

Giulia is dressed, Candle is naked: "objectification" in women and men

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Objectification refers to the tendency to appraise an individual as an object or as less human [1]. Several studies investigate the other objectification of others (e.g. [2]), especially of women, by focusing perceivers' attention on the appearance or the sexuality of the targets. These findings attest that stressing the physical aspects rather than mental aspects of female targets [3] leads both female and male perceivers to attribute less human concepts to female targets [4-7], and to perceived them as less competent [4,8], less agentic [9,10], less moral [9,11], less warm [8], but with more experience (i.e., pain; [9]). Together, these findings agree on the association between female objectification and the denial of human features. However, some animal-related attributes employed in these studies (e.g. [5]) could be, in principle, also applied to humans (e.g., primary emotions), while some other typical human attributes could be, in principle, also ascribed to objects (e.g., objects in motion can be seen as agentic) or to animals (e.g., experience). Additionally, other attributes (e.g., lack of warmth) could be assigned to both animals and objects. In sum, these studies have relied on dimensions that vary in terms of human typicality, but have not included contrasting dimensions exclusively referring to humans and to objects. Hence, the employed dependent variables do not allow to draw a clear conclusion on whether objectified women are more associated with animal/object domain than with the human domain [12]. Only one study tests indirectly the association between objectification and objects in terms of perceptual processes, and finds that the perception of sexualized women, compared to sexualized men, is more similar to the processing supporting objects' recognition (analytic, [13]). However, the authors have not included non-sexualized women, thus not allowing to answer the question about whether women in general or only sexualized women could be perceived as objects. To address this question, and to overcome the human and animal/object overlap, in two studies, participants were presented with an equal number of images of sexualized women (i.e., wearing bikini) and of personalized women (i.e., full-dressed) associated with exclusively *human words* (i.e., first names, Mara) and uniquely *object words* (i.e., object names, Candle). Participants were asked to recollect the image-word association they had been presented with. Participants were presented with twelve associations in Study 1, and forty-eight associations in Study 2, as needed to reduce the unbiasing effect of memory on association performance. We tested whether male and female participants spontaneously associated *object words* with sexualized women more than with personalized women, while the complementary pattern was expected for *human words*, that could be more strongly associated with personalized women than with sexualized women. As a measure of individual association strength between sexualized women and *object words*, we used a like d' score with *object words* as the Signal and *human words* as the Noise. In so doing, positive like d' scores resulted from a larger proportion of sexualized female pictures→*object words* association (Hit), relative to sexualized female pictures→*human words* association (Fa), while a null d' score stood for a similar objectification of both sexualized women and personalized women. Results of both

studies showed that female participants d' were significantly larger than male participants d' , with only female d' being significantly different from zero. Our data surprisingly attested an objectification of sexualized female targets by female participants, while the same process did not guide male participants' name-female picture associations. Future research has to investigate whether self-female picture similarity, selective exposure to objectified material through media, and/or upward comparison processes can account for the observed gender effects on the proposed measure of female objectification.

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