



# A Gendered Analysis of Nonsuicidal Self-Injury and

## Body Image Avoidant Behavior

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### 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.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ 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.<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ Those with high body dissatisfaction also tend to engage in body image avoidant behavior.<sup>6</sup>
- ❖ 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.

### Methods

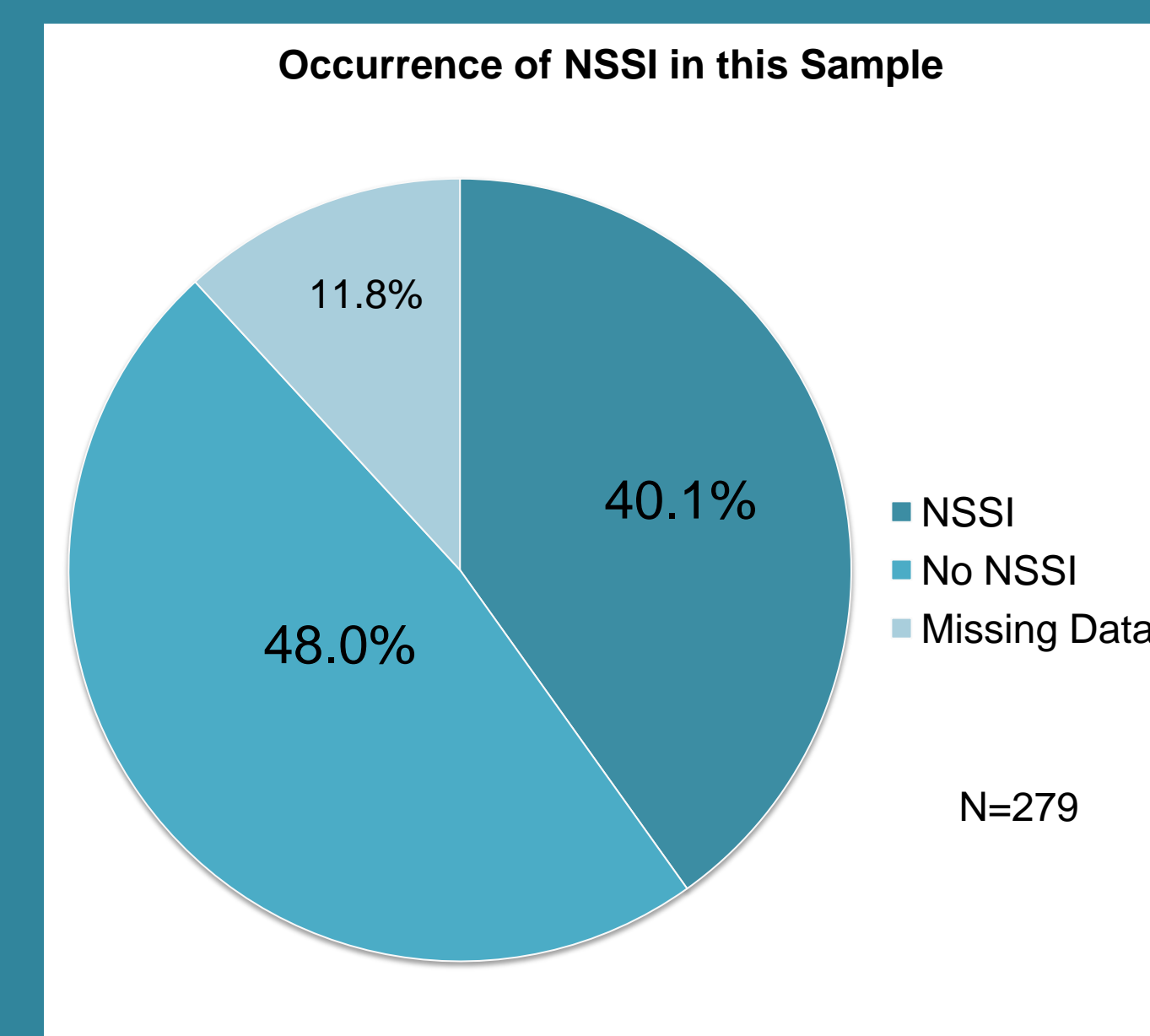
#### Participants

- ❖ Students were recruited through flyers and course emails describing the study and directing them to an online survey.
- ❖ 279 participants completed the survey
  - ❖ 226 (81.0%) were Female; 53 (19.0%) were Male
  - ❖ Mean Age = 20.6
  - ❖ Predominantly White/Caucasian (92.8%)

#### Materials

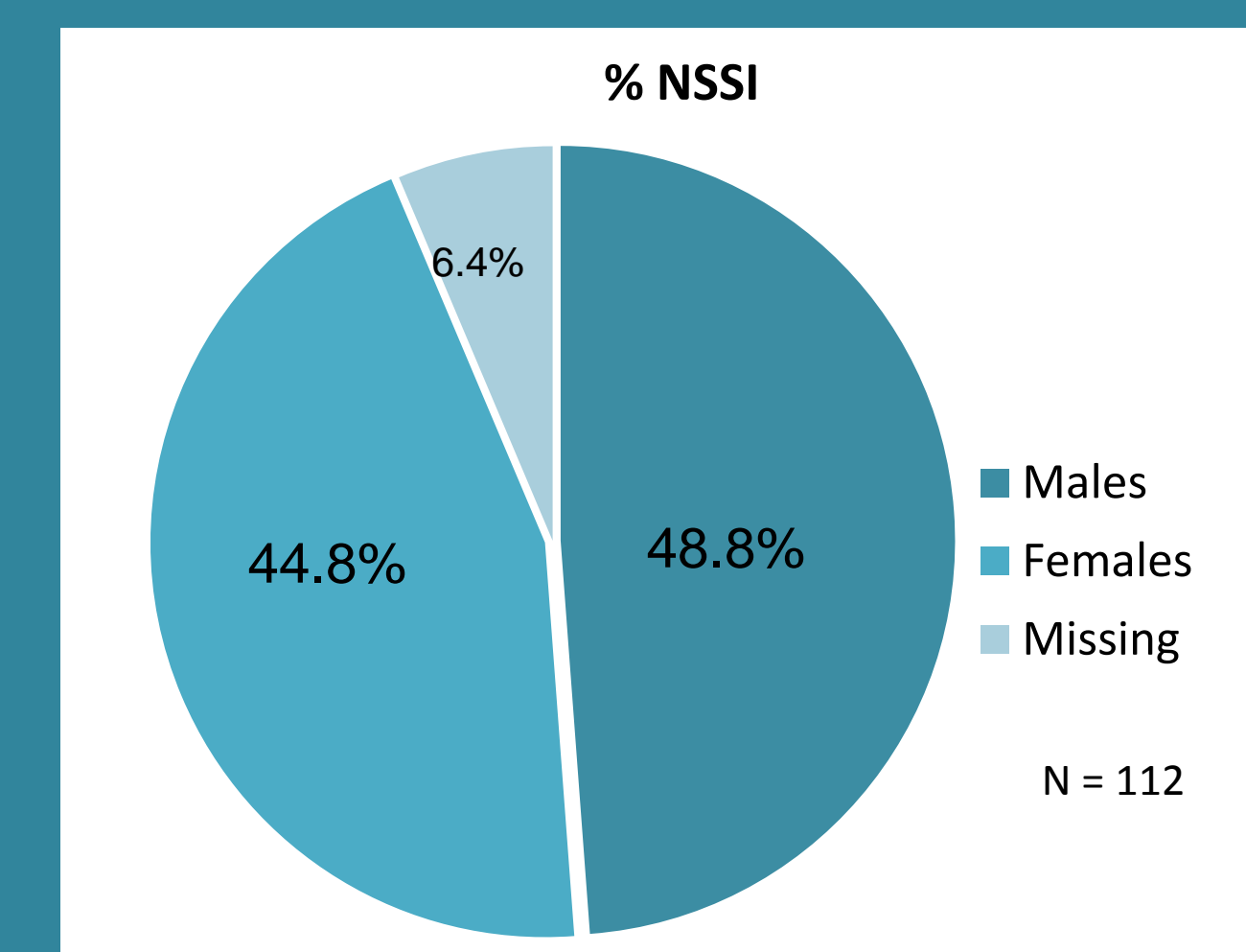
- ❖ *Body Image Avoidance Questionnaire (BIAQ)*<sup>6</sup> measures body avoidant behaviors with 4 subscales
- ❖ *The Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS)*<sup>2</sup> measures aspects of self-objectification & body shame
- ❖ *The Body-Esteem Scale (BES)*<sup>1</sup> measures feelings toward body parts and functions
- ❖ *Deliberate Self-Harm Inventory (DSHI)*<sup>3</sup> measures NSSI behaviors and characteristics

### Results



#### ❖ The top four methods of NSSI

- ❖ Cutting (46.4%)
- ❖ Punching (34.8%)
- ❖ Severe Scratching (22.3%)
- ❖ Carving Words/Designs (14.3%)



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

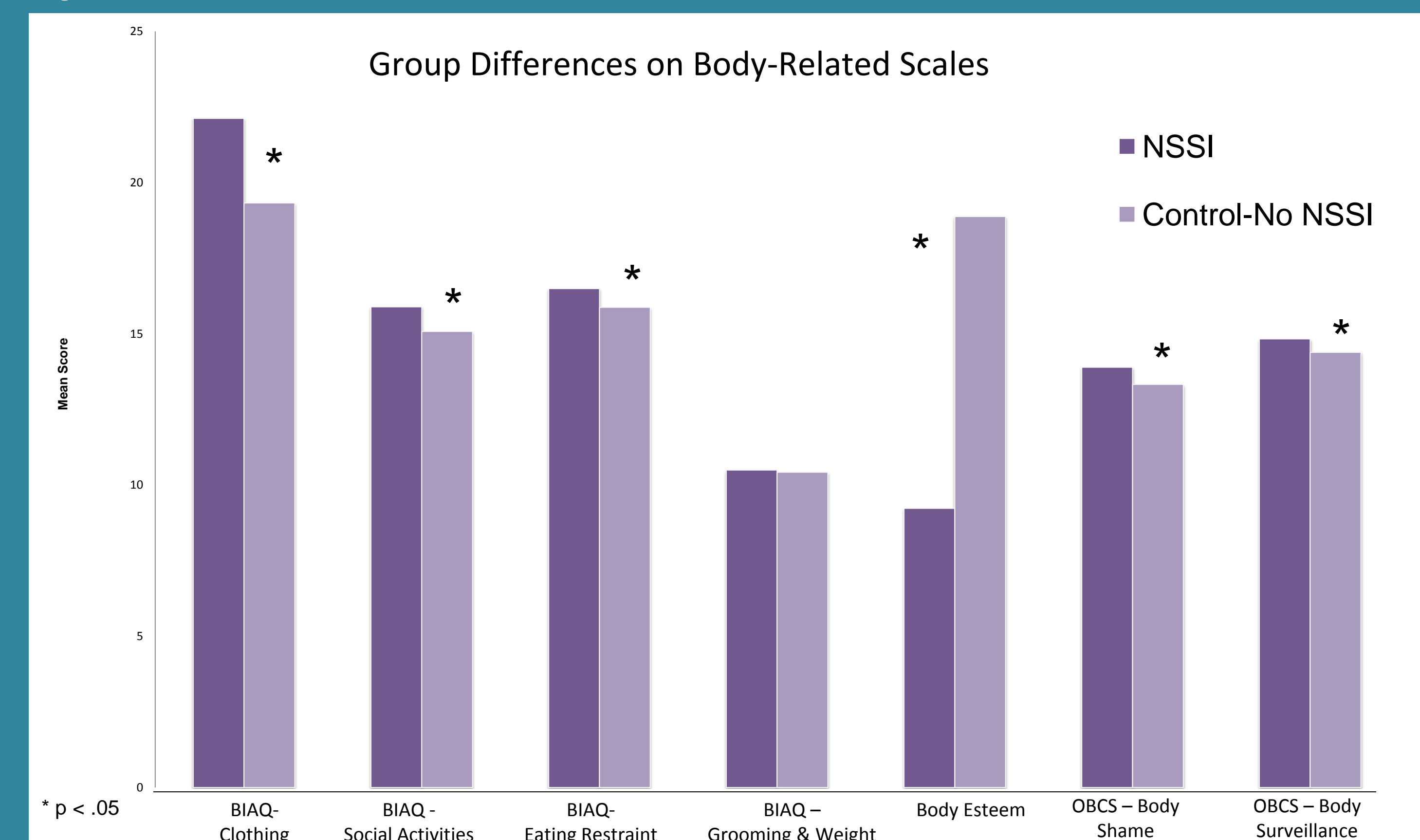
Table 1. Correlations of NSSI Frequency & Body Image Variables

	Males	Females
<b>BIAQ - Clothing</b>	<b>.393**</b>	<b>.363**</b>
<b>BIAQ - Social Activities</b>	.044	<b>.382**</b>
<b>BIAQ- Eating Restraint</b>	.205	<b>.174*</b>
<b>BIAQ - Grooming and Weighing</b>	-.105	<b>-.208**</b>
<b>Body Esteem Scale</b>	-.197	<b>-.309**</b>
<b>OBCS- Body Shame</b>	<b>.292*</b>	<b>.289**</b>
<b>OBCS - Body Surveillance</b>	.201	<b>.283**</b>

\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

- ❖ A MANOVA, controlling for gender was used to evaluate group differences in body image avoidant behaviors, and was significant,  $F(7, 212) = 567.50$ ,  $p < .01$

Figure 1



### 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 behavior, body esteem, and self-objectification 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.
- ❖ Results of this study further supports the theoretical framework stating self-objectification may lead to psychological difficulties in women and help understand female risk for NSSI.

#### Limitations:

- ❖ The sample in question was not representative of a global community.
- ❖ The questionnaire was taken through the online survey system.
- ❖ In the description of the questionnaire, the term *self-injury* was presented, which may have attracted those with a history or curiosity of NSSI.

### 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

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6. Rosen, J., Srebnik, D., Saltzberg, E., & Wendt, S. (1991). Development of a body image avoidance questionnaire. *Psychological Assessment: A Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 3, 32-37.