

Introduction

- **Gender norms** play an important role in society and human development.
- There is an increased pressure to follow these norms in adolescence, when **girls learn that they should “stay in a woman’s place”** and boys learn that it is not “manly” to show emotions (Hill & Lynch, 1983). This pressure continues in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000).
- **Investment in gender ideals** refers to the extent to which an individual believes it is **important to be similar to the “ideal model” for their gender** (Sanchez & Crocker, 2005; Good & Sanchez, 2010).
- While investing in gender ideals may have a positive effect on boys’ psychological well-being, it can **negatively affect girls’ self-esteem** (Sanchez & Crocker, 2005; Egan & Perry, 2001).
- Two factors to consider are one’s **ethnic background** and **ethnic identity**, as different ethnic groups may hold different beliefs about what constitutes the “ideal man” and “ideal woman” (Perez-Strumolo, 2003; Sanchez & Crocker, 2005).
- **The purpose of our study was to examine whether college-aged women invest in feminine gender norms/ideals and how choosing to endorse (or not endorse) these expectations affects self-esteem.**

Method

One hundred and sixty-five women (18-63 years old, $M = 21.78$, $SD = 6.28$) participated in our study. **All students were Brooklyn College undergraduates.**

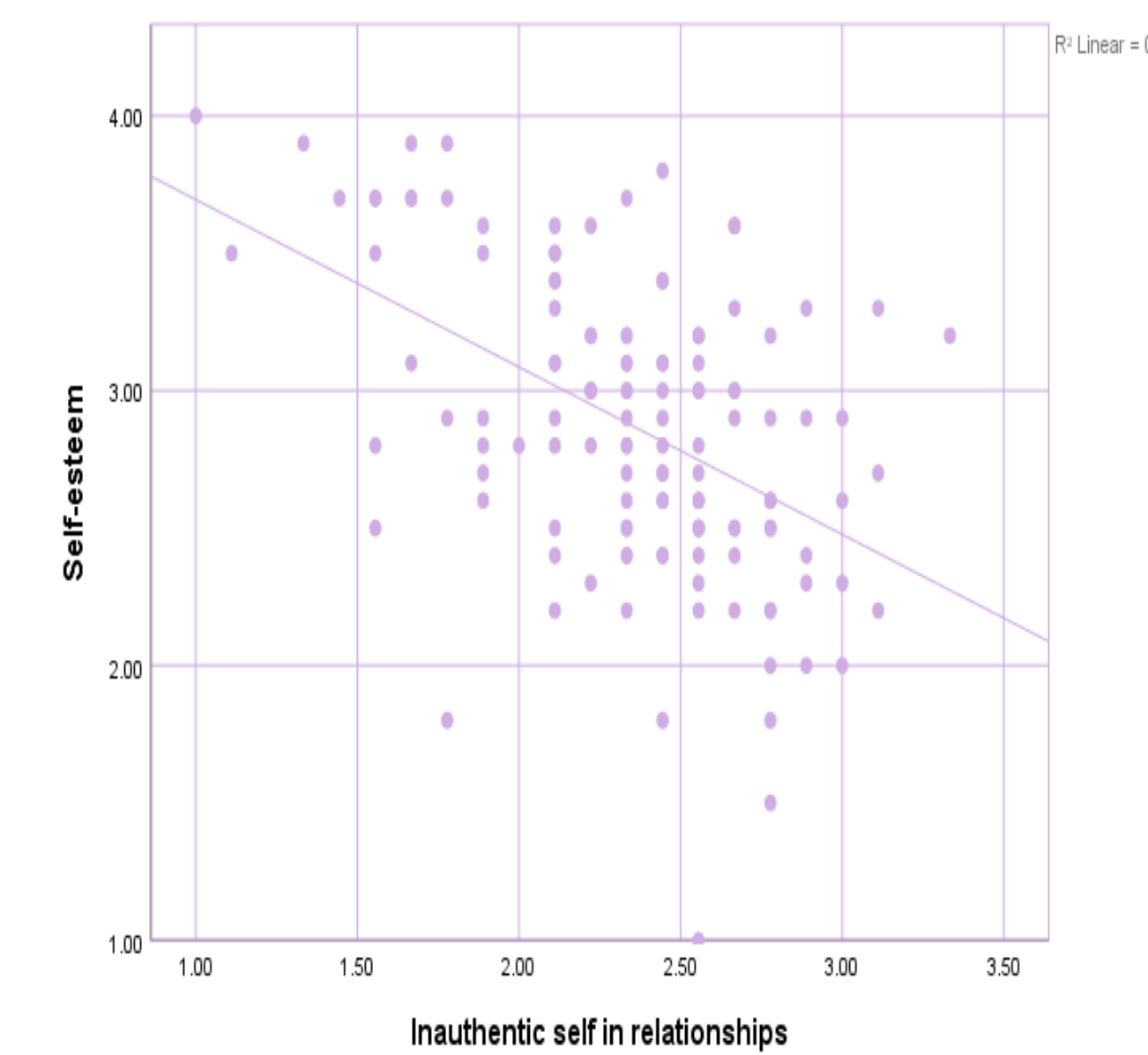
Measures such as the **Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory (CFNI)**, **Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)**, and the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)** were used to **assess whether participants endorsed statements that included feminine norms/ideals, their ethnic identity, and self-esteem** (Mahalik et al., 2005; Phinney, 1992; Rosenberg, 1965).

Participants completed an online questionnaire and were asked to report whether statements regarding **feminine norms** (e.g., “It is important to let people know they are special”), **ethnic identity** (e.g., “I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me”) and **self-esteem** (e.g., “I take a positive attitude toward myself”) were true for them.



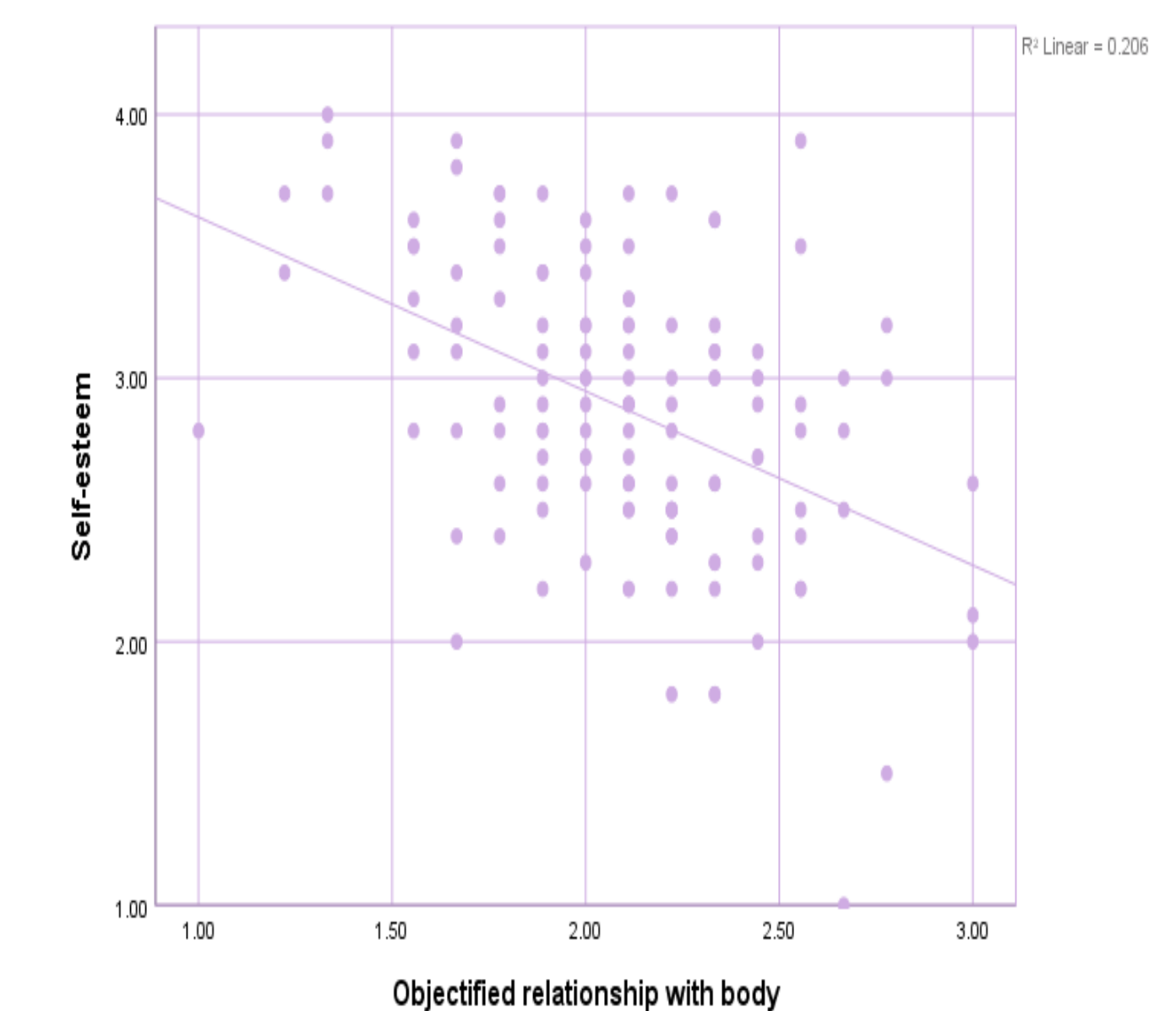
Results

Figure 1a. Inauthentic Self in Relationships x Self-Esteem



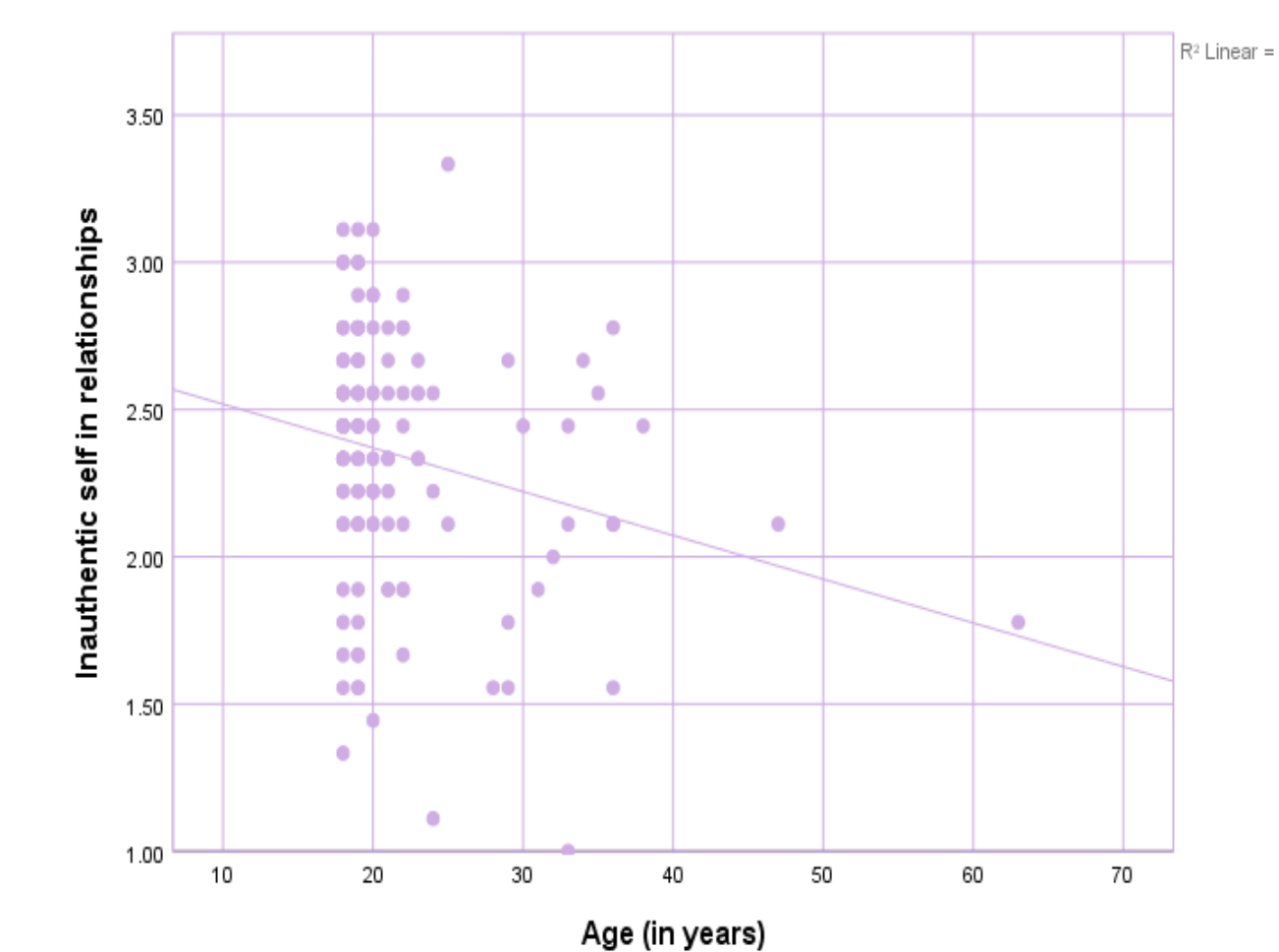
$$r = -.479, p < .01$$

Figure 1b. Objectified Relationship with Body x Self-Esteem



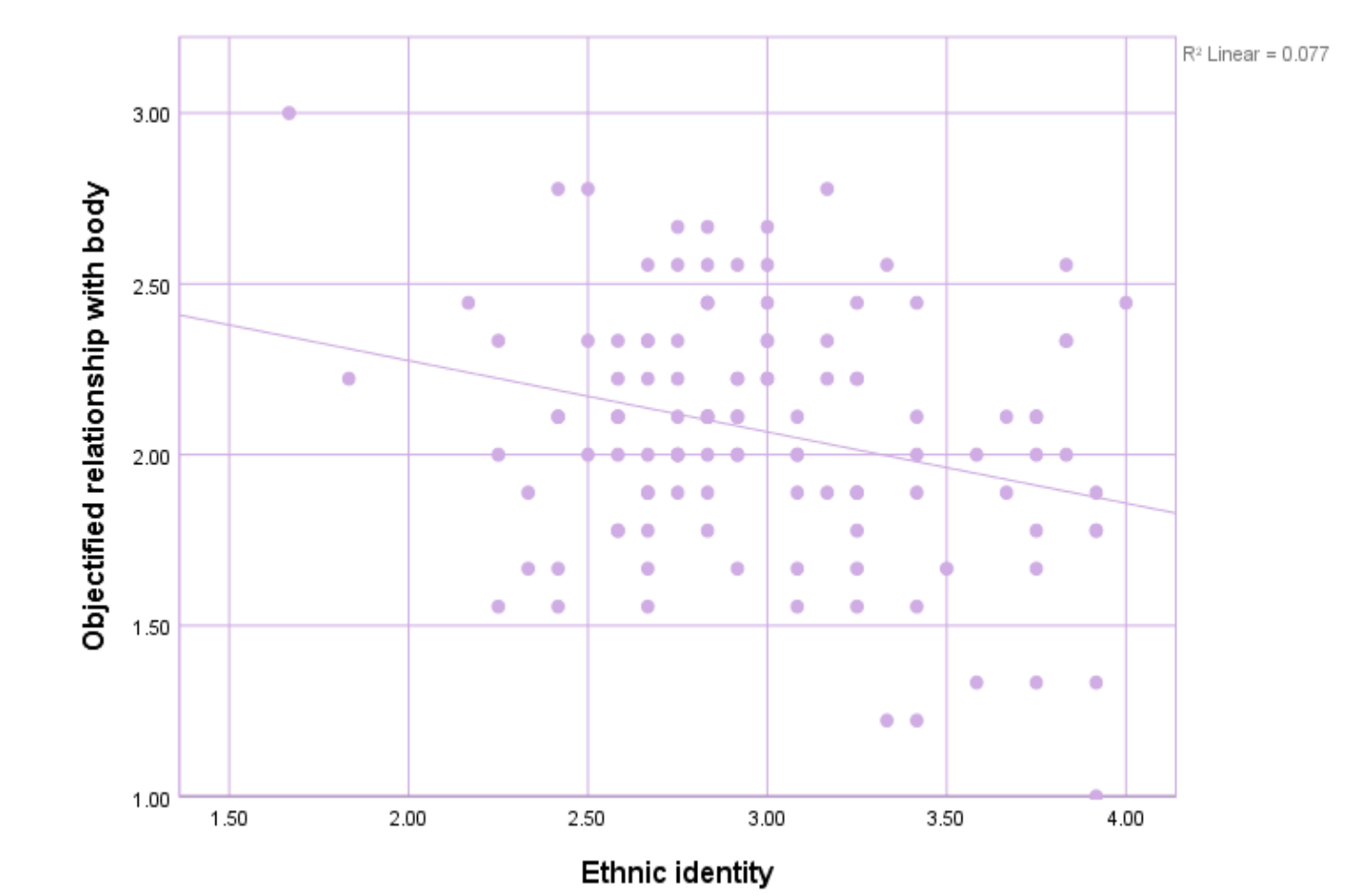
$$r = -.454, p < .01$$

Figure 2a. Age x Inauthentic Self in Relationships



$$r = -.220, p < .05$$

Figure 2b. Ethnic Identity x Objectified Relationship with Body



$$r = -.277, p < .01$$

Discussion

- The **more that women agreed with statements about feminine norms/ideals** (e.g., “I often wish my body were different”), the **less of a positive effect it had on their self-esteem.**
- **Older women** were less likely to endorse norms/ideals that would not allow them to be **authentic in their relationships with others.**
- The more that a woman **feels connected to her ethnic background**, the **less likely she is to have negative thoughts about her body.**
- This could mean that a woman’s identity may play a significant role in the ways that she thinks about gender, indicating a **need for more self-love and self-acceptance** among women to combat societal norms.

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