

## Fast track report

# Objectification leads to depersonalization: The denial of mind and moral concern to objectified others

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### Abstract

*Philosophers have argued that when people are objectified they are treated as if they lack the mental states and moral status associated with personhood. These aspects of objectification have been neglected by psychologists. This research investigates the role of depersonalization in objectification. In Study 1, objectified women were attributed less mind and were accorded lesser moral status than non-objectified women. In Study 2, we replicated this effect with male and female targets and extended it to include perceptions of competence and pain attribution. Further, we explored whether target and perceiver gender qualify depersonalization. Overall, this research indicates that when people are objectified they are denied personhood. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

When objectification occurs, the person is depersonalized

Andrea Dworkin (2000, p 30)

Objectification has interested philosophers since the term was introduced by Immanuel Kant. Kant argued that the risk of objectification is present in all sexual encounters, where a person can become merely a need-satisfying “object of appetite” (Papadaki, 2007). In Kant’s view, objectified people are denied humanity and regarded as means to others’ ends. Nussbaum (1995) elaborated this idea, arguing that objectification has many facets, some of which are more morally problematic than others. Treating a person as an object is especially troubling when certain human characteristics are denied (i.e., autonomy, subjectivity, agency). From both Kant’s and Nussbaum’s standpoint, objectification has two key features: Emphasis on the target’s instrumentality and denial of their humanness or personhood. The second feature, depersonalization<sup>1</sup>, is the focus of the present work.

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<sup>1</sup>We use the term depersonalization to refer to the denial of personhood. This is distinct from clinical notion of depersonalization disorder (DSM-IV). It is also distinct from the Self-Categorization Theory use of the term to refer to an individual being viewed in terms of their group membership and group attributes (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

The last decade has witnessed a growing interest in objectification, particularly in relation to gender. Since the influential work of Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), numerous papers have investigated the damaging consequences of adopting a third person perspective on the self. Self-objectification decreases subjective well being (Breines, Crocker, & Garcia, 2008), and increases depressive symptoms (Tiggemann & Kuring, 2004), self-harm (Muehlenkamp, Swanson, & Brausch, 2005), and disordered eating (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998). It also reduces intellectual performance (Fredrickson et al., 1998) by diverting attention to the body (Quinn, Kallen, Twenge, & Fredrickson, 2006) and reducing intrinsic motivation and feelings of self-efficacy (Gapinski, Brownell, & LaFrance, 2003). Objectification by others also has significant consequences. When women anticipate a male sexual gaze, they report increased body discomfort (Calogero, 2004). Moreover, self- and other-objectification have been reported to be positively related (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005), suggesting a circularity between the two processes.

The sense of objectification employed in psychological research contrasts sharply with the views of philosophers. Psychological work on objectification focuses on what is emphasized (i.e., the body) whereas philosophical work focuses on what is de-emphasized or denied (i.e., personhood and humanity). One notable exception is the work of Heflick and Goldenberg (2009), who found that when people focus on a woman's appearance they perceive her as less human. Their study is the first to demonstrate that objectification leads to a reduction in perceived humanity. However, it employed two well-known female targets (i.e., Angelina Jolie, Sarah Palin) and a broad measure of personhood (i.e., humanness). No other objectification research has examined whether objectified people are denied the mental and moral status that we have as persons. The current research aims to redress this shortcoming and examine whether objectification may lead to depersonalization.

A clear understanding of what constitutes "personhood" is necessary to understand the process of depersonalization. Although this concept is contested, there is some agreement that to qualify as a person an individual must be seen as possessing a mind and as deserving moral consideration (Sapontzis, 1981). Recent social psychological research provides convergent evidence that lay people tend to assign mental experience (i.e., different aspects of "mind") and morality (i.e., deservingness of moral status) in a flexible way that responds to the target's characteristics. For example, Morewedge, Preston, and Wegner (2007) demonstrated that both human and non-human entities moving at a speed similar to normal humans are judged to possess more "mind" than entities moving faster or slower. Kozak, Marsh, and Wegner (2006) also demonstrated that disliked targets are demoralized relative to liked targets. Both findings indicate that target attributes may influence judgments of mind. Attributions of moral status also vary as a function of target attributes. Recent research examining perceptions of human and non-human entities indicates that they are distinguished on two dimensions of morality: Moral agency (i.e., capacity to act morally) and moral patiency (i.e., deservingness of moral treatment) (Gray, Gray, & Wegner, 2007). The attribution of these two aspects of morality varies according to the type of mind an entity is seen to possess. Entities possessing thoughts and intentions (e.g., adults, robots, God) are awarded moral agency, and those seen as possessing emotions (e.g., adults, children, animals) are awarded moral patiency. Combined, this research implies that personhood may be attributed or denied to people in a flexible and motivated fashion.

In sum, although depersonalization is a central theme in philosophical approaches to objectification, it has yet to receive systematic examination in social psychological work. Previous research has shown that two components of personhood—mind and moral status—may be denied to people, and these phenomena may clarify the psychological basis of objectification. We, therefore, predicted that when people are presented in an objectified manner they would be depersonalized, and specifically denied mental states (dementalized) and moral status.

## STUDY 1

Study 1 investigates the influence of objectification on judgments of personhood. Given the important consequences of female objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and the robust findings for female objectification in the previous research (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009), this study focused only on perceptions of women. We predicted that both male and female participants would depersonalize objectified women relative to non-objectified women.

Referring to the traditional definition of objectification as a focus on the body, the female targets varied according to the attention they drew to the body. This was manipulated by varying the amount of skin the target displayed and the face-ism bias. Face-ism is a measure of facial prominence in the visual representation of a person, calculated as the ratio of space

occupied by the face over the space occupied by the body in the entire figure. Previous research has shown that images of men tend to include proportionally more face relative to body compared with images of women (Archer, Iritani, Kimes, & Barrios, 1983; Schwarz & Kurz, 1989). This emphasis on the face and de-emphasis on the body has been shown to affect perceptions of the target, with high face-ism indices leading to greater attribution of competence, assertiveness, and intelligence (Archer et al., 1983; Matthews, 2007; Schwarz & Kurz, 1989). In sum, we hypothesize that objectified women will be depersonalized compared to non-objectified women in terms of lesser attribution of mind and moral status.

## Method

### *Participants*

Eighty-six people (54 female, 32 male) participated as part of a larger experiment in exchange for \$15 payment. Participants had a mean age of 20.5 years ( $SD = 3.0$ ).

### *Materials and Procedure*

Participants completed a questionnaire in which they rated three photographs which pictured either a woman's full body<sup>2</sup> (full-body), only her head (head-only), or only her body (body-only). To construct these images, three pictures of different women in swimsuits were sampled from internet advertisements and matched by the authors for orientation, expression, and image size. Using imaging software we isolated the face and body as separate pictures. The three types of image vary in terms of face-ism index (FI), with the head-only images (mean FI = 0.77) yielding higher scores compared to full-body images (mean FI = 0.26), which in turn yielded higher scores than body-only images (mean FI = 0.00). The full-body and body-only images also displayed the target wearing minimal clothing (i.e., a bikini). Accordingly, these images represented low, moderate, and high objectification, respectively. A Latin-square design was used to ensure that although all participants rated a full-body, head-only, and body-only image, no participant saw the same woman twice.

The three photographs were presented individually on successive screens. Prior to the presentation of each image participants were instructed to "look carefully at the woman in this picture. You will be asked to make a series of judgments about this person, so from their picture try to get an idea of what they are like." Participants rated each image on two measures of mind attribution. The Mental State Attribution (MSA) task (Haslam, Kashima, Loughnan, Shi, & Suitner, 2007) required participants to rate the extent to which the individual experiences 20 mental states reflecting perception (e.g., seeing, hearing), emotions (e.g., fear, joy), thoughts (e.g., reason, thinking), and intentions (e.g., wishes, plans) (1—*not at all*; 7—*very much so*). The General measure of Mind Attribution General Mind Attribution task (GMA) asked participants "how much mind does this woman have?"

Three measures assessed the assignment of moral status. Two were blatant; "how much does this woman deserve moral treatment?" and "how unpleasant would it be to harm this woman?" (1—*not at all*; 7—*very much so*). The third, subtle measure consisted of an 11-item Experience Scale drawn from previous research assessing moral patency (Gray et al., 2007). Entities high in Experience are considered to possess high moral patency (they deserve moral consideration), whereas entities low in Experience lack moral patency (they do not deserve moral consideration) (Gray et al., 2007). Participants completed the questionnaire as part of a larger experiment under experimenter supervision.

## Results

There were no systematic effects of questionnaire version, age, or ethnicity so these factors were excluded from all subsequent analyses. A 3 (image type: Head-only, full-body, body-only)  $\times$  2 (participant gender: Male, female) mixed model analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for MSA total score (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.88$ – $0.94$ ) with image type as a within-subjects variable. This revealed a significant main effect of image type,  $F(2,81) = 11.84$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.23$ . This effect was not qualified by participant gender,  $p > 0.50$ . Planned comparisons indicated that the mental state ratings of all images significantly differed,  $p < 0.05$ , with head-only images receiving higher ratings than full-body, which received

<sup>2</sup>The "full body" image showed a woman from her head to just below the knees.

Table 1. Mean ratings of mind attribution and moral status for the three types of images

	Head-only	Full-body	Body-only
MSA	4.68 <sup>a</sup>	4.56 <sup>b</sup>	4.31 <sup>c</sup>
GMA	4.86 <sup>a</sup>	4.73 <sup>a</sup>	4.13 <sup>b</sup>
Experience Scale	4.64 <sup>a</sup>	4.49 <sup>b</sup>	4.34 <sup>c</sup>
General Moral Status	6.25 <sup>a</sup>	6.21 <sup>a</sup>	6.00 <sup>b</sup>

Values with the same superscript *in the same row* do not differ,  $p > 0.05$ .

higher ratings than body-only (Table 1). The measure of GMA was analyzed in the same manner, yielding a significant effect of image type,  $F(2,81) = 13.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.24$ , which was not qualified by participant gender,  $p > 0.70$ . Planned contrasts revealed a significant difference between face-only and body-only images (Table 1). These results demonstrate that the effect of objectification on dehumanization is a function of drawing attention away from the face, which elicits high mind ratings, and towards the body, which elicits low mind ratings.

The two items measuring moral status were significantly correlated (average correlation,  $r(81) = 0.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and were therefore averaged. A 3 (image type)  $\times$  2 (participant gender) mixed model ANOVA was conducted with image type as a within-subjects variable. There was a significant main effect of image type,  $F(2,81) = 4.11$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$ , which was not qualified by participant gender,  $p > 0.30$ . Planned comparisons indicated that although face-only and full-body images did not differ, body-only images elicited significantly lower levels of moral status (Table 1).

The Experience Scale demonstrated good reliability for all images (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.85\text{--}0.88$ ). A 3 (image type)  $\times$  2 (participant gender) mixed model ANOVA was conducted on this measure with image type as a within-subjects variable. There was a significant main effect of image type,  $F(2,81) = 11.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.22$ , which was not qualified by participant gender,  $p > 0.40$ . Planned comparisons indicated that ratings of all images significantly differed,  $ps < 0.05$ , with head-only images receiving higher ratings than full-body, which received higher ratings than body-only (Table 1).

## Discussion

The results of Study 1 indicate that participants deny objectified women both proposed aspects of personhood: Mind and moral status. Importantly, participant gender did not qualify these effects. Across both blatant and subtle measures of mind and moral status, the highly objectified woman was denied personhood compared with the non-objectified woman.

This study contained two blatant (GMA, moral status) and two subtle (MSA, Experience Scale) measures of personhood. Interestingly, the two blatant measures yielded no significant difference between face-only and full-body images, whereas the subtle measures demonstrated differences between all three image types. This finding suggests that participants might be willing to blatantly depersonalize highly objectified others (i.e., body-only images), but not moderately objectified images (i.e., full-body). However, moderate objectification is sufficient to elicit subtle depersonalization. Future research may consider the role of implicit depersonalization as a more subtle measure of perceptions of objectified others (see also Vaes, Paladino, & Puvia, 2010).

## STUDY 2

Study 1 investigated the influence of objectification on judgments of personhood, specifically the attribution of mind and moral status. It showed that objectified women are denied both aspects of personhood. This study contained three main shortcomings: The absence of male targets, unequal numbers of male and female participants, and the manipulation of objectification. A majority of previous research has focused on female objectification. However, there is an emerging consensus that males can also be objectified (e.g., Kozak, Frankenhauser, & Roberts, 2009). To explore whether men may also be depersonalized, we included male targets in this study. In the previous study there was no significant interaction between participant gender and objectification. However, the study also contained a limited number of male participants.

Accordingly, it is difficult to conclude that this reflects a genuine lack of an intergroup effect. In the current study we included equal numbers of male and female participants. Finally, the previous study manipulated objectification through both a greater focus on the body compared with the face and a more revealing appearance. Although this manipulation was successful, the simultaneous shift of both characteristics creates ambiguity as to which factor is driving the effect. Therefore, in the current study we pilot-tested a series of images which varied in their perceived degree of objectification but not their face-ism.

Objectification research has begun to explore how objectified people might be treated. Heflick and Goldenberg (2009) have suggested that objectified women might be viewed as less competent than non-objectified women. Recently, Gray and Wegner (2009) suggested that people denied moral status may be seen as less sensitive to pain. In the current study we tested the attribution of pain and competence, predicting that objectified people would be viewed as less competent and less sensitive to pain.

## Method

### *Participants*

Eighty people (40 female, 40 male) participated as part of a course requirement. Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 33 years ( $M = 19.2$ ,  $SD = 2.44$ ).

### *Images*

Eight images were selected from freely available online sources. They depicted four non-famous individuals—two females and two males—who each appeared in an objectified and a non-objectified manner. The objectified images pictured women in bikinis and shirtless men. The non-objectified images consisted of fully-clothed women and men. The FI was matched for the objectified ( $M = 0.23$ ,  $SD = 0.03$ ) and non-objectified images ( $M = 0.23$ ,  $SD = 0.02$ ). Forty-one participants each rated half of these images for attractiveness (how attractive is this person?), emotional expressiveness (how much is this person expressing an emotion?), and objectification (how objectified is this person?) on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *extremely*). Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted for each target individual comparing the objectified and non-objectified images. These analyses showed that there were no significant differences in ratings of attractiveness ( $t(40) < 1.40$ ,  $ps > 0.10$ ) or emotionality ( $t(40) < 0.60$ ,  $ps > 0.60$ ). By contrast, the revealing images were rated as more objectified ( $M = 5.86$ ) than the non-revealing images ( $M = 3.69$ ),  $t(40) > 6.0$ ,  $ps < 0.001$ . In short, the images did not differ on face-ism, attractiveness, or emotionality, but did differ on objectification.

### *Questionnaire*

Participants completed a questionnaire where they rated four images: An objectified male, a non-objectified male, an objectified female, and a non-objectified female. From the eight pilot tested images, two versions of the questionnaire were created such that each contained four images and did not show the same person twice (e.g., the same man was not displayed in an objectified and non-objectified image). The questionnaire was introduced as a task involving "impression formation." To assess mind attribution, participants completed the two scales from Study 1 (i.e., MSA; General Mind Attribution (GMA)). In addition, they estimated the individual's intelligence quotient (IQ)<sup>3</sup>. To assess moral status, participants were asked to complete the Experience Scale used in Study 1 and a four-item scale assessing moral patency (Gray & Wegner, 2009).

To test whether perceptions of competence are affected when people are objectified, participants were asked to assess the competence of the individual at performing four different jobs (i.e., lawyer, manager, stockbroker, scientist). Participants rated how competently they believed the target could perform each job (1 = *extremely incompetent*;

<sup>3</sup>Participants—all first year psychology students—had prior knowledge of the meaning and range of IQ scores.

7 = *extremely competent*). Finally, participants completed a tablet allocation task which was designed to assess moral status (Gray & Wegner, 2009). Participants were asked to imagine that in the near future scientists invent a pill capable of temporarily inducing pain. Participants were told that they had five tablets and they must decide how many tablets to give to the person in the image to induce a specific amount of pain (1 = *limited amount*; 5 = *substantial amount*). Participants circled the number of tablets from one to five which they would choose to administer to the target. The experiment was completed in groups of three to six participants under experimenter supervision. Following the completion of the final questionnaire, participants were thanked and fully debriefed.

## Results

### Mind

There were no systematic effects of questionnaire version, age, or ethnicity so these factors were excluded from all subsequent analyses. All of the scales yielded acceptable reliabilities (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.69\text{--}0.94$ ). A 2 (objectified, non-objectified)  $\times$  2 (target gender: male, female)  $\times$  2 (participant gender: male, female) mixed model ANOVA with the first two variables as within-subjects factors was used to analyze each of the dependent variables. To examine mind attribution, we first entered MSA into this ANOVA. As predicted, there was a significant main effect of objectification,  $F(1,78) = 24.47$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.24$  (Table 2). This effect was qualified by a three way interaction,  $F(1,78) = 7.50$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$ . To decompose this interaction we analyzed the male and female participants separately. For male participants, there was only a significant main effect of objectification,  $F(1,39) = 11.95$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.23$ , with objectified targets attributed less mind than non-objectified targets. For female participants, there was a significant gender by objectification interaction,  $F(1,39) = 11.76$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.23$ . Simple effects analysis revealed that women denied mind to male targets when objectified,  $F(1,39) = 38.40$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , but not to female targets,  $F(1,39) = 0.20$ ,  $p > 0.50$ .

The single-item measure of GMA was analyzed in the same way, yielding a significant main effect of objectification,  $F(1,78) = 95.59$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.55$ , with objectified targets receiving lower ratings than non-objectified targets (Table 2). Unlike the MSA, this effect was not qualified by target or participant gender,  $ps > 0.20$ . The IQ estimates yielded a significant main effect of objectification,  $F(1,78) = 45.13$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.36$ , with objectified targets receiving lower IQ estimates than non-objectified targets (Table 2). Again, this was not qualified by target or participant gender,  $ps > 0.10$ . Across the three measures a consistent picture emerges; when people are objectified they are demoralized.

Participants rated each image on their competence at performing the four demanding jobs. These ratings were averaged to create a competence score. The same mixed model ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of objectification,  $F(1,78) = 93.67$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.54$ , with objectified targets judged as less competent than non-objectified targets (Table 2). This effect was not qualified by target or participant gender,  $ps > 0.30$ . This result replicates Heflick and Goldenberg's (2009) finding and extends it to male targets.

Table 2. Mean ratings of mind attribution and moral status for objectified and non-objectified targets

	Non-objectified	Objectified
MSA	4.86 <sup>b</sup>	4.57 <sup>a</sup>
GMA	5.36 <sup>b</sup>	4.21 <sup>a</sup>
IQ	108.94 <sup>b</sup>	98.16 <sup>a</sup>
Competence	4.52 <sup>b</sup>	3.55 <sup>a</sup>
Experience	4.65 <sup>b</sup>	4.52 <sup>a</sup>
Patience	4.60 <sup>b</sup>	4.34 <sup>a</sup>
Pain	2.19 <sup>b</sup>	2.47 <sup>a</sup>

Values with the same superscript in the same row do not differ,  $p > 0.05$ .

Table 3. Mean ratings of experience and patience for male and female, objectified and non-objectified targets

	Male target		Female target	
	Non-objectified	Objectified	Non-objectified	Objectified
Experience	4.68 <sup>a</sup>	4.40 <sup>b</sup>	4.62 <sup>a</sup>	4.64 <sup>a</sup>
Patience	4.57 <sup>a</sup>	4.17 <sup>b</sup>	4.62 <sup>a</sup>	4.50 <sup>a</sup>

Values with the same superscript *in the same row* do not differ,  $p > 0.05$ .

### Moral Status

Participants completed two morality scales: Experience and moral patience. Examining the Experience scale, a mixed model ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of objectification,  $F(1,78) = 5.66$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$  (Table 2). This was qualified by a two-way interaction between objectification and target gender,  $F(1,78) = 14.10$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.15$ . Simple effects analysis revealed that objectified men were seen as lacking Experience compared with non-objectified men,  $F(1,78) = 18.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . This effect did not emerge for female targets,  $F(1,78) = 0.11$ ,  $p = 0.73$  (Table 3). Turning to the patience scale, a mixed model ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of objectification,  $F(1,78) = 12.81$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.14$  (Table 2), which was qualified by a 2-way interaction between objectification and target gender,  $F(1,78) = 4.35$ ,  $p = 0.040$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$ . Simple effects analysis revealed that ratings of female targets were not affected by objectification,  $F(1,78) = 1.52$ ,  $p = 0.22$ . By contrast, objectified men were seen as lacking patience compared with non-objectified men,  $F(1,78) = 17.28$ ,  $p < 0.001$  (Table 3).

The final moral status task involved the assignment of pain tablets to each target. A mixed model ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of objectification,  $F(1,78) = 11.52$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.13$ , with objectified targets given more tablets than non-objectified targets (Table 2). This effect was not qualified by any interactions,  $ps > 0.30$ . Across these three measures of moral status, an interesting picture emerges. Compared with non-objectified targets, the objectified are denied moral status. However, this is qualified by target, but not perceiver, gender.

### Discussion

The aim of Study 2 was two-fold: To replicate Study 1 and to examine potential target gender and perceiver gender interactions. The results largely replicated the findings of Study 1. The main effect of objectification emerged for all comparisons with objectified targets denied both mind and moral status, although some effects were qualified by interactions. Interestingly, participant gender appeared to have little effect on ratings. This perhaps suggests that both men and women depersonalize the objectified. On the two variables with the most apparent real-world implications (i.e., competence and pain allocation), there was *only* a main effect of objectification. Our findings for competence replicate and extend those of Heflick and Goldenberg (2009) through a wider range of targets and jobs.

Importantly, this study highlighted the role of target gender. Three of the seven dependent measures showed higher order interactions with target gender. It was objectified *male* targets who were attributed fewer mental states, less experience, and less moral patience. This result surprisingly suggests that objectification may have an equal or even greater effect on the perception of males as it does on the perception of females. Given the focus of previous work on females, the current work suggests that the objectification of males may warrant future attention. The absence of any higher-order perceiver gender interactions suggests that this is not an intergroup effect. Instead, it may be that when both female and male targets are present people attribute more moral status to women. If this is the case, the results may reflect the belief that women should be protected (*cf.* benevolent sexism, Glick & Fiske, 1996). Alternatively, the results could reflect a social norm against objectifying women<sup>4</sup> or a motivation to avoid appearing sexist (Klonis, Plant, & Devine, 2005). Such a norm or motivation may not exist for men.

<sup>4</sup>We would like to thank Russell Spears for this suggestion.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

In two studies we have demonstrated that objectification influences depersonalization, specifically the attribution of mind and moral status. As objectification increased, mind attribution decreased and moral status was withdrawn. Although this emerged as a main effect in almost all analyses, Study 2 revealed the important qualifying role of target gender.

The finding that objectification results in dementalization for both male and female targets suggests that depersonalization is an important aspect of the objectification process itself, rather than being limited to a specific gender. Although previous research has shown that features inherent in the target can influence mind attribution (Morewedge et al., 2007), it appears that target gender does not do so in this context. This finding relates to recent research suggesting that male objectification is more common (Rohlinger, 2002) and damaging (Aubrey, 2006) than previously recognized. Just as research has begun to examine the deleterious impact of male self-objectification (e.g., Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005), the current research suggests that the processes related to objectification are not unique for female targets.

A particularly worrying original finding of this research is that objectification diminishes a second aspect of personhood, perceived moral status. Whether this reduction precipitates less moral treatment of objectified others is an important question for future research. Study 2 demonstrated that the objectified are assigned more pain tablets, a finding which may indicate that they are seen as less sensitive to pain or that we care less about their suffering. Feminist theorists have argued that objectification plays an important role in facilitating violence against women (Dworkin, 2000). We are currently investigating the link between objectification and aggression, and whether it may be mediated by depersonalization.

More broadly, the current studies provide empirical evidence for a long standing philosophical claim: Objectification involves depersonalization. Kant asserted that objectification is troublesome because it involves treating a person as merely an instrumentally useful object (Papadaki, 2007). Nussbaum (1995) similarly proposed that objectification has potentially dire consequences for the objectified, who may be seen to lack subjectivity and autonomy. Whether the form of depersonalization observed in these studies leads to the morally problematic consequences foreseen by these philosophers awaits future research.

In conclusion, the current research demonstrates a causal link between objectification and depersonalization. Objectification leads to people being viewed as lacking mental states and being less deserving of moral status. As the opening quote by Andrea Dworkin states, when objectification occurs, the person is depersonalized.

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