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Mikkola, M.

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WHY DEHUMANIZATION IS DISTINCT FROM OBJECTIFICATION

Mari Mikkola

21.1 Introduction

Dehumanization seemingly involves a complex of the following: an assault on ‘our’ human dignity or value as ends-in-ourselves (being treated as a mere means to others’ ends); treating someone as something, or reducing someone to something; comparison of human beings to animals or inanimate objects, thereby committing a sort of category mistake; denial of agency or distinctly human capabilities; and a psychological attitude of conceiving others as subhuman. Specifically feminist philosophical discussions often treat *dehumanization* and *objectification* as being closely related, if not equivalent. For instance, Ann Cudd talks about ‘dehumanizing objectification’ that involves treating “persons as mere objects, ignoring their full and equal status as persons” (Cudd 2006, 165). For her, humans are special due to our sense of the good and the right; our capacity to desire, to value, and to plan for future lives that express our desires and values. Dehumanizing objectification, however, robs someone of their “right to express these unique qualities” (166); in other words, objectification hinders the realization of our full humanity.

In this chapter, I will consider how dehumanization and objectification are typically taken to be closely connected, and challenge this putative connectedness. As I see it, objectification is one thing and dehumanization another. I will consider two prominent accounts that can be termed ‘reductive’ and ‘non-reductive’ objectification. The former holds that objectification makes people into things and so seemingly involves a category mistake: human beings are literally and falsely categorized as things, which is morally troubling. The latter view, however, holds that objectification involves something else: persons are treated as if they are less than fully human—objectification involves x somehow reducing y ’s humanity. Proponents of these views take objectification (in either sense) to be equivalent to dehumanization; I disagree and argue here that neither should be equated with dehumanization. I will first outline prominent feminist accounts of objectification (Section 21.2). I will then consider why dehumanization should not be considered equivalent to reductive objectification (Section 21.3). On this view, even though objectification centrally involves treating someone *literally* as something, proponents of the view also hold that objectification involves treating someone *as if* they are something. But now reductive objectification-views end up being incoherent since one cannot simultaneously commit a category mistake (treat someone *literally* as something) *and* perform a reduction (treat someone *as if* they are something). We are dealing with two distinct phenomena since the latter presupposes

a prior recognition of another's humanity to be reduced while the former does not. We should not then treat dehumanization as equivalent to reductive objectification because this would make dehumanization an incoherent notion, too.

Next, I will discuss why non-reductive objectification isn't equivalent to dehumanization either (Section 21.4). In short: the way non-reductive objectification supposedly works does not offer a compelling analysis of dehumanization because some apparent instances of dehumanization would not count as being such even though they intuitively strike us as dehumanizing. This discussion shows that there is an odd 'paradox' of dehumanization, which ill fits well-known feminist accounts of objectification: for dehumanization to involve denying or disrespecting important person-defining capacities, one must first attribute those capacities to others in order to deny or disrespect them—one must *acknowledge* the humanity of another in order to dehumanize them. This further demonstrates (I hold) that objectification as commonly understood by feminist philosophers is not equivalent to dehumanization. I discuss the 'paradox' of dehumanization in Section 21.5.

I should add a content warning from the outset. Much of the relevant feminist literature makes use of examples from the sexual realm. My discussion does so as well and especially focuses on sexualized violence against women. Some readers may find the examples used harrowing and disturbing. They are not gratuitous descriptions of violence though, but serve important argumentative purposes: they enable our analysis of dehumanization to stay grounded in actual (albeit disturbing) real life circumstances. Moreover, the examples demonstrate something important about philosophical methodology: that armchair-philosophical discussions of sexualized violence are insufficient and fail to pass muster once we take actual cases seriously.

21.2 Objectification

What is objectification? Feminist discussions most basically take objectification to involve seeing and/or treating a person as a thing. There are, however, a number of ways to spell out what this means. Rae Langton outlines various attitudes the phenomenon of objectification may involve. All *intentional* attitudes directed toward persons make them 'objects' of those attitudes. Someone can be an object of another's thoughts, love, loathing, respect, or desire (Langton 2009, 325). There is nothing morally exigent about this though, and it expresses a rather innocuous sense of making another an 'object' (see also Heinämaa and Jardine in this volume). Moreover, one might make another an object by taking an *objective* attitude toward them. This idea draws on P.F. Strawson's discussion of attitudes like resentment. It involves viewing someone "as if she were a natural phenomenon ... lacking in responsibility, not (or not fully) free, autonomous, or responsible for what she does" (Langton 2009, 330). It may be inappropriate for us to resent someone who cannot be held responsible for their actions, though we may not be able to genuinely respect that person. It is the attitude of "the impartial social scientist, the kind teacher, the concerned psychiatrist" who treats a person as a thing, but nonetheless in a rather benevolent manner qua an experimental subject, pupil, or patient (Langton 2009, 331).

However, a more morally worrisome attitude is the *objectifying* one, where someone views another as thing-like: lacking in responsibility, and

as if there were nothing more to her than an appearance ... nothing more than a conveniently packaged bundle of eyes, lips, face, breasts, buttocks, legs. Someone might view a person as if she were a mere tool, a mere instrument to serve his own purposes, or property that belonged to him. (Langton 2009, 331)

The objective and objectifying attitudes may have in common that the ‘object’ is viewed without respect. But in taking the former, one sees another in terms of certain “well-meaning relational gerundives: he sees him as to be handled, to be managed, to be cured, to be trained”; in taking an objectifying attitude, however, one sees another as “something to be looked at, to be pursued, to be consumed, to be used, to be possessed” (Langton 2009, 331). Importantly, although she has identified various attitudes, Langton holds that we are not dealing with mere harmless states of mind. For her, “a person is injured when she is viewed as if she were a thing—unfree, mere appearance, body, tool, or property” (2009, 332). Nonetheless, both objective and objectifying attitudes involve not merely seeing but also doing something. In the former case, if I see you as someone to be managed, I will aim to manage you thereby acting in a certain way. The same goes for objectification: it is “a stance, a way of looking at the world, and a social practice” (Langton 2009, 332). Hence, it too involves both seeing and doing.

With these attitudes in mind, consider two prominent feminist accounts of objectification. Catharine MacKinnon understands objectification to be dehumanizing because the former involves a kind of *reduction*, whereby “the objectified individual’s humanity is reduced ... as she ends up acquiring the status of a thing (a being that no longer is a person)” (Papadaki 2015b, 96). This draws on a familiar Kantian idea that objectification involves diminishing, reducing, or lowering a person’s humanity to the status of an object (for detailed discussions of this view, see Herman 2002; Papadaki 2007, 2015a). MacKinnon (1987) holds that, specifically in pornography, women are made into sex objects and as objects they lack autonomy, subjectivity, agency, and self-determination. Her view famously takes there to be an objectifying attitude that reduces women to mere ‘unfree’ tools and objects for the satisfaction of men’s sexual needs.

Martha Nussbaum, by contrast, advances a *non-reductive* conception of objectification: it involves ignoring or not properly acknowledging someone’s humanity, rather than a downright destruction of humanity (contra MacKinnon). In a well-known article, Nussbaum examines ‘objectification’ as a loose cluster-term. Or more specifically, objectification seemingly involves treating a person as an object, and such treatment involves seven possible features:

- *instrumentality*: treating a person as a tool for the objectifier’s purposes;
- *denial of autonomy*: treating a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination;
- *inertness*: treating a person as lacking in agency;
- *fungibility*: treating a person as interchangeable with other objects;
- *violability*: treating a person as lacking in boundary-integrity;
- *ownership*: treating a person as something that can be bought or sold;
- *denial of subjectivity*: treating a person as something whose experiences and feelings need not be taken into account. (Nussbaum 1995, 257)¹

For Nussbaum, objectification can take place even if only one of the seven features is present, though in most cases objectification involves more than just one feature (1995, 258). Still, she takes the denial of autonomy and instrumentalization to be the most morally exigent features. They are also connected in that non-instrumental treatment of a person seemingly entails that their autonomy is recognized (Nussbaum 1995, 264). It seems that on Nussbaum’s account objectification always involves an objective attitude, but only sometimes does it involve an objectifying attitude. In order to make sense of this further and to see how objectification is putatively tied to dehumanization, consider what makes objectification morally problematic on MacKinnon and Nussbaum’s views.

For MacKinnon, objectification is always morally objectionable: since it is dehumanizing and dehumanization is always morally wrong, so is objectification. *Contra* MacKinnon, Nussbaum does not hold that every instance of objectification is morally problematic. For her, “context is everything ... in many if not all cases, the difference between an objectionable and a benign use of objectification will be made by the overall context of the human relationship” in which objectification takes place (Nussbaum 1995, 271). Features of benign objectification for Nussbaum encompass the absence of instrumentalization and that objectification is “symmetrical and mutual—and in both cases undertaken in a context of mutual respect and rough social equality” (Nussbaum 1995, 275). Furthermore, “there is no malign or destructive intent” on the part of the objectifier (Nussbaum 1995, 281), and a person’s humanity is still acknowledged and respected (Papadaki 2010, 31). This phenomenon conceivably involves either Langton’s innocuous sense of taking another as an intentional object of one’s attitudes and feelings, or a benevolent sense of taking an objective attitude toward someone. Negative or objectionable objectification, however, takes place when equality, respect, and consent are absent. And this sort of objectification is dehumanizing: “What is made sexy ... is precisely the act of turning a creature whom in one dim corner of one’s mind one knows to be human into a thing, a something rather than a someone” (1995, 281). That is, even though objectification for Nussbaum involves merely ignoring or not properly acknowledging someone’s humanity—it is about *disrespecting*, rather than destroying, the objectified individual’s humanity (Papadaki 2015b)—some instances of objectification involve such grave disrespect that they end up being dehumanizing.

Nussbaum’s conception then is weaker than MacKinnon’s: objectification does not have absolute power to destroy women’s humanity or reduce them to objects.² But, for Nussbaum, objectification is always morally problematic *under some conditions*; whether these conditions hold depends on the overall context in which objectification takes place. In Langton’s terminology, only in some contexts is an objectifying attitude morally problematic in being dehumanizing. To explicate this, Nussbaum unfortunately and confusingly writes: “the instrumental treatment of human beings as tools of the purposes of another is always morally problematic; if it does not take place in a larger context of regard for humanity, it is a central form of the morally objectionable” (1995, 289). So, Nussbaum identifies instrumentalization as the most worrisome feature of objectification in being *always* morally problematic, while other features of objectification can be morally mitigated. Nonetheless, Nussbaum holds that *even instrumentalization* can be morally mitigated if it takes place “in a larger context of regard for humanity.” How can we make sense of this? In short, Nussbaum is drawing a distinction between instrumental use and *mere* instrumental use. The former is not problematic in all contexts. Consider Nussbaum’s example to illustrate:

If I am lying around with my lover on the bed, and use his stomach as a pillow there seems to be nothing at all baneful about this, provided that I do so with his consent... and without causing him pain, provided, as well, that I do so in the context of a relationship in which he is generally treated as more than a pillow. (1995, 265)

And so, we can make sense of the above claim: instrumentalization in a strong sense involves treating someone as a mere instrument for one’s ends, which is always morally wrong as this ends up being dehumanizing. Instrumentalization in a weaker sense, where the objectified person’s humanity has not been negated, is not. Settling whether instrumentalization involves the strong or the weak sense depends on the context, and whether the context is characterized

by mutual respect and rough social equality (as Nussbaum puts it). In other words, MacKinnon and Nussbaum offer reductive and non-reductive understandings of objectification, respectively, and both understandings are equated with dehumanization. However, I contend it is a mistake to think that either is equivalent to dehumanization—or so I will argue in following two sections.

21.3 Reductive objectification and dehumanization

As mentioned, MacKinnon equates objectification and dehumanization. She is not alone in doing so. Andrea Dworkin also writes:

Objectification occurs when a human being, through social means, is made less than human, turned into a thing or commodity, bought and sold. When objectification occurs, a person is depersonalized, so that no individuality or integrity is available ... Objectification is an injury right at the heart of discrimination: those who can be used as if they are not fully human are no longer fully human in social terms; their humanity is hurt by being diminished. (2000, 30–31)

Linda LeMoncheck (1985), too, takes objectification to involve dehumanization: sexual objectification constructs women as lesser human beings. The wrong of objectification then is grounded in a failure to treat women as moral equals. However, I am unconvinced that this equation is helpful and fitting: it ends up putting forward an incoherent view.

To see this, consider Dworkin's claim above. On the one hand, she claims that persons are *made* into things; on the other, persons are treated *as if* they are 'less' than fully human. In the former case, the problem with objectification boils down to a sort of category mistake: human beings are literally and falsely categorized as things, which is morally troubling. However, in the latter case something else is going on: if objectification involves x reducing y 's humanity, then x must have attributed humanity to y to begin with. But, reducing another's humanity and literally treating someone as something are two distinct phenomena: the former presupposes another's humanity to be reduced while the latter does not. Subsequently, reductive objectification accounts like those of MacKinnon and Dworkin are incoherent: one cannot commit a category mistake where one views and treats *someone* literally as *something*, and simultaneously views and treats them as a *lesser* person. In the latter case, one treats another as a person to begin with, which shows that one has not committed a category mistake.³ Or in committing a category mistake, one cannot *simultaneously* reduce the other's humanity or personhood for the simple reason that the other is not viewed as a human person to begin with.

One might challenge this by appealing to Langton's different attitudes above: perhaps in cases of reductive objectification that are dehumanizing, one takes an objective attitude toward someone, which grounds the putative category mistake, and an objectifying attitude, which explains how one can view someone as a lesser person. If possible, the incoherence I have alluded to would disappear. It certainly seems that one can take either an objective or an objectifying attitude toward the same person at different times; but can one entertain these two attitudes toward the same person simultaneously? As a physician, I can clearly take an objective attitude toward a female patient *qua* patient and at the same time take an objectifying attitude toward her *qua* woman. But this does not well besit the idea of reductive dehumanizing objectification. On the Dworkin–MacKinnon view, *women qua women* are simultaneously made into things and treated as

if they are 'less' than fully human. Even though it seems that I can take different attitudes to the same person on the basis of that person's divergent social roles or identity facets, it does not seem conceivable that I can take these differing attitudes toward the same person on the basis of one and the same role or identity facet.

Ann Cahill holds that objectification or objectifying imagery does not represent or portray women as "utterly object-like, as lacking in the traits and abilities usually associated with persons" (2011, 27). She too holds that simply equating dehumanization and objectification is problematic, but for a different reason. MacKinnon, Dworkin, LeMoncheck, and Nussbaum all on Cahill's view accept "autonomy as a hallmark of the person, and objectification as a means of limiting or encroaching upon a person's autonomy" (Cahill 2011, 24). However, Cahill rejects this picture of personhood because it does not take seriously the embodiment of persons. That is, accounts that take objectification to be autonomy violating, risk defining personhood in atomistic terms removed from and prior to relationships, and in an overly individualistic manner. For Cahill, these positions do not sufficiently theorize the body as being contained in the notion of subjectivity, and personhood becomes just about the mind or intellect (2011, 26). As an alternative, she proposes the concept of *derivatization*: "To derivatize is to portray, render, understand, or approach a being solely or primarily as the reflection, projection, or expression of another being's identity, desires, fears" (2011, 32). For instance, in the realm of sex this is problematic from a feminist perspective insofar as women are constructed "as reducible to the desires or beings of men" (Cahill 2011, 42). The moral problem then isn't that one is viewed or treated as a thing rather than a person—instead, the problem is that *qua* person one is a projection of others' desires. (I will return to this idea shortly.)

21.4 Non-reductive objectification and dehumanization

Nussbaum's notion of objectification is meant to be non-reductive: it involves disrespecting rather than absolutely destroying someone's humanity. Nonetheless, Nussbaum holds that objectification in the sense of instrumentalization is always morally exigent in seemingly involving dehumanization. That is, even though Nussbaum thinks objectification is non-reductive in that it does not involve destroying someone's humanity, there are instances of disrespecting someone's humanity that are so grave as to involve dehumanization. These instances involve objectification in the sense of instrumentalization. However, I hold that this does not provide a good analysis of dehumanization. To see this, I will consider an application of Nussbaum's view, and John Gardner and Stephen Shute's (2000) analysis of the wrongfulness of rape: what makes it wrongful is that the perpetrator *objectifies* the victim by treating the latter as a mere thing or instrument to be used. *Qua* persons we have a certain worth due to which "[t]o use people without at the same time respecting this [worth] involves treating them as something other than people. It means treating them as things" (Gardner and Shute 2000, 203–4). This is a familiar Kantian picture: one should treat others, not as mere means to one's ends, but as ends in themselves. Rape violates this by objectifying (i.e., instrumentalizing) the victim: the rapist is treating another person as a *mere* tool or instrument for their own end. In being the "sheer use" of a subject, rape denies someone personhood and this makes it "literally dehumanizing" (Gardner and Shute 2000, 205). However, as I argue next, many sexualized attacks fail to fit this model of dehumanization, and yet we think of them pre-theoretically as dehumanizing. Moreover, I am unconvinced that rape necessarily involves instrumentalization as understood by Gardner and Shute. Hence, we should not equate Nussbaum's non-reductive objectification with dehumanization.

Start with my former point. Gardner and Shute take rape to be dehumanizing because it is the sheer instrumental use of a person. They do not clearly say that it involves the sheer instrumental use of a person for some *sexual* ends. But, they must hold this view—otherwise, they cannot distinguish the wrongfulness of rape from the wrongfulness of other merely instrumental uses of persons, which is something Gardner and Shute aim to do. They hold that although rape usually involves some physical, psychological, and/or emotional harm, it need not—these are merely epiphenomenal to rape. So, Gardner and Shute present the following example:

It is possible, although unusual, for a rapist to do no harm. A victim may be forever oblivious to the fact that she was raped, if, say, she was drugged or drunk to the point of unconsciousness when the rape was committed, and the rapist wore a condom... we have a victim of rape whose life is not changed for the worse, or at all, by the rape. She does not... 'feel violated.' She has no feelings about the incident, since she knows nothing of it [and]... the incident never comes to light at all. (2000, 196)

This example supposedly homes in on the core wrong of rape: objectification understood as instrumentalization. Following Gardner and Shute, rape's wrongfulness consists in the perpetrator treating another as a mere instrument for their end.

Now, compare the above example to the following case.⁴ Imagine an identical situation where the perpetrator makes sheer use of another for some other end; for instance, one is drugged and mouth swabbed so that one's DNA can be extracted for scientific research, when (for some reason) the person would not have consented to its extraction. This is done in a way that leaves no physical markers, and the person is forever oblivious to what has happened to them. They have been used as a sheer instrument. So, in this respect the mouth swab case is on a par with the above example of rape, and the two are morally indistinguishable. But Gardner and Shute should not want this result: they are explicitly aiming to cash out what is *specifically* wrongful about rape that sets it morally apart from other heinous crimes. The way to distinguish the two cases is in terms of their ends: in the mouth swab, the end is to extract DNA; in the rape case, it is "sexual pleasure" (Gardner & Shute 2000, 204). So, Gardner and Shute must say that the wrongfulness of rape consists in it being a sheer use of a person for some *sexual* ends.

With this qualification, their picture of the rapist becomes that of Langton's sexual solipsist. The sheer sexual use of a person dehumanizes them; it turns human beings into things. For Langton, this kind of sexual solipsist fails to see that in sexual contexts women are not things: they treat women as "mere bodies, as merely sensory appearances, as not free, as items that can be possessed, as items whose value is merely instrumental" (2009, 316). What instrumentalizes women in this way is the solipsist's sexual desire toward the object of their desire due to which they display the objectifying attitude—namely, they view a person as thing-like. For the rapist, the other is a sex *object* to be used merely as a tool for their sexual ends and gratification. However, the objectification argument subsequently fails to capture the wrong of rape: the criterion of wrongfulness will leave out some important cases, which we pre-theoretically think of as dehumanizing. In order to see this, consider the practice of rape used as a weapon of war or martial rape. Aid agencies and human rights organizations have identified the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to be the epicenter of recent wartime sexual violence against women. In the DRC, the rape of civilians by combatants is a systematic practice and used as part of fighting a war "for a variety of purposes, including intimidation, humiliation, political terror, extracting information, rewarding soldiers, and 'ethnic cleansing'" (Amnesty International 2005, 1). Sexualized violence is part and parcel of general attacks on communities where combatants/soldiers also kill or injure civilians, and destroy their property.⁵ Rape is used

“to terrorize communities into accepting [the combatants’/soldiers’] control or to punish them for real or supposed aid to opposing forces” (Human Rights Watch 2002). It aims to “win and maintain control over civilians and [their] territory” particularly by terrorizing and humiliating women, who in this cultural context are seen as the representatives of their communities (Human Rights Watch 2002). For instance, women and children are often attacked in public in front of their husbands and parents.

Relative to the DRC context, perpetrators do not appear primarily to use their victims for sexual ends but for fighting a war. The independent web-initiative *Women Under Siege Blog* (<http://www.womenundersiegeproject.org/>) documents the use of rape and sexualized violence as weapons of war. It provides a detailed and comprehensive account of the recent situation in DRC as well as of the apparent ends to which women and children are subject to sexualized violence. These include the already mentioned ends: humiliation, control of people and natural resources, retaliation (women whose husbands are community figureheads or supporters of rival militia are often raped in retaliation). The *Women Under Siege Blog* lists other ends too:

- Soldiers’ protection: some combatants believe that raping a woman fortifies them for battle, which is needed to “beat the enemy.”
- Termination of pregnancies: some evidence suggests that pregnant women are targeted for rape in order to induce miscarriages.
- Avoidance of violence from superiors: combatants are reported to suffer severe beatings from their superiors if they refuse to attack women. Some combatants admit perpetrating sexualized violence in order to avoid violence themselves.

These perpetrators use other persons as means to their ends for sure; but given the purposes for which the practice of martial rape is used, their ends do not appear to be primarily sexual. So, the perpetrators do not fit Langton’s picture of the sexual solipsist, to which Gardner and Shute’s account is wedded. The objectification argument holds that rape dehumanizes (and is, hence, morally wrongful) because the perpetrator uses another for sheer sexual ends. But, this does not capture what is dehumanizing about martial rape: the martial rapist instrumentalizes another, *not* for sexual ends, but for ends that have to do with warfare. The distinction between sexual and sexualized ends clarifies this point further. The former include ends that are directly to do with sex, like sexual gratification. However, the latter involves instrumentalization for some (non-sexual) ends by sexual *means*. To a large extent, this seems to be the case in the DRC: violent sexual means are used to achieve ends that are to do with warfare. However, in relying on the view that rape is about instrumentalization for sexual ends, the objectification argument fails to account for the wrong of martial rape. So, even if the sheer use of persons for sexual ends is dehumanizing, *this* is not what makes martial rape dehumanizing when surely it is.⁶

Moreover, rape does not necessarily involve instrumentalization as understood by Gardner and Shute: the *kind* of instrumentalization involved does not obviously involve treating persons *literally* as things. So, if treating people literally as things is meant to make the treatment dehumanizing, some instances of sexualized violence end up not being dehumanizing, contra pre-theoretical intuitions. Again, looking at the harrowing situation in the DRC is instructive. Women in the conflict areas are sexually violated (among other reasons) because they are seen as the representatives of their communities and the facilitators of the communities’ continuation. Given this, and the broader goals of the practice, martial rapists do not appear to view the affected women as thing-like. They are genuinely and literally viewed as persons with goals, life plans, and a desire for wellbeing; wartime rape as a practice is aimed at precisely thwarting these

aspects of women's lives, thereby destroying whole communities, and making it extremely hard for people to rebuild them. The victims of the practice are not treated as inert things simply to be destroyed, like dwellings. Actually, martial rapists are more akin to sadistic rapists, who want their victims to fight back, and thereby affirm that they are subjects rather than inert things. A kind of autonomy affirmation is a necessary feature of sadistic attitudes this type of sexualized violence accompanies. As Langton puts it, sadistic desire seeks that a person will turn themselves into a thing, "abjure" herself, and come to identify with a "broken and enslaved freedom." It aims for a person to make themselves as thing-like as "it is possible for a person to be" (Langton 2009, 336). In the above examples, women's personhood is affirmed insofar as their social roles as community representatives are recognized; and this is a necessary prerequisite for violating their personhood. Otherwise the practice of wartime rape would not be such an effective weapon. The situation is akin to David Sussman's discussion of Abu Ghraib-like torture. A person becomes an accomplice in their own violation in that the torture "involves not just the insults and injuries to be found in other kinds of violence, but a wrong that, by exploiting the victim's own participation, might best be called humiliation" (Sussman 2005, 30). Inert objects cannot partake in their own violation, only persons or subjects with agency can. So, the kind of mere use in martial rape that violates others presupposes that the affected subjects are persons with life plans and particular social roles. And the wrong committed by the rapist is precisely aimed at exploiting *that* in order to violate the affected persons (for more, see Mikkola 2016). This demonstrates a *prima facie* odd 'paradox' of dehumanization: to dehumanize seemingly involves an *affirmation* of humanity and personhood. I will turn to examining this phenomenon next in order to further bolster the view that dehumanization and objectification are not equivalent.

21.5 The paradox of dehumanization

Smith (2016) considers this "strangeness of dehumanization," where dehumanization is understood to be about conceiving others as subhuman creatures.⁷ It seems that as a phenomenon dehumanization in this sense involves conceiving of other human beings "as not really human at all, but as organisms that are more akin to rats, lice, snakes, or cockroaches" (Smith 2016, 416–7; see also Smith 2014 and Smith, this volume). Nonetheless, simultaneously "those who characterize their victims as nonhuman animals also describe them in ways that are uniquely applicable to human beings ... Furthermore, dehumanizers often behave toward their victims in a manner that implicitly acknowledges their humanity" (Smith 2016, 417). One explanation for this strangeness would be that dehumanization does *not* in the end involve viewing others as subhuman, and dehumanizing language merely serves a rhetorical purpose of making violence against others easier. Nonetheless, Smith holds that we can explain how humanity can both be denied and implicitly affirmed in a way that makes sense of dehumanization: "in dehumanizing others, we categorize them simultaneously as human and subhuman ... this gives dehumanization its distinctive character and differentiates it from the purely rhetorical use of animalistic language to characterize others" (Smith 2016, 418).

Smith understands dehumanization as a psychological phenomenon and a certain pattern of thinking that is often politically formed and determined. In short: "When we dehumanize others, we assign them a peculiar status. We typically think of them as beings that appear human and behave in human-like ways, but that are really subhuman on the 'inside.'" (Smith 2016, 420) Bluntly put, the idea is that a creature can 'appear' human and this gives the surface appearance of them being like us; but such a creature can fail to possess a human essence thus being a member of a subhuman kind that isn't part of our moral community.

This phenomenon is (Smith holds) tied to our emotional responses and to the notion of ‘uncanny’: something being “frightening in a distinctive, difficult-to-describe way” (Smith 2016, 431). In other words,

A being that is both human and subhuman transgresses culturally sanctioned metaphysical categories. . . . such beings are regarded as unclean, impure, defiled, and consequently defiling, and pose a threat to any social order founded on metaphysical presumptions about the natural order of things (that is, every social order). (Smith 2016, 430)

For instance, a rat in rat form is just a rat that might frighten or disgust us, but a rat in human form is deeply unsettling in a different way: it is “intrinsically repellent and horrifying” (Smith 2016, 430). And so, the dehumanized person’s appearance grounds our classification of them as a human being, but “the nonperceptual belief that she is a subhuman creature—normally acquired by political propaganda or entrenched ideological biases” grounds a contrary reaction (Smith 2016, 434). Hence, the dehumanized person is “felt to be both human and subhuman—and therefore as an uncanny entity. Paradoxically, then, part of what makes such dehumanized people so loathsome and menacing is their seeming humanity” (Smith 2016, 435).

This explanation of the paradox of dehumanization is deeply interesting and insightful. It seems to fit certain pre-theoretically paradigm cases of dehumanization, such as events that took place in Rwanda or that resulted from Nazi propaganda. But I am unconvinced that this explanation fits the case of wartime sexualized violence I discussed above. The case of DRC above certainly suggests that women were seen as threatening to the social order; but the explanation for this does not seem to be that they were seen as threatening because of their ‘uncanniness,’ or because perpetrators viewed their victims simultaneously as human and subhuman in the sense that Smith holds. Rather, women were viewed as human through and through—or as Kate Manne (2017) puts it, women who are subject to misogyny are seen as human, all too human. Whether this point actually counts against Smith’s view though, isn’t entirely clear. In his (2011), Smith readily admits that the particular form of dehumanization directed at women is different from the idea that dehumanization involves seeing someone as subhuman (2011, 5). He is concerned with dehumanization associated with war and genocide, while women’s dehumanization typically takes the form of sexual objectification as discussed above. However, since I hold that the cases of wartime rape are not dehumanizing by virtue of involving objectification in either of the two senses discussed above, we are seemingly analyzing the same piece of reality. And, hence, one would expect that wartime dehumanization of women via sexualized violence should be explainable through the idea that one sees another as subhuman—something I disagree with. That said, we do both agree that objectification isn’t equivalent to dehumanization. Smith writes: “treating someone as only a means to a sexual end is not the same as regarding them as subhuman, for one can fail to acknowledge a person’s subjectivity without denying the existence of that subjectivity” (2011, 27). On his view then, it seems that when women are objectified, their humanity is recognized but disregarded. In the case of genocidal dehumanization though, it seems that one’s humanity isn’t (fully) recognized insofar as one is thought to have a subhuman essence or to be subhuman ‘inside.’

I agree with Smith that we are dealing with two distinct phenomena, though my reasons for resisting the equation of *objectification* and *dehumanization* are different. Nonetheless, I think that the example of wartime rape puts pressure on Smith’s explanation of the ‘paradox’ of dehumanization. Consider Manne’s alternative explanation, which she offers in her discussion of misogyny’s logic and mechanism. Manne holds that misogyny isn’t best understood as being

about the hatred of women, which she terms as the “naïve conception.” Instead, it is primarily “a property of social environments in which women are liable to encounter hostility due to the enforcement and policing of patriarchal norms and expectations—often ... insofar as they violate patriarchal law and order” (Manne 2017, 19). Misogyny is patriarchy’s police force, so to speak, correcting women who breach its laws— it functions to put women back in ‘their place.’ The naïve conception of misogyny makes it a property of individuals who universally or generally hate women *qua* women, which makes it a psychological matter. For Manne, misogyny is better understood as a sociopolitical phenomenon with psychological, structural, and institutional manifestations. Misogyny’s essence resides in its social function and involves various ‘down girl’ moves that target women selectively when they are ‘out of line,’ rather than some general psychological state of hatred toward women. In other words, misogyny involves the ‘paradox of dehumanization’ insofar as it takes women to be *all too* human: “Her humanity is precisely the problem, when it’s directed to the wrong people, in the wrong way, or in the wrong spirit, by his lights.” (Manne 2017, 22)

Manne, hence, rejects the view that misogyny involves viewing women as less than human or not human at all, and the idea that misogyny crucially involves some form of dehumanization. This “humanist” view in moral psychology, Manne claims, holds that dehumanization is the best explanation for inhumane conduct, where

such behavior often stems from people’s failure to recognize some of their fellows as fellow human beings. The former may instead see the latter as subhuman creatures, non-human animals, supernatural beings (e.g., demons, witches), or even as mere things (i.e., mindless objects). If people could only appreciate their shared or common humanity, then they would have a hard time mistreating other members of the species. (Manne 2017, 135)

A problem with humanism though is that “[m]any of the nastiest things that people do to each other seem to proceed in full view of, and are in fact plausibly triggered by, these others’ manifestations of their shared or common humanity” (Manne 2017, 150). In other words, we treat others as “potentially dangerous and threatening in ways only a human being can be” (Manne 2017, 149). Only other human beings can be viewed and treated as enemies, rivals, usurpers, insubordinates, and traitors (Manne 2017, 154). By way of example, Manne notes the terms ‘thug,’ ‘welfare queen,’ and ‘urban youth’ that are used in the US political discourse disparagingly to refer to black Americans. She admits that these terms reflect a type of “us” and “them” mentality. But Manne holds, and I think rightly so, “the ‘us’ in question need not be human beings writ large; it may be human beings in a particular social position or who occupy a certain rank in one of many potential intra-human hierarchies” (Manne 2017, 153). In a manner similar to my discussion above about wartime rape, this type of thinking and putting down of fellow humans only succeeds by assuming that they are social position occupants with life plans and desires. The put down works by utilizing the subjects’ human agency, rather than by holding that the recipients are ‘uncanny’ in the sense discussed by Smith.

One might argue in defense of Smith though holding that perhaps the objectifying attitude can make one view women as ‘uncanny.’ Langton writes (without having Smith’s sense of dehumanization in mind):

Someone who views women reductively, as brutish creatures whose purpose is the satisfaction of men’s lusts, may also manifest resentment towards women. Misogyny

may sometimes present just this combination. And perhaps the connection between the resentment and the objectifying attitude is not coincidental. Perhaps it is caused by a horror that one's desires put one in the power of such contemptible creatures. (2009, 332)

Perhaps it is this horror that can make women subhuman 'inside.' For instance, Langton recounts a story told by Margaret Atwood, asking a group of men what is it that they fear most about women. The men replied: We're afraid that they'll laugh at us. Maybe there is a way to see how women can be 'uncanny,' too, in the sense Smith's notion of dehumanization presupposes: women's sexuality is somehow a mysterious beast beyond understanding and comprehension; hence, it is seen as something dangerous. In other words, there is a surface similarity in 'female' and 'male' sexuality, but a deep mystery and fear about the former, which seemingly could render women uncanny. Just think back to the example of a rat that looks like human: there is a surface similarity of humanity, but a difference on a deeper level of having a "rodent-essence" that generates fear and renders the creature subhuman and uncanny. Now, even though this plausibly describes and explains some men's sexual psychologies and egos, it would surely be too essentialist and essentializing to explain "the male sexual psyche" generally in this way. For a start, no such singular psyche exists in my view. To explain complex practices of human sexuality and especially those of wartime rape in terms of men viewing women as uncanny due to their sexual mysteriousness ignores many conceivably important structural concerns and renders our explanations too psychologistic. Some instances of dehumanization may involve this type of uncanniness, but it strikes me as an overstatement that the phenomenon of gendered dehumanization is grounded in it. (For a detailed discussion of psychological essentialism and dehumanization, see Kronfeldner in this volume.)

By contrast, I hold, dehumanization works and is paradoxical precisely because it involves a sort of co-opting of the agent and their humanity in the violations involved (think back to the example of Abu Ghraib-type torture). Cahill's notion of derivatization may insightfully shed more light into this type of phenomenon. For her,

the derivatized subject is degraded not by being mistakenly treated as an object, but by being mistakenly treated as a subject whose subjectivity (actions, speech, appearance, and so on) can be wholly determined by the subjective needs or desires of another. (2014, 845)

In other words, one's subjectivity and identity are projections of others' desires and needs. Perhaps this underpins some aspects of dehumanization's psychology: for instance, misogynistic dehumanization works by men derivatizing women's subjectivity through various 'down girl' moves so that women are 'put back in their place,' and come to conform to men's needs and desires. If something like this is going on, we can see again that dehumanization does not (and need not) involve objectification in the sense of viewing or treating women as literally object-like or as if they were objects. Women are treated as subjects all right, just not self-determining ones—dehumanization turns on precisely aiming to hamper and frustrate women's self-set goals, aims, and life plans.

Still, one might challenge my view that dehumanization and objectification are distinct phenomena by considering self-objectification. Langton describes this as being a kind of objectification, where an agent views themselves as (naturally) determined in some manner and as having value only to the extent that they can be used or possessed by another. This type of

self-objectifying attitude involves both doing and seeing. Someone may turn themselves into an object in having such an attitude. They may bring it about that they are more thing-like and less free by becoming passive, submissive, and enslaved (Langton 2009, 334–5). If one can self-objectify to the extent that one enslaves oneself, the situation starts to look intuitively more like self-dehumanization. Perhaps this speaks for dehumanization and objectification being closer than I hold.

Given the paradox of dehumanization it seems implausible though that one could self-dehumanize. Take Smith's view: for the dehumanized person to self-dehumanize they would have to take their human appearance as grounds for thinking of themselves as a human being, but at the same time entertain a nonperceptual belief that they are a subhuman creature. In other words, they would have to feel both human and subhuman, and therefore an uncanny entity. Having these sorts of attitudes toward oneself simultaneously looks pre-theoretically wedded to a rather odd psychology. People can certainly feel self-loathing in various ways, but to view oneself uncanny in the above sense seems intuitively different from more ordinary forms of self-loathing. Or at the very least, self-dehumanization in this sense is probably not a widespread phenomenon. Hence, even though it may be that some people can have both self-objectifying and self-dehumanizing attitudes toward themselves, the apparent rarity of this coextension does not speak for objectification and dehumanization being closely connected—and it certainly does not suffice to make the two equivalent.

21.6 Final remarks

For Manne, putting down of fellow humans only succeeds by assuming that they are social position occupants with life plans and desires. Dehumanization works by utilizing the subjects' human agency, so that they are put back to their place should they venture to rebel and challenge their lot. Relative to misogyny, some of this conceivably involves objectification, both other and self-directed. After all, women conceiving of themselves as unfree and naturally determined is what patriarchy and sexism aim to accomplish with misogyny's various 'down girl' moves coming into play should women act to the contrary. It seems then that misogyny is closely related to both dehumanization and objectification. Still, we ought not to treat objectification and dehumanization as being equivalent, even though they are causally connected. Self-objectification is a *mechanism* by which dehumanization can be brought about. Nevertheless, I maintain, the two are not constitutively connected in the strong sense as some feminist discussions presuppose.

Notes

- 1 Langton has added three more features to Nussbaum's list: reduction to body (a person is identified with their body parts), reduction to appearance (treating a person in terms of how they look), and silencing (treating a person as lacking the capacity to speak) (2009, 228–229).
- 2 See also McLeod (2002) for a critique of the view that objectification must be 'absolute' in order to be morally problematic.
- 3 Another worry with accounts of dehumanizing sexual objectification is that such accounts come close to accepting a highly implausible and dim view about the nature of sex. This view is found in Kant: for him, sexual activity *per se* seriously damages and debases humanity as such, although this damage can be morally mitigated if one enters a monogamous marriage relationship (for a discussion, see Herman 2002). The view that every act of sex debases humanity, unless it takes place within the confines of patriarchal marriage relations, is surely to be rejected. In advancing conceptions of dehumanizing sexual objectification, some feminists come close to such Kantian-sounding regressive views.

- 4 The example is my variant of David Archard's (2008) non-consensual mouth swab example.
- 5 I will talk of 'combatants' and 'soldiers' without distinguishing which soldiers/combatants I have in mind. This is because the political situation in the DRC is hugely complex with many different factions fighting one another. Actually, this makes no difference since all sides have been reported to practice martial rape.
- 6 The so-called 'corrective rapes' also ill fit the objectification argument. In such cases, non-heterosexual females are raped in order to 'cure' them sexually. Again, the end is not sexual gratification, but to induce heterosexuality by using sexual means.
- 7 In the discussion to follow, I will argue that Smith's view (that dehumanization involves conceiving of others as subhuman) fails to explain the paradox of dehumanization sufficiently. Of course, this leaves open the option that some other account of dehumanization may do so. Due to considerations of space, however, I will be focusing on Smith as his discussion of the paradox is one the most prominent ones found in current literature.

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