying this topic because I believe it will contribute important information to help improve individuals' lives and their relationships.

You may take the survey here: [https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/relationship\\_questionnaire](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/relationship_questionnaire)

Basic summary of the study (see full description below):

- Ability to participate in a questionnaire that may benefit women's well-being and help to improve their interpersonal relationships
- Website to take the surveys: [https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/relationship\\_questionnaire](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/relationship_questionnaire)
- Opportunity to enter a drawing to win a \$25 gift card to Amazon.com
- Eligibility requirements: (a) Identify as female, (b) at least 18 years of age, (c) experience being in a sexual relationship with a male partner within the past year
- Takes approximately 20-30 minutes to complete

In the research survey, you will be asked about your views and attitudes regarding sexual relationships, your thoughts and behaviors in sexual relationships, as well as some questions about other social attitudes. The risk involved in this study is minimal and answering the questions may feel as personal as answering questions at a doctor's office, but with this survey, your answers will be anonymous.

The survey will take 20 to 30 minutes to complete. You may complete the survey anonymously, and all of your responses will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. Only people directly involved with this project, including myself and my advisor, will have access to the surveys.

Completion of this survey indicates voluntary consent to participate in this study. After completion of the survey, you may exit the survey and enter an optional drawing to an Amazon gift card worth \$25. You will be asked to include an email address for the drawing; this will be kept separately from your questionnaire results and deleted as soon as the research study has completed. If you are not eligible for the study but wish to pass this invitation email along to another individual who may be eligible, you are welcome to do so (but are under no obligation to do so).

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact me at via email at [kate.hagadone@gmail.com](mailto:kate.hagadone@gmail.com) or by telephone at (734) 996-9111 x270. You may also contact my supervising professor, Dr. Ann R. Fischer, Dept. of Psychology, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL by email at [arf12@siu.edu](mailto:arf12@siu.edu).

Two reminder emails will be sent in the next several weeks. If you would like to opt out of receiving these follow-up emails, please send an email to me at [kate.hagadone@gmail.com](mailto:kate.hagadone@gmail.com) and I will do my best to ensure you are not included in any future mailings.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research.

Kate M. Hagadone, M.A.  
Ph.D. Candidate in Counseling Psychology  
Southern Illinois University - Carbondale  
(734) 996-9111 x270  
[kate.hagadone@gmail.com](mailto:kate.hagadone@gmail.com)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Development and Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FORM & DO NOT MEET CRITERIA ANNOUNCEMENT

#### Consent Form

Dear Participant:

Thank you for your interest in this study. My name is Kate Hagadone and I am currently a graduate student at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. I am currently conducting a research study examining women's attitudes and behaviors in sexual relationships and how that may relate to different aspects of their identity.

Before beginning this study, please verify that you meet all three of the following eligibility criteria by selecting yes or no to indicate whether the following statements are true for you or not:

- | Yes                      | No                       |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Identify as female  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Be at least 18 years of age   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have been in a sexual relationship with a male partner within the past year (12 months) |

If you do not meet all three of these eligibility criteria, please close this window to exit the survey. Participation in the study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, it will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes of your time. In the research survey, you will be asked about your views and attitudes regarding sexual relationships, your thoughts and behaviors in sexual relationships, as well as some questions about other social attitudes. The risk involved in this study is minimal and answering the questions may feel as personal as answering questions at a doctor's office, but with this survey, your answers will be anonymous. Only those directly involved with this project will have access to the data.

After completion of the entire survey, you will be able to enter an optional drawing for an Amazon gift card worth \$25. You will be asked to include an email address for the drawing; this will be kept separately from your questionnaire results and deleted as soon as the research study has completed. If you are not eligible for the study, but wish to pass this email along to another individual who may be, you are welcome to do so (but are under no obligation to do so).

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at <kate.hagadone@gmail.com> or (734) 996-9111 x270, or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Ann Fischer, at <arf12@siu.edu>.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research.

Regards,  
 Kate M. Hagadone, M.A.  
 Ph.D. Candidate in Counseling Psychology  
 Southern Illinois University  
 Carbondale, IL 62901  
 kate.hagadone@gmail.com

By selecting the "I consent" box below, and by completing the following survey materials, you are indicating your consent to participate in this research.

- I CONSENT  
 I DO NOT CONSENT (please close this window to exit the survey)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Development and Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)

## Do Not Meet Criteria Page<sup>8</sup>

Thank you for your interest in this study. Unfortunately, you have indicated that you currently do not meet one or more of the three criteria necessary for inclusion in this study at this time (i.e., identifying as female, being at least 18 years of age, and having had a sexual relationship with a male partner in the past year). *(If you feel you do meet the inclusion criteria and have reached this page in error, please click the back button on your browser to return to the previous page.)* Again, I thank you for your interest in this research project and for helping to support my research.

Regards,

Kate M. Hagadone, M.A.  
Ph.D. Candidate in Counseling Psychology  
Southern Illinois University  
Carbondale, IL 62901  
kate.hagadone@gmail.com

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<sup>8</sup> Participants will reach this page if they select “no” to one or more of the inclusion criteria on the consent page.

## APPENDIX C

### HURLBERT INDEX OF SEXUAL ASSERTIVENESS

Thank you for your participation in this research. The following questions on this page are designed to measure beliefs about sexuality you have in the sexual relationship with your partner. "Sex" may pertain to a range of sexual behaviors, including, but not isolated to, intercourse. This is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer each item as accurately as you can by placing a number by each question as follows:

Never	Rarely	Some of the Time	Most of the Time	All of the Time
1	2	3	4	5

1. I feel uncomfortable talking during sex.
2. I feel that I am shy when it comes to sex.
3. I approach my partner for sex when I desire it.\*
4. I think I am open with my partner about my sexual needs.\*
5. I enjoy sharing my sexual fantasies with my partner.\*
6. I feel uncomfortable talking to my friends about sex.
7. I communicate my sexual desires to my partner.\*
8. It is difficult for me to touch myself during sex.
9. It is hard for me to say no even when I do not want sex.
10. I am reluctant to describe myself as a sexual person.
11. I feel uncomfortable telling my partner what feels good.
12. I speak up for my sexual feelings.\*
13. I am reluctant to insist that my partner satisfy me.
14. I find myself having sex when I do not really want it.
15. When a sexual technique does not feel good, I tell my partner.\*
16. I feel comfortable giving sexual praise to my partner.\*
17. It is easy for me to discuss sex with my partner.\*
18. I feel comfortable in initiating sex with my partner.\*
19. I find myself doing sexual things with my partner that I do not like.
20. Pleasing my partner is more important than my own sexual pleasure.
21. I feel comfortable telling my partner how to touch me.\*
22. I enjoy masturbating myself to orgasm.\*
23. If something feels good in sex, I insist on doing it again.\*
24. It is hard for me to be honest about my sexual feelings.
25. I try to avoid discussing the subject of sex.
26. What gender is the partner you had in mind when answering these questions? \_\_\_\_\_

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\* Reverse-scored

## APPENDIX D

### FEMINIST IDENTITY COMPOSITE: PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE AND ACTIVE COMMITMENT SUBSCALES<sup>9</sup>

The statements listed below describe attitudes you may have toward yourself as a woman. There are no right or wrong answers. Please express your feelings by indicating how much agree or disagree with each statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral/Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree

1. I like being a traditional female.\*
2. I think it's lucky that women aren't expected to do some of the more dangerous jobs that men are expected to do, like construction work or race car driving.\*
3. I care very deeply about men and women having equal opportunities in all respects.
4. If I were married to a man and my husband was offered a job in another state, it would be my obligation to move in support of his career.\*
5. I think that men and women had it better in the 1950s when married women were housewives and their husbands supported them.\*
6. It is very satisfying to me to be able to use my talents and skills in my work in the women's movement.
7. I am willing to make certain sacrifices to effect change in this society in order to create a nonsexist, peaceful place where all people have equal opportunities.
8. One thing I especially like about being a woman is that men will offer me their seat on a crowded bus or open doors for me because I am a woman.\*
9. On some level, my motivation for almost every activity I engage in is my desire for an egalitarian world.
10. I don't see much point in questioning the general expectation that men should be masculine and women should be feminine.\*
11. I feel that I am a very powerful and effective spokesperson for the women's issues I am concerned with right now.
12. I think that most women will feel most fulfilled by being a wife and a mother.\*
13. I want to work to improve women's status.
14. I am very committed to a cause that I believe contributes to a more fair and just world for all people.

---

<sup>9</sup> Fischer, et al., 2000

\* Indicates Passive Acceptance item; all other items on main scale represent Active Commitment scale items.

## APPENDIX E

### WOMEN OF COLOR SUBSCALE OF THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES SCALE<sup>10</sup>

Please rate how much you Agree/Disagree with the following statements.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Undecided	Somewhat Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

1. In education and legislation to stop rape, ethnicity and race must be treated sensitively to ensure that women of color are protected equally.
2. Racism and sexism make double the oppression for women of color in the work environment.
3. Women of color have less legal and social service protection from being battered than White women have.
4. Women of color are oppressed by White standards of beauty.
5. Being put on a pedestal, which White women have protested, is a luxury that women of color have not had.
6. Antigay and racist prejudice act together to make it more difficult for gay male and lesbian people of color to maintain relationships.
7. In rape programs and workshops, not enough attention has been given to the special needs of women of color.
8. Discrimination in the workplace is worse for women of color than for all men and White women.
9. Much of the talk about power for women overlooks the need to empower people of all races and colors first.
10. The tradition of African-American women who are strong family leaders has strengthened the African-American community as a whole.

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<sup>10</sup> Henley et al., 1998

## APPENDIX F

### BODY SURVEILLANCE SUBSCALE OF OBJECTIFIED BODY CONSCIOUSNESS

#### SCALE<sup>11</sup>

For the following questions, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

Strongly Disagree				Neither agree nor disagree				Strongly Agree	<i>Does not apply</i>
1	2	3		4	5	6		7	N/A

1. I rarely think about how I look.\*
  2. I think it is more important that my clothes are comfortable than whether they look good on me.\*
  3. I think more about how my body feels than how my body looks.\*
  4. I rarely compare how I look with how other people look.\*
  5. During the day, I think about how I look many times.
  6. I often worry about whether the clothes I am wearing make me look good.
  7. I rarely worry about how I look to other people.\*
  8. I am more concerned with what my body can do than how it looks.\*
- 

<sup>11</sup> McKinley & Shibley Hyde, 1996

\* Reverse Scored

## APPENDIX G

### SILENCING THE SELF SCALE

For the following questions, please circle the number that best describes how you feel about each of the statements listed below. If you are not currently in an intimate relationship, please indicate how you felt and acted in your previous intimate relationships by placing the appropriate number next to each item to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that the item fits for you.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I think it is best to put myself first because no one else will look out for me. \*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I don't speak my feelings in an intimate relationship when I know they will cause disagreement.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Caring means putting the other person's needs in front of my own.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Considering my needs to be as important as those of the people I love is selfish.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I find it is harder to be myself when I am in a close relationship than when I am on my own.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I tend to judge myself by how I think other people see me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I feel dissatisfied with myself because I should be able to do all the things people are supposed to be able to do these days.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. When my partner's needs and feelings conflict with my own, I always state mine clearly. \*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. In a close relationship, my responsibility is to make the other person happy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Caring means choosing to do what the other person wants, even when I want to do something different.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. In order to feel good about myself, I need to feel independent and self-sufficient. \*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. One of the worst things I can do is to be selfish.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. I feel I have to act in a certain way to please my partner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Instead of risking confrontations in close relationships, I would rather not rock the boat.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I speak my feelings with my partner, even when it leads to problems or disagreements. \*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Often I look happy enough on the outside, but inwardly I feel angry and rebellious.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. In order for my partner to love me, I cannot reveal certain things about myself to him/her.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. When my partner's needs or opinions conflict with mine, rather than asserting my own point of view I usually end up agreeing with him/her.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. When I am in a close relationship I lose my sense of who I am.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. When it looks as though certain of my needs can't be met in a relationship, I usually realize that they weren't very important anyway.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. My partner loves and appreciates me for who I am. \*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. Doing things just for myself is selfish.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. When I make decisions, other people's thoughts and opinions influence me more than my own thoughts and opinions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. I rarely express my anger at those close to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. I feel that my partner does not know my real self.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. I think it's better to keep my feelings to myself when they do conflict with my partner's.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. I often feel responsible for other people's feelings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. I find it hard to know what I think and feel because I spend a lot of time thinking about how other people are feeling.

---

\* Reverse scored

- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. In a close relationship I don't usually care what we do, as long as the other person is happy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. I try to bury my feelings when I think they will cause trouble in my close relationship(s).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. I never seem to measure up to the standards I set for myself.

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**Copyright Permission from the Author:**

**Dana Jack** <Dana.Jack@wwu.edu> Sat, Jun 11, 2011 at 5:42 PM  
To: Kate Hagadone <kate.hagadone@gmail.com>

Dear Kate,

You have my permission to use the STSS in your dissertation research, with the caveat that, as you specified, you will keep the copyright on the scale and not change the items in any way. Please be sure to look at the scale construction article for information regarding reverse-scored items.

You might be interested in my recent edited book *Silencing the Self Across Cultures: Depression and Gender in the Social World* (Oxford University Press). There may be chapters that are of use to you. That book just received the APA International Division Ursula Gielen Award. All the best with your research and I would definitely like to receive your results.

Sincerely,

Dana

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## APPENDIX H

### EMPOWERED ENTITLEMENT SUBSCALE OF ENTITLEMENT ATTITUDES SCALE

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For the following questions, please indicate below how much **you agree or disagree** with the following statements according to the seven point scale:<sup>12</sup>

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree

1. I am more optimistic about other people's success than I am about my own. \*
2. It is easy for people to take advantage of me without my realizing it. \*
3. When I ask people to do things for me I feel like I am imposing. \*

Please indicate below how often the following statements are **true for you** according to the seven point scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never			Sometimes			Always

4. I feel obliged to fulfill any demands made on me. \*
  5. I am easily intimidated by opinionated people. \*
  6. I don't have the courage to stand up for myself when someone infringes on my rights. \*
  7. I hesitate to assert my preference or opinions over someone else's. \*
  8. I hesitate to ask friends for support because I don't want to be a burden. \*
  9. I can't seem to say "no" even when I really don't want to do something. \*
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<sup>12</sup> Nadkarni, Steil, Malone, & Sagrestano (2005)

\* Reverse-scored

**APPENDIX I****DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. Please indicate your gender: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
  - Some high school
  - High school or equivalent
  - Some college
  - Vocational/technical school (2 year degree)
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Master's degree
  - Doctoral Degree
  - Professional Degree (MD, JD, etc.)
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Please indicate your ethnic, racial, and/or cultural identity, if you feel comfortable: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Please indicate your sexual orientation, if you feel comfortable: \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is/are the gender(s) of your current partner(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Which of the following below best describes your current relationship status?
  - Single
  - In a dating relationship
  - A member of an unmarried couple/in a long-term partnership
  - Separated
  - Married or in a civil union
  - Divorced
  - Widowed
  - Prefer not to say
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
8. To help us describe the participants who engaged in this research, please provide an estimate of the number of sexual partners you have in the past year: \_\_\_\_\_
9. How did you hear about this research survey?
  - Email from a friend or colleague
  - Listserv posting
  - Facebook posting
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX J

### DEBRIEFING INFORMATION

Thank you for participating in this study!

We know you are very busy and your participation is very much appreciated. There was some information about the study that I was not able to disclose prior to you answering the questionnaires, as it may have impacted your responses and thus possibly have affected the results. I would like to explain more about the study now.

The research is examining the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness (or ability to state one's needs or desires during heterosexual encounters). Additionally, I am examining how variables such as self-objectification (surveying one's self as if from an outside perspective), entitlement (feeling deserving of fair treatment), and self-silencing (censoring one's thoughts or feelings to put a partner's needs first) may help explain the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness. Based on prior research, I expect to find a positive relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness. I also expect to find self-objectification, entitlement, and self-silencing each play a role in the relationship between feminist identity and sexual assertiveness.

I hope that this clarifies the purpose of the research and answers any questions you may have had about the study. If you would like more information about this research, please contact the principle investigator, Kate M. Hagadone, M.A. ([kate.hagadone@gmail.com](mailto:kate.hagadone@gmail.com) or (734) 996-9111 x270)

I ask that you do not discuss the details of the study with any other potential participants until after the study is complete, as it may impact the study results. You are welcome to pass the study link on to others who may be interested in completing the study if you wish, but you are by no means obligated to do so. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Kate M. Hagadone by email ([kate.hagadone@gmail.com](mailto:kate.hagadone@gmail.com)). **You may also contact the supervising professor, Dr. Ann R. Fischer, Dept. of Psychology, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL by email at [arf12@siu.edu](mailto:arf12@siu.edu).**

Your responses to the research questions are anonymous. All of your data will be kept confidential within reasonable limits; only those directly involved with this project will have access to the data.

If you would like to enter the optional drawing for a \$25 Amazon.com gift card, please click the following link to enter. Please note that by clicking on this link you will exit this survey and go to separate website. You will be able to enter an email address where we may contact you if you win; however, because you will enter this information on a separate website, your email address will not be connected with your questionnaire answers at all.

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/raffle\\_website](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/raffle_website)

Thank you again for your participation,

Kate M. Hagadone, M.A.  
Ph.D. Candidate in Counseling Psychology  
Southern Illinois University  
Carbondale, IL 62901  
[kate.hagadone@gmail.com](mailto:kate.hagadone@gmail.com)  
(734) 996-9111 x270

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Development and Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)

**APPENDIX K**  
**OPTIONAL RAFFLE ENTRY**

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**Thank You**  
for your help in conducting this research!

If you would like to be entered in to a drawing for a chance to win one of four \$25 gift cards to Amazon.com for completing the questionnaires, please enter a contact email address below. (If you would not like to enter the drawing, please close this window to exit the survey.)

Enter email address here:

	<b>Submit</b>
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**Privacy Information:** This webpage is completely separate from the research survey you just completed and the email address you enter will not be connected to any of your data from the study. The email address you provide will not be shared with any third parties and will ONLY be used to contact you if that email address is chosen at random to receive one of the four gift cards, and the information will be deleted as soon as the raffle is complete. If you are concerned about privacy, you may consider using an email address that is not connected with your name or any other personal information. (There are several free email providers, such as Gmail, hotmail, or Yahoo where you may create an email account.)

**Chances of Winning:** Each person's email entry will be assigned a number and four numbers will be selected using a random number generator. Your chances of winning are unknown at this time and are dependent on the number of entries received.

**If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me (see contact information below) or my supervising professor, Dr. Ann R. Fischer, Dept. of Psychology, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL (email: [arf12@siu.edu](mailto:arf12@siu.edu)).**

Thank you again,

Kate M. Hagadone, M.A.  
Ph.D. Candidate in Counseling Psychology  
Southern Illinois University  
Carbondale, IL 62901  
[kate.hagadone@gmail.com](mailto:kate.hagadone@gmail.com)

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## VITA

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University

Kate M. Hagadone

kate.hagadone@gmail.com

Kalamazoo College  
Bachelor of Arts, Psychology, June 2002

Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Master of Arts in Psychology, August 2005

### Special Honors and Awards:

Honors, Senior Individualized Project, 2002

Marshall Hallock Brenner Award for Excellence in Psychology, 2001

Kalamazoo College Honors Fellowship, 1998 – 2002

### Dissertation Title:

Making the Political Personal: Investigating the Relationship between Feminist Beliefs and Sexual Assertiveness

Major Professor: Ann R. Fischer, Ph.D.

### Publications and Presentations:

Dollinger, S., Chwalisz, K., Zerth, E., O’Leary Hagadone, K., & Chiavini, A. (2005).  
Telehelp Line for Caregivers: A Flexible Training Manual. Poster Presentation at  
the 2005 Great Lakes Conference, Bloomington, Indiana.

Ford, T.E., Ferguson, M.A., Brooks, J., & Hagadone, K.M. (2004). Coping sense of  
humor reduces effects of stereotype threat on women's math performance.  
*Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 643-653.

O’Leary Hagadone, K. (2008). Confronting an “Acceptable Prejudice”: Addressing  
Sizism in the College Community. Presentation at the 2008 Big Ten Counseling  
Centers Conference, Madison, Wisconsin.

O’Leary Hagadone, K. (2006). Negotiating Diverse Beliefs: Respecting Religion &  
Sexual Orientation. Presentation as part of the *Addressing Religion and  
Spirituality to Achieve Multicultural Competency: The Neglected Diversity  
Symposium* (S. Shah, MA, Chair) at the 2006 APA Conference; Washington,  
D.C.

- O'Leary Hagadone, K., & Huber, J. (2006). Toward a More Perfect Union: Yoga as a Tool to Reunite Mind & Body. Roundtable Presentation at the 2006 Association for Women in Psychology Conference, Ypsilanti, Michigan.
- O'Leary Hagadone, K. & Tamkin, V. (2006). "Oh, The Skin We're In!": Skin Tone and Body Image in the Lives of African American Women. Presentation at the 2006 Great Lakes Conference, West Lafayette, IN.
- Zerth, E.O., & O'Leary Hagadone, K. (2005) Multicultural Training Environment: Perspective of European American Trainees. Presentation as part of the *Students' Perspectives on Multicultural Training— Valuing Our Differences and Strengths* Symposium (Y.W. Wang, Chair) at the 2005 APA Conference; Washington, D.C.