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Objectification: Seeing and treating people as things

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It is our pleasure to introduce a special issue of the *British Journal of Social Psychology* on the topic of objectification; seeing and treating other people as things. Here we draw together papers from scholars across the globe presenting a plurality of perspectives on the nature, causes, and consequences of objectification. As a sign of the health of the field, the work displays a diversity of methods, ranging from tightly controlled laboratory studies measuring both cognitive and physiological variables, to more traditional questionnaire and recall paradigms, to work conducted in the field. Informed by different theoretical perspectives, we hope that these papers showcase the breadth and depth of work on the topic of objectification. This special issue is timely; appearing 20 years after the publication which introduced objectification to social psychology (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). So, as the field approaches its 21st birthday, we can take a moment to reflect on its life so far.

At conception, the clear focus was the study of female objectification in the sexual domain. In the paper which launched a thousand studies, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) defined sexual objectification as a phenomenon that primarily affects women, that reduces their body, body parts or sexual functions to the mere status of instruments that are capable of representing her. Such a narrowed body focus is prevalent in Western cultures and socializes women to take a third-person perspective on their bodies, treating their physical selves as objects to be looked at and evaluated (i.e., self-objectification). Most of the work that build on these original ideas has demonstrated a cascade of negative physical, mental, and social consequences of self-objectification. The decade that followed saw rapid growth, as evidence for the physical and psychological damage of self-objectification mounted (see Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 2011; Moradi & Huang, 2008, for reviews). That evidence continues to grow today. In their paper, Holland and colleagues (this issue) show that everyday experiences of sexual objectification cause women to show increases in state self-objectification. Thus, as Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argued from the beginning, experienced objectification can be internalized as self-objectification. While most of the previous work focused on media influences or individual differences in state self-objectification, the current article clearly suggests that experiencing day-to-day sexually objectifying events lead to substantial increases in state self-objectification among young women.

Following the identification of female self-objectification, landmark studies revealed how inducing this state can undermine cognitive performance (Fredrickson, et al., 1998). The impairment of female cognitive performance as a function of self-objectification has been reported and replicated in several articles, but none have investigated the mechanisms underlying this decrement. Thanks to the work of Guizzo and Cadinu (this issue) we now know that this is partially a function of reduced psychological flow. Flow is a peak motivational state that is associated with enjoyment and creativity and leads to better performances on a wide range of abilities. In their research, Guizzo and Cadinu show that self-objectification is linked to lower levels of flow, which in turn reduces cognitive performance. In short, objectification research was born and thrived on an understanding of how people come to objectify themselves, and the consequences this has for their wellbeing.

By age 12 however, serious and sweeping changes were on the horizon that broadened the scope of objectification research. Ironically perhaps as the teenage years began the field became less 'self'-centered and started paying closer attention to other people. In 2009, Heflick and Goldenberg (2009) inverted the lens and looked at how we objectify *others*. They showed that objectification includes a dehumanization of the objectified, a finding that was quickly replicated and extended (Loughnan et al., 2010; Vaes et al., 2011; Rudman & Merscher, 2012). For example, other objectification was picked up with implicit measures suggesting that the dehumanization of objectified women might occur automatically. Indeed, when looking at sexualized women it appears to require effort *not* to objectify them. In their paper on regulatory control, Tyler and colleagues (this issue) find that resisting objectification requires considerable cognitive resources. This effort may also vary across the ovulatory cycle, with ovulating women more likely to dehumanize women in general compared to women who have a lower likelihood of conception (Piccoli et al, this issue). These results are interesting as they suggest that mate-attraction goals might be driving objectification processes among women. This focus on the objectification of others is now coming full circle. Examining reactions to being objectified, Loughnan and colleagues (this issue) find that people seem to internalize the objectifier's perspective, seeing themselves as less human. As such, the objectified see themselves in the same manner they are seen by the objectifiers. By focusing on how objectification can involve dehumanization, researchers have shed light on our understanding of how women are (mis)treated. In addition to the raft of negative consequences that come from self-objectification (Moradi & Huang, 2008), women who are objectified are deemed less worthy of moral concern. For instance, in two studies Pacilli and colleagues (this issue) show that objectifying a woman undermines her moral credentials and people's willingness to intervene when she is the victim of intimate partner violence.

As the field has aged it has branched out and tried its hand at many new things. New researchers often brought with them a desire to extend objectification beyond its traditional and fruitful focus on the sexual domain. We know that objectification can happen in the workplace. For instance, Baldissarri and colleagues (this issue) have found that repetitive, machine-like labor leads workers to see themselves as mere tools or instruments, adding new meaning to self-objectification. This worker self-perception may well align with how they are viewed by their employers, especially if those employers are driven by hard economic imperatives and profit maximization. Wang and Krumhuber (this issue) report that a love of money – and a sharp need for it – increases the extent to which people see others as mere instrumental means to a financial end and deprives them of elementary mental capacities. This theoretical expansion continues today. In their paper Brinol and colleagues (this issue) argue that physical objects can become part of the self, and that the immaterial (e.g., thoughts) can be objectified.

In 2015, a *European Association of Social Psychology* sponsored group meeting in Rovereto, Italy marked the field's 18th birthday and gave the impetus of the current special issue. Alongside the enormous gains in the understanding of self-objectification stood new understandings of how, when, why, and with what consequence we objectify other people. The papers presented in this special issue seek to showcase this new, inclusive perspective on objectification. It is our hope that this special issue will be generative for future research endeavors on objectification and help to ultimately uncover the ways it can be reduced.

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