A Gendered Analysis of Nonsuicidal Self-Injury and Body Image Avoidant Behavior
Andrea Nelson & Alicia Nemec
Faculty Mentor: Jennifer Muehlenkamp, Ph.D.
Psychology & Women’s Studies

Introduction
- Objectification Theory states the societal objectification of the female body leads women to view their body as an object and internalize a cultural view of body standards.2
- Such self-objectification is believed to lead to psychological difficulties such as disordered eating, body dissatisfaction, and possibly, self-harm. Research has found both men and women with body dissatisfaction to have a higher capacity for self-harm.5
- Those with high body dissatisfaction also tend to engage in body image avoidant behaviors.6
- Nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI) has been found to be linked to body dissatisfaction, but there is little research examining its connection to self-objectification and other body-focused problems such as body image avoidant behaviors.
- Additionally, there appears to be gender differences in the rates and correlates of NSSI, suggesting males and females may experience different risks for NSSI.

Hypotheses
- We hypothesized that body objectification, NSSI, and body image avoidant behaviors would be significantly and positively correlated, but that the correlations would be higher for females.
- We also hypothesized those with NSSI would engage in more body image avoidant behavior.

Results
- Pearson’s chi-square test showed the proportion of males and females who reported NSSI was non-significant, \( \chi^2 = .230, p = .63 \).

Discussion
- The results of this study support both hypotheses such that body objectification and body image avoidant behaviors were significantly correlated with NSSI in the expected direction (see Table 1).
- Furthermore, the associations between the body-related variables and NSSI differed for males and females.
- Even after controlling for gender differences in body-image avoidant behaviors, participants reporting NSSI were more likely to engage in body-image avoidant behaviors.
- Results of this study suggest that body image avoidant behaviors may be indicators of NSSI risk (see Figure 1).
- Collectively, the current results suggest that self-objectification theory may explain risk for NSSI better for females.

Conclusion
- NSSI appears to have strong relationships with body image avoidant behaviors, suggesting that those engaging in NSSI may be more likely to have body-related concerns. Clinicians treating people with NSSI may want to address body-related concerns as one way to potentially reduce NSSI. Also, results from this study demonstrate a lack of difference between rates of NSSI in college males and females suggesting this behavior may not be as gender-based as originally believed. However, consistent with hypotheses, women prone to self-objectification and it’s resulting body shame may be at greater risk for NSSI than males.

Select References