

Abusive leadership versus objectifying job features: Factors that influence organizational dehumanization and workers' self-objectification

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Abstract

Recent research has revealed that work often can undermine people's humanness by promoting a view of them as mere objects. In particular, the workers' meta-perceptions of being treated as company resources (i.e., organizational dehumanization) and their self-perceptions of being instrument-like (i.e., self-objectification) could be triggered by several factors. Previous research has identified that abusive supervisors and engaging in objectifying (repetitive, fragmented and other oriented) tasks are two of the main key factors that affect worker's dehumanization. The present project aims to disentangle the extent both factors (perceptions of abusive leadership and performing objectifying tasks) contribute to created perceptions of organizational dehumanization and self-objectification among workers that, ultimately, affects workers job satisfaction. In Study 1 ($N = 208$ workers), we measured the extent perceived abusive supervisors and objectifying job features predicted organizational dehumanization, self-objectification, and job satisfaction. The results indicate that abusive supervisors predicted perceptions of organizational dehumanization and workers self-objectification in a higher extent than objectifying job features, while workers job satisfaction was predicted in a higher extent by objectifying job features. In Study 2 ($N = 141$), we experimentally manipulated the abusive (versus nonabusive) supervisors and the objectifying (versus nonobjectifying) tasks in a laboratory setting. Results also indicated that the abusive supervisor exerts a greater influence than performing objectifying tasks on organizational dehumanization, self-objectification, and job satisfaction. The detrimental effect of an abusive supervisor in comparison with other working conditions on workers' humanness is discussed, and practical implications are highlighted.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Objectification, the view of some-one as some-thing (Nussbaum, 1995), is a pervasive phenomenon that arises in different domains of modern societies. During the last decades, social psychologists analyzed this peculiar form of dehumanization mainly in the sexual realm (e.g., Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). However, objectification deeply permeates another important facet of modern

human beings: the work domain (Volpato & Andrighetto, 2015). Different theoretical and empirical analyses have recently shown that workers are often seen and treated as mere objects (e.g., Andrighetto et al., 2017; Honneth, 2008; Valtorta et al., 2019; Volpato et al., 2017). Given that work serves people to define their identities and social roles (e.g., Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Dovidio et al., 2000), in the last few recent years social psychological and organizational scholars focused their attention on the impact of the

phenomenon on workers. In particular, they analyzed the factors that lead workers to perceive of being treated as a mere resource by their companies and to internalize this objectifying gaze, identifying different triggers. However, previous research has not compared the prediction capability of each factor or the extent to which they interact in undermining the workers' identities and well-being. The present project aims to focus on how two of these specific threats, the perceived abusive leadership style (Tepper, 2000) and the objectifying job features (Baldissarri, Andrighetto et al., 2017) influence how workers perceived the organization treats them (i.e., organizational dehumanization), in what manner they internalize this perception (i.e., self-objectification) and to what extent this, lastly, leads to lowering job satisfaction.

2 | OBJECTIFICATION, ORGANIZATIONAL DEHUMANIZATION AND SELF-OBJECTIFICATION

The tendency to dehumanize others (i.e., denying human traits and characteristics to other human beings) is a pervasive process that has detrimental consequences for those who are victims of this phenomenon (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Indeed, those who are dehumanized meta-perceive the way other people conceive them (i.e., meta-dehumanization, Kteily & Bruneau, 2017) and it can even lead to the internalization of this representation (i.e., self-dehumanize, Bastian & Crimston, 2014). Moreover, dehumanization takes shape in different forms. For example, Haslam (2006) suggests that dehumanization can manifest in a mechanistic (the targets are seen as lacking Human Nature traits, such as warmth or emotional responsiveness, as they were robots) or animalistic (the targets are seen as lacking Human Uniqueness traits, such as civility or rationality, as they were animal) view of others. Furthermore, and more inherent to the present work, dehumanization can transform others into mere objects. According to several scholars (e.g., Nussbaum, 1995; Vaes et al., 2014) objectification consists of perceiving others as instruments for personal purposes and as lacking both the dimension of humanness (see Baldissarri, Valtorta et al., 2017; Haslam et al., 2008; Li et al., 2014). Despite the growing literature in the dehumanization and in the objectification field, specifically related to the sexual realm, social researchers have only recently begun to explore this process in the work sphere.

In the workplace, workers are especially vulnerable to be treated as instruments and, uniquely, valued by their labor force, without considering their fundamental needs as human beings (Bell & Khoury, 2011, 2016; Christoff, 2014; Demoulin et al., 2020; Volpato et al., 2017). In particular, the meta-perception of being considered a tool, to reach the company goals, has been identified in the literature by using different labels that refers to two different sources (i.e., supervisors and organizations). For instance, Baldissarri and colleagues (2014) analyzed the phenomenon as the perception of being objectified by superiors, while a similar process has been called and systematized by other authors as organizational dehumanization

(e.g., Bell & Khoury, 2011; Caesens et al., 2017) with a focus of being objectified by the whole organization. Specifically, organizational dehumanization refers to the meta-perception the workers have about being objectified as a mere interchangeable resource within their organizations (Caesens et al., 2017). This process has been associated with decreased well-being (i.e., lower satisfaction, higher emotional exhaustion, higher psychosomatic strain) or higher turnover intentions among employees (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2019; Caesens et al., 2017; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2018, 2020).

In addition to this meta-dehumanized perception that workers can identify within their companies (from here on out called organizational dehumanization), previous research has also analyzed the self-dehumanizing facet of this phenomenon (i.e., the tendency to internalize these objectifying perceptions). This process is known as self-objectification, and it reflects the internal workers' tendency to perceive themselves as closer to instruments than to human beings (e.g., Baldissarri et al., 2014). As all other kinds of dehumanization, the meta-perception of being objectified is strictly related to this objectifying self-dehumanization. As well explained by the objectification theory that analyzed this process in the sexual domain, self-definition is based on the looking-glass self-process (Cooley, 1902). This theory proposed that the self is a social construction depending on how others see us. Therefore, perceiving to being objectified has the detrimental consequence of leading people to internalize this objectifying gaze, that is to self-objectify (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This process has been supported also by the reification theoretical analysis (e.g., Honneth, 2008; Islam, 2012) and by empirical findings in social psychological field (Baldissarri & Andrighetto, 2021; Baldissarri et al., 2014). From this process, negative consequences can arise for workers, such as dismissing free will, increasing conforming behaviours or worsening task engagement and performance (e.g., Andrighetto et al., 2018; Baldissarri, Andrighetto, et al., 2017; Baldissarri and Andrighetto, 2021).

In short, work environments may trigger workers' perceptions of being dehumanized in an objectifying way by the company (i.e., meta-dehumanization) that could, potentially, lead to workers' self-definition as instruments (i.e., self-dehumanization). Moreover, these objectifying processes can arise as a consequence of many factors, from the status associated with a position (Baldissarri et al., 2014), the supervisors' emotional distance displayed toward subordinates (Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018), the leadership style that workers identify in their supervisors (Caesens et al., 2019), the type of tasks that they perform in their daily routines (Baldissarri, Andrighetto, et al., 2017; Bell & Khoury, 2011) or the working environments (e.g., Taskin et al., 2019). These factors did not only lead workers to perceive that they were treated as resources by their companies or to internalize the perception of themselves as objects, but also influenced workers well-being and working satisfaction (e.g., Caesens et al., 2017, 2019). In the present study, we aim to focus on two of the previously addressed factors: the type of leadership (Caesens et al., 2019) and the type of tasks (Baldissarri, Andrighetto, et al., 2017) that workers perform as triggers of organizational dehumanization and self-objectification.

3 | ABUSIVE LEADERSHIP STYLE AND OBJECTIFYING JOB FEATURES

As previously stated, among the conditions that could affect the subjective (e.g., well-being) and objective (e.g., performance) condition of workers, previous research has highlighted the role of two variables: the perceived leadership style of supervisors and the objective conditions or features in which workers perform their daily routines. As for the perceived leadership style, previous research focused on the role of abusive supervisors as a trigger for organizational dehumanization (Caesens et al., 2019). Specifically, perceiving a supervisor engaging in behavior, such as ridiculing employees, denigrating them, or blaming them for the supervisor's wrongdoings (Einarsen et al., 2007; Tepper, 2000), has a clear negative impact on workers. Caesens and colleagues (2019) confirmed abusive leadership leads to negative impacts on different variables, including decreased job satisfaction (e.g., Tepper, 2000). Furthermore, they found this relationship can be explained by increased organizational dehumanization. According to the authors, when workers are frequently abused by their supervisors, they could feel treated like less than human and could shift these negative perceptions partly to the organization. Indeed, the authors showed the more abusive the leadership, the higher the perception of being treated as an object by the organization, which in turn leads to decreased job satisfaction, given that the basic psychological needs of workers are thwarted in this process (Caesens et al., 2019).

Regarding the objectifying job features, Baldissarri, Andrighetto and colleagues (2017) showed that performing a manual or a computer task characterized by repetitiveness—the task requires the same gestures using the same simple skills—fragmentation—the task refers only to a single part of an entire process—and other-direction—the control of work pace is directed by external sources and not by the individual—leads to increased self-objectification.

Nevertheless, until now, as far as we know, no research has tried to compare these two triggering factors in a unique model. The only exception is provided by Baldissarri et al. (2019), who, through a correlational study, tested the objectifying job features and the perceived objectification (in term of meta-perception of being objectified by superiors, therefore slightly different from organizational dehumanization) as independent predictors of self-objectification. The two factors—job features and perceived objectification—when considered together, maintained a specific role in increasing self-objectification. In the present paper, we aimed to merge previous literature on objectification in the work domain to further expand the research in different ways.

First, we aimed at merging results on abusive leadership, organizational dehumanization, self-objectification, and job satisfaction. Indeed, research found that abusive leadership has a negative impact on job satisfaction via organizational dehumanization (Caesens et al., 2019). At the same time, the meta-perception of being objectified is related to an increase in self-perception of being instrument-like (Baldissarri et al., 2014, 2019). Even if these latter results focus on the meta-perception of being objectified by superiors, it is strictly plausible that similar findings can be expected when we consider the meta-perception of being objectified by the companies, as they both are

meta-dehumanizing processes in which the workers experience a similar objectifying gaze that can be internalized (i.e., they self-objectify). Given that these objectifying self-perceptions, when performing their daily routines, clearly does not fulfill the basic needs of self-esteem and social recognition expected to find in one's work, it is plausible that self-objectification could contribute to explain why abusive leadership and organizational dehumanization leads to decreased job satisfaction. Therefore, we hypothesized a process in which abusive leadership undermines job satisfaction via increased organizational dehumanization and, in turn, higher perceptions of self-objectification.

Second, to compare the prediction capability of abusive leadership with other factors, we wanted to introduce in the process the features of the job performed by workers. The relationship between objectifying job features and self-objectification has already been established by previous research (e.g., Baldissarri, Andrighetto, et al., 2017). Furthermore, as already suggested by previous analysis, performing this kind of job and experiencing abusive leadership fails to fulfill the worker's basic needs, potentially undermining their job satisfaction. Therefore, we also hypothesized a relationship between objectifying job features and decreased job satisfaction.

Finally, we decided to consider the relationship between objectifying job features and the perception of being objectified in a different way compared to past research. Indeed, Baldissarri and colleagues (2019) treated these two factors as autonomous same level predictors of self-objectification. However, it is plausible that being asked to perform an objectifying task can influence the meta-perception of being considered a mere object by others (supervisors and organization). Correlations reported in Baldissarri and colleagues (2019) suggested a relationship between the two factors can be supported. For this reason, we decided to consider job features at the same level of abusive leadership, with the final hypothesis that the two factors can increase the meta-perception of being objectified by the organization (i.e., organizational dehumanization), which should lead to increased self-objectification and, in turn, to decreased job satisfaction.

In sum, we aimed to understand to what extent factors associated with the perceived abusive leadership style of the direct supervisor compared with the type of task that workers perform in their daily routines, affect worker's satisfaction with the working position, through organizational dehumanization and self-objectification. Data and materials can be found online (https://osf.io/xket4/?view_only=6a3e03ab605047eba0c6abafbf069ac6).

4 | STUDY 1

The present study aims to explore which aspects of the working conditions predicts meta-perceptions of dehumanization and self-dehumanization among workers. To do so, we rely on the measures of dehumanization created for this specific sphere (e.g., organizational dehumanization and self-objectification). Specifically, we wanted to compare the extent to which the perceived abusive supervision and the objectifying job features predict organizational dehumanization (Hypothesis 1a), worker's self-objectification (Hypothesis 1b), and

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Abusive leadership	1.58 (.66)	–	.01	.40*	.35*	–.21*
2. Objectifying job features	2.82 (1.52)		–	.05	.16*	–.32*
3. Organizational dehumanization	2.41 (.86)			–	.46*	–.30*
4. Self-objectification	–3.56 (2.71)				–	–.37*
5. Job satisfaction	5.37 (1.69)					–

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .001$.

job satisfaction (Hypothesis 1c). Moreover, we explored if the possible relationship between abusive supervision and job satisfaction will be serially mediated by organizational dehumanization (mediator 1) and self-objectification (mediator 2; Hypothesis 2), and if the possible relationship between objectifying job features and job satisfaction is also mediated by organizational dehumanization (mediator 1) and self-objectification (mediator 2; Hypothesis 3). Preregistration can be found online (https://osf.io/3xnfz/?view_only=874bdf16507f49cb8b9191823fe81b56).

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants and procedure

Participants were blue-collar workers from three factories based in an industrial city in the north of Mexico. Sample size was computed for a small-medium effect size (two predictors, 95% power, $\alpha = .05$, $f^2 = .10$, minimum $N = 158$) by using G-Power analysis (Faul et al., 2009). The final sample was composed of 208 workers (94 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 31.29$, $SD = 10.71$). Workers were asked to volunteer in a study about their working conditions in exchange for participation in a raffle (2,000 MXN). Once they agreed to participate, they were presented with the following measures (the order of the abusive leadership and objectifying job task features were counterbalanced):

4.1.2 | Abusive leadership

To measure employees' perceptions of abusive supervision participants answered 15 items (e.g., "My supervisor ridicules me"; $\alpha = .90$) from Tepper (2000). Participants indicated the extent their supervisor engages in different attitudes and behaviours from 1 (*I cannot remember him/her ever using this behavior with me*) to 5 (*He/she uses this behavior very often with me*).

4.1.3 | Objectifying job features

Workers' perceptions of their positions as repetitive, fragmented, and other-oriented were measured by using four items (e.g., "The job is arranged so that I have the chance to do an entire piece of work

from beginning to end"; $\alpha = .74$) from the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Answers were provided from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*).¹

4.1.4 | Organizational dehumanization

Employees' perceptions of being dehumanized by the organization were measured by using 11 items (e.g., "My organization considers me as a number"; $\alpha = .83$) from Caesens et al., (2017). Participants indicated the extent to which they believed the organization considered them a resource from 1 (*nothing frequently*) to 5 (*very frequently*).

4.1.5 | Self-objectification

Self-dehumanization, as being instrument-like (versus human-like), was measured by asking participants the extent to which they perceived themselves similar to instruments (five items: e.g., machine, object; $\alpha = .84$) and humans (three items: e.g., human being, person; $\alpha = .78$) when performing their daily tasks within the company (Baldissarri et al., 2019).² A self-objectification score was computed by subtracting instrument scores from human scores (higher scores meant more self-objectification).

4.1.6 | Job satisfaction

Employees' satisfaction with their current positions was measured by using four items (e.g., "All in all, I am very satisfied with my current job"; $\alpha = .86$) from Eisenberger et al. (1997). Answers were provided from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*).

Finally, participants answered demographic information (gender, age, nationality, and language) and provided some details of their positions (years in the company, working hours, etc.). This information was included with exploratory purposes and can be found online (Supplementary Materials).

¹Two items ("My job requires me to use a number of complex or high-level skills" and "My job is quite simple and repetitive") were excluded because they lowered the reliability.

²Two items ("Individuals" and "Subjects") were excluded from the human scores because they lowered the reliability. This might be due to linguistic differences from the original language in which the scale was created.

TABLE 1 Descriptive analysis and correlations between the measures (Study 1)

TABLE 2 Multiple regression analysis of abusive leadership and objectifying job features in the variables included in study 1

	Organizational dehumanization		Self-objectification		Job satisfaction	
	β (SE)	95% CI	β (SE)	95% CI	β (SE)	95% CI
Abusive leadership	.39 (.08) [*]	[.35; .68]	.35 (.27) [†]	[.91; 1.9]	-.21 (.17) [*]	[-.86; -.21]
Job features	.03 (.04)	[-.05; .10]	.16 (.12) [*]	[.06; .52]	-.31 (.07) [*]	[-.49; -.20]

Note: Coefficients are standardized.

Abbreviation: CI, confidence interval.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .001$.

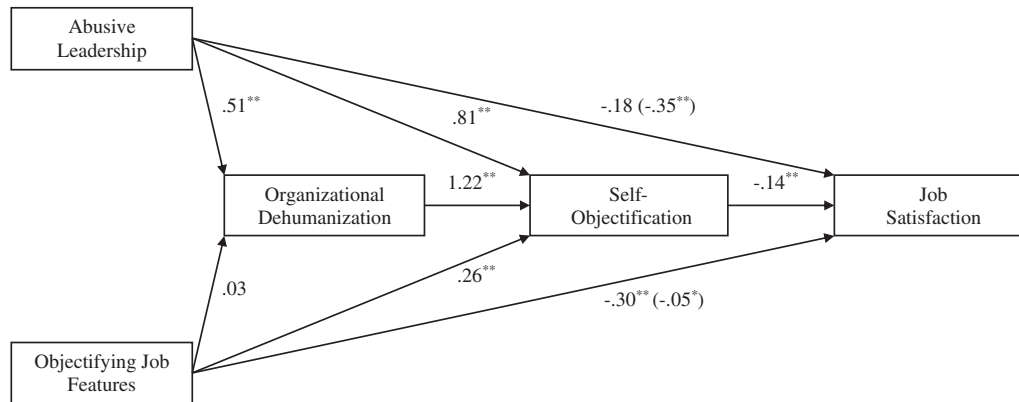


FIGURE 1 Mediation analysis of organizational dehumanization and self-objectification on the relationship between abusive leadership/objectifying job features and job satisfaction in Study 1. Total effects are next to the brackets, and direct effects are in the brackets. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$

4.2 | Results

First, descriptive analyses and correlations were computed (Table 1).³ Results indicated abusive leadership is positively related to organizational dehumanization and self-objectification, and it is negatively related to job satisfaction. Similar results were obtained for the objectifying job features, with the exception of organizational dehumanization that seems to not be related to this factor. Moreover, the predictor variables, leadership, and objectifying job features, seem to not be related to each other.

Second, we computed three multiple regression analyses to compare the capability of predicting abusive leadership and objectifying job features (Table 2). Results support our hypotheses 1a to 1c, as, at least, one variable predicted organizational dehumanization, self-objectification, and job satisfaction. Self-objectification and job satisfaction are predicted by the leadership style and the objectifying features of the task. Abusive leadership seems to have a greater impact on self-objectification than objectifying job features, while this latter factor seems to have a greater impact on job satisfaction (see supplementary analyses for the comparison of R^2 values). However, the perceived organizational dehumanization is uniquely predicted

by the abusive leadership style, while, as anticipated by correlations, objectifying job features do not have an impact on the perception of being dehumanized by the organization.

Third, in order to identify the relationships among all the variables included in the study and to test Hypotheses 2 and 3, we computed sequential mediational analysis (PROCESS model 6, bootstrapping 5,000 samples, 95% CI; Hayes, 2018; Figure 1) For both the studies, we performed Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the items related to the serial mediators (organizational dehumanization and self-objectification) considered in the models. CFA confirmed the expected factors structure with acceptable model fit in both the studies. See Supplementary Materials for further information.⁴ The results confirmed abusive leadership was associated with increased organizational dehumanization, $b = 5.14$, $SE = .08$, $t(202) = 6.12$, $p < .001$, while objectifying job features was not related to this variable, $b = .03$, $SE = .36$, $t(202) = 0.72$, $p = .470$. In turn, the increased organizational dehumanization was associated with increased self-objectification, $b = 1.22$, $SE = .21$, $t(201) = 5.80$, $p < .001$. In this step, leadership style, $b = .81$, $SE = .27$, $t(201) = 2.95$, $p = .004$, and objectifying job features, $b = .26$, $SE = .11$, $t(202) = 2.42$, $p = .016$, maintain a direct effect on self-objectification. Finally, the increased self-objectification was

³Given the high correlations among some of variables, we controlled for potential multicollinearity issues. The Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) did not signal any critical value, all VIFs <1.43 in Study 1 and VIFs <3.37 in Study 2.

⁴For both the studies, we performed Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the items related to the serial mediators (organizational dehumanization and self-objectification) considered in the models. CFA confirmed the expected factors structure with acceptable model fit in both the studies. See supplementary materials for further information.

associated with a decreased job satisfaction, $b = -.14$, $SE = .04$, $t(200) = -3.20$, $p = .002$. In this step, the objectifying job features, $b = -.30$, $SE = .07$, $t(200) = 4.23$, $p < .001$, still had an effect on job satisfaction. Crucially, and supporting Hypothesis 2, the indirect effect of abusive leadership on decreased job satisfaction, via organizational dehumanization and self-objectification, was significant: $a*b*c = -.09$, 95% CI $[-.18, -.03]$. In line with the regression results, Hypothesis 3 was not confirmed: the indirect effect of the objectifying job features, considering the two hypothesized mediators, was not significant, $a*b*c = -.01$, 95% CI $[-.02, .01]$. However, the indirect effect of objectifying job features on job satisfaction via self-objectification was significant, $a*b = -.04$, 95% CI $[-.08, -.01]$, indicating the process underlining the effect of objectifying job features on job satisfaction can be explained by increased self-objectification.^{5,6}

4.3 | Discussion

The present study highlights perceived abusive supervision and objectifying job features may not exert the same influence on the workers. Specifically, it seems a supervisor who engages in practices that humiliate workers has a greater association with organizational dehumanization (i.e., meta perceptions of dehumanization) and self-objectification (workers self-dehumanization). These results also indicated the leadership style of the supervisor and the type of task predict worker satisfaction; however, the latter factor is a greater predictor of job satisfaction.

Even when previous literature identifies both factors could potentially predict the variables, the higher contribution of the abusive supervisor might in part be due to the explicit and blatant nature of the abusive leadership style. In this sense, we should acknowledge this scale reflects extremely negative behaviours or attitudes from a supervisor that could be considered dehumanizing per se (e.g., ridiculing, yelling; Renger et al., 2016). However, even when performing objectifying job features might lead to self-objectification (Baldissarri et al., 2019), these types of tasks are not inherently humiliating. Thus, the extreme negative valence of the abusive supervisor could be dismissing the influence variable of performing objectifying tasks in the daily routine.

Moreover, we identified a sequential indirect effect of organizational dehumanization and self-objectification in the relationship between abusive leadership and job satisfaction but not in the relationship between objectifying job features and job satisfaction. This lack of indirect effect on the second case seems to be due to the lack of relation between the type of task that workers perform and the

workers' perceptions of being considered a tool by their companies. These results indicate how leadership style and type of task could be linked to less job satisfaction but follow different paths. While leadership style predicted people feel others dehumanize them and, thus, internalize this objectification, the performance of repetitive, fragmented, and other-directed tasks could directly predict workers to self-objectify and, thus, lower their job satisfaction without the need to perceive the companies treat them as tools for their own means.

Despite the different paths these two factors follow, both factors have serious implications for workers. However, these conclusions are based only on correlational data. To increase the robustness of this pattern of results, we conducted an experimental study.

5 | STUDY 2

In this study, we aimed to experimentally confirm the specific influence that abusive leadership and objectifying job features exert on organizational dehumanization (perceptions of meta-dehumanization), self-objectification (workers self-dehumanization), and job satisfaction. To achieve this aim, we created a work simulation in which the leadership style and the work activity were manipulated. Specifically, we involved a confederate that, during the activity, treated the participants in an abusive versus nonabusive way, depending on the condition. Furthermore, in order to manipulate the objectifying job features, we created a manual construction task that allowed us to manipulate the objectifying versus nonobjectifying job features in the laboratory. Based on previous findings, we expected abusive (versus nonabusive) leadership, more than the objectifying task (versus nonobjectifying), would worsen how participants perceived they are treated by others as a resource (i.e., organizational dehumanization, Hypothesis 1a) and how they define themselves as instruments (i.e., self-objectification, Hypothesis 1b). Moreover, we expected the interplay between abusive (versus nonabusive) leadership and the objectifying task (versus nonobjectifying) would reduce the extent participants were satisfied with their positions (i.e., job satisfaction, Hypothesis 1c). Finally, we wanted to confirm if organizational dehumanization and self-objectification not only mediated the relationship between leadership style (abusive = 1, nonabusive = 0) and job satisfaction (mediation 1, Hypothesis 2) but also if these variables (organizational dehumanization and self-objectification) serially mediated the relationship between the type of task (objectifying = 1, nonobjectifying = 0) and job satisfaction (mediation 2, Hypothesis 3). Preregistration can be found online (https://osf.io/y529t/?view_only=138bded2ae7c475a85e3cf72bd2a90f).

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Pilot studies

In order to develop the materials for implementing the manipulations we carried out two pilot studies.

⁵As recommended by Becker (2005) and Becker et al. (2016), analyses were performed with and without the sociodemographic variables (age, gender, nationality, years in the company, seniority, working hours, contract, and rotation). Given that the results were similar to those obtained without these variables, we reported the results without the sociodemographic variables to decrease the models' complexity (for a similar procedure, see Caesens et al., 2017).

⁶We rule out alternative sequential mediational analysis by testing other models. This information can be found in the supplementary materials.

TABLE 3 Abusive and nonabusive sentences and behaviours from a supervisor (pilot study)

Abusive sentences	Nonabusive sentences
I think you are the slowest person to have done this task	I think you are doing better than most people. Very good job
I think you are a bit useless. You are incompetent for this type of tasks	I think you are good at this. You have the skill for this task
When I tell the others how bad you are doing, they will be impressed	When I tell the other supervisors how well you have done, they will be surprised
When I tell the other supervisors that you have not been able to do better, we will laugh a lot	Congratulations! You are doing better than the rest of your classmates
You should be working faster. I do not think you are trying hard enough	This is a demanding task, but you are doing well. Keep going!
You should do it faster. You are very slow	I am impressed with the work you are doing. You are doing very well
The task is quite simple. I cannot understand why you are going so slowly	I will tell the other supervisors how well you are doing
You are stupid. I do not see that you are progressing on the task	You are doing well. You are very good at this task
Even a child could do it faster	I would like to tell you that you are doing very well
Do not make any mistakes or everything will go wrong	Do not worry if you make mistakes. Everything can be corrected
I do not want to hear you during all of work. Do not talk to me while you work	You are undoubtedly one of the best workers who have gone through this task
I do not want to look bad. If this does not work out, I will say it is your fault	If the task does not work out, do not worry. I assume full responsibility for the results
I am going to tell the other supervisors how bad you are doing	If you have any comments or questions about the work, do not hesitate to ask me
Pay attention to not make the same mistakes over and over again	Please focus on your work so you can do better
Abusive behaviours	Nonabusive behaviours
Remains silent after you ask a question or express doubt	Answers all your questions
Ignores you because he/she is focused on his/her phone	Cares about your well-being during the task (e.g., offers you water)
Does not call you by your name but by your position	Addresses you by your name
Complains because it took you too long to do the task instead of thanking you	Thank you when you finish your task

Note: These are the translated sentences and behaviours. The originals (in Spanish) can be found in the Supplementary Materials.

Abusive and nonabusive sentences and behaviours from the supervisor

A pilot study was conducted to select abusive and nonabusive sentences and behaviours from a supervisor (Table 3). A total of 68 participants (43 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 26.35$, $SD = 7.48$) rated the extent 28 sentences—14 abusive sentences (e.g., “Pay attention to not make the same mistakes over and over again”; $\alpha = .84$) and 14 nonabusive sentences (e.g., “This is a demanding task, but you are doing well. Keep going!”; $\alpha = .60$)—and eight behaviours—four abusive behaviours (e.g., “Complains because it took you too long to do the task instead of thanking you”; $\alpha = .75$) and four nonabusive behaviours (e.g., “Thanks you when you finish your task”; $\alpha = .80$)—that came from a direct supervisor were perceived as abusive from 1 (*not at all abusive*) to 7 (*completely abusive*). Expected differences were found: Abusive sentences ($M = 5.44$, $SD = .92$) were perceived as more abusive than nonabusive sentences ($M = 1.50$, $SD = .42$), $t(67) = 37.06$, $p < .001$, *Hedges' g* = 5.48. Moreover, abusive behaviours ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.36$) were also perceived as more abusive than nonabusive behaviours ($M = 1.13$, $SD = .43$), $t(67) = 21.46$, $p < .001$, *Hedges' g* = 3.80.

Objectifying and nonobjectifying task

To simulate the objectifying job features (versus nonobjectifying) in a controlled context, we created a construction task (Baldissarri et al., 2019). Specifically, a total of 61 participants (40 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.29$, $SD = 5.01$) were randomly assigned to an objectifying task or to a nonobjectifying task. In the objectifying condition, participants were required to assemble small square metal pieces by using a set of nuts, washers, and screws; while in the nonobjectifying condition, participants used the same pieces to assemble a creative figure of their choice (see Supplementary Materials). Further, in the objectifying condition participants were told that they will perform uniquely a part of the whole task (the pieces he/she will assemble will be used for another purpose), while in the nonobjectifying condition participants were told to create a figure from the beginning to the end. In both conditions, participants performed the task for 15 min. A timer on a screen displays the remaining time. In the objectifying condition, participants were told that they need to assemble as many pieces as they can, in the nonobjectifying condition participants were told that they can use the whole session to prepare their figure. Participants answered six items on the objectifying task (e.g.,

"The task is quite simple and repetitive once you understand the instructions" or "The tasks allow me to have freedom and independence in the way that I build the pieces" (reverse); $\alpha = .69$; Hackman & Oldham, 1975) that were slightly adapted from the previous study to the experimental context. The answers were from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*). The results indicated the objectifying task ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.28$) was perceived as more objectifying than the nonobjectifying task ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.14$), $t(59) = 4.83$, $p < .001$, $Hedges' g = 1.22$, confirming the usefulness of the procedure.

5.1.2 | Participants for the main study

Participants for this study were students from a north Mexican university who volunteered in exchange for inclusion in a raffle (2,000 MXN). We calculated the sample size for a medium effect size (80% power, $\alpha = .05$, $f^2 = .25$, minimum $N = 128$; Faul et al., 2009). The final sample was composed of 141 participants (96 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 19.81$, $SD = 1.71$), of which 19.9% were currently working (see Supplementary Materials).

5.1.3 | Procedure for the main study

We asked participants to volunteer in the main study that was approved by the ethics committee. In this study, we tried to simulate a labor setting similar to the ones that the workers face in their daily routine. For this reason, we used role playing in which one participant acted as an employee and performed the construction task for 15 min (i.e., objectifying or nonobjectifying task) while another participant (a confederate of ours) acted as the supervisor (i.e., abusive or nonabusive) during the time the employee was performing the task.

Specifically, when participants came to the lab, another student was already waiting there (confederate). Once both participants were in the lab with us, we told the recruited participants that they were assigned to the employee role and that people in the employee role would uniquely participate one time in the task. We also explained that the participant recruited as a supervisor (confederate) had participated in the role playing a few times, so she had some experience supervising employees. Once both participants understood the general guidelines of the task, we provided specific instructions for each role. We asked the employee to sit at a table with a poster labeled *employee* and a box with the materials and a computer. Then the participant was to focus on a construction task for 15 min (a timer on a screen signaled the remaining time), answer questions about the task they did, and evaluate the supervisor's behavior. We provided the same instructions out loud to the supervisor: We asked her to sit at a table labeled *supervisor*, where she would also find a computer. We also asked her, out loud, to focus on the supervisor's role while the participants were performing the task and then to answer questions evaluating the employee's performance. Moreover, we told the employee (participant) that he or she would be part of a raffle (2,000 MXN) for volunteering for the task and loudly told

the supervisor (confederate) that she would receive higher or lower compensation based on the employee's performance. The supervisor (confederate) was a female student who was trained to perform, randomly, the abusive or a nonabusive supervisor style by using the sentences and behaviours that we developed in the pilot study. She performed the role according to an indication that appeared on her computer. The compensation for her participation was not related to the employee's performance. She received 10,000 MXN and course credits for her contribution.

The role playing started the exact moment the researcher left the room, and the confederate had instructions to start performing her role as abusive or nonabusive. She interacted a minimum of five times with each participant during the 15 min the construction task lasted. Once the time was up, we came back into the room. At this moment, we asked the employee and the supervisor to answer some questions about the role playing in which they had participated. The participants who acted as employees answered the following measures:

Manipulation checks

The participants ranked three questions regarding the abusive (or nonabusive) behavior of the supervisor (e.g., "The supervisor ridiculed me during the task"; $\alpha = .75$) and three questions about the objectifying (or nonobjectifying) task they performed (e.g., "The task is quite simple and repetitive once you understand the instructions"; $\alpha = .70$) from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*).⁷

Organizational dehumanization, self-objectification, and job satisfaction

We included the same measures, slightly adapted to the experimental context, of organizational dehumanization (11 items; e.g., "If my work in the dynamic could be done by a machine or a robot"; $\alpha = .94$), self-objectification (five instrument words, $\alpha = .94$); and five human words, $\alpha = .884$), and job satisfaction (four items, e.g., "I am very satisfied with the dynamics in which I just participated"; $\alpha = .91$) from the previous study.

Additionally, we included demographic information (gender, age, nationality, and language) and questions related to their current job (e.g., years in the company, working hours). Finally, we fully debriefed the volunteers, informing them about our goal for the study and thanking them for participating, and the confederate apologized for her behavior.

5.2 | Results

First, our results confirmed the manipulations' effectiveness: Participants perceived the supervisor as more abusive in the abusive condition ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.68$) than in the nonabusive condition

⁷One item ("The task allows me to completely finish the construction that I have begun (i.e., at the end of the task I have constructed a complex figure with the pieces or, on the contrary, I have simply made many times a simple square piece") was excluded because it lowered the reliability.

($M = 1.54$, $SD = .86$), $t(139) = 10.24$, $p < .001$, $Hedges' g = 1.72$. Moreover, they also perceived the objectifying task as more objectifying ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.61$) than the nonobjectifying task ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.97$), $t(139) = 5.18$, $p < .001$, $Hedges' g = .87$; thus, this manipulation was also successful. Then, we computed correlations between the study variables (Table 4)^{3,4}. As shown in Table 4, the more the participants perceived being dehumanized by the supervisor, the more they self-objectified, and the less they felt satisfied with the task.

Second, we computed 2 (Leadership style: abusive versus non-abusive) \times 2 (Type of task: objectifying versus nonobjectifying) univariate ANOVAs to analyze the effect of the between-subjects factors (leadership and task) on organizational dehumanization, self-objectification, and job satisfaction, controlling by the perceived credibility of the confederate in the analysis. Most comparisons showed a similar pattern. The leadership style factor had an influence on organizational dehumanization, $F(1, 136) = 317.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .70$, self-objectification, $F(1, 136) = 150.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .52$, and satisfaction with the dynamic, $F(1, 136) = 69.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .34$. In contrast, the objectifying task factor, or the interaction between leadership style and objectifying task, did not exert an influence on organizational dehumanization (Type of task: $F(1, 136) = 1.72$, $p = .192$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$; Interaction: $F(1, 136) = .09$, $p = .759$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$), self-objectification (Type of task: $F(1, 136) = .58$, $p = .448$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$; Interaction: $F(1, 136) = 1.35$, $p = .248$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$), and job satisfaction (Type of task: $F(1, 136) = .24$, $p = .623$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$; Interaction: $F(1, 136) = .54$, $p = .461$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$). Our confederate's performance did not show a significant effect on any of the previous analyses. In short, the results from these analyses indicated that supervisor

behaviours exert greater influence on organizational dehumanization and self-objectification than the influence of the objectifying task does (in line with Hypotheses 1a and 1b), and those behaviours exert greater influence on job satisfaction (as opposed to Hypothesis 1c). Thus, our results indicated that when considered together, the leadership style exerts more influence on job satisfaction than the characteristics of the task.

Third, we computed a sequential mediational analysis (PROCESS model 6, bootstrapping 5,000 samples, 95% CI; Hayes, 2018) to test if organizational dehumanization and self-objectification serially mediated (a) the relationship between leadership style (abusive = 1, nonabusive = 0) and job satisfaction or (b) the relationship between the type of task (objectifying = 1, nonobjectifying = 0) and job satisfaction (sequential mediation 2). Our confederate's performance was also included as a covariate. As already suggested by ANOVA and the previous study, the type of task was not associated with organizational dehumanization, $b = .22$, $SE = .16$, $t(137) = 1.32$, $p = 1.88$. Instead, abusive leadership was associated with an increased perception of being dehumanized by the organization, $b = 2.99$, $SE = .17$, $t(137) = 17.87$, $p < .001$. In turn, the increased organizational dehumanization was associated with increased self-objectification, $b = 1.40$, $SE = .16$, $t(136) = 8.98$, $p < .001$. However, in this model, the increased self-objectification was not associated with decreased job satisfaction, $b = -.04$, $SE = .07$, $t(135) = -.54$, $p = .590$, while organizational dehumanization had an effect on this latter variable, $b = -.45$, $SE = .16$, $t(135) = -2.90$, $p = .004$. Therefore, our results indicated that there was not a sequential significant indirect effect of the type of task (objectifying = 1, nonobjectifying = 0) on job satisfaction via organizational dehumanization and self-objectification, $a^*b^*c = -.01$, 95% CI $[-.08; .04]$, nor was there a sequential significant indirect effect of leadership style (abusive = 1, nonabusive = 0) on job satisfaction via organizational objectification and self-objectification, $a^*b^*c = -.15$, 95% CI $[-.80; .41]$ (Hypotheses 2 and 3; Figure 2). Nevertheless, the indirect effect of leadership style on job satisfaction via organizational dehumanization was significant, $a^*b = -1.34$, 95% CI $[-2.26, -.41]$, indicating that leadership

TABLE 4 Correlations between the measures (study 2)

	1	2	3
Organizational dehumanization	-	.84*	-.64*
Self-objectification		-	-.56*
Job satisfaction			-

* $p \leq .001$.

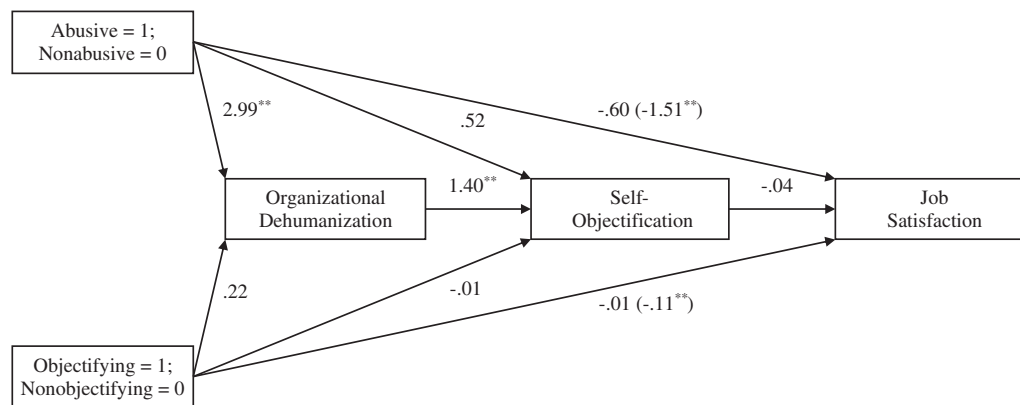


FIGURE 2 Mediation analysis of organizational dehumanization and self-objectification on the relationship between abusive leadership/objectifying job features and job satisfaction in Study 2. Total effects are next to the brackets, and direct effects are in the brackets. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$

style did have an effect on worker's satisfaction through organizational dehumanization.^{5,6}

Finally, we ran a simple mediational analysis (Model 4) to test for additional indirect effects. Our results this time highlighted an indirect effect of leadership on job satisfaction via self-objectification, $a*b = -.74$, 95% CI [-1.47, -.19], but also confirmed that leadership style led to self-objectification via organizational dehumanization, $a*b = 4.21$, 95% CI [3.16, 5.47], see Supplementary Materials.

5.3 | Discussion

This study seems to indicate that an abusive (versus nonabusive) supervisor has a greater impact on the variables that we studied (Caesens et al., 2019) than the type of task that participants had to perform (Baldissarri et al., 2019). As we have mentioned before, the presence of such a negative leadership style seems to undermine the negative effects that performing an objectifying task has on participants. This study indicates that performing an objectifying task does not have a clear effect on the present findings. We should acknowledge that this finding does not necessarily contradict previous literature highlighting the detrimental psychological consequences of performing an objectifying task (Baldissarri, Andriuguetto, et al., 2017). In our study, it might be possible that the constant (positive or negative) interactions between the supervisor and employee during the 15 min of the experiment could have undermined the effect that performing an objectifying or nonobjectifying task had on the participants. This does not necessarily mean that performing a objectifying task does not lead to workers' self-objectification (regarding this issue, see the Supplementary Materials that show the effectiveness of the considered manipulation for inducing self-objectification in the pilot study), but it speaks about the possible malleability of this process: Objectifying tasks probably have the worst effect on workers' self-objectification when there are no external interferences during the performance of the task.

In addition, the lack of a (sequential or simple) mediational indirect effect on the relationship between objectifying (versus non objectifying) tasks and job satisfaction could potentially be explained not only by the interference generated by the (positive or negative) interventions of the supervisor distracting the workers from the type of task they are performing but also by the previously identified lack of relationship between the type of task and how workers perceive that they are considered within the organization.

Finally, our results also indicate that the relationship between a supervisor's abusive (versus nonabusive) style and job satisfaction was simply mediated by (a) workers' perceptions of being treated as tools (i.e., organizational dehumanization) and (b) workers' internalizing this self-representation as objects (i.e., self-objectification), without the presence of a sequential effect. This absence of the sequential effect seems to be due to the lack of a significant effect of self-objectification on satisfaction when considering the sequential analysis, but it appeared in the simple mediation. This indicates that its absence is because, in the sequential mediational analysis,

organizational dehumanization has a greater impact (full simple mediation effect) than self-objectification does (partially simple mediation effect) on the relationship between abusive leadership and job satisfaction, making the latter relationship nonsignificant. Therefore, from the present pattern of results, we can understand that abusive leaders are willing to decrease job satisfaction more as a consequence of increasing perceptions of organizational dehumanization than as a consequence of driving self-objectification.

6 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this research, we aimed to deepen the knowledge on the factors that can undermine people's humanness in the work domain. Specifically, we focused on disentangling the roles of abusive leadership and objectifying tasks in inducing workers' meta-perceptions of being dehumanized by their company (i.e., organizational dehumanization) that lead to internalizing these perceptions (i.e., self-objectification), thus decreasing their job satisfaction.

To sum up, our results provided important information about the process that we are analyzing and, thus, on the factors that threaten humanness in the work domain, both considering interpersonal relationships (abusive leadership) on one hand and personal behavior related to objective work features (objectifying task) on the other hand. First, the results regarding abusive leadership showed that this variable has a greater impact on the perception of being objectified and on self-objectification. As already suggested by previous studies on abusive leadership and organizational dehumanization, this kind of treatment by superiors is something that in its core is dehumanizing per se (Caesens et al., 2019), and so it had a stronger effect on our measures. Furthermore, for the first time, as far as we know, research showed that abusive leadership and the consequent perception of being objectified leads to workers' internalizing this external gaze by self-objectifying. Finally, this sequential pattern explains the well-known detrimental effect of abusive leadership on job satisfaction. However, our results regarding objectifying job features showed a different pattern. Keeping in mind that abusive leadership has a greater effect on the considered variables, objectifying job features showed that this factor exerts a similar, albeit minor, negative impact on workers, but follows a different path.

At the beginning of our research, we hypothesized that organizations' putting workers in roles that ask them to perform objectifying tasks rather than self-fulfilling ones could lead to the workers' having a higher perception of being considered objects by the organization, and this could indeed contribute to explaining the workers' increased self-objectification. Despite our previous hypothesis, our results showed that this is not the case because objectifying job features are not related to organizational dehumanization. Nevertheless, we did identify the effect of performing objectifying tasks on job satisfaction through self-objectification. This is in line with self-perception theory (Bem, 1967; as cited in Baldissarri, Andriuguetto, et al., 2017), which assumes that people defining themselves on the basis of their behaviors and actions: acting merely as a passive tool subject to the

objectifying features of the job, may contribute directly to their self-defining as an object rather than a human being.

The second important issue our results provided was the main issue raised in the second study regarding the interplay between leadership styles and objectifying job features. Given the ANOVAs' results, it was clear that abusive leadership again had a stronger impact on our variables, nullifying the potential impact of the task that we adopted as objectifying work simulation. This lack of effect of our objectifying manipulation is very interesting for different reasons. In the pilot study, we found that this manipulation was effective for inducing self-objectification (see supplementary analyses). In the main study, we considered this objectifying task combined with the presence of an abusive or nonabusive supervisor and found the objectifying task manipulation had no effect on self-objectification. This suggests two issues. First, the presence of a human being who is interacting with a worker performing a potentially objectifying activity interferes with the process of self-objectification. This shows that self-objectification due to work activity is potentially malleable by other working conditions (e.g., receiving feedback during the task). This possibility has not been addressed in previous research, and it will require further investigation to understand how modifying working conditions (e.g., promoting human interaction with colleagues) can reduce the self-objectification tendency when performing these particular tasks. This pattern of results leads directly to the second issue. The nonabusive style we used in our study employed a series of sentences that supported and recognized the workers' value (e.g., "This is a demanding task, but you are doing well. Keep going!"). These sentences prevent workers from internalizing the dehumanizing feelings related to their work activities. This provides evidence to support the importance of interpersonal factors (how workers are treated) as having a stronger protective effect than the working conditions.

We considered that these findings have clear and important implications for social psychological research and the organizational one as well. First, regarding the process of objectification in the work domain and of dehumanization in general, these results provide insights in the knowledge on the processes that trigger self-dehumanization. Previous research has highlighted the negative consequences of self-dehumanization (e.g., negative emotions, detrimental states) and how ostracism or discrimination experiences could lead to people self-dehumanization (Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011). Our work extends these previous findings by providing more empirical evidence on this issue: That is, as other human beings can lead people to self-dehumanize (in this case abusive supervisor led to meta-objectify and self-objectify), but also that the same human beings can instead protect from self-dehumanization triggered by contextual factors (i.e., nonabusive supervisor protect from objective dehumanizing conditions). This highlights how the interpersonal human factor has a more relevant role than the objective factor related to the task, and so to personal behaviors, both in undermining one's humanness and in protecting it. Second and consequently, it appears clear that organizations can limit the negative effect of objectifying tasks that often cannot be eliminated in work environments, by prioritizing the

eradication of abusive leadership styles within their companies and favoring instead more supportive leadership styles (e.g., authentic leadership style; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

6.1 | Limitations and future directions

Future studies should be conducted to overcome the limitations of this research by addressing the following issues. First, in our field study, we had some problems with the scales' reliability. We can argue that blue-collar or disadvantaged workers (who are the most likely to be dehumanized; Sainz, Loughnan et al., 2020; Sainz, Martínez et al., 2020; Volpato et al., 2017) often have low educational backgrounds which sometimes make it difficult to reply to long questionnaires. This should be acknowledged in future studies by implementing a shorter version of the questionnaires and materials that are specifically designated for these workers' profiles. Moreover, we are also aware that the experimental manipulation (task in Study 2) lasted uniquely 15 min in a single session. Given that dehumanizing processes usually are felt by people involved in longstanding experiences (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Christoff, 2014), it is plausible that the short session could have reduced the objectifying task's capability for recreating real working conditions and the related effects of a live work session.

Additionally, given the difficulties of carrying out an experimental manipulation in a natural context (e.g., current blue-collar workers in a real company), this experimental manipulation was carried out in a single session with university students instead of with real blue-collar workers. To address these issues, future studies should, for instance, implement longitudinal procedures with more than one session that could potentially last longer in order to create perceptions of repetitiveness and monotony within the participants. Another way could be to involve real blue collar-workers in a real set (instead of students in the lab) in order to increase the ecological validity of the study. These modifications would help test if a stronger effect of self-objectification due to work tasks, compared to leadership style, needs more than one session to appear in blue collar workers, while increasing the generalization of our findings as well.

Furthermore, our research focused on two specific antecedents of the objectifying process (i.e., abusive leadership style and objectifying job features) and a specific outcome (i.e., job satisfaction). In order to have a complete picture of the phenomenon, future research should develop these findings by analyze other critical conditions and consequences related to the organizational sphere (such as turnover or psychosomatic strain), but also to the individual's well-being (such as low self-esteem, detrimental mental states, prevalence of mental health issues).

Finally, future studies should also consider other leadership styles that will not employ such an extreme negative valence. For instance, it might be interesting to compare the extent of workers perceived organizational dehumanization or self-objectification when their supervisor exerts a transactional leadership style, which focuses uniquely on the task performance, compared to a

transformational leadership style, which focuses not only on the task but also on the workers' well-being. Under the transactional leadership, the objectifying task might have a higher effect than the one we identified or the interaction between both of them will be significant. In contrast, the transformational leader could potentially act as a protective factor for workers' well-being, and as a consequence, workers would perceive that they are regarded as human beings (Bass & Avolio, 1990).

In short, our results highlight that even when other working conditions are pernicious, the presence of an abusive leader is a key factor affecting workers. Companies and organizations should prioritize the identification of this leadership style above other possible modifications in the workplace to protect workers against the negative impact of being dehumanized in their working environment.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We would also like to declare there is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data and supplementary materials are available online (<https://osf.io/xkkt4/>).

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional Supporting Information may be found online in the Supporting Information section.

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