

Special Thematic Section on "Societal Change"

Objectification, Self-Objectification, and Societal Change

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Abstract

This review focuses on the ways in which the objectification of individuals and groups of people, as well as the self-objectification that typically develops from such treatment, is implicated in positive and negative societal change. Four areas are reviewed: (a) objectification (including dehumanization, infra-humanization, dehumanized perception, sexualization, and colonialism), (b) self-objectification (including double consciousness, internalized oppression, and colonial mentality), (c) genocide and mass violence, and (c) collective action. After reviewing theories in each area, a set of underlying constructs is presented, organized under higher-order categories. Finally, connections between objectification and genocide perpetration, as well as between self-objectification and collective action, are described. It is concluded that the objectification of other people contributes to societal change that runs counter to principles of equality and respect for others, threatens civil rights, and ultimately can result in genocide or mass killings. Furthermore, self-objectification impairs the ability of oppressed groups to act collectively on their own behalf. In contrast, the process of decolonization supports collective action and positive societal change, in part because it liberates oppressed people from self-objectification.

Keywords: objectification, dehumanization, infra-humanization, internalized oppression, colonization, collective action, social change, activism, genocide, mass killings, discrimination, oppression

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Objectification of others is a process that has long been understood to play a role in profoundly negative societal change such as genocide and mass killings (Arendt, 1964; Bandura, 1999; Opatow, 2005; Staub, 1989). It also can contribute to societal structures that, in less overt ways, harm groups of people and trample their civil and human rights. Self-objectification has not been linked directly to societal change (but see Calogero, 2013), yet understanding the psyches of oppressed people can help illuminate the interwoven processes of subjectification and collective action meant to effect change. The goal of the present review is to examine the literatures on objectification, self-objectification, genocide, and collective action and to use what is known about these four domains to theorize how objectification and self-objectification might enable oppressive societal change and hinder progressive societal change.

A high-level conceptual model describing the scope of the review is presented in Figure 1. For each of the four research areas (represented by the four boxes) relevant theories will first be reviewed and then key constructs will be integrated into a hierarchical set of categories. Probable connections between objectification and genocide and between self-objectification and collective action (represented by the bold vertical arrows) will be explored in depth. Thus, the focus of the review is on links between processes of objectification or self-objectification and societal change. The dashed horizontal lines represent connections between types of societal change and between the processes of objectification and self-objectification. Although not the focus of the present review, prior research suggests that these connections exist; they are included in the figure for completeness and discussed briefly.

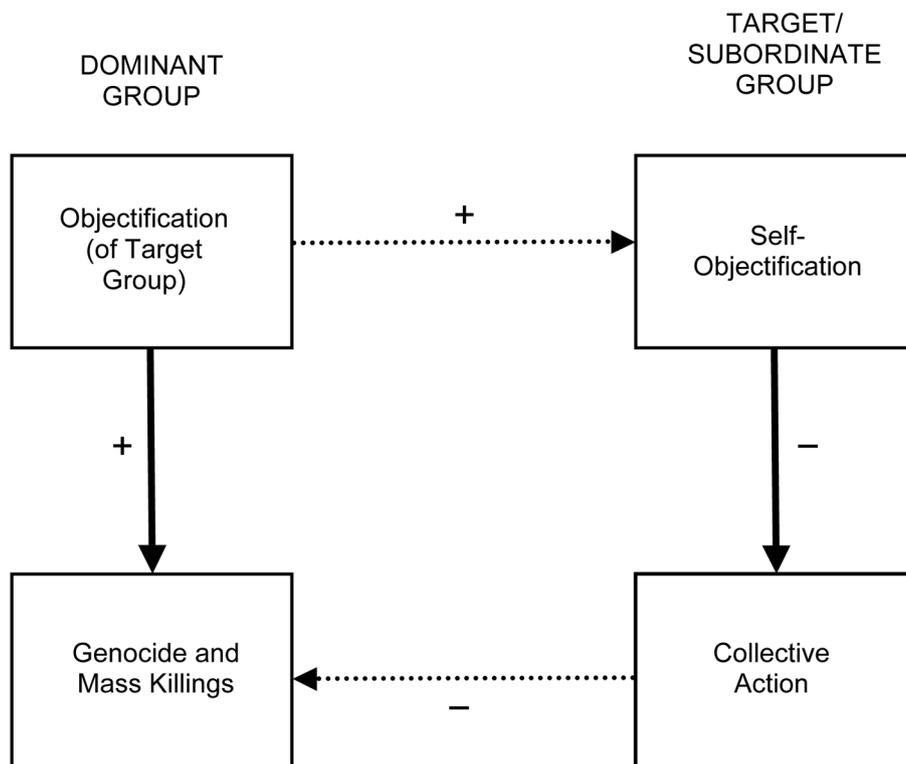


Figure 1. Proposed model linking objectification, self-objectification, and societal change.

The questions under consideration are deeply interdisciplinary and have rightly received attention from scholars across a wide range of disciplines including philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, political science, history, education, feminist studies, area studies, and racial/ethnic studies. A full consideration of all of these perspectives is beyond the scope of this paper; for that reason, the focus is mostly on psychological theories and empirical findings. Occasionally, however, work from another disciplinary perspective is presented. The overarching goals are to provide a comprehensive review of four literatures that have deep theoretical links, yet are not often brought into conversation with each other, and to outline specific connections that have not yet been studied but are likely to be present, thus laying the groundwork for future empirical investigations.

Objectification and Self-Objectification

Objectification and self-objectification have been theorized in a variety of ways, with different terminologies used to describe the phenomena. Some theories focus on objectification, some on self-objectification, and some integrate the two. For that reason, objectification and self-objectification will be reviewed together in the summary of key theories that follows. However, the two phenomena are conceptually distinct and represent fundamentally different processes. Whereas objectification is something that dominant group members do to members of a target group, self-objectification is something that members of the target group do to themselves. Thus, the categorization of key constructs will consider these two phenomena separately.

Key Theories

Classic Theories

One of the earliest concepts related to objectification was [Cooley's \(1902\)](#) discussion of the *looking-glass self*. Cooley, a social psychologist, argued that our sense of self is a social construction, largely a reflection of how we are seen by others. Contemporaneously, the historian, sociologist, and civil rights activist [W. E. B. Du Bois \(1903/2003\)](#) coined the term *double consciousness* to describe the experience of the Black American who experiences “no true self-consciousness” because the dominant White world “only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (p. 5). These early scholarly works spoke of the possibility that the construal of the self might be shaped largely from the perspective of others, setting the stage for many subsequent theories that took up and expanded this insight.

Feminist Theoretical Perspectives on Objectification

From the beginning of the second wave women's movement in the 1960s, feminist scholars and activists have argued that the objectification of women is a key component of sexism, one that must be addressed if gender equality is to be achieved ([de Beauvoir, 1949/1971](#); [MacKinnon, 1987](#)). Sexual objectification has received particularly intense attention from feminist scholars ([Bergen, Edleson, & Renzetti, 2005](#); [Dworkin, 1991](#); [MacKinnon, 1987](#); [Radford & Russell, 1992](#)).

In their work arguing that pornography represents sex discrimination and exploitation of women, [MacKinnon \(1987\)](#) and [Dworkin \(1991\)](#) focused heavily on the elements of pornography that objectify or dehumanize women. For example, [MacKinnon \(1987\)](#) incorporated objectification as a central part of her definition of pornography (and central to its harmful nature), referring to presentations in which women are “dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities,” (p. 176) reduced to their body parts or shown in sexual positions with objects or animals (an implicit form of dehumanization).

Philosophical Perspective on Objectification

Philosophers have also been interested in the question of objectification. In her analysis specifically of sexual objectification, [LeMoncheck \(1985\)](#) focused on the moral status of women. She argued that the key element of sexual objectification was a transformation of women from fully human and deserving of the human rights of “well being and freedom” (p. 2) to people of a lesser status, without the full moral stature of a human being.

Among contemporary philosophers, [Nussbaum \(1995\)](#) has provided the most detailed analysis of objectification. A primary goal of her work was to understand sexual objectification, and she was, in part, writing in response to

the feminist analyses described above. However, she specifically discusses other situations (i.e., other than the sexual) in which people might be objectified. Nussbaum addresses the question of what it means to “treat a person as a thing” (p. 256) and hypothesizes that there are seven main ways to do so: instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity. *Instrumentality* refers to treating someone as a tool, interacting with them only in terms of how they can be used to serve one’s own purposes. Denial of *autonomy* is accomplished when the target person is treated as lacking in self-determination, and is not allowed to act independently. When a target person is treated as being incapable of activity or agency, *inertness* is at play. *Fungibility* refers to the practice of treating a person as fully interchangeable with other people or types of people. A type of objectification with the potential for physical harm is *violability*: when a person’s physical boundaries are not respected, and it is believed to be acceptable to smash, harm, or break up their physical self. Another type of objectification with clear potential of harm is *ownership*, defined as the belief that someone can literally be owned, and can be bought and sold. Finally, Nussbaum’s seventh category of objectification is *denial of subjectivity*, in which a target person is treated as if his or her feelings and experiences are of no import and need not be considered.

Langton (2009) recently expanded on Nussbaum’s (1995) analysis by adding three categories: a *reduction to a body or body parts*; a *focus on appearance*; and *silencing*. Interestingly, all three of these have been the object of intense empirical scrutiny by psychologists interested in the experiences of women. Indeed, the focus on appearance forms the heart of an important feminist psychological theory about the objectification of women, objectification theory.

Objectification Theory

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) developed an influential theory that posits that one of the foundational experiences of women in modern society is being observed and evaluated for one’s appearance. The pervasiveness of this experience leads women to internalize the perspective of an observer, which interferes with agency and autonomy. This internalized objectified perspective is operationalized as a focus on appearance (how the body/self appears, and whether this appearance is pleasing to others) as opposed to a focus on action and performance (what the body can do). Fredrickson and Roberts’ theory has generated extensive empirical work (for reviews see Moradi & Huang, 2008; Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). Although it is often an explicitly sexual gaze that is directed toward women, objectification theory does not focus solely on sexuality, but on appearance more broadly. The self-objectifying woman strives to be attractive, but not necessarily to attract sexual partners or attention. To better understand a more explicitly sexual form of objectification, scholars have developed the concept of sexualization.

Sexualization

The American Psychological Association’s Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (APA, 2007) formulated a multi-part definition of sexualization. A person is sexualized if any of the following occur: (1) a person is valued only or primarily for their sexual appeal, rather than for other qualities, (2) the judgment of sexual attractiveness is based solely on physical appearance and this is defined according to a very narrow (and nearly impossible to achieve) standard, (3) a person is treated as a sexual object, for the use and enjoyment of someone else, rather than a real person with thoughts, feelings, and desires of their own, and (4) sexuality is inappropriately imposed, as in a non-sexual situation (e.g., the workplace) or upon very young children (APA, 2007). Note that, according to this definition, sexualization is a broader concept than sexual objectification.

Infra-Humanization

Social psychologists have also been active in theorizing and studying concepts related to objectification. Leyens and colleagues (Leyens, 2009; Leyens, Demoulin, Vaes, Gaunt, & Paladino, 2007) developed a theory of infra-humanization to explain a process whereby some people and groups are seen as fully human whereas others are seen as less than human (and more like non-human animals). Central to this theory is the concept of secondary emotions. Human and non-human animals share primary emotions such as sadness, fear, surprise, and anger (Ekman, 1992). However, only humans have higher-order emotions such as pride, remorse, or admiration. Groups of people who are conceptualized as having only primary emotions, rather than both primary and secondary, are thus conflated with non-human animals and become less than human.

Dehumanization

Haslam and colleagues' recent proliferation of theoretical and empirical work on dehumanization (Haslam, 2006; Haslam, Loughnan, & Holland, 2013) in some sense encompasses infra-humanization while extending beyond it. Haslam proposes that there are two forms of dehumanization, *human uniqueness* and *human nature*. Human uniqueness involves a comparison of humans to non-human animals and thus is very similar to infra-humanization. In contrast, human nature involves a comparison of humans to non-living entities or objects. Such a comparison denies a person one or more qualities that are understood as essential to human nature, to what it means to be human. Individuals denied their human nature are not seen as sub-human, they are seen as alien. Haslam et al. (2013) specifically connect dehumanization with objectification, stating that objectification is "a form of dehumanization which strips the target of their humanity, mind, and moral standing" (p. 44).

Dehumanized Perception

Stigmatized individuals are sometimes viewed with a *dehumanized perception* (Harris & Fiske, 2009). Such a perception is conceptualized as a type of cognitive bias in which the perceiver's normal social cognition about a target person is not spontaneously engaged. In other words, instead of automatically recognizing that the other person has a mind, with thoughts and feelings, the perceiver fails to think in this way. This phenomenon has been demonstrated both with behavioral and cognitive neuroscience techniques, and tends to co-occur with feelings of disgust.

Internalized Oppression

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have long noted that systems of dominance and oppression are most effectively perpetuated not simply through force, but through the subjugation and transformation of the minds of the oppressed people (Pyke, 2010; Woodson, 1933). This changed psychological state is known as internalized oppression.

Although internalized oppression can be present in regards to many different stigmatized identities (e.g., class, sexual orientation, gender) it was first studied concerning race. For example, in some of the earliest studies, Black children preferred to play with White dolls rather than Black dolls (Clark & Clark, 1939). One often-quoted definition of internalized oppression was provided by Williams and Williams-Morris (2000): "Internalized racism refers to the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves" (p. 255). Such internalized racism has numerous negative effects, including identity confusion, lowered self-worth and a devalued concept of the self (Thomas, 1971). Similar negative effects (e.g., self-hatred, valuing the dominant culture more than one's own) are seen in individuals who remain in the pre-encounter stage of Cross's "nigrescence" model of Black identity development (Cross, 1971). Other types of internalized oppression have also been studied,

including internalized homophobia (Wagner, Brondolo, & Rabkin, 1997) and internalized sexism (Bearman, Korobov, & Thorne, 2009).

Colonialism and Colonial Mentality

Many historical instances of oppression have been embedded within a complex sociological experience of colonization. The legacy of colonialism continues to have contemporary psychological effects, which are sometimes referred to as an internalized colonial mentality (David & Okazaki, 2006a; Revilla, 1997) that can be understood as a particular form of internalized oppression.

In his classic model of colonization, Fanon (1963) described a process that included a specific sequence of events beginning with the forced entry of the colonial power into the territory of the colonized, leading to the establishment of a colonial society and eventually to a transformation into a race-based society which is marked by the subjugation of the colonized peoples for the benefit of the colonizers. The goals of the colonizers included the construction of the two cultures as being very different (with the colonized culture described as inferior) and a further construction of the colonized peoples as sub-human, as wild savages who need to be tamed or suppressed, or guided, educated, and protected from their own folly or ignorance. These actions often impacted the colonized by leading to an internalization of the imposed narratives. Eventually, they came to see themselves as the colonizers did (Memmi, 1965). Often, this resulted in doubts about the self, identity confusion, feelings of inferiority, and sometimes an attempt to distance the self from the indigenous culture. David (2008; David & Okazaki 2006a, 2006b) has developed a theoretical description of colonial mentality that includes four key components: (1) denigrating the self, (2) denigrating one's culture and physical features of one's group, (3) discrimination against less assimilated members of one's group, and (4) a tolerance of historical and contemporary oppression by the colonizer.

Each of these components is important, but two deserve additional discussion. Discrimination against one's in-group (by minority individuals) was theorized by Allport (1954/1979) as being due to the minority group's desire to conform to the attitudes and opinions of the dominant group (see also Freire, 1970). The tolerance of oppression by the colonizing group has sometimes led even further to what Rimonte (1997) referred to as *colonial debt*—the debt that the colonized owe to the colonizers for having been saved, civilized, and lifted up from the “natural” state of primitive savagery.

Key Constructs: Objectification

The theories described above were developed by scholars from different disciplines and were meant to address a diverse set of phenomena. In addition, some theories focus mostly on the process of objectification (i.e., the objectifying actions taken by others) while others focus mostly on self-objectification (i.e., the internalization of an objectified perspective and the effects that result from that internalization). Thus, it is not surprising that each theory has a unique focus and that overlap between fundamental constructs, while present, is somewhat modest. However, it is possible to organize the specific constructs delineated by or implicit within the various theories into several overarching categories, one set of categories for objectification (see Table 1), and another for self-objectification (see Table 2). For objectification, I propose three higher-level categories: equating a human being with something non-human or less-than human, taking away something that is normally accorded to a human, and denying a person some portion of their essence.

Table 1
Connections between Objectification and Genocide

		GENOCIDE FACTORS		
		Social and Structural	Denigrating the target group	Justifying tactics
				Blaming the victim
				Minimizing consequences
				Reducing responsibility
				Palliative comparison
				Euphemistic labeling
				Moral justification
				Scapegoating
				Dehumanization
				Devaluing sub-groups
				Continuum of violence
				Obedience to authority
				Monolithic society
				Adoption of ideologies
				Cultural self-concept, goals, values
				Identification with group
				Difficult life conditions
OBJECTIFICATION FACTORS		Associated theorists and constructs		
Equate human with something else				
non-human animal		Leyens; Haslam (human uniqueness); MacKinnon; Dworkin		
the alien		Haslam (human nature)		
sub-human		Leyens; Haslam (human uniqueness); LeMoncheck		
an object		MacKinnon; APA TFSG; Nussbaum (inertness)		
a tool		Nussbaum (instrumentality); MacKinnon; Dworkin; APA TFSG		
Take away something accorded to humans				
autonomy		Nussbaum (autonomy)		
freedom		LeMoncheck; MacKinnon; Nussbaum (ownership)		
voice		Langton (silencing)		
moral stature		LeMoncheck; Leyens; Haslam		
human rights		LeMoncheck; Leyens; Haslam		
safety		Nussbaum (viability); MacKinnon; Dworkin		
Denial of part of essence				
human emotions		Leyens; Haslam; Harris & Fiske; Nussbaum (denial of subjectivity)		
human mind/cognitions		Haslam; Harris & Fiske		
uniqueness		Nussbaum (fungibility)		
complexity/wholeness		Langton (focus on appearance, reduction to body parts); APA TFSG		

Note. APA TFSG = American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls

*Depending on the ideology. †In combination with other factors.

Equate a Human Being With Something Else

Perhaps the most fundamental way to objectify a person is to simply refuse to acknowledge that they are human. The theories above outlined several specific ways in which this can be done. Objectified people can be *equated with a non-human animal*, resulting in what Leyens (2009) calls infra-humanization and Haslam (2006) refers to as a denial of our human uniqueness. A critique of this form of objectification is inherent in the anti-pornography work of MacKinnon (1987) and Dworkin (1991), in that they find portrayals of women interacting sexually with animals dehumanizing and highly objectionable. Haslam's second form of dehumanization is "human nature," in which someone is objectified by being *equated with the alien*. The objectified person is not within the animal kingdom but falls outside of it, and is something strange, foreign, and "other." A third form of equating a human with something else is to be *equated with something less than human*. This characteristic is inherent in the concepts of infra-humanization and human uniqueness, but is also discussed in a less precise way by LeMoncheck (1985).

Perhaps not surprisingly, some accounts of objectification (e.g., MacKinnon, 1987) state that someone is objectified if they are *equated with an object*. Haslam (2006) argued that this definition is too vague to be of much use; however, it is possible to be more precise. For example, the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007) defined sexual objectification as being "made into a thing for others' sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making" (APA, 2007, p. 2). Nussbaum's conception of inertness also fits within this category because inertness (lack of activity, movement, and growth) differentiate objects from living things. A more narrow characteristic is to be *equated with a tool*. This corresponds with Nussbaum's category of instrumentality, and is perhaps implicit in MacKinnon and Dworkin's discussions of sexual objectification. It also is an implicit component of the APA Task Force's definition of sexual objectification (APA, 2007).

Take Away Something Normally Accorded to Human Beings

Many of the theorists above specify particular rights, privileges, or abstract concepts that are denied to an objectified person or taken from them. One of Nussbaum's categories is *autonomy*, which might be defined as the ability to act independently. LeMoncheck (1985) states that an objectified person has lost their *freedom*. MacKinnon (1987) derides turning a person into a (sexual) commodity, and Nussbaum includes ownership as one of her categories of objectification; both are related to the loss of freedom. One of Langton's (2009) additions to Nussbaum's categorization system describes the ways in which objectified people are silenced and lose their *voice*. LeMoncheck (1985) indicates that objectified people have lost their *moral stature* as humans as well as their *human rights*; these two losses are perhaps implicit in the infrahumanization and dehumanization theories of Leyens and Haslam. Finally, Nussbaum's category of violability, which allows an objectified person to be violated, harmed or smashed, takes away their right to *safety*. Although they do not specifically call out this concept as indicative of objectification, MacKinnon and Dworkin give ample examples of objectified individuals who were physically harmed or whose physical safety was at risk.

Deny a Person Part of Their Essence

A third category of key constructs related to objectification is the denial to an objectified person of some important part of their essence as a human being. The *denial of human emotions* is the centerpiece of Leyens' (2009) conceptualization of infrahumanization and is an important component of dehumanization (Haslam, 2006) and dehumanized perception (Harris & Fiske, 2009) as well. It also represents at least a portion of Nussbaum's category of "denial of subjectivity", although for Nussbaum subjectivity encompasses not only feelings, but also experiences, both of which are denied to the objectified person (or, at the least, if their feelings and experiences are acknowledged

to exist they are judged not to matter). As discussed above, the concept of dehumanization goes beyond a consideration of emotions to also discuss the *denial of cognitions, mental states, and the mind of a human*. The concept of dehumanized perception also involves a failure to consider the mind and thoughts of another person.

Nussbaum's category of fungibility states that an objectified person can be interchanged with others of the same category, thus representing a *denial of uniqueness*. Finally, two of Langton's categories might best be described as a denial of some part of a person's essence, in that they represent a *denial of complexity or wholeness*. By focusing on someone's appearance or by reducing them to their body or to body parts, the objectified person is denied the full and complex range of their humanity, for example, their personality, intellect, sense of humor, creativity, athleticism, nurturance, generativity, and hopes and dreams. This is very similar to the first portion of the APA's definition: "a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics" (APA, 2007, p. 2).

Key Constructs: Self-Objectification

Theories concerning self-objectification include some constructs that overlap with those included in theories of objectification; however, a different categorization system for self-objectification constructs seems necessary (see Table 2). These include: observer perspective, negative beliefs about self and own group, negative actions against own group, and identification with the aggressor. In addition, because so much empirical work has been conducted on the costs of self-objectification and the ways that it is harmful, these harms and costs are discussed as well.

Observer Perspective

The definition of self-objectification, according to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), is that a person *internalizes the perspective of the other*, of an external observer. In doing so, his or her own perspective, and even reality, is lost. Cooley's (1902) looking glass self represents a similar conception. In describing the phenomenon of double consciousness, Du Bois (1903/2003) also discussed the experience of internalizing the perspective of an outsider. However, for him, the self-perspective is retained, hence leading to the consciousness of a "doubled" self, the true self and the self as seen by the other. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) state that, because of the nature of the observer's perspective, internalizing it will result in two consequences for women: a *focus on appearance* and a *lack of focus on agency*.

Negative Beliefs About Self and Own Group

According to Williams and Williams-Morris (2000), the definition of internalized oppression is an *acceptance of the dominant group's negative stereotypes* about one's own group. This *denigration of the self* is discussed in nearly all accounts of internalized oppression (e.g., David & Okazaki, 2006a; Thomas, 1971). Negative beliefs often extend beyond the self to encompass *negative beliefs about one's culture* (David & Okazaki, 2006a; Memmi, 1965), going even so far as hating one's culture and giving up on one's own history. A milder instantiation is simply *valuing the dominant culture* more than one's own.

Negative Actions Against Own Group

Negative beliefs about one's group can lead to negative actions against in-group members. This often manifests as *acts of discrimination*, particularly against group members who are less culturally and linguistically assimilated, who have physical features that are less similar to the dominant group's (e.g., dark skin, nappy hair, flat nose, lack of upper eyelid fold), and who continue to embrace and celebrate the practices of their own culture (David &

Table 2

Connections between Self-Objectification and Collective Action

SELF-OBJECTIFICATION FACTORS		Associated theorists		COLLECTIVE ACTION FACTORS										
				Perceived injustice	Social identity	Collective Efficacy	Ability to make rational cost/benefit analysis							
				Awareness of conditions	Imagination and desire	Deservingness	Perceived legitimacy	Emotional response (anger)	Group consciousness	Belief in impermeability	Sympathy with movement goals	Collective efficacy	Belief in instability	Ability to make rational cost/benefit analysis
Observer perspective														
internalize perspective of other		Cooley; du Bois; Fredrickson & Roberts		X	X			X		X			X	X
focus on own appearance		Fredrickson & Roberts		X	X									
lack of focus on own agency		Fredrickson & Roberts											X	X
Negative beliefs about self and own group														
acceptance of dominant group's stereotypes		Williams & Williams-Morris			X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
denigration of the self		many (e.g., David & Okazaki; Thomas)			X	X	X						X	
negative beliefs about own culture		Memmi; David & Okazaki			X	X	X	X					X	
valuing dominant culture		Memmi; David & Okazaki						X		X				X
Negative actions against own group														
acts of discrimination		David & Okazaki; Allport; Freire				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
tolerance of oppression		David & Okazaki			X	X	X	X	X	X				X
Identification with aggressor														
idolizing dominant group		Freire							X	X	X			
denigrating own group		Memmi; David & Okazaki				X	X	X	X					
colonial debt		Rimonte		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Harms and costs														
identity confusion		Thomas; Memmi; Cross								X	X			
low self-esteem		APA TFSG		X	X		X					X		X
anxiety		Fredrickson & Roberts												X
shame		Fredrickson & Roberts		X	X		X					X		
depression		Fredrickson & Roberts		X	X		X					X		X
dissatisfaction with one's body		Fredrickson & Roberts		X										
self-hatred		David		X	X		X					X		
attentional difficulties		Fredrickson & Roberts		X	X							X		X
isolation from community		Fredrickson & Roberts						X		X	X			
loss of time and energy		APA TFSG		X								X		X
physical risks		APA TFSG												

Note. APA TFSG = American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls

Okazaki, 2006b; Pyke, 2010). *Tolerance of current and historical oppression* of one's group (David & Okazaki, 2006b) also falls in this category, because although such tolerance can be characterized as an act of omission

(rather than commission), it nevertheless has negative consequences for the group.

Identification With the Aggressor

In situations of prolonged abuse (e.g., child abuse, domestic violence, or captivity), the traumatized person can come to identify with the aggressor (Herman, 1997). Group-based oppression, especially in a totalizing context such as colonization, can lead to a similar phenomenon, which can involve *idolizing the dominant group*, trying to imitate its members (e.g., look like them, talk like them, dress like them), and *denigrating one's own group* and attempting to create distance (physical and psychological) between oneself and its other members (Freire, 1970). In extreme form, this results in "*colonial debt*" (Rimonte, 1997)—a sense of gratitude to the dominant group for its colonizing actions.

Harms and Costs

A great deal of research has been conducted on the sequelae of self-objectification (APA, 2007; Moradi & Huang, 2008). Harmful psychological effects include *identity confusion* (Cross, 1971; Memmi, 1965; Thomas, 1971), *low self-esteem*, *anxiety*, *shame* and *depression*, hatred of or *dissatisfaction with one's body*, *self-hatred*, and *attentional difficulties* (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998). There are also concrete personal costs such as *isolation from one's community*, *lost time and energy* spent trying to physically change the self to conform with the standards of the dominant group, and *physical risks* from some of the more extreme attempts at body modification (e.g., plastic surgery).

Oppressive Societal Change: Genocide and Mass Killing

Genocide and mass killings are not uncommon, but they are also not ubiquitous. A process of societal change must occur before these extreme forms of violence can take place. Given the horrifying consequences that ensue, it is no surprise that the field of genocide studies is burgeoning, with attention from historians, sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and economists. Here, however, the focus is on two influential theories developed by social psychologists, Staub's (1989) theory of genocide and Bandura's (1999) theory of moral disengagement. These two theories encompass many of the social psychological constructs that have proved fruitful for understanding the societal processes that underlie and support extreme acts of violence.

Key Psychological Theories

Staub's Theory of Genocide: The Multifactorial "Roots of Evil"

Staub (1989, 2011) has written extensively about the complex roots of genocide and mass killings. A key element of his account concerns the continuum of violence. Genocide does not occur in a vacuum. There are cultural and societal preconditions and an evolution over time. It is this progression of actions and changing beliefs and attitudes that result in societal change and the eventual commission of war crimes and atrocities.

One of the preconditions of genocide is difficult life conditions, including rapid social change, increasing economic problems, war or political conflict, and high rates of crime. Such difficulties impact people psychologically, leading them to want security, a sense of control, and a positive identity. A typical response is to turn to group affiliation to attempt to meet these needs. Group affiliation can provide belonging, identity, meaning, a sense of control, and hope for the future. Unfortunately, especially during difficult societal conditions, such groups often advocate

devaluing and scapegoating other groups and embracing ideologies that identify enemies who, it is argued, caused the problems.

Staub (1989, 2011) discusses other social and structural factors that contribute to genocide. Some societies encourage a submissive and obedient orientation to authority, which makes individuals less able to cope with difficult life conditions on their own and more likely to turn to leaders for solutions. If these leaders blame target groups and encourage aggression against them, individuals with a strong obedience to authority will be susceptible to these calls to violence. Societies also differ in their cultural self-concepts, goals, and values, and these may impact the likelihood of genocide and mass killings. For example, higher levels of ethnocentrism and the acceptance of aggression as a means of solving problems put a society at greater risk of mass violence. Goals and values are not necessarily shared by all members of a society. A pluralistic (as opposed to monolithic) society will be more accepting of a diverse set of values and perspectives, and thus less likely to devalue and scapegoat a particular sub-group.

Of special relevance to understanding societal change is Staub's careful analysis of the evolution of violence that nearly always precedes a genocide. Only rarely does extreme violence of this type erupt suddenly. A key component of this analysis is the importance of learning by doing. Staub demonstrates that smaller actions of discrimination or violence cause important changes in perpetrators, as well as in bystanders (and even victims). Devaluation of a victim is usually necessary before an act of aggression occurs, but the very act itself triggers feelings of revulsion for the victim, which leads to further devaluation. Moreover, the cognitive dissonance that arises from committing what would otherwise be an immoral act can be resolved by adopting the belief that the victim is outside of the moral sphere. Eventually, perpetrators may come to believe that it would be immoral *not* to aggress against the victims, a phenomenon that Staub refers to as moral reversal.

Bandura's Theory of Moral Disengagement

Bandura (1999) theorized the commission of atrocities from the perspective of individual moral agency. He first considers the processes of moral disengagement that operate on the conduct of the perpetrators. Here, moral disengagement requires a reconstrual of the conduct and the actions so that they are no longer deemed to be immoral. Bandura proposes three ways in which this can be done. *Moral justification* does not abandon moral arguments entirely, but rather tries to argue that a larger moral purpose is served by what at first appears to be an immoral act. If one can demonstrate that the actions serve an important moral function for society, then the conduct becomes acceptable. For example, the Nazis justified the "final solution" for Jews during the Holocaust because they believed that Jewish people were the cause of all of Germany's economic and social problems. The murder of millions of civilians was seen as amply justified by the larger-than-life goal of saving a great nation from annihilation. *Euphemistic labeling* is also frequently employed. It serves the purpose of making the reprehensible actions more acceptable by using sanitizing language. For example, military personnel might describe dropping bombs on people (including civilians and even children) as "servicing the target," which connotes a kind of bureaucratic cleanliness but also a sense of being helpful (being of service to someone rather than killing or maiming them). Finally, moral disengagement from conduct can occur through the use of *palliative or advantageous comparisons*. With this technique, one makes one's own actions justifiable by comparing them to even worse actions by the enemy. Considered alone, one's actions might be condemned, but when placed against this larger backdrop, it becomes clear that they were justified rather than immoral. For example, during U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, napalm bombing of the countryside resulted in the deaths of civilians, but the North Vietnamese were characterized as committing even worse atrocities.

A second set of processes revolve around the concept of responsibility and serve to redefine and minimize one's own actions and role. *Displacement of responsibility* refers to a process whereby the responsibility for immoral conduct is transferred from the person who literally committed the action to the higher authority who arranged or ordered that the conduct take place. This process seems to have been one of the factors that led so many people to administer painful and dangerous shocks to a confederate in Milgram's (1974) obedience to authority studies. *Diffusion of responsibility* is also frequently used in hierarchical bureaucracies. Here, there is a division of labor such that each person performs only one action, perhaps quite small, that contributes to the violence. For example, one person is responsible only for scheduling the trains that take prisoners to death camps, or only responsible for transporting prisoners to and from interrogation rooms where torture takes place.

Further possibilities for moral disengagement arise when considering the detrimental effects of the perpetrator's actions. A very common means of morally disengaging is by *minimizing, ignoring, or misconstruing the consequences* of the reprehensible conduct. One simple way to accomplish this is to literally distance oneself from the consequences. For example, when dropping bombs from an airplane, the bombardier does not see the destruction below. In the Milgram (1974) experiments, people stopped giving shocks earlier if they were in the same room as the victim and visually observed the effects of the shock on him. Perhaps in recognition of this psychological reality, hierarchical systems are often designed to separate the decision makers from direct evidence of the effects of their decisions.

Finally, moral disengagement can occur when considering the victims themselves. One very common (and effective) method of moral disengagement is *dehumanization*. Because most people have developed at least some level of empathy toward others, it is difficult for them to mistreat humanized persons. By dehumanizing other people, however, mistreating them becomes possible, and does not lead to guilt or empathic distress. Another method of moral disengagement involves the *attribution of blame to the victim*—making victims to blame for their own abuse. Acts that they commit in self-defense are redefined as unwarranted provocation. Their humiliation and vulnerability trigger disgust and further dehumanization. Blaming the victim mitigates any cognitive dissonance that might otherwise arise from harming other human beings.

Key Constructs

These two detailed theories discuss a wide range of constructs that predict genocide and mass violence. In the summary below, three higher-order categories are used to encompass all the individual constructs: social and structural factors, denigrating the target group, and justifying, distancing, and minimizing. These constructs are summarized in the columns of Table 1.

Social and Structural Factors

Staub's model begins with the occurrence of *difficult life conditions* such as economic turmoil. Significant psychological needs are triggered by these conditions, which people attempt to solve through *identification with a group*. The groups that are most attractive are shaped in part by the *cultural self-concept, goals, and values* present currently and historically. Groups have particular *ideologies*, some of which (e.g., anti-Semitism) are risk factors for violence perpetration. Staub further argues that *pluralism* is a protective factor: monolithic societies are more likely to commit genocide. Societies in which *obedience to authority* is strong are at increased risk for genocide, as well. Finally, he stresses the importance of a *continuum of violence*, in which performing smaller violent acts changes perpetrators and leads them to commit greater and greater acts of violence.

Denigrating the Target Group

Both Bandura (1999) and Staub (1989) discuss denigrating and blaming the target group as key processes that contribute to genocide and other mass violence. Staub describes the historical record of *devaluing sub-groups* that preceded the Holocaust as well as genocides in Rwanda and Turkey. He also describes the detailed ways in which the *scapegoating* of these groups occurred. Bandura stresses the importance of *dehumanization* of the victims in enabling a moral disengagement from them.

Justifying, Distancing, and Minimizing

Bandura's model is especially rich in descriptions of moral disengagement used to justify, minimize, and distance oneself from violent acts. Tactics used to justify the perpetration of violence include *moral justification*, *palliative or advantageous comparison*, and *attribution of blame to the victim*. Distancing techniques include *euphemistic labeling* and *reducing responsibility* (whether through diffusion of responsibility or displacing one's own responsibility to others). Minimization is accomplished through *minimizing the consequences of violence*, and perhaps also by euphemistic labeling. All of these techniques make mass violence more likely.

Progressive Societal Change: Collective Action

Overtaking inequitable social structures typically requires a concerted, and collective, effort by those who are disempowered. Research on the psychology of collective action has a long history (Davies, 1962; Olson, 1968) with three major theoretical framings: resource utilization or cost/benefit analysis, relative deprivation, and social identity theory. Each is briefly reviewed here; longer reviews can be found in Klandermans (2003), van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears (2008), and Duncan (2012).

Key Theories

Cost/Benefit Theories

Some of the earliest explanations for collective action highlighted the importance of the physical and structural disadvantages that accrued to members of the subordinate groups (Davies, 1962; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Olson, 1968). Disadvantaged individuals were assumed to make rational cost-benefit analyses that would result in a decision about attempting to effect change.

One of the most fully developed versions of this type of theory is the resource mobilization model proposed by Klandermans (1997). This model outlines four steps that must take place to result in a person's participation in a social movement. First, they must sympathize with the goals of the movement; second, they must be targeted by mobilization attempts; third, they must be motivated to participate; and fourth, they must overcome any barriers to participation. In elaborating the third step, Klandermans discusses several possible motivations, including the reward motive—an assessment of specific personal costs and benefits.

Relative Deprivation Theories

The next set of theories (Crosby, 1976; Runciman, 1966) moved the focus from an objective assessment of measurable disadvantage to an assessment of the psychological perception of disadvantage. Moreover, it is not absolute disadvantage but rather relative disadvantage—as measured against a meaningful comparison—that generates resentment and a sense of deprivation. Crosby's original model included five preconditions to experience

relative deprivation: (a) see that others possess something, (b) want that thing, (c) feel that one deserves it, (d) think it feasible to obtain it, and (e) lack a sense of responsibility for failure to possess it. Notably, these preconditions did not include any sort of group identification or group consciousness and thus described the experience of *personal* relative deprivation. In later work, however, Crosby expanded her theory to an analysis of fraternal (group) deprivation (Clayton & Crosby, 1992). The addition of group consciousness or identification was an important one. In a meta-analysis, Smith and Ortiz (2002) showed that collective action can be predicted from a sense of relative deprivation, but only when the deprivation is perceived as group-based.

Social Identity Theory

The third major theoretical framing is social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This theory focuses on the inter-group nature of societal advantage/disadvantage and highlights the importance of collective identity in attempts to effect societal change and increase equality. Many studies have confirmed that identification with the group is an important predictor of collective action; most modern theories of collective action incorporate social identity in some form.

Extensive empirical research has provided a wealth of knowledge about additional complexities. *Permeability of group boundaries* is important. If the distinction between in-group and out-group is permeable, members of the disadvantaged out-group could most easily improve their position by changing their group membership. Thus, collective action would be unlikely to result (Ellemers, 1993). *Perceptions of legitimacy and deservingness* are also important (Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999). As with Crosby's (1976) third precondition of relative deprivation, if members of a disadvantaged group believe that their situation is deserved (and that there is nothing unfair or illegitimate about it), efforts to upset the status quo are not likely. A related component is the *ability to imagine alternatives* (Tajfel, 1978). As noted by Bay-Cheng (2010, p. 100), "Exploitation takes hold in the absence of entitlement: A woman who does not have a sense of how good something (e.g., sex, relationships, learning, working) can be has no grounds to protest when it is bad." Finally, a third important factor is *stability* (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). If the hierarchical status quo is seen as completely stable, with no hope for disruption, self-efficacy to effect change would be low and collective action unlikely.

Multi-Factorial Models

Several researchers have developed integrative models of collective action that incorporate elements of these foundational models. Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, and Leach (2004) developed a two-track model that subsumes elements of the theories into a framework aligned with appraisal theory. In this model, collective action against a perceived injustice is mediated through group anger and group-based efficacy. Stürmer and Simon (2004, 2009) have also developed a dual-pathway model that integrates a social identity pathway (*collective identification*) with a cost-benefit pathway; moreover, they demonstrated that group-based anger was an additional pathway that predicted unique variance.

Key Constructs

This rich body of theoretical and empirical work on collective action provides a number of individual constructs that are clearly important in explaining collective action. In the summary below, three higher-order categories are used to encompass all the individual constructs: perceived injustice, in-group identification, and collective efficacy. These constructs are summarized in the columns of Table 2.

Perceived Injustice

For collective action to occur, individuals must first perceive that an injustice exists. All the theories described in the previous section include one or more specific factors or preconditions related to the perception of injustice. According to relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976), the first precondition is to see that others possess some desired entity, in other words to have an *awareness of conditions that exist for others*. The second of Crosby's preconditions is to want that thing for oneself and to be consciously aware of this desire. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) discussed a related precondition, the ability to imagine alternatives for oneself. These can be combined into a second specific factor *imagination and desire*—the cognitive ability to imagine a different possible future for oneself and access to the affective experience of desire.

Deservingness is a third factor and refers to the belief that an individual deserves to have the desired outcome. This is Crosby's third precondition for relative deprivation; in addition, the perception of deservingness is a part of many social identity theory approaches (e.g., Mummendey et al., 1999). A fourth individual factor is the *perceived legitimacy* of the demands or desires of a subordinate group. If a subordinate group has no legitimate claim on whatever the dominant group has, there is no injustice in this group difference. It is only when both groups can legitimately claim the right that an injustice exists. In Crosby's list of preconditions for relative deprivation, this most closely corresponds to the fourth: lack of a sense of responsibility for failing to obtain the desired outcome. This failure is not the fault of the disadvantaged person; thus, their desire is legitimate.

There is an increasing body of work on the role of emotion in predicting collective action and the data indicate that *emotional response* is an important factor in understanding this phenomenon. Specific emotions arise in the presence of particular attributions and anger is often associated with perceived injustice and is a predictor of collective action (Stürmer & Simon, 2009; van Zomeren et al., 2004).

Social Identity and In-Group Identification

The second major category of factors important in understanding collective action is *social identity*. Researchers have conceptualized social identity in a variety of ways, with subtle distinctions. Labels include group identification, group consciousness, collective identity, stratum consciousness (Gurin, 1985) and politicized collective identity (Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

One aspect of in-group identification that is important in understanding collective action is *permeability/impermeability*. When boundaries are impermeable, collective action is more likely. Finally, *sympathy with the goals of the social movement*, the first step in Klandermans' four-step model, can perhaps best be classified here, given that it describes the necessity of a resonance between (one aspect of) the self and the social group.

Collective Efficacy

The final category of factors related to collective action is *collective (or group-based) efficacy*—the belief that one's group is likely to be successful in effecting change. In Crosby's (1976) list of preconditions to relative deprivation, this is captured by her fifth condition, that one thinks it is feasible to obtain the desired entity. A related concept in SIT is *stability/instability*. If one believes that the socio-political situation is stable and unlikely to be vulnerable to change, then one's sense of efficacy is likely to be low. In Klandermans' resource mobilization model, one must have the *ability to make a rational cost/benefit analysis* in order to assess efficacy and the likelihood of success.

How Objectification and Self-Objectification Enable Oppressive Societal Change and Hinder Progressive Societal Change

Research in each of these areas has proceeded mostly independently, yet there are good reasons to expect numerous connections between the constructs reviewed above. [Figure 1](#) illustrates a high-level model of some hypothesized causal relationships. According to this model, a dominant group's objectification of a target group is a causal factor leading to increased risk of genocide and mass killing of the target group. For members of a target group, self-objectification (the internalization of the objectifying beliefs and perspectives of the powerful group) is a causal factor leading to decreased likelihood of engaging in collective action resisting the dominant group. These two causal pathways, operating either on members of the dominant group (vertical bold path on left side of [Figure 1](#)) or on members of the target group (vertical bold path on right side of [Figure 1](#)) are the focus of discussion in the present review. However, there is ample research to suggest that there are also causal processes operating between the groups (horizontal dashed paths). Objectifying practices by members of a dominant group make self-objectification by target group members more likely ([Calogero & Jost, 2011](#)). Collective action by target group members ([O'Keefe & Schumaker, 1983](#)) can be effective in redressing grievances, and actions taken by bystanders ([Levine, Taylor, & Best, 2011](#); [Staub, 1989](#)) can exert a suppressing influence on the dominant group, making violence less likely.

Many elements of objectification and self-objectification are implicated in the enabling or blocking of genocide and collective action, respectively. These specific connections are summarized in [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) and discussed below. Although there are data supportive of some of these links, most are based on theory and have not yet been subject to empirical investigation; they are deserving of systematic study. In addition, the lists of connections are not meant to be comprehensive; the focus here is on linkages that seem especially likely to exist or to hold promise of generative future research.

Oppressive Societal Change: Objectification and Genocide

It is generally accepted that objectification of a target group nearly always occurs before extreme violence can be enacted against members of that group ([Bandura, 1999](#); [Staub, 1989](#)). More specifically, though, certain types (and functions) of objectification may be implicated in specific socio-psychological processes that are involved when societies commit genocide or mass violence. Not surprisingly, processes related to devaluing the enemy depend fundamentally on objectification and dehumanization processes. Other factors that increase the likelihood of genocide (e.g., difficult life conditions) may have few, or no, points of overlap with the elements of objectification. Some of the most probable links are indicated in [Table 1](#) and discussed below.

Social and Structural Factors

Many of the social and structural precursors of genocide would be expected to be independent of processes of objectification. For example, the economic difficulties faced by Germany in the 1930s (a *difficult life condition*) were not caused by the objectifying and anti-Semitic beliefs that were common at the time; these were two independent factors. Staub argues that in times of trouble people *seek to identify with a group to meet basic needs* of belonging, safety, and meaning, but this quest for identification is independent of specific objectifying beliefs and would be expected to occur in the absence of such beliefs as well as in their presence. Where a connection might occur is in the choice of a group with which to identify. Someone who holds objectifying beliefs about a sub-

group would probably seek to identify with a group that shares those beliefs and espouses an *ideology* (e.g., anti-Semitism) to support them. Similarly, a *monolithic society* might be more likely than a pluralistic society to objectify an out-group, but this would probably happen only if other genocidal risk factors were also present; homogeneity in a society would be unlikely to be sufficient, alone, to lead to extreme violence.

Stronger connections might exist between objectification and some of the other social and structural factors underlying genocide. In cultures that have a strong orientation of *obedience to authority*, group members may have come to accept encroachments on their own autonomy, freedom, voice, and human rights. If it is acceptable for this sort of objectification to be meted out to the dominant group, it would be even more justifiable to do so to a stigmatized group. Thus, people living in authoritarian cultures might be predisposed to quickly accept the adoption of objectifying behaviors in which authorities take from target group members things that are typically accorded to humans. In addition, members of some cultures are used to having parts of their own essence routinely denied. If obedience to authority is the strict rule, one need not (and, indeed, is not allowed to) think for oneself and have one's own cognitions. Similarly, one's uniqueness is probably not recognized, as all members of the group must follow the dictates of the authority in lockstep. Again, if these objectifying actions are tolerated against the self, they are likely to be easily accepted when enacted against an out-group.

Finally, Staub stresses the crucial importance of a *continuum of violence* in which small aggressive actions change the perpetrator (as well as bystanders), making further, more intense actions possible and likely. It may be that the most extreme objectifying beliefs and actions (e.g., seeing someone as non-human or sub-human, taking away their moral stature or human rights, killing or torturing them in a most flagrant violation of their right to safety) require this progression of actions.

Denigrating the Target Group

In contrast to the somewhat sparse points of connection between objectification and the social and structural factors that underlie genocide, there are multiple strong links expected between group denigration and objectification. Indeed, the elements of objectification are, in essence, a list of specific ways in which one can *devalue* a sub-group and *dehumanize* its members while providing ample justification for *scapegoating*. In particular, to dehumanize out-group members, one can equate them with non-human animals, vermin, or insects, portray them as alien and foreign, argue that they are less than human, or imply that they are objects or tools. One can also specifically deny them human emotions and human intelligence and thoughts. One can deny that sub-group members are unique individuals (and this may be easy to do, given that the out-group homogeneity effect has been demonstrated repeatedly; Jones, Wood, & Quattrone, 1981). Further, one can deny complexity and wholeness to a target group member, focusing instead on narrow aspects of their appearance, history, or cultural practices.

By equating target group members with something less than human (animal, object, tool) or alien to humanity, devaluation of that group is accomplished. Once devaluation occurs, it becomes easier to take away all the things that are normally accorded to humans (autonomy, freedom, voice, moral stature, human rights, and safety). Similarly, scapegoating provides an additional justification for taking these away. Devaluation makes it easier to deny target group members elements of their essence, including their emotions, intelligence, uniqueness, and complexity. Once they are stripped of these essences, further devaluation is enabled.

Justifying, Distancing, and Minimizing Tactics

The tactics that comprise Bandura's (1999) theory of moral disengagement have a relationship with objectification that is potentially complex and dialectical. For example, *moral justification* might be assumed to enable many of the actions of objectification, including taking away people's autonomy and other rights. However, Bandura conceptualizes moral justification as applying to the violent act itself, not to the target victims. In other words, moral justification does not seem to require a dehumanization or objectification of the victim (Bandura discusses dehumanization separately). The humanity of the victims might be unquestioned, yet because of a larger moral agenda, the victims must nevertheless be sacrificed. The one element of objectification that has a clear connection with moral justification as defined by Bandura is taking away a person's moral stature. The dominant group must have decided that, at least in that specific socio-historical moment, target group members either no longer had moral stature at all, or their moral rights were subsumed by a larger moral goal.

Euphemistic labeling can take many forms but there are numerous examples of giving non-human euphemistic labels to dehumanized out-group members (e.g., "pig" for police, "kraut" for German soldiers in World War II). Presumably, one of the reasons why euphemistic labeling is effective at helping distance oneself from the effects of one's violence is that it removes from awareness the recognition that the target of the violent acts is a human being. *Palliative comparisons* may serve a similar function (reduction of guilt and cognitive dissonance; enabling of the violent action) by bolstering the belief that the enemy is sub-human (by virtue of their truly reprehensible actions, far worse than those perpetrated by one's own group). These comparisons may also trigger the escalation of violence. If one party originally declined to violate human rights or safety, the belief that their enemy is observing no such niceties could open the door to escalating violence.

Depending on the specific limited actions assigned to an individual, *reduction in responsibility* might enable him or her to more easily engage in certain types of objectification. If one's only contact with victims is as numbers on paper, it is easier to think of them as abstract objects rather than people. One will also be less likely to see them as whole human beings, if one is focused on a single function or problem. For example, the bureaucrat who is in charge of planning transportation of victims to death camps can focus only on physical volume—how many bodies will fit in a certain size train car? There is no need to know anything about the histories or lives of the individual people; in fact, such information would reduce the bureaucrat's efficiency.

Objectification facilitates the process of *minimizing the consequences* of the violence in several ways. Such minimization becomes easy when thinking of the victim as an object or automaton, rather than a person. Objects feel no pain and cannot die; neither can some non-human aliens (such as robots). Similarly, denying any part of a person's essence reduces the number of negative consequences that can befall them.

The final justifying tactic, *blaming the victim*, probably has a complex relationship with objectification. One justifying argument that is frequently used in situations of mass violence is that the victim group is a threat to the dominant group's safety and is engaging in provocative acts designed to harm the dominant group. Thus, because the dominant group claims to fear for its own safety, it states that it has no choice but to act in self-defense and places the blame on the victims (who supposedly started the conflict). Once one has blamed the victim, it becomes justifiable to enact punishment by taking away the target group's autonomy, freedom, voice, moral stature, or human rights, thus resulting in further objectification. Yet, paradoxically, the victim impotence that results from such punishment can result in further attempts by the dominant group to blame the victim. In a perverse distortion of the truth, the dominant group comes to believe that if members of the target group won't speak up for themselves,

they deserve to be dominated. It is as if the perpetrators forget that they themselves created the condition (lack of voice) that they now blame the victims for.

Progressive Societal Change: Self-Objectification and Collective Action

Just as there are many points of alignment between specific practices of objectification and factors related to genocide, there are many points of alignment between specific elements of self-objectification and factors predictive of collective action (see [Table 2](#)). Self-objectification interferes with perceptions of injustice, social identity, and collective efficacy, all three of which are necessary for collective action.

Perceived Injustice

As noted above, several things must happen for a subordinate group member to perceive an injustice against his or her group, and all of them are potentially impacted by self-objectification. First, there must be a basic *awareness that different conditions exist* for the dominant group than for the subordinate group. Several of the factors implicated in self-objectification mitigate against such awareness. The process of self-objectification as theorized by [Fredrickson and Roberts \(1997\)](#) involves focusing one's attention on how one appears to others—in essence, looking at one's reflection in the mirror, rather than looking outward at the world. Taken literally, this Narcissus-like viewpoint makes it impossible to notice what is happening in the larger world. Psychological processes of a more unconscious nature may be at play, as well. If combined with colonial debt, an awareness of group-based differences in living conditions might lead to cognitive dissonance that is most easily resolved by suppressing awareness of those differences. Two of the harms and costs of self-objectification also seem particularly relevant. Attentional difficulties would be expected to interfere with information processing of all kinds. Also, the loss of time and energy that results from a focus on improving one's appearance or attempting to fit in with the dominant group would leave fewer resources for investigating the experiences of the dominant group and comparing them with one's own.

The second component necessary for the perception of injustice is the ability to *imagine and desire* an alternative reality for oneself. Many of the elements of self-objectification would interfere with these two processes. As has been argued by feminist and anti-colonialist scholars for years, when subjugated people internalize the perspective of the dominant group, they lose the ability to envision for themselves possible futures and possible selves. Even if the outsider perspective includes some positive goals or outcomes for the subordinate group, these goals and outcomes were designed and developed by the dominant group, not by the members of the subordinate group. Thus, even if relatively benign, they likely choke off independent imagination and desire. If, as is often the case, the outsider perspective includes a host of negative beliefs about the subordinate group, and if those beliefs are internalized and accepted, the impact on imagination and desire would be even stronger (especially if combined with denigration of the self and negative beliefs about one's own culture). Similarly, a tolerance of the current and historical oppression of one's group is antithetical to a desire for a different sort of treatment; if an individual tolerates oppression, they cannot have a strong desire for its elimination. Colonial debt operates similarly. If one is grateful for current conditions, it is unlikely that one would envision and desire changed conditions. Finally, many of the psychological harms and costs of self-objectification impede well-being and healthful, adaptive functioning ([Moradi & Huang, 2008](#)) and would be expected to impair various processes of collective action. Here, imagination and desire are likely to be stymied in a person with low self-esteem, shame, depression, body dissatisfaction, self-hatred, and attentional difficulties.

The next two components of perceived injustice are *perceptions of deservingness* and *perceived legitimacy*; many aspects of self-objectification would be expected to impair both of these. Recall that the dominant group's negative

beliefs about the subordinate group are likely to include stereotypes of laziness, stupidity, and primitiveness. One of the functions of these stereotypes is to serve as legitimizing ideologies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) to support the inequitable treatment of the subordinate group. If these stereotypes are accepted, it is clear that the subordinate group does not deserve to be treated any differently. Thus, if subordinate group members accept the dominant group's stereotypes, engage in denigration of the self, and endorse negative beliefs about their own culture, they are unlikely to feel deserving of improved treatment. Moreover, if subordinate group members engage in negative actions against their own group, the need for legitimizing beliefs becomes even stronger and more urgent because they must justify their own oppressive and discriminatory actions. The belief that in-group members deserve no better is a potent means of reducing guilt and cognitive dissonance. The desire to reduce cognitive dissonance is also a possible motive for denying deservingness if one is experiencing colonial debt—it would be unseemly to want more from the dominant group, who has already bestowed so many gifts on the subordinate group. Finally, a hallmark of negative psychological states such as low self-esteem, shame, depression, and self-hatred is the belief that one deserves nothing better. Thus, perceptions of deservingness are likely to be low when any of these psychological states are present.

Finally, a specific *emotional response* (typically, anger) is predictive of collective action. Anger would often be expected to follow directly from certain appraisals (e.g., of deservingness and legitimacy) and so the impact of various elements of self-objectification may often operate indirectly on anger (through these various appraisals). However, some aspects of self-objectification might also have a direct effect on anger. For example, if one deeply internalizes the perspective of the other, or identifies with the aggressors, it might not be possible to feel anger toward them. Similarly, the gratitude inherent in colonial debt might prevent anger from occurring. Finally, “internalizing” psychological states such as self-esteem, shame, self-hatred, and depression are generally understood to comprise a separate psychological pathway from “externalizing” states such as anger and aggression (Krueger, 1999). Thus, anger would typically be predicted to be incompatible with depression and other similar psychological outcomes associated with self-objectification.

Social Identity

The preeminent component of the social identity category is *group consciousness*. Numerous aspects of self-objectification would be expected to interfere with this process of group identification, including holding negative beliefs about one's own group, taking negative actions against them, and preferences for the dominant group instead of one's own. Thus, an acceptance of the dominant group's stereotypes and negative beliefs about one's culture would be expected to interfere with this identification process, as would valuing the dominant culture above one's own or idolizing the dominant culture. Discrimination against one's own group or tolerance of its oppression would be expected to make identification with the group less likely, as would colonial debt. Finally, in a practical sense, the physical and emotional isolation from one's community that often results from internalizing an objectified perspective of group members would also make it difficult for identification to occur.

A belief in the *permeability* of boundaries between subordinate and dominant groups is highly relevant to social identity. If one believes that the barriers between groups are permeable, a choice might be made to attempt to gain membership in the dominant group rather than work collectively for systemic change. All aspects of identification with the aggressor are likely to lead to increased belief in the permeability of boundaries: idolizing the dominant group, denigrating one's own group, as well as colonial debt. In addition, when internalized oppression and self-objectification lead to identity confusion, a belief in the permeability of group boundaries might develop.

A final element of social identity is sympathy with movement goals. According to Klandermans (1997) this is a pivotal first step in the pathway toward collective action, yet several elements of self-objectification would make it less likely. Internalizing the perspective of the dominant group would make awareness (and understanding) of the perspective of the subordinate group's movement less likely. Similarly, when one accepts the dominant group's stereotypes and values its culture more than one's own, little sympathy with the subordinate group's movement is likely to result. If one has tolerated oppression against one's own group (or, even worse, participated in discrimination against in-group members) one would have little likelihood of working to end such oppression and discrimination. Finally, several of the costs of self-identification could also mitigate against sympathy with movement goals. Part of identity confusion would likely involve confusion about whether a particular group or social movement speaks for a target group member, which would impact whether identification with the group occurs. And, practically speaking, isolation from one's community would result in an impaired ability to learn about the movement's goals from that community, resulting in a reduced likelihood of understanding and sympathizing with those goals.

Collective Efficacy

The third component of most collective action theories is a sense of *collective efficacy*. Individuals must believe that there is a reasonable chance that their collective actions will be successful. Several elements of self-objectification might interfere with collective efficacy, especially some of the harmful effects. Part of taking an observer perspective involves a lack of focus and attention on one's own agency (and, implicitly, self-efficacy). This might translate into a lack of focus on the collective's efficacy, as well. Acceptance of the dominant group's stereotypes about one's own group as well as negative beliefs about one's culture might lead to impaired collective efficacy, depending on the nature of the stereotypes and cultural beliefs. Many denigrating stereotypes include an assessment of the subordinated group as lazy, stupid, childlike, and lacking in leadership; thus, internalizing these stereotypes would be likely to lead to a reduced assessment of efficacy. Moreover, discriminatory acts against one's own group might impair the group's actual efficacy as it devotes time and resources to responding to the in-group discrimination. Finally, psychological states such as low self-esteem, shame, depression, and self-hatred are likely to lead to a negative bias in assessments of self-efficacy (Gotlib & Joormann, 2010). Attentional difficulties could interfere with assessment of efficacy and isolation from one's community, or lack of time and energy to learn about one's group, might result in less than complete information about the group's strengths and resources.

Two other components are part of collective efficacy. One is the *belief in instability*. Collective efficacy to create societal change will necessarily be judged low in the face of strong beliefs that existing social structures are stable. Such beliefs are likely to be held by the dominant group, who have a vested interest in keeping the status quo intact. Thus, internalizing the dominant group's perspective, accepting the dominant group's stereotypes, and valuing the dominant culture more than one's own might lead to stronger beliefs in the stability of the status quo. Moreover, the stereotypes perpetuated by dominant groups often naturalize differences through arguments of biological determinism. If such themes are present in the internalized stereotypes, belief in stability is likely to be especially strong. Also, if one values the dominant culture, motivational factors come into play, adding to the belief that the differences are stable, a wish that they remain so.

Finally, some form of *cost/benefit analysis* is necessary in order to assess efficacy. The ability to conduct this sort of analysis is impeded by several of the elements of self-objectification. It is difficult to do a complete cost/benefit analysis if one is looking at the data only from the perspective of the dominant group. A lack of focus on one's own agency is likely to impair its development, perhaps leaving the individual lacking in the skills necessary to do a cost/benefit analysis, and with impaired individual self-efficacy concerning such skills. For individuals that have

tolerated prior oppression against their group or engaged in acts of discrimination themselves, cognitive dissonance and a desire for consistency may make it difficult to move beyond this prior acceptance of oppression to a new analysis. Negative psychological consequences from self-objectification (e.g., low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and attentional difficulties) might impair the ability to perform complicated cognitive tasks such as a cost/benefit analysis. Finally, conducting such an analysis takes time and energy, which may be in short supply when self-objectification occurs.

Concluding Comments

It is important to note that none of the processes discussed here are deterministic. There are many contextual factors and individual difference variables that serve as moderators. In particular, there are clear individual differences in levels of self-objectification (Zurbriggen, Ramsey, & Jaworski, 2011) and internalized oppression (Szymanski & Stewart, 2010), even among people who appear to be exposed to similar levels of discrimination and objectifying treatment. Researchers have known for decades that members of stigmatized groups often are able to maintain a positive appraisal of the self (and high self-esteem) even though they have a clear understanding of their socially devalued identity in the eyes of the dominant group (e.g., Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994). Several strategies including self-protective appraisals and group identification have been shown to allow members of target groups to resist internalized oppression and self-objectification (Crocker & Major, 1989; Miller & Kaiser, 2001). There are many such adaptive coping responses worthy of further study.

There are also numerous other concepts and literatures in social psychology that are potentially relevant. These include broad topics such as stigma (Link & Phelan, 2001), stereotyping (Nelson, 2009), prejudice (Biernat & Danaher, 2013), and intergroup conflict (Bar-Tal, 2011) as well as narrower topics (e.g., delegitimization, Bar-Tal, 1990). Given that both objectification and self-objectification can operate outside of conscious awareness, work on implicit attitudes and cognitions (Gawronski & Payne, 2010) may be relevant.

Understanding the mediators that help to explain paths between objectification, self-objectification, and societal change is also important. Although it was beyond the scope of the present paper to review these efforts, some of the promising mediators include social dominance orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), system-justifying beliefs (Jost & Banaji, 1994), and moral exclusion (Opatow, 2005). For example, recent research by Calogero (2013) showed that the relationship between self-objectification and (low levels of) social action around gender issues was mediated by the endorsement of system-justifying beliefs.

Finally, it is also important to consider the many societal-level efforts that are underway to reduce levels of objectification and dehumanization, promote reconciliation and healing in communities ravaged by genocide and mass killing, and set up warning and prevention systems to reduce the incidence of future genocides (e.g., Staub, 2011). With a deeper understanding of the links between objectification and societal change leading to mass violence, these programs can become more effective. Similarly, scholars and activists are making strides in their efforts to help individuals protect themselves from internalizing objectifying messages, and in deprogramming the colonized mind if this internalization has already taken place (Lin & Israel, 2012; Zurbriggen & Roberts, 2013). Projects of decolonization are thus important tools for collective action.

The objectification of other people leads to societal change that runs counter to principles of equality and respect for others, threatens civil rights, and ultimately can result in genocide or mass killings. Self-objectification impairs the ability of oppressed groups to act in their own behalf. This review of research on objectification, self-objectification, genocide, and collective action suggests that there are multiple links and connections between these four phenomena. Hopefully, this exploration of connections will lead to research that integrates constructs from across the four domains. Such research can help prevent negative societal change and enable positive societal change, while helping to liberate both oppressed people and their oppressors.

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