

# Contingent Self-esteem Plays a Prominent Role in the Relationship between Self-objectification, Self-esteem, and Compulsive Buying

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## INTRODUCTION

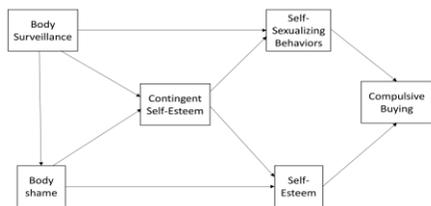
Objectification theory explains the psychological processes by which individuals are regarded as sex objects and as such are evaluated in terms of their sexual-physical characteristics (Moradi, 2011). The main source of objectification is the internalization of the thin-ideal body which is depicted in the mass media (Bell & Dittmar, 2011). The gap between the ideal body and the average body of women could result in body surveillance which intensifies negative feelings like body shame (Dittmar, 2008). It is hypothesized that self-objectification will intensify contingent self-esteem and, in turn, negatively affect self-esteem. Contingent-self-esteem refers to self-worth that is based on meeting certain standards regarding appearance and physical body.

Contingent self-esteem, as a consequence of self-objectification, combining with the perception of self-shortcomings results in the motivation to compensate for these shortcomings. Research demonstrates that women try to alleviate their negative feelings, body shame, and lower levels of self-esteem through being involved in self-sexualizing behaviors and compulsive buying (Barzoki et al., 2016). This may involve acquiring and using material goods that symbolize aspects of the self that are felt to be lacking. In this regard, this research tends to investigate and explain the prominent role of contingent self-esteem in the relationship between self-objectification, self-esteem, and compulsive buying.

## OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the current study is to examine the degree to which the contingent self-esteem mediates the association between the components of objectified body consciousness involving body surveillance, body shame, self-sexualizing behaviors, and self-esteem. More specifically, according to Fig. 1, we intend to examine the mediating role of contingent self-esteem in the relationship between body surveillance and self-esteem, as well as the mediating role of self-esteem and self-sexualizing behaviors in the relationship between contingent self-esteem and compulsive buying.

Fig. 1. Theoretical Model



## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

This study was approved by the social and behavioral institutional review board prior to initiation. Participants were 178 female students aged 18-30 from a large southern university in the United States. Data screening led to the removal of 15 participants who responded to only half the questions and three cases for being outside the age range. Normality of the main variables and presence and quality of outliers were taken into account through statistical analyses (Bannon, 2013). The mean and standard deviation for the age variable were 21.17 and 2.51; the middle 50% of the respondents aged between 19 and 23. Participants were asked to report their height and weight. From these measurements, Quetelet's Body Mass Index was calculated based on the following formula:  $BMI = 703 * (\text{weight in pounds}) / (\text{height squared in inches})$ . The sample consisted of 63% who reported a normal BMI (18.5-24.9), 10% who were underweight (below 18.5), 17% who were overweight (25.0-29.9), and 10% who were obese (30.0 and above).

### Measures

**Body Surveillance:** We used the surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996), which consists of eight items assessing women's thinking of their body and the way their body may appear to others.

**Body Shame:** We used the shame subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996), which consists of eight items that reflect how people feel bad when they do not meet cultural standards regarding their body.

**Contingent Self-esteem:** This scale was originally developed by Paradise and Kernis (1999)(Roberts et al., 2014), and consists of eight items examining the extent to which self-worth is based on expectations and standards regarding social approval and appearance.

**Self-Sexualizing Behaviors:** The Self-Sexualization Behavior Questionnaire for Women (SSBQ-W; Smolak et al., 2014) examines women's intentional engagement in activities in order to appear more sexually appealing.

**Self-Esteem:** We used Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), as a well-established measure of global self-esteem which consists of ten items.

**Compulsive Buying:** We used Compulsive Buying Scale (Edwards, 1993), which consists of 13 items to assess women's control over their buying behaviors.

## RESULTS

Means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients are presented in Table 1. All correlation coefficients were significant except for the correlation of self-sexualizing behaviors (SSB) with self-esteem. When the effect of contingent self-esteem was controlled, consistent with earlier results by Barzoki et al. (2016), the correlation coefficient between SSB and self-esteem was significant:  $r = .272, p = .001$ .

Table 1. Means, SDs, and Zero-Order Correlations

	Mean (SD)	Body shame	CSE	SSB	Self-Esteem	CB
BS	23.98(5.87)	.471**	.473**	.434**	-.285**	.340**
Body Shame	20.12(5.88)		.445**	.202**	-.524**	.300**
CSE	26.30(4.68)			.260**	-.482**	.309**
SSB	39.60(8.40)				-.105	.212**
Self-Esteem	32.82(5.20)					-.334**
CB	23.83(7.81)					

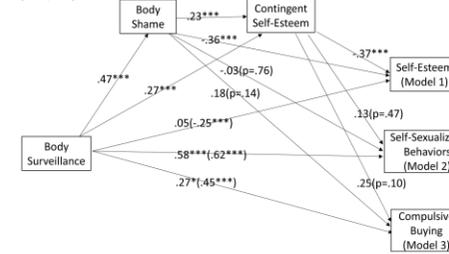
\*\* $p < .01$ .

BS=Body Surveillance, SSB= Self-Sexualizing Behaviors, CSE=Contingent Self-esteem, CB=Compulsive Buying

**Mediation analysis:** Direct and indirect effects were tested using model 6 of the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2012) which uses a bootstrap resampling process repeated 10,000 times to generate a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval.

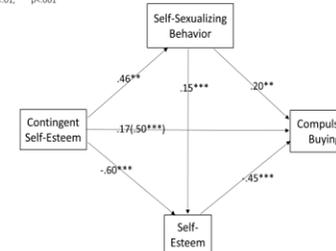
As shown in the Fig. 2, in Step 1 of the mediation models, the regressions of body surveillance on self-esteem (model 1), self-sexualizing behaviors(Model 2), and compulsive buying(Model 3) were significant when not accounting for mediators. Step 2 showed that regression established a significant predictive relationship between body surveillance and the mediators (body shame and contingent self-esteem (CSE));  $b_1 = .47, t(157) = 6.25, p < .0001$  and  $b_2 = .27, t(157) = 4.45, p < .0001$ , respectively. Step 3 indicated that the mediators (body shame and CSE), controlling for body surveillance, were only significant predictors of self-esteem:  $b_3 = -.36, t(156) = -4.64, p < .0001$  and  $b_4 = -.37, t(156) = -3.97, p = .0001$ . Step 4 of the analyses revealed that, controlling for the mediators, body surveillance scores were not significant predictors for self-esteem:  $b = .05, t(156) = 0.79, p = .42$ . Overall, it was found that body shame and CSE fully mediated the relationship between body surveillance and self-esteem.

Fig. 2. Path coefficients for the multiple mediation models in which the association between Body Surveillance and self-esteem(Model 1), Self-Sexualizing Behaviors(Model 2) and Compulsive Buying(Model 3) were tested to mediating roles of Body shame and Contingent Self-esteem. The path coefficients are included for direct effect(coefficients inside the parenthesis) and indirect effect(coefficients outside the parenthesis). \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



In the second part of the theoretical model, analysis focused on the association between CSE and compulsive buying. As shown in Fig. 3, in Step 1 of the mediation model, the regression of CSE on compulsive buying (ignoring the mediators) was significant:  $b = .50, t(158) = 3.93, p < .001$ . Step 2 showed that the regression of the CSE on the mediators, self-sexualizing behaviors (SSB) and self-esteem, was also significant:  $b_1 = .46, t(157) = 2.82, p < .005$  and  $b_2 = -.60, t(157) = -7.76, p < .001$ , respectively. Step 3 showed that the mediators (SSB and self-esteem), controlling for CSE, were significant predictors of compulsive buying:  $b = .20, t(156) = 2.89, p = .0043$  and  $b = -.45, t(156) = -3.46, p = .0001$ . Step 4 of the analyses revealed that, controlling for the mediators, CSE scores were not significant predictors of compulsive buying:  $b = .17, t(156) = 1.09, p = .27$ . Overall, it was found that SSB and self-esteem fully mediated the relationship between CSE and compulsive buying.

Fig. 3. Path coefficients for the multiple mediation model in which the association between contingent self-esteem and compulsive buying was mediated by self-sexualizing behaviors and self-esteem. The path coefficients are included for direct effect(coefficients inside the parenthesis) and indirect effect(coefficients outside the parenthesis). \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



## DISCUSSION

This study tested an innovative theoretical model to explain the underlying context of compulsive buying, as well as to demonstrate psychological processes at work in the interaction between self-objectification and self-esteem.

The present research is one of the first to demonstrate how body surveillance results in contingent self-esteem and, in turn, affects self-esteem. When people internalize media portrayals of the "ideal" thin body, they engage in body surveillance as the starting point of self-objectification process. The gap between the ideal body and the average body of women leads to body shame, and intensifies contingent self-esteem. Based on mediation analysis, the results of this research are informative in the sense that body shame and contingent self-esteem fully mediated the connection between body surveillance and self-esteem. These results reject the assumptions of previous research (Noser & Zeigler-Hill, 2014) which considered a mediating role for body surveillance in the relationship between appearance-contingent self-esteem and appearance-based self-esteem.

In addition, it was shown that self-sexualizing behaviors and self-esteem fully mediated the relationship between contingent self-esteem and compulsive buying. The current research confirms that low self-esteem is correlated with compulsive buying. In other words, people are engaged in compulsive buying to achieve a better self through acquiring symbolic meanings attached to material goods. Thus, the motive behind compulsive buying is the gap between the real and the ideal selves, and people shop to fill this gap.

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