Women’s use of violence is a growing social issue, and is associated with a variety of health and mental health disparities. However, little is known about the ways in which gender can operate as an ecological variable (i.e., through oppression) to structure women’s social environments in ways that promote their use of violence.

In this study, we use a feminist theoretical framework, identifying the construct of objectification as a contextual factor illuminating forces of oppression in women’s lives.

Our primary research questions:
1) to what extent does objectification characterize women’s lives?
2) how does objectification promote women’s use of violence?

Findings
- Objectification Experiences are Typical, and are part of a gendered social milieu creating a context that can promote women’s use of violence.
- Seeing Red: The Externalization of Silencing: Women engaged in a dual process of internalization followed by externalization, often through use of violence.
- Surveillance of the Body as Social Control:
  - Women recounted many layers of social surveillance and linked them directly and indirectly with violence.
  - The mechanisms through which this occurs are centered on surveillance and body monitoring; hallmarks of objectification as a social process (Fredrickson, & Roberts, 1997). Thus, an objectifying social context is translated into the psychological experience of self-objectification.
  - This process is about the socialization of an oppressed group via psychological colonization (i.e., acceptance of oppressed conditions and collusion with the oppressor’s ideology and social system; Germov & Williams, 1999).
  - Participants are thus under surveillance by others and themselves; their movements, ideas, and opportunities are socially controlled (Frye, 1995).
- Violent acts were preceded by these messages and by feelings of being voiceless or “trapped.”
- Violence as an Act of Resistance: A clear theme of using violence as an act of resistance emerged, consistent with previous theorizing (Johnson, 2001; Wesely, 2006). The focus of this study was on violence as resistance to the context of objectification, and the emerging psychological consequences (e.g., shame, anxiety).

We thank the women who participated in this study and shared their stories.

Additional questions can be directed to shabnam.javdani@nyu.edu