A FEMINIST APPROACH TO A THEORY OF DEHUMANIZATION
Evaluating Dehumanization of Women in Contemporary
Digital Social Environments

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DEDICATION

To my children who inspire,

To my mom whom I aspire

And

To my supervisor whom I admire.

And Jon.

ABSTRACT

Dehumanization has facilitated the worst atrocities in humanity's historical record and continues to facilitate some of the gravest cruelties in the world today. While there is substantial work on dehumanization within philosophical and scientific disciplines, there remains an incongruence within the theoretical conceptualizations of dehumanization leading to the neglect or denial of the dehumanization of women. Some contend that dehumanization most characteristically occurs between racial or ethnic groups, but dehumanization may be a more general and deeply embedded aspect of human nature, more robust and perilous in its potential to victimize any member of a distinct group, even where group memberships might otherwise overlap with one another in more affiliative ways. As our social environments are evolving in lockstep with our communication technologies, the recognition of and response to the dehumanization of women remains inadequate and morally inexcusable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SMP – Social Media Platforms
SNS – Social Networking Sites

INTRODUCTION

> Whether in war or in what is called peacetime, at home or abroad, in private or in public, by our side or the other side, man's inhumanity to woman is ignored.
>
> — Catherine MacKinnon, *Crimes of War, Crimes of Peace*

With the spread of political fascism in the West, there is increasing attention directed at dehumanization, including its historical roots and psychological foundations. Much of this attention is focused on the dehumanization of racial or ethnic others, and rightly so. Nevertheless, there continues to be a lack of recognition and response to the ways that women are dehumanized. Feminist traditions have long challenged the harmful objectification of women, sometimes obscuring a necessary distinction between objectification and dehumanization, but sometimes illuminating important similarities between these two different ways of morally, politically, and socially disrespecting other human beings.

At its most basic, dehumanization is to conceive of other persons as less than human, inspiring behaviors that treat them as subhuman, making violence or other harms to them permissible. Philosopher David Livingstone Smith (2020, 2011) offers a theory of dehumanization that attends to the psychological and social conditions that enable dehumanization to flourish. However, Smith's account is presented in such a way as to limit the potential targets of dehumanization. More specifically, Smith argues that while racial or ethnic *others* can be dehumanized, women *(as such)* cannot. Smith argues that while women can be dehumanized according to how they are racialized, women "are not dehumanized *because* they are women" (2020, p.181, italics in original).

In stark contrast to Smith, radical feminist scholars have long confronted and opposed the dehumanization of women, challenging the subjugation and exploitation of women that has been fostered by their dehumanization. To adequately understand and resist dehumanization, it is from this feminist perspective that we must acknowledge that dehumanization may be a phenomenon that is more robust and diverse in its victimization than Smith's theory maintains. This is important because the dehumanization of women remains a contemporary and persistent phenomenon that has only become more insidious through the normalization and familiarity afforded by way of the technological evolution of our social environments to include real, virtual, and overlapping sets of relationships.

Our social engagements are occurring online more frequently, and these spaces are rife with sexism and misogyny. These environments supply more than sufficient conditions for the propagation of dehumanizing attitudes, the manifest expression of the dehumanization of women, and the denial of the humanity of women, having consequences that extend well beyond the digital boundary of the internet. When women are denied their humanity, they may experience a range of harms including, for example, human rights violations, inequality, oppression, exploitation, violence, or femicide. Further, the ongoing use of digital media to dehumanize women lends to the reification of dehumanizing attitudes in the broader social environment offline. Therefore, we must be dedicated to recognizing, refusing, and rebuking the dehumanization of all women, everywhere.

This thesis explores the dehumanization of women by looking at how dehumanization is conceptualized and understood, how the dehumanization of women manifests itself, what function dehumanization serves, the various harms of

dehumanization of women, and the moral injury done to women by failing to respond appropriately to this dehumanization.

Though dehumanization has historically occurred offline, the online environment is particularly well-structured to facilitate the exchange of beliefs and the endorsement of behaviours that encourage the proliferation of dehumanization offline. Because the online expression of dehumanization of women carries the potential to contribute to serious offline consequences, I employ a selection of digital cases reflective of a world that is at once on- and offline. My goal in this thesis is to identify the dehumanization of women as a unique form of a broader phenomenon, to explore how it is manifested in its contemporary Western iterations, and to explain why dehumanization of women is dangerous and a morally significant form of harm.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH FOCUS

The scope of this project will attend directly to the dehumanization of women with insights from feminist philosophy and moral theory. The focus on the dehumanization of women does not suggest that the dehumanization of *others* is not part of a complicated system of dominance relationships which influence the perpetration and perpetuation of dehumanization more generally. Rather, due to the size and scope of an MA thesis, I must place boundaries upon the length of this thesis and, therefore, a comprehensive analysis of all forms and expressions of dehumanization and how they might intersect is far beyond the scope of this particular project. What is most interesting to me, here, is how the dehumanization of women could have been left out of a prominent general theory of dehumanization.

My thesis acknowledges that while dehumanization happens to scores of *others*, often in intersecting ways, a more direct focus on the dehumanization of women wherever else they might be socially located is important for three reasons: (1) women experience violence, subjugation, and oppression more invariably across cultures so it is crucial to recognise these processes of dehumanization within our social, cultural, and political practices, (2) the dehumanization of women seems to challenge some ongoing philosophical assumptions about who may be a target of dehumanization and (3) it is important to consider the moral implications of the dehumanization of women both between groups and within them. Therefore, I forward an argument that recognizes the reality of the dehumanization of women, the possible harms for individual women and for women as members of broader social groups, and the possible moral implications of the dehumanization of women at a broad and general level of explanation and analysis.

Our social environments are increasingly positioned in online spaces, and so within this project I curate and analyze digital examples that show rhetorical and visual expressions of the dehumanization of women within online social environments. Therefore, it must be indicated here that the following research discussion will include sensitive, obscene, or offensive discourses and images. In showing how dehumanizing another human is morally problematic, the sensitivity of the examples reviewed in Chapter Three is central to establishing the conclusions of this thesis. Finally, it is worthwhile to note that while the examples employed in this thesis have been procured from online spaces, they are representative of social beliefs and attitudes that have long preceded any representational or relational developments in the digital world. A main

point in my thesis is that the move to a more online world greatly amplifies the possible moral harms of the dehumanization of women.

THESIS OUTLINE

In Chapter One: *Dehumanization,* I will review the literature within the philosophical domain, as well as highlight some important contributions from beyond this disciplinary border. I will introduce a theory of dehumanization as presented by the philosopher David Livingstone Smith. I will carefully review and synthesize the various components of his approach regarding what dehumanization is and engage with aspects of his approach so that we might better conceptualize dehumanization before extending it to women.

In Chapter Two: *A Feminist Critique to A Theory of Dehumanization*, I will provide an objection to Smith's account and deliver an argument that expands on his conception of dehumanization in ways that I believe delivers a more robust theoretical conception of dehumanization that makes room for the dehumanization of a range of others. Smith argues that dehumanization occurs between ethnically or racially distinct groups. However, I contend that dehumanization is not only based on real or perceived distinctions between ethnicity or race, but rather a process that may occur for members of other biologically and/or socially defined groups. This would allow us to understand dehumanization as a process that occurs to enforce relationships of domination and oppression between various outgroups and a process that occurs to legitimize oppressive relationships within ingroups.

To illustrate my argument within our contemporary social environments, in the third chapter I have curated three examples that support my claim of the reality of the dehumanization of women, *as such*. Chapter Three: *The Dehumanization of Women* will

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attend to the manifestation of dehumanization of women within our contemporary

Western social atmosphere of online social media platforms (SMP) and online social

networking sites (SNS). With the utmost respect for the dignity of others, I will provide a

thorough review of three cases that reflect the enduring dehumanization of women

including a famous pop-culture icon, women depicted as a homogonous group, and an

unidentified individual woman. This chapter will identify patterns of expressed

dehumanization that we also see occur in the manifest dehumanization of racialized

others. Therefore, the primary focus of this chapter will be to explore the examples of the

dehumanization of women to both provide support for my objection to Smith's account

of dehumanization and defend my position that women may be the subject of, subjected

to, and harmed by dehumanization. My curated collection will include both visual and

discursive examples. Some examples are explicit, so while I offer a content warning in

advance, the readers who proceed are encouraged to consider the content with

compassion and discretion. These women are human beings and deserve our full respect

of their humanity.

Chapter Four: The *Harms of the Dehumanization of Women* addresses my

concerns regarding the harm that occurs because of dehumanization. Once again, my

primary focus will be on harms to women.   The potential and realized harms will be

discussed, pointing to the ways women may experience embodied, structural, epistemic,

and moral harms, as well as how these harms may be experienced individually or as part

of a broader social group. I will also raise concerns regarding the way digital spaces may

facilitate or encourage dehumanization, and the amplification of moral harms of

dehumanization, which is something that is worth considerable attention for any social group within our increasingly intensive online presence.

In the conclusion, I argue that the dehumanization of women is very real, is very harmful, and is something that, counter to the long history of discounting women, demands an immediate and dedicated attention within the philosophical tradition, as well as the focused attention of empirical inquiry within sociological and psychological disciplines. Further, changes to the way social networking sites and social media platforms are operated and monitored is necessary to ensure safe environments for women. While my argument will be concluded in this final chapter, it is recognized that this is but a small philosophical contribution to larger bodies of research regarding dehumanization within and across disciplines. With the heavy moral burden that this research carries, I will point to questions that I could not ask, spaces I could not visit, and topics that remain open to evaluation for potential policy formation and directions of future research. The social environments online remain under-protected and mis-utilized and there does not seem to be an effective and accessible system of policies or mechanisms in place to address or prevent harm. Social media platforms and networking sites are convoluted by notions of producer and consumer, participant and observer, marketeer and procurer, offender and sufferer, dehumanizer and dehumanized, and there is much work to be done to develop appropriate ethical frameworks for these digital social spaces. The way power moves through the relationships mentioned above is not bound to digital environments, but rather originates in and reinforces the social and political dynamics of the offline world.

CHAPTER 1: DEHUMANIZATION

> Dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed.
>
> —Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

1.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of dehumanization has some history in feminist philosophical scholarship but is gaining traction in additional branches of philosophy and other disciplines. This suggests an ongoing quest to understand what dehumanization is so that we may more broadly reject and respond to dehumanization. Because of the general nature of the inhumanities that are engendered by dehumanization, I firmly believe that understanding and preventing the dehumanization of others requires the development of a robust theory of dehumanization, a theory that can help us identify and reject the dehumanization of any other in whatever form it presents itself in. Because dehumanization is important across a range of disciplines and remains deeply morally significant across numerous populations, it is important to look to where the contemporary study of dehumanization is, in philosophy and in other fields.

1.0.1   DEHUMANIZATION IN (FEMINIST) PHILOSOPHY

In the philosophical tradition, dehumanization has often been closely tied to objectification. While they are distinct concepts, they do share some important features. In Martha Nussbaum's work *Objectification* (1995), she suggests that objectification can mark both harmful and non-harmful interactions between people depending on the contextual parameters of the situation. Nussbaum argues that human beings may be objectified if they are treated in one or more of seven ways: if they are treated as

instruments or tools, denied autonomy or the right to self-determination, treated as if they lack agency, treated as if they are interchangeable with others, denied respect of boundary integrity, treated as something that is owned and can be bought, sold or traded, and denied a recognition of subjective feelings or experiences. Nussbaum argues that while these modes of objectification may be indicative of objectification, they are not sufficient to confirm instances of problematic objectification. For example, denying the autonomy of a young child, laying one's head on the shoulder of another as an instrument of comfort, or acting as if workers on a manufacturing line are interchangeable may not constitute a morally problematic objectification, but slavery as the instrumental use, ownership over and denial of the autonomy of a human being most certainly is. So, for Nussbaum, while the seven features can be helpful in identifying objectification, context is necessarily important to determining when a human being is objectified. In a Kantian way, Nussbaum argues that objectification is only and always morally problematic and intolerable when human beings are denied the recognition of being ends in themselves, denied the respect for their humanity.

In *Hiding from Humanity* (2004), Nussbaum discusses the role of dehumanization in justice and the law and the way emotions, like shame and disgust, are projected onto victims by perpetrators or agents of projection. Nussbaum examines the projection of attributes representative of animality, irrationality, or cruelty imposed upon individuals and groups with weak or fragile social positions who are unable to refuse or rebut the projections. This subsequently builds and strengthens the stigmatization of the dehumanized individual or groups and substantiates policies of segregation, marginalization, and discrimination. Nussbaum sees shame and disgust as important

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moral emotions for members of society but sees an unfair projection of these emotions towards vulnerable group members as a moral disservice to both the victims and to the actors. We may appreciate that Nussbaum's work recognizes an important connection between direct experiences and indirect consequences of dehumanization.

Legal and feminist scholar Catherine MacKinnon's work includes *Are Women Human?* (2007). MacKinnon argues there is a lack of recognition of women's humanity when women are trafficked around the world and forced into sexual and reproductive slavery, or when women are trafficked throughout the world for sexual entertainment facilitated by various technologies, when women are raped as acts of genocide or when women are raped and exploited in the "undeclared war" that continues all the time and everywhere. MacKinnon's work focuses on the universality of human rights and the ways women are neglected and prohibited, discursively and in practice. Legal frameworks, argued MacKinnon, are based on the conceptual understanding of man as human being and therefore "half of humanity is effectively defined as nonhuman, subhuman, properly rightless creatures, beings whose reality of violation, to the extent it is somehow female, floats beneath international legal space" (2007, p. 142). The lack of recognition of women's humanity in our legal institutions signified a lack of the recognition of women's humanity more broadly.

Radical feminist Andrea Dworkin saw gender-based violence and sexual exploitation of women, in both the public and the private realms, as the result of widespread beliefs that women are not human beings in the same sense as their oppressors (1990). Dedicated to the abolition of patriarchy, Dworkin was steadfast in her critiques of pornography and prostitution as intolerable forms of sexual exploitation

and violence against women. Dworkin argued that oppressed women are not seen as human beings, not seen as having the same kind of essence, but rather that women are subjected to violence, exploitation, and oppression because women are seen as having something different on the inside, their very nature of being, and this very nature of being women is used to justify the harms perpetrated upon them. Dworkin described the dehumanization of women and argued the hatred for women was "as pernicious, as lethal, as sadistic, as vicious as other kinds of hatred that are directed against people because of a condition of birth. We have recognized some, only some, of the historical atrocities that have occurred" (p.39, 1991). Dworkin's argument emphasizes the insidious nature of the dehumanization of women; she argued that we do recognize dehumanization when racialized groups are subjected to violence or exploitation, but we fail to recognize dehumanization when it is women who are subjected to the same violence or exploitation.

Feminist phenomenologist and existential philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, published *The Second Sex* in 1949. This significant contribution to feminist ethics is not only noted for articulating the sex-gender distinction, but also for condemning the way women are defined as inferior, as "the inessential other", as distinct from man, who is perceived to embody the absolute standard of humanity. Beauvoir recognized that women's experience of the world is lived through an engendered body and the experiences a woman has are in part determined by the historically and culturally defined conventions and opportunities for an "Inessential Other". Additionally, Beauvoir was critical of social hierarchies and saw the oppression of various identity categories as a means of hierarchy enforcement.   While both history and culture are thoroughly

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entangled with social hierarchy, Beauvoir recognized that the subjugation of women is distinct from racial oppression.

More contemporarily, in *Down girl: the logic of misogyny* (2018)**,** Kate Manne argues against the dehumanization of women (and dehumanization more broadly) and suggests that dehumanization is merely a rhetorical device. In fact, Manne argues that people who participate in genocidal violence must recognize their victims as humans, not as objects, subhuman animals, or superhuman creatures. For Manne this is particularly true in the case of women, who are often violently raped during war and genocide, and because of their sexualized victimization, women must only be recognized as human. Manne's logic suggests the recognition of the humanity of all women is confirmed by men being perpetrators of brutally violent sexual assaults of women. While Manne's logic here is questionable, admittedly, there is a paradoxical nature between dehumanization and the manifest violence that seems to respond directly to the very humanity of its victims – this paradoxicality will be addressed in the thesis. While I disagree with Manne's position on dehumanization, she does recognize the similarities between the prejudice and violence based on race and gender, which is a link that will also be addressed in this thesis.

In *The Wrong of Injustice: Dehumanization and its Role in Feminist Philosophy*, Mari Mikkola defines dehumanization as any behaviour that causes "indefensible setback to some of our legitimate human interests, where this setback constitutes a moral injury" (p.145, 2016). She suggests that the concept of dehumanization is integral to understanding the social injustices of discrimination, domination, and oppression. From a humanist approach, she argues that we should understand injustices perpetrated against

women as violations of human beings.   Mikkola (2021) appreciates that dehumanization recognizes the humanity of others in the very acts of dehumanization in what others (like D. L. Smith) have identified as the paradox of dehumanization. I, too, recognise the paradoxical nature of dehumanization and suggest that this contradictory nature is even more pronounced in cases of dehumanized women.

Popular theories or models of dehumanization integrate patterns of essentialist thinking into the explanations of dehumanization. The idea is that a biological human essence, transferred by descent from adults to their children, buttresses racial and ethnic intergroup dehumanization. The notion of an essence leads group members to believe that any of *them* categorically cannot be of *our kind.* Because the group making the determination has understood themselves to be essentially human, paired with an assumption that the other group does not share this same intrinsic human essence, the other is therefore positioned correspondingly lower down in a hierarchical social order.

Objecting to the claim that dehumanization is this simple, Maria Kronfeldner (2021) argues that there are four strategies that can promote dehumanization: "physiological difference", "relational difference", "behavioural difference", or "unobservable difference". These strategies can account for individual or group dehumanization, and promote dehumanization as a response to various anatomical, behavioural, or cultural differences. The last strategy, "unobservable difference," Kronfeldner suggests is used only when the notion of an unobservable human essence is required to facilitate dehumanization that cannot be successfully accomplished via the three alternative and more straightforward strategies.

While Kronfeldner argues dehumanization is a powerful cognitive tool and agrees that essentialist thinking may be connected to dehumanization in interesting ways, she does not agree that patterns of essentialist thinking are necessary. I appreciate Kronfeldner's dedication to the study of dehumanization because, like me, she wants a theory of dehumanization that accounts for the dehumanization of women and others that may have been neglected in the study of dehumanization. While I am inclined to argue that psychological essentialism does play a role in dehumanization, I will integrate a different perspective for the role of essentialist belief patterns. However, Kronfeldner offers important insights that may be valuable to additional research within this domain.

1.0.2 DEHUMANIZATION IN OTHER DISCIPLINES

Dehumanization has also received attention within the psychology sub-disciplines of developmental, evolutionary, experimental, moral, and social psychology with researchers in each of these areas making important contributions to the study of dehumanization. Developmental Psychologist Erik Erikson (1985) focussed his scholarship on human identity but developed the term pseudo-speciation for the ways in which people seem to evaluate distinct groups as different species. More contemporarily, Jacques-Philippe Leyens and colleagues (2007, 2001) have worked on what they have coined as infra-humanization. At the foundation of infra-humanization lies a mix of essentialist and ethnocentric beliefs. Infra-humanization is an intergroup phenomenon defined as "a process by which people consider their ingroup as fully human and outgroups as less human and more animal-like" (2007, p. 140) indicative of a widespread attitude that humanness varies by degree according to group membership. Leyens suggests that infra-humanization is an attitude that distinguishes racial or ethnic groups

by degree of humanness and is more common in frequency and subtler in intensity than dehumanization, which is argued to be a more extreme attitude that denies groups any humanity at all.

Social Psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal (1989) explored stereotyping and prejudice. Bar-Tal defined delegitimization as "categorization of groups into extreme negative social categories" (1989, p.170). Dehumanization is one strategy of delegitimization which excludes the target group from a shared humanity. Delegitimization is understood as negative social representation and categorization of others with consequences for the way we think, the way we feel, and the way we act towards them (1989, p. 169). Importantly, Bar-Tal does not reserve delegitimization for groups and highlights that it may occur at the individual level.

Social Psychologist Albert Bandura (1999) suggested that dehumanization is sustained by moral disengagement, a cognitive move to legitimize and make permissible callous, sadistic, and morally impermissible conduct. Moral disengagement, therefore, is a coping strategy to psychologically justify the inhumanities of dehumanization. Alternatively, Social Psychologist Susan Opotow (1990) argued that dehumanization is a symptom of moral exclusion. For Opotow, moral exclusion is when individuals or groups are deemed to be beyond the boundaries of a shared morality. In more extreme cases, the group excluded from the moral boundary may be perceived as a contagion or a threat, and therefore a sense of moral obligation is created that requires the dehumanized group to be discriminated against, exploited, oppressed, or harmed in other (often severe) ways. Further, because those dehumanized are considered to exist outside of a shared morality, dehumanization itself can be ignored or unnoticed.

Social Psychologist Nick Haslam (2013, 2006) defines two forms of dehumanization, animalistic and mechanistic. Animalistic dehumanization is the denial of uniquely human traits and characterizes the dehumanized as animal-like. Uniquely human traits are typically understood to "define the boundary that separates humans from the related category of animals" (2006, p. 256), with Haslam identifying "civility", "refinement", "moral sensibility", "rationality", and "maturity" (p. 257) as the uniquely human traits which are subsequently denied to those animalistically dehumanized. Haslam highlights the point that the paradigm of animalistic dehumanization can be seen in intergroup conflicts between racially or ethnically distinct groups that have led to genocide. Mechanistic dehumanization is the denial of human nature and corresponds to characterizations of the dehumanized as objects or machines. The traits of human nature are presumed to be representative of essential traits for the kind of species that humans are. Characteristics of human nature are typically understood as "emotional responsiveness", "interpersonal warmth", "cognitive openness", "agency and individuality", and "depth" (2006, p.257). Correspondingly, these features of human nature are denied to those who are mechanistically dehumanized, and a paradigmatic case identified is the objectification of women.

Importantly, Haslam's work has recognized that dehumanization may manifest explicitly or implicitly, appreciating that dehumanization may manifest differently depending on the social context. Haslam's model of dehumanization accounts for both intergroup dehumanization and interpersonal dehumanization, recognizing not only that dehumanization may occur at both the group level, but also at individual levels where individuals may share common group memberships. This is an important contribution

for understanding the unique nuance and diverse manifestations of dehumanization corresponding to a broad variety of identities and group memberships.

Social Psychologist and Women's Studies scholar Sarah Gervais has developed a unified theory of objectification and dehumanization and suggests that there is a continuum with anthropomorphism and humanization at one extreme and objectification and dehumanization at the opposite. In a research synthesis, Gervais et al. (2013), highlight the multidimensionality of objectification and dehumanization in context of expression and degrees of severity. Specifically, Gervais et al. (2013) suggest that dehumanization may be a consequence of objectification and facilitates adverse behaviours towards the objectified target. This may be the result of cognitive processes that appraise and categorize women's bodies which may be influenced by both cultural norms and perceptions of threat. Furthermore, this may suggest that women are objectified and dehumanized differently within and between different cultural environments, and that women may contribute with their own self-objectification.

I am inclined to see objectification and dehumanization as two distinct phenomena which may be related or concurrent in many cases, but not necessarily in all cases. There are instances where a person may be objectified but not dehumanized, there may be instances where someone is dehumanized but not objectified, and there are many cases where a person is both objectified and dehumanized.

When a woman is dehumanized, she is still seen as a living creature, not as an inanimate object and this is important for the way the dehumanized are appraised and victimized. When a woman is objectified, her value is often reduced to that of her body or body parts and how they may be manipulated and used instrumentally. For example, a

woman may be objectified when her legs or breasts are employed as overly sexualized props in an advertisement, and while it may be sexualizing or sexually objectifying, it is different from dehumanization. The dehumanized are often perceived or represented as beings with intention or instinct. For example, an image that shows a woman positioned as a sexualized and aggressive animal in a cage is dehumanization not objectification (see for example Jean Paul Goude's photograph on cover of Jungle Fever, 1982). Many women are dehumanized as animals, witches or other creatures that may defy control or bring about harm, but objects are not things that possess instinct or intentionality. Further, instrumentality is not reserved for objects as we have a long history of instrumentalizing many animal species and those that cannot be controlled and exploited are often eliminated.

It may be that in some cases the objectification of women is a manifest form of Haslam's mechanistic dehumanization, while in other cases, dehumanization and objectification are related but can be identified as distinct phenomena which co-occur. Or it may be the case that the dehumanization of women is a phenomenon that has made the frequent objectification of women normative and socially permissible. This is to say that because women are perceived as less than human, they may be treated like animals or objects to exploit and manipulate. While Gervais sees dehumanization as a consequence of objectification, this perspective would see objectification (at least in the sense of Nussbaum's problematic objectification) as a consequence of dehumanization. A perspective that I think carries more explanatory capacity. While this remains unsettled, what is clear is that there is abundant opportunity for future research and argument in both, often-related, domains.

Each of these experts provide important contributions to the study of dehumanization and demonstrate the different perspectives and developments within the study of dehumanization. In common, these different theorists and researchers see dehumanization as the targeted characterization of others as *less than human*, and the characterization may endorse and justify aggressive or violent behaviour towards, or oppression of, members of a targeted group. It is this shared perspective which informs my thesis and substantiates the dedication to this field of study.

Understanding how dehumanization is made possible is important if the goal is to deter and prevent it. Philosopher David Livingstone Smith has endeavoured to conceptualize a robust account of dehumanization that addresses the cognitive and the environmental constituents of dehumanization (2021, 2020, 2016, 2011). Smith employs historical examples of the most extreme consequences of dehumanization to call alarm to the connection between dehumanization and the legitimization of violence, oppression, and genocide. However, Smith, whose focus is centered on race and ethnicity, unequivocally denies the dehumanization of women with his framework. In fact, Smith only draws on gender when he suggests that, while all members of a racial or ethnic group may be victims of dehumanization, it is most commonly male group members who are targeted by dehumanization (2021). My thesis aims to resolve this error within Smith's theory of dehumanization, provide a contribution to the academic discourses of dehumanization more broadly, and identify the dehumanization of women as more pervasive in our contemporary social environments than is currently acknowledged.

1.1 DEFINING DEHUMANIZATION

Dehumanization is a belief or an attitude that another person, or group, is less than human. These beliefs can manifest themselves in harmful behaviours towards those who are perceived and represented as subhuman. When a person believes that an individual or group is less than human, the person holding the belief will deny the humanity and moral worth of the target(s), making permissible various degrees of harm to the target(s) of dehumanization. This understanding of dehumanization is informed by the philosophical work of David Livingstone Smith. Dehumanizing beliefs occur when there are perceived distinctions between individuals and/or groups based on meaningful elements of identity and the differences are alleged to be so great that the *other(s)* is excluded from the ontological boundary of humanity. People come to develop or accept dehumanizing beliefs and attitudes about others because of instrumental social environments that promote prejudice and propagate the dehumanization of the target individual or group. Dehumanization may be expressed through rhetorical language or imagery and is utilized to encourage the exclusion of the *other(s)* from the scope of humanity. Dehumanizing beliefs may also be expressed directly toward the target of dehumanization through various kinds of pernicious or violent behaviours. Additionally, dehumanization may inform social systems resulting in the expression of ongoing systemic inequality, exploitation, and oppression. In any of these cases, the beliefs regarding or attitudes towards another human as being less than human may facilitate the humiliation, oppression, exploitation, or death of the other(s).

To identify the diverse expressions and the possible consequences of dehumanization, it is important to understand how and why dehumanization happens.

David Livingstone Smith has proposed a theory of dehumanization which addresses the cognitive underpinnings that explain how we are psychologically susceptible to dehumanizing beliefs. Further, Smith's account of dehumanization recognizes the instrumentality of the social and political environments in which dehumanization may thrive. Smith's account carries epistemological, metaphysical, social, and moral significance. Although Smith's theory refuses to offer a comprehensive account of the dehumanization of women, it does provide a foundation for understanding the cognitive and social structures that make dehumanization possible. To facilitate a feminist objection to and subsequently refine Smith's theory in light of this objection, it is important to first have a firm conceptual grasp of Smith's theory and to recognize the crucial components of the theory that I will accept or at least accept under revision.

1.2 A THEORY OF DEHUMANIZATION

David Livingstone Smith has developed an account of dehumanization that includes understanding how the cognitive elements of dehumanization depend on social and political contexts. This theory contributes to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of dehumanization and provides ties relating the cognitive processes of dehumanization to our biological and cultural development while also orientating dehumanization within sociopolitical milieus. Smith (2021, 2020, 2016, 2011) has written about the psychological processes of dehumanization and the cognitive adaptations that facilitate humans' capacity to psychologically reduce other humans to subhuman. Smith provides an account of dehumanization that both threads back to our evolutionary roots in which the survival adaptations facilitated the identification of possible threats to survival through to the operation of contemporary social and political

processes that perpetuate hierarchies between groups. Our general proclivity to categorize people and catalogue things in informative ways contributes to the understanding of how dehumanization is possible. Of importance, Smith's account does not suggest an evolutionary development of dehumanization per se, but rather points to dehumanization as contingent on both our cognitive adaptations and our socio-political environments, making dehumanization traceable through histories and across geographies.

As defined by Smith, dehumanization is the conception of another person(s) as less than human, a subhuman animal or creature distinct from humanity (2021, 2020). These beliefs and attitudes make possible the denial of moral regard and makes permissible, or obligatory, the commission of acts of violence towards the dehumanized. When a racialized person, or group of people, is excluded from the boundaries of moral consideration there is a toleration, acceptance, or encouragement of harm to the racialized individual, or group.

For Smith, dehumanizing beliefs are facilitated by three key cognitive components: the way we carve up the world into natural kinds of things, psychological essentialism, or the way we employ essentialized thinking which contributes to a perceived correspondence between a kind and an underlying essence, and the belief in and operation of moral hierarchies, or our tendency to think of the natural world as representative of a normative, morally defined, hierarchical structure. Much of this chapter will be dedicated to engaging with these cognitive components to understand Smith's framework and the way we might better understand the ways we employ these cognitive mechanisms. I am inclined to agree that these three cognitive tendencies do

make space for the susceptibility to develop and maintain dehumanizing beliefs, but I would argue that we employ these patterns of thinking a bit differently than Smith maintains. If I am right, I believe my refinements of his theory allow for more explanatory power than the more limited applicability of Smith's theory as he argues for it himself.

1.2.1 NATURAL KINDS & ESSENTIALISM

Some of the cognitive practices that are adaptational characteristics of the human mind also make possible the process of dehumanization. An important adaptive cognitive pathway is the way in which our minds identify and explain the world around us taxonomically. This feature of the human mind, the propensity to differentiate and organize the world, facilitated semantically important communication aiding survival for our ancestors. As humans progressed, understanding the world through increasingly scientific lenses saw items in the natural world being grouped into various natural kinds. And as human cultures expanded, artificial or constructed kinds appeared as the kinds of things that are classified according to human practices or preferences. Fashion brands, vehicles, and sports teams are all artificial kinds of things that are culturally produced and are not part of the natural world as it exists apart from humans and our cultural practices and preferences.

Natural kinds are categories understood as corresponding to or consistent with sets that reveal or reproduce the composition of the natural world as it exists independently of human thought (Bird & Tobin, 2022). Natural kinds have been traditionally understood to meet several criteria presumed to establish the parameters of natural kind categories.

Bird and Tobin (2022) highlight traditionally proposed criteria employed to determine natural kinds:

1. Natural kind constituents should share some properties in common.

2. Inductive inferences should be possible by membership in a natural kind category.

3. Natural kinds should adhere to the laws of nature.

4. Constituents of a natural kind establish a kind.

5. Natural kinds should establish a hierarchy.

6. Distinct classification between natural kinds should be evident.

Silver or gold, water or oxygen, or female and male sexes in sexually reproducing species are all natural kinds according to these criteria. Biologically male and female humans would thus be considered natural kinds. However, when we think of different kinds of human beings, we identify artificial kinds like athletes or nurses, but we also conceptually organize the world according to social kinds, such as different ethnic or racial groups, or different gendered identities, or even sexual identities that go beyond bodies that produce either sperm or eggs. Like natural kinds, social kinds "condition our expectations, inform our preferences, and guide our behavior" (Mason, 2016, p. 841). Natural, artificial, and social kinds shape the heuristics we rely on, the nearly instantaneous assumptions about the way the world is based on inductive inferences. Although we regularly think this way to get around in our contemporary environments, parsing up the world remains a complicated task. In fact, some philosophers still debate exactly where we should place our demarcation lines between kinds, and kinds of kinds, and what kinds of inferences we can make from these divisions.

Philosopher John Dupré (1993) proffers a theory of *promiscuous realism,* which holds that there are multiple, complex, and overlapping ways in which we can and do form natural kind categories. While Dupré suggests that this sense of natural kind classifications will provide explanatory power that is epistemologically and methodologically valuable, it will not meet the desiderata of traditional conceptions of natural kinds as identified above (Dupre, 2002). Dupré's account permits legitimate membership in multiple, cross-classifying kind categories where members may share properties in common among various kind memberships. This legitimacy in multiple kind categories allows for broader inference potential in accordance with the purpose of categorization. However, promiscuous realism rejects that any shared properties between members of a kind are essential properties. Additionally, Dupré rejects the premise that natural kinds form a hierarchical structure. While Dupré appropriately rejects notions of essentialism and hierarchical classifications, Smith reminds us that "essentialism comes naturally to us" (2011, p.99), and it does appear to be a heuristic device that the human mind has adapted to follow in a world that requires quick forms of cognition and action. It may be that such heuristics work best when we are also inclined to take them at face value, that is, as being veridical. So, a further evolutionary hypothesis is not just that we developed the capacity to create and follow heuristic rules, but to think that such rules, when they work, work because they are accurate representations of the way the world really is. This line of thought is consistent with philosopher Rebecca Mason's (2016) argument that many social kinds are natural kinds and that social kinds are bound to the natural world. Further, for Mason (2016), social kinds do have essential properties which

provide warrant for inductive inferences which may allow us to have expectations or generalize about social kinds.

Just as natural kinds remain an unsettled philosophical topic, so too does essentialism. Essentialism is a concept that relates to natural kinds and systems of classification. It suggests that there are specific features or properties shared by all constituents of a natural kind, a shared essence. The essence is a fixed, intrinsic, and permanent feature of all members that belong to a kind. Not only does essentialism appear to come naturally to us, but it has proven to be stubbornly resistant to criticism and evidential condemnation (Hallett, 1991).

Essentialism reflects our propensity to believe and behave in ways that presuppose that all members of a biological kind have a shared unobservable nature, a shared essence. The assumed essence is unalterable, inseparable, and undeniable. Whatever the essence is, it cannot be changed, it cannot be removed, and it cannot be denied. The essence, shared by any and all members belonging to a kind, is something believed to be necessarily within each member so superficial properties may indicate membership, but superficial properties are not sufficient for kind membership. Further, superficial properties could be illusory and obscure or conceal actual inherent essence of kind memberships. Maria Kronfeldner (2021) identifies the most common features of essentialist thinking. The features are:

1. Homogeneity of salient properties shared by members of a group.

2. Informativeness or inference potential of group membership.

3. Inherence of essential features or properties.

4. Natural and unavoidable occurrence of essential properties.

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5. Inalterability of essential features.

6. Unobservability of an essence.

7. Distinctness between group memberships.

8. Normality of shared properties and delinquency of deficiency.

We apply patterns of essentialist thinking to every kind in the natural world and we are inclined to perceive that humanity itself has a biological essence that is not shared with other species, a human essence that sets us uniquely apart. Additionally, we are inclined to prioritize our own kind or group as having what counts as the true human essence (Leyens et al., 2001), and therefore, at various times and places we exclude some people from this shared humanity, deny them a human essence and essentialize them as being of a different kind.

According to Smith, we are particularly inclined to exclude people of different races or ethnicities from a shared human essence. This is to say that while they appear to be human, by displaying the same superficial appearance of a human, they do not share the distinct, inalterable and unobservable human essence. Centrally, Smith argues that we see the essences as directly tied to descent, which connects the human essence to more traditional conceptions of natural kinds, as something that is passed from parent to child through biological reproduction. This relies on two general mistakes that people make. First, believing that a social kind is a biological kind, therefore leading to a belief that, *any of them are not one of us*. Second, ignoring the common decent of all humans. Because the target group is presumed to be a distinct biological kind, they are believed to not share the human essence (which is reserved for the dehumanizers), and because they

do not share this essence, excluded peoples are believed to share some other intrinsically different essence of a non-humankind.

Darwinian evolutionary biology will deny that a human essence exists (Haslam et al., 2000), but that being a descendant within the homo sapiens lineage is all that is necessary and sufficient for species membership (Ereshefsky, 2017). However, psychologically we do have a propensity to hold essentialist beliefs about biological kinds (Haslam et al., 2000), and we also think essentially about social kinds and make inferences based on social group membership. Rothbart and Taylor (1992) showed that some social categories are perceived to have a shared, permanent essence, and more contemporarily, Eleonore Neufeld accurately reflects, in addition to essentialist thinking about natural kind categories, that

> "we also represent a number of social categories—for instance, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexualities—as kinds that share a common essence and are grounded in the 'basic ontology' of the world. Thus, when essentializing someone on the basis of membership in a social group, we act as if they bear an intrinsic, deep, causally potent nature, which is responsible for what the person is and does" (Neufeld, 2020, p. 705).

Rebecca Mason (2021) argues that social kinds do have essential properties. Additionally, Mason argues that while the essential properties individuate kinds, they need not imply causal responsibility for shared properties among members of the kind and shouldn't be confused with biological essences.

Anti-essentialist Gayatri Spivak (2015) argued that some groups who are marginalized or vulnerable to discrimination may find that identifying with identity categories may be used strategically for a particular political purpose despite the rejection of the essentialist beliefs attributed to the identity category. In some cases, recognition, solidarity, and strength are located within the membership boundaries of an essentialized

group when trying to challenge the essentialization of the group itself. For example, marginalized populations may find comradery and intensity to challenge their subjugation and still deny the essentialized features of identity attributed to the marginalized group. This recognizes that essentializing a group in a way that reduces or eliminates their agency or capacity for self-determination supports systems of discrimination, intolerance, oppression, and violence, but challenging these systems may require organization from within the groups themselves.

Smith argues that dehumanizing attitudes will only arise about people of different races and ethnicities, because their dehumanizers "sincerely believe those whom they persecute are less than human" (2020, p. 28), an essentializing belief that rests on the notion that the persecuted group is another species, a distinct natural biological kind. Alternatively, Erik Erikson (1985) coined the term "pseudospeciation" to refer to our propensities to treat our social groups as different species. Erikson suggest that pseudospeciation gives us a sense of human superiority by way of our memberships within particularly salient social groups, "from tribes to nations, from castes to classes, from religions to ideologies, and [even] professional associations" (1985, p. 214), many of which simply ignore the biological integrity of the human species. These patterns of essentialist thinking about biological and social kinds seem to be common and persistent and are not reserved for ethnicity and race.

Females as a biological kind or women as a social kind may be equated to or perceived as distinct populations and subsequently the focus of essentialist beliefs. To elaborate, we do need to agree that there is a shared *something* that connects all women together as both a natural kind and as a broad social group. In fact, Iris Young argues

that without a conceptual category, or kind, for *women*, it would be impossible to

"conceptualize [women's] oppression as a systematic, structured, institutional process"

(Young, 1997, p. 17). Nevertheless, what constitutes that essential *something* is

impossible to identify when we recognize the complicated ways that women can be

distributed and individualized within the social kind category, as well as the ways that

females show variation and mutation within the biological kind category.

Prentice and Miller (2007) argue that the category *woman* is one of the most

intensely essentialized categories. Whether biological or social kind categorization,

essentialist thinking about women remains dangerously pervasive, strategically

important, and while it is undoubtedly influenced by kind membership, it is not

conditional on descent or pedigree in the same way Smith argues patterns of essentialist

thinking about race is. Of importance, while I will focus my argument on the

dehumanization of women, I do support Smith's argument that essentialized thinking is

required for dehumanization. However, biased perceptions and strict assumptions about

what *kind* of being a person is may be associated with race, ethnicity, sex, gender, or

other promiscuously salient and arbitrarily defined kind categories, and how this kind of

differentiation corresponds to a conceived human essence may be enough to fashion

dehumanizing beliefs within instrumental sociopolitical environments.

1.2.2 HIERARCHICAL THINKING

The relationship between natural kinds, essentialism, and hierarchical thinking is

multifaceted and complex. Many cultures around the world have long been systematizing

their societies and environments according to hierarchical structures used to position

kinds and organize their world − a phenomenon that is frequently employed to create an

indexical unification of fact and value of the natural world. Many cultures (though not all) are intensely anthropocentric, with humans electing ourselves as the most superior species. An Aristotelian conception that allowed humans in Western traditions to organize and understand the universe, the Great Chain of Being, extends its influence over our social relationships, political schemata, and importantly, the evaluation of moral regard. Design notions like Scala Naturae, or the Great Chain of Being, are understood as the inherent hierarchical structure of the natural world. With Western religious adaptation, the chain of being positioned the deity God at the top of the hierarchy, the angelic beings below God, followed by humans, various animals, plants, rocks, and minerals at the bottom, and finally, beyond the margins of the hierarchy was believed to be evil, demonic creatures. Each level of the hierarchy was then able to be subdivided, including the level occupied by humans. The great chain allowed some groups to be fully human, and to be located within the appropriate humankind category, while pushing some groups outside of the boundary of humanity. The *others*, excluded from humanity, are therefore subhuman animals or monsters and could, or must, be treated accordingly. While this kind of axiological organization is not exclusive to the Western tradition, it is also not the case that every cultural tradition employs the same value assessing taxonomy.

While the ideas of Scala Natura, or the Great Chain of Being, have been directly disproven by Darwin's evolutionary theory, the influence of this kind of axiological hierarchy still pervades our contemporary societies. Gilbert (2021), for example, highlights how the post-Darwinian record continued to seek scientific support to show that both Africans were less evolved than Caucasians and that women were less evolved

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than men. Even in the late 20th century, scientific analysis of embryogenesis and human chromosomes was employed in attempts to confirm both Caucasian and male superiority. Brandt and Reyna (2011) indicate that "for centuries, philosophers, theologians, and scientists have used the idea of the Great Chain of Being to rank all beings," and like Smith, they suggest that most people still psychologically subscribe to a moral hierarchy to understand the world. Actively or passively subscribing to a moral hierarchy is what legitimizes the ongoing exploitation and destruction of the natural world and all of its inhabitants.

Even though the progression of science allows us to strengthen the evolutionary understanding of the world, hierarchical thinking continues to permeate our daily lives. From religious organizations, bureaucracies, academic institutions, and family structures to the way we treat the biologically diverse animal kingdom and the environment, nearly every facet of our lives is structured according to hierarchically organized relationships. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we participate in and heavily rely on hierarchical organization and lose sight of the fact that there is no inherent hierarchical moral structure to the natural world (the underlying and persuasive argument in Melanie Challenger's 2021 book *How To Be Animal)*. Still, hierarchical models are so entrenched in our daily lives that we operate with the susceptibility of sustaining accustomed dispositions that relegate some human lives to inferior positions while elevating others. While this may not be problematic in some cases, it is the disposition that hierarchies exist in the natural world that supports our susceptibility to hold dehumanizing beliefs about other kinds of people. Smith writes,

> "Thinking of others as less than human isn't something that arises spontaneously from within as a response to "difference." Those who try to explain

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dehumanization, racism, and other related phenomena psychologically as natural antagonisms toward "outgroups" lose sight of the fact that ingroups and outgroups are political creations rather than brute facts of nature" (Smith, 2020, p. 7).

Moral hierarchies are not a naturally occurring feature of the world, but rather a sociopolitical invention to impose a normative evaluation of the world or acquire support for a political or economic advantage and justify exploitation and inequality.

Now we can understand the cognitive apparatuses that support the development and comprehension of dehumanizing beliefs − we employ essentialist thinking patterns about the biological and social kind categories that we acknowledge or establish, and we organize these kinds in hierarchical arrangements. When the essentialized groups are positioned within hierarchical schemas that are enforced, disputed, or even perceived to be threatened, we have fruitful cognitive ground for the development or maintenance of dehumanizing beliefs. Once there are conditions for the establishment of dehumanizing beliefs by an individual or shared by a group of people, Smith's account of dehumanization requires a social or political environment in which these beliefs can propagate and manifest behaviour.

1.2.3 SOCIAL & POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS

Evolutionary development has influenced our cognitive adaptations for organizing the world taxonomically to make inferences about biological and non-biological encounters in the environment. Robert Sapolsky (2019) succinctly explains that understanding "the dynamics of human group identity... requires grasping the biological and cognitive underpinnings that shape them." In the previous sections the complexities of the way we organize the world, the conclusions we infer based on our classification systems, and the way we arrange these taxonomies hierarchically were discussed. Here it

needs to be stressed that the way we psychologically organize and understand the world and make inferences based on our understanding of it is entrenched in and influenced by our political and cultural conditions. At base, it is advantageous for individuals to distinguish between and prioritize cooperative ingroups that will respond to behaviour from outgroups that may be threatening or hostile. And in fact, our brains distinguish between members of our ingroups and the members of outgroups nearly instantaneously. Distinguishing group membership based on race, gender, or social status happens with only about fifty milliseconds of exposure to the face of another (Sapolsky, 2017, p. 388). Markers of group membership, like clothing and ornamentation, also facilitate the less than a second it takes to recognize if another person is one of *us* or is one of *them*.

There is thus an important survival advantage for partiality towards one's own group, and as well, the speed at which we decipher between ingroup and outgroup members. However, while this distinction between groups encourages pro-social behaviour to ingroup members, it may also foster unfavourably competitive or aggressive behaviour to members of outgroups (Sapolsky, 2019). Yet, due to our culturally complex and intricately networked and globalized world, the recognition of group membership is "arbitrary, and often fluid" (Sapolsky, 2019). The way we demarcate kind membership, biological or social, may establish flexible and fluid membership in multiple valid, salient, and instrumental kind groups. These memberships are meaningful and related to real features and dynamics of the world. The cognitive adaptations for parsing up the world, in conjunction with our complex social environments, creates opportunities for exclusion of the other while we maintain partiality for the members of our own ingroups. The multiple, often overlapping group memberships also makes possible the

intersectional and dynamic ways people may experience prejudice and oppression. We can recognize that members of some groups experience concurrent forms of oppression due to having complex identities that may experience multiple kinds of discrimination.

While we may have tribal instincts, we also have inhibitions to harming others. It is not easy for most of us to take the life of another human being, and as the social and intelligent species that we are, we exhibit reservations about harming other people. This inhibition has facilitated our hyper sociality and alliance building within and between groups. We can identify ourselves as belonging to multiple kind categories simultaneously and we maintain partiality to the categories or groups in which we most strongly identify as members. However, our social and political environment plays a particular role in regulating which of these memberships are salient, which carry more normative weight, and in manipulating the perception of and responses to groups characterized as disparate, defective, dangerous, or disgusting. Political and cultural conditions and the distribution of power within the social environment not only determines which social kind groups are primary, which groups fall at our periphery, but also which groups may fall outside of the margins of humanity altogether. Just as it takes a fraction of a minute for our brains to distinguish group membership, experimental psychologists Harris and Fiske determined it takes approximately 150 milliseconds to differentiate between groups that are dehumanized and those groups that maintain membership within a shared humanity (2009, p. 221). In other words, a fraction of a minute for our brains to distinguish ingroup from outgroup, us from them, and human from subhuman.

Social and political environments function in such a way that the complex social tensions between groups, and within groups, can be exploited in morally bad kinds of ways. Nationalism, racism, sexism, and misogyny are just some of the more obvious ideologies that can ignite and enflame morally problematic forms of dehumanization. Demagogues and ideologues appeal to our tribal instincts, manipulating our emotional responses and psychologically priming us to focus on what makes *them* different from *us,* even if they share other group memberships with us. As Sapolsky writes, "cultural mechanisms can sharpen or soften the edges of our dichotomizing" (2017, p. 405) between us and them. Ingroup parochialism leads us to act altruistically to our own ingroup, prioritizing partiality and loyalty to our own group members, while viewing outgroup members as homogenously "threatening and angry, disgusting and repellent, primitive and undifferentiated" (Sapolsky, 2017, p. 399). We dehumanize the other to facilitate our responses to a perceived threat, to enforce or maintain domination of the social and moral hierarchy, or to assert or compel ingroup loyalty.

Political and religious leaders, scientific authorities and cultural influencers, family or friends, or random encounters that are perceived to confirm pre-existing biases can all stoke the fear of or hate for the other and encourage certain responses from other ingroup members. Therefore, dehumanization can be understood to be both cognitive and behavioural in its practice and dissemination. As discussed in previous sections, the cognitive component depends on the adaptive features of our psychology, in particular the way we organize the world cognitively based on kinds, essences, and hierarchies. The behavioural component of dehumanization is dependent upon the social and political

environment and can be expressed and witnessed in environments that are more oriented

to relations of social dominance and display systemic features of prejudice. Systemic

racism and patriarchy (along with heteronormativity and other invidious forms of

discrimination) are prominent structures in our social and political environments that

enforce hierarchical organization, where divisions between members are imagined as

unassailable, irrefutable, and indicative of impermeable difference, allowing for the

deliberate manipulation and exploitation of the illusory essential distinction itself to

promote dehumanization. The interaction between cognition, behaviour, and

environment can become both cyclical and disastrous.

Moral disengagement is a process whereby individuals cognitively disassociate

themselves from their usual moral standards and moral obligations to others, allowing

themselves to behave unethically (Bandura, 1999, 2002). Dehumanization enables moral

disengagement (Bandura, 1999, 2002) from the other which then facilitates the

enforcement or maintenance of systems of domination by representing the other as a

threat or as an incumbrance, signifying the other as having diminished capacity for self-

determination or restraint, and as possessing immutable traits of mendacity, impurity, or

minacity. Further, dehumanization does not just make moral disengagement from the

other permissible, but dehumanization is a mechanism that can enhance the perception of

moral obligation or duty to one's own kind (Smith, 2020) which facilitates the promotion

and protection of one's ingroup. This is what makes people susceptible to dehumanizing

propaganda; once there is an illusion or a perception of threat, even if that threat does not

exist, we may prioritize *us* and be antipathetic to *them*. Dehumanizing propaganda and

the dissemination of disinformation can then be utilized strategically and garner support

for some politically motivated end by encouraging dehumanizing beliefs of and attitudes towards others, leading to often powerful feedbacks.

Social and political practices that encourage the positioning of others lower on the axiological hierarchy, practices such as racism, sexism and misogyny, classism, ablism and other prejudicial systems of belief and behaviour, can straddle up dangerously close to or quite effortlessly progress into dehumanization. Such beliefs can manifest explicitly or implicitly and can range in severity of expression. It is the most severe beliefs that position others lower on a moral hierarchy to the point that they are situated outside of humankind membership. When a social group is perceived to be less than human, the members can be treated like the animals, diseases, villains, or monsters they are purported to be. Smith suggests that dehumanization is faciliatory, not justificatory (2012, p. 535). In other words, when dehumanizing attitudes become more salient, it facilitates acts of violence that result from the dehumanizing process. But to be clear, dehumanization is both – faciliatory and justificatory. We dehumanize people because we want to harm them, and once we have harmed them the same dehumanizing attitudes are employed to defend or justify why the violence or harm ought to have occurred.

Dehumanization may lead to exploitation, persecution or enslavement, excessive violence, homicide, and genocide. Smith writes, "when a group of people is dehumanized, they become mere creatures to be managed, exploited, or disposed of, as the occasion demands. Throughout history, propagandists have exploited this to serve their political ends" (2011, p. 130). These propagandists can be any authority figure – political leaders, scientific authorities, community figures, religious leaders, advertisers, or, as will be implied in Chapter Three, individuals within social media environments

where the capacity to influence others is epistemically unique. In our hyper social digital environments, not only do we too frivolously and too frequently place our epistemic trust in anonymous strangers, but we may be psychologically influenced simply through exposure. Influencers become influencers because we allow this to happen. Why we so readily allow it to happen in cases of dehumanization has been the topic of this section.

CHAPTER 2: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE TO DAVID LIVINGSTONE SMITH'S THEORY OF DEHUMANIZATION

You [women] live here on earth as the world's most imperfect creature, the scum of nature, the cause of misfortune, the source of quarrels, the toy of the foolish, the plague of the wise, the stirrer of hell, the tinder of vice, the guardian of excrement, a monster in nature, an evil necessity, a multiple chimera, a sorry pleasure, Devil's bait, the enemy of angels.

—Jacques Olivier [Alexis Rousset], *Alphabet de l'imperfection et malice des femmes* (1617)

From the start, the gods made women different.
One type is from a pig—a hairy sow
Whose house is like a rolling heap of filth;
And she herself, unbathed, in unwashed clothes,
Reposes on the shit-pile growing fat.
Another type the gods made from a fox:
Pure evil, and aware of everything.
This woman misses nothing: good or bad,
She notices, considers, and declares
That good is bad and bad is good. Her mood
Changes from one moment to the next.
One type is from a dog—a no-good bitch,
A mother through and through; she wants to hear
Everything, know everything, go everywhere,
And stick her nose in everything, and bark
Whether she sees anyone or not.

—Semonides of Amorgos, *Iamb on Women* (Seventh Century B.C.)

In *Less Than Human* (2011) , Smith prefaces his theoretical project with a quote from the United States Declaration of Independence. The quote from Thomas Jefferson reads, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (p.1). Smith explains that the designation of "men" created as equal, meant "human", and subsequently highlights the problematic nature of

the category of human, more precisely, who was excluded from being counted as *human*.

Accurately, Smith highlights how Blacks were denied inclusion in the category of human

to facilitate their ongoing exploitation and prolong the economic prosperity afforded, to

some, by slavery.   Africans were considered subhuman and therefore did not warrant the

respect, the equality, or the legal or moral inclusion in the rights to life, liberty, or the

pursuit of happiness.

While Smith explains the designation of white men as human praxis, and that

Blacks were catalogued as subhuman, let it be clear that women, too, were excluded from

the category of human. American feminist legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon argued,

> "human rights have not been women's rights – not in theory or in reality, not
> legally or socially, not domestically or internationally. Rights that human beings
> have by virtue of being human have not been rights to which women have had
> access, nor have violations of women as such been part of the definition of the
> violation of human rights as such on which human rights law has traditionally
> been predicated" (1994, p. 5).

Obviously, Smith could not deny that women were excluded from the same rights

endowed to men, but failure to explicitly acknowledge this simply ignores that women

were also omitted from humanity and denied the unalienable human rights bestowed to

men. The denial of the same humanity, deserving of equal respect and participation,

continues for women today.

Nearly two centuries before the Declaration of Independence was written in

America, a paper later attributed to German Valens Acidalius written in 1595 argued

women were not human. An apparent satire aimed to criticize Socinian beliefs,

'Disputatio nova contra mulieres, qua probatur eas homines non ese' translated in English

to 'A new argument against women, in which it is demonstrated that they are not human

beings', was actually utilized to support anti-feminist beliefs and expression for over a

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century following its anonymous publications (Fleischer, 1981). This text included various passages suggesting women were soulless, lacked rationality, linked them to animals and demons, and suggested that women were mere conduits for the perpetuation of the human species, but were not human beings themselves (Fleischer, 1981). Even further back in history in the Seventh Century, Semonides of Amorgos authored a poem illustrating how different kinds of women's minds were thought to be made from different animals. This poem is also believed to have been a satire cataloguing kinds of women. Satirical or not, these texts and the subsequent responses and refutations show an enduring debate regarding the humanity of women.

Smith intentionally excludes women from his theory of dehumanization. In *On Inhumanity* (2020) Smith argues that "women aren't dehumanized *as such*…when women are dehumanized, it's not because they're women. It's because of how they are racialized" [emphasis in original] (p.180). As acknowledged earlier, Smith considers racialization or ethnicization as necessary features of dehumanization and suggests that dehumanization depends on the mistaken assumption of the biological heredity of an ethnic or racial essence. This exclusion is not surprising as women are often overlooked as victims of harm when they are grouped into kind categories with male members and their unique victimhood as women is ignored. As MacKinnon writes, "[w]hen what happens to women also happens to men, like being beaten and disappearing and being tortured to death, the fact that those it happened to are *women* is not registered in the record of human atrocity" [emphasis in original] (MacKinnon, 1994, p. 5). For feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, this kind of systematic ambiguity is because man is the

subject and woman is not only positioned as inferior, but as the "Inessential Other" (de

Beauvoir, 2010).

The important work of Simone de Beauvoir, Catherine MacKinnon, and Andrea

Dworkin recognizes the experiences of women *as such*. While the scope of this thesis

grants me space to argue that dehumanization of women (*as such*) does occur, more

generally I am inclined to think that an intersectionally dynamic approach to

dehumanization would be useful as women are complex and unique individuals with

dynamic identities located within complex and often overlapping communities.

Accordingly, I suggest that while it remains that ethnicity or race may be sufficient

factors for dehumanization to occur, they need not be necessary features of identity for

dehumanization to occur. For example, acts of rape and murder are often committed

against women during genocide or war, as acts of genocide or war. But acts of rape and

murder are also committed outside of the contexts of genocide and war and within our

own communities. In fact, there are serious and severe instances of dehumanization that

occur within the conceived boundaries of a shared race or ethnicity. Additionally, a

female member of a racialized group may face unique forms of victimization because of

the intersections of her identity as a member of multiple dehumanized groups. Prentice

and Miller show that in addition to race or ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual

orientation, language, religion, disease, and physique are all categorizations that are

highly essentialized (2007, p. 203). Undoubtedly an intersectional approach would

recognize that ethnicity or race may be primary or incidental factors in the manifestation

of dehumanization, and while it might be the case that it is the necessary feature of

identity in some instances, race or ethnicity are not necessarily the exclusive feature of

identity required for dehumanization to occur in all instances. Further, an intersectional

approach will recognize the unique experiences of women, including the unique

dehumanization of women that is both politically persuasive and culturally pervasive.

As discussed in Chapter One, race and ethnicity are social kinds rather than

traditional natural kinds or biological kinds. Male and female sexes of sexually

reproducing species, however, are natural kinds in the traditional sense. If our

understanding of race and ethnicity may be subject to essentialized thinking based on an

erroneous conception as a natural kind, women may be even more easily essentialized as

a traditional natural kind. Biological sex may seem to transfer seamlessly into a binary

concept of gender that is itself highly essentialized. If our understanding of race or

ethnicity may be subject to essentialized thinking as a social kind, so too are women

essentialized as a (gendered) social group. Therefore, I agree with Smith that essentialist

patterns of thinking about natural kinds, social kinds, and what it is *to be human*, along

with the hierarchical organization (psychological and political) of those kinds, are

necessary for dehumanization.   However, I argue against the notion that for

dehumanization to occur an individual or group must be thought to have a different

ethnic- or race-based essence that is passed by biological descent. Rather, I argue that

any individual or group that may be essentialized as *other* within a hierarchical society is

that which is required for dehumanization to occur. This would allow us to recognize

that dehumanization happens both between groups and within groups. If I am right, it

would allow for dimensions of compatibility with other research on dehumanization, as

Psychologists Nick Haslam and Steve Loughnan synthesize research suggesting that in

addition to ethnicity and race, dehumanization may also target individuals and groups

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according to social class, certain medical or mental health conditions, occupation, legal status, sexual orientation, sex and gender (2014, 407-409).

While I maintain that Smith's account may be too narrow, his theory does do important work for the conceptual development and understanding of dehumanization as it relates to the relationships between our psychological proclivities, our biocultural evolution, and our contemporary social and political environments. Further, Smith's account of dehumanization does provide a strong framework to refine and analyze the dehumanization of women, *as such*. Smith explains,

> "conceiving of other people as subhuman creatures may underwrite verbally characterising them as subhuman entities, to result in treating them in morally injurious ways, will result in the denial of their personhood and may inspire behaviour that diminishes their human attributes" (2014, p. 815).

Throughout Smith's work, he reviews important examples of the dehumanization of individuals and groups of people based on their race or ethnicity. Blacks implicitly and explicitly dehumanized as beasts or apes, reinforced by slavery and lynching, Jewish people blatantly dehumanized as vermin or rats, reinforced by their containment and extermination, and Indigenous peoples dehumanized as savages, reinforced by violent colonization, proselytization, assimilation, or confinement. Smith also provides accounts of dehumanization committed by groups beyond Europeans, such as the Rwandan genocide, or cases that date farther back in history, for example reflecting on evidence which suggests that Chinese groups referred only to themselves as human beings in 4BCE while other groups were likened to insects or animals (p. 109, 2011). These various cases show a long history of racial and ethnic dehumanization, and sadly, there are so many of these instances, to varying degrees of horror. We see how one group of people believes that other individuals and groups are subhuman, and therefore lower on

(or distinctly outside of) a moral hierarchy. Undoubtedly, this is dehumanization, but dehumanization is not *only* this.

Dehumanization occurs beyond the demarcations of race or ethnicity and "is not confined to combatants and victims of genocide" (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014, p. 418). The dehumanization of women is frequent, diffuse, and insidious. The manifest dehumanization of women, implicit or explicit, is incontestably connected to patriarchy, sexism, misogyny, and notions of male dominance and superiority. The dehumanization of women is substantiated by predominant, cross cultural beliefs of women being more closely connected to nature, being more emotive and less rational, as lacking self-control and being more susceptible to moral delinquency. Additionally, women are perceived to have the power to convince, control, or contaminate men to be less rational and more susceptible to moral delinquency.   Women are essentialized as being intimately connected to the natural world by their role in reproduction, which subsequently positions women below men on social hierarchies, as men are essentialized as the rational beings of the sexes and dominators of the natural world. Smith writes,

> "the ordinary concept of race is hierarchical because it's a product of conflict and domination. Racializing a group of people has the function of setting them apart, and placing them in a subordinate position (with the racializers setting themselves apart in a superior position). *Racialized others are considered to be defective human beings whose true destiny is to be enslaved, exploited, or exterminated by the master race*" [emphasis added] (Smith, 2020, p. 50).

While this is true for racializing others, we can see these same hierarchical positionings due to conflict and domination between the sexes and genders. Sexism, misogyny, gender discrimination, and sexualizing women also serve the function of relegating women to a subordinate position. *Women as others are considered to be defective human beings whose true destiny is to be enslaved, exploited, or exterminated by the master sex.*

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Undoubtedly, dehumanization is a process that may be complicated and exacerbated by intersections of identity. Motivations for and techniques of dehumanizing women may be unique to various contextual elements. While dehumanization occurs to women, *as such*, the intersectionally dynamic features of identity may influence the manifested expression of dehumanization depending on a women's identification of race, age, class, gender, sexual orientation, physique, and ability, etc. There are ways in which women experience dehumanization due to assumptions about the very nature of being women, their *essence*, separate from the essence of men. Distinct from racialization, dehumanization of women may occur due to the strategic essentialization of women and the connection to culturally constructed gender roles or the sexualization of women's bodies. This is to say that women's humanity is coupled to the abidance to and compliance with strategically defined essential feminine characteristics and/or prescribed gender roles. Women experience discrimination, exploitation, and oppression more invariably across cultures, and in many cases, there is a seamless progression into dehumanization. To ignore or deny the dehumanization women experience will preclude a comprehensive theory of dehumanization and be a disservice to all humanity.

While Smith argues that a unified theory of dehumanization must account for a very specific and narrow phenomena, that is the dehumanizing beliefs and behaviours, based on ethnicity or race (2020), I argue that what is needed is a more comprehensive and integrated approach to dehumanization that accounts for the complexities of why dehumanization happens, how it happens and who it may happen to. A more comprehensive theory would be able to account for the processes of dehumanization against outgroup "others," but also the dehumanization of ingroup members, because our

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social groups are multiple, complex, intersecting, overlapping, fluid and often arbitrary. The only barrier between Smith's account and a more robust theory is his dependence on the notion of the perceived biological heredity of an essence, which again I argue, may be sufficient but not necessary.

Beliefs and attitudes do not come from nowhere, they are cultivated through social and political stimuli and influential social norms. While Smith utilizes examples such as propaganda against Blacks, Jews, and Indigenous populations to discuss the cultural and political propaganda employed in dehumanization, he disregards both the long tradition and the contemporary manifestations of dehumanizing rhetoric and political and cultural propaganda against women. The attention dedicated to the extreme nature of dehumanization is undoubtedly important and effective, but to deny the dehumanization of women is a shortcoming that must be rectified if the goal is to prevent the harmful consequences of dehumanization most broadly. Ultimately, dehumanization is employed to encourage and enforce relationships of power and maintain social dominance and political control. Women are targets of dehumanization and if the resulting oppression, exploitation, enslavement, violence, sexual violence, and murder of women is not considered extreme to the same degree as that of the oppression, exploitation, enslavement, violence, sexual violence and killing of ethnic or racial others, this lack of consideration itself serves to reify and sustain the dehumanization of *all women*, *everywhere*.

2.1 THE PARADOX OF DEHUMANIZATION

A final component of Smith's theory to review within a feminist critique of his theory is what he appropriately identifies as the paradox of dehumanization (2016), the

apparent contradiction between the dehumanizer believing that the other is less than human while at the same time maintaining the implicit understanding that the victim is a human being. Some scholars, like Kate Manne (2018), suggest it is this contradiction that invalidates the notion of dehumanization as being anything other than a metaphorical tool in a rhetorical toolbox for discrimination and prejudice. The paradox of dehumanization rests on the notion that the individual or group being dehumanized is recognized as both fully human and fully subhuman, simultaneously like an optical illusion (Smith, 2021, p. 240). This suggests that what occurs for the dehumanizer is a psychological swap, like a gestalt switch being flipped back and forth in the perpetrator's mind, when considering the target or victim. From one psychological perspective, the dehumanizer recognizes the humanity of the other, from another perspective, the dehumanizer only recognizes an animality or monstrosity of the target. For example, the common optical illusions of the young girl/old woman or the duck/rabbit, show that we can cognitively switch between which perceptual cues we utilize to infer different conclusions. To dehumanize another is then reflected in the simultaneity of the way that the perpetrator is believing the victim belongs to a subhuman category, outside of the moral and metaphysical considerations of what it means to be human, while expressing their dehumanizing beliefs in ways that recognizes and responds to the humanness of the victim. In cases of dehumanization, we can all too easily identify the malice, condescension, disparagement, vilification, and humiliation that only makes sense when the aim is to cause harm to another human. For Smith, the metaphysical incongruency is made possible by the complex cognitive adaptations that allow us to categorize group membership into hierarchically stratified kind categories, and the simultaneous and

significant influence that a shared humanity has upon us (Smith, 2016, p. 435).

Alternatively, Ben Phillips (2022) suggests that the paradox is resolved when we consider

the concept of human as a dual character concept of which creates simultaneous but

distinct descriptive and normative assessments of what it is to be human. Therefore,

people recognize the descriptive humanity of the target but a sub-humanity in their

normative assessments of the target. This may reveal compatibility with the metaphysical

incongruencies of multiple kind categorizations and the psychological effort required to

maintain multiple conflicting, but simultaneous appraisals. Pursuing this line of thought

would require further scholarship, which may turn out be a valuable endeavour.

My point here is to suggest that the paradox of dehumanization is more striking

with the dehumanization of women than with other forms of dehumanization. The

reproductive interdependency of women and men makes the paradox of dehumanization

even more confusing because "biological families are made up of males and females,

they share the same spatiotemporal and cultural environments and are interpersonally

dependent on each other" (Richardson, 2010, p.13).   Beauvoir (2010) recognized the

way that the interdependence of men and women created a unique connection between

the oppressor and the oppressed. Therefore, due to the influence of the interdependence

between women and men, the paradox of dehumanization is more enigmatic in the case

of dehumanized women. The function of dehumanization is to encourage, facilitate, and

justify exploitation, violence and oppression of others which is otherwise morally

impermissible. The paradox of dehumanization becomes clearer when we review cases

of dehumanization in Chapter Three and reflect on the way women are dehumanized, yet

represent our sisters, daughters, mothers, companions, and friends within our shared humanity.

2.2 MAKING MONSTERS OF MEN … AND WOMEN

In 2021, David Livingstone Smith published *Making Monsters: The Uncanny Power of Dehumanization*. This book encompasses more recent developments within Smith's theory of dehumanization including the ways that dehumanized individuals are often conceived, not as animals or subhuman creatures, but as monstrous creatures or demonic beings, perhaps superhuman beings. Here Smith does address a gendered dimension of dehumanization but only so far as claiming that men are most typically dehumanized, consistently employing examples of lynchings or WWII propaganda to support his claim. For example, Smith describes how it was Black males who were the most common (though not exclusive) group of individuals lynched in American streets and the public lynching events would draw crowds to be entertained by the spectacle in the streets. However, there are many parallels between lynchings of Black men and the persecution of so-called witches, for example. Klaits has argued,

> "the witch craze often has been described as one of the most terrible instances of man's inhumanity to man. But more accurate is the formulation by gender, not genus: witch trials exemplify men's inhumanity to women. The sexually powerful and menacing witch figure was nearly always portrayed as female" (1985, p.51).

Like victims of lynching, women accused of being witches had their genitals examined, they were tortured, and put to death, executed in front of celebrating community members (Klaits, 1985). Andrea Dworkin describes how over the course of three centuries, the lore of witches resulted in the slaughter of as many as nine million (mostly) women (1974, p.149) though the accuracy of this number cannot be confirmed. The employment of demonizing dehumanization would have undoubtedly supported this kind of gynocidal

violence, as it still does with the persecution and executions of women accused of witchery persisting in some parts of the world today. Women accused of witchcraft most often exist within the boundaries of a shared race or ethnicity with their accusers, and the accusations appear to be related to their failure to conform to, or inability to fulfill, culturally defined gender roles. While this would be a worthwhile direction for a comparative research project, unfortunately, the constraints of this thesis do not permit further exploration of a comparative nature between the lynching of Black Americans and the lynching of women as witches. For certain, one thing they both share is the appeal to spectatorship.

We can see gang rape, pornography, or the exploitational industries of sex work more generally as contemporary participatory spectacles of the dehumanization of women. Catherine MacKinnon has argued that "women are violated in many ways that men are not, or rarely are; many of these violations are sexual and reproductive. Ranging from objectification to killing, from dehumanization and defilement to mutilation and torture to sexual murder" (1993, p. 60). We should expect that the manifestations of the dehumanization of women will look differently than the dehumanization of racialized men. The lynching of predominately Black men does not contradict or invalidate the dehumanization of women, just as the burning of women at the stake does not invalidate the dehumanization of Black men. The way dehumanization of women manifests, and the way women experience dehumanization, is going to be different than the way dehumanization manifests for other groups because dehumanization is dynamic, diverse, and flexible in its expression. We will examine some of the ways women are made into animals, monsters, or sources of contagion in Chapter Three.

2.3 A FEMINIST APPROACH TO A THEORY OF DEHUMANIZATION

These first two chapters have aimed to provide an understanding of David Livingstone Smith's theory of dehumanization and discuss the psychological mechanisms and social conditions that are necessary for dehumanization to occur. However, for a theory of dehumanization to be as robust and thorough as possible, it needs to recognize that dehumanization can happen to any individual or group who has been categorized, essentialized, and socially or politically positioned as *other*. It is important for a theory of dehumanization to recognize that biological or social group membership may be capriciously saliant and promiscuously defined, but membership may be immediately important in certain contexts. When people are ontologically defined as less than human in accordance with their identity or group memberships, social and political manipulation encourages the proliferation of these attitudes, encouraging further dehumanizing beliefs and behaviours. Dehumanization of the other is employed to facilitate harm, whether by intentional neglect or by behaving aggressively, violently, sometimes lethally or genocidally, to obtain or maintain dominance in the social environment. Kteily and Landry (2022) discuss how recent work in cognitive science is providing evidence that subtle dehumanization happens to a much wider range of targets than the conventional focus on race or ethnicity. However, it remains that the dehumanization of women is largely ignored.

Therefore, informed by Smith's theory and feminist scholarship, I argue that dehumanization:

(a) engages cognitive processes of categorization and strategic essentialization of people(s) based on promiscuously salient group memberships and identities,

(b) exercises patterns of thinking reinforced by hierarchical social structures and a socially defined hierarchical moral order,

(c) requires receptive social and political conditions to proliferate, and therefore,

(d) has the theoretical potential to target any individual or group socially or politically identified as *other* (including women), and

(e) is harmful and morally problematic.

The process of dehumanization involves the categorization of the target(s) or victim(s) as a particular kind, patterns of essentialist thinking and the incompatibility of the targets' kind membership with the notion of what it means to be a fellow human being, the influence of the social or political circulation of prejudiced, hateful, or dehumanizing attitudes and may result in direct or indirect harm to re-/enforce systems of unjustifiable social dominance and violence. In the next chapter we will explore three contemporary examples of women as the targets or victims of dehumanization.

CHAPTER 3: THE CONTEMPORARY DEHUMANIZATION OF WOMEN

> "I would much rather be the 'obnoxious feminist girl' than be complicit in my own dehumanization."

—Kathleen Hanna, Musician

As contemporary social environments have seen enormous change over the last few decades, we are increasingly finding ourselves entangled in online spaces. Social networking sites (SNS) and social media platforms (SMP) facilitate the interchangeability, multiplicity, and cultural salience of groups memberships and identities. A social constructivist position suggests that technology, human behaviour, and social interactivity have convoluted and reciprocal relationships, each shaping the other (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999). It's apparent that SNS and SMP encourage hierarchical competition for social positions via hierarchical structuring, quantifying recognition, and monetizing reputation, all shaping and shaped by patterns of human behaviour and social activity. For some, there is an emancipatory potential within the digital realm, a sense of freedom to challenge the social and cultural rules that accompany certain identities. Some find anonymity or pseudonymity provides resistance to identity itself, while others take the opportunity to participate in patterns of involvement that can be less inhibited or restricted in online spaces that do not mandate authentic identification (Elina Vaahensalo, 2021, p. 231). However, anonymity or pseudonymity enables some individuals to act in ways that are hostile, harmful, and dangerous, encouraging discrimination, intolerance, and hate.

Our epistemic practices are often confused in online spaces leading to mismanagement of the way we assign trust and epistemic credibility, often leading us to

be more charitable than we should be online. Traditionally we place our epistemic confidence in political leaders, scientific authorities, community figures, religious leaders, and those with close social ties, but the digital environment sees us more easily trusting individuals who are anonymous strangers. While we do delineate between online and offline settings, there is no hard and fast line between the two spaces. Our interactions intersect as we exchange ideas, beliefs, and information, leading us to frequently underestimate the consequences of our participation online and disregard the transience of the digital boundary and the speed by which communication flows; all of which makes us more susceptible to harming others or being harmed ourselves.

Online social environments are complex, powerful, and often hostile spaces, sustained by the lack of capacity and ineffectiveness of the mechanisms designed to monitor these spaces. The structural features of online social spaces, including the instantaneity, perpetuity, scope, anonymity, acontextuality, and lack of physical obstructions, all lend to the potential for harm. Of importance, Stoleru and Costescu (2014) show that the tolerance of, and participation in, violence against women and girls transcends the digital boundary between online and offline environments. Women and girls disproportionately experience sex- and gender-based violence, and our virtual environments are no exception, but rather an extension and expansion of this aggressive and violent phenomenon. The social ecological changes that have occurred with the development of SNS and SMP have not only perpetuated but exacerbated the disproportional amounts of gender-based abuse, sexual harassment and violence against women (Ging & Siapera, 2018). The dehumanization of women also transcends the illusory online boundary, extending the potential for harm in complicated ways and

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supporting the enduring patterns of sex- and gender-based violence offline. This chapter

will review some blatant manifestations of the dehumanization of women online to

illustrate ways that women are targeted and dehumanized. While the examples included

are only a few, they will reflect that expressions of dehumanizing beliefs about women in

virtual environments can have consequences offline, including violent manifestations of

dehumanization in the physical world.

3.1 DEHUMANIZATION OF WOMEN IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Drawing on feministic scholarship and tools of critical discourse analysis, I have

curated the following examples to demonstrate the dehumanization of women within the

digital social environment. The selection includes both visual and text-based examples

which have been carefully selected to show the normalization of dehumanization, perhaps

obvious to some, but regularly entrenched within social media exchanges. The examples

have been selected to reflect that while individual experiences of those targeted by

dehumanized are not uniform, the process of dehumanization is not always and only

contingent on ethnicity or race. In other words, dehumanization may occur based on

group memberships or intersections of socially salient identities that are *othered* and how

these individuals or groups might be thought to violate or threaten historically, socially,

or politically constructed conventions. Importantly, the selection exemplifies a more

general pattern of the dehumanization of women within Western digital social

environments that facilitate and encourage the ongoing dehumanization of women. The

pattern will be recognized with comparisons to dehumanization of racialized others while

also keeping in mind that dehumanization is a process that may negatively harm any

member of a group contextually categorized as the subhuman or monstrous other.

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The selection of examples I have employed have also been chosen with consideration for my ontological, epistemic, and social position as a white, heterosexual, cisgender woman. Intersections of identity may change the ways dehumanizing attitudes manifest as expression and behaviour and the way manifest dehumanization is experienced by direct and indirect victims. Future philosophical research on the intersections of identity and dehumanization would certainly be valuable, as would be a wider scope of social media platforms. However, in this analysis of the expressions of dehumanization of women, the examples have been selected to support my specific objection to Smith's claims that dehumanization is focused on race or ethnicity. The digital examples selected reflect that women are dehumanized, *as such*. However, the digital domain is not isolated from the rest of the world and the boundary between these spaces is flexible and ambiguous. Additionally, I mean not to suggest that whiteness is praxis by employing two visual examples of Caucasian women. Rather, I have employed these two examples with consideration of being a Caucasian woman myself, while sensitively recognizing that dehumanization of women also exists for BIPOC women in severe and damaging ways.

An important point to make abundantly clear is that the examples used here are paradigmatic. These examples are representative of an excessive number of instances of dehumanization that are accessible, aggressive, and permeate our online and offline environments. While explicit, they are merely a drop in the bucket of the magnitude of the overall phenomena. The seriousness of this issue must not be taken lightly, and it is the excessiveness of this behaviour that must be acknowledged, addressed, and accounted for by policy makers who govern and regulate our online communities. While this may

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be uncomfortable or distressing, it is a necessary exploration of the contemporary dehumanization of women because these women represent women as our sisters, daughters, mothers, companions, and friends within our shared humanity.

Finally, the following examples have been selected as a reflection of the multimodality of manifest dehumanization, and the various methods of expressed dehumanization within the technology facilitated social environment. While the images do represent different styles of expression, they also reflect different degrees of visceral impact that are communicated with each expression of dehumanization. There are far more extreme manifestations of dehumanization of women both offline and across the internet. These examples have been chosen to reflect the regularity and toleration of the dehumanization of women and to lend support to the argument that there is a negative moral implication of these beliefs and behaviours which we need to understand and to which we must respond.

3.1 THE CASE OF MILEY CYRUS (A SHAREABLE SPECTACLE)

To set the tone of the visual representation of dehumanizing propaganda, or a graphic manifestation of dehumanization, the first image (Image 1) is of a poster from Nazi occupied Denmark in the 1940s. The dehumanization of Jews is evident in this poster as it portrays a caricatured Jewish man's face on a rat body. Accompanied by the caption that translates to "RATS, DESTROY THEM". The impact of these images can be significant, as Smith writes, "the architecture of our minds makes us vulnerable to these forms of persuasion. Images like these speak to something deep inside us" (2011,

p.130). These kinds of metaphorical images are designed to elicit fear or disgust with the aim of establishing or maintaining support for dominance, oppression, and genocide.

Image 1 – Nazi Propaganda Poster from Occupied Denmark, 1940s. Retrieved from The Philadelphia Holocaust Remembrance Foundation.
https://www.philaholocaustmemorial.org/antisemitism-explained/. Accessed December 15, 2023.

To compare, Image 2 is a contemporary animated meme, one that was located on the social media platform Twitter (although this image was also shared broadly across other popular participatory social media sites). A sharable digital spectacle, a 'meme,' coined after Richard Dawkins' 1976 term 'meme,' is a rapidly transmissible unit of cultural communication that replicates and perpetuates culturally salient information.

While internet memes have a variety of forms, features, and functions, successful memes are highly efficient and powerful cultural artifacts.

In this image we see a metaphorical image of the uncanny, a digital caricaturizing of a woman, celebrity musician Miley Cyrus, as a turkey. Captioned with "I was looking forward to Thanksgiving till I saw Miley the Twerking Turkey…How disgusting. Lol."

Image 2 – Miley Cyrus Meme. Retrieved from Twitter account
@CindyYork28 dated Nov. 6, 2015.
https://twitter.com/CindyYork28/status/662704629336133632?s=20.
Accessed July 30, 2021.

The apparent humour of the image, discerned from the "Lol" (Laughing out loud) in the caption, suggests dehumanization may be more deeply embedded in our societal attitudes while presenting as merely facetious. Vaahensalo says "othering, whether online or

offline, is not always openly hostile or aggressive… humor is also used to convey stereotyping and marginalising ideas" (2021, p.236), and we can identify here the way humour has been utilized to express dehumanizing attitudes.

The Cyrus meme spread rapidly across the internet following a 2013 performance by Cyrus at a popular televised music awards event. For the digital audience, this image produces an effect that may elicit the same response styles of disgust that Nazis intended to elicit with the caricatures of the Jewish population, disgust and repulsion. The image reflects Cyrus's head and face appended to the body of a turkey, an animal that may be understood as wild or bothersome, but also considered prey or game. Psychologists Tipler and Ruscher suggest that the strategic dehumanization of women as prey occurs because "prey are clearly subordinate, submissive and docile…prey do not challenge the authority of humans. They are appropriately dominated by their masters and submissive to their will" (2019, p. 111). Alternatively, some women are purposefully dehumanized as predators meant to elicit social fear of powerful women, likening them to "wild animals [that] are independent, outside of human control, and dangerous" (Tipler and Ruscher, 2019, p.110). These strategies are employed to designate a woman's sexuality, status, or social power as illegitimate. This chimeric image of Cyrus, a popular cultural icon and woman with social influence, obscures the predatory/prey distinction and serves to communicate either (or both) that women are weak and subordinate or dangerous and illegitimate, depending on the predisposition of the viewers.

In Image 2 we see the picture of the body of a raw, uncooked turkey and the animated version shows the rear of the turkey bobbing and gyrating. Raw poultry is commonly associated with bacteria and disease, eliciting a threat response to danger or

disgust. Smith also sees the distinct dimensions of portraying people as predators or as

prey and the style of dehumanization, where one's essence is conceived to be predacious,

poisonous, infectious, contaminated, or malevolent in nature is labelled "demonizing

dehumanization" (Smith, 2016, p. 439).   Alternatively, images like Image 2 may also

serve to create a mental association of women to livestock or domesticated fowl,

referencing practices whereby turkeys are raised for exploitation and consumption. This

is another kind of dehumanization referred to as "enfeebling dehumanization," which

occurs when people are depicted or treated as domesticated animals, livestock, trained

animals, or animals pursued for sport (Smith, 2016, p. 439). Like the Nazi image, Image

2 works to reinforce a notion that women are animals who must be controlled and

dominated, while suggesting they may also be dangerous and harbouring disease. It

incorporates characteristics of both types of dehumanization, demonizing and enfeebling,

predatory and prey. Additionally, this image prompts a metaphysically uncomfortable

response as the woman's head is seamlessly positioned on the animal's body. Cyrus is

visualized as a subhuman creature that straddles the metaphysical boundary between

human and animal. She is visualized chimerically, digitally reproduced as an uncanny,

monstrous kind of creature.

Employing humor for this style of animalistic dehumanization insidiously

reinforces hierarchical practices of male supremacy and dominance and a normativity to

the subordination, oppression, and exploitation of women.   Irene López Rodríguez

(2009) discusses the ways women are likened to animals in language through metaphors

presenting women as "chickens, bitches or vixens".   López Rodríguez highlights the

impact metaphors have on the development and perpetuation of attitudes and folk beliefs, and writes,

> "[g]iven the cognitive and social force of metaphor in our understanding of the world and of ourselves, such animal images offer a window on the role given to women in our society. In fact, whether in the form of pets, livestock, wild animals, women tend to be seen as inferior and subordinated to men" (2009, p. 77).

In the Cyrus meme we can see a digitally manipulated and socially propagated image of a woman portrayed not only as a potentially contaminated animal, but also a kind of sexually monstrous creature whose very nature must be quelled. While metaphorical images of animalized people may not always constitute dehumanization, these kinds of images represent, and can inspire, dehumanizing beliefs and attitudes about women. Metaphorical depictions of women as animals may "help express and perpetuate collective evaluations about their role in society, reinforcing stereotypes and, ultimately, pigeonholing people into the normative binary set of "the self" and "the other" (López Rodríguez, p. 80). The cultural attitudes that are communicated with and reinforced by this highly transmissible unit of digital information is that women are animals, they may be treated like animals, and they have the same moral worth of (less than human) animals.

Undoubtedly, dehumanizing propaganda may assist in the social and political justification and psychological normalization of acts of harm to racialized others. The same styles of dehumanizing propaganda may be useful in justifying and normalizing harm to women, to sustain heteronormative, patriarchal systems that erase the humanity from women to endorse and enforce disproportionate relations of power, valuing women not for their intrinsic value, but their instrumental value. Women who are dehumanized

animalistically (demonizing or enfeebling) are positioned inferiorly to men within the axiological social order and men are reinforced as human praxis.

It is worth noting that as the Image 2 meme "went viral", Cyrus herself explained that this image had a tangible effect on her mental health, leading to the development of unhealthy social phobias and a personal struggle with confidence, low self-esteem, and body shame (Bailey, 2020). For example, she avoided wearing swim attire or shorts for years following the humiliation by way of this meme and referred to the experience as feeling embarrassed and body shamed. However, while public responses to her performance certainly included features of body-shaming, she was also a woman being dehumanized, and while there were very real consequences for Cyrus herself as the primary target, there were also consequences for women more generally. My point here is that while many declared a disappointment in Cyrus regarding her provocative performance and expectations for appropriate female role model behaviour, there continues to be a general neglect regarding the dehumanization of women and the influence that it may have, not only on young girls and women, but also on the attitudes and behaviour of boys and men.

3.3 THE CASE OF THE INCELS

The previous case looked at the dehumanization of women targeted at an individual woman with significant notoriety. But dehumanization of women will not always target an individual woman, nor will it always target powerful or famous women; rather, it is often expressed in ways that reflect a more general attitude towards women as members of a homogenous group. This next case reflects the more general phenomena of dehumanization of women and to properly contextualize the example, it is important to

define an "incel" as a man who has self-identified as "involuntarily celibate" and is most typically distinguished by his sexist and misogynistic attitudes. While self-deprecation is common, accompanying these attitudes are anger and resentment directed at women for not providing opportunities to form intimate bonds with an incel and a belief that attractive women are unfairly reserving sexual access for more physically appealing partners. Though incel communities have been primarily located within the digital environment, their attitudes and behaviors have contributed to what some scholarship identifies as extremist violence offline (O'Donnell & Shor, 2022). For example, Elliot Rodgers was a 22-year-old self-proclaimed incel who participated in groups that could be considered misogynistic extremists and carried out acts that could be considered misogynistic terrorism. In 2014, Rodgers shared a 140+ page manifesto online and posted a video to YouTube prior to going on a murderous rampage. Rodgers' autobiographical manuscript reflected his beliefs that women "are like animals, completely controlled by their primal, depraved emotions and impulses," that women "needed to be contained," and that he had to "wage a war against women" ("The Manifesto of Elliot Rodger," 2014). This supposed war against women resulted in Rodgers taking the lives of six people, causing injuries to fourteen others, and ending with his suicide.

Rodgers is not an exception. Virtual incel communities are the digital coalescence of groups of men who blame, victimize, and dehumanize women because of their personal lack of sexual access to women or their inability to form intimate relationships with women. INCELS.net was a website utilized as a digital networking and community platform for those that self-identified as incels. The posts shared can be seen as a

reflection of the group members' attitudes towards women and the ways that digital

communities can facilitate the development of echo chambers resulting in hostile and

harmful social conformity. The following example of dehumanization comes from the

INCEL.net website and the language is explicit. The dialogue exchange goes beyond

misogynistic speech and the discursive content is most certainly representative of

dehumanizing attitudes. This now expunged website was just one of many internet

forums where participants can write and share posts that express their feelings and

attitudes about women. A brief content warning may be warranted here as the language

employed by these members is explicit, extreme, misogynistic, and undoubtedly

dehumanizing.

The example includes a discursive exchange of an original post and responses by

other participants. The exchange is included because, while the original post may have

been sufficient on its own to make my point, there is further significance in the discursive

interaction of exchanging and engaging with the shared viewpoints. On July 26, 2020, a

participant on the forum site www.INCELS.net with username "ihateexistence" titled his

post "I have zero empathy for women". A screenshot of the posts has been included

below and it reads in part,

> "I really can't stand their existence to be honest. I see them as cancer. A plague.
> A disease. I view them as inferior to men in every aspect. The way women act
> and behave these days is extremely repulsive. These dumb whores have no
> shame, no dignity, no self respect. They fuck around….I can't relate to someone
> who gets a free pass in life just for having a vagina. I have literally zero empathy
> for them. I view them as soulless hivemind. They are all clones of each other."

In response, another user wrote, "They are akin to animals. Even with their sentience
they struggle to tell what is truly real with all of their internal fantasies."

And another, "The one deadly mistake this world made was giving these holes any rights
to begin with, no wonder their kind will be hunted and exterminated like rats in Postal."
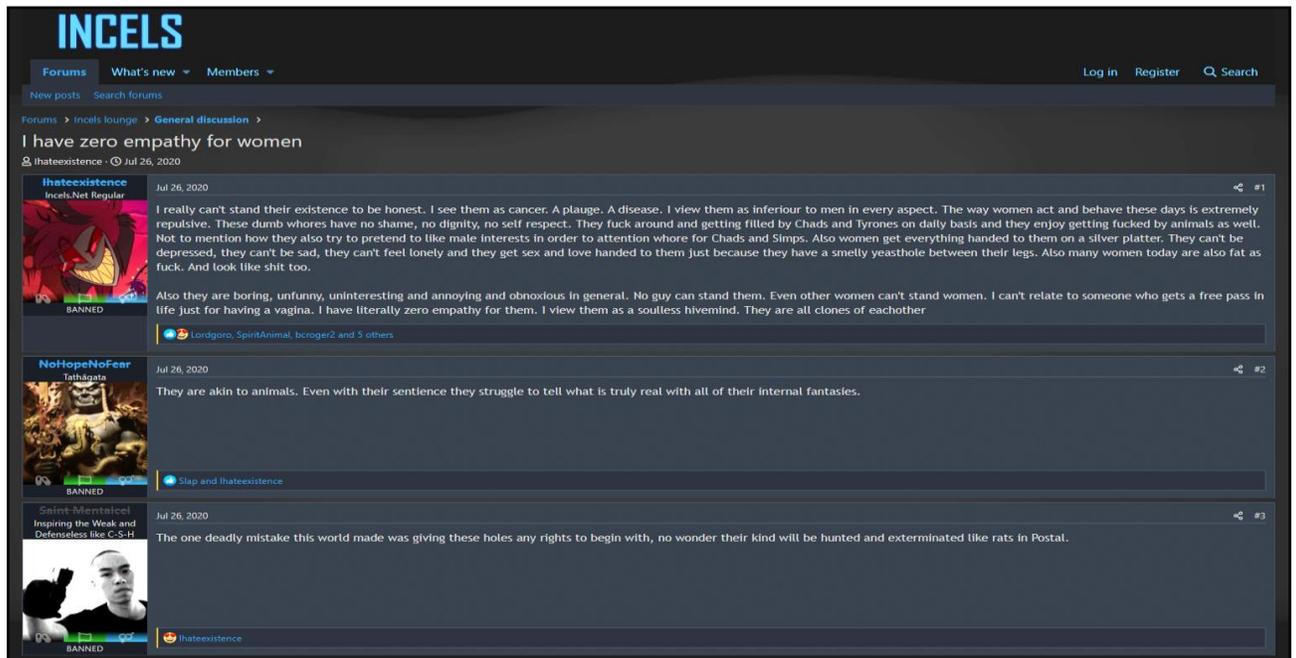
The communication in these highly sexualized forum posts is epistemically

violent and reflective of the dehumanizing beliefs held by the authors. The evaluation of

women as a source of contagion, or a disease, equated to animals with a non-human

sentience is the same style of rhetorical techniques that we see in cases of racial

dehumanization that have accompanied the worst atrocities in history.

To compare the dangerous speech revealing the dehumanizing attitudes about

women, we can look to the dangerous discourses that promoted the Holocaust.

Regarding the Jewish population, Nazi propaganda pamphlets edited by SS commander

Heinrich Himmler read,

> "The subhuman is a biological creature, crafted by nature, which has hands, legs,
> eyes and mouth, even the semblance of a brain. Nevertheless, this terrible
> creature is only a partial human being. Although it has features similar to a
> human, the subhuman is lower on the spiritual and psychological scale than any
> animal. Inside of this creature lies wild and unrestrained passions: an incessant

need to destroy, filled with the most primitive desires, chaos and coldhearted villainy"(Reichsführer-SS, 1942).

While the Nazi's referred to Jews, Blacks, Gypsies, homosexuals, and others as "hordes" of subhumans (Reichsführer-SS, 1942), more contemporarily American President Donald Trump said, "You wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people. These are animals" (Theodoridis & Martherus, 2018) regarding Central and South American migrants. The same kind of language is reflected in both the dehumanization of racialized groups and the dehumanization of women. These discourses reflect the broader beliefs and attitudes held by the individuals who spoke (or wrote) the words.

The extreme nature of these beliefs within the incel.net post is witnessed in the comment that women will be "hunted and exterminated like rats..." and clearly shows the extremely negative attitudes toward women by these community members. When women are not seen to be representing attractive and submissive characteristics or fulfilling patriarchal prescribed gender roles and responsibilities (including a responsibility to provide sexual access as ambiguously defined), they are deemed to be lacking the quintessential attributes of a woman and denied their humanity. Alternatively, when women are measured as too attractive, too submissive, or providing sexual access too generously, they are also deemed to be lacking the quintessential attributes of a woman and denied a human essence. The definitional category for a human woman is narrow and contradictive. This dehumanization of women, capitalizing on ambiguity, functions to make permissible violence that is perceived to redress the incels' perceived injustice regarding women's sexual preferences.

Within Smith's approach, when the perpetrators of dehumanization exchange diatribes that refer to their targets as subhuman, we can identify the dehumanization as a genuine pattern of belief, rather than simple metaphorical speech acts intended to directly humiliate a target. Smith explains, "Often, perpetrators describe their victims to one another as subhumans. This makes little sense if the aim of dehumanizing language is to degrade and humiliate the victim" (Smith, 2016, p. 430). If men only employed animalistic metaphors and dehumanizing slurs as a hurtful speech act directed at women, we would not see men employing blatantly dehumanizing language and promoting violence against women with each other in this conversational style. But the example here shows men are communicating and digitally posturing their shared beliefs and attitudes with each other, emboldening the dehumanizing mindset they share and inspiring dehumanizing behavior in the broader social environment.

While incels are an important case of digital social group formation centered around contemporary perceptions of romantic and sexual entitlement, incels are but a part of a broader trend of toxic male supremacy and antifeminist movements that continue to grow on- and offline. MGTOW, an acronym for Men Going Their Own Way, is another popular community, predominately focused on misogynistic ideology and a conviction that feminist movements are responsible for women becoming threats to men due to their promiscuity, selectivity, or duplicity. These various groups flourish in internet channels while the toxicity and harm promoted by these communities reverberates offline. For example, in Toronto in 2020, a radicalized 17-year-old offender, who self-identified as an incel, murdered a young woman and caused physical injuries to others (Hasham, 2022), while the 28-year-old Alek Minassian said his 2018 Toronto van attack, that killed 11 and

injured 15, was motivated in part by the MTGOW philosophy (Humphreys, 2020). The digital atmosphere, with the lack of ethical oversight and legal regulations, supports groups and organizations that promote extreme sexist and misogynistic ideologies, ideologies that promote and employ dehumanization, and this digital social landscape provides the conditions necessary to not only make harm to women (and others) permissible, but in some cases such as the incel Elliott Rodgers, we see a man's belief that women are subhuman become so intense that violence and feminicide became not only desirable but obligatory. Again, Rodgers is not an exception.

3.4 THE CASE OF THE UNNAMED WOMAN

The third example of the dehumanization of women has been retrieved from Reddit, an online social news and discussion forum. Because the example lacks any contextuality and displays an eroticization of dehumanization, it requires a bit of an introduction in order to show respect to the woman subject in the image, to respect the reader, and to respect myself as a woman engaging with this morally injurious material. Image 4 is a challenging image to discuss, both academically and as a woman, and to introduce this image I must first explain the process of reflection employed while considering the image. Utilizing an explicit image, within an academic thesis, I wanted to ensure respect for the woman in the image, as well as to my academic supervisors, peers, and to any audience this paper receives. The general processes of academic intervention may require engaging with uncomfortable and explicit resources to affect change in the broader social arena. Elina Vaahensalo (2021) writes, "dismantling hateful dynamics in online communities is impossible if the dark side of internet communication is left in the shadows," while Emma Alice Jane (2014) warns that failing to address that

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which is 'unspeakable' within the norms of discursive etiquette perpetuates misogynistic vitriol and fails to establish ethical resolution. My instrumental use of this example is coupled with the attempt to challenge the dehumanization of women to inspire awareness and emphasize the intrinsic value of all women.

To avoid any perception of a disingenuous reproduction of graphic violence, additional insights into the selection process may be valuable. First, this is an explicit image of a Caucasian woman, and this was an intentional selection. The account on Reddit that shared this image shared dozens of additional images dehumanizing many women, including Black and brown women. Because I am a Caucasian woman, I wanted to discuss an image based on the subject being a Caucasian woman like myself, to support my argument that women are dehumanized, while ensuring I do not misinterpret, misrepresent, oversimplify, or overgeneralize the experiences of a woman of color for the intersecting ways that she may be dehumanized or experience dehumanization. Including both, the image of a white woman and a similar image of a Black woman, to reflect the dehumanization experienced by women across their racial identities was considered, but in addition to the moral sensitivity of sharing explicit and dehumanizing images, I wanted to avoid a comparison to be misconstrued as assumed uniformity of or insensitivity to lived experiences.

Secondly, this image was selected to provide contrast to the first visual example of the culturally influential Miley Cyrus because the woman in this image represents a degree of anonymity, and this is important when we consider who may be targeted by dehumanization. However, while the woman's face was shared in the original image, it has been determined that blocking the woman's face is important. In an age of rapidly

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evolving and advancing facial recognition software, precautions must be taken to safeguard the woman's identity. Although distorting the image may compromise some important elements of the image, it is morally responsible to protect her from identification through a publication of my thesis. Although the woman's face is blocked, it is important to remember that faces are an important point of human connection, supporting empathic responses from others, and while I wanted to minimize losing any detail that may prompt compassion from the reader, protecting women is foundational to the motivation of this thesis. So, with compassion and respect at the fore, we now turn to the analysis of the image of the anonymous woman.

Image 4 shows a woman who is exposed from the waist up, her breasts are bound tightly by elastic bands, and expletives and humiliating terms written in red ink all over her face and torso. The word "PIG' is written across her forehead with red ink and the letters "WH" and "Re" are on each cheek – red lipstick on her mouth to form an O and infers the word "WHORE". Her chest has "SHIT ON MY FACE" written and one breast has "BEAT ME" while the other has "RAPE ME" also written with red ink. She holds a note that reads, "WOMEN ARE JUST OBJECTS FOR MEN TO HUMILIATE AND LAUGH AT."
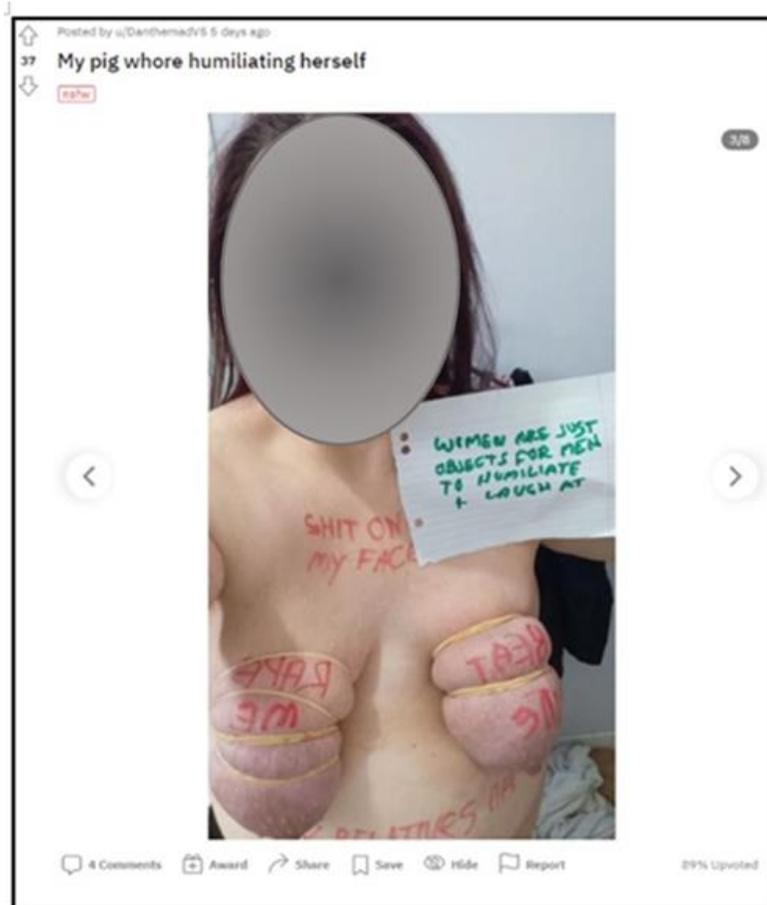
Image 4 - Reddit NSFW Anonymous Woman. Adapted from original. Original retrieved from Reddit.com user DanthemadV5. https://www.reddit.com/r/HumiliatingComments/comments/orkb8p/my_ pig_whore_humiliating_herself/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=ios_ app&utm_name=iossmf. *Accessed August 1, 2021.*

There can be little doubt that the woman in this image, posted with the title caption "My pig whore humiliating herself," is being dehumanized and it is important that we sensitively review the different components of this image. The woman has the word "PIG" written across her forehead and referring to this woman as "PIG" or as "pig whore" communicates that she is an animal and it is permissible to use violence and sexual violence against her, the anonymous woman, and any woman. López Rodríguez explains that an animal commonly "used in the representation of women is the

pig…metaphorically used as terms of opprobrium for a woman, implying fatness, dirtiness, ugliness and even promiscuity" (López Rodríguez, 2009, p. 89). This kind of strategic animalization of women allows a dehumanizer to deny the woman's dignity and welfare, enabling the dehumanizer to treat the targeted woman/women in ways that would otherwise be unacceptable and impermissible.

The camera lens positioned to be looking down upon the woman, her breasts are tightly bound with the words "BEAT ME" and "RAPE ME" on her left and right breast. This aggressive and sexually violent display represents the brutality that is required for men to force women into submission, to create or maintain relationships of oppression. The image doesn't just reflect the violence or threat of violence required to enforce inequal power relations but portrays a woman as inviting that aggression and brutality. This gives the perpetrator an excuse and sustains a victim blaming mentality; the victims of dehumanization, especially women, are blamed for their victimization. The image communicates that this woman cannot be a human because no real human would volunteer to be beaten and raped, and because she isn't a human, it is permissible to bestow such violence upon her. Here we can identify the faciliatory and justificatory nature of dehumanization: she can be beaten and raped because she isn't human, and she isn't human because she can be beaten and raped. Further, this mechanism supports broader trends of sex- and gender- based violence and victim shaming, that is physically or sexually assaulting women and subsequently blaming and punishing the victims rather than the perpetrators.

The woman is holding a note that reads, "women are just objects for men to humiliate and laugh at." The note suggests women are objects, and some may argue that

this woman is being objectified. However, objects are things, and things cannot be

humiliated; objects do not have a sense of self for which can be embarrassed or ashamed,

women most certainly do. This is indicative of the paradox of dehumanization.

Dehumanization often aims to humiliate and degrade, to paradoxically cause the

humiliation of the human being who is being dehumanized, to cause shame and

embarrassment, and to eliminate the self- and social worth of the target(s). The

dehumanizer humiliates the person or group that they are dehumanizing in order to

destroy any sense of shared belonging and to create social distance between the target(s)

and those who witness or spectate. Humiliating the woman in Image 4 not only makes

violence or harm towards her permissible, but seemingly obligatory by invitation.

Further, as will be discussed in the next chapter, images like this not only communicate a

permissibility of violence and sexual violence towards the subject in the photo, but they

also communicate a permissibility of harm towards women more generally.

We can identify specific features of this image that indicate dehumanization is a

tool to perpetrate and sustain harm, and as well, a tool to enforce an unequal power

relationship between men and women. Again, Smith calls dehumanization "the

handmaid of oppression" (2020, p.14), and as Canadian researchers Lorenne Clark and

Debra Lewis explained back in 1977,

> "all unequal power relationships must, in the end, rely on the threat or reality of
> violence to maintain themselves. This is true whether the power relationship
> exists between males and females, between white males and black males, or
> between the rich industrialized nations of the West and the poor and developing
> countries of the Third World. And it is also true whether or not the use or threat
> of violence is manifested by the system as a whole, or solely by individuals"
> (1977, p.176-177).

Dehumanization facilitates and legitimizes the threat or reality of violence, thereby legitimizing the unequal and oppressive relationships.

The sharing of this kind of image online creates opportunities for general exposure as well as the production of artifacts of dehumanization. During the spectacle lynchings in the United States, "trophy collectors" would attend with a goal of collecting an item from the tortured and burned bodies of the lynching victim. Digital spectatorship like this turns the image of a manifestation of dehumanization, the sexual exploitation and violence, into the trophy itself. The digital social media landscape has created a perpetual memory or record of events and carries opportunities to download and save content. Thus, not only has the dehumanizer obtained a trophy of the dehumanization to be held in private reverence but also created a trophy to be shared publicly in perpetuity, making the accrual of artifacts of dehumanization nearly limitless, allowing individual images to amass themselves into larger ideological mechanisms.

Someone might object to try to argue that the anonymous woman in this particular image is taking part in masochist behaviour, as someone who extracts gratification from violent and painful exploitation and humiliation, because it appears she may be taking a "selfie," an image capturing the subject produced by the subject. However, there is no sign of permission or consent by the woman to share this image publicly, it was not shared by a personal account, and the understanding of autonomy and permissibility are vague and precarious in online forums. While I have blocked her face, my interpretation of the original does not recognize or indicate any kind of gratification communicated by the woman. Further, we can appreciate that photographs like this are often exploited or

extorted from women as there are numerous cases of women forced to pose in sexualizing or dehumanizing photographs and videos.

Andrea Dworkin's and Catherine MacKinnon's work on pornography and sexual violence against women advised that pornography portraying sexually aggressive or sexually violent content as pleasurable for or desired by the victim amplifies the acceptability of coercivity in sexual relations which appears to be related to sexual aggression (1988). Further, for men consuming sexually aggressive or sexually violent content, implied consent increases perceptions that women desire and are not harmed by rape, while increasing or intensifying attitudes that women "are worthless, trivial, nonhuman, objectlike, and unequal to men" (1988, p.35). Ultimately, the sharing of this kind of sexually aggressive or sexually violent content on an accessible digital platform promotes exposure to dehumanization of women within the broader environment of social relations that it is part of.

Finally, I want to consider all three selections as a collection of women's dehumanization. The first example a "humorous" viral meme of celebrity songstress Miley Cyrus, the second example a hostile discursive exchange targeting no singular target but women as a homogenous group, and the final example portraying the sexual violence and exploitation of an anonymous woman. Whether these images portray an individual woman of influential social status, women as the homogenous foci of contempt, or a virtually anonymous woman, they suggest that *any* woman may be the target of dehumanization depending on the social context. The dehumanization of women spans other intersections of identity, and while some women may be more protected from dehumanization, or more shielded from the consequences of

dehumanization, it is not a phenomenon reserved for certain kinds of women. Rather, the

dehumanization of women may be directed at any and all women, and some women will

find themselves experiencing the direst consequences of this dehumanization.

To close this chapter, I want to further reflect on some insights provided by

Andrea Dworkin on the technological proliferation of dehumanization long before social

media and social networking became so commonplace. Of the dehumanization and

objectification of women through pornography, Dworkin wrote,

> "the numbers grow as the technology and its accessibility grow. The technology
> by its very nature encourages more and more passive acquiescence to the graphic
> depictions. Passivity makes the already credulous consumer more
> credulous…The technology itself legitimizes the uses of women conveyed by it"
> (1981, p. 202).

We must recognize the impact that social media and social networking sites have upon

our epistemic practices and the increasing credulity we have in response to digital

content. For decades, researchers have studied the impacts of pornography and the way

some consumers of pornography are desensitized to sexual violence and pornography's

influence on beliefs about women's sexuality and a desire for rape (see for examples

Bridges, 2019; Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt & Giery, 1995; Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1988;

Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981). This kind of dehumanizing digital content reinforces

the normalization and habituation of beliefs that some lives are less morally valuable

because they are not considered to be the same kind of human life; they are instead the

sort of lives that are led by uncontrollable, sexualized animals or cunning, deceitful

monsters. The consequences of these attitudes are morally significant, and as we move

into Chapter 4 *The Harms of Dehumanization*, it will be important to consider the

impacts and effects of the expression of dehumanization of women, particularly in the

contemporary context of digital algorithms and social networking.

CHAPTER 4: THE HARMS OF DEHUMANIZATION

"It seems to me that violence against women has been tolerated for so long that the world has become numb to it."

— Zainab Salbi, Author and Activist

The collection of online expressions of dehumanization shared in the previous chapter show that dehumanization easily transgresses the digital boundary with women experiencing harm directly and indirectly, online and off. Dehumanizing attitudes are expressed and reproduced in our cyberscapes, ensuring the continuity of online and offline oppression of women. Our present understanding of the dehumanization of women online faces similar challenges as the dehumanization of women offline — it remains unclear how best to approach, monitor, and resist the dehumanization of women and to prevent accompanying harm. Research indicates that women are disproportionately targeted by online harassment and hate speech in cyberspace (Henry & Powell, 2015), and it would be fair to assume this disproportionality would be consistent with both the targeted dehumanization of women online and the online expression of the dehumanization of women.

We can consider the function of manifest dehumanization as serving the construction, maintenance, or enforcements of social hierarchies, relationships of oppression, and the legitimization of violence. The digital landscape is particularly well suited to support these functions. The dehumanization of women online, as a contemporary medium for dehumanization, is a current iteration of an enduring belief system that facilitates violence against and oppression of women, violence that occurs

both online and offline in our 21st century social landscape, and violence that has historical origins that far predate current social media contexts.

The examples in Chapter Three show that the online social landscape offers discursive and visual opportunities to express, endorse, and disseminate dehumanizing beliefs about women. Additionally, dehumanization may manifest online as aggressive behaviour and these manifestations may carry a range of harms for women, both directly and indirectly, on- and offline. Harms may be physical, mental, social, professional, individual or collective, or epistemic – all of which constitute moral harm. Digital technologies like social media platforms are employed to reinforce traditional and enforce novel sex- and gender-based inequalities, as well as support the perpetration of both conventional and innovative styles of aggressive and abusive behavior and victimization (Henry & Powell, 2015). Technological communications (and the influence of algorithms) can amplify delegitimization, inequality and injustice, and the digitally circulated sex- and gender-based dehumanization. With their breadth of scope and rate of speed, these communications protect and reinforce the relentlessness of women's disempowerment. DeKeseredy and Olsson (2011) argue that technologically facilitated social spaces support men in enacting the victimization of women online in addition to their online coalescence as members of groups grounded in the legitimization of male dominance. Incel and MGTOW communities, for example, demonstrate the coalescence of men into groups based in sexism and misogyny that develop or maintain dehumanizing attitudes towards women. Dehumanization in the digital landscape can be understood to be amplifying the influence of the belief that women are inferior and unequal, as well as facilitate behaviours that victimize, on and offline. Smith wrote,

"It's true that people sometimes characterize others as less than human as a post hoc justification for bad behaviour, but dehumanization appears to more than mere rationalization. It is facilitative rather than justificatory: when we dehumanize others we really believe that they are creatures of an inferior kind, and this *releases* our propensity for violence rather than simply legitimizing it" (2012, p. 535. Italics in original.).

Similarly, the dehumanization of women facilitates violence and oppression, in addition to offering post hoc legitimacy.

The recognition that dehumanization causes harm is what fundamentally drives theoretical and empirical research into dehumanization. Dedicated to the theoretical conception and understanding of dehumanization, Smith (2011, 2020) showed that the dehumanization of racialized groups has facilitated atrocity and genocide. Additionally, contemporary research is connecting dehumanization with harms against several other targeted groups. For example, research is demonstrating how dehumanization has facilitated violence against Black Americans (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008), the social exclusion of refugees and immigrant populations (Esses, Veenvliet, Hodson, & Mihic, 2008), the over-incarceration of Indigenous women in Canada perpetuating the harms of settler colonialism (McGuire & Murdoch, 2021), the social ostracism of the mentally ill (Martinez, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, & Hinshaw, 2011), and inspiring the reduced social inclusion of homosexual people (Fasoli et al., 2015). Of course, these cases are far from an exhaustive catalogue of the harms of dehumanization, but research is beginning to uncover the connection between the dehumanization of women with sexual aggression against them (Rudman & Mescher, 2012) which endorses the re-evaluation of any theory of dehumanization that denies the dehumanization of women, as such.

My goal in this chapter is to theorize the different kinds of harm that result from the dehumanization of women while exploring the relationship of online dehumanization as a particular mode embedded within, and reinforcing of, a broader social phenomenon. I hope that highlighting some of the direct, structural, epistemic, and moral harms that may be associated with the dehumanization of women may lead others to direct more attention to the link between the dehumanization of women and the often traumatic and tragic consequences women experience.

4.1 EMBODIED AND SYMBOLIC HARMS OF DIGITAL DEHUMANIZATION OF WOMEN

Objectification and dehumanization of women, as argued earlier, are two different but related and often co-occurring phenomena and as we are theorizing the harms of dehumanization, it is useful to look to the research that has been done on the objectification of women. Sexual objectification of women is problematic, and Gervais and Eagan (2017) discuss the ways sexual objectification can provide the footing for violence against women in two ways. First, through direct aggression towards women that follows from objectification. Second, through a more deceptive route where people who objectify women influence social norms that make permissible certain forms of behaviour towards women. Additionally, Gervais and Eagan suggest that recurring exposure to objectification can lead to the passive acceptance, and therefore tolerance of aggression and violence towards women (2017, p.228). It has been found that the sexual objectification of women influences women's demeanour and behaviour in ways that reinforces their perceived subordinate status (Klein, Allen, Bernard, & Gervais, 2014), while simultaneously women's sexual objectification reinforces men's perception of

power and dominance, thus rousing and emboldening behaviour that oppresses women

and reinforces prevailing gender roles (Bareket & Shnabel, 2020). Empirical research

has found that exposure to sexual objectification in media elicits an objectifying lens

from the consumer (Karsay, Knoll, & Matthes, 2018; Vandenbosch and Eggermont,

2012), as well as increases proclivity for sexual coercion, sexual harassment, and

increases male tendency to conform to masculinized gender norms (Galdi, Maass, &

Cadinu, 2014).

The literature regarding sexual objectification of women is substantial and

indicates that sexualization of women causes an analytic focus on the body as parts of a

whole rather than a whole human being, reduces the responses to women's faces, and

appraises the targets as objects (Bernard, Cogoni, & Carnaghi, 2020). Further, the

empirical literature on sexualization suggests that sexualization leads to the reduced

recognition of women's intelligence, aptitude, agency, moral status and reduces empathic

responsiveness to women (for discussion see Bernard et al., 2020). Neuroscientific

research indicates that brain responses to sexualized women are similar to the way the

brain responds to objects (Vaes, Cristoforetti, Ruzzante, Cogoni, & Mazza, 2019),

findings that appear to be supported with behavioural research (Cikara, Eberhardt, &

Fiske, 2011; Vaes, Paladino & Puvia, 2011). While research confirms that women can be

sexually objectified, and many researchers link this to Haslam's mechanistic

dehumanization (Haslam, Bastian, Laham, & Loughnan, 2012), women are also

animalistically dehumanized. In fact, Gray, Knobe, Sheskin, Bloom, and Barrett (2011)

show a focus on bodies and sexualization may also be connected to animalistic

dehumanization. It appears that women may be dehumanized in two ways,

mechanistically or animalistically. There may be important correspondence between Smith's accounts of demonizing and enfeebling dehumanization with the empirical research on mechanistic and animalistic dehumanization, both of which might connect to the presentation of women's sexuality as submissive, obedient, and docile, or as predatorial, impure, and dangerous. I see here important links between conceptions of dehumanization that have yet to be fully fleshed out in both the theoretical and empirical disciplines and research on dehumanization remains incomplete.

Not surprisingly, what this does suggest is that the link between dehumanization and sexualization is significant, a claim that finds support in feminist scholarship and makes intuitive sense when the dehumanization of women is grounded in sex and gender. It would be worthwhile to comparatively investigate the neurological responses to women who are at once sexualized and dehumanized and compare them with the neurological responses to women who are sexually objectified, women who are dehumanized but not in a sexualized manner, and non-sexualized, non-dehumanized women. There may be important insights into when and where these processes intersect or co-occur.

Although sexualization and objectification have been empirically correlated to aggression and violence against women (Gervais and Eagan, 2017) and dehumanization has been observed to incite aggression and violence against racialized outgroups, the empirical attention to the harm caused by the dehumanization of women remains underwhelming. Rudman and Mescher (2011) did find that both dehumanizing women as subhuman animals and objectifying women influenced the sexual aggression of males. Therefore, it is a reasonable supposition that parallel to the harms of objectification of women and the dehumanization of outgroups, the dehumanization of women leads to

harm directly to women as a result of degrading, aggressive and violent behaviour perpetrated against them, as well as to further harms to women as a collective social unit due to the legitimization of social norms that insist women are less than human.

A general association has been empirically identified between dehumanization and increased aggression and proclivity for violence (Bastian, Jetten, & Radke, 2012; Viki et al., 2013; Harris and Fiske, 2011). Rudman and Mescher (2012) found that dehumanizing women animalistically influenced the sexual aggression of men, including sexual harassment, rape proclivity, and adverse attitudes towards female victims of sexual assault. Research by Bevens and Loughnan (2019) also found a correlational link between dehumanization and rape proclivity, a link between dehumanization and adverse attitudes towards the victims of sexual violence, as well as a link between dehumanization and men's blatant endorsement of sexual aggression. Additionally, Loughnan, Pina, Vasquez, and Puvia (2013) found that dehumanization reduced perceptions of the suffering of sexual assault victims, while Bevens and Loughnan (2019) located a pattern that suggests the sexualization of women increases the likelihood of dehumanization and sexual aggression directed against sexualized women. This evidence supports the claim that dehumanization facilitates violence to women as well as justifies the condemnation of those who've been victimized. While more exhaustive research needs to be done, thus far these empirical studies do corroborate the theoretical claims of feminist scholars like Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon who unwaveringly argued that the sexualization, objectification, and dehumanization of women generally, and specifically in pornography, leads to harm for individual women *and* societal harm for women. The unnamed woman in the third example in Chapter 3 reflects the kind of

content that Andrea Dworkin would demand urgent attention to as the sexualization and manifest dehumanization of women within a technological medium cultivates acquiescence at individual and societal levels. The communications medium of cyberspace and the social environments of SNS and SMP provide the structural conditions that amplify acceptance, tolerance, or ignorance to the dehumanization of women making it more insidious and harder to challenge.

The harms that women may experience due to dehumanization include humiliation, exploitation, sexual aggression, and violence, ranging on a continuum of severity. But people who dehumanize women also have influence on the social norms and institutions that legitimize certain behaviour towards women and general exposure to dehumanization may desensitize and sustain a tolerance for the oppression of women. The social contexts of SMP and SNS influence not only those who directly participate in them, but because these environments make up significant portions of our social lives, discourse and behaviour online has ancillary effects throughout society. Social Psychology Lasana T. Harris explains that,

> "The social context can affect not only brain and physiological responses, driving behaviour, but the likelihood of behaviour being performed in the future by other people. This is because the social context creates culture, transmitting behaviours as moral rules and norms vicariously from one person to another in a society" (2017, p. 120).

This should be a major concern as the opportunity for exposure to dehumanization is immense in the culturally entangled online social environment and the more it accumulates and increasingly pervades digital social landscapes, the more cultural tolerance and social acceptance of women's inferiority will persist or expand.

We have seen that dehumanization does not only manifest in the physical world; therefore, we can anticipate that direct and indirect harms will not be restricted to direct offline encounters. Harm to women may accompany the expressions of dehumanization within online social environments, in offline encounters fueled by online dehumanization, as well as general exposure to manifest dehumanization online that may be unintentional yet unavoidable within these spaces and lend to the passive tolerance of women's perceived inferiority. Henry & Powell suggest that the harms that occur online must be understood as a distinct kind of harm (2015, p.765), a particularly challenging task in SMP and SNS, because as noted earlier, the boundary separating these digital spaces from the physical landscape has become ambiguous and convoluted. And though we might acknowledge the distinctiveness of harms against women online, we must recognize that these harms are part of a broader and continuous, rapidly evolving, social environment.

Humiliation, aggression, violence, sexual exploitation, and sexual servitude are not the only consequences of dehumanization for women. Women may also experience derivative consequences that result subsequently from a direct experience of or exposure to dehumanization. These kinds of harms may include decreased self-esteem and harsh self-evaluations, depression, anxiety, and fear, as well as other impacts on mental and physical health. Further, when women are not seen as fully human beings, they are not regarded as equals, not deserving of the same human rights, opportunities, respect, and dignity that are conferred upon men who maintain an advantageous social power. The practice of and exposure to dehumanization of women influences social norms and legitimizes oppression, facilitating the endurance of sexism and gender hierarchies which

sanctions societal harms against women. For example, the denial of educational and employment opportunities, forced compliance to culturally defined gender roles, the denial of reproductive health care or forced reproductive labour because of maternal care denial, the denial of women's autonomy, high rates of gender-based violence and femicide, among other consequences all result from women's perceived inferiority and subhumanity. Additionally, there may be dynamic harms for some women who have socially significant intersections of identity that make them even more vulnerable to harm, such as race or non-typical sexual orientation. The dehumanization of women reinforces ideological commitments that promote patriarchy, gendered social roles, sex and gender inequality, sexual exploitation, aggression, and violence towards women. There can be little doubt that these mechanisms of dominance and oppression are facilitated by dehumanization and utilize dehumanization for justification, and when women are dehumanized, they are denied their voice.

4.2 EPISTEMOLOGICAL HARMS OF DIGITAL DEHUMANIZATION OF WOMEN

Jeremy Waldron (2012) argues that assurances of inclusivity and safety in society are public goods that should be protected. It is these public goods that lead us to endorse policies of equality, diversity, and inclusion. However, equality, diversity, and inclusion are not guaranteed to anyone negotiating the digital social landscape. For Waldron, hate speech is something that publicizes that an equal level of security and inclusion in the public sphere is not guaranteed for all groups, and therefore, members of a targeted group should expect to experience humiliation and discrimination when they exit the private domain and enter the public domain. Waldron argues that there is a threat to the lives,

livelihoods, and characters of individuals targeted by hate speech and this is a threat that should be responded to (2012). However, the way of the everchanging internet domain is becoming increasingly difficult to draw a clear distinction between public and private domains, and while dehumanization does not always manifest in the form of blatant hate speech, it certainly is a dangerous phenomenon that humiliates its targets, communicates the threat of discrimination and violence, and may pose threats to the lives and livelihoods of those targeted.

Speech acts are a research focus in epistemological, feminist and moral inquiry for scholars wanting to protect free speech while prohibiting hate speech. The harms of hate speech encompass the immediate and direct psychological harm of someone targeted by assaultive acts of hate speech, or the more cumulative and enduring consequences of acts of propagandistic hate speech directed at members of discriminated groups (Anderson & Barnes, 2022; see also Gelber and McNamara, 2016; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993). But how we conceive of and define hate speech is still often debated, and while we want to be careful as to avoid broadening the concept of hate speech too widely, commonly enforced conceptions of hate speech do not account for discursive practices that sponsor hate, inequality, and oppression or cause harm to women. Catherine MacKinnon observed that some speech acts "set the conditions" for which regulate the opportunity that other speech acts may be successful (1993, p.63-68) and the marketplace of ideas is structured and controlled by the inequalities and discrimination within the public domain. In staunch resistance to hateful language, the violence that it incites or emboldens, and the knowledge it supresses, in her 1993 Nobel Lecture, Toni Morrison claimed, "oppressive language does more than represent

violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge, it limits knowledge" (Morrison, 1993). Fasoli et al. refer to the use of derogatory epithets and slurs as the "language of dehumanization" (2015, p. 9) and Nicola Henry explains that some speech acts have the potential to harm in ways that are "cumulative, long-term, and generational, reinforcing and amplifying discriminatory activities and behaviours that treat the "other" as inferior and subordinate, and solidifying existing power relations" (2021, introduction, chapter 9, p.167).

In the social cyberscape, there is not only a general abundance of derogatory insults and slurs, but vitriolic and hostile communication against women has been increasing in prevalence and force (Jane, 2015). Both sexist or misogynistic hate speech and discursive practices of dehumanization have been discounted or ignored within internet scholarship, and as seen in Chapter 3, SMP and SNS do not just support text-based dehumanization, but also visual dehumanization, which carry the potential of image-based harm. There is growing research related to image-based harms, defined by Henry (2021, p. 267) as the "the creation or dissemination of images that denigrate and subjugate the person depicted in the image, or which expose the viewer to vicarious affect or trauma." This is important because not only may the subject and the audience be affected, but they may be deprived of or withdraw their active or passive participation from the realm of public discourse. The work of MacKinnon and Dworkin led to the feminist argument that pornography is a demonstration of image-based hate speech because not only does it undermine women's participation as equal interlocutors in the public arena (because the pornographic content creator's free speech takes precedent over the participation of women in the realm of public discourse), but it also propagates beliefs

that negatively influence women's ability to be recognized as knowers and threatens the wellbeing of women. These same arguments can be applied to the dehumanization of women expressed online verbally and visually.

Images can be compelling communication tools, forceful and governed by the same epistemic inequalities as dialogue. The dehumanization of women online, whether in direct communicative exchanges or through general exposure, can have a silencing effect on women due either to fear of participating in exchanges leading to the stifling of their own voice, or because an audience has determined, voluntarily or not, that women are subhuman and therefore don't qualify or deserve a seat at the discursive table. These silencing effects are referred to as testimonial smothering and testimonial quieting, respectively (Dotson, 2011).

Gayatri Spivak (2015) employed the concept of epistemic violence to explain the elimination of knowledge of oppressed groups by their oppressors. Epistemic violence can be done by damaging or eliminating the opportunity of an oppressed group to speak or be heard, resulting in epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice, according to Miranda Fricker (2007), may occur as testimonial injustice, or what happens when someone is disregarded or distrusted due to prejudices towards their identity (2007, p.28). A woman who is dehumanized will experience distrust of or contempt for her knowledge, rendering her participation in communicative exchanges denied, discounted, or disparaged, whether the exchanges occur online or offline. Kristie Dotson (2011) elaborates on epistemic violence as an instrument for causing epistemic silencing which can transpire as a single instance, or as a recurring and regular feature of social interactions (2011, p.241). A woman may experience multiple instances of silencing because she has been targeted or

victimized by dehumanization, but the dehumanization of women as an enduring phenomenon targeting all women does support a persistent practice of silencing women in the larger public forum. Dehumanization can result in the silencing of women's voices, their opinions, experiences, and knowledge, affecting the ways they may participate and contribute to the public marketplace of ideas and affecting how others may treat them during direct encounters. Thus, dehumanization of women facilitates epistemic violence against women, having a silencing effect.

Because of the challenges to monitor and regulate SMP and SNS, the extensive volume and reach of dehumanizing content online prioritizes the participation of the dehumanizers and their content over women's freedom to participate in either online or offline social settings. Further, in part due to adaptive algorithms that profile and target receptive audiences, audience exposure to content that dehumanizes women reinforces sex- and gender-based inequalities and reinforces social norms that perpetuate sexualization, sexual aggression, gender-based violence and epistemic exclusion. Social cognition theory suggests that people can form beliefs or attitudes, or learn behaviours through observation, both "direct observation as well as mediated observations" (M.J. Lee et al., 2009, p. 98). When social media environments are fundamentally built upon capitalist notions of viewership and repetitive observation, we can appreciate the role that dehumanization manifested online may have in influencing the beliefs and behaviours of active participants, as well as on inert media consumers who are susceptible to passively accepting or tolerating dehumanizing attitudes.

Building on decades long history within the feminist tradition, the subtle or explicit digital dehumanization of women, directly targeted or generally observed,

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influences the perceptions and informs the appraisals that people make about women as unique individuals and as a collective social group. Thus, dehumanization supports the ongoing oppression of women through the denial of equal epistemic participation, representation, and respect.

4.3 MORAL MATHEMATICAS AND DIGITAL DEHUMANIZATION OF WOMEN

The physical, mental, and epistemological harms of dehumanization constitute moral harms. The cumulative influence of the instantaneity, perpetuity, magnitude of scope, anonymity, and acontextuality of our online experiences makes understanding the embodied, epistemic, and moral significance of our online social landscape imperative. Although there have been opportunities for individuals and groups to unite against injustices, social media environments remain tumultuous locations ruled by relentless exposure and merciless confrontation, reinforcing offline inequalities where members of targeted populations are under-protected, and perpetrators are indemnified against reprimand. Henry & Powell explain that in the online arena, "disinhibition, anonymity, complicity, and impunity operate to diffuse responsibility, blame victims, and deindividualize the problem" (2015, p.760). Further, there is a tolerance or acceptance of online hostility and hate, sustained by the rapidity and copious amounts of aggressive posts, threads, memes, and shares. The sheer magnitude of participation and information contributes to a general ignorance of the harm done by users and to flouted responsibility by platform owners and operators. These features of our online social landscapes perpetuate the dehumanization of women, justifying and legitimizing their victimization, and denying them their own agency while simultaneously making them responsible for

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the agency of others. Feminism, media, and cultural studies scholar Emma A. Jane cautions against our widespread acquiescence to online aggression when she writes, "the notion that online aggression is simply a natural and inevitable part of the cyberscape…is wrong and dangerous in its own way. Harmful agents online are agents, not neutral causal forces" (Jane, 2017, p.81). People who use social media to transmit and encourage the dehumanization of women are harmful agents, even if their own level of harm seems nearly impossible to compute or quantify.

Dehumanizers in cyber space bear the benefit of what Sociologist Majid Yar (2005) has termed a "force multiplier" in online communication spaces. This force multiplier can facilitate a disproportionate and significant negative impact on multiple victims from a minimal effort by the wrongdoer. Yar attributes the significance of impact of online victimization to the breakdown of any spatial-temporal obstacles, the complex connectivity, and the anonymity and deceivability of online identity. These features also assist dehumanizers to harm without obstruction, regardless of time, distance, or other environmental barriers. Dehumanizers can coalesce; with an exponential impact as one offender can dehumanize many individuals, one act can be repeatedly propagated forward, or one individual can lose themselves in an echo chamber of dehumanization while avoiding detection because not only is dehumanization not a demarcated pursuit for moderators, but policy enforcement can be difficult, perhaps impossible. The harm multiplier effect that digital dehumanization carries is significant, and we must consider the moral mathematics and cumulative effects of online dehumanization.

In Reasons and Persons (1984), Philosopher Derek Parfit explains five common errors that we make in assessing the consequences or our actions. Parfit advises that we

make errors in assessing the moral impact, the harms or benefits, of our actions when they involve many people. In other words, Parfit describes five common errors in moral mathematics that lead us to miscalculate, underestimate, ignore or neglect morally significant consequences because there are large numbers of people involved in a situation. Because this chapter is attending to the harms of dehumanization to women and our online environment, the moral mistakes, or the errors we make in assessing the harms of online dehumanization of women, is a particularly important consideration with the social design and format features of SNS and SMP as highlighted earlier.

Parfit argues that in situations that involve many people, the claim that a single choice or action would be inconsequential or would make no difference to the outcome is wildly mistaken and addresses five mistakes we make in calculating consequences. He suggests that the first mistake in moral mathematics is the "Share-of-the-Total View" mistake (1984, p. 67). The Share-of-the-Total View is that the total sum of the good or bad of an outcome is equally distributed to the participants of an act. While there is not space to dissect the entirety of his argument here, Parfit argues this it is a moral mistake to think that the moral value of an outcome can be evenly divided and distributed across the participants of an act. Alternatively, Parfit assesses the moral value of an act to be based on the net benefit or harm, considering costs or losses, and argues that each agent is morally responsible for the net harm or benefit.

It is impossible to quantify the net harms of dehumanization in the social cyberscape, and just as impossible to equally divide the responsibility of harm, but there is a unique mathematical component of online social media that could exponentially increase the net harms of an action. If every person who contributes to the

dehumanization of women is responsible for the net harm of this dehumanization, this can be a massive moral responsibility. The computational rules and algorithms that operate within SNS and SMP stand ready to exponentially increase the net harm of a person's online contribution without that individual even recognizing the extent of the harm they have contributed or the sheer size of the net harm. This means that the net moral harm is not only contributed to by every individual who participated in the dehumanization of women online with every post, like or share, but the net harm that is amassed across geographies and accumulated over time by the mechanisms of online social media. Additionally, every individual who participates, or fails to resist, is equally morally responsible for the net moral harm. This brings us to the second error of moral mathematics.

The second mistake in moral mathematics is the "Ignoring the Effects of Sets of Acts" error (1984, p. 70). This is to say that there is an error in assessing a particular act to be right or wrong based on the effects of one particular act in isolation. Parfit argues that determining the rightness or wrongness of an action in isolation is a mathematical error because actions can occur in sets, where multiple agent actions influence each other or perform together and that the effects of actions cannot be separated. For example, two people can act individually in ways that are not considered to cause harm but taken together their actions can be wrong because together they cause harm. Further, two people can act in a way that produces harm and when together it contributes to an even greater moral harm. Parfit writes, "even if an act harms no one, this act may be wrong because it is one act of a set of acts that together harm other people" (1984, p.70). So, let us consider the Incel community and the second case from Chapter 3. If one person

posted dehumanizing hate speech about women in a men's support group, it may not be considered to have an effect or cause harm on its own. But taken together, the thousands of acts of sexist and gendered dehumanizing speech acts cause significant harm to others. If you contribute to mob violence, you are part of mob violence. Mob violence, to work, requires mobs of people acting together to produce effects they are all (and each) responsible for.

The next errors in moral mathematics to consider in the context of the contemporary dehumanization of women are Ignoring Small Chances, Ignoring Small Effects, and Ignoring Imperceptible Effects. The Ignoring Small Chances mistake (1984, p.73) happens when we ignore a moral impact when we think that an act has a small chance of causing a significant harm or benefit. A case that Parfit uses to highlight why this is a mistake is the nuclear catastrophe case. If we faced a one-in-a-million chance of causing significant harm or benefit to a single individual, we would likely act according to our preferences and ignore the small chance of having a significant moral impact. However, says Parfit, if a nuclear engineer was to design a nuclear reactor that utilized a module with a one-in-a-million chance of failure, it would be wrong for the engineer to ignore that one-in-a-million chance because the consequence of ignoring this chance could be calamitous. Parfit argues that when the consequences could be significant, we should never ignore the small chance of producing the consequence. Additionally, when the consequences of an action could have a significant harm, if the act would be produced repetitively many times, even if there is a small chance of producing that harm, the repetitive nature of the act counters the small chance of producing the harm.

When we consider the moral mistake of Ignoring Small Chances in the context of

dehumanization online, we must consider the repetitive nature of SNS and SMP.

Adaptive algorithms and participant sharing increase the chance that dehumanizing

content will cause harm. For example, consider the Miley Cyrus meme discussed earlier,

perhaps the individual who originally created the image intended it to be humorous and

didn't perceive any wrongdoing. However, when a meme is shared millions of times, it

can (and did) produce a significant harm for the subject in the image, Miss Cyrus.

Additionally, considering the influence of such memes on social norms and attitudes, the

repetitive nature of an act like this can produce harm for women much more generally.

Harmful expressions of dehumanization that are spread online, while taken to have small

chances as individual actions, may produce significant moral harm as a set.   This leads

us to Parfit's fourth and fifth mistakes in moral mathematics.

The fourth and fifth errors in moral mathematics are similar. The fourth error is

ignoring very small effects and the fifth is ignoring imperceptible effects. According to

Parfit, it is a mistake to believe that,

> "If some act has effects on other people that are imperceptible, this act cannot be
> morally wrong *because* it has these effects. An act cannot be wrong because of its
> effects on other people, if none of these people could ever notice any difference.
> Similarly, if some act would have imperceptible effects on other people, these
> effects cannot make this what someone ought to do" (1984, p.75) (emphasis in
> original).

These two mistakes can be considered wrong because if the harm of an act is very small

or imperceptible at an individual level, it may be done in a set together or repeatedly to

produce a significant harm. Parfit uses two important examples to explain the fourth and

fifth mistakes. The first example is that someone could radiate another, and the effect is

imperceptible, until years later when the victim has cancer. Parfit says in this kind of

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case the effect is perceptible, just not immediate, and because there is a separation from time of act and effect, we assume the is no effect and therefore no wrongdoing when it is just a failure to see the effect in a timely manner. The second example that Parfit employs involves a case where there is a hundred men dying from thirst and a thousand individuals could act to add a single drop of water to a bucket that could be used to alleviate the thirst of the men. We might think there is no difference in moral effect from a single drop because it is so small or imperceptible; yet, taken together, these individual actions produce a significant effect.

Parfit argues that small or imperceptible effects can still carry moral weight because they can contribute to a larger moral wrong and because it is not possible to determine the precise point when an effect would move from imperceptible to perceptible. A single meme might be perceived as the smallest of actions, a mere microaggression, but even microaggressions can have an effect when shared many times over. The moral significance that accumulates in this way can be significant. As well, if the meme is shared or observed millions of times, it is impossible to determine when the effect becomes perceptible. This does not mean that individual users can avoid moral responsibility for the moral harm their joint actions have created because as we remember the first mistake, every agent is responsible for the net harm.

Parfit considered the mistakes we make in moral mathematics in terms of sets of acts and accumulated consequences. When we assess the moral harm of dehumanization, we must also consider the moral significance of sets of acts that accumulate over time. Bustamante, Jashnani and Stoudt (2018) develop the concept of 'cumulative dehumanization' and argue that dehumanization carries historical legacies forward

through the "individual and collective bodies and minds." This is true for the

intergenerational traumas of ethnic- or race-based dehumanization, and for the enduring

prejudice these ideologies have maintained. Bustamante, Jashnani, and Stoudt point to

cumulative dehumanization as a recognition of the

> "web of vertical and horizontal, synthetic and dynamic processes, affectively and
> materially interwoven to produce extreme, everyday state-sanctioned
> dehumanization – an ongoing, racialized dehumanization that is fundamentally
> cumulative, both temporally and spatially – with a profusion of consequences
> attached" (2018, p. 2).

The concept of cumulative dehumanization may also be applied to the dehumanization of

women as an ongoing, gendered dehumanization that is cumulative across time and space

and profuse with consequences.

The dehumanization of women, as female members of a natural biological kind or

as a gendered social kind essentialized as an inferior group, perpetuates social legacies of

patriarchy and sex/gender discrimination which have direct and/or indirect consequences

for the victims, the perpetrators, the bystanders, and the social collective. The

dehumanization of women encourages a failure to value the intrinsic worth of all women,

everywhere, and facilitates the ongoing inequality of women. Emma A. Jane explains

that "gendered hate speech online has significant offline consequences. Female targets

suffer socially, psychologically, professionally, financially, and politically" (Misogyny

Online, p. 4). Similarly, I argue that dehumanization of women online carries significant

offline harm. Not only may those women specifically targeted by dehumanization endure

social, psychological, professional, financial, or political consequences, but the humanity

of all women is discounted and disrespected. The dehumanization of women manifested

online normalizes, perpetuates, and legitimizes the long history of women's inequality, a

history that has facilitated the persistence of violence against women and girls, sexual exploitation, sex trafficking and enslavement; a history that still too often denies women equal opportunity and political participation; a history that exploits women and prioritizes the masculine male experience.

Decades of research and analysis of the oppression, exploitation, and objectification of women has led to important conclusions. However, scholarship in the fields of dehumanization and in the ethics of social media is still developing. There has been a persistent neglect of women in the study of dehumanization. Additionally, the continuous and rapid changes that structure digital environments and the perplexing entanglement between our online and offline presence make scholarship in this field challenging. Therefore, the abovementioned harms cannot be assumed exhaustive, and while they may never be fully resolved, determination to the defiance of dehumanization must not be abandoned. I believe that sustained research in these fields will refine my concerns, revealing additional harms specific to women, and uncover harms to other groups within social media environments more generally. Deeper understanding of what dehumanization is, how it can happen, and who it can victimize, will be necessary to form strategies of deterrence and regulation. It may be useful to look to the way legislators and advocates respond to technologically facilitated gender-based violence. Law and technology legal scholar Suzie Dunn (2021) has argued that technologically facilitated abuse *is* violence and the way we conceptualize various kinds of online behaviour as forms of violence allows us to direct attention and resources to their elimination through amending societal norms.

Cyberviolence is the virtual extension of violence, cyberbullying is the online occurrence of bullying, digital stalking is the virtual manifestation of stalking. While it remains unclear if the way we conceptualize dehumanization online will be understood as an extension of dehumanization offline, scholarship does need to advance an approach to dehumanization that is better able to address dehumanization and its range of manifestations in order to prevent it. The elimination of dehumanization will only occur through the amendment of social organization and societal norms that have sustained the phenomena thus far. However, with the rapidly consuming entanglement of humans and our digital spaces, it is of vital importance that we are dedicated to the recognition of the violence and harm that occurs due to on- and offline dehumanization, the ways each may reinforce and sustain the other, and the ways women are harmed by these mutual reinforcing manifestations of on- and offline dehumanization.

We can not only witness and assess the dehumanization of women occurring online based on sex or gender, but additionally we can see manifestations of dehumanization based on race, ethnicity, class, ability, sexuality, religion, political ideology, etc. being shared online. SNS and SMP are social spaces that we need to evaluate. It is essential to develop and employ ethical frameworks to guide our online engagement, and to create mechanisms that deter and inhibit the proliferation of dehumanization in whatever form it appears. The dehumanization of any one of us is a moral problem affecting all of us.

CONCLUSION

All of our humanity is dependent upon recognizing the humanity in others.

—Desmond Tutu, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time*

There are three main conclusions of this thesis. First, the dehumanization of women is a real phenomenon. It is important to develop a theory of dehumanization that recognizes that dehumanization can happen to a plethora of others. Dehumanization is not restricted to racialized others but can occur to anyone, depending on the social conditions and political circumstances, including women. Those targeted by dehumanizers may be more vulnerable depending on the social salience of the essentialized groups that they may be a part of. The examples curated for this thesis reflect the belief or attitude that women are less than human. While David Livingstone Smith provides an important and meaningful contribution with his theoretical conception of dehumanization, his theory denies the dehumanization of an important group, a group that makes up half of humanity. If the goal of a theory of dehumanization is to better explain and prevent the phenomena, then we need a theory that can acknowledge the diversity of potential targets and the complexities, nuances, and intersectional features of manifest dehumanization.

The second conclusion is that the digital environments of social media platforms and social networking sites enable digital communities to develop in ways that contribute to the ease of proliferation and maintenance of dehumanizing attitudes towards women. Social media and social networking sites have influenced the frequency and endurability of manifest dehumanization, allowing expressions of dehumanization to proliferate and reviving an acquiescence to women's inferiority. The sites referred to here are

commonly accessible to anyone with internet access. When we consider these spaces to be locations where dehumanization can flourish, we must also acknowledge that there is likely darker manifestations of dehumanization within the Dark Web. The Dark Web is the digital environment that operates to anonymize participants and host sites for illicit and illegal activity. More research is required to understand the depth and degree to which dehumanization occurs within the Dark Web. Although more research is required, the anonymization built into the structure could certainly lend to the exacerbation of harms discussed in Chapter Four.

The third conclusion of this thesis is that dehumanization of women causes harm, including moral harms, and contributes to the resurgence and endurance of women's inequality and exploitation. The evidence provided suggests that like racial dehumanization, dehumanization of women represents and fosters beliefs and attitudes that certain people are less than human. While the objectification of women is a phenomenon that reduces women to their individual body parts, typically in a sexualized manner, dehumanization of women also occurs in a sexualized manner, often in ways that represent women as disgusting or sinful sexual animals. The dehumanization of women is aimed at a population that faces an enduring prejudice, a prejudice that lends itself to their sustained exploitation and oppression, in addition to the disproportionate frequency of sex- and gender-based violence.

To challenge the dehumanization of women on- and offline, we must collectively, as women, and as men who support women, engage in our social media environments in ways that celebrate the humanity of every woman and all women. We can apply Parfit's moral mathematics in reverse, to contribute to a net benefit of positive on- and offline

engagement, and work to acknowledge and honour the humanity of women as our

mothers, our sisters, our daughters, our friends, and as our teachers, our mentors, and our

leaders. We can demand that online communications platforms enhance monitoring,

regulation, and algorithms that challenge and prevent the spread of dehumanization and

violence against women. We can demand that our governments dedicate time and

resources to these same ends.

FUTURE RESEARCH

While more research needs to be directed at understanding dehumanization and

the harms produced, the feminist tradition and early empirical data point to the

dehumanization of women as facilitating the humiliation, exploitation, oppression,

violence, and sexual violence of women as individuals and women as members of a

biological kind and/or social group. I anticipate future research would reflect that the

dehumanization of women is as cross-cultural as women's oppression and exploitation.

Additionally, looking at the dehumanization of women from an intersectional standpoint

would provide insights into how the dehumanization based on sex- and gender- manifests

or intersects with other important identities. An intersectional approach to a theory of

dehumanization would provide valuable insights into the ways that dehumanization

manifests differently for different individuals or groups in complicated ways. I suspect

that the intersectional dynamics of identity may cause dehumanization to manifest

differently depending on the target, the setting, and the political goals of the

dehumanizers. For example, a Black woman may experience dehumanization based on

both her sex or gender identity and her racial identity while a white woman experiencing

houselessness may be dehumanized based on her sex or gender identity and her class

identity. This will depend on the social environments of the perpetrator and the target

leading to variations in the manifestation of dehumanization. While an intersectional

analysis would be an important academic endeavour, and I wish I had the capacity to

investigate this, the dimensions of project scope are often limiting. It is also likely the

case that an intersectional approach to dehumanization would constitute a major work on

its own that would certainly benefit from multiple researchers from diverse backgrounds

and disciplines. Additionally, this research could be advanced from a variety of

methodological approaches.

In addition to a cross-cultural study of the dehumanization of women, a

genealogical approach would be an interesting endeavour that would trace

dehumanization of women through our institutions and social systems, from the present

into the past. A genealogical or historical study would find interesting connections

between the ways women are dehumanized, as animals and monsters, and the role

dehumanization played in restricting participation in the public realm while producing

submissive or docile female bodies. The dehumanization of women has long been a

political tool, and a genealogical approach would be both interesting and insightful.

Finally, more research needs to be done in order to understand how we can resist

and prevent dehumanization. Research by Zhang et al. (2015) suggests that people

dehumanize others less when they feel more secure and cared for within their

interpersonal relationships and social interactions (see also Haslam and Loughnan, 2016).

This lends support to the importance of strong relationships throughout our hyper social

species and the significance of nurturance - a trait most ascribed to women.

Relationships are important to us, the more secure and loved we feel, the less we want to

harm others. Alternatively, research by Waytz and Epley (2012) suggests that strong social connections with those close to us may cause severe disconnection with others, increasing the likelihood of dehumanization and subsequent aggression towards others. There is substantial opportunity for research to understand how our social relationships can facilitate or impede dehumanization.

It is with sincere hope that this direction of research can implore others, both scholars and non-scholars alike, to actively identify, refuse, and work to protect others from being targeted by dehumanization.

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