# *OBJECTIFICATION AT WORK: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW, EMPIRICAL TESTS, AND A RETHINK OF THE "HUMANS-AS-RESOURCES" FORMULA*

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# OBJECTIFICATION AT WORK: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW, EMPIRICAL TESTS, AND A RETHINK OF THE "HUMANS-AS-RESOURCES" FORMULA

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2022

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**ABSTRACT**

Objectification—treating human beings as instrumental tools that are deprived of agency and experience—is a common element in many management theories and practices. Objectification seems to cater to the needs of employers attempting to maximize profits by objectifying employees. However, objectification undermines target employees' needs, interests, and well-being. This thesis seeks to address this dilemma by looking into relevant theories and empirical evidence with regard to workplace objectification. I first examine the prevailing logic of objectification in many of labor economics and management theories. Second, I report a systematic review of objectification research that summarizes and integrates what is known about the antecedents and consequences of objectification from three different perspectives: Objectifying others, self-objectification, and experiencing objectification. This review sheds light on the dilemma of objectification, by showing that people often objectify others in order to achieve their extrinsic goals, such as money and power, or to reduce subjectivity uncertainty, while thwarting the objectified targets' fundamental control, belonging, and self-esteem needs. Third, I present an empirical paper. Despite the negative impacts of objectification on the victims, I argue that objectification may have positive ancillary implications for the perpetrators. Drawing from system justification theory, I posit that especially in an organization characterized by higher power distance, objectifying supervisors would be afforded more power by their subordinates because they would deem such behavior as more typical (i.e., descriptive justification) and more desirable (i.e., prescriptive justification). Two experiments and

one field study with supervisor-subordinate dyads were conducted to test the hypotheses. The results showed that when power distance was higher, subordinates afforded more power to an objectifying supervisor through prescriptive (but not descriptive) justification. This thesis contributes to the objectification literature by offering a unifying framework of objectification and by demonstrating when and how supervisor objectification can be rationalized and perpetuated.

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# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

> Let's compare two jobs. Workers employed in firm X have a probability of fatal injury equal to $\rho_x$ and earn $\omega_x$ dollars per year. Workers employed in firm Y have a probability of fatal injury exceeding that in firm X by 0.001. The empirical evidence indicates that the riskier job, on average, pays about $8,700 more. (Borjas, 2019, p. 184)

*Objectification*—the treatment of human beings as instrumental tools that are deprived of agency and experience—renders the trade-off between human lives and economic rewards possible. As the opening quote from *Labor Economics* by George Borjas highlights, each human life is assigned a monetary value at work. By offering a compensating differential of $8,700 firm Y is able to nudge workers to accept the additional risk of fatal injury. Not only do firms constantly engage in the trade-off between life and profit, but also governments routinely apply the concept of the value of life in their policy-making, such as speed limit regulations on highways (Ashenfelter & Greenstone, 2004). In response to Covid-19, governments determine their disease control policy by calculating the costs and benefits: This cost/benefit analysis is based on a variety of factors including infection rates and the coping capacity of health care systems, but notably the calculation of the value of life plays a role as well. For instance, in United Kingdom it has been suggested that, "if we impose the condition that peak infection must not exceed what the health service can handle, it is optimal to dispense with lockdown when the value of life is below £1.56m" (Rowthorn & Maciejowski, 2020, p. S50). Such a calculation of the value of

life implies that human beings are reduced to the inanimate tools that serve an economic end. Since human life is treated as though it follows an economic logic, it would not be too surprising to see that intimacy, personal care, emotions, and other human qualities are likewise transformed into the commodities that can be bought and sold in the marketplace (Zelizer, 2010).

However, by no means can human labor be equated to an inanimate value-conferring tool. Employers who aspire to maximize profits through labor objectification tend to focus on employees' instrumental value in aiding economic goals, while disregarding employees' basic psychological needs (Shields & Grant, 2010; Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018). Indeed, objectification undermines employees' fundamental needs for control, belonging, and self-esteem (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020; Demoulin et al., 2021; Poon, Chen, Teng, & Wong, 2020). Employees who are objectified also perceive themselves as less warm, competent, moral, and human (Loughnan, Baldissarri, Spaccatini, & Elder, 2017). This is accompanied by further deleterious consequences, such that objectified employees experience more negative emotions, report lower organizational-based self-esteem (Demoulin et al., 2021), exhibit more aggression (Poon et al., 2020), and have a higher intention to quit (Bell & Khoury, 2016). Hence this thesis seeks to address this dilemma that employers' pursuit of profits via objectification often undermines employees' needs, interests, and well-being by focusing on the concept of objectification.

In particular, this thesis attempts to integrate the diverse theoretical perspectives

on objectification, and to summarize the extant empirical evidence on the antecedents and consequences of objectification in work contexts. Although sexual objectification research has a clear theoretical basis rooted in sexist ideologies (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), the extant research on objectification outside of the sexual realm lacks a unifying theoretical framework, and often latches on to sexual objectification research. However, studying objectification through a sexism approach might pose a limitation on our understanding of objectification at work, and hinder research progress in this domain. One primary aim of this thesis is therefore to provide a comprehensive framework that integrates relevant theories and empirical evidence with regard to workplace objectification.

Although prior research has shown that objectification has profound negative impacts on the victims, much less attention has been devoted to the perpetrators of objectification. Indeed, little is known about how people think about or respond to objectifiers. To address this deficiency, this thesis also examines the perceptional and behavioral consequences of objectification for the objectifiers. Of particular interest in this thesis is when and how supervisor objectification can be accepted and sustained. Another major purpose of this thesis is therefore to investigate when objectifying supervisors are perceived as fair and are afforded power by their subordinates, whereby workplace objectification can be rationalized and perpetuated.

Objectification is deeply rooted in labor economics and management theories. It is often taken for granted that workers sell their time and labor to employers for monetary returns, and that workers' needs are rarely employers' concern. What

employers purchase from workers is their time, which workers are presumed to use for their employers' benefit (Braverman, 1974; Pfeffer & DeVoe, 2012). It is the root assumption in labor economics that firms aspire to maximize profits by making production decisions and correspondingly decisions on labor utilization that best serve the *consumers' needs* (Borjas, 2019). Meanwhile, on the side of labor supply, it is assumed that people work for monetary rewards so as to buy desired goods in the marketplace. That is, the employment relationship is essentially marked by the transaction between capital and labor. In fact, a firm's output is produced by any combination of capital and labor, and capital and labor are perfect substitutes whenever the rate of exchange between capital and labor is constant (Borjas, 2019). Likewise, according to labor economics, workers with similar skills are considered to be perfect substitutes for one another. In other words, labor economics conceptualizes human labor in a way that legitimizes objectification of workers—the treatment of human beings as instrumental objects that are to be used to generate profits for firms, just like work machines.

Extending this conceptualization, a primary concern of management is to facilitate the control over labor process so as to ensure that workers do use their time for their employers' benefit while at work (Pfeffer & DeVoe, 2012). Once again, workers' needs are rarely their employers' major concern. Aligning with employers' profit-maximizing objective, management theories and practices tend to regard workers as resource objects that are to be fully utilized. Among these management attempts are agency theory, human capital theory, and control or compliance oriented

human resource systems and practices. For instance, agency theory explicitly specifies the agency relationship in which the principal (e.g., employer) delegates work to the agent (e.g., employee). It contends that the principal and agent have divergent desires or goals, and that governance mechanisms shall be in place to curb the agent's self-serving behavior and ensure that the agent behaves in the interests of the principal (Eisenhardt, 1989). Likewise, with the agenda to reduce the indeterminacy involved in the employment contract, human resource management provides a variety of technologies that render employees knowable, measurable, calculable, and governable (Townley, 1993). As Shields and Grant put it, objectification is "the most proximal, intimate and (potentially) insidious facet of labor utilization" (2010, p. 62).

However, these textbook theories often fail to match the lived reality and function less effectively than one might expect, for the very reason that people who are categorized as workers are, first and foremost, human beings who think, feel, and have their own needs and need-fulfilling pursuit other than material one. With these managerial attempts to construct humans as resource objects, people indeed feel more objectified in a work (vs. non-work) context (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). Employees who experience more objectification at work report more negative emotions, lower job satisfaction, lower sense of belonging, lower sense of control, lower organizational-based self-esteem, more burnout, more aggression, and higher turnover intention (e.g., Baldissarri, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2014; Belmi & Schroeder, 2020; Poon et al., 2020), which arguably has consequential implications for employers

(Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018). The "work-for-money" argument is also debatable, as evidenced by the fact that lawyers who enjoy high incomes nevertheless show low satisfaction with their employers and jobs, and as a consequence leave their organizations and profession in relatively large numbers (Kaveny, 2001; Pfeffer & DeVoe, 2012). This highlights the dilemma that employers' pursuit of profits by objectification undermines employees' needs and interests. The question arises as to how profitability and employee thriving can be achieved simultaneously.

Indeed, an approach to tackle this issue may lie in altering the fundamental orientation towards employees—that is, to undo the "humans-as-resource-objects" mode, or to treat employees as ends in and of themselves, not just as the means to an end. More specifically, instead of treating employees as fixed mechanical resource objects to be monitored and managed by ever-more sophisticated techniques, employers may benefit from respecting employees' needs and feelings, and fostering employee growth or development. Human Relations Movement made such an effort in recognizing the welfare of workers, as do more recent management approaches such as employee commitment and involvement strategies. From a psychological perspective, self-determination theory also highlights the welfare of workers, and contends that individuals have basic needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and that need satisfaction fosters personal development as well as productivity (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Employers who support (vs. thwart) employees' basic needs can achieve a more motivated and productive workforce (Olafsen, Deci, & Halvari, 2018), which can be translated into a sustainable growth in profits. Furthermore, in

the strategic management literature, it has been argued that a firm needs to incorporate this people-centered management into its strategy, rather than limiting it to a role of "strategy implementer" (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 1988; Snell & Morris, 2021). That is, people can be regarded as having strategic capacity to generate or select competitive choices, along with or beyond implementing strategy. In sum, there are alternatives to objectification in conceptualizing human labor.

In this thesis, I critique the taken-for-granted assumption underlying many of labor economics and management theories that labor objectification is inevitable and necessary in order to achieve economic goals. I argue that economic objectives can be achieved by not treating workers as mechanical objects, but rather by respecting workers' fundamental needs, feelings, and self-determination. In the remainder of this chapter, I first draw a distinction between labor commodification and objectification, and then show that it is a market-pricing mode (a mental model) rather than commodification per se that triggers objectification. I examine the prevailing logic of objectification in labor economics and management theories, and show the limitations of understanding labor process by taking an objectifying perspective. Drawing on research on need, motivation, and value systems, I further illustrate from a psychological perspective the driving forces of objectification and corresponding consequences.

Furthermore, this thesis also comprises a systematic review and an empirical paper. To offer a comprehensive and critical review of objectification research, Chapter 2 presents a more detailed systematic review paper that summarizes and

integrates what is known about the antecedents and consequences of objectification from three different perspectives: Objectifying others, self-objectification, and experiencing objectification. Chapter 3 presents an empirical paper where two experiments and one field study were conducted to examine when objectifying supervisors would be perceived as fair and afforded power by their subordinates, whereby workplace objectification could be rationalized and perpetuated. In the general discussion chapter, building upon theoretical and empirical work, alternative approaches to understanding labor process are discussed, in terms of how to achieve profitability and employee thriving simultaneously.

This thesis provides several theoretical contributions. As my main contribution, I advance theorizing about objectification by integrating diverse perspectives from labor economics, management, and psychology. In particular, from a psychological perspective, I show that objectification in the labor context originates from a market-pricing mode (Fiske, 1991, 1992), such that people think of others and themselves in a calculative utilitarian way. Chapter 2 presents a systematic review of objectification at work, and builds up a unifying framework of objectification by integrating the extent research on objectification. This systematic review also identifies major theoretical and methodological issues facing objectification research, and offers pragmatic directions for future research.

Second, this thesis explores how employers' pursuit of profit via labor objectification can be counterproductive, and why labor objectification is a managerial aspiration that may never be fully fulfilled. This thesis adds to the streams

of management research that seek to satisfy the interests of both workers and employers, but also extends the literature by offering a psychological perspective based on needs, motivations, and values (Deci et al., 2017; Dweck, 2017; Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012). In Chapter 2, I show that objectification is often driven by extrinsic aspirations, such as money and power, while it undermines target workers' intrinsic aspects such as fundamental control, belonging, and self-esteem needs. With the limitations and downsides of objectification in mind, alternative approaches to understanding labor process are discussed. Specifically in the general discussion chapter, I argue that by thinking beyond extrinsic aspirations and considering the full spectrum of workers' needs, motivations, and values, employers have a greater chance to invigorate workers as well as business.

Third, this thesis extends the objectification literature by examining when and how objectification can be justified and sustained. In Chapter 3, drawing on system justification theory (Jost, 2020; Jost & Banaji, 1994), a series of empirical studies were conducted to illustrate when and why an objectifying supervisor would be granted power, whereby workplace objectification could be sustained rather than challenged. More broadly, this thesis contributes to labor management theorizing by uncovering the objectification feature that a variety of management theories and practices have in common: Instead of speaking in the seemingly benevolent "human resources" term, this thesis uncovers how workers are in fact reduced to resource objects—a labor process that is rendered possible through "human resources management" discourse—by offering the concept "objectification". In this sense, this

thesis hopefully empowers workers to challenge employers' objectifying practices, and to achieve their own individual and/or collective self-determination.

In the following sections, I first draw a distinction between labor commodification and objectification in order to demonstrate that objectification is a problematic and unnecessary practice of labor utilization before turning to a more psychological theorizing of objectification.

## Origins of Objectification

### Labor Commodification and Objectification

As one of the defining features of market capitalism, *commodification* refers to the process of assigning market value to the goods or services that once existed outside the sphere of market (Marx, 1867/1978). Commodification enables the transformation of labor or the product of labor into a commodity that can be bought and sold in the marketplace. The scope of commodification has been expanding to various realms that were once regarded as private, personal, intimate, or put another way, should not be equated with a price tag. For instance, you would regard it as ridiculous if someone offers you a million dollars for your daughter (Rai & Fiske, 2011). Nevertheless, commodification has been proliferating and permeating throughout domains of life, whereby fetus, marriage, intimacy, and personal care are rendered as purchasable (Constable, 2009). This raises a question of "what—if anything—exists outside of commodity exchange" (Russ, 2005, p. 142).

However, it is important to note that labor commodification does not necessarily crowd out altruism, benevolence, intimacy, compassion, or warm sentiment. Take

surrogacy as an example. The labor of a surrogate mother can be a labor of altruism (Anderson, 1990). Empirical data showed that some commercial surrogate mothers exercised their self-determination in participating in surrogacy, were content with surrogacy experience, and regarded it as noble deed to relinquish the fetus (Naik, 2017). While those surrogacy mothers attempt to make the most out of their reproductive potential through engaging in commercial surrogacy, other people who disapprove of surrogacy may consider it as dehumanizing and objectifying. Notably, commodification opens up channels for people to make whatever arrangements they desire for themselves, but it is still open to each individual to make the decision about whether or not to partake in certain market exchange. As what is perceived to be exchangeable varies from one person to another, there is also a great variability in the process of market exchange (Zelizer, 2010). The process of market exchange can either be cold, objectifying or warm-hearted (Henkel, Boegershausen, Hoegg, Aquino, & Lemmink, 2018). That is, labor commodification does not preclude altruism, benevolence, or intimacy in the exchange process. Nor does labor commodification inevitably contaminate what can be purchased from the market (e.g., fetus is still invaluable; Zelizer, 2010).

Therein lies a difference between market as an institution and market as a cognitive frame (Gold, 2019). A market as an institution is a hybrid whereby people can either adopt a market frame or do not. Likewise, people can utilize a market frame (or not) in a non-market institution. For instance, a market frame can be applied to marriage and child-rearing, such that some married couples manage their relationships

like a business with the pursuit of economic gains (Brooks, 2005), and measure the monetary value of their own children (Radin, 1996). In other words, people can apply a market frame and treat others as instrumental tools that serve an economic end in market as well as non-market settings.

As labor commodification does not necessarily entail an impersonal or purely economic exchange, neither does it inevitably lead to objectification of workers. As noted earlier, *objectification* is defined as the treatment of human beings as instrumental tools that are deprived of humanity (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020; Gray, Knobe, Sheskin, Bloom, & Barrett, 2011; Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008; Nussbaum, 1995). Workers experience objectification when they are reduced to inanimate tools that serve objectifiers' goals, and when they are deprived of agency (the capacity to plan to act) and experience (the capacity to sense and feel). Objectification originates from a market-pricing mode as a mental model that people adopt in relating to others (Fiske, 1991, 1992). For instance, consumers who adopt a more market-pricing mode objectify customer service employees to a greater extent by attributing less human qualities to those employees (Henkel, Boegershausen, Hoegg, Aquino, & Lemmink, 2018). In other words, it is a market-pricing mode (a mental model) rather than commodification per se that triggers objectification.

**Market-Pricing Mode**

Alan Fiske (1992) theorized the market-pricing mode as one of four fundamental relational models that people use to generate most kinds of social interaction. People in a work context especially tend to adopt a market-pricing mode to construct and

construe relationships: People take a calculative utilitarian approach in relating to others, and constantly engage in cost/benefit analyses in decision making (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). That is, individuals who adopt a market-pricing mode are likely to accept the trade-off between monetary gains and human life, as embodied in the notion of value of life. It is important to note that a market-pricing mode is not limited to marketplace exchange, but rather it refers to a generic relational model where people utilize some proportional standards or metrics so as to make rational calculations of costs and benefits (Fiske, 1992). For instance, followers who adopt the market-pricing mode in relating to their leaders would expect the leaders adhere to explicit contracts and allocate rewards in proportion to task input (Giessner & van Quaquebeke, 2010). Fiske (1992) proposed that market-pricing mode also shapes how a person views the self, such that the self is primarily defined in terms of an occupation or economic role, and that achievement is the major motivation. In addition, under a market-pricing mode, people believe that time should be spent efficiently and effectively in terms of rates of interest, pay or productivity. In short, a market-pricing mode tends to elicit objectification of both oneself and others, as exemplified by the perception of oneself and other people as instrumental tools that serve an economic goal (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2018; Henkel, Boegershausen, Hoegg, Aquino, & Lemmink, 2018; Wang & Krumhuber, 2017).

The market-pricing theorizing of objectification has demonstrated its predictive power and robustness by receiving support from empirical studies. Belmi and Schroeder (2020) found that people objectified others more in work contexts than

non-work contexts, because they engaged in a more calculative and strategic thinking. When people worked in an environment in which their economic outcomes depended more on others, they were also more likely to view others in an instrumental fashion and choose a competent partner over a sociable one (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2018). Likewise, a salient performance goal or performance incentive could lead people to approach a more instrumental target (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008; Hur, Lee-Yoon, & Whillans, 2018).

Furthermore, both behavioral and neurological data offered support for the market-pricing mechanism underlying objectification (Harris, Lee, Capestany, & Cohen, 2014; Teng, Chen, Poon, Zhang, & Jiang, 2016). In an experimental context that simulated a labor market, participants showed reduced activity in the social cognition brain network (a dehumanized brain response; including superior temporal gyrus, middle frontal gyrus, postcentral gyrus, caudate, medial prefrontal cortex, cingulate gyrus, inferior frontal gyrus, and superior temporal gyrus) when assigning economic value to people in the labor market or viewing purchased targets (Harris et al., 2014). Separate valuation systems were observed in reactions towards purchased versus non-purchased targets, such that activation in social cognition brain regions modulated revaluation behavior towards purchased targets, while activation in medial orbito-frontal cortex (traditional valuation regions) predicted revaluation behavior towards non-purchased targets (Harris et al., 2014).

Presuming a market-pricing mode, labor economics and management theories often conceptualize labor in a way that legitimizes objectification of workers. Labor

economics assume that firms want to maximize profits by making the production decisions and associated decisions on labor utilization that best serve the consumers' needs (Borjas, 2019). This implies that firms want to maximize profits by hiring more workers when labor is cheap, and less workers when labor is expensive. This labor demand of firms conflicts with workers' interests, as it is assumed that workers are more motivated to supply their services at higher wage. On the side of labor supply, utility function specifies that people derive happiness from the consumption of goods and leisure (time spent not working), and an individual intends to maximize utility by choosing a certain combination of consumption of goods and leisure; that is, at a optimal combination of consumption of goods and leisure, the rate at which an individual trades leisure time for consumption of goods equals the wage rate that is determined by the market (Borjas, 2019). In other words, workers exchange their time and labor for nothing but economic returns, and workers' needs other than economic one are out of the question.

As employers tend to purchase workers' time, employers have to achieve control over how workers spend that time so as to ensure profit from the transaction. A primary concern of management is to facilitate the control over labor process so as to ensure that workers do use their time for their employers' benefit while at work (Pfeffer & DeVoe, 2012). Notably, because "what the worker sells, and what the capitalist buys, is not an agreed amount of labor, but the power to labor an agreed period of time" (Braverman, 1974, p. 54), employers need to put an effort to make the most out of labor power. Aligning with employers' profit-maximizing objective,

management theories and practices tend to treat workers as resource objects that are to be fully utilized. In particular, human resource management associates workers with value-conferring tools, and devises a variety of technologies that render workers knowable, measurable, calculable, and thereby governable (Shields & Grant, 2010; Townley, 1993). The choices of how to reward workers, such as hourly payment and pay-for-performance, reflect the effort to make more out of labor power.

Taken together, although labor commodification does not imply a purely economic exchange, it is often the case in theory and in practice that workers are reduced to instrumental tools that serve an economic end. The market-pricing mode provides a theoretical foundation for understanding objectification at work: Objectification often occurs when people take a calculative utilitarian approach in relating to others, and when they engage in cost/benefit analyses in decision making. However, there are potential costs and downsides of objectification, as it highlights the economic part of workers while ignoring other psychological needs, motivations, and values of workers. An objectifying view of workers is also limited in the sense that any attempt that reduces workers to numbers on some evaluative matrix yields at best an imperfect estimation (McGregor, 1972). Drawing on research on need, motivation, and value systems (Deci et al., 2017; Dweck, 2017; Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012), I further illustrate from a psychological perspective what drives objectification and what consequences it generates in the next section.

## Understanding Objectification in Terms of Needs, Motivations, and Values

When people are treated as “human resources” to be fully utilized, it implies that

people are rendered known, measured, calculated, ordered, and valued in some certain ways (Townley, 1993). As the market-pricing theorizing of objectification suggests, a calculative utilitarian frame is activated in a work context, and objectified targets are reduced to instrumental tools that serve some particular goals. Although from an employer's point of view, workforces are evaluated in terms of their instrumental value in aiding economic goals, it remains less clear what specific work arrangement or aspect of work causes individual employees to feel objectified in their day-to-day work life. This section seeks to identify what this calculative utilitarian frame involves, what are driving forces underlying objectification, and what implications objectification has particularly for the objectified employees. Research on needs, motivations, and values (Deci et al., 2017; Dweck, 2017; Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012) may lend an insight into these issues.

**Motivational Forces of Objectification**

Self-determination theory (Deci et al., 2017; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996) differentiates between extrinsic aspirations and intrinsic aspirations that people pursue as important goals. Extrinsic aspirations, including financial wealth, recognition or fame, and attractive image, involve instrumental behavior that is intended to achieve a separate outcome (Deci et al., 2017). By contrast, intrinsic aspirations, including personal development, meaningful relationships, and physical health, involve more autonomously motivated behavior, that is, the motivation lies more in the behavior itself (Deci et al., 2017). In a similar vein, the theory of basic individual values (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012)

suggests that values form a circular motivational continuum expressive of self-protection versus growth. Self-protection values (e.g., power, achievement, and conformity) are directed towards protecting the self against anxiety, and emphasize self-restriction, self-enhancement, and order (Schwartz et al., 2012). They conflict with growth values (e.g., universalism, benevolence, and self-direction) that are relatively anxiety-free and emphasize self-expansion (Schwartz et al., 2012).

Aligning with extrinsic aspirations and self-protection values, objectification entails instrumental behavior that is often driven by external, controlled, or anxiety-avoidance goals, such as an individual advancement goal (Shea & Fitzsimons, 2016) and the pursuit of money (Wang & Krumhuber, 2017). More specifically, because extrinsic aspirations and self-protection values heighten people's tendency to think of others and the self in a calculative utilitarian way in terms of instrumental value in furthering one's outcomes, extrinsic aspirations and self-protection values lead people to objectify others and the self more than intrinsic aspirations and growth values do. Supporting this account, research showed that the pursuit of money enhanced the appraisal and approach of the social targets who were instrumental to goal achievement (Teng et al., 2016; Wang & Krumhuber, 2017). Power also led to viewing and approaching social targets as instruments for goal attainment (Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Schaerer, du Plessis, Yap, & Thau, 2018). Likewise, people with an individual advancement goal viewed others more on the basis of their instrumental value than did those with an interpersonal affiliation goal (Shea & Fitzsimons, 2016). Extrinsic goals were also associated with self-objectification, such that individuals

with higher performance expectancy engaged in more job search related self-objectification (Nistor & Stanciu, 2017). In other words, *it is extrinsic goals and values that tend to elicit objectification of others and the self*.

In terms of job characteristics, work that features external regulation, restricts autonomy, or highlights an extrinsic focus tends to contribute to objectification. Andrighetto, Baldissarri, and Volpato (2017) found that workers whose job was characterized as fragmented, repetitive, and dependent on the machine were perceived as more instrument-like, and less able to experience mental states. Those work features were also associated with self-objectification, such that people who performed a more fragmented, repetitive, and other-directed activity perceived themselves as being more instrument-like, and as having less human mental states including emotions, perceptions, thoughts, wishes, and intentions (Andrighetto et al., 2018; Baldissarri, 2017; Baldissarri, Andrighetto, Bernardo, & Annoni, 2020; Baldissarri, Andrighetto, Gabbiadini, & Volpato, 2017; Baldissarri, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2019). In addition, people engaged more in objectification when a job featured more reward interdependence (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2018), performance-based (vs. fixed) incentive (Hur et al., 2018), and high (vs. low) peer evaluation (Hur et al., 2018). These effects were in part explained by perceived alienation, that is, workers were perceived to be alienated from their act of production (Baldissarri, Valtorta, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2017).

Taken together, extrinsic goals drive people to objectify others and the self, and correspondingly work conditions that highlight an extrinsic focus contribute to

objectification. Self-determination theory and the theory of basic individual values add to the market-pricing theorizing of objectification by indicating the motivational forces underlying objectification. While the market-pricing theorizing suggests that objectification entails a calculative utilitarian frame, self-determination theory and the theory of basic individual values further specify that a calculative utilitarian frame is activated in order to achieve more extrinsic goals (e.g., power and money) than intrinsic ones.

**Need-Thwarting Effects of Objectification**

As self-determination theory suggests an inherent conflict between extrinsic aspirations and intrinsic aspirations, and as the theory of basic individual values suggests a conflict between self-protection values and growth values, people who are attuned to extrinsic aspirations and self-protection values are likely to disregard intrinsic aspirations and growth values (Deci et al., 2017; Schwartz et al., 2012). Because objectification is more driven by extrinsic goals and values than intrinsic ones, people who objectify others focus more on the others' instrumental value in aiding extrinsic goal achievement, and are less attuned to the others' needs or concerns (Kasser, 2002; Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2007). Supporting this account, research showed that in a medical context, people who objectified the physician recalled fewer personal facts about the physician, but expected the physician to know more about them (Schroeder & Fishbach, 2015). An experimental study found that participants who objectified employees more in terms of occupational roles were more likely to be harsh with employees and to fire an

employee who violated company policy (Landau, Sullivan, Keefer, Rothschild, & Osman, 2012).

From the perspective of people being objectified, they reported that objectification undermined their fundamental control, belonging, and self-esteem needs (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020; Demoulin et al., 2021; Poon et al., 2020). As a consequence, prospective job seekers who perceived more organizational objectification showed less interest in applying to work at that organization (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). People who felt more objectified by their organization were more likely to experience negative emotions, report lower organizational-based self-esteem, use avoidance coping strategies (Demoulin et al., 2021), and have a higher intention to quit (Bell & Khoury, 2016). The experience of being objectified also triggered burnout (exhaustion and cynicism; Baldissarri et al., 2014) and aggression (Poon et al., 2020).

To summarize, objectification threatens objectified targets' fundamental control, belonging, and self-esteem needs, and those who are objectified in turn exhibit more passive or negative affect, work attitudes, and work engagement. People who are objectified may suffer more than what extant research has documented within and beyond a work context, for the reason that those basic needs for control, belonging and self-esteem are critical to individuals' well-being and optimal development (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Dweck, 2017; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

## Overview of the Thesis

This thesis comprises a systematic review paper (Chapter 2) and an empirical paper (Chapter 3). These chapters are autonomous papers that have been submitted to journals for review. This approach was taken to facilitate publication and was approved by my supervisors.

Chapter 2 presents a systematic review paper on objectification at work. This review offers a comprehensive framework that summarizes and integrates what is known about the antecedents and consequences of objectification from three different perspectives: Objectifying others, self-objectification, and experiencing objectification. This review also addresses the key conceptualization issues of objectification by clarifying how objectification overlaps with and diverges from other constructs (i.e., dehumanization and sexual objectification), and by presenting a clear and concise definition of objectification. Moreover, this review examines both theoretical and methodological issues and concerns in this research domain, and suggests future research directions that may enrich our understanding of objectification.

Chapter 3 presents an empirical paper that examines when and why objectifying supervisors are afforded power by their subordinates. Drawing from system justification theory (Jost, 2020; Jost & Banaji, 1994), I posit that especially in organizations characterized by higher power distance, objectifying supervisors would be afforded more power by their subordinates, because they would deem such behavior as more typical (i.e., descriptive justification) and more desirable (i.e., prescriptive justification). Two experiments ($N$ = 443 and $N$ = 211) and one field

survey with dyads of supervisors and subordinates ($N$ = 122) were conducted to examine the hypotheses. This research contributes to objectification literature by demonstrating when and how supervisor objectification can be rationalized and perpetuated through granting objectifiers power.

Chapter 4 summarizes the findings of the systematic review and empirical studies. To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of objectification, I offer an integrative framework that articulates the processes of objectification from a multilevel perspective. This multilevel theorizing of objectification helps connect different levels and theoretical perspectives. In addition, alternative approaches to understanding labor process are discussed, in terms of how to achieve profitability and employee thriving simultaneously. The limitations of this thesis and future directions are discussed before reaching a conclusion.

# CHAPTER 2

# HUMANS OR MACHINES? A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF OBJECTIFICATION AT WORK

This chapter is based on the manuscript: Zhang, B., Wisse, B., & Lord, R. G. (2021). Humans or machines? A systematic review of objectification at work.

Acknowledgements: We thank Les Graham, Chia-Huei Wu, and Olga Epitropaki for the helpful comments received during discussions of earlier work.

# HUMANS OR MACHINES? A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF OBJECTIFICATION AT WORK

In Chapter 1, I show that objectification in a work context originates from a market-pricing mode, such that people think of others and themselves in a calculative utilitarian way. I examine the prevailing logic of objectification in labor economics and management theories, and show that an objectifying view of workers is limited insofar as it highlights the economic part of workers while ignoring their psychological needs, motivations, and values. From a psychological perspective, I further argue that objectification is more driven by extrinsic goals and values than intrinsic ones, and that objectification threatens objectified targets' fundamental control, belonging, and self-esteem needs. To offer a comprehensive and critical review of objectification research, Chapter 2 presents a more detailed systematic review paper that summarizes and integrates what is known about the antecedents and consequences of objectification from three different perspectives: Objectifying others, self-objectification, and experiencing objectification. This systematic review also identifies major theoretical and methodological issues facing objectification research, and offers pragmatic directions for future research.

## Introduction

The commonly utilized term "human resource management" has the connotation that humans are viewed as fungible resources or value-conferring tools in the workplace. With the term "human resource", employees might feel objectified and get the impression that "the company has forgotten [about] the people, emphasizing

business over employees" (Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018, p. 107); their sole purpose is to hit the performance targets in exchange for money—full stop (Laaser & Bolton, 2017). *Objectification*—the treatment of human beings as instrumental objects without any needs or feelings regarding the work—poses a fundamental threat to human dignity, because by no means can employees be equated to work machines. As such, employees who feel objectified report lower job satisfaction, lower sense of belonging, more burnout, more aggression, and higher turnover intention (e.g., Baldissarri et al., 2014; Belmi & Schroeder, 2020; Poon et al., 2020). The negative impact of objectification spills over into interpersonal relationships outside of work as well (i.e., with family and friends; Hur et al., 2018), and can be long-lasting given that it damages a person's perceptions of the self (Baldissarri, Andrighetto, et al., 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2019).

Yet, despite the negative effects on employees, employers who aspire to transform human labor into economic value may feel tempted to objectify their employees. Indeed, because employers' primary agenda is to maximize profits via labor utilization, objectification is deeply rooted in management practices and theories (Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018), including but not limited to pay-for-performance, human capital theory, and social exchange theory. Objectification is also rooted in labor economics, such that it is assumed that a firm's output is produced by any combination of capital and labor, and that capital and labor are perfect substitutes whenever the rate of exchange between capital and labor is constant (Borjas, 2019). Likewise, workers of similar skills are perfect substitutes for one another. As Shields

and Grant (2010) put it, objectification is “the most proximal, intimate and (potentially) insidious facet of labor utilization” (p. 62). Hence this review seeks to address this dilemma that employers’ pursuit of profits by objectification often undermines employees’ interests and well-being.

In this review, we attempt to integrate the diverse theoretical perspectives on objectification, and to summarize the extant empirical evidence on the antecedents and consequences of objectification within organizational contexts. A systematic review is critical and timely, because the objectification literature is quickly growing yet still fragmented. Although sexual objectification research has a clear theoretical basis rooted in sexist ideologies (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), the extant research on objectification outside of the sexual realm lacks a unifying theoretical framework, and often seeks support from sexual objectification research. However, studying objectification through a sexism approach might pose a limitation on our understanding of objectification at work, and hinder research progress in this domain. The goal of this review is therefore to provide a comprehensive framework that integrates relevant theories and empirical evidence with regard to workplace objectification, and to identify both theoretical and methodological recommendations. Our desire is to provide a foundation for scholars to build upon as to make further contributions to objectification research.

This review is organized as follows. First, we review the theories of objectification across disciplines, and present the conceptualizations of objectification. We distinguish it from two close constructs, namely sexual objectification and

dehumanization, and seek to address the conceptual confusion by presenting a clear and concise definition of objectification. We then illustrate that objectification originates from a market-pricing mode that people adopt in relating to others (Fiske, 1991, 1992). Second, we review the empirical studies of the antecedents and consequences of objectification, along with describing how objectification is manipulated and/or measured in each study. Third, we examine both theoretical and methodological issues and concerns in this research domain, and suggest future research directions that may enrich our understanding of objectification. Lastly, we conclude with a discussion of the practical implications.

## Theoretical Foundations

The question of what is objectification has been debated for a long time and can be traced back to philosophical literature. Immanuel Kant defined objectification as "the lowering of a person, a being with humanity, to the status of an object" (Kant, 1797/1996, p. 209). Karl Marx (1867/1976) maintained that capitalism stimulates the perception of the value of humans by their production of labor; other qualities of humans become irrelevant to the nexus among members of society in the market economy. Building upon a great variety of works covering feminism, slavery and Marx's analysis of capitalism, Nussbaum (1995) conceptualized objectification as "treating as an object what is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being" (p. 257), which involves treating people as an instrumental tool of one's purposes, as lacking in autonomy and subjectivity, and as something that is interchangeable with other objects and that can be bought, owned, or sold.

**A Definition of Objectification**

Drawing from the earlier philosophical thinking and recent work from the field of psychology, we propose the following generic definition of objectification: *Objectification is reducing human beings into instrumental tools as devoid of agency and experience*. Several scholars have conceptualized objectification from a psychological perspective, such that the act of objectification is an interpersonal behavior in which at least one social target is treated like a tool instead of a human being by at least one agent (e.g., Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Orehek & Weaverling, 2017). However, this interpersonal view of objectification is limited, because objectification can happen at other levels too, such as the group, organizational, or country level (see Bell & Khoury, 2016; Belmi & Schroeder, 2020; Demoulin et al., 2021). For instance, some organizations stating "staff first, your customer second" show less objectification towards their employees than other organizations that put "customer first" (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). Moreover, people can also objectify themselves. As an intrapersonal phenomenon, self-objectification refers to the treatment of oneself as a passive object to be looked at and evaluated (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), as if one lacks self-determination, agency and feelings. Therefore, in an attempt to offer a comprehensive definition of objectification that can apply to various levels of analysis, we further delineate our definition as follows: *Objectification is reducing human beings into instrumental tools as devoid of agency and experience by any entities (viz. individuals, groups, organizations, or countries)*.

Our definition makes clear that objectification is essentially characterized by

instrumentality, denial of agency, and denial of experience, for which support is reviewed below and further in the discussion section. Researchers have identified *instrumentality*, the reducing of targets into tools to reach specific goals for the objectifier, as the key attribute of objectification (e.g., Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Nussbaum, 1995; Orehek & Weaverling, 2017; Wang & Krumhuber, 2017). That is, objectification occurs when the target is useful to the achievement of the actor's active goal at that moment, such as a performance goal (Gruenfeld et al., 2008), an individual advancement goal (Shea & Fitzsimons, 2016), or the pursuit of money (Wang & Krumhuber, 2017). However, instrumentality in and by itself does not necessarily imply objectification. Instrumentality is fundamental to all interpersonal relationships, such that the way people perceive, evaluate, and act towards relationship partners is shaped by the extent to which these partners are instrumental to their goals (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008).

What is involved in objectification and makes it problematic is treating someone *merely* as a tool, a tool that is deprived of humanity (e.g., K. Gray, Knobe, Sheskin, Bloom, & Barrett, 2011; Nussbaum, 1995; Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018). Specifically, the objectified are deprived of *agency*—the capacity to plan to act—and *experience*—the capacity to sense and feel (e.g., Belmi & Schroeder, 2020; H. M. Gray, Gray, & Wegner, 2007; K. Gray et al., 2011; Loughnan et al., 2010). Indeed, it has been observed that the objectified were attributed low agency and low experience by both themselves and others (e.g., Andrighetto et al., 2017; Loughnan et al., 2017). We propose that these three attributes are each individually necessary and collectively

sufficient to qualify a certain treatment as objectification. Identifying these attributes can also clarify how objectification overlaps with and diverges from other constructs, such as dehumanization and sexual objectification.

Despite some convergence, objectification is distinct from dehumanization and sexual objectification by incorporating instrumentality, denial of agency, and denial of experience. Dehumanization implies the denial of humanness in others. It takes either the form of mechanistic dehumanization (the likening of humans to automata) or animalistic dehumanization (the likening of humans to animals). Whereas objectification bears resemblance to dehumanization, particularly mechanistic dehumanization, in terms of denial of agency and denial of experience (Haslam, 2006), objectification is different from dehumanization in that objectification includes the notion of instrumentality (Gruenfeld et al., 2008). Dehumanization either does not emphasize or deliberately excludes instrumentality in its conceptualization: It focuses on the idea that others lack human qualities, and the extent to which others are useful is not regarded.

Although sexual objectification—the act of reducing a person, typically a woman, to her or his sexual parts or functions as if they were capable of representing the entire person (Bartky, 1990)—seems to be a special form of objectification, it is debatable whether sexual objectification should be regarded as literal objectification at all. A focus of one's sexual parts or functions actually leads to a redistribution of mind (i.e., reduced agency but increased experience) rather than a denial of mind (K. Gray et al., 2011). In other words, people who are sexually objectified are not treated as mere

objects but instead likened to more experiential, less agentic animals. For the purposes of this review, we consider objectification research in a work context only. It is beyond the scope of this paper to review dehumanization and sexual objectification for their very different focuses.

**Market-Pricing Mode**

The market-pricing mode provides a theoretical foundation for understanding objectification at work. Alan Fiske (1992) theorized that a market-pricing mode is one of four fundamental relational models that people use to generate most kinds of social interaction. People in a work context especially tend to adopt a market-pricing mode to construct and construe relationships: People take a calculative utilitarian approach in relating to others, and constantly engage in cost/benefit analyses in decision making. Market-pricing mode also shapes how a person views the self, such that the self is primarily defined in terms of an occupation or economic role, and achievement is the major motivation. In addition, under a market-pricing mode, people believe that time should be spent efficiently and effectively in terms of rates of interest, pay or productivity. In short, a market-pricing mode tends to elicit objectification of both oneself and others.

The market-pricing theorizing of objectification has received support from empirical studies across several research fields. Belmi and Schroeder (2020) found that people objectified others more in work contexts than non-work contexts, because they engaged in a more calculative and strategic thinking. When people worked in an environment in which their economic outcomes depended more on others, they were

also more likely to view others in an instrumental fashion and choose a competent partner over a sociable one (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2018). Likewise, a salient performance goal or performance incentive could lead people to approach a more instrumental target (Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Hur et al., 2018). In the marketing area, consumers who adopted a price conscious mentality—a singular focus on getting the cheapest deal—attributed less human qualities to customer service employees (Henkel, Boegershausen, Hoegg, Aquino, & Lemmink, 2018).

Furthermore, both behavioral and neurological data offered support for the market-pricing mechanism underlying objectification (Harris et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2016). In an experimental context that simulated a labor market, participants showed reduced activity in the social cognition brain network (a dehumanized brain response; including superior temporal gyrus, middle frontal gyrus, postcentral gyrus, caudate, medial prefrontal cortex, cingulate gyrus, inferior frontal gyrus, and superior temporal gyrus) when assigning economic value to people in the labor market or viewing purchased targets (Harris et al., 2014). Separate valuation systems were observed in reactions towards purchased versus non-purchased targets, such that activation in social cognition brain regions modulated revaluation behavior towards purchased targets, while activation in medial orbito-frontal cortex (traditional valuation regions) predicted revaluation behavior towards non-purchased targets (Harris et al., 2014). Taken together, a market-pricing mode provides a robust theoretical framework for objectification research.

To present a holistic picture of objectification at work, we summarize and

integrate the extant literature on objectification at work by using an organizing framework that has two dimensions. As a first organizing principle of our review, we differentiate between antecedents and consequences of objectification at work. As such, we not only look into the determinants of objectification but also into the outcomes it generates. As a second organizing principle, we take into account that people may objectify others, that some may objectify themselves (self-objectification), and that some may be objectified by their organization or others (experiencing objectification). This review sheds new light on the dilemma of objectification, by identifying agents' motives to objectify and targets' experience of being objectified, and by comparing the impacts of objectification on the agents with its impacts on the targets. We first report how we conducted the literature search and screening before turning to the summary of the findings.

## Method

### Literature Search Strategy

To cover the literature as exhaustively as possible and prevent any bias in the inclusion of studies, we adopted a series of search strategies (see Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges, 2019). First, an extensive search was conducted in October 2020 for studies containing "objectification" or "objectify" or "objectified" in their titles, abstracts and keywords in the following databases: EBSCO, PsycINFO, Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, Business Source Complete, PsycARTICLES, EconLit, Eric, and Open Dissertations. Second, we used Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar to obtain the studies that had cited the key reference Gruenfeld and colleagues' (2008)

paper and contained the word “objectification”. Gruenfeld and colleagues’ (2008) paper was chosen as the key reference, because this paper can be seen as the starting point for empirically studying objectification in the work domain, and it presented an objectification measure that has been widely used ever since. Third, we searched the reference sections of relevant articles for additional studies.

**In- and Exclusion Criteria**

Studies were included if they fulfilled the following requirements: (a) The conceptualization of objectification was consistent with our definition, or consistent to a substantial extent, i.e., at least one of the three attributes of objectification (instrumentality, denial of agency, denial of experience) was explicitly included; (b) the study included a measure and/or manipulation of objectification; (c) the study examined objectification in a work context; (d) the study was quantitative in nature; (e) the study included a variable that was conceptualized as an antecedent or outcome of objectification; (f) the study was reported in the English or Chinese language. We excluded all studies that focused on sexual objectification, because sexual objectification is beyond the purpose of the present review.

The initial search yielded 8867 potentially relevant articles and they all were imported into Endnote for screening. After duplicates were removed, 6515 articles were left for further screening based on title and abstract. Three hundred and thirty-seven articles were left after further screening, and were thoroughly examined for their eligibility for inclusion based on the full text. In the end, 30 articles were considered eligible and included in our review (see Table S1 in the supplemental

materials for the details of the studies included in this review).

## Results

Below we summarize and integrate the results by antecedents and consequences, and further within each section by objectifying others, self-objectification and experiencing objectification (see Table S2 in the supplemental materials for a summary of the research findings).

### Antecedents of Objectification

**Objectifying others.** Most of the available research has studied the antecedents of objectifying others by using an experimental design. Those antecedents can be categorized according to situational factors, job characteristics, and personal motivations, goals, and cognitive factors. With regard to situational factors, Belmi and Schroeder (2020) found that people objectified others more often in a work context than a non-work context. Objectifying others is also more likely to occur when a work situation involves more duty, less intellectual engagement, more adversity, more deception, less sociality, less positivity, and more negativity (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). Consistent with market-pricing theorizing, a calculative and strategic thinking explains the effects of those work situations on objectifying others. As such, when nudged to "go with the flow", and to "just enjoy the moment, without actively calculating whether it will be worth investing your time in this person" (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020, p. 17), people are less likely to objectify others.

In terms of job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), work that restricts autonomy, independence, and task identity tends to elicit objectification. Andrighetto,

Baldissarri, and Volpato (2017) found that workers whose job was characterized as fragmented, repetitive, and dependent on the machine were perceived as more instrument-like, and less able to experience mental states. Similarly, people objectified a factory worker more than an artisan (Baldissarri, Valtorta, et al., 2017), and a socially tainted worker (having a subordinate relationship with others) more than a morally tainted worker (employing methods that are immoral) or physically tainted worker (working under dangerous and dirty conditions; Valtorta, Baldissarri, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2019). People also objectified employees of a thrift-oriented brand (emphasizing prices, deals, and savings) more than employees of a non-thrift-oriented brand (emphasizing full-service and experience; Henkel et al., 2018). In addition, people engaged in more objectification when a job featured reward interdependence (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2018), performance-based (vs. fixed) incentive (Hur et al., 2018), and high (vs. low) peer evaluation (Hur et al., 2018). These effects were explained by perceived alienation, that is, workers were perceived to be alienated from their act of production (Baldissarri, Valtorta, et al., 2017). In other words, those work conditions that feature external regulations contribute to objectification through undermining perceived intrinsic motivation (see Deci et al., 2017).

Not all individuals objectify others equally. Particularly individual differences in extrinsic aspirations, such as money and power, predict objectification of others. More specifically, love of money enhanced the appraisal and approach of the social targets who were instrumental to goal achievement (Teng et al., 2016; Wang & Krumhuber,

2017). The effect of money on objectification diminished when people were competent in achieving the goal themselves (Teng et al., 2016). Likewise, power led to viewing and approaching social targets as instruments for goal attainment, regardless of goal content (e.g., a performance or sociability goal; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Schaerer, du Plessis, Yap, & Thau, 2018). However, Shea and Fitzsimons (2016) found that specific goal content mattered, such that individuals with an individual advancement goal viewed people more on the basis of their instrumental value than did individuals with an interpersonal affiliation goal. Those findings are in line with market-pricing theorizing that interpersonal relationships are built and maintained based on the calculation of what one can get from a relationship, but it remains inconclusive how extrinsic versus intrinsic motivations or diverse goals affect objectification.

In addition to motivations and goals, individual differences in cognitive uncertainty also contribute to objectification of others. According to Landau and colleagues' (2012) subjectivity uncertainty theory, people objectify others when they desire successful interactions with others but feel uncertain about their capability to navigate others' subjectivity (i.e., idiosyncratic personality characteristics and mental states). Supporting this account, they found that when participants were led to feel uncertain about their managerial ability through test feedback (vs. control) and were concerned about their ability to handle employees' personality quirks (vs. subjectivity-unrelated concern), they objectified employees more by viewing them in terms of instrumental value for workplace goals than their personal attributes.

Subjectivity uncertainty account complements market-pricing theorizing of objectification by suggesting objectification as a means of reducing uncertainty or restoring control.

**Self-objectification.** Fewer studies have investigated the antecedents of self-objectification, relative to objectifying others. Interestingly, self-objectification shares some work features (fragmentation and repetitiveness) as antecedents to objectifying others. That is, participants who performed a more fragmented, repetitive, and other-directed activity perceived themselves as being more instrument-like, and as having less human mental states including emotions, perceptions, thoughts, wishes, and intentions (Andrighetto et al., 2018; Baldissarri, 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2020; Baldissarri, Andrighetto, et al., 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2019). Job insecurity was another source of self-objectification, such that employees who perceived more job insecurity rated themselves as being more instrument-like, and as having lower mental states (Baldissarri, 2017). Baldissarri attributed this to the notion that the state of uncertainty over one's job resembles the state of objects as passive entities that are under control of external forces.

In addition to job features and insecurity, organizational culture also contributes to self-objectification. A field survey showed that organizational innovation, goal, rule, and support orientations were positively associated with employees' self-attribution of mental states (i.e., less self-objectification; Auzoult & Personnaz, 2016). The rationale for this association is based on uncertainty reduction: Objectification is considered as a means of reducing uncertainty by downplaying one's subjective attributes (Landau,

Kay, & Whitson, 2015; Landau et al., 2012); A strong organizational culture, whatever its orientation, reduces uncertainty by providing a guiding framework, and hence is associated with less self-objectification.

Individual differences also play a role in self-objectification. Specifically, individuals with higher performance expectancy engaged in more job search related self-objectification (Nistor & Stanciu, 2017). Employees who experienced more burnout at work self-objectified more by attributing lower mental states to the self (Auzoult & Personnaz, 2016). In addition, the perception of being objectified by supervisors and/or colleagues was positively associated with self-objectification (Auzoult & Personnaz, 2016; Baldissarri, 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2019), and this association was weaker for those who had a higher private self-consciousness (Auzoult & Personnaz, 2016). Auzoult and Personnaz explained that a heightened private self-consciousness facilitated the regulation of experiences of being objectified. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of self-regulation in the process of self-objectification.

**Experiencing objectification.** The experience or perception of being objectified has its own unique antecedents with its focus on the objectified target instead of the objectifying agent as discussed above. Despite the limited number of studies, it is a lively research area where diverse factors have been investigated. People can feel objectified by either their organizations or others, when their fundamental needs are thwarted. Specifically, employees who experienced control, belonging, and self-esteem need thwarting, assessed by job autonomy, professional isolation, and

abusive supervision respectively, felt objectified by their organizations (Demoulin et al., 2021). Prospective job seekers perceived more objectification from the companies that contained more calculative and strategic language in their mission statement, such as Amazon's "we value calculated risk taking" and "accomplish more with less" (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). Notably, those job seekers also reported lower sense of belonging to the more objectifying companies (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). Similarly, procedural, distributive, and interpersonal justice were negatively correlated with organizational objectification assessed four weeks later (Bell & Khoury, 2016). Bell and Khoury (2016) explained that justice satisfied fundamental existential, relational, and self-esteem needs, and hence reduced the perception of objectification. Furthermore, the effect of procedural justice on organizational objectification was stronger for women than for men, arguably because women might feel more uncertain of and sensitive to procedural justice (Bell & Khoury, 2016).

With regard to the perception of being objectified by others, three studies have been conducted so far to explore its antecedents. Again consistent with market-pricing theorizing, a work context elicited a higher expectation of being objectified by others than did a non-work context (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). Two experimental studies showed that after receiving a favor or ingratiation, high-power individuals felt more objectified by others than equal-power individuals; as such they rated power-relevant attributes to be more important to their self-definition (Inesi, Lee, & Rios, 2014). It seems that extrinsic motivations such as power not only drive people to objectify others more, but also lead people to feel more objectified by others.

## Consequences of Objectification

**Objectifying others.** Objectification has significantly different implications for the objectifying agent than for the objectified target. In line with the instrumental nature of objectification, people objectify others by appraising them in terms of goal-relevant attributes, and by approaching others that aid goal achievement (Orehek & Weaverling, 2017). Indeed, it has been consistently observed that people showed a greater approach tendency towards instrumental or objectified others (Martínez, Rodríguez-Bailón, Moya, & Vaes, 2017; Teng et al., 2016). Individuals who thought of coworkers in a more instrumental way chose a competent coworker over sociable one (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2018). Likewise, people who perceived more goal instrumentality of work ties were more willing to socialize with work ties over non-work personal ties (Hur et al., 2018). Correspondingly, an instrumental view of social contacts led to the activation of sparser social networks (Shea & Fitzsimons, 2016). In a medical context, people who objectified the physician recalled fewer personal facts about the physician, but expected the physician to know more about them; they perceived their physician to have less self-focused emotions but more patient-focused emotions; they attributed less self-focused emotions but more agency to physicians; likewise, they would feel more surprised to see their dentists engaging in experiential activities, such as dining at a fancy restaurant (Schroeder & Fishbach, 2015).

With regard to goal-disrupting targets, an experimental study showed that participants who objectified employees more in terms of occupational roles were

more likely to fire the employee who violated company policy (Landau et al., 2012). Taken together, objectification led to more positive appraisals and approach towards useful others that aided goal attainment, while it increased avoidance or even punitiveness towards people who were deemed less useful.

**Self-objectification.** In contrast to the favorable implications that objectifying others has for the self, self-objectification has numerous negative implications for oneself. Specifically, self-objectification was linked to reduced belief in personal free will (Baldissarri, Andrighetto, et al., 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2019), reduced well-being (Baldissarri, 2017), and more conforming behavior (Andrighetto et al., 2018; Baldissarri et al., 2020). Yet in one correlational study that used a self-developed scale, the Job Search Related Self-Objectification, self-objectification was positively associated with job-related self-efficacy and well-being (Nistor & Stanciu, 2017). This discrepancy in the results regarding the self-objectification and well-being relationship could be attributed to the different measures or samples utilized.

**Experiencing objectification.** Research has shown coherent findings regarding the negative outcomes of the experience or perception of being objectified by an organization and by others. People who felt more objectified by their organization were more likely to experience negative emotions, report lower organizational-based self-esteem, use avoidance coping strategies (Demoulin et al., 2021), and have a higher intention to quit (Bell & Khoury, 2016). Likewise, prospective job seekers who perceived more organizational objectification showed less interest in applying to work

at that organization (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). This low interest was because organizational objectification undermined people's sense of belonging (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020).

People who felt more objectified by their employer, supervisor and/or colleagues were more likely to self-objectify (Auzoult, 2020; Baldissarri et al., 2014), and to internalize objectification by perceiving themselves as less warm, competent, moral, and human (Loughnan et al., 2017). The experience of being objectified also triggered negative emotions (Poon et al., 2020), burnout (exhaustion and cynicism; Baldissarri et al., 2014), and aggression (Poon et al., 2020). The experience of being-objectified has further impacts on one's identity. Two experimental studies found that after receiving a favor from a coworker, high-power participants felt more objectified by the coworker than did equal-power counterparts, which led them to rate power-relevant attributes to be more important to their self-definition, and to be more willing to pay for high-status goods that were consistent with their self-definition (Inesi et al., 2014). Furthermore, with respect to mediating mechanisms, a thwarted sense of control explained the effect of objectification on aggression; also as an intervention, restoring objectified targets' perceived control could weaken their aggression (Poon et al., 2020). Taken together, those findings show that an objectified target is treated as a passive instrument for the agent's goal pursuit with the target's fundamental needs thwarted.

In the only study that investigated the consequences of observing objectification, Belmi and Schroeder (2020) found that the more people observed, experienced, and

engaged in objectification in the workplace at time one, the less job satisfaction and prosocial behavior, the more incivility and turnover intention people reported in a second survey. Reduced sense of belonging mediated the relationship between objectification and those various outcome variables. This research again adds support to the view that objectification threatens individuals' fundamental needs, which in turn affects workplace attitudes and behaviors.

## Discussion

This review summarizes and integrates what is known about the antecedents and consequences of objectification in a work context. Figure 2.1 presents an integrative framework for objectification. In line with the market-pricing theorizing of objectification, the extant research shows that people sometimes are reduced to instrumental tools with their intrinsic values, needs, and motivations being thwarted. Situational factors (e.g., work context, duty, adversity), job characteristics (e.g., fragmentation, repetitiveness, dependence), and individual differences (e.g., power, performance goal, individual advancement goal) can contribute to objectification of others, as those factors tend to elicit a calculative and strategic thinking about others. Objectification in turn leads to more positive appraisals of and approach towards instrumental others that aid goal attainment, whereas the less or counter instrumental others are devalued, avoided, or even punished.

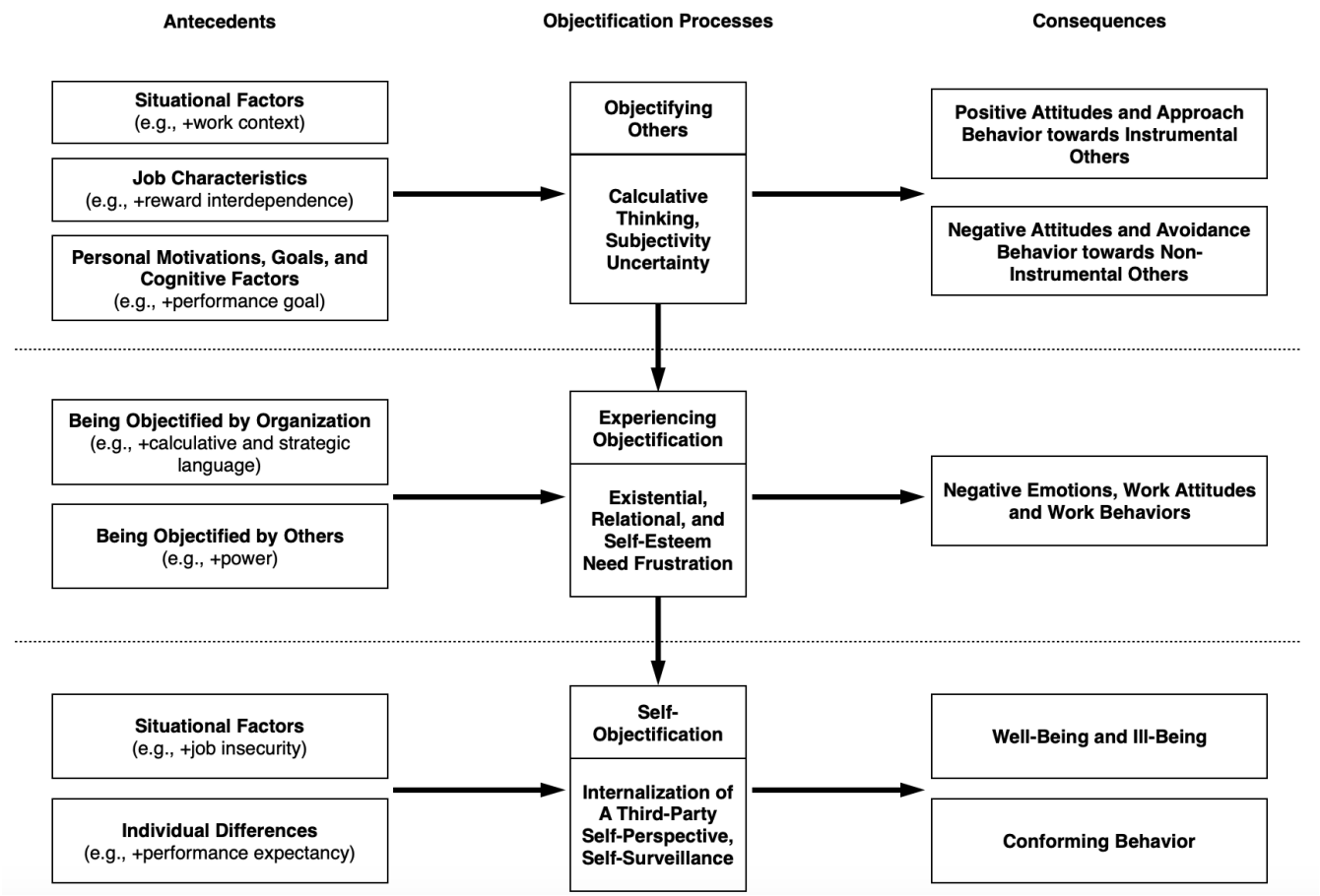



*Figure 2.1. A model of workplace objectification.*

With regard to the experience or perception of being objectified, people can feel objectified by their organization or others when their fundamental control, belonging, and self-esteem needs are thwarted; individuals who are objectified exhibit more passive or negative affect, attitudes, and work engagement (e.g., burnout, turnover intention, aggression). The experience of being-objectified also results in self-objectification, such that people come to view and monitor themselves from a third-party's standpoint. In addition, situational factors (e.g., organizational culture, job insecurity, other-direction work) and individual differences (e.g., performance expectancy, private self-consciousness, burnout) can also contribution to self-objectification. Self-objectification is in turn linked to negative outcomes for oneself (e.g., reduced well-being, less belief in personal free will, more conformity).

**Theoretical Contributions**

This review makes a number of theoretical contributions to objectification research. Our review supports market-pricing theorizing of objectification by showing that people often take a calculative utilitarian approach in relating to others, and that their objectifying behavior is often driven by the pursuit of extrinsic goals, such as money and power. Notably, a subjectivity uncertainty account complements market-pricing theorizing of objectification, by showing that people also tend to objectify others when they desire successful interactions with others yet feel uncertain about their capability to navigate others' subjectivity (Landau et al., 2012). From the perspective of the person being objectified, the fundamental needs for control, belonging, and self-esteem (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000;

Ryan & Deci, 2000) are often threatened by objectification, which explains both causes and effects of being-objectified experience. In a nutshell, we contribute to objectification research by revealing and synthesizing its underlying mechanisms, such that people objectify others to achieve their extrinsic goals or reduce subjectivity uncertainty, while undermining the objectified targets' fundamental needs.

This review speaks to an ongoing debate about whether objectification results in negative consequences. On the one hand, some scholars argue that objectification is detrimental and immoral (e.g., Belmi & Schroeder, 2020; Poon et al., 2020), for the reason that a person cannot and should not be reduced to a tool devoid of humanity. On the other hand, some suggest that objectification is inevitable and can be benign (e.g., Orehek, Forest, & Barbaro, 2018; Orehek & Weaverling, 2017). For instance, Orehek and Weaverling (2017) contend that people are mentally represented in the same way as objects, following the same means-goal principles. That is, people are unavoidably seen as means to goals, and evaluated in terms of instrumentality to goals. Thereby the consequences of objectification depend on what goal is relevant, and on whether the objectified person wants to serve that goal. However, by considering the objectified target's consent, the latter acknowledges the target's self-determination and conceptualizes objectification primarily as instrumentality. As such, perceiving others in terms of instrumental value may have benign effects, when it is not combined with assuming lack of agency and lack of experience (Converse & Fishbach, 2012; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). Yet according to our definition of objectification, only when all the three attributes (instrumentality, denial of agency,

and denial of experience) are present can a certain treatment be qualified as objectification.

The findings in our review align more with the former argument by showing that objectification is linked to numerous negative outcomes for the objectified target. In addition, an important distinction needs to be drawn between objectifying agents and objectified targets with regard to the implications of objectification, as objectification can have favorable implications for the agent who objectifies others in terms of goal pursuit and subjectivity uncertainty reduction, but unfavorable outcomes for the target.

Our review also adds to an ongoing debate about how organizations should balance the concerns related to profitability versus employee thriving. There is a long-standing and widely-utilized perspective that the primary purpose of an organization is to earn profits (e.g., Friedman, 1970), and that labor is a cost that can be cut or eliminated through outsourcing, automation and such wherever possible (Pfeffer, 1998). Such a belief system seeks an alignment of social concerns with economic objectives (Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse, & Figge, 2014), and social concerns such as workplace friendships are deemed as a hindrance to be eliminated (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). In contrast, some suggest that an organization should put people first, and be dedicated to employee thriving (e.g., Pfeffer, 1998; Pollard, 1996). This people-centered approach recognizes the importance of people to organizational success, and challenges the former profit-oriented approach by arguing that an exclusive focus on profit can be counterproductive through destroying employees'

work motives. Moreover, it is important to note that labor commodification, as one of the defining features of the capitalist mode, does not necessarily imply employee objectification on a workplace scale (Shields & Grant, 2010). Our review provides support for the people-centered approach, by showing that employees who feel less objectified by their organization perceive more control over their work, a higher sense of belonging, and in turn enhanced work engagement. Substantial empirical research has also shown that self-determination experienced by employees is positively linked to both employee well-being and work performance (e.g., Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014; Deci et al., 2017).

**Theoretical Issues**

Research on objectification is in an early stage, and requires further theoretical guidance as well as empirical examination. Researchers who have studied objectification based on the theories of market-pricing, self-determination, justice, and subjectivity uncertainty have made some progress. Yet empirical tests for each theory remain relatively scarce, and need further verification. Moreover, there are many other aspects or directions that await exploration. In other words, objectification presents tremendous opportunities for future research, and this review hopefully provides some directions (see Table 2.1 for a list of recommendations).

First, with regard to the antecedents of objectification, there is a need to examine whether critical work practices that are popularized today induce people to objectify others more or feel more objectified. Despite the initial attempt made at identifying performance incentive as one cause of objectification (Hur et al., 2018), more

Table 2.1

*Theoretical and Methodological Issues*

| Theoretical issues | Methodological issues |
|---|---|
| How work practices that elicit an economic frame (e.g., hourly payment, billing time, and temporary contracts) or show little concern about employee wellness affect objectification | Improve psychometric properties of the objectification measures |
| How diverse goals (e.g., personal achievement vs. interpersonal affiliation) affect objectification and its downstream consequences | Investigate objectification as a multilevel phenomenon |
| How objectification affects performance of various kinds and of different sources in the short and long term | Use more longitudinal designs |
| Examine objectification processes or mechanisms, particularly with regard to how people respond to the perpetrators of objectification | Use more nuanced and rigorous experimental designs |
| Study interventions or factors that protect against objectification (e.g., inter-subjectivity, public self-consciousness, approach balancing operations) | Address endogeneity and control for method variance in field studies |

research is needed to examine the potential effects of reward systems and other organizational practices on objectification as well as self-objectification. In particular, it is plausible that hourly payment, billing time, temporary contracts, and contingent rewards might induce people to think of themselves and their coworkers in a more calculative, objectifying fashion, for the reason that those practices could elicit a more economic view about time use (DeVoe & Pfeffer, 2007; Wright, George, Farnsworth, & McMahan, 1993; Yakura, 2001), and that such economic frame might shape how one views oneself and others (Fiske, 1992). In addition, organizational practices, such as lack of health care and lack of career development, may enhance employees' perception of being objectified by the organization, as those practices show little concern about employees' wellness or growth. The Covid-19 crisis highlights how some workers (e.g., meatpackers) are objectified by their organization that requires them to work in an unsafe environment (Lussenhop, 2020). By studying the impact of those workplace practices on objectification, we would develop a better understanding of how those practices work out and hence move forward to provide a better work environment.

Second, goal orientations or content may play a role in how people objectify others and how others receive objectification. In line with the instrumental orientation of objectification, people evaluate others on the basis of their instrumental value in aiding goal achievement (e.g., Feeney, 2004; Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010, 2011; Fitzsimons, Finkel, & van Dellen, 2015). Yet, it remains unclear how agents' diverse goals affect objectification. In particular, it would be interesting to investigate the

possible different impacts of personal achievement goal and interpersonal affiliation goal on objectification. A two-cell experiment by Shea and Fitzsimons (2016) found that people with an individual advancement goal viewed social network contacts in a more instrumental manner than did those with an interpersonal affiliation goal. Nevertheless, no definitive conclusion can be drawn yet, because it cannot be excluded from that experiment the possibility that both advancement and affiliation goals would increase objectification, relative to a baseline condition.

It is important to note that establishing or maintaining a relationship can be more or less objectifying, depending on whether an agent sees others as ends in themselves. That is, affiliation-oriented behavior can be objectifying, cold and undesirable, which can be more relevant in a work (vs. personal) context. Indeed, instrumental networking for professional purpose led people to feel more dirty than personal, spontaneous networking, especially when people had a low (vs. high) level of power (Casciaro, Gino, & Kouchaki, 2014). It is an intriguing area for future research to investigate how diverse goals affect objectification and its downstream consequences, given its relevance to work life and complexity involved.

Third, more research is needed on the short-term and long-term consequences of objectification, particularly performance outcomes of various kinds and of different sources. Although it's known that objectification predicts work attitudes and behavior, it remains empirically unexplored whether objectification (of various levels) affects individuals' work performance, team performance, or organizational economic performance. A direct examination of the link between objectification and

performance could contribute to the profitability versus employee thriving debate that we discussed earlier. It is plausible that objectification may undermine individuals' performance through diminishing their sense of competence and motivation to learn. In addition, it is likely that objectification has a more negative impact on objectified victims' performance than objectifiers' performance, for the reason that people being objectified may experience greater "cognitive deconstruction" (Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003).

It is also important to consider types of performance or performance in different types of tasks when examining the effects of objectification on performance. Christoff (2014) challenges the commonly held belief that suppressing empathy is necessary for problem solving in work settings by examining evidence from social psychology and neuroscientific research. More specifically, a distinction needs to be drawn between problem solving in physical domains and social domains: Reduced empathy may benefit mechanistic reasoning about physical objects (Jack et al., 2013), whereas empathy is not only compatible with, but also crucial for problem solving in the social domains (Amodio & Frith, 2006; Harris & Fiske, 2006). That is, objectification may lead to worse performance on the social tasks that require more empathy, such as consultation. Moreover, objectification may predict poorer performance on complex tasks than simple algorithmic tasks, because it may undermine intrinsic motivations that are involved more in complex tasks (see Deci et al., 2017; Hon, 2012; Weibel, Rost, & Osterloh, 2010). Objectification may also hinder performance on the tasks that entail creative thinking (Ellamil, Dobson, Beeman, & Christoff, 2012).

Fourth, more research is needed to examine objectification processes or mechanisms. Limited research effort has been devoted to examining the underlying psychological process of objectification and being-objectified experience, and even fewer on seeing objectification (see Belmi & Schroeder, 2020; Poon et al., 2020 for some exceptions). It is essential to examine whether the market-pricing account could explain more effects of objectification to establish its robustness, along with the test of other potential mechanisms. A competitive alternative comes from system justification theory (Jost, 2020; Jost & Banaji, 1994). It is suggested that people tend to rationalize and perpetuate the status quo, even when it implies inequality or unfair treatment. Accordingly, system justification may explain how objectification can be accepted and why objectifiers sometimes fare well in organizational contexts. That is, the system justification account would contribute to objectification research by revealing how people respond to the perpetrators of objectification, an overlooked topic in objectification literature.

Last but not least, the next stage of objectification research may be to study interventions or factors that protect against objectification (e.g., Roberts & Waters, 2012). Prior research has shown that a reminder of low calculative mindset could effectively decrease objectification (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020), and that restoring sense of control could alleviate the detrimental impact of objectification (Poon et al., 2020). Future research can look into whether enhancing inter-subjectivity or empathy is another approach to reduce objectification. In addition, from the perspective of the targets of objectification, public self-consciousness—the degree to which people are

aware of themselves as social objects to be perceived and evaluated (Scheier & Carver, 1985)—may play a key role in reaction to objectification. Individuals who have a lower public self-consciousness might be less subject to influence of objectification, as they attend less to social cues (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Alternatively, according to power-dependence theory (Emerson, 1962), the targets of objectification can take approach balancing operations (i.e., coalition formation and value enhancement) as coping strategies to reduce the occurrence of objectification through increasing the objectifier's dependence on them (see Wee, Liao, Liu, & Liu, 2017).

**Methodological Issues**

There are five major methodological issues that temper the conclusions we could draw from the extant research on objectification. First, although research in this domain has largely measured objectification, with a few exceptions that manipulated objectification, the psychometric properties of these objectification measures need to be further investigated and improved. It is imperative to establish both validity and reliability of objectification scales in order to advance this field. Specifically, despite the assertion made on incorporating the three attributes (instrumentality, denial of agency, and denial of experience) into the definition of objectification (e.g., Baldissarri, Valtorta, et al., 2017), in practice the extant research has often measured objectification by containing one or two of the three attributes. Researchers have most frequently operationalized objectification in terms of instrumentality, such as Gruenfeld and colleagues' (2008) Objectification Scale, and Andrighetto, Baldissarri,

and Volpato's (2017) Instrument-Like Attribution Measure. Another stream of researchers has operationalized objectification in terms of denial of agency and experience, such as Mental State Attribution Measure by Haslam et al. (2008), and Mind Attribution Scale by Kozak et al. (2006). Notably, there are measures that incorporate all three attributes, such as Belmi and Schroeder's (2020) Objectification Scale, and the relatively short Role Objectification Scale from Landau et al. (2012), which we encourage future work to adopt and examine.

To date it remains statistically unexamined whether these three attributes could be confirmed by factor analysis, and whether such confirmation would generalize across samples and contexts. It might not be beneficial to the advance of objectification research to continue the practice that separated instrumentality from denial of agency and experience by using different scales or in different studies (e.g., Andrighetto et al., 2017). In addition, it is crucial to investigate the possible different effect of each attribute of objectification or their interactive effects on outcome variables. In doing so, we could develop a clearer idea about how objectification functions. Furthermore, there is a need to examine convergent and discriminant validity to empirically map objectification in relation to other close constructs, such as dehumanization.

In terms of internal consistency reliability, the frequently applied 10-item Objectification Scale developed by Gruenfeld et al. (2008) that was claimed to be unidimensional (i.e., instrumentality) also requires further examination and improvement, as its Cronbach's alpha value turned out consistently fall in a low-to-moderate range (from .67 to .79 with one exception of an adapted version

reported as .91 in Study 6 of Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). Moreover, it might not be appropriate to use Cronbach's alpha to estimate internal consistency reliability, for the reason that the strict assumptions underlying Cronbach's alpha were often violated, including tau equivalence (each item on the scale contributes equally to the total scale score), continuous items with normal distributions, and uncorrelated errors (e.g., McNeish, 2018). We would like to recommend that future researchers verify the assumptions prior to calculating Cronbach's alpha, or utilize alternative methods that do not make rigid assumptions as Cronbach's alpha to assess reliability of objectification scales, such as omega coefficients (e.g., McNeish, 2018).

Second, objectification studies need to move beyond the individual level of analysis, a predominant approach the extant research has undertaken, and to investigate objectification as a multilevel phenomenon. It has been conceived that some organizations could objectify employees more than others (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Belmi & Schroeder, 2020; Caesens, Stinglhamber, Demoulin, & De Wilde, 2017), but objectification at an organizational level has not been empirically examined. It would also be advantageous for future research to look into objectification at group, industry or country levels.

Third, little is known about how objectification unfolds over time. The majority of field studies have addressed objectification as a between-person phenomenon by taking a cross-sectional design. It remains unknown whether those between-person effects that were observed in prior research could apply to within-person effects. That is, it would enrich our understanding of objectification by examining the extent to

which objectification changes over time, and the extent to which those theoretical accounts that we reviewed apply in explaining intra-individual processes of objectification. Longitudinal models not only enable the disaggregation of within-person and between-person effects, but also offer other benefits, such as establishment of temporal precedence, increases in statistical power, decreases in alternative explanations, and more comprehensive measurement (e.g., Curran & Bauer, 2011).

In particular, future researchers might consider examining whether objectification would undermine sense of control as a within-person process by adopting a longitudinal study design (in comparison with the between-person process observed by Poon et al., 2020). Compensatory control theory (Landau et al., 2015) suggests an interesting alternative with respect to the within-person process, such that when an individual experiences objectification that reduces perceived control, this individual is likely to restore perceived control subsequently by means of bolstering personal or external agency, or seeking simple and clear interpretations of the environment. With regard to agents of objectification, it would be important to study how agents react to their own objectifying behavior, and whether they travel down a slippery slope through moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996) or take reparative actions through moral cleansing (see Liao, Yam, Johnson, Liu, & Song, 2018). In addition, longitudinal data designs could become more relevant and critically needed when it comes to intervention research of objectification. One promising direction for future research would be to examine how

different coping strategies that objectified targets use might influence their experience and occurrence of objectification over time.

Fourth, with regard to experimental studies of objectification, there is a need for more nuanced and rigorous study designs. Prior experiments have used 2-cell study designs in which a high level of objectification was compared either to a low level of objectification (e.g., Poon et al., 2020, Experiment 1), or to an objectification-unrelated control condition (e.g., recalling one's last visit to a supermarket or grocery store; Poon et al., 2020, Experiment 4). However, there are some limitations in the mere use of 2-cell designs: It remains unknown whether objectification would have non-linear effects (e.g., high and low levels of objectification could possibly differ from a middle level of objectification in predicting performance outcomes); it is also unclear whether different attributes of objectification would have different impacts. It would hence be advantageous to use the manipulations that allow for a more fine-grained differentiation between levels of objectification and between attributes of objectification. For example, future researchers might consider objectification as a continuum rather than a binary variable, and examine the possibility that objectification leads to non-linear patterns by using at least 3-cell study designs.

Another issue regarding the manipulations of objectification is that they often induce demand effects, such that participants are aware of what the experimenter expects them to do (Orne, 2009). A common manipulation is to ask participants to recall an experience in which they feel objectified (e.g., Loughnan et al., 2017; Poon

et al., 2020, Experiment 4). Such recall task is problematic because it cannot establish that *only* objectification is manipulated (that is, participants are likely to do what is expected of them, as per demand effects). As a consequence, the results derived from such manipulation are confounded with demand effects: It is unclear how much participants' responses to outcome variables are due to the manipulation or demand effect. One approach to reduce demand effects is to use more subtle or implicit manipulations such as word search or unscrambling tasks. In addition, the manipulations that bear more experimental realism could be a better alternative to recall tasks, such as receiving objectifying feedbacks from a work partner during collaborative tasks (Poon et al., 2020, Experiment 1), or conducting fragmented, repetitive, and other-directed tasks (Andrighetto et al., 2018).

Lastly, the field studies of objectification have mostly relied on cross-sectional self-reports, which posed a threat to the validity of the research findings for endogeneity and common-method issues. Specifically, measured (not manipulated) variables in field studies often share common causes with the outcome variables, which causes endogeneity and renders the estimation of causality impossible (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010). Moreover, all measures in such a study shared a common source (or sources) of method variance, which would inflate or bias observed relationships among measured variables (e.g., Spector, Rosen, Richardson, Williams, & Johnson, 2019). Social desirability could be a notable source of method variance in the use of self-reports, considering that responses to objectification could be subject to perceived social desirability. To reduce method

variance, future researchers might consider obtaining measures of predictor and criterion variables from different sources, introducing temporal separation between the measures of predictor and criterion variables, varying response formats of scales (e.g., agreement vs. frequency), and/or using statistical control (e.g., Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012).

## Conclusion

Should a person doubt his or her existential value if that person is judged as useless (e.g., less instrumental than an ergonomic chair)? Or should a musician (or music-lover as the market would define) stop playing music if there is no market value? A market-pricing view would discourage people from doing any useless thing in terms of economic returns. Meanwhile, it renders the purchase of a human (surrogacy) or other forms of objectification possible. Our review indicates that objectification originates from a market-pricing mode, such that people think of themselves and others in a calculative utilitarian way.

Furthermore, our review debunks the argument that objectification is inevitable and inconsequential (e.g., Harris et al., 2014). The empirical evidence shows that people often objectify others in order to achieve their extrinsic goals or reduce subjectivity uncertainty, while undermining the objectified targets' fundamental control, belonging, and self-esteem needs. As such, objectification often sabotages targets' work motives and engagement, which might have financial implications for organizations. That is, employers who aspire to earn profits by objectification might pay a price.

On the practice implications, one approach that an organization can take to reduce objectification is to eliminate or diminish objectifying, calculative language when referring to employees. For example, the term “human resources management” can be replaced by “people management”, for that “human resources” likens people to assests, something interchangeable as machines. More importantly, an organization needs to enact on the people-oriented belief by providing extensive training, enabling self-managed teams, increasing employee involvement, designing reward systems that forge psychological links between organizational and employee goals, enhancing employment security, and/or accommodating the interrelated yet conflicting economic and social concerns etc. (Hahn et al., 2014; Pfeffer, 1998).

Our review also provides important practical implications on how to deal with the challenges posed by surging gig economy. Over twenty percent of US workers now work in gig economy (McKinsey & Co., 2016), and the number of workers involved in gig economy continues growing in US as well as worldwide (Kässi & Lehdonvirta, 2018). While people embrace independence and flexibility afforded by gig work, some may feel objectified by job insecurity, unpredictability of work, and lack of career development. Of critical importance is that gig economy renders social relations at work highly transactional (Gandini, 2019). In order to improve gig workers’ experiences and well-being, we suggest that more legal protections be granted to gig workers with respect to their working conditions, and that digital platforms through which gig workers offer services cultivate sense of connection between workers and clients by emphasizing quality service rather than prices, build

experience-sharing communities, and grant more autonomy to gig workers (e.g., the rights to set pay rates, to determine schedule, and to accept or deny clients' requests). To thrive in gig economy, workers as individuals need to manage uncertainty and embrace the challenge with an entrepreneurial spirit.

# CHAPTER 3

# HOW OBJECTIFIERS ARE GRANTED POWER IN THE WORKPLACE

This chapter is based on the manuscript: Zhang, B., Wisse, B., & Lord, R. G. (2021). How objectifiers are granted power in the workplace.

Acknowledgements: We thank Susanne Braun for the helpful comments on the earlier version of the article.

# HOW OBJECTIFIERS ARE GRANTED POWER IN THE WORKPLACE

Chapter 2 summarizes and integrates what is known about antecedents and consequences of objectification, and shows that people often objectify others in order to achieve their extrinsic goals, such as money and power, or to reduce subjectivity uncertainty, while thwarting the objectified targets' fundamental control, belonging, and self-esteem needs. Although prior research has shown that objectification has profound negative impacts on the victims as demonstrated in Chapter 2, much less attention has been devoted to the perpetrators of objectification. Indeed, little is known about how people think about or respond to objectifiers. To address this deficiency, Chapter 3 examines the perceptional and potential behavioral consequences of objectification for the objectifiers. More specifically, Chapter 3 presents an empirical paper where two experiments and one field study were conducted to examine when objectifying supervisors would be perceived as fair and afforded power by their subordinates, whereby workplace objectification could be rationalized and perpetuated.

## Introduction

*Objectification*, the treatment of human beings as instrumental tools (Gruenfeld et al., 2008), is omnipresent in everyday life. In the workplace, it is manifest when supervisors treat their subordinates as equivalent to inanimate machines, useful only for production of labor that serves the purposes of those of the organization. The 996 working schedule, which refers to working from 9 am to 9 pm for 6 days per week, exemplifies how humans sometimes find themselves in a position that parallels a

working machine (The Economist, 2019). Similarly, in response to Covid-19, some leaders prioritized wealth over the health of the employees, such that they urged employees go to the workplace without safety measures put in place (Lussenhop, 2020). Interestingly, those who objectify sometimes fare well in organizational contexts and are able to obtain powerful positions. This research thus examines when and why objectifying supervisors are afforded power by their subordinates.

We argue that *power distance*, the extent to which people accept the legitimacy of unequal power distribution (Hofstede, 1997; House, Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, & Sully de Luque, 2014), may co-determine when objectification is seen as justifiable behavior. In a higher power distance context, the distance between the powerful and the powerless is larger, and such inequality is also more accepted by both the powerful *and the powerless*. As a consequence, in a high power distance context, supervisor objectification is more likely to be seen as the behavior that is typical and desirable (e.g., Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012), which may form the basis of further power acquisition. Notably, rather than taking a cross-cultural approach, *this research examines objectification at the individual level of analysis.* It aims to examine whether subordinate power distance orientation, as an individual-level construct, moderates the extent to which supervisor objectification is justified, and furthermore the extent to which objectifying supervisors are afforded power.

Our research provides several theoretical contributions. First, we look beyond *sexual objectification*, the act of reducing a person to her or his sexual parts or functions as if they were capable of representing the entire person (Bartky, 1990),

because objectification in the work context often takes other, more general, forms. Second, prior research showed that objectification had profound negative impacts on the victims, who were perceived to be less competent, less warm, and less worthy of moral treatment (e.g., Heflick, Goldenberg, Cooper, & Puvia, 2011; Loughnan et al., 2010; Pacilli et al., 2017). However, much less attention has been devoted to the perpetrators of objectification. Indeed, we know little about how people respond to objectifiers. To address this deficiency, this research examines the behavioral consequence of objectification (i.e., power affordance) for the objectifiers. Third, our research also extends the power literature by examining determinants of power granting. We know relatively little about the processes explaining why power may be bestowed upon those who engage in deviant behavior. Based on system justification theory, which argues that people tend to rationalize the status quo (Jost, 2020; Jost & Hunyady, 2002), we posit that subordinates afford power to their objectifying supervisor because those subordinates engage in a post hoc rationalization, such that they believe that a supervisor *typically objectifies* (i.e., *descriptive justification*) and *should objectify* (i.e., *prescriptive justification*) employees. Such justification is stronger for higher power distance subordinates (see Figure 3.1 for our research model). In the following sections, we first elaborate on what objectification is, and then explain the theory of when and why objectifiers are afforded power.

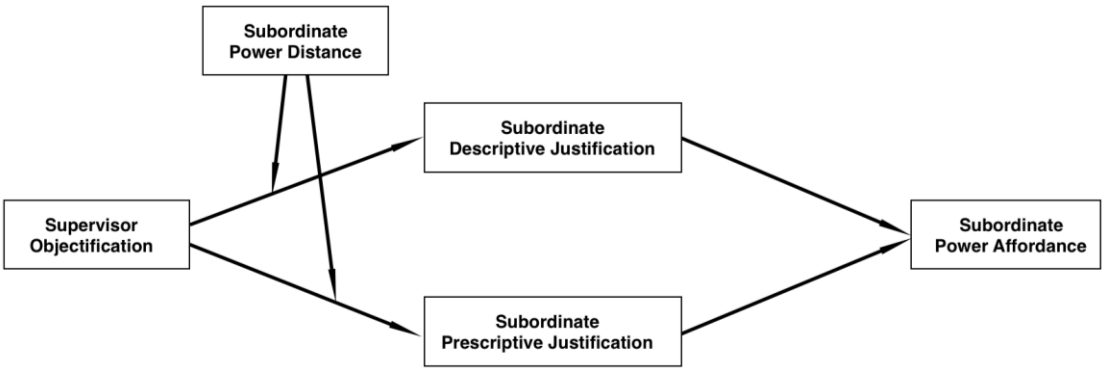



*Figure 3.1*. A moderated mediation model of objectification.

## What is Objectification?

Objectification can be seen as interpersonal behavior in which at least one social target is treated like a tool instead of a human being by at least one agent (Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Nussbaum, 1995; Orehek & Weaverling, 2017). As such, we distinguish it from *self-objectification*—the treatment of oneself as an object to be looked at and evaluated (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The key attribute of objectification is *instrumentality* by which the targets are reduced to tools ready for use by the objectifiers (Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Nussbaum, 1995; Orehek & Weaverling, 2017). For instance, in the 996 case, employees are defined by how instrumental they are to the employers' goals of speedy production and cost reduction: Those employees who can work 996 are valued, while those who are unable or unwilling are derogated as "slackers" or even dismissed (Kuo, 2019). In other words, employees are seen as the mere means to an end. Apart from instrumentality, objectification also entails the denial of humanity. That is, people are denied both *agency*—the capacity to plan and act—and *experience*—the capacity to sense and feel (e.g., Gray et al., 2007). Indeed, prior research showed that the objectified were attributed low agency and low

experience by both themselves and others (e.g., Andrighetto et al., 2017; Loughnan et al., 2017). Whereas objectification bears resemblance to dehumanization in terms of denial of agency and denial of experience (Haslam, 2006), objectification is distinct from dehumanization in that objectification includes the notion of instrumentality (Gruenfeld et al., 2008). Dehumanization does not emphasize or involve instrumentality in its conceptualization.

Our research focuses on objectification that occurs between a supervisor (as the agent of objectification) and his or her subordinate (as the target who is objectified). Accordingly, an objectifying supervisor is someone who evaluates his or her subordinate based on the utility for accomplishing work tasks, while depriving the subordinate of self-regulation in work-related plans and actions and of feelings towards work. The relationship between supervisor and subordinate is characterized by the fact that usually the supervisor has more power than the subordinate (Rus, van Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2010). Supervisors generally have more power, because they outrank their subordinates and a higher rank entails more control over resources (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Wisse, Rus, Keller, & Sleebos, 2019). To explain why supervisors who objectify are granted power we build on system justification theory (Jost, 2020; Jost & Banaji, 1994).

## The System Justification Model of Objectification and Power

System justification theory assumes that people tend to use ideas about groups and individuals to justify the way things are, “so that existing social arrangements are perceived as fair and legitimate, perhaps even natural and inevitable” (Jost &

Hunyady, 2002, p. 119). System justification provides an explanation for how societal inequality persists and how the unfair treatment, such as objectification, of the disadvantaged is legitimized.

**Power-Related Stereotypes and Justification of Objectification**

People are inclined to use role-bound stereotypes to justify unfair social arrangements or misconduct (e.g., Haines & Jost, 2000; Jost & Kay, 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003). One such stereotype is that, in general, power holders are more self-oriented and uncaring than their powerless counterparts (Moya, Fiske, Durante, & Tablante, 2017) and correspondingly more likely to exhibit objectifying behavior. Notably, those role-bound stereotypes do not necessarily serve the purpose of depicting individuals in a certain role as being positive or negative, but rather as a means to indicate that they are well-suited for their status (Haines & Jost, 2000). Derogating the powerless on the power-relevant dimensions (e.g., competence and achievement orientations) justifies the position that they have, so does compensating them on the dimensions that are less relevant to power (e.g., warmth and interpersonal orientations; Jost, Kivetz, Rubini, Guermandi, & Mosso, 2005). Likewise, by derogating the powerful on the dimensions that are less relevant to power (e.g., warmth), and praising them on the power-relevant dimensions (e.g., competence), their suitability for their roles is underscored (Moya et al., 2017). In a nutshell, supervisors, given their powerful positions, are often believed to be relatively cold and outcome-oriented, and perhaps therefore more prone to objectify others.

Consistent with people's power-related stereotypes, power indeed breeds

objectification and dehumanization (Civile & Obhi, 2016; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Xiao, Li, Zheng, & Wang, 2019). For instance, Gruenfeld and colleagues (2008) found that power holders tended to approach a social target based on whether a target was deemed useful. The powerful attribute fewer uniquely human traits to their powerless counterparts than vice versa (Capozza, Andrighetto, Di Bernardo, & Falvo, 2012; Gwinn, Judd, & Park, 2013), and they view the powerless as objects of manipulation (Kipnis, 1972). Likewise, powerful people generally pay more attention to stereotypic and depersonalized information than do the powerless (e.g., Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000). Moreover, power positively predicts immoral behavior (e.g., Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2015), prejudice (Richeson & Ambady, 2003), self-enhancement, and other-derogation (Georgesen & Harris, 2000). In short, there is evidence showing that the powerful, relative to the powerless, are more likely to objectify others.

Moreover, by applying these power-related stereotypes, people defend and bolster the existing state of affairs, even when doing so undermines the interest of the disadvantaged (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Counter-intuitively, these system-justifying stereotypes are held both by the advantaged *and the disadvantaged* (Haines & Jost, 2000; Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002). The powerless not only attribute greater superiority to the powerful to legitimize the status quo (Haines & Jost, 2000), but they further misremember explanations for their powerlessness as being more legitimate than they actually are (Jost et al., 2004). Low-status people legitimize power inequality to such an extent

that they show less favoritism to themselves (e.g., choosing to interact with a member of high-status group over members of their own group), while high-status people exhibit more favoritism towards themselves (Jost & Burgess, 2000; Jost et al., 2002). Notably, the adoption of system-justifying stereotypes has behavioral implications, insofar as it leads people to actively support (as opposed to challenge) the status quo (Calogero, 2013; Calogero & Jost, 2011). Therefore, we argue that subordinates are likely to rationalize and perpetuate supervisor objectification by granting power to an objectifying supervisor.

**Power Distance as the Moderator**

The effects of supervisor objectification can vary from one culture to another, or from one individual with a specific cultural value to another. In this respect, the concept of *power distance* is especially relevant to the current research, given both its system-justifying functions (Jost & Hunyady, 2005) and its implications for how negative supervisory behaviors are appraised (Lian et al., 2012; Tepper, 2007). Power distance reflects the degree to which individuals accept inequality of power distribution existing in a society or an organization (Hofstede, 1997; House et al., 2014). Those inequalities of power distribution not only concern what one *perceives* to be the case but also what one *desires* to be the case (Hofstede, 1997). In a high, relative to low, power distance work environment, supervisors expect and demand more obedience (Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007), and subordinates are more inclined to have a unquestioning and submissive attitude towards their supervisors (Khatri, 2009). Such power asymmetry can be conducive to supervisor mistreatment towards

subordinates (Son Hing, Bobocel, Zanna, & McBride, 2007).

Indeed, not only does high power distance allow and even facilitate supervisors' unfair treatment towards their subordinates (Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Zhang & Bednall, 2016), but it also has the effect that subordinates place less weight on the quality of their treatment by supervisors (e.g., whether or not they are treated with dignity; Tyler, Lind, & Huo, 2000), and are less likely to view supervisor mistreatment as interpersonally unfair (Lian et al., 2012; Vogel et al., 2015). In addition, from an uncertainty management perspective (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002), because a relatively high power distance reduces one's uncertainty by offering a predictable, structured order and a clear rule about who should do what (Friesen, Kay, Eibach, & Galinsky, 2014), subordinates higher in power distance are less in need of fairness or fairness-related signals (Thau, Bennett, Mitchell, & Marrs, 2009). In other words, subordinates who have a higher power distance orientation are more likely to rationalize supervisor mistreatment such as objectification.

On the basis of the above, subordinates higher (vs. lower) in power distance are more likely to willingly afford power to an objectifying supervisor through their muted fairness concern. Supporting this account, prior research showed that subordinates high (vs. low) in power distance were not only more acquiescent to abusive supervision (Lian et al., 2012), but they were also more supportive of the abusive supervisor, such that they showed more trust in their supervisor and constructive effort at work (Lee, Pillutla, & Law, 2000; Vogel et al., 2015). Likewise, the negative effects of abusive supervision on employee psychological health and job

satisfaction were weaker for employees higher in power distance (Lin, Wang, & Chen, 2013). We therefore hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: *The relation between supervisor objectification and power affordance is moderated by subordinate power distance, such that relative to low-power-distance subordinates, high-power-distance subordinates afford more power to an objectifying supervisor, and less power to a non-objectifying supervisor.*

**Descriptive Justification versus Prescriptive Justification as the Mediator**

Why are subordinates who are higher in power distance more likely to afford power to an objectifying supervisor? As shown in Figure 3.1, we argue that it is because subordinates who are higher in power distance descriptively and prescriptively justify supervisor objectification (cf. Hu, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2016; see also Abrams, de Moura, & Travaglino, 2013; Moon, Weick, & Uskul, 2018). By *descriptive justification*, we mean the extent to which subordinates think that it is typical for a powerful supervisor to objectify employees; by *prescriptive justification*, we mean the extent to which subordinates think that it is desirable for a powerful supervisor to objectify employees. Although descriptive and prescriptive terms are closely intertwined, such that people automatically associate commonness of an event with its desirability (Eriksson, Strimling, & Coultas, 2015; Lindström, Jangard, Selbing, & Olsson, 2018), differentiating between the two constructs can advance our understanding of the link between objectification and power affordance.

In particular, because subordinates higher in power distance prefer well-defined roles and clear instructions given by supervisors (Daniels & Greguras, 2014), they are

more likely to perceive objectification as both typical and desirable supervisory behavior. By contrast, because subordinates lower in power distance value more people-oriented and less task-oriented supervisory behavior (Daniels & Greguras, 2014), they are less likely to justify objectification in either descriptive or prescriptive terms. This also aligns with the normative nature of power distance, in that power distance as a value construct indicates what is common as well as desirable (Hofstede, 1997). Moreover, the notion of power and its related stereotypes are arguably stronger in the subordinates with higher power distance orientations (see Jost, 2020; Jost & Hunyady, 2005), which may in turn lead them to show more descriptive and prescriptive justification for supervisor objectification. As a consequence, subordinates higher in power distance may willingly afford more power to an objectifying supervisor. Thereby we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: *Subordinates' descriptive and prescriptive justification mediate the moderating effect of power distance on the relation between supervisor objectification and power affordance, such that relative to low-power-distance subordinates, high-power-distance subordinates afford more power to their objectifying supervisor, because of descriptive justification* (a) *and prescriptive justification* (b).

## Study Overview

We opted for a multi-study, multi-method test of our hypotheses. To establish causality, we conducted two experiments in which we manipulated power distance and objectification with self-designed scenarios (Study 1, $N$ = 443) or video clips (Study 2, $N$ = 211). We then measured descriptive justification, prescriptive

justification, and power affordance. In Study 2 we also included a behavioral measure of power affordance. To increase external validity, we conducted a field survey (Study 3, $N = 122$) with dyads of supervisors and subordinates. Supervisors rated the extent to which they engaged in objectifying behavior, while their subordinates indicated power distance, descriptive and prescriptive justification, and power affordance. University ethics approval was obtained prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained and participation was voluntary and confidential in all three studies.

## Study 1

### Method

**Participants and design.** We used a 2 (objectification: non-objectification vs. objectification) × 3 (power distance: low vs. control vs. high) between-subjects design. We recruited participants from Prolific, a crowdsourcing platform that provided high data quality, especially in terms of reproducibility of known effects and participants' naivety to experimental tasks (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017). A total of 409 British employees fulfilled our criteria for participation (working either full- or part-time, having a 95% Prolific approval rate, and using a computer). To further ensure data quality and in line with the recommendations by Meade and Craig (2012), we removed all data of the participants who failed instructed response items ($n = 36$), indicated that his or her data should not be used ($n = 24$), showed zero variance in responses (i.e., straight-lining; $n = 12$), reported a malfunction during the experiment ($n = 1$), or were an extreme multivariate outlier ($n = 1$).[1] The final sample consisted

[1] Three participants were identified as careless in two of the listed respects.

of 328 participants (199 women and 129 men) with a mean age at 39.52 (*SD* = 10.99).[2] The majority of participants were Caucasian (94.2%), had an undergraduate degree (41.5%), and had a personal annual income ranging from £20,000 to £29,999 (30.8%). The most typical industries in which participants worked were education (14.3%), science and technology (11.6%), health care (11.3%), and retail (11.0%). Most participants worked 33 to 40 hours per week (57.9%).

**Procedure and materials.** After answering the questions pertaining to demographics, participants were informed that they would read a description of a work situation. They were asked to imagine that they were working in a reputable company that could be seen as an industry leader in the fast-moving consumer goods sector and that was currently expanding operations in several countries around the globe. Then participants were randomly assigned to one of three power distance conditions. Next, all participants were introduced to their supervisor, named Bill, in the scenario. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two objectification conditions, in which they read a dialogue between Bill and one of Bill's colleagues. All participants were then asked to fill out descriptive justification, prescriptive justification, and power affordance scales. Finally, participants were debriefed and compensated (£0.70).

**Power distance manipulation, manipulation check, and measure.** We adopted the power distance manipulation developed by Moon, Weick, and Uskul (2018). Specifically, after a short introduction of the company, participants in the low power

[2] The inclusion of careless responses did not change the pattern of results in Study 1.

distance condition read, for instance: “Those in authority treat juniors with respect and do not pull rank”. In the high power distance condition, participants read, for instance: “Those in authority openly demonstrate their rank and expect those in junior positions to be aware of the existing ranks and show respect towards seniors”. Participants in the low and high power distance conditions then completed a two-item power distance manipulation check (“Power is distributed unequally between the seniors and the juniors in this organization”, “This organization has a hierarchical structure”; 1 = *disagree strongly*, 7 = *agree strongly*; α = .94). Participants in the control condition received no information regarding power distance. Instead, they completed the six-item Power Distance Scale (Clugston, Howell, & Dorfman, 2000; α = .57) as a filler task. They indicated their chronic power distance orientation by indicating the extent to which they agreed (1 = *disagree strongly*, 7 = *agree strongly*) with statements like “Supervisors should make most decisions without consulting subordinates”.

**Objectification manipulation and manipulation check.** To manipulate objectification, we presented participants with a dialogue in which the supervisor Bill made either objectifying or non-objectifying remarks regarding employees. This dialogue was developed based on the items of Gruenfeld and colleagues’ (2008) Objectification Scale (see Appendix B for the full text of the dialogue). Note that all three attributes of objectification were incorporated in the dialogue. For instance in the objectification condition, Bill evaluated employees based on their *instrumental* value by saying “Let’s try to see which muppets we could use for this new project”

(vs. “Let’s try to see which employees we could involve in this new project”); Bill also *deprived employees of agency* by saying “We don’t want any ‘suggestions’ about how to do the work” (vs. “We want her to voice her opinion about how to do the work”); Bill also showed *denial of experience* by saying “It does not improve efficiency to discuss personal life at work” (vs. “It is always nice to get to know a bit more about people’s personal lives”). After the objectification manipulation, participants completed a four-item objectification manipulation check (α = .94) by indicating how much they agreed (1 = *disagree strongly*, 7 = *agree strongly*) with the statements: “Bill treats employees as objects rather than human beings”; “Bill ignores employees’ thoughts and feelings”; “Bill treats employees as means to reach goals”; “Bill tends to contact employees only when he needs something from them”.

**Descriptive and prescriptive justification measures.** We developed a three-item *Descriptive Justification Scale* (α = .91). Participants were asked to estimate “how common/ typical/ likely it is that a powerful supervisor in this organization treats his/her employees as Bill does” on a 7-point scale (1 = *very uncommon/ untypical/ unlikely*, 7 = *very common/ typical/ likely*). The four-item *Prescriptive Justification Scale* (α = .98) asked participants to indicate “how appropriate/ acceptable/ proper/ desirable is it for a powerful supervisor to treat employees in the way that Bill does in this organization” on a 7-point scale (1 = *completely inappropriate/ unacceptable/ improper/ undesirable*, 7 = *perfectly appropriate/ acceptable/ proper/ desirable*).

**Power affordance measure.** We formed a seven-item *Power Affordance Scale*

(α = .98) by using items from previous power-related scales (Caza, Tiedens, & Lee, 2011; Mayer & Davis, 1999; Platow, Reid, & Andrew, 1998). Participants indicated the extent to which they would be (1 = *definitely not*, 7 = *definitely*) in favour of Bill having power as indicated by their responses to items such as: "If a vote were to be held, I'd like to vote for Bill as my leader again", and "I would let Bill have influence over job issues that are important to me" (see Appendix B for the complete scale).

**Results and Discussion**

**Manipulation checks.** As expected, participants in the high power distance condition ($M$ = 6.27, $SD$ = .84) indicated that the organization had a more hierarchical structure than did participants in the low power distance condition ($M$ = 2.32, $SD$ = 1.28), $t$ (170.24) = -26.64, $p < .001$, $d$ = -3.71. A 2 (objectification: non-objectification vs. objectification) × 3 (power distance: control vs. low vs. high) analysis of variance (ANOVA) confirmed that participants evaluated their objectifying supervisor ($M$ = 6.71, $SD$ = .47) as exhibiting more objectifying behaviors than the non-objectifying supervisor ($M$ = 3.74, $SD$ = 1.44), $F$ (1, 322) = 685.12, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .68$. A main effect of power distance was also observed, $F$ (2, 322) = 8.81, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. In addition, an interaction effect indicated that the difference between objectification and non-objectification was significant within each power distance condition, albeit less pronounced in the high power distance condition than in the low power distance and control conditions, $F$ (2, 322) = 6.36, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. This effect seemed unsurprising given the nature of power distance. Moreover, given the relatively small effect size, we concluded that our manipulations were successful.

**Power affordance.** To test whether objectification and power distance interacted in affecting power affordance (Hypothesis 1), we conducted a 2 × 3 ANOVA on power affordance. A main effect of objectification was observed ($F$ (1, 322) = 414.13, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .56$), indicating that relative to an objectifying supervisor ($M = 1.42$, $SD = .63$), a non-objectifying supervisor ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.72$) was afforded more power. A main effect of power distance was also observed, $F$ (2, 322) = 3.04, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Most importantly, supporting Hypothesis 1, the interaction term was significant, $F$ (2, 322) = 3.26, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$ (see Figure 3.2a). Pairwise comparisons (Bonferroni) further revealed that participants afforded more power to a non-objectifying supervisor than to an objectifying supervisor in each power distance condition ($p$s < .001); but compared with participants in the low power distance condition, participants in the high power distance condition afforded less power to a non-objectifying supervisor ($p < .05$, $g = .34$).

**A moderated mediation model.** We tested the first-stage moderated mediation model (i.e., Hypothesis 2) by using PROCESS Model 7 (Hayes, 2018) with 95% CI and 5,000 bootstrap iterations. We entered objectification (0 = non-objectification, 1 = objectification) as the independent variable, power distance (coded with two dummy variables: 0, 0 for low power distance; 1, 0 for control condition; 0, 1 for high power distance) as the moderator, and descriptive and prescriptive justifications as the mediators.

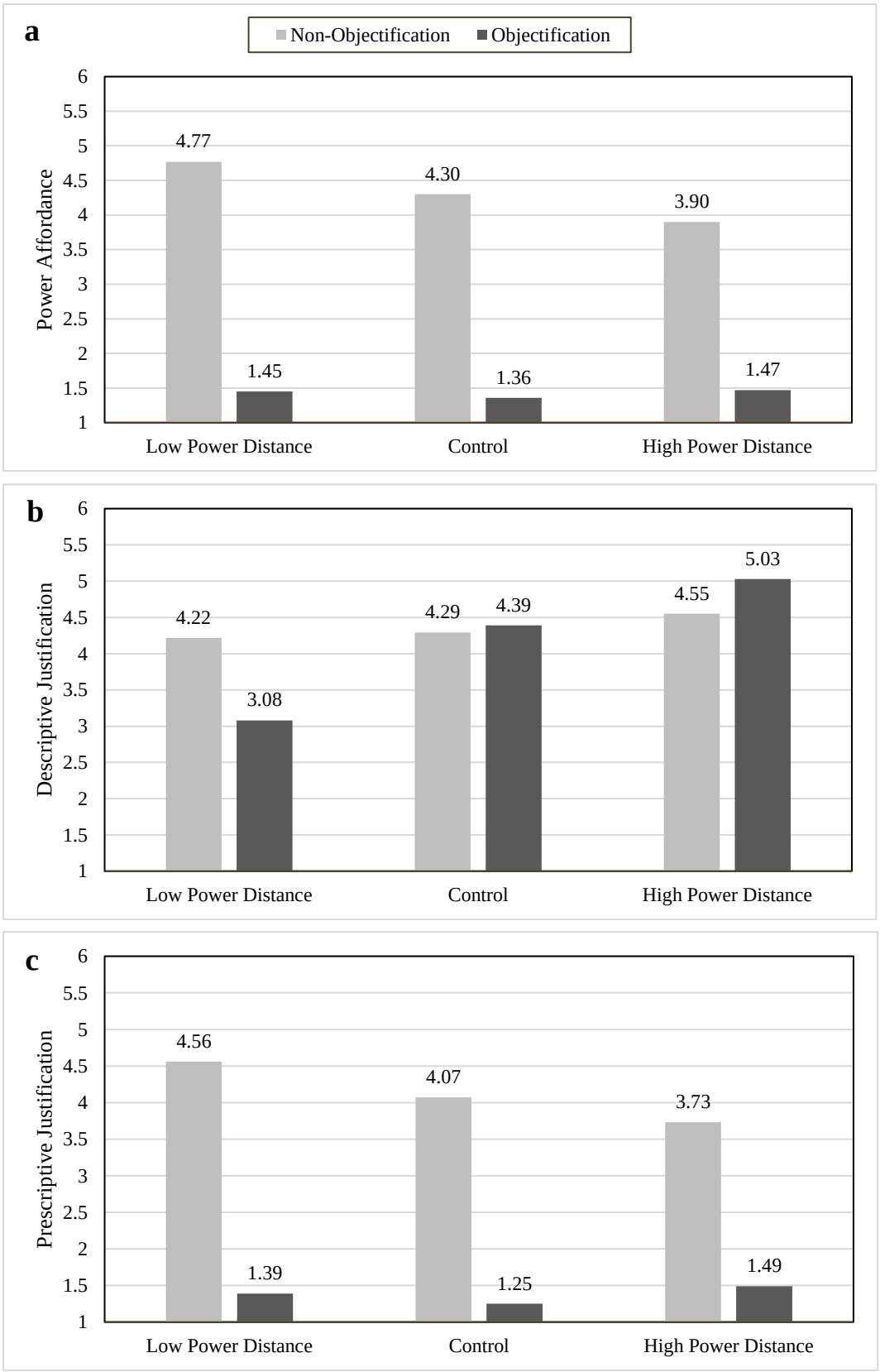



*Figure 3.2.* Power affordance (panel a), descriptive justification (panel b), and prescriptive justification (panel c) as the function of objectification and power distance with means shown on the top of bars (Study 1).

Table 3.1

*Model Coefficients for the Effects of Objectification on Power Affordance through Descriptive Justification and Prescriptive Justification as a Function of Power Distance (Study 1)*

| Predictor | Descriptive Justification | | Prescriptive Justification | | Power Affordance | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *b* (*SE*) | 95% CI | *b* (*SE*) | 95% CI | *b* (*SE*) | 95% CI |
| Objectification | -1.13*** (.29) | [-1.71, -.55] | -3.17*** (.24) | [-3.65, -2.70] | -.50*** (.11) | [-.72, -.27] |
| Descriptive Justification | | | | | -.07** (.02) | [-.12, -.02] |
| Prescriptive Justification | | | | | .88*** (.03) | [.81, .94] |
| Power Distance (V1) | .07 (.29) | [-.50, .64] | -.50* (.24) | [-.97, -.03] | | |
| Power Distance (V2) | .34 (.28) | [-.21, .88] | -.84*** (.23) | [-1.28, -.39] | | |
| Objectification × Power Distance (V1) | 1.23** (.41) | [.43, 2.04] | .36 (.34) | [-.30, 1.03] | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Objectification × Power Distance (V2) | 1.61*** (.40) | [.82, 2.40] | .93** (.33) | [.27, 1.59] | | |
| Constant | 4.22*** (.20) | [3.82, 4.61] | 4.56*** (.17) | [4.24, 4.89] | 1.03*** (.18) | [.68, 1.37] |
| $R^2$ | .13 | | .57 | | .87 | |
| $F$ | 9.53*** | | 84.03*** | | 743.65*** | |

The Conditional Indirect Effects of Objectification on Power Affordance

| | Mediator: Descriptive Justification | | | Mediator: Prescriptive Justification | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Moderator: Power Distance | Effect | Bootstrap SE | 95% Bootst. CI | Effect | Bootstrap SE | 95% Bootst. CI |
| High | -.03 | .02 | [-.09, .003] | -1.96 | .21 | [-2.38, -1.56] |
| Control | -.01 | .02 | [-.06, .03] | -2.46 | .23 | [-2.92, -2.02] |
| Low | .08 | .04 | [.02, .16] | -2.78 | .25 | [-3.27, -2.30] |

*Note.* As dummy coded variables for power distance, V1 compares control condition to low power distance, and V2 compares high power distance to low power distance. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .00$

As can be seen in Table 3.1, objectification and power distance interactively predicted both descriptive justification and prescriptive justification. As shown in Figures 3.2b and 3.2c, compared with participants in the low power distance condition, participants in the high power distance condition considered objectification as more typical supervisory behavior (i.e., descriptive justification; $p < .001$, $g = .74$), and non-objectification as less desirable supervisory behavior (i.e., prescriptive justification; $p < .05$, $g = .31$).

As can be seen in Table 3.1, the full model accounted for a substantial amount of variance in power affordance. A negative direct effect of objectification indicated that an objectifying supervisor was afforded less power than a non-objectifying supervisor. Contrary to our prediction (Hypothesis 2a), the moderated mediation effects via descriptive justification turned out to be negative (high power distance vis-à-vis low power distance: *index* = -.12, *SE* = .05, CI [-.23, -.03]). This showed that with larger power distance, subordinates afforded less power to an objectifying supervisor, because objectification was seen as more typical supervisory behavior. Only in a low power distance organization did subordinates afford power to an objectifying supervisor because of descriptive justification (see the bottom of Table 3.1). In contrast, supporting Hypothesis 2b, we found a positive moderated mediation effect via prescriptive justification (high power distance vis-à-vis low power distance: index = .81, SE = .29, CI [.25, 1.40]). Although the indirect effects via prescriptive justification were significantly negative across three levels of power distance, there was a clear upward trend indicating that with power distance increasing, supervisor

objectification predicted greater power affordance through prescriptive justification.

To summarize, we found that compared with low-power-distance subordinates, those high-power-distance subordinates afforded more power to an objectifying supervisor through prescriptive justification, that is because they considered objectification as more desirable supervisory behavior. The results of Study 1 provided support for part of the model (see Figure 3.1), namely the indirect effect of objectification on power affordance via prescriptive justification.

## Study 2

Study 2 sought to replicate the findings of Study 1, while adding a behavioral measure of power affordance—the extent to which participants would grant their supervisor the power to evaluate their task performance and to determine the monetary reward for their task performance. A pilot study reported below was first conducted to validate two videos as successful manipulation of objectification.

### Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to assess the construct validity of the objectification videos. We used a one-factor (non-objectification versus objectification) between-subjects design in which 40 women and 19 men with the mean age at 36.39 ($SD$ = 10.60) were randomly assigned to view either the objectification or the non-objectification video, and then provided ratings on objectification manipulation checks ($\alpha$ = .95; the same scale of Study 1) and relevant measures as described below. We created two video clips that portrayed a supervisor who either objectified or did not objectify subordinates using the script from study 1, with minor adaptations to fit

the study context. Two British male doctorate students in management were recruited as the actors and were allegedly discussing the recruitment of students for a project. In both conditions, the actors wore the same blue shirts, and sat in the same business meeting room, on the same chairs, and behind the same table. Camera perspective was identical in two videos. The two videos were similar in terms of length, word count, the actors' vocal tone, facial expressions, and body movement.

As intended, participants indicated that the objectifying supervisor ($M$ = 6.22, $SD$ = .82) exhibited more objectifying behaviors than the non-objectifying supervisor ($M$ = 3.08, $SD$ = 1.20), $t$ (51.42) = 11.71, $p$ < .001. Participants also perceived the objectifying supervisor ($M$ = 4.11, $SD$ = .52) to be more dominant than the non-objectifying supervisor ($M$ = 3.07, $SD$ = .84), $t$ (48.82) = 5.80, $p$ < .001. In addition, compared with the non-objectifying one, the objectifying supervisor was perceived to be less trustworthy ($p$ < .001), liked ($p$ < .001), competent ($p$ < .05), and warm ($p$ < .001). The videos did not differ in how prestigious, economically successful, well-educated, masculine, physically attractive, or young/old the leader appeared. Given the results, the videos can be considered successful in manipulating objectification.

**Focal Study Method**

**Participants and design.** A total of 211 participants from a university located in northern England were randomly assigned to one condition of a 2 (objectification: non-objectification vs. objectification) × 2 (power distance: low vs. high) between-subjects design. Participants were recruited through university-wide email

advertisements, flyers, and social media. To ensure data quality, we removed the responses from 8 participants who did not watch the video as required, and 8 participants who knew (one of) the actors, 6 participants who were extreme multivariate outliers, and 21 participants who were identified as suspicious for various reasons, such as that some restarted the computer program accidentally in the middle of the experiment.[3] Our final sample consisted of 174 participants (114 females, 60 males) with the mean age at 23.94 (*SD* = 6.72). The majority of participants were students (87.4%), and 12.6% of them were university staff. Half of the final sample were Caucasian, 40.8% were Asian, and the remaining 9.2% had various other ethnic backgrounds.[4]

**Procedure and materials.** All participants were informed that they would participate in a computer-mediated study on "social interaction in the workplace" and were seated behind a computer that was used to present all instructions, stimuli, and dependent measures. Participants were told that "by participating in this study you have become a member of Mirror", "a simulated organization established to study business decision-making processes". They read the profile of Mirror that described either high or low power distance. To increase psychological realness we created and presented a logo of Mirror (Callahan & Ledgerwood, 2016) and presented participants with some general information about Mirror (e.g., the number of local students

[3] Six responses were identified as invalid in more than one respect.

[4] Including any demographic variable as control variable did not change the pattern of results that we reported.

involved in Mirror).

After completing power distance manipulation check, participants were asked to review a part of decision-making process in which their supervisor Bill was involved by watching one of the two videos that were developed to manipulate objectification and were validated in pilot study. After completing objectification manipulation check, participants filled out the descriptive and prescriptive justification scales. Then, they were asked to complete two job-related tasks, which would be evaluated in order to assess whether or not they could get a bonus. How much power participants granted to their supervisor over the evaluation of their task performance served as the behavioural measure of power affordance. Finally, participants filled out the power affordance scale. Participants also answered demographic questions (gender, age, etc.). Participants were compensated and debriefed. Each participant was compensated £5 for the participation and had the chance to win a £25 Amazon gift card contingent on their task performance.

**Power distance manipulation and manipulation check.** We adapted the power distance manipulation of Study 1, which was originally developed by Moon, Weick, and Uskul (2018). The power distance was manipulated in the description of Mirror, and included the following four elements: First, “our culture” provided detailed descriptions of power distance which were similar to Study 1; second, the “code of conduct” summarized the keywords “deference, authority, and hierarchy” for high power distance, or “autonomy, equality, and fairness” for low power distance; third, a “star employee” further emphasized the importance of “respecting” (i.e., high power

distance) or "challenging" (i.e., low power distance) the decisions of those in authority; and fourth, the "organization chart" graphically showed positions along a vertical (i.e., high power distance) or horizontal (i.e., low power distance) axis. Participants completed a four-item power distance manipulation check (Moon et al., 2018; α = .90) by indicating how much they agreed (1 = *disagree strongly*, 7 = *agree strongly*) with statements like "This organization has a hierarchical structure".

**Objectification manipulation and manipulation check.** The objectification manipulation was introduced by informing participants that they needed to watch and review a video of a decision-making process in which their supervisor Bill was involved (see the pilot section for more details). In each video, Bill discussed the recruitment of students for a new project with his colleague, and he made either objectifying or non-objectifying remarks about students. After watching the video, participants completed a four-item objectification manipulation check (α = .87), which was identical to Study 1.

**Measures.** *Descriptive justification* (α = .82) and *prescriptive justification* (α = .93) measures were the same as Study 1. For *power affordance*, we developed a behavioral measure and also used a self-report scale. For the behavioral measure, we first asked participants to complete two job-related tasks (viz., proofreading and self-presentation), and they were told that their performance in each task would be evaluated and scored separately by both their supervisor Bill and an algorithm (as a neutral competitor). For each evaluated task, the scores given by Bill and by the algorithm would be combined, and the composite score would determine their chance

of winning a £25 Amazon gift card. The behavioral component was that participants could decide how much power they would like to give to Bill (or the algorithm) by allocating the weight (0 = *none at all*, 100 = *a great deal*) to Bill and the algorithm for each task score. As participants did weight allocation for two tasks, this behavioral measure of power affordance had two items (α = .63).[5] Afterwards, participants filled out the conventional power affordance scale (α = .92), of which seven items were adopted from Study 1's power affordance scale and a new item was added specific to this experiment "I'd like Bill to lead the new project". As expected, the two power affordance measures were positively correlated, $r = .33$, $p < .001$.

**Results and Discussion**

**Manipulation checks.** As expected, participants in the high power distance condition ($M = 6.08$, $SD = .85$) perceived the organization to have higher power distance than did participants in the low power distance condition ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.13$), $t\ (154.15) = -20.22$, $p < .001$, $d = -3.10$. Moreover, a 2 × 2 ANOVA confirmed the main effect of objectification, such that participants perceived an objectifying supervisor ($M = 5.83$, $SD = .99$) as exhibiting more objectifying behaviors, relative to the non-objectifying supervisor ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.33$), $F\ (1, 170) = 144.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .46$. Similar to Study 1, two smaller additional effects were found: A main effect of power distance ($F\ (1, 170) = 6.91$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$) and an interaction effect ($F\ (1, 170) = 11.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$) revealing that although the difference between

[5] Except for the behavioral measure of power affordance (101-point scale), all of measures in Study 2 were 7-point Likert scales.

objectification and non-objectification was significant at each power distance level, the difference was smaller in the high power distance condition ($p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$), relative to the low power distance condition ($p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .40$).

**Power affordance.** To test whether objectification and power distance would jointly predict power affordance (Hypothesis 1), we conducted a 2 × 2 ANOVA for each power affordance measure. A main effect of objectification was observed for the self-report power affordance measure ($F$ (1, 170) = 39.37, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$), indicating that relative to an objectifying supervisor ($M$ = 2.71, $SD$ = 1.11), a non-objectifying supervisor ($M$ = 3.81, $SD$ = 1.30) was afforded more power. This main effect was not observed for the behavioral power affordance measure ($F < 1$, *ns*). No main effect of power distance attained significance for any power affordance measure ($F$s < 1, *ns*). Most importantly, supporting Hypothesis 1, the interaction term was significant for both the behavioral measure ($F$ (1, 170) = 6.26, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$) and self-report measure ($F$ (1, 170) = 6.62, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$) of power affordance. As shown in Figures 3.3a and 3.3b, participants in the high power distance condition afforded less power to a non-objectifying supervisor than did participants in the low power distance condition for the self-report measure ($F$ (1, 170) = 6.12, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$) but not for the behavioral measure ($F$ (1, 170) = 3.73, $p < .10$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$); participants in the high power distance condition did not afford more power to an objectifying supervisor than did participants in the low power distance condition (behavioral measure: $F$ (1, 170) = 2.56, $p = .11$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$; self-report measure: $F$ (1, 170) = 1.31, $p = .25$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$).

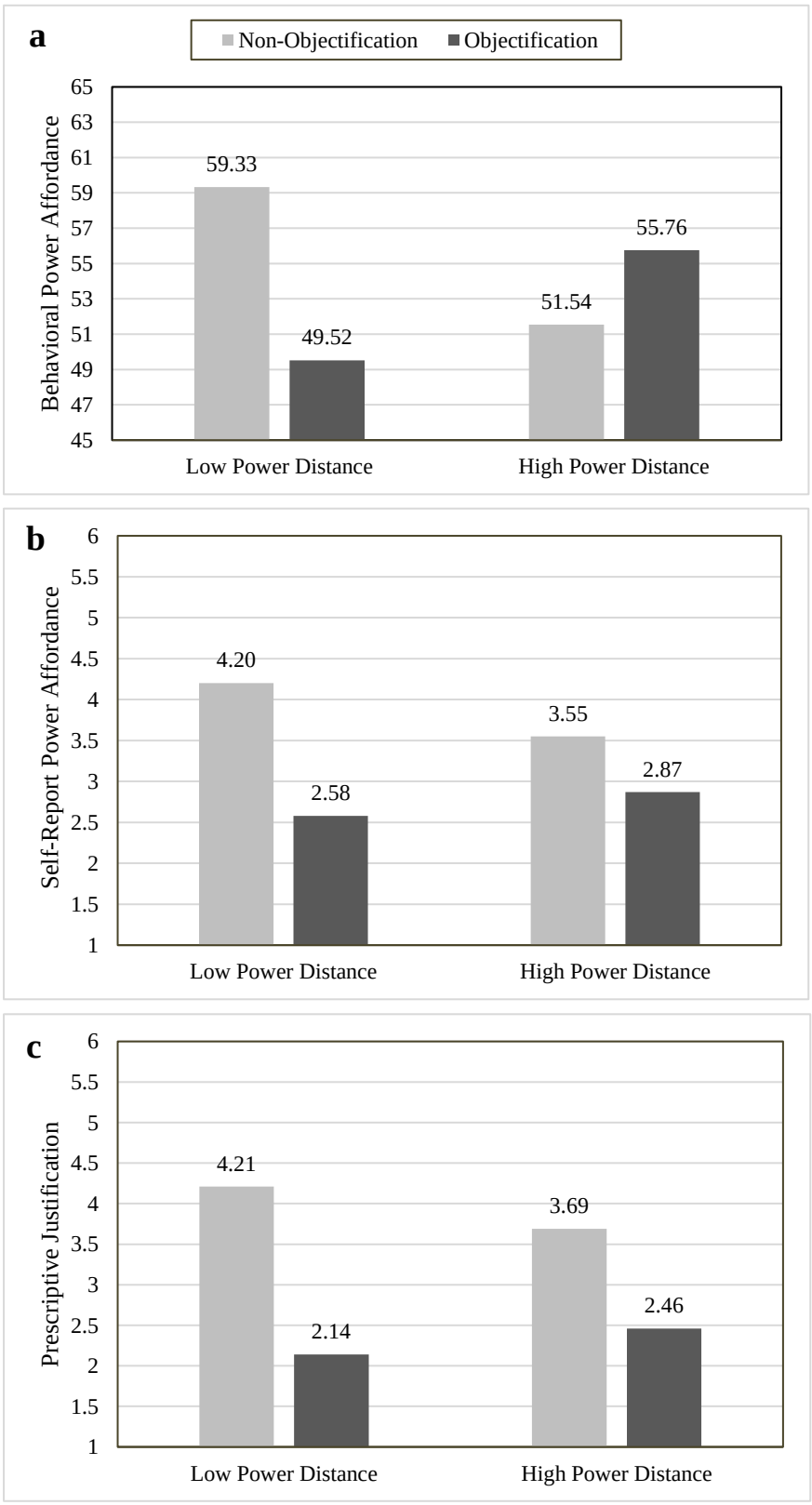



*Figure 3.3*. Behavioral power affordance (panel a), self-report power affordance (panel b), and prescriptive justification (panel c) as the function of objectification and power distance with means shown on the top of the bars (Study 2).

**Moderated mediation models.** We then tested the first-stage moderated mediation model for each power affordance measure (i.e., Hypothesis 2). As in Study 1, we utilized Hayes' (2018) PROCESS Model 7 with 95% CI and 5,000 bootstrap iterations. We consistently entered objectification (0 = non-objectification, 1 = objectification) as the independent variable, power distance (0 = low power distance, 1 = high power distance) as the moderator, and two types of justification as the mediators.

As can be seen in Table 3.2, objectification and power distance interactively predicted prescriptive justification, but not descriptive justification. As shown in Figure 3.3c, in both power distance conditions supervisor objectification was regarded as inappropriate (*p*s < .001), but the difference between objectification and non-objectification in prescriptive justification was smaller for participants in the high power distance condition ($F$ (1, 170) = 20.41, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$) than for those in the low power distance condition ($F$ (1, 170) = 52.91, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .24$). As in Study 1, participants in the high power distance condition evaluated their supervisor's non-objectifying behavior as less desirable than did the participants in the low power distance condition, $F$ (1, 170) = 3.41, $p < .10$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$.

Table 3.2

*Model Coefficients for the Effects of Objectification on Power Affordance through Descriptive Justification and Prescriptive Justification as a Function of Power Distance (Study 2)*

| Predictor | Descriptive Justification | | Prescriptive Justification | | Behavioral Power Affordance | | Self-Report Power Affordance | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *b* (*SE*) | 95% CI | *b* (*SE*) | 95% CI | *b* (*SE*) | 95% CI | *b* (*SE*) | 95% CI |
| Obj | -.26 (.27) | [-.79, .27] | -2.06*** (.28) | [-2.62, -1.50] | 3.89 (3.23) | [-2.50, 10.27] | .05 (.14) | [-.23, .34] |
| DJ | | | | | -.28 (1.13) | [-2.51, 1.94] | .05 (.05) | [-.05, .14] |
| PJ | | | | | 3.92*** (1.07) | [1.81, 6.04] | .71*** (.05) | [.62, .81] |
| PD | .27 (.27) | [-.26, .79] | -.52$^{+}$ (.28) | [-1.08, .04] | | | | |
| Obj × PD | .40 (.37) | [-.33, 1.13] | .84* (.39) | [.06, 1.61] | | | | |
| Constant | 4.90*** (.20) | [4.50, 5.31] | 4.21*** (.22) | [3.78, 4.64] | 40.89*** (7.84) | [25.42, 56.36] | .81* (.35) | [.12, 1.51] |
| $R^2$ | .05 | | .30 | | .08 | | .64 | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *F* | 2.73* | 24.60*** | 4.99** | 101.96*** |

The Conditional Indirect Effects of Objectification on Behavioral Power Affordance

| | Mediator: Descriptive Justification | | | Mediator: Prescriptive Justification | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Moderator: PD | Effect | Bootstrap SE | 95% Bootst. CI | Effect | Bootstrap SE | 95% Bootst. CI |
| High | -.04 | .32 | [-.79, .62] | -4.82 | 1.81 | [-8.73, -1.66] |
| Low | .07 | .41 | [-.78, .98] | -8.10 | 2.83 | [-13.97, -2.89] |

The Conditional Indirect Effects of Objectification on Self-Report Power Affordance

| | Mediator: Descriptive Justification | | | Mediator: Prescriptive Justification | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Moderator: PD | Effect | Bootstrap SE | 95% Bootst. CI | Effect | Bootstrap SE | 95% Bootst. CI |
| High | .01 | .02 | [-.03, .05] | -.87 | .20 | [-1.29, -.49] |
| Low | -.01 | .02 | [-.07, .02] | -1.47 | .23 | [-1.93, -1.02] |

*Note.* Obj = objectification; DJ = descriptive justification; PJ = prescriptive justification; PD = power distance. $^{+}$ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

For the behavioral measure of power affordance, as can be seen in Table 3.2, the whole model accounted for 8.09% of the variance. As hypothesized, we found a positive indirect effect of objectification on power affordance through prescriptive justification, *index* = 3.28, *SE* = 1.98, CI [.15, 7.79]. Similar to Study 1's findings, though the indirect effects of objectification on power affordance via prescriptive justification were significantly negative at both low and high levels of power distance (see the bottom of Table 3.2), there was an upward trend that with power distance increasing, supervisor objectification predicted greater power affordance through prescriptive justification. Yet no indirect effect via descriptive justification was found, *index* = -.11, *SE* = .60, CI [-1.38, 1.11].

The pattern of results was the same for the self-report measure of power affordance. As can be seen in Table 3.2, the full model accounted for a substantial amount of variance (64.28%). As hypothesized, there was a positive moderated mediation effect of objectification on power affordance via prescriptive justification, *index* = .59, *SE* = .29, CI [.05, 1.16]. As before, although the indirect effects via prescriptive justification were negative at both low and high levels of power distance, there was a clear upward trend showing that with power distance increasing, supervisor objectification predicted greater power affordance through prescriptive justification. Again, no indirect effect via descriptive justification was found, *index* = .02, *SE* = .03, CI [-.04, .09]. Those results supported Hypothesis 2b, but not Hypothesis 2a.

To summarize, we found that compared with low-power-distance subordinates,

high-power-distance subordinates afforded more power to an objectifying supervisor through prescriptive justification, that is because they considered objectification as more desirable supervisory behavior. Study 2 further established the uniqueness of prescriptive justification mechanism in explaining the interaction effect of objectification and power distance on power affordance. Notably, those results held for both the behavioral and the self-report measures of power affordance. Consistent with the findings of Study 1, Study 2 provided partial support for Hypothesis 1 and full support for Hypothesis 2b. Again Study 2 provided no support for Hypothesis 2a.

## Study 3

Study 3 sought to examine our moderated mediation model in a real-life work context. By conducting this field study, we examined whether our model could be applied to chronic power distance relative to primed power distance in Studies 1 and 2. More importantly, we assessed whether our model could generalize to the supervisor-subordinate dyads that had regular face-to-face interactions.

### Respondents

The sample consisted of 122 supervisor-subordinate dyads (66.3% response rate) working in the Netherlands. After removing the data from dyads that had missing data for a whole scale or more (5 dyads) or that were detected as a multivariate outlier (1 dyad), our final sample contained 116 supervisor-subordinate dyads. In the final sample, subordinates (64 women, 52 men) had a mean age of 32.72 ($SD$ = 12.32), while supervisors (34 women, 81 men, 1 missing data) had a mean age of 43.33 ($SD$ = 12.36). Most of the respondents worked in catering (18.3%), construction and retail

(17.3%), or business services (16.3%). Respondents typically had a higher education degree (Bachelor degree or higher; 52.6% subordinates, 68.1% supervisors), worked more than 33 hours per week (47.8% subordinates, 79.1% supervisors), had worked in the current organization for 5 years or more (28.4% subordinates, 52.6% supervisors), and had been in the current supervisory relationship for more than 2 years (52.6%).

**Procedure and Measures**

**Procedure.** Data were collected as part of a study on the role of social interaction in the workplace. Graduate students recruited respondents by using their work environment and personal network, and by visiting local businesses. Potential respondents were approached via e-mail, phone, or face-to-face contact. Envelops with paper-and-pencil questionnaires were distributed in pairs to employees and their direct supervisors. Each pair was numbered so as to enable the matching of supervisor-subordinate data. Those individuals willing to participate in the study were asked to fill in the questionnaires without consulting their colleagues, subordinates or supervisors, and to return the questionnaires in the enclosed envelope. This envelope was subsequently either picked up or returned by mail. Because people often filled in the questionnaires during work hours, we kept the survey short. Moreover, we stressed the fact that participation in the study was voluntary and that data would be treated confidentially. Supervisors filled out the objectification scale, while subordinates completed the power distance, descriptive and prescriptive justification, and power affordance scales. Both supervisors and subordinates answered demographical questions.

**Measures.** We used an adapted version of the *Objectification Scale* (Gruenfeld et al., 2008; α = .70) to measure supervisors' objectification of their subordinates.[6] Supervisors indicated the extent to which they agreed (1 = *disagree strongly*, 7 = *agree strongly*) with statements like: "I think more about what employees can do for me than what I can do for them". The six-item *Power Distance Scale* (Clugston et al., 2000; α = .73) was used to measure the extent to which subordinates accepted that power was distributed unequally. Subordinates indicated how much they agreed (1 = *disagree strongly*, 6 = *agree strongly*) with statements like: "Managers should make most decisions without consulting subordinates". A three-item *Descriptive Justification Scale* (α = .68) asked subordinates the extent to which they agreed (1 = *disagree strongly*, 6 = *agree strongly*) with the following statements: (a) "The powerful usually treat employees as objects rather than human beings"; (b) "Power holders normally use employees as means to reach their goals"; (c) "It is common in this workplace that people in high power positions ignore employees' needs and interests". A four-item *Prescriptive Justification Scale* (α = .61) asked subordinates to indicate the extent to which they agreed (1 = *disagree strongly*, 6 = *agree strongly*) with the following statements: (a) "Those who possess power should use employees as tools to achieve their goals"; (b) "It is acceptable for the powerful to limit employees' autonomy"; (c) "Supervisors in power positions should consider

[6] Due to the poor reliability of the original ten-item scale (α = .52), factor analysis and reliability analysis were conducted and accordingly five items were removed in this study (items 1, 2, 3, 8, and 9 were retained).

employees' thoughts and feelings" (reverse-coded); (d) "It is appropriate for power holders to contact employees primarily when they have tasks for them".

To assess subordinates' willingness to afford power to their supervisor, we used an adapted version of the four-item *Perceived Organizational Power Scale* (Caza et al., 2011; $\alpha = .73$). Instead of asking respondents to rate their own power as in the original scale, we asked subordinates to rate how powerful they'd like their supervisor to be in their workplace. Subordinates indicated the extent to which they agreed (1 = *disagree strongly*, 6 = *agree strongly*) with the statements like: "I'd like my supervisor to be at the top of the power hierarchy in this workplace".

**Control variables.** We controlled for supervisors' gender (0 = female, 1 = male) and age (in years), as men (vs. women; e.g., Dobbins, Long, Dedrick, & Clemons, 1990) and older people (vs. the younger; see Khatri, 2009) were possibly regarded as more powerful. We also controlled for subordinates' self-report weekly work time (1 = *8 hours or less*, 2 = *9 to 16 hours*, 3 = *17 to 24 hours*, 4 = *25 to 32 hours*, 5 = *33 to 40 hours*) and contact frequency with their supervisor (1 = *rarely or never*, 5 = *very often*), because people who spent more time at work or with their supervisor were more likely to justify their supervisor's objectifying behavior and support their supervisor in order to diminish cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

**Results and Discussion**

**Preliminary analyses.** We first ran three confirmatory factor analyses. We compared a five-factor solution (Model 1: One factor for each variable) to a four-factor solution (Model 2: Descriptive justification and prescriptive justification

load on one factor) and a one-factor solution (Model 3: All items load on one factor).[7] Model fit revealed the five-factor solution to be superior to the four- and one-factor solutions (Model 1: $\chi^2(197) = 273.54$, CFI = .89, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .08; Model 2: $\chi^2(201) = 352.54$, CFI = .78, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .09; Model 3: $\chi^2(207) = 566.85$, CFI = .48, RMSEA = .12, SRMR = .12). These results indicated that the factor structure was appropriate, and that the two types of justification were empirically distinct from each other. Table 3.3 reports descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables. The more supervisors objectified their subordinates, the less subordinates were willing to afford power to their supervisors ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$). Despite the positive association between two types of justification ($r = .29$, $p < .01$), descriptive justification was negatively related to power affordance ($r = -.18$, $p = .06$), while prescriptive justification was positively related to power affordance ($r = .16$, $p = .09$) both at a marginal significance level.

**Power affordance.** To examine whether power distance would moderate the relation between objectification and power affordance (Hypothesis 1), we conducted the regressions with four control variables, mean-centered objectification,

[7] Two modifications were made to each model: The errors of two objectification indicators (i.e., items 8 and 9) were allowed to covary, because both indicators described the scenario that involved change of job; the errors of a descriptive justification indicator (i.e., item (b), see Measures) and a prescriptive justification indicator (i.e., item (a), see Measures) were also allowed to covary, because the two indicators had the same content, and only differed in the descriptive or prescriptive term.

mean-centered power distance, and their interaction as the predictors. None of the control variables exerted a main effect on power affordance. Objectification was negatively related to power affordance ($b$ = -.21, $SE$ = .08, $t$ = -2.74, $p$ < .01, CI [-.37, -.06]), whereas power distance was positively related to power affordance ($b$ = .20, $SE$ = .09, $t$ = 2.18, $p$ < .05, CI [.02, .39]). However, the interaction term was not significant ($b$ = .05, *ns*). We thus did not find evidence in support of Hypothesis 1.

Table 3.3

*Correlations among Study 3 Variables*

| Measure | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Objectification | 3.66 | .97 | | | | |
| 2. Power Distance | 2.55 | .77 | .14 | | | |
| 3. Descriptive Justification | 3.08 | .92 | .04 | .10 | | |
| 4. Prescriptive Justification | 2.56 | .75 | .25** | .41*** | .29** | |
| 5. Power Affordance | 4.07 | .77 | -.21* | .18* | -.18 | .16 |

*Note.* * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001.

**A moderated mediation model.** We examined the first-stage moderated mediation model (i.e., Hypothesis 2) by using Hayes' (2018) PROCESS Model 7 with 95% CI and 5,000 bootstrap iterations. We entered objectification as the independent variable, power distance as the moderator, and two types of justification as the mediators.

As can be seen in Table 3.4, objectification and power distance interactively predicted prescriptive justification, but not descriptive justification. As shown in Figure 3.4, for subordinates who reported low power distance (one *SD* below the mean), supervisor objectifying behavior did not predict subordinate prescriptive justification, $b$ = -.01, $SE$ = .09, $t$ = -.16, $p$ = .87, CI [-.19, .16], whereas for subordinates who reported high power distance (one *SD* above the mean), supervisor objectifying behavior positively predicted subordinate prescriptive justification, $b$ = .29, $SE$ = .10, $t$ = 2.88, $p$ < .01, CI [.09, .49]. As hypothesized, the conditional indirect effect of objectification on power affordance via prescriptive justification was significantly positive, *index* = .07, *SE (boot)* = .04, CI [.002, .16]. That is, the positive indirect effect of objectification on power affordance through prescriptive justification was stronger for the subordinates with higher (vs. lower) power distance orientations. Supervisor objectification predicted power affordance via prescriptive justification when subordinate power distance was high (or moderate), but not when power distance was low (see the bottom of Table 3.4). The conditional indirect effect of objectification on power affordance via descriptive justification was not significant, *index* = -.01, *SE (boot)* = .03, CI [-.06, .06]. Notably, the direct effect of objectification on power affordance was negative after accounting for the contribution of two types of justification.

Table 3.4

*Model Coefficients for the Effects of Objectification on Power Affordance through Descriptive Justification and Prescriptive Justification as a Function of Power Distance (Study 3)*

| Predictor | Descriptive Justification | | Prescriptive Justification | | Power Affordance | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *b* (*SE*) | 95% CI | *b* (*SE*) | 95% CI | *b* (*SE*) | 95% CI |
| Objectification | .03 (.10) | [-.16, .22] | .14* (.06) | [.01, .26] | -.24** (.08) | [-.39, -.09] |
| Descriptive Justification | | | | | -.19* (.08) | [-.35, -.03] |
| Prescriptive Justification | | | | | .34** (.11) | [.13, .55] |
| Power Distance | .13 (.12) | [-.10, .36] | .36*** (.08) | [.21, .51] | | |
| Objectification × Power Distance | .03 (.14) | [-.24, .31] | .20* (.09) | [.01, .38] | | |
| Supervisors' Gender | .39$^{+}$ (.20) | [-.02, .79] | .34* (.14) | [.08, .61] | -.16 (.16) | [-.49, .16] |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Supervisors' Age | -.00 (.01) | [-.02, .01] | -.02** (.01) | [-.03, -.01] | .01 (.01) | [-.00, .02] |
| Subordinates' Weekly Work Time | -.13$^{+}$ (.08) | [-.28, .02] | .08 (.05) | [-.02, .18] | .02 (.06) | [-.10, .14] |
| Supervisor-Subordinate Contact Frequency | .00 (.09) | [-.18, .18] | -.09 (.06) | [-.21, .03] | -.01 (.07) | [-.16, .13] |
| Constant | 3.44*** (.48) | [2.50, 4.39] | 3.01*** (.32) | [2.39, 3.64] | 3.49*** (.52) | [2.46, 4.51] |
| $R^2$ | .07 | | .38 | | .19 | |
| $F$ | 1.18 | | 9.05*** | | 3.37** | |

The Conditional Indirect Effects of Objectification on Power Affordance

| | Mediator: Descriptive Justification | | | Mediator: Prescriptive Justification | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Moderator: Power Distance | Effect | Bootstrap SE | 95% Bootst. CI | Effect | Bootstrap SE | 95% Bootst. CI |
| High (+ *SD*) | -.01 | .03 | [-.07, .04] | .10 | .04 | [.02, .19] |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mean | -.01 | .02 | [-.04, .03] | .05 | .02 | [.003, .10] |
| Low (− *SD*) | -.001 | .03 | [-.06, .05] | -.005 | .04 | [-.08, .06] |

*Note.* $^{+}$ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

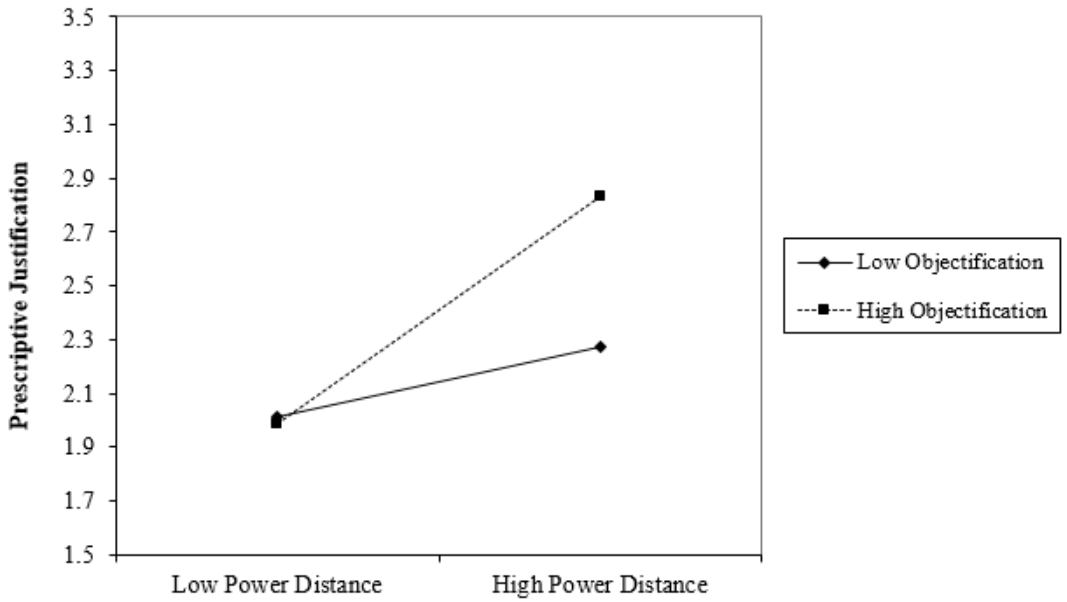
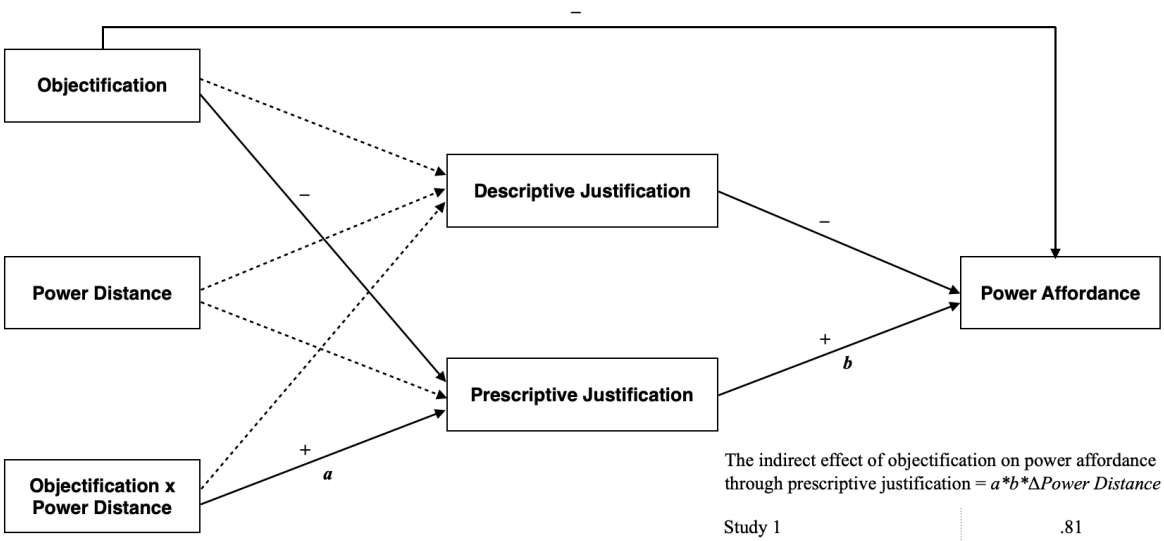



*Figure 3.4.* Prescriptive justification as the function of objectification and power distance (Study 3).

To summarize, we found that subordinates higher (vs. lower) in power distance afforded more power to their objectifying supervisor through prescriptive justification, that is because they considered objectification as more desirable supervisory behavior. Consistent with previous two studies, Study 3 provided support for Hypothesis 2b, but not Hypothesis 2a. Yet Study 3 found no support for Hypothesis 1. Figure 3.5 shows a summary of the results that confirm the moderated mediation effect of objectification on power affordance through prescriptive justification across three studies.




The indirect effect of objectification on power affordance through prescriptive justification = $a*b*\Delta Power\ Distance$

| | |
|---|---|
| Study 1 | .81 |
| Study 2: Behavioral Measure | 3.28 |
| Study 2: Self-Report Measure | .59 |
| Study 3 | .07 |

*Figure 3.5.* Result summary for the moderated mediation effect of objectification on power affordance. All solid lines in the figure signify significant paths that are confirmed at least in two studies, and dashed lines signify otherwise.

## General Discussion

In this article, we examined whether the effect of supervisor objectification on

power affordance was moderated by power distance. In Studies 1 and 2, we found that compared with subordinates in the low power distance condition, subordinates in the high power distance condition afforded less power to a non-objectifying supervisor. There was no evidence that individuals high (vs. low) in power distance would afford more power to an objectifying supervisor. Most importantly, across three studies, we found that prescriptive justification mediated the interaction effect of objectification and power distance on power affordance. That is, relative to low-power-distance subordinates, high-power-distance subordinates afforded more power to an objectifying supervisor through prescriptive justification (i.e., they regarded objectification as more desirable supervisory behavior).

**Implications for Objectification and Power**

Our research has a number of implications for understanding objectification, power, and the relationship between the two. First, despite all negative impacts that objectification has on victims, our studies show that perpetrators of objectification can be granted power in a relatively high power distance context *because subordinates perceive objectification as more appropriate supervisory behavior*. In doing so, those subordinates are likely to support rather than challenge the status quo—supervisors treat employees as tools as lacking in agency and experience. Those findings suggest that subordinates in a relatively high power distance organization may rationalize supervisor objectification and perpetuate it by granting power to an objectifying supervisor. Our research makes contribution to objectification literature by demonstrating when and how objectification can be legitimized and perpetuated.

Second, our work contributes to power literature by demonstrating when and how an objectifier can be granted power. It is assumed that people who exhibit aggressive or abusive behavior fail to attain status (Ridgeway, 1987). Research shows that although people believe that the powerful engage in more unethical behavior than the powerless, people expect that the powerful should behave more ethically than the powerless (Hu et al., 2016). Because compared to the powerless, power holders bear a greater responsibility to advance common good (Keltner, Van Kleef, Chen, & Kraus, 2008; Tost, 2015; Wood & Harms, 2017), it is less desirable to see power holders violate norms. Correspondingly, compared to the powerless, power holders are less trusted and are given less leniency, when both of them commit the same transgression (e.g., falsifying details in a report or contract; Kim et al., 2017).

However, we suggest that this effect might not hold in a high power distance context or for high power distance individuals. Our studies challenge those views by showing that an objectifying supervisor can be granted more power by his or her subordinates, particularly in a high power distance context or for high-power-distance subordinates. We also offer a prescriptive justification mechanism to explain the interaction effect of objectification and power distance on power affordance. That is, subordinates higher (vs. lower) in power distance afford more power to an objectifying supervisor, because they perceive objectification as more desirable supervisory behavior. Our findings thus shed light on how people who engage in deviant behavior, such as objectification, can acquire and maintain power.

Third, in a broader sense, our work suggests that objectification and power can be

intertwined and have the potential to reinforce each other. That is, power fosters the extent to which people objectify others (Civile & Obhi, 2016; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Landau et al., 2012; Xiao et al., 2019), and by doing so objectifiers can also enhance their power. This view coincides with Foucault's (2007) conception of biopower—achieving the control over populations by reducing humans into biological parts or functions. Particularly, reducing humans to labor value facilitates the regulations imposed on humans. For example, in response to Covid-19, some politicians urged people to go to work without safety measures put in place, while visiting families or friends was prohibited (BBC News, 2020; Prime Minister's Office and The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, 2020). That is to say, it was deemed not safe for a family member to visit one's house, yet it was indicated to be safe for a cleaner to go clean a client's house. It shows how some leaders objectify people and achieve control over people by objectification. Admittedly, relative to slavery, the modern forms of objectification are more nuanced, but it is commonplace and worrying (Haslam, 2006). Our work contributes to the understanding of an important yet under-studied phenomenon.

**Implications for Power Distance**

Our research also contributes to power distance literature. Our results regarding the moderating effects of power distance on the relations between objectification and prescriptive justification, and between objectification and power affordance suggest that power distance has a system-justifying function. Our studies found that subordinates afforded less power to an objectifying supervisor than to a

non-objectifying supervisor, because they perceived objectification as less appropriate supervisory behavior. However, those perceptual and behavioral differences between objectification and non-objectification were smaller for subordinates who were higher in power distance. In doing so, subordinates who are higher in power distance are more likely to maintain the status quo, even when it implies the treatment of fellow humans as instrumental tools.

In addition, our findings echo prior researchers' views that power distance can alter people's moral reasoning and judgment (Hofstede, 1997; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Our studies found that although both high and low power distance subordinates believed that it was unacceptable for a supervisor to objectify employees, the difference between objectification and non-objectification in prescriptive judgment was smaller for high-power-distance subordinates. This result suggests that high-power-distance individuals may hold a somewhat different value system than that of low-power-distance counterparts. It also suggests a possibility that power prevails over moral judgment for high-power-distance individuals.

**Practical Implications**

Our research provides some important practical implications regarding objectification in the workplace and beyond. As our studies show that subordinates working in a higher power distance organization are less likely to object to an objectifying supervisor, we suggest that organizations strive to create a low power distance culture whereby subordinates can be protected from objectification. Subordinates can also benefit from a system where they can safely disclosure

supervisory misconducts and challenge supervisors' authority. On the other hand, it is sometimes the individuals who are attracted to, are selected by, and remain in a work environment that determine the environment (Schneider, 1987). As shown in our research, high-power-distance individuals are likely to make a work environment where objectification can be legitimized and perpetuated. Thus in this respect, seeking or selecting the "right" people can be crucial to curb objectification in the workplace.

In addition, our research has some implications on how leaders may deal with the challenges posed by Covid-19. As leaders around the world are fighting the Covid-19 epidemic, they face very different challenges. Some are criticized for hard protective measures that they put in place, such that people feel that they are treated as children, whereas others are criticized for their soft measures, such that people feel that they are objectified and not protected for the sake of economy. Our studies suggest that people in high power distance countries may more willingly accept and comply with the regulations that leaders make; but people in low power distance countries may demand more autonomy, sympathy, and a rationale for the decisions that leaders make, otherwise people may feel treated either as children as lacking autonomy or as tools as lacking human right. Nevertheless, regardless of power distance levels, we suggest that leaders act responsibly and respect each individual life, as our studies show that compared with an objectifying leader, a non-objectifying leader is always perceived as more desirable and granted more power.

# CHAPTER 4

# GENERAL DISCUSSION

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

This thesis offers an integrative framework for objectification through theoretical examinations, a systematic review, and empirical studies that employed the multi-method design. The systematic review of Chapter 2 demonstrates that people sometimes are reduced to instrumental tools with their intrinsic values, needs, and motivations being thwarted. The systematic review summarizes what is known about the antecedents and consequences of objectification. More specifically, objectification is often driven by one's extrinsic goals, such as pursuit of money (Wang & Krumhuber, 2017). Situational factors (e.g., work contexts), job characteristics (e.g., dependence), and individual differences (e.g., power) can contribute to objectification through highlighting an extrinsic focus. Objectification in turn leads to more positive appraisals of and approach towards instrumental others that aid attainment of extrinsic goals, whereas the less or counter instrumental others are devalued, avoided, or even punished. From the perspective of people being objectified, objectification undermines their fundamental control, belonging, and self-esteem needs, which in turn leads to more negative affect, work attitudes, and work engagement.

In spite of all the negative effects of objectification demonstrated in Chapter 2, I argued that subordinates with a relatively high power distance would rationalize and sustain supervisor objectification by granting the supervisor power. Empirical studies of Chapter 3 investigated whether the effect of supervisor objectification on power affordance was moderated by power distance. In support of system justification theory, the results of the three studies showed that compared with low-power-distance

subordinates, high-power-distance subordinates afforded more power to an objectifying supervisor through prescriptive justification, that is, because they regarded objectification as more desirable supervisory behavior. Those findings suggest that subordinates with a high (vs. low) power distance orientation are not only more likely to rationalize supervisor objectification, but also perpetuate the situation by granting power to an objectifying supervisor.

More specifically, in the two experimental studies in which power distance and objectification were manipulated, the two variables interactively predicted power affordance. The results of Studies 1 and 2 showed that participants afforded more power to a non-objectifying supervisor than to an objectifying supervisor within each power distance condition, but that compared with participants in the low power distance condition, participants in the high power distance condition afforded less power to a non-objectifying supervisor. There was no evidence that individuals high in power distance would afford more power to an objectifying supervisor than those low in power distance. That is, Studies 1 and 2 provided partial support for Hypothesis 1. While the findings of the experimental studies provided evidence for the causal impact of objectification and power distance on power affordance, this interaction effect was not replicated in the field study. In the field setting, the results of Study 3 showed that less power would be granted to a more objectifying supervisor regardless of subordinates' power distance orientation. Those studies were conducted in the United Kingdom and Netherlands both featuring a relatively low power distance culture, which made it challenging to observe the true effect for a high-level

power distance. This might explain the failure to find evidence for the high power distance part of Hypothesis 1.

Importantly, supporting Hypothesis 2b, the moderated mediation effect of objectification on power affordance via prescriptive justification was positive in all studies. In both experimental studies, although the indirect effects of objectification on power affordance via prescriptive justification were negative across all power distance levels, there was a clear upward trend that with power distance increasing, supervisor objectification predicted greater power affordance through prescriptive justification. In the field study, supervisor objectification positively predicted power affordance via prescriptive justification when power distance was high or moderate, but not when power distance was low. However, I did not find evidence that descriptive justification would mediate the interaction effect of objectification and power distance on power affordance (Hypothesis 2a was not supported). This issue could be caused by, among other things, the fact that objectification was not very common among the respondents of the field study, or by the difficulty that participants might have in making such inference in an experimental context. Taken together, the findings of the three studies demonstrated that subordinates higher (vs. lower) in power distance would afford more power to an objectifying supervisor because of prescriptive justification, but not descriptive justification.

An interesting question emerged in the experimental studies with regard to the extent to which objectification would diverge from power distance. This question was raised in part by the fact that the manipulations of objectification and power distance

were confounded in the two experiments as shown by a significant interaction effect of the two variables on the manipulation check of objectification, albeit a small-to-medium effect size. Although participants rated an objectifying supervisor as exhibiting more objectifying behaviors relative to the non-objectifying supervisor within each power distance condition, the difference between objectification and non-objectification was smaller in the high (vs. low and control in Study1; vs. low in Study 2) power distance condition. On the one hand, this indicated that individuals higher in power distance rationalized supervisor objectification to a greater extent such that they perceived it as less objectifying. On the other hand, it might suggest some potential overlaps existing between objectification and power distance in terms of conceptualization and/or operationalization. Both variables involve the deprival of employees' autonomy and experience. Nevertheless, I argue that the two variables are distinguishable in that objectification has a unique feature of instrumentality, while power distance emphasizes hierarchy and deference to those in authority.

## Toward Integrating the Processes of Objectification from a Multilevel Perspective

To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of objectification, I propose an integrative framework that articulates the processes of objectification from a multilevel perspective (see Table 4.1). A multilevel approach not only helps clarify how the process of objectification varies for the different sources of objectification (the objectifying entities) and levels of analysis, but also aids in connecting different levels and the underlying theoretical foundations.

Table 4.1

*A Multilevel Theorizing of Objectification*

| Level | Key process | Key finding | Important cross-level linkage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Individual | Objectification entails instrumental behavior that is more driven by one's extrinsic (vs. intrinsic) goals and self-protection (vs. growth) values. It thwarts objectified targets' control, belonging, self-esteem needs. | Extrinsic goals, such as pursuit of money, trigger objectification (Wang & Krumhuber, 2017). Individuals who are objectified exhibit more passive or negative affect, work attitudes, and work behavior. | Organizational human resource systems that emphasize compliance may affect individuals' objectifying behavior through encouraging extrinsic goal-pursuit, while eliciting targets' perceived objectification through disregarding basic psychological needs. |
| Dyadic | Subordinates higher (vs. lower) in power distance have a greater tendency to rationalize and perpetuate supervisor objectification by granting power to an objectifying supervisor. | Subordinates high (vs. low) in power distance afford more power to an objectifying supervisor through prescriptive justification (i.e., they regard objectification as more desirable supervisory behavior). | Market exchange leads individuals to think of others and their relationships in a calculative utilitarian way. Objectification can be justified and sustained in the dyads when the relational partner embraces market-pricing mode or endorses system-justifying belief. |
| Organizational | Organizational human resource system that features a transactional relationship between the organization and | | Organizational objectification may enjoy legitimacy and be maintained in the society marked by market-pricing |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | employees and shows little concern about employees' needs can enhance organizational objectification experienced by employees. | exchange. |
| Societal | The market institutional arrangement, social welfare structures, and cultural values (e.g., humane orientation, achievement value, and materialistic value) can shape societal objectification experienced by society members. | Societal objectification may be associated with basic psychological need satisfaction (or frustration) of society members and calculus-based relationships that society members have with each other. |

At the individual level, extrinsic aspirations and self-protection values lead a person to objectify others more than intrinsic aspirations and growth values do, as the former drives a person to think of others more in terms of instrumental value in furthering one's own outcomes. Individuals who are objectified suffer from the frustration of basic psychological needs, including the needs for control, belonging, and self-esteem. The systematic review identifies some supporting evidence for these theoretical arguments, but this thesis does not empirically test them. The empirical studies of the present thesis shows that at the dyadic level, supervisor objectification and subordinate power distance interact in such a way that a subordinate higher, rather than lower, in power distance orientation affords more power to an objectifying supervisor through prescriptive justification. At the organizational level, human resource system and overarching strategic goals of an organization can contribute to organizational objectification experienced by employees, when strategic goals and human resource system reflect a transactional relationship between the organization and employees and show little concern for employees' wellness (Lepak, Liao, Chung, & Harden, 2006; Mossholder, Richardson, & Settoon, 2011). At the societal level, the market institutional arrangement, social welfare structures, and cultural values (e.g., humane orientation, achievement value, and materialistic value) may come into play in forming societal objectification, in part because those social, institutional, and cultural factors can shape the extent to which people feel like a cog that is measured by economic value and subjected to "vicissitudes of the market" (Kasser et al., 2007; Martin, Cullen, Johnson, & Parboteeah, 2007).

This multilevel model of objectification suggests important cross-level linkages. Higher levels of objectification may be associated with lower level processes, such that societal and organizational objectification may thwart basic psychological needs of the individuals (Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018). Likewise, societal and organizational conditions can give rise to individuals' objectifying behavior, when those conditions, such as materialistic culture and control or compliance oriented human resource systems, drive individuals to pursue extrinsic goals (Kasser et al., 2007; Lepak et al., 2006). In addition, system justification theory offers an insight into when and how objectification of different levels can be rationalized and sustained. Societal-level market exchange creates a context in which individuals are encouraged to build calculus-based relationships with others and organizations strive to achieve economic success by utilizing human capital resources (Kasser et al., 2007; Ployhart, Nyberg, Reilly, & Maltarich, 2014). Relational objectification and organizational objectification are likely to be justified and maintained, when the relational partner embraces market-pricing mode or endorses system-justifying belief (with the system referring to the prevailing social condition), and when the organization exists in a society dominated by market forces, respectively. Admittedly, this thesis has raised much more questions than it has answered. Nevertheless, a multilevel theorizing would advance our understanding of objectification by connecting different levels and theoretical perspectives, and hopefully open up channels for future research.

## Theoretical and Practical Implications

This thesis has a number of theoretical and practical implications in relation to

objectification. First and foremost, this thesis contributes to objectification literature by demonstrating when and how objectification can be legitimized and perpetuated. This thesis also adds to system justification literature by unveiling the system-justifying function of objectification and power distance. Specifically, our empirical studies showed that compared with low-power-distance subordinates, high-power-distance subordinates afforded more power to an objectifying supervisor through prescriptive justification, that is, because they perceived objectification as more appropriate supervisory behavior. In doing so, subordinates with a relatively high power distance orientation may support rather than challenge the status quo—supervisors treat subordinates as instrumental tools as lacking in agency and experience. Considering the numerous negative impacts that objectification has on the victims as documented in Chapter 2, it is important to address the objectification issue at work. This thesis suggests that organizations may consider striving for a low power distance culture whereby subordinates can be protected from supervisor objectification. Subordinates can also benefit from a system where they can safely disclosure supervisory misconducts, such as objectification.

In a broader sense, the notion of objectification reveals that individuals are reduced to instrumental tools that are deprived of self-determination and are subjugated to external forces that are relational and discursive in nature (see Shields & Grant, 2010). By relational forces, I refer to the relationship between an objectifier and the objectified target (e.g., an employer-employee relationship), and notably an objectifier often acts upon or exerts more influence on the target than vice versa. By

discursive forces, I mean that a set of discourses is constructed to facilitate the occurrence and legitimacy of objectification (e.g., human resource management; Townley, 1993). Those discourses "make" individuals insofar as the discourses make individuals to be known in a certain way as passive objects. That is, it is in a social relation and in a discourse that a person is rendered as an object. This implies that people may be capable of challenging objectification and achieving self-determination through the construction of discourse that articulates ones' own needs.

In addition, this thesis challenges the taken-for-granted assumption underlying many of labor economics and management theories that labor objectification is inevitable and necessary in order to achieve economic goals. It is important to note that labor commodification, as one of the defining features of the capitalist mode, does not necessarily imply employee objectification on a workplace scale (Shields & Grant, 2010). The systematic review suggests that a market-pricing mode (not commodification) triggers objectification. Objectification occurs as people think of themselves and others in a calculative utilitarian way. Self-determination theory and the theory of basic individual values further lend an insight into the motivational forces underlying objectification. That is, objectification is often driven by one's pursuit of extrinsic goals, such as money and power. This explanation suggests that objectification could potentially be reduced through undoing a calculative utilitarian mindset, muting one's extrinsic aspirations, or stimulating intrinsic aspirations.

Chapter 2 of this thesis suggests that employers' pursuit of profit via labor objectification can be counterproductive. From the perspective of the person being

objectified, objectification undermines the fundamental needs for control, belonging, and self-esteem. Individuals who are objectified exhibit more passive or negative affect, work attitudes, and work engagement (e.g., burnout, turnover intention, and aggression). The negative impact of objectification can be long-lasting as objectification damages a person's perceptions of the self, such that a person who is objectified comes to view the self as being more instrument-like and as having less human mental states including emotions, perceptions, thoughts, wishes, and intentions (Andrighetto et al., 2018; Baldissarri, 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2020; Baldissarri, Andrighetto, et al., 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2019). That is, objectification is linked to numerous negative outcomes for the objectified employees, which arguably has consequential implications for employers (Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018).

As an alternative to objectification, treating employees as ends in and of themselves could be beneficial in terms of achieving profitability as well as employees' wellness. More specifically, instead of treating employees as fixed mechanical resource objects to be managed, employers may benefit from management that (a) respects employees' needs, feelings, and self-determination by, for instance, increasing employee involvement, job enrichment, and job security (Lepak et al., 2006; Mom, Chang, Cholakova, & Jansen, 2019), and (b) fosters employee growth by providing extensive training and developmental appraisal (Mom, Chang, Cholakova, & Jansen, 2019), and (c) cultivates a more communal, less transactional relational climate (Mossholder, Richardson, & Settoon, 2011). It is universally recognized that the satisfaction of the basic needs for control, belonging, and self-esteem is crucial to

individuals' well-being and optimal development (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Dweck, 2017; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individuals' need satisfaction also fosters productivity through enhancing work motives (Deci et al., 2017). That is, employers who support (vs. thwart) employees' basic needs can achieve a more motivated and productive workforce (Olafsen, Deci, & Halvari, 2018), and thereby create competitive advantage (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012). Furthermore, with respect to strategic management, employers need incorporate this people-centered management into their strategy, such that employees can be regarded as having strategic capacity to generate or select competitive choices, along with or beyond implementing strategy (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 1988; Snell & Morris, 2021).

It is important to note that as labor economics suggest, a firm's demand for labor is a derived demand, a demand derived from consumers' needs (Borjas, 2019), and that the success of a firm hinges on its capability to enrich current customer value and/or to create new customer value (Chan & Mauborgne, 1997; Kang, Morris, & Snell, 2007). When employees are empowered to explore potential innovations and to set strategic objectives, a firm may create new markets through quantum leaps in customer value, and as a result achieve profitable growth (Kang et al., 2007). That is, employers can benefit from cultivating an autonomous workforce.

## Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations of the present thesis that could give rise to fruitful avenues for future research. First, despite the argument I made that objectification is

often driven by one's extrinsic aspirations, empirical tests for this argument remain relatively scarce and need further verification. Prior research showed that money, power, and individual advancement goals led people to objectify others (Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Schaerer et al., 2018; Shea & Fitzsimons, 2016; Teng et al., 2016; Wang & Krumhuber, 2017). Other extrinsic goals and values that are specified by self-determination theory (Deci et al., 2017) and the theory of basic individual values (Schwartz et al., 2012) have received much less attention. Future research could examine more systematically how extrinsic values and goals predict objectification, and how organizational-level conditions that highlight an extrinsic focus contribute to individuals' objectifying behavior. It would also be advantageous to build a multilevel model that examines the interplay between organizational-level conditions (e.g., control or compliance oriented human resource systems) and individual-level factors (e.g., conformity) in shaping individuals' objectifying behavior. Such a model would shed light on how to mitigate objectification in organizations.

Second, our empirical studies showed that individuals with a high (vs. low) power distance orientation would afford more power to an objectifying supervisor because of prescriptive justification. However, there were three major limitations of the empirical studies: (a) The studies were conducted in the United Kingdom and Netherlands both featuring a relatively low power distance culture, and thereby it remains unclear whether the findings could be generalized to other cultural contexts; (b) The manipulations of objectification and power distance were confounded in the two experiments as discussed earlier; (c) The field study was cross-sectional and

would not inform whether the relationship between objectification and power affordance could be observed over time or applied to a within-person effect. In addition, although I argued that supervisor objectification might be sustained rather than challenged through granting objectifiers power, neither the experiments nor the field study offered the option of challenging objectifiers. Future research could test how to challenge supervisor objectification (e.g., protest and voice), or other interventions or factors that protect against objectification.

Third, it is likely that objectification constitutes a learned behavior in work contexts. According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1973, 1977), people learn that certain behavior is desirable and results in rewards, and thereby engage more in such behavior. As people believe that it is appropriate and potentially rewarding to utilize an economic frame in work contexts (Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse, & Figge, 2014; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018), such belief forms a basis for their behavior, such as objectification. This explanation raises questions of what prompts individuals to develop an economic frame in work contexts, and how reward systems and other work practices potentially promote an economic frame and objectifying behavior. In addition, although I argue that objectification is deeply rooted in labor economics and management theorizing of labor, little empirical research has been conducted to examine whether or not people perceive those theories as objectifying. Future research could test whether participants in an experimental context would feel objectified after learning about those theories on labor, such as the conception of value of life, and whether participants would further learn to engage in objectification

themselves.

Fourth, objectification may also have positive implications in organizations. In line with the instrumental orientation of objectification, people objectify others by appraising others in terms of goal-relevant attributes and by approaching others that aid goal achievement (Orehek & Weaverling, 2017). That is, objectification can have favorable implications for the agent who objectifies others in terms of goal achievement, especially extrinsic goals, and subjectivity uncertainty reduction. As a more distal consequence, objectifiers may acquire career advancement particularly in organizations that feature clear employment contracts, contingent rewards, and transactional interpersonal relationships (Zhong & Robinson, 2021). From the perspective of the targets of objectification, how they experience objectification is likely to be affected by the extent to which they identify with objectifiers, objectifiers' motives, and/or objectifiers' relational models. In a similar vein, when there is a high degree of match or congruence between what a follower desires from a leader and how the leader acts in terms of objectification, the follower can perceive an objectifying leader as relatively ethical and positive (see Giessner & van Quaquebeke, 2011). At the organizational level, organizational objectification can contribute to managerial efficacy and organizational efficiency when performance ambiguity is low and goal incongruence between organization and its members is high (see Ouchi, 1980). Future research could look into more positive aspects of objectification and consider both positive and negative aspects of objectification in organizations.

## Conclusion

Objectification poses a fundamental threat to human dignity at work as it reduces workers to instrumental tools that are deprived of humanity. As a person is not a piece of machinery, one cannot focus on the instrumental part of workers only, while disregarding workers' basic psychological needs, feelings, or human aspects. To address the objectification issue at work, this thesis examined the phenomenon of objectification in a systematic way, including what causes objectification, what its consequences are, and how objectification gets legitimized in work contexts. This thesis debunks the argument that objectification is inevitable and inconsequential (e.g., Harris et al., 2014), by showing that people often objectify others in order to achieve their extrinsic goals, such as money and power, or to reduce subjectivity uncertainty, while thwarting the objectified targets' fundamental control, belonging, and self-esteem needs. Interestingly, despite the negative consequences of objectification for victims, this thesis suggested that objectification might have positive ancillary implications for perpetrators. In support of system justification theory, the empirical studies demonstrated that compared with low-power-distance subordinates, high-power-distance subordinates afforded more power to an objectifying supervisor through prescriptive justification, that is, because they regarded objectification as more desirable supervisory behavior. These findings suggest that subordinates with a higher (vs. lower) power distance orientation are more likely to rationalize supervisor objectification and maintain the situation by granting power to an objectifying supervisor. It should also be noted that different from the positive conditional indirect effect of objectification on power affordance via prescriptive justification, the direct

effect of objectification on power affordance was negative, which suggests that compared to a non-objectifying supervisor, an objectifying supervisor can be granted less power. Rethinking the “humans-as-resource-objects” formula may be the first step to creating workplaces where employees and business can thrive together.

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## APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS FOR CHAPTER 2

**Table S1**

*Summary of the Studies of Objectification*

| Study | Type of objectification | Operationalization of objectification | | | Manipulation/ Measure of objectification | Antecedent | Consequence | Research design |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Instrumentality | Denial of agency | Denial of experience | | | | |
| Andrighetto, Baldissarri, Gabbiadini, Sacino, Valtorta, & Volpato, 2018 | Self-objectification | | x | x | Measure: Self-Mental State Attribution | Work features (fragmentation, repetitiveness, other-direction) | Conforming behavior | 133 Italian undergraduates, experiment, single source |
| Andrighetto, Baldissarri, & Volpato, 2017 (Study 1) | Objectification of others | x | x | x | Measure: Instrument-like attribution; Mental State Attribution | Work features (fragmentation, repetitiveness, dependence on the machine) | | 126 Italian undergraduates, experiment, single source |
| Andrighetto, Baldissarri, & Volpato, 2017 (Study 2) | Objectification of others | x | | | Measure: Instrument-like attribution | Factory worker (vs. artisan); Factory worker (vs. artisan) x Work (vs. person) | | 63 Italian undergraduates, experiment, single source |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | focus | | | |
| Andrighetto, Baldissarri, & Volpato, 2017 (Study 3) | Objectification of others | | x | x | Measure: Mental State Attribution | Factory worker (vs. artisan); Factory worker (vs. artisan) x Work (vs. person) focus | | 83 Italian undergraduates, experiment, single source |
| Auzoult & Personnaz, 2016 | Self-objectification | | x | x | Measure: Self-Mental State Attribution | Perception of being objectified; Perception of being objectified x Private self-consciousness; Burnout; Organizational culture | | 363 employees, cross-sectional, single source |
| Auzoult, 2020 | Perception of being objectified by boss and/or colleagues | x | x | x | Measure: Perception of being objectified by boss and/or colleagues | | Instrumentality attribution to self | 153 employees, cross-sectional, single source |
| Baldissarri, 2017 (Study 2, Chapter 4) | Self-objectification | x | x | x | Measure: Self-Mental State Attribution; Instrument-like | Work feature (repetitiveness, fragmentation, other-direction); | Well-being | 195 manufacturing industry workers in |

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| | | | | | perception | Perception of being objectified by supervisors; Job insecurity | | Italy, cross-sectional, single source |
| Baldissarri, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2014 | Perception of being objectified by foremen | x | | | Measure: Perception of being objectified by foremen | | Self-objectification; Burnout (exhaustion, cynicism) | 120 supermarket employees, cross-sectional, single source |
| Baldissarri, Andrighetto, Gabbiadini, & Volpato, 2017 (Study 1) | Self-objectification | | x | x | Measure: Self-Mental State Attribution | Work feature (Repetitiveness, fragmentation, other-direction) | Belief in personal free will | 60 Italian undergraduates, experiment, single source |
| Baldissarri, Andrighetto, Gabbiadini, & Volpato, 2017 (Study 2) | Self-objectification | x | | | Measure: Instrument-like attribution | Work feature (Repetitiveness, fragmentation, other-direction) | Belief in personal free will | 92 undergraduates, experiment, single source |
| Baldissarri, Andrighetto, Gabbiadini, & Volpato, 2017 (Study 3) | Self-objectification | x | x | x | Measure: Self-Mental State Attribution; Instrument-like attribution | Work feature (Repetitiveness, fragmentation, other-direction) | Belief in personal free will | 102 undergraduates, experiment, single source |

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| Baldissarri, Valtorta, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2017 | Objectification of others | x | x | x | Measure: Implicit Association Test; Attributions of agency and experience | Factory worker (vs. artisan); Alienation | | 68 undergraduates, experiment, single source |
| Baldissarri, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2019 | Self-objectification | x | x | x | Measure: Self-Mental State Attribution; Instrument-like perception | Work feature (Repetitiveness, fragmentation, other-direction); Perception of being objectified by supervisors | Belief in personal free will | 303 workers of manufacturing industries in Italy, cross-sectional, single source |
| Baldissarri, Andrighetto, Bernardo, & Annoni, 2020 (Study 1) | Self-objectification | x | x | x | Measure: Self-Mental State Attribution; Instrument-like perception | Work feature (Repetitiveness, fragmentation, other-direction) | Conformity | 216 Italian workers of manufacturing industry, cross-sectional, single source |
| Baldissarri, Andrighetto, Bernardo, & Annoni, 2020 (Study 2) | Self-objectification | x | x | x | Measure: Self-Mental State Attribution; Instrument-like perception | Work feature (Repetitiveness, fragmentation, other-direction) | Conformity | 100 British workers, experiment, single source |

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| Bell & Khoury, 2016 | Perception of being objectified by the organization | x | x | x | Measure: Organizational dehumanization | Procedural, distributive, & interpersonal justice; Procedural justice x Gender | Turnover intention | 102 respondents in Canada, two-wave (4 weeks), single source |
| Belmi & Pfeffer, 2018 (Study 1) | Objectification of others | x | | | Measure: Instrumental and calculative thinking | Reward interdependence | Competence over sociability in coworker preference | 374 working adults from Mturk, cross-sectional, single source |
| Belmi & Pfeffer, 2018 (Study 3) | Objectification of others | x | | | Measure: Instrumental and calculative thinking | Reward interdependence | Competence over sociability in teammate preference | 176 US college students, experiment, single source |
| Belmi & Schroeder, 2020 (Study 1) | Objectification of others | x | | | Measure: Objectification Scale | Work (vs. non work) context | | 203 participants from MTurk, experiment, single source |
| Belmi & Schroeder, 2020 (Study | Objectification of others; Expectation of | x | x | x | Measure: Objectification Scale | Work (vs. non work) context | | 402 participants from Mturk, |

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| 2) | being objectified | | | | | | experiment, single source |
| Belmi & Schroeder, 2020 (Study 3a) | Objectification of others | x | | x | Measure: Objectification Scale | Work (vs. non work) interaction | 154 full-time working adults, experience sampling, single source |
| Belmi & Schroeder, 2020 (Study 3b) | Objectification of others | x | | x | Measure: Objectification Scale | Work (vs. non work) interaction; Duty, intellect, adversity, positivity, negativity, deception, and sociality features of situations | 184 working adults from Mturk, experience sampling, single source |
| Belmi & Schroeder, 2020 (Study 4) | Objectification of others | x | x | x | Measure: Objectification Scale | Work (vs. non work) context; Low calculative and strategic mindset (vs. control); Work context x Low calculative and | 809 single working adults from Mturk, experiment, single source |

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| | | | | | | strategic mindset | | |
| Belmi & Schroeder, 2020 (Study 5) | Organizational objectification | x | x | x | Measure: Objectification Scale | Calculative and strategic language in organizational mission statements | Sense of belonging; Interest in working for an organization | 503 adults from Mturk, experiment, single source |
| Belmi & Schroeder, 2020 (Study 6) | Objectification of others; Seeing objectification of others; Feeling objectified | x | | x | Measure: Objectification Scale | | Sense of belonging; Job satisfaction; Prosocial behavior; Incivility; Turnover intention | 440 working adults from Mturk, two-wave survey, single source |
| Demoulin et al., 2020 (Study 1c) | Perception of being objectified by the organization | x | | | Measure: Organizational Dehumanization Scale | Job autonomy; Professional isolation; Abusive supervision | Negative emotions; Avoidance coping; Organizational-based self-esteem | 316 employees from Prolific, cross-sectional, single source |
| Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008 (Experiment 1a) | Objectification of others | x | | | Measure: Objectification Scale | Subordinate (vs. peer) as target; Executive (vs. MBA student) as perceiver | | 42 executives and 37 MBA students, experiment, single source |

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| Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008 (Experiment 1b) | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Objectification Scale | High (vs. low) power | 59 university undergraduates, experiment, single source |
| Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008 (Experiment 2) | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Selection of instrumental (vs. non-instrumental) candidate | High (vs. low) power | 140 undergraduates, experiment, single source |
| Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008 (Experiment 3) | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Selection of instrumental (vs. non-instrumental) work partner | High (vs. low) power | 48 university students and staff, experiment, single source |
| Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008 (Experiment 4) | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Liking of instrumental (vs. non-instrumental) target | High (vs. baseline) power | 51 undergraduates, experiment, single source |
| Gruenfeld, | Objectification | x | Measure: Approach | Target kindness; | 176 adults in |

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| Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008 (Experiment 5) | of others | | | ratings | Performance goal; Perceiver power (high vs. baseline) x Target kindness x Performance goal | | US, experiment, single source |
| Henkel, Boegershausen, Hoegg, Aquino, & Lemmink, 2017 (Study 2) | Objectification of others | | x | x | Measure: Mind attribution scale | Thrift-oriented brand (vs. non-thrift-oriented brand vs. control) | | 208 university students in Netherlands, experiment, single source |
| Henkel, Boegershausen, Hoegg, Aquino, & Lemmink, 2017 (Study 3) | Objectification of others | | x | x | Measure: Mind attribution scale | Thrift-oriented brand (vs. non-thrift-oriented brand) | | 50 university undergraduates in Netherlands, experiment, single source |
| Hur, Lee-Yoon, & Whillans, 2018 (Study 2) | Objectification of others | x | | | Measure: Perceived instrumentality of work ties | Performance (vs. fixed) incentive | Willingness to socialize with work ties | 447 participants from Mturk, experiment, single source |

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| Hur, Lee-Yoon, & Whillans, 2018 (Study 4) | Objectification of others | x | | | Measure: Perceived instrumentality of work ties | Performance (vs. fixed) incentive; Peer evaluation (high vs. low); Performance (vs. fixed) incentive x Peer evaluation (high vs. low) | Willingness to socialize with work ties | 886 participants from Mturk, experiment, single source |
| Inesi, Lee, & Rios, 2014 (Study 3) | Perception of being objectified by others | x | | | Measure: Beliefs about being objectified by others | Power (high vs. equal); Co-worker favor-giving (yes vs. no); Power (high vs. equal) x Co-worker favor-giving (yes vs. no) | Importance of power-relevant attributes to self-definition | 71 participants in UK, experiment, single source |
| Inesi, Lee, & Rios, 2014 (Study 4) | Perception of being objectified by others | x | | | Measure: Beliefs about being objectified by others | Power (high vs. equal) | Willingness to pay for high-status goods | 52 men in UK, experiment, single source |
| Landau, Sullivan, Keefer, Rothschild, & Osman, 2012 | Objectification of others | x | x | x | Measure: Role objectification | Managerial ability uncertainty (vs. control); Subjectivity-related concern | Punitiveness | 44 undergraduates, experiment, single source |

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| (Study 3) | | | | | | | | |
| Loughnan, Baldissarri, Spaccatini, & Elder, 2017 (Study 2) | The perception of being objectified by others or job | x | | | Manipulation: Recall an experience of being objectified by an employer or the job | | Self-perception of warmth, competence, morality, human nature, human uniqueness | 62 participants from Prolific, experiment, single source |
| Martínez, Rodríguez-Bailón, Moya, & Vaes, 2017 (Study 3) | Objectification of others | x | x | x | Measure: Objectification scale | Mechanistic dehumanization (vs. animalistic dehumanization vs. human) in a professional scenario | Intention to interact | 68 university students in Italy, experiment, single source |
| Nistor & Stanciu, 2017 | Self-objectification | x | | | Measure: Job Search Related Self-Objectification | Performance expectancy | Job-related self-efficacy; Well-being | 273 social media users, cross-sectional, single source |
| Poon, Chen, Teng, & Wong, 2020 (Experiment 1) | The experience of being objectified by others | x | | | Manipulation: Performance-based objectification (vs. non-objectification) feedback | | Negative emotion; Aggression | 74 undergraduates in Hong Kong, experiment, single source |

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| Poon, Chen, Teng, & Wong, 2020 (Experiment 2) | The experience of being objectified by others | x | Manipulation: Performance-based objectification (vs. misfortune) imagination | Aggression | 82 undergraduates in Hong Kong, experiment, single source |
| Poon, Chen, Teng, & Wong, 2020 (Experiment 3) | The experience of being objectified by others | x | Manipulation: Performance-based objectification (vs. non-objectification) feedback | Perceived control; Aggression | 129 undergraduates in Hong Kong, experiment, single source |
| Poon, Chen, Teng, & Wong, 2020 (Experiment 4) | The experience of being objectified by others | x | Manipulation: Performance-based objectification (vs. control) recall task | Perceived control; Negative emotion; Aggression | 139 participants from Mturk, experiment, single source |
| Poon, Chen, Teng, & Wong, 2020 (Experiment 5) | The experience of being objectified by others | x | Manipulation: Objectification (vs. non-objectification) imagination | Aggression (moderated by control restoration) | 277 participants from Mturk, experiment, single source |
| Poon, Chen, Teng, & Wong, 2020 | The experience of being | x | Manipulation: Performance-based objectification (vs. | Aggression (moderated by control restoration) | 369 participants from Mturk, |

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| (Experiment 6) | objectified by others | | non-objectification) feedback | | | experiment, single source |
| Schaerer, du Plessis, Yap, & Thau, 2018 | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Objectification Scale | High (vs. low vs. equal) power | | 900 participants from Mturk and 900 participants from Prolific, experiment, single source |
| Schroeder & Fishbach, 2015 (Study 1) | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Instrumentality scale | | Recall of the physician's personal life; Physician's knowledge of the patient's personal life | 99 participants from Mturk, cross-sectiona l, single source |
| Schroeder & Fishbach, 2015 (Study 2) | Objectification of others | x | Manipulation: Physicians' instrumentality | | Attribution of (self-focused) emotions to physicians; Attribution of agency to physicians | 94 participants from Mturk, experiment, single source |
| Schroeder & | Objectification | x | Manipulation: High | | Attribution of | 191 |

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| Fishbach, 2015 (Study 3) | of others | | (vs. low) need for dental care | (self-focused) emotions to dentists | participants from Mturk, experiment, single source |
| Schroeder & Fishbach, 2015 (Study 4) | Objectification of others | x | Manipulation: High (vs. low) need for dental care | Surprise at dentists' experiential activities | 143 participants from Mturk, experiment, single source |
| Schroeder & Fishbach, 2015 (Study 5) | Objectification of others | x | Manipulation: High (vs. low) need for physicians | Perception of physicians' self-focused emotions; Perception of physicians' patient-focused emotions; Wanting for physicians who feel patients' emotions | 157 university students, experiment, single source |
| Schroeder & Fishbach, 2015 (Study 6) | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Patients (vs. non-patients) as need for physicians | Perception of physicians' self-focused emotions; Wanting for emotional | 70 patients and 80 non-patients, cross-sectiona l, single |

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| | | | | | physicians; Wanting for physicians who feel patients' emotions | source |
| Shea & Fitzsimons, 2016 (Study 2) | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Objectification Scale | Individual advancement goal (vs. interpersonal affiliation goal) | Social network density | 689 full-time employees from Mturk, experiment, single source |
| Teng, Chen, Poon, Zhang, & Jiang, 2016 (Experiment 2) | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Perceived instrumentality | Instrumental (vs. non-instrumental) target; Money (vs. control) x Instrumental (vs. non-instrumental) target | Approach intention | 200 undergraduates in China, experiment, single source |
| Teng, Chen, Poon, Zhang, & Jiang, 2016 (Experiment 3) | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Perceived instrumentality | High (vs. low) self-competence; Money (vs. control) x High (vs. low) self-competence | Approach intention | 182 undergraduates in China, experiment, single source |
| Teng, Chen, Poon, Zhang, & Jiang, 2016 | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Perceived instrumentality | High-instrumental (vs. low-instrumental | Approach intention | 248 undergraduates, experiment, |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Experiment 4) | | | | vs. neutral) target; Money (vs. control) x High-instrumental (vs. low-instrumental vs. neutral) target | single source |
| Valtorta, Baldissarri, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2019 | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Object-like perception | Socially tainted (vs. morally tainted vs. physically tainted) workers | 124 undergraduates in Italy, experiment, single source |
| Wang & Krumhuber, 2017 (Study 2) | Objectification of others | x | Measure: Preference for the useful but unkind partner | Money (vs. control) | 84 participants in UK, experiment, single source |

**Table S2**

*Summary of the Antecedents and Consequences of Objectification*

| | Objectifying | | Being objectified | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Others | Self | By organization | By others |
| Antecedent | +Work features: fragmentation, repetitiveness, dependence on the machine;<br><br>+Factory worker (vs. artisan);<br>+Factory worker (vs. artisan) x Work (vs. person) focus;<br><br>+Alienation;<br><br>+Reward interdependence;<br><br>+Work (vs. non work) context/interaction;<br><br>+Duty, -Intellect, +Adversity, -Positivity, +Negativity, +Deception, -Sociality; | +Work features: fragmentation, repetitiveness, other-direction;<br><br>+Perception of being objectified by boss, supervisor and/or colleagues;<br><br>-Perception of being objectified by boss and/or colleagues x Private self-consciousness;<br><br>+Burnout;<br><br>-Organizational culture (goal orientation, innovation, support, rule); | -Procedural, distributive, & interpersonal justice;<br>+Procedural justice x Gender (stronger for women);<br><br>+Calculative and strategic language in organizational mission statements;<br><br>+Job autonomy (reversed);<br><br>+Professional isolation;<br><br>+Abusive supervision | +Work (vs. non work) context;<br><br>+Power (high vs. equal);<br>+Co-worker favor-giving (yes vs. no); +Power (high vs. equal) x Co-worker favor-giving (yes vs. no) |

| | |
|---|---|
| -Low calculative and strategic mindset (vs. control); -Work (vs. non work) context x Low calculative and strategic mindset (vs. control); | +Job insecurity; |
| | +Performance expectancy |
| +Subordinate (vs. peer) as target; +Executive (vs. MBA student) as perceiver; | |
| +High (vs. low vs. baseline) power;<br>+High (vs. equal) power;<br>+Low (vs. equal) power | |
| +Target kindness;<br>+Performance goal;<br>+Perceiver power (high vs. baseline) x Target kindness x Performance goal; | |
| -Thrift-oriented brand (vs. non-thrift-oriented brand vs. control); | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | +Performance (vs. fixed) incentive; +Peer evaluation (high vs. low); +Performance (vs. fixed) incentive x Peer evaluation (high vs. low); |
| | +Managerial ability uncertainty (vs. control); +Subjectivity-related concern; |
| | +Mechanistic dehumanization (vs. animalistic dehumanization vs. human) in a professional scenario; |
| | +Individual advancement goal (vs. interpersonal affiliation goal); |
| | +Instrumental (vs. non-instrumental) target; +Money (vs. control) x Instrumental (vs. non-instrumental) target; |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | -High (vs. low) self-competence; +Money (vs. control) x High (vs. low) self-competence;<br><br>+High-instrumental (vs. low-instrumental vs. neutral) target; +Money (vs. control) x High-instrumental (vs. low-instrumental vs. neutral) target;<br><br>+Socially tainted (vs. morally tainted vs. physically tainted) workers;<br><br>+Money (vs. control) | | | |
| Consequence | +Competence over sociability in coworker preference;<br><br>+Willingness to socialize with work ties; | +Conforming behavior;<br><br>-Well-being (+ in another paper);<br><br>-Belief in personal free will; | +Turnover intention;<br><br>-Sense of belonging;<br><br>-Interest in working for the organization; | +Self-objectification;<br><br>+Burnout (exhaustion, cynicism);<br><br>+Importance of |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| +Punitiveness;<br><br>+Intention to interact;<br><br>-Recall of the physician's personal life; +Physician's knowledge of the patient's personal life;<br><br>-Attribution of (self-focused) emotions to physicians; +Attribution of agency to physicians;<br><br>+Surprise at dentists' experiential activities;<br><br>-Perception of physicians' self-focused emotions; +Perception of physicians' patient-focused emotions; +Wanting for physicians who feel patients' emotions; +Wanting for emotional physicians; | +Job-related self-efficacy; | +Negative emotions;<br><br>+Avoidance coping;<br><br>-Organizational-based self-esteem | power-relevant attributes to self-definition;<br><br>+Willingness to pay for high-status goods;<br><br>+Negative emotion;<br><br>+Aggression; +Aggression (negatively moderated by control restoration);<br><br>-Perceived control;<br><br>-Self-perception of warmth; -Self-perception of competence; -Self-perception of morality; -Self-perception of human nature; -Self-perception of human uniqueness |

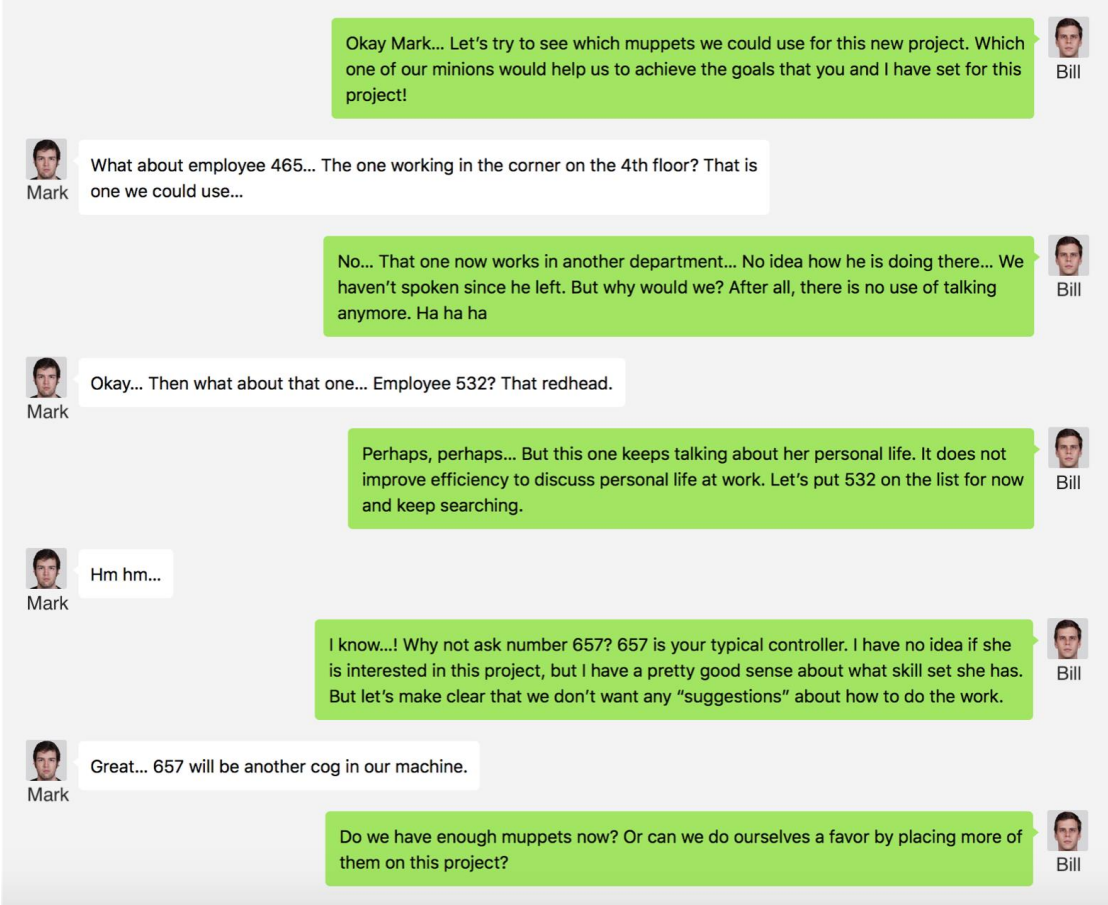
-Social network density;

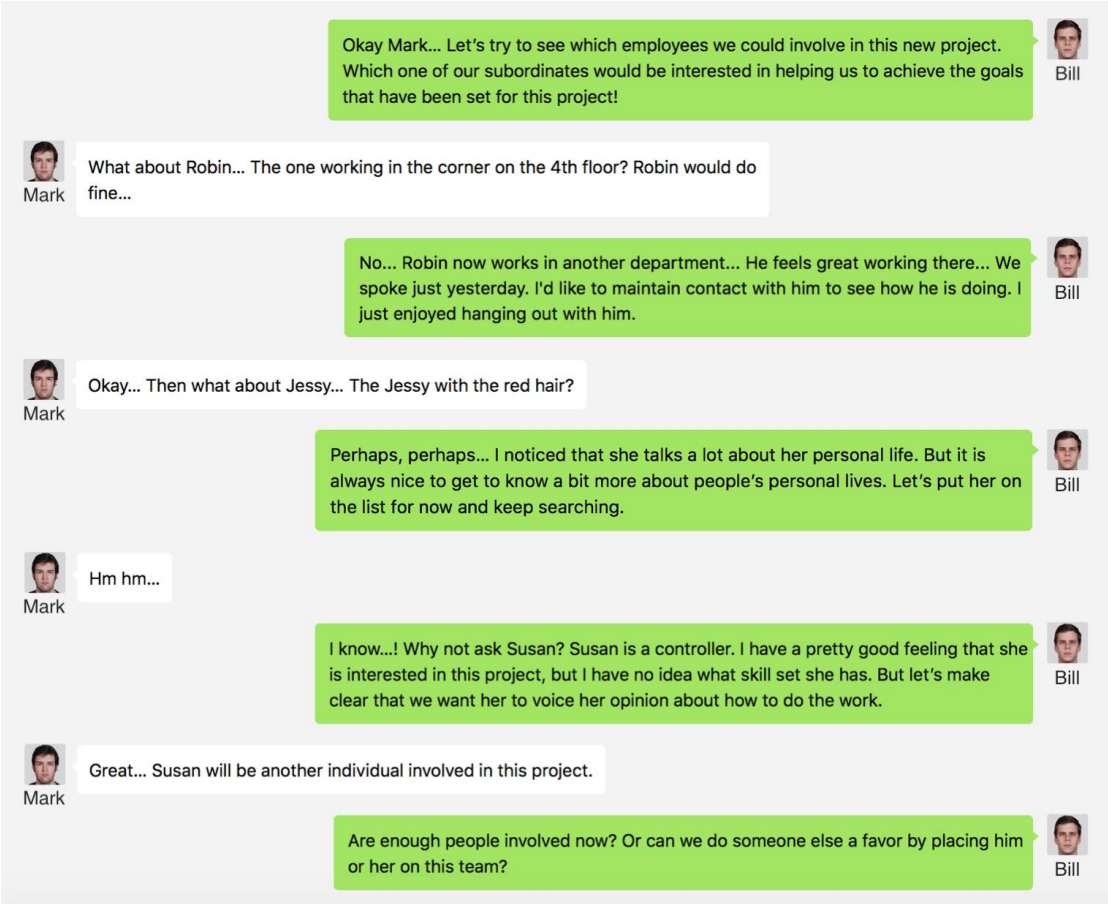
+Approach intention

# APPENDIX B: SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS FOR CHAPTER 3

## Dialogue Paradigm in Study 1

Below are objectification manipulation and non-objectification manipulation in sequence. Both facial portraits of Bill and Mark were taken from the MR2 database (Strohminger et al., 2016). Two facial images were rated to be equal in term of trustworthiness, physical attractiveness, mood, masculinity, and estimated age (Strohminger et al., 2016).




Okay Mark... Let's try to see which employees we could involve in this new project. Which one of our subordinates would be interested in helping us to achieve the goals that have been set for this project!
Bill
What about Robin... The one working in the corner on the 4th floor? Robin would do fine...
Mark
No... Robin now works in another department... He feels great working there... We spoke just yesterday. I'd like to maintain contact with him to see how he is doing. I just enjoyed hanging out with him.
Bill
Okay... Then what about Jessy... The Jessy with the red hair?
Mark
Perhaps, perhaps... I noticed that she talks a lot about her personal life. But it is always nice to get to know a bit more about people's personal lives. Let's put her on the list for now and keep searching.
Bill
Hm hm...
Mark
I know...! Why not ask Susan? Susan is a controller. I have a pretty good feeling that she is interested in this project, but I have no idea what skill set she has. But let's make clear that we want her to voice her opinion about how to do the work.
Bill
Great... Susan will be another individual involved in this project.
Mark
Are enough people involved now? Or can we do someone else a favor by placing him or her on this team?
Bill

**Power Affordance Scale in Study 1**

1. I'd like Bill to be at the top of the power hierarchy in this workplace.
2. I'd like Bill to have authority in this workplace.
3. I'd like Bill to be powerless in this workplace. (R)
4. I'd like Bill to have a position of power in this workplace.
5. If a vote were to be held, I'd like to vote for Bill as my leader again.
6. I would let Bill have influence over job issues that are important to me.
7. I would be willing to let Bill have control over my future in this company.

(R) = reverse-scored item