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11 The Inhuman Body: When Sexual Objectification Becomes Dehumanizing

Jeroen Vaes, Steve Loughnan, and Elisa Puvia

In our daily lives, we all define goals, and rather often we use other people to achieve them. Asking your romantic partner to warm your feet using his or her body is a good example of the instrumental use of someone else. In that specific moment, we are likely more concerned with resolving our personal problem (i.e., cold feet) and consequently value our partner's foot warming qualities, instead of his or her personality. In other words, our momentary goals make us judge our partner as an object that is valued for its usefulness rather than for his or her personal qualities. Still, most readers would agree that there is nothing wrong with this type of behavior. The request implies using the other for one's purposes, but provided that this kind of behavior is done consensually, without causing pain, in the context of a relationship where the partner is also treated as a full human being and not only a foot warmer (see Nussbaum, 1999, for a similar reasoning), it can hardly be seen as problematic. In contrast, we would all agree that the use of slave babies and children as foot warmers would be highly objectionable. Using a child slave as a foot warmer does not only imply the temporary instrumental treatment of a human being. Given that it takes place outside of a larger context of regard for humanity, it loses all legitimacy and occurs in complete disregard of the necessities, feelings and wellbeing of the objectified. As such, it appears that objectification understood as the instrumental consideration of the other changes in quality and consequences when dehumanization is involved.

In the present chapter, we want to analyze the pervasive phenomenon of objectification. We will begin by defining the concept from both philosophical and social psychological perspectives. In doing so, the importance of dehumanization in understanding the process of objectification will be highlighted. Dehumanization is a key attribute of the objectification process that determines when objectification becomes problematic and will have negative consequences. In the second part of the chapter, our analysis will focus on sexual objectification. Building on the main findings of recent empirical research, the conditions that make sexual objectification dehumanizing and determine its negative consequences will be described.

Philosophical Considerations on Objectification

Arguably, Immanuel Kant (1991) was the first to introduce the idea of a thing-like treatment of persons. He introduced this notion in the context of sexual union, which he defined as “the reciprocal use that one human being makes of the sexual organs and capacities of another” (Kant, 1991, p. 96). According to Kant, the keen interest that both parties have in sexual satisfaction leads us to see the other person as a set of bodily parts that are tools in reaching personal sexual satisfaction. Kant argues that such a thinglike treatment can only be morally acceptable in the context of marriage. The reciprocity entailed in marriage means that “the one who is acquired acquires the other in turn; for in this way each reclaims itself and restores its personality” (Kant, 1991, p. 97). Put simply, in the context of an enduring reciprocal relationship, sexual objectification exists, without being problematic.

More recently, Martha Nussbaum (1999) proposed seven aspects of objectification. All of these aspects are features of our treatment of things and can be involved when we treat a “someone” as a “something.” *Instrumentality* implies that the objectified is treated as a tool for meeting the needs of the objectifier; *ownership* and *fungibility* occur when the objectified is seen as something that can be owned, traded, or exchanged; *violability* refers to the lack of integrity making it permissible to hurt or destroy the objectified; the *denial of autonomy* and *subjectivity* strip the objectified of free will and personal experience; finally, *inertness* takes away the agency of the objectified. None of these aspects reflect a sufficient, or a necessary condition in defining objectification, but most of the time multiple aspects are present when the term is applied. While this is true for purely definitional purposes, when analyzing the moral implications of objectification Nussbaum (1999) emphasizes that *instrumentality* seems to be the most morally demanding aspect. “The instrumental treatment of human beings, . . . is always morally problematic; if it does not take place in a larger context of regard for humanity, it is a central form of the morally objectionable” (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 238). This phrase is central in understanding the role of (de)humanization in the objectification process. Nussbaum clearly emphasizes that the instrumentalization of the other is not problematic *per se*, but that treating someone merely as an instrument with disregard of his or her human qualities is always unacceptable.

Even though Nussbaum derived her analysis from examining sex and social justice, the taxonomy she developed is domain independent. Indeed, Kaufmann (2011) proposes a similar reasoning in his analysis of instrumentalization. His definition of the concept is more practical and emphasizes three conditions. First, before you can use a person as a tool, you need to interact with that person. Second, through the interaction we must pursue a goal that is not directed toward a state that is supposed to be good or bad for the used person; in other words, the goal is not directed to him or her.

Finally, we should believe that the targeted person is able to contribute to this goal and is therefore useful. These three conditions define what it means to use a person, but do not identify a property that makes such acts problematic. It is easy to think of many cases in which using a person in this way leads to benign and innocent interactions. In order to define the boundary conditions that make the *mere* use of another person wrongful, Kaufmann (2011) introduces the concept of dignity; a set of properties that bestow status on its bearer and should constrain our behavior toward them. According to Kaufmann, then, merely using a person becomes problematic if we do not recognize their dignity, that is, we stop treating the other as a person and reduce him or her to a tool. One way in which this problem can be circumvented is seeking the consent of the other. Consent changes the status of the used person from a tool into an end-pursuing person and transforms the person-tool relationship into cooperation (cf. Kant's idea about marriage).

Common to these philosophical accounts is the idea that the *mere* use of another person is morally problematic when it implies that they are not seen as fully human, but instead put on a par with a tool. These considerations, therefore, hint to the importance of the concept of (de)humanization in understanding the true moral value and implications of objectification, an argument that will be central throughout this chapter.

A Social Psychological Definition of Objectification

It is generally known that we normally process and treat people differently than objects. Objectification instead occurs when we perceive and treat persons as if they were objects. It is the result of a narrowed perception that is rooted in the basic cognitive processes of goal pursuit and attention. The necessary elements for objectification to occur are the same as those mentioned by Kaufmann (2011). We need to focus our attention on a person, who is seen as useful to obtain our goal, while this goal is not necessarily useful or relevant for the targeted person. As a result the target will be fragmented into task-relevant and irrelevant attributes. The task-focused perceiver will then focus on the task-relevant attributes and ignore or minimize the task-irrelevant attributes creating a skewed perception of the target which highlights what they can do, while neglecting who they are. As a result, once a person becomes instrumental to satisfying a goal, the person becomes interesting and more attractive to those for whom the goal is important. Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, and Galinsky (2008) have used this idea to show that objectification is a frequent response to social power. In a set of six studies, they found compared to people in a low power condition, those with high levels of power were more likely to approach a social target when he or she was seen as useful, defined in terms of the perceiver's goals. In these experiments, the targets were not approached because they were seen as similar, kind or more generally liked, but because they were seen as goal relevant. It was their usefulness—not their personal qualities—that lead to them being approached.

This definition grounds objectification in the basic cognitive processes of goal pursuit. Goal pursuit is a complex process that marshals a range of cognitive abilities including attention and valuation (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Förster, Liberman, & Friedman, 2008). When an individual possesses a specific goal—either chronic or temporary—goal-relevant stimuli are highly valued, attract attention and are more readily approached whereas goal-irrelevant stimuli are not valued or attended (Corbetta & Schulman, 2002; Custers & Aarts, 2005; Ferguson & Bargh, 2004). In a similar vein, our social relationships have shown to be goal dependent (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). We feel closer to and more attracted toward friends that help us to achieve an active goal compared to those who obstruct it. While objectification involves similar approach reactions, unlike affect-based relationships the objectified is approached because of his or her instrumentality regardless of the extent to which the target is seen as likeable, kind, or similar to the perceiver.

The centrality of instrumentality in defining objectification is interesting in that it implies the approach toward, rather than avoidance of, the objectified target. As such, objectification can be distinguished from other, related constructs, such as dehumanization and stereotyping, both of which typically tend to be associated with a desire to distance oneself from the target (Gruenfeld et al., 2008). Even though Gruenfeld and colleagues explicitly distinguished objectification from dehumanization, separating out the instrumental qualities of a person can lead to the disregard of his or her human characteristics and to more problematic forms of objectification. This can be the direct consequence of the attentional process that fragments the objectified into relevant and irrelevant attributes and makes us represent the individual in terms of these goal-relevant attributes. As such, objectification makes us perceive an individual in terms of what they can do for us, rather than who they are as human beings. At the same time and as we will see later in this chapter, specific contextual and motivational variables can play a determining role in making processes of objectification worrisome as they involve processes of dehumanization. As such, we agree with the former philosophical analysis, that dehumanization is a key variable in determining whether the objectification of a person is problematic and will likely have negative consequences.

In the following parts of the chapter, we will apply this general definition to the realm of sexual objectification highlighting the role of dehumanization, analyzing the cognitive and motivational variables that trigger the dehumanization of sexually objectified targets and documenting the consequences of the process.

Sexual Objectification

The concept of sexual objectification was developed and expanded by feminist writers (Bartky, 1990; Dworkin, 2000; MacKinnon, 1982). Unlike Kant, they did not believe that the thinglike treatment of others is intrinsic to sexual

desire. According to them, the problem derives from the way both men and women are sexually socialized. Most, if not all, societies have created asymmetric gender roles that are marked by hierarchy and domination. Especially for those men who have learned to experience desire in connection with domination (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995) women are perceived as consumable sex objects. Women are exposed to the same scenario and learn to eroticize being dominated and judged as objects (Sanchez, Kiefer, & Ybarra, 2006). From the perspective of feminist theorizing, sexual objectification is asymmetrical; power differentials between men and women mean that only sexualized women are turned into something rather than someone.

Sexual objectification was introduced to social psychology by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). They strongly based their analysis on the thinking of these feminist scholars in defining sexual objectification and framed it as a phenomenon that primarily affects women. When sexually objectified, “a woman’s body, body parts or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her” (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 175; see also Bartky, 1990, for a similar definition). This definition is literally exemplified by surrealist René Magritte’s 1934 painting *The Rape* (see <http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/rene-magritte/rape-1934>), in which a woman’s face is represented by a naked body so that her breasts form the eyes, the navel a nose, and her vagina a mouth. Important for our purpose is that in their definition Fredrickson and Roberts put instrumentality at the center of objectification stating that when sexually objectified women are treated as bodies for the use or consumption of others.

Most of the work on objectification theory has provided a detailed analysis of the psychological and physical consequences for women to live in an objectifying culture. The culture of female objectification is so pervasive that women are socialized to take a third-person perspective on their physical selves, treating their bodies as objects to be looked at and evaluated (i.e., self-objectification). An ever-increasing amount of research has demonstrated the physical and mental health risks that self-objectification entails (see Moradi & Huang, 2008, for a recent review).

When talking about sexual objectification *per se*, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) mostly present descriptive evidence. Their starting point is the sexualized gaze that zooms in on certain body parts and contains a strong potential for sexual objectification. The objectifying gaze targets women more than men and is apparent in both the media that regularly focuses on women’s bodies and in social interactions that involve sexualized comments and gaze. There is considerable evidence that such a sexually objectifying environment exists for women (e.g., Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). In 2007, the American Psychological Association published a report on sexualization through the media and other cultural sources. Sexualization was defined as practices considering a person only in terms of his or her sex appeal, implying that an individual’s sexuality overwhelms his or

her personality when social judgments are made. The research focused on the U.S. culture and found that women and girls are more likely than men and boys to be sexually objectified in a variety of media including television, magazines, and music videos; in advertisement; and in several commercial products, such as dolls, clothing, and cosmetics. Archer, Ititani, Kimes, and Barrios (1983) quantified sexual objectification by calculating the relative facial prominence of publicity photos depicting men or women in 11 cultures. In all cases, women showed a lower “face-ism” index (i.e., the proportion of the face portrayed relative to the rest of the body) than men suggesting that the media implicitly provide the message that the essence of a man resides in his face and head, whereas that of a woman is thought to reside more generally in her body.

While these descriptive findings framed sexual objectification as a phenomenon that targets women and is enacted by men, more recent research has loosened this claim somewhat. Strelan and Hargreaves (2005), for example, showed that women objectify other women. These authors measured the extent to which participants viewed their own bodies and the bodies of others in body appearance-based, objectified terms versus body competence-based, nonobjectified terms. While men objectified women more than women did, women also objectified other women especially if they objectified their own body. Kozak, Frankenhauser, and Roberts (2009) extended this finding to homosexual men, showing that they objectified themselves and other men to a greater extent than did heterosexual men. Further support that both men and women are prone to sexually objectify female targets stems from a recent study conducted by Bernard, Gervais, Allen, Campomizzi, and Klein (2012). Integrating the literatures on sexual objectification and the different cognitive processes that underlie person and object recognition, Bernard and colleagues tested the sexualized-body inversion hypothesis. The inversion effect—that inverted stimuli are more difficult to recognize than upright ones (Yin, 1969)—has been used to disentangle the different processing styles that are used in person and object recognition. Because people are perceived configurally—implying that successful recognition depends on the perception of the relations between the constitutive parts of the stimulus. Therefore, inverted humanlike stimuli (e.g., faces and body postures) are more difficult to recognize than upright ones, whereas inversion does not affect object recognition because here the spatial relations among stimulus parts are not considered (e.g., Reed, Stone, Bozova, & Tanaka, 2003; Reed, Stone, Grubb, & McGoldrick, 2006). Applying the inversion effect to the realm of sexual objectification, Bernard et al. (2012) found that inverted sexualized male bodies were recognized less accurately than upright ones, while no difference occurred for sexualized female bodies when they were shown upright or inverted. This result was not qualified by participants’ gender showing that both men and women perceived sexualized women like objects whereas sexualized men were viewed as persons at a basic cognitive level. These results were corroborated focusing on local

and global processing by Gervais, Vescio, Förster, Maass, and Suitner (2012) who employed dressed male and female targets. These authors found a sexual body part recognition bias only for female targets showing the presence of local processing that is known to underlie object recognition.

In our general definition of objectification, we emphasized the importance of instrumentality—that the objectified is reduced to a set of useful characteristics in line with the perceiver's goal. In this regard, we have highlighted the importance of the media in using the female body (but see Rohlinger, 2002) to attract attention and sell a whole range of products. When confronted with these sexualized female bodies, people indeed seem to process these stimuli as objects rather than persons (Bernard et al., 2012). But, are there also instances in which a particular goal of the perceiver rather than characteristics of the stimulus lead to the sexual objectification of a female target? Evidence for such goal-directed objectification stems from an experiment that was never meant to measure processes of objectification, but that can be easily read within this framework (Confer, Perilloux, & Buss, 2010). Male and female heterosexual participants were instructed to consider dating a person of the opposite sex. They were presented with a full-body photograph of a female or a male target respectively. In each case the photograph was fully covered with a “face box” occluding the target's face and a “body box” occluding the target's body. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two mating conditions. In the short-term mate condition, participants were asked to consider the possibility of having a one-night stand with the target. By contrast, in the long-term mating condition they had to imagine him or her as a committed relationship partner. To inform their decision about whether or not they would like to engage in the designated relationship with the occluded target, participants could only remove one box (the “face box” or the “body box”). Results indicated that participants had an overall tendency to remove the “face box” more often, except in one condition; when male participants had a short-term mating goal, they preferred to focus on the female targets' body. Confer et al. (2010) explained this finding from an evolutionary perspective, claiming that fertility cues are more readily assessed from a woman's body than her face. Evolutionary theories (Buss & Schmitt, 1993) suggest that for men pursuing a short-term mate, a woman's current fertility is more important than her reproductive value and therefore focus more on a woman's body. Arguably, a simpler explanation can be found from a sexual objectification perspective. Men with a short-term sex goal more readily focus on a woman's body, separating out her sexual functions from her person. Given that a person's facial features are often seen as a valid guide to personality (Penton-Voak, Pound, Little, & Perrett, 2006), the present result could be interpreted as a narrowed perception of women, focusing on their bodies or body parts that are seen as instrumental for the male's sex goal. Even though this claim may seem speculative at this point, we will come back to this issue later on in the chapter providing further evidence.

Taken together, these data show that sexual objectification is a recurrent phenomenon that targets women more than men (except in the case of homosexual men who tend to objectify other men; see Kozak et al., 2009). Contrary to the initial feminist premise, objectification does not seem a strictly male pursuit. Rather, women objectify other women, describing them more readily in body appearance-based terms and cognitively processing sexualized females as objects. Much of the aforementioned literature hints to the possibility that certain forms of sexual objectification entail a forfeiture of humanity, but none directly measured the concept. Therefore, we will turn now to the question of when sexual objectification can become dehumanizing and what consequences it can trigger.

When Sexual Objectification Entails a Forfeiture of Humanity

Humanness is a core dimension of social judgment that can be granted or denied, and the current book gives a range of contexts in which it plays a pivotal role. References to subtle forms of dehumanization already surfaced in the original definition of sexual objectification formulated by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). They mentioned that a narrowed body focus could strip the objectified of their individuality and personality. Different aspects of person perception have been linked with dehumanization and one of them is the lack of mind. Mind attribution (see Epley & Waytz, 2010; Waytz, Schroeder, & Epley, this volume [Chapter 4]) is associated with the extent to which we grant others the capacity to have thoughts, feelings, intentions, and perceptions. Given that Nussbaum (1999) highlighted that objectification is often accompanied with denials of autonomy, subjectivity, and agency, one can expect that the objectified will be seen as less mindful. Loughnan and colleagues (2010) were the first to test this hypothesis and compared fully dressed and scantily dressed pictures of male and female targets showing that the sexualized representations of both genders decreased mind attribution. Cikara, Eberhardt, and Fiske (2011) focused on mental capacities and showed that only sexualized female targets, as compared to sexualized males, were seen as less agentic and less likely to engage brain regions that are associated with mental state attributions. Gray, Knobe, Sheskin, Bloom, and Barrett (2011) measured both dimensions of mind perception, agency and experience (Gray, Gary, & Wegener, 2007), and found that focusing on someone's body reduces the perception of agency but instead increases perceptions of experience.

The inconsistencies between these different studies are considerable and include both the targets of objectification and the specific dimensions of mind perception that was denied to the objectified targets. While in the studies of Loughnan et al. (2010) and Gray et al. (2011) both objectified males and females were denied mindfulness, in the study of Cikara and colleagues (2011) only female targets suffered the same narrowed perception. At the same time, all studies corroborate on the fact that objectified targets

are perceived as less agentic, only Loughnan et al. (2010) found evidence for the denial of experience like traits. Without any doubt some of these inconsistencies can be explained by procedural differences. Gray et al. (2011), for example, measured experience only in terms of the attribution of primary emotions (e.g., pleasure, desire, and fear) that are known to be shared with animals (Demoulin et al., 2004). Granting these emotions to a greater extent to an objectified target then can hardly be seen as a way to humanize them. Instead, Loughnan et al. (2010) used the mental state attribution task (Haslam, Kashima, et al., 2008), which measures the full spectrum of 20 mental states that reflects a person's perceptions, emotions, intentions, and thoughts. Taken together, these studies cannot be conclusive on the exact target (male and/or female), nor the exact dimension of mind perception that is denied to objectified targets, but they all suggest that focusing on a person's body leads to a reduction of perceived mind.

Other studies have measured the potential dehumanized perceptions of objectified targets more directly. Haslam (2006; Haslam, Loughnan, et al., 2008, for reviews) recently broadened the concept of dehumanization, differentiating between *animalistic* (i.e., the denial of uniquely human characteristics that distinguish us from animals, such as civility and refinement) and *mechanistic dehumanization* (i.e., the denial of core human nature traits, such as emotionality, openness, and depth), and recent studies have provided evidence for the dehumanization of objectified female targets on both dimensions. Heflick and Goldenberg (2009) showed that when male and female participants were asked to focus on the body compared to the personality of a famous female target (i.e., Sarah Palin or Angelina Jolie), body focus resulted in decreased description of these targets in terms of human nature traits. Comparing both male and female targets, Heflick, Goldenberg, Cooper, and Puvia (2011) measured judgments of warmth, competence, and morality when both male and female participants were asked to focus on the target's appearance compared to their personality. The results showed that judgments of female, but not male targets were lowered on all these dimensions in the appearance condition. Given that Harris and Fiske (2006) showed that people who are judged both low in competence and warmth are more likely dehumanized, Heflick et al. (2011) interpreted their findings as an instance of dehumanization.

Vaes, Paladino, and Puvia (2011) focused on animalistic dehumanization and measured the implicit associations between uniquely human (e.g., culture and values) versus animal-related words (e.g., nature and instinct) and sexually objectified versus nonobjectified pictures of male and female targets. Results indicated that compared to all other targets, both male and female participants less readily associated sexually objectified female targets with uniquely human words. Testing a similar hypothesis, Vaes and Latrofa (2012) used an eye tracker to measure participants' gaze and identified it as objectifying when participants focused on the targets' scantily dressed body with the intent to evaluate the targets' physical appearance rather than their

personality features. As predicted, the longer both male and female participants looked at the scantily dressed female (but not male) targets, the less they described them with uniquely human words.

These studies offer convergent evidence on the dehumanization of sexually objectified targets using a range of techniques. Sexually objectified women were the most objectified, being denied both dimensions of humanness by both male and female participants. But, why would men and women deny full humanness to sexually objectified females? We suspect they might do this for very different reasons.

What Triggers the Dehumanization of Sexually Objectified Women?

Research examining the motivations to objectify has shown that different processes are at play for men and women; therefore, we will treat them separately.

For women, sexually objectified female targets constitute the in-group but at the same time potentially pose a problem. Sexually objectified depictions often show women in sexually provocative and humiliating positions and quite often present an unattainable beauty image. On the one hand, these negative associations may make sexually objectified female targets potentially threatening for the perception of the entire category of women motivating them to perceive these sexualized depictions as a despised subcategory. In line with this idea, Vaes et al. (2011, Study 2) found that the more women perceived sexually objectified females as a separate subcategory from which they wanted to distance themselves, the more they dehumanized them. On the other hand, belonging to the same gender category, women more likely engage in processes of social comparison with sexualized female targets especially those that highly value the importance of their physical appearance (i.e., self-objectifiers). To test this idea, Puvia and Vaes (2013) measured female participants' appearance related self-views (i.e., level of self-objectification, internalization of the sociocultural beauty standard, and motivation to look attractive to men) and linked these with their tendency to dehumanize sexually objectified female targets. Results confirmed that both women's motivation to look attractive to men and their tendency to internalize the sociocultural beauty standards were positively linked to the dehumanization of sexually objectified female targets. As expected, these relations were mediated by participants' level of self-objectification. These mediational models suggest that women dehumanize sexually objectified female targets especially when they emphasize the importance of their physical appeal (i.e., self-objectify) either to look attractive to men or when they internalize the prevailing beauty standards. So, women dehumanize their sexually objectified counterparts for different reasons. Either because they see them as a vulgar subcategory of women from which they want to distance themselves, or because they strongly value the physical appearance of their own body, comparing or even competing with others on the same dimension, therefore reducing sexy women to not-quite-human, bodily objects.

Males dehumanize sexually objectified women for other reasons. Here, sexual attraction is expected to play a major role. Different lines of research have shown that thinking about sex attunes men more to the sexual functions of a female target, highlighting her instrumental qualities in order to satisfy their sex goal. Gruenfeld and colleagues (2008) demonstrated this process especially for men in a high power position. Rudman and Borgida (1995) showed a similar finding in a hiring context showing that the presence of a sex goal led men to focus on appearance instead of competence when considering a female job candidate. In a similar vein, objectification theory has suggested that men attend especially to a woman's sexual function when confronted with a sexually objectified depiction of her (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This increase in focus on the body and appearance could then imply that men fail to attend to the personal and individual qualities of the sexually objectified target seeing her as a lesser human being. A study reported in Vaes et al. (2011, Study 3) provides initial evidence for this idea. In a first phase, male participants for whom a sex goal was activated by solving sex-related anagrams, had to choose with whom they wanted to collaborate on a difficult math task. They were presented with a series of female candidates and results showed that they were more willing to collaborate with the incompetent, but good-looking female candidate compared to participants in the control condition. Given that the preferred female targets did not have the capacities to successfully contribute to the math task, these results confirm the idea that men with an active sex goal make an instrumental choice in line with this goal focusing on the physical appeal of women, resulting in the sexual objectification of these female targets. This result aligns with the previously cited study of Confer et al. (2010) where male participants showed increased body focus when they were asked to imagine having a one-night stand with a female target. These data can be easily explained in terms of sexual objectification and corroborate with the results of Vaes et al. (2011).

Importantly, male participants with an active sex goal not only objectified the female collaborators, but they also had more difficulty associating them with uniquely human terms than those who were exposed to a neutral prime. Overall, these studies show that even though men and women dehumanize sexually objectified targets to the same extent, their reaction is driven by different processes. Once men feel sexually attracted toward a female, they tend to activate an instrumental mindset that makes them emphasize a female's physical characteristics seeing her as a lesser human being. In short, a sex goal makes that men potentially engage in both instrumental and dehumanizing processes. For women, instead, dehumanization appears to be a consequence of a confrontation with a sexually objectified depiction of a member of their gender group. For some women (i.e., self-objectifiers), this is a chance to engage in a dehumanizing, body-focused comparison. For others, it is a chance to dehumanize a disliked, vulgar subcategory.

On the Consequences of Dehumanizing Sexually Objectified Women

Our focus on dehumanization is inspired by our belief that it is an important marker that indicates when sexual objectification becomes problematic and likely leads to negative consequences. Saying that dehumanization signals problematic sexual objectification implies that we defend the view that benign sexual objectification is possible. Sunstein (1995) cautiously suggested the idea “that it may be possible to argue, as some people do, that objectification and a form of use are substantial parts of sexual life, or wonderful parts of sexual life, or ineradicable parts of sexual life” (p. 46). The possibility of a benign form of objectification has been central in the works of many philosophers who all discussed different conditions under which sexual objectification stops being problematic (e.g., marriage for Kant, 1991; dignity for Kaufmann, 2011; autonomy and consent for Marino, 2008; equality and consent for Nussbaum, 1999). In the present chapter, we want to defend the idea that when sexual objectification includes the dehumanization of the objectified, it becomes problematic and has serious negative consequences. While this proposition is similar to what Nussbaum (1999) proposed previously, it has often been discarded as being too vague to be useful. Now that social psychology has provided several approaches for measuring dehumanization in a valid and reliable way, this statement becomes empirically verifiable.

Initial evidence stems from the studies of Loughnan et al. (2010), who measured both attributions of mind and moral standing to the objectified. In both studies, these authors found that as objectification increased not only did mind attribution decrease, but the moral status of objectified targets’ was withdrawn. In one of these studies, for example, the objectified were assigned more pain tablets, a finding which may indicate that sexually objectified targets are seen as less sensitive to pain or that we care less about their suffering. This finding was conceptually corroborated in work looking at rape and sexual objectification. Loughnan and colleagues presented participants with sexually objectified or nonobjectified women who were reported to be the victims of an acquaintance rape (Loughnan, Pina, Vasquez, & Puvia, in press). Similar to Loughnan et al. (2010), moral concern was withdrawn from the objectified rape victims. Further, the withdrawal of moral concern was linked to a belief that the victim suffered less as a result of the rape. Such findings suggest that the extent to which we deny sexually objectified targets essential human characteristics opens the gate to aggressive behavior.

The existence of such a link was clearly demonstrated in a recent set of studies by Rudman and Mescher (2012). In their research the link between men’s tendency to implicitly dehumanize women and their likelihood to engage in sexual aggression was tested. Using the Implicit Association Test, they measured men and women’s tendency to associate men or women in general with animal-related (e.g., instinct, paw, or snout) or object-related (e.g., tool,

device, or thing) terms. They also measured participants' benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and their rape proclivity. Even when controlling for their level of sexism, both implicit dehumanization indices predicted male (but not female) participants' rape proclivity of female targets. Importantly, women were not associated with animal- or object-related concepts more than men. Instead, the more men implicitly dehumanized women (as either animals or objects), the more likely they sexually victimized them.

Discussion and Future Directions

Objectification is a long-standing concept that has obtained empirical attention only in the last decades. Initially philosophers were intrigued by the idea that people could treat their fellow human beings as objects and tried to define the circumstances under which such treatments could be benign or morally problematic. Their efforts have paved the way to empirical research that has confirmed many of their propositions. In line with their reasoning, we defined objectification as treating a person as a thing, perceived as instrumental in satisfying the perceiver's goals. From this perspective, objectification is grounded in the basic processes of attention and goal pursuit applied to a human target. Once a goal is activated and another person is seen as useful to satisfy this goal, the perceiver will reduce the other person to his or her goal-relevant attributes, disregarding goal-irrelevant characteristics. This process can take on different benign forms but becomes problematic in the context of disregard for the objectified as a full human being. Therefore, dehumanization is a key concept in understanding and predicting its potential harmful consequences. In the present chapter, we have applied these principals to the case of sexual objectification confirming the general tenets of the concept. Still, some interesting questions and speculations for future research remain that we will treat in the next paragraphs.

Beyond Instrumentalization: The Other Faces of (Sexual) Objectification

Arguably, Nussbaum (1999) has provided the most complete analysis of sexual objectification. She mentioned seven distinct aspects, defining objectification as a cluster term for situations where often a plurality of these features is present. In our current analysis, we have emphasized instrumentality as a key feature and discussed violability as a possible consequence of dehumanizing forms of objectification. However, the prevalence of other components could be important in certain contexts and further differentiate the consequences of objectification. One recent example focused on the fungibility hypothesis and tested whether men and women would be seen as interchangeable with physically similar others (Gervais, Vescio, & Allen, 2012). These authors presented images of average and ideal women and men to male and female participants and confronted them with a surprise

matching task in which they were required to match the bodies and the faces that appeared in the original images. Results for both genders indicated that both average and ideal female targets and male targets with ideal bodies were more fungible—showing more body-face pairing errors—than men with average body types.

This study clearly demonstrates sexual objectification as a multifaceted concept and opens the possibility to research other components and their consequences. For instance, inertness may play a more central role in research on sexual objectification. While previous research has measured agency (Cikara et al., 2011) or related concepts (e.g., competence: Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Heflick et al., 2011; Loughnan et al., 2010), it is in its meaning of passiveness or submissiveness that it could become another, important facet of sexual objectification and explain why mostly women are affected. The female body and the sexuality it potentially emanates, has obtained a different cultural meaning than the sexuality of the male body. Compared to male, female sexuality is more closely associated with submissiveness, lacking in agency and activity (e.g., Sanchez et al., 2006). As such, it seems that inertness could play a central role in explaining why mostly women bear the burden of sexual objectification and its more dreadful consequences. In a similar vein, the role and consequences of ownership could be researched in the contexts of paid sex (i.e., prostitution and pornography) testing to what extent the idea of owning another person involves processes of dehumanization.

Other Moderating Variables of Sexual Objectification

Throughout the present chapter, we already mentioned several moderating variables that increase the occurrence of sexual objectification. Broadly these can be divided into perceiver and target characteristics. Examples of the former often involve a perceiver's goals, like a male sex goal (Confer et al., 2010; Vaes et al., 2011) or, more generally, a goal that installs a body focus (e.g., judging a celebrity on appearance, Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; or evaluating fashion models, Vaes & Latrofa, 2012). Sometimes sexual objectification increases the more perceivers want to create a distance between themselves and the objectified. This is the case for women judging sexually objectified female targets (Vaes et al., 2011, Study 2). Also, one's appearance-related self-views, like self-objectification, exacerbate the objectification process, especially for women (Puvia & Vaes, 2013; Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005) and homosexuals (Kozak et al., 2009).

Stimulus attributes, instead, are the most important target characteristics that have shown to moderate the objectification process. Whether people are mostly represented with a body rather than with a face (Archer et al., 1983) or in a way that emphasizes their sexuality (Cikara et al., 2011; Loughnan et al., 2010; Vaes et al., 2011), increases the chances for being objectified dramatically. Still, this seems to be mostly true for female targets.

Over and above target and perceiver characteristics, other moderating variables are conceivable. Cultural variables, for example, are deemed to play a key role. A recent study examined the extent to which sexual objectification is culturally robust or present primarily in Western societies (Loughnan et al., 2012). It revealed that sexual objectification is much stronger in the West and considerably attenuated, or even absent, in non-Western nations (i.e., Japan, Pakistan, and India). It is currently unclear which cultural factor gives rise to this variability in sexual objectification. However, it is clear that culture plays an important, previously unrecognized moderating role.

The (In)Human Body

In this final paragraph, we want to reflect on the specific susceptibility for dehumanization of forms of objectification that involve the human body. Objectification has been described in a variety of contexts. In work settings, physical laborers are often only valued for their productivity and efficiency without seeing them as people with unique personalities and emotions (Marx, 1844/1964). In the medical practice, objectification has been used extensively to describe a depersonalized, illness-focused care that creates a barrier between the patient and the physician (Haslam, 2007; Leyens, this volume [Chapter 10]; Timmermans & Almeling, 2009). Together with sexual objectification, all of these contexts potentially involve the reduction of the objectified to his or her body to a varying degree.

At least intuitively, it seems that the more objectification implies the reduction of the other to a body, the more it becomes likely to be associated with dehumanizing perceptions. The human body seems to enclose an intrinsic ambivalence (see also, Heflick & Goldenberg, this volume [Chapter 7]; Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004; Oliver, 2011). On the one hand, the body and its utility (e.g., as a tool, its appearance) is more closely associated to historically oppressed groups like women and slaves or primitive people, often seen as less than fully human, uncivilized, or irrational (Saminaden, Loughnan, & Haslam, 2010). On the other hand, violations of the corporeal status of human beings often represent clear instances of dehumanizing processes. Torture, rape, and other human atrocities are all instances of dehumanization that are enacted on and through the body suggesting that one's corporeal integrity is deeply linked with a person's dignity and humanness. It seems to us that objectification and its dehumanizing consequences can be read in this ambiguity. Reducing a person to be nothing more than a body to use, consume, and potentially humiliate is always going to be dehumanizing. Even though our bodies represent our animal side (Goldenberg, 2005), once they are approached with disrespect or mistreated, this will be seen as an instance of dehumanization. Therefore, reducing the dehumanizing aspects of objectification involves the body as well. If a person's body is not merely used but also respected, if it is admired not because of its parts

but as a whole including both outer and inner beauty, then humiliation and dehumanization can be avoided. The Roman philosopher Seneca eloquently pointed this out when he said: “A beautiful woman is not she of whom you praise her legs or arms, but she whose whole aspect is so beautiful that it takes away all possibility of admiring her single parts.”¹

Note

1. Free translation from Wikiquotes, http://it.wikiquote.org/wiki/Lucio_Anneo_Seneca.

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