**Motherhood and Objectification[[1]](#footnote-1)**

*Fiona Woollard*

*University of Southampton*

**Introduction**

Feminists have most frequently discussed objectification in the context of sex. I show that the way in which we understand women as mothers involves a similar kind of objectionable objectification. One extremely influential element in contemporary thought about mothers and maternal behaviour is what I will call the Model of Motherhood. The Model of Motherhood presents a picture of motherhood that claims to be both descriptive and normative: it purports to tell us what mothers ‘naturally’ are, do and feel and thus to provide a standard by which the character, behaviour and feelings of individual mothers are assessed and criticised. According to this picture, mothers are naturally cheerfully self-sacrificing, focused solely on the needs of their children. This way of understanding motherhood involves an objectionable form of objectification.

I’ll begin by introducing the Model of Motherhood and its role in contemporary thought about maternal behaviour. I will then discuss the concept of objectification, taking as my starting point an account of objectification drawn from Martha Nussbaum and Rae Langton, which identifies ten features of objectification. Nussbaum holds, and Langton appears to concur, that objectification is a cluster term applicable when sufficiently many of these features are present. I’ll then argue that the Model of Motherhood meets this condition. The Model of Motherhood involves *violability*; *reduction to body; ownership* and *silencing* in a relatively straightforward way. It involves *instrumentality*, *denial of autonomy*; *inertness*; *fungibility*; and *denial of subjectivity* in a more complex ‘double-edged’ way.

I will then consider arguments from Nussbaum and Leslie Green that objectification may not always be objectionable but can be an important part of human flourishing. It might be tempting to think that the role portrayed in the Model of Motherhood is valuable in part because of the very features which I suggest make it objectifying: the instrumentality of motherhood is valuable because we find meaning in lives that are useful to others and in being needed by others; the violability is valuable because the blurred boundaries between child and mother allows us to experience a uniquely valuable connection to another. Drawing on Green’s discussion, I will propose an important amendment to Nussbaum’s analysis of objectification. I suggest that each of the object-appropriate features of treatment highlighted by Nussbaum is only objectification if it involves treating a person as an object in that respect in a way (or to an extent) incompatible with appropriate treatment of a person. Thus the examples Nussbaum discusses are not instances of ‘wonderful’ objectification: they are not instances of objectification at all. This does not rebut the original objection to my argument: those who were originally worried about whether the objectification involved in the Model of Motherhood is objectionable will now be worried about whether the object-appropriate treatment is objectification. I will argue that the Model of Motherhood involves objectionable objectification because the object-appropriate treatment it involves is (a) coerced; (b) extreme and (c) long-term. Nonetheless, I will suggest that reflection on motherhood does highlight various ways in which object-appropriate treatment can be an important aspect of human flourishing. Thus we should both modify our understanding of motherhood and revise our understanding of the treatment appropriate for persons.

Although I focus on the Nussbaum/ Langton analysis of objectification, the discussion also has implications for other approaches to understanding objectification. In my final section, I will briefly discuss some other approaches to objectification, including the classic Dworkin/ MacKinnon account, the Bordo/ Bartky account, and Sally Haslanger and Nancy Bauer’s non-analytic approach. Not only does considering these approaches support understanding the way we think about motherhood as involving objectification, but thinking about objectification in motherhood highlights some of the ways in which these accounts need to be developed.

This paper draws on two already established bodies of work: work by Amy Mullin and Rebecca Kukla, among others, on the way in which a picture of mothers as naturally self-sacrificing influences discussion of and treatment of mothers and pregnant women; work by Nussbaum and Langton, among many others, on the notion of objectification. The paper’s distinctive contribution is to bring those two discussions together, exploring what we can learn about the model of motherhood by explicitly thinking about it in terms of objectification and what we can learn about objectification by thinking about motherhood.

**The Model of Motherhood**

The way of thinking about motherhood in which I am interested is nicely illustrated by a Mothers Day advert from greetings cards company American Greetings. The advert, which went viral, showed a fake job interview for the position of “Director of Operations”. The candidates were told that the job required you to be “constantly on your feet.” They were also told “There are no breaks available”, “no vacations” and “no time to sleep.” “You can have lunch but only when the associate has finished their lunch.” “The associate needs constant attention.” “If you had a life, we’d really ask you to give that life up.” In addition, they were told that they must do all this “with a happy disposition.”[[2]](#footnote-2) When the candidates express disbelief at the demands of this job, they are informed that this job is already held by…. “Moms!” The candidates’ eyes well up with tears and they each vow to send their mother a lovely Mothers Day Card. While I am in favour of appreciating the hard work of parenting, the underlying message of the advert is damaging. It presents an exaggerated, unreasonable picture of what mothers – or good mothers – do. A mother does not expect breaks or help. She does not have her own interests or needs. If she happened to have a life before becoming a mother, she must cheerfully give that life up. In Mullin’s words: “Motherhood is supposed to involve endless self-sacrifice that is thought to come naturally to women, and furthermore this self-sacrifice is supposed to bring women happiness. Finally mothers are expected to tend to all the needs of their children, on their own, with the exception of financial resources that are supposed to come from fathers.”[[3]](#footnote-3) There is no mention of a co-Director of Operations sharing shifts in the American Greetings job description, let alone of support from a wider community.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The phenomenon that I call the Model of Motherhood is closely related to what Amy Mullin calls “the ideology of motherhood”[[5]](#footnote-5) and shares significant features with what Rebecca Kukla calls the “Fetish Mother”.[[6]](#footnote-6) Mullin explains, “The ideology of motherhood, like all ideological constructions, makes claims both about what its subject is like and what it should be like, often blurring the line between the two.”[[7]](#footnote-7) It presents a picture of what mothers will naturally feel or do and then uses this picture to measure women’s mothering as adequate or inadequate. The mother is pictured as a selfless saint, happily subsuming her own needs and desires to those of her children. I have not followed Mullin’s terminology, because the word ‘ideology’ is used in many different ways[[8]](#footnote-8), and it is not entirely clear from the text which meaning(s) Mullin intends. She does not offer a definition of ‘ideology’. I want to avoid unintentionally endorsing claims with which I may not agree due to aspects of the concept of ‘ideology’ or conations of the term ‘ideology’ that I haven’t considered.[[9]](#footnote-9) The crucial elements in Mullin’s use of the term ‘ideology of motherhood’ seem to me to be:

1. The ideology of motherhood is a set of ideas about what mothers are like.
2. These ideas have widespread acceptance/influence in our society
3. We see the ideology of motherhood at play when these ideas are either explicitly stated or implicated assumed.
4. The ideas may be expressed in many different ways, for example through the things we say, the things we do, the images we present, our feelings and reactive attitudes, our laws, etc.
5. The ideology derives normative claims about what mothers should be like from purportedly descriptive claims about what mothers are like.
6. According to these claims mothers are (and should be) absolutely available, cheerfully self-sacrificing, and find happiness in subsuming their needs to those of their offspring.

When I use the term ‘Model of Motherhood’, I have in mind a phenomenon that has these key features of Mullin’s Ideology of Motherhood.

Kukla’s Fetish Mother is one of a pair of imaginary mother figures, which together with its counterpart, the Unruly Mother, shapes the way that mothers’ bodies are treated in contemporary Europe and North America.[[10]](#footnote-10) The Fetish Mother is a “well-ordered, ‘natural’ body enjoying perfect unity and reciprocity with its child” while the Unruly Mother is an “unruly, capricious, improperly and porously bounded body, easily corrupted and driven by cravings and passions.”[[11]](#footnote-11) As Kukla explains, “These two maternal bodies or figures are not, of course, literal bodies, but neither are they mere symbols or archetypes or myths. Rather they are idealized, imaginary bodies through which we read, interpret, negotiate and judge mothers’ actual bodies (whether these are our own bodies or not).”[[12]](#footnote-12) Like the Model of Motherhood, the Fetish Mother is both normative and descriptive, it “exists as a *guiding image* of appropriate motherhood, which at the same time expresses the purported essence of ‘true’ maternality.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

The Model of Motherhood tells us not just what ‘mothers’ (aka good mothers) do but what they feel and desire. Kukla discusses the way in which parenting guides offer “*predictions* about what new mothers will ‘naturally’ find themselves desiring.” She notes:

La Leche League, in its guide, offers such predictions addressed to the mother in the second person, calling upon her to find herself reflected in them. ‘Along with whatever else you are doing during the day, you will want to keep your baby close to you as a matter of course…’And again, ‘You won’t want to leave your baby any more than you have to because babies need their mother… A mother finds that when she does leave her baby for that long awaited ‘night out’ she worries so much about how the baby is getting on that she doesn’t really enjoy the occasion.’[[14]](#footnote-14) In these passages, expectant and new mothers are not told what would be good for the baby but rather what they will, of their own accord, ‘naturally’ feel and know once they are mothering… The rhetoric suggests that if ‘you’ find you *do* enjoy your night out, the flaw is in your maternality not in their parenting suggestions. [[15]](#footnote-15)

Kukla also notes the interesting restrictions on the desires appropriate for new mothers imposed by claims such as: “You don’t have to be a stay-at-home with a breastfed baby. Baby can go right along with you almost anywhere you want to go.”[[16]](#footnote-16) As Kukla notes:

Indeed, this guide like many others is full of examples of mothers satisfying their desires for mobility by taking their babies to shopping malls, parks, friends’ houses, and other gendered leisure spaces. The rhetoric of the claim forecloses the possibilities of mothers even having real desires to go to a classical music concert, a research library, an academic talk, a board meeting, or any of many other spaces inappropriate for babies, in which various kinds of serious, perhaps identity-defining projects and passions might be pursued. Such rhetoric casts mothers’ desires that conflict with proximity as inappropriate and unnatural.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Many of the spaces mentioned by Kukla are not – or should not be – truly “inappropriate for babies”. Nonetheless, given the choice of examples and the lack of discussion about the challenges of negotiating these kinds of places with a baby in tow, Kukla is right about the implicit message.

The Model of Motherhood is a picture of what mothers, or good mothers, ‘naturally’ are, do and feel which is either explicitly or implicitly present in much contemporary representation and discussion of mothers and motherhood. It is used as a standard by which mother’s behaviour is judged. It is used to justify moral demands made on mothers, either directly or indirectly through influencing our application of other morally relevant concepts to mothers’ behaviour. (As Elselijn Kingma and I argue elsewhere, our classifications of pregnant women’s behaviour as doing harm rather than merely allowing harm or failing to benefit often implicitly appeal to expectations about mothers’ behaviour. Because we assume that ‘mothers do whatever is best for their babies’ behaviour is often taken as doing harm simply because it is non-optimal.[[18]](#footnote-18)) It encourages acceptance of unnecessary hardship for pregnant woman and mothers, because the assumption is that this is what motherhood naturally involves. Moreover, in elevating motherhood as the single most important influence on children’s lives, it encourages social policy that focuses on changing individual maternal behaviour, normally through sanctions, rather than on looking at changes that could be made in the wider environment.

Not all representations of motherhood conform to the Model of Motherhood, nor is it implicitly or explicitly assumed by all discussions of maternal behaviour. The Model of Motherhood is not universally accepted. Instead, it is a significant thread in our thinking about motherhood. Many representations of motherhood, both contemporary and historical, can be seen to implicitly or explicitly assume this view of what mothers will naturally be, do and feel. Many discussions of maternal behaviour can be fruitfully interpreted as influenced by these assumptions.[[19]](#footnote-19)

**Objectification**

According to Nussbaum, “in all cases of objectification, what is at issue is a question of treating one thing as another. One is treating as an object what is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Nussbaum picks out seven features of treating something as a thing.[[21]](#footnote-21) She then suggests that we understand ‘objectification’ as “a relatively loose cluster-term, for whose application we sometimes treat any one of these features as sufficient, though more often a plurality of features is present when the term is applied.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Nussbaum’s seven features of treating something as an object are:

1. *instrumentality*: the objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes;
2. *denial of autonomy*: the objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination;
3. *inertness*: the objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity;
4. *fungibility*: the objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type and/or (b) with objects of other types;
5. *violability*: the objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into;
6. *ownership*: the objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.;
7. *denial of subjectivity*: the objectifier treats the object as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Rae Langton adds three further features to Nussbaum’s account of objectification:

1. *reduction to body*: one treats [the object] as identified with its body, or body parts;
2. *reduction to appearance*: one treats [the object] primarily in terms of how it looks, or how it appear to the senses;
3. *silencing*: one treats [the object] as silent, lacking the capacity to speak.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Langton also adds to Nussbaum’s account by paying greater attention to the different ways in which we can treat someone or something as lacking autonomy: “failing to attribute it, violating it, surrendering it, demanding that another surrender it, destroying it, stifling it.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

As Langton notes, “This variation [in ways of denying autonomy] allows for the possibility of treatment that denies autonomy in one way, while affirming it in another.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Indeed, Langton shows that in some cases the denial of autonomy can be accomplished through affirmation of autonomy. For example, in the pornographic film *Deep Throat*, Linda Lovelace is portrayed as “Liberated Woman in her most extreme form, taking life and sex on her own terms.” Langton argues that this attribution of autonomy serves autonomy violation, both of Linda Lovelace herself and of woman in general. Lovelace was forced to play her role – the role of a woman freely choosing throat sex – using violence, rape and death threats and later forced to claim that this role was freely chosen.[[27]](#footnote-27) In addition, as Langton points out the film purports to reflect the autonomous choices of not just Lovelace but all women: “Linda is not just *a* woman but *woman*.” “In affirming women’s autonomy one way, and identifying that autonomy with sexual freedom, *Deep Throat* style, it legitimated autonomy-denial in a different way, when the pornographer’s image of women’s choices was used to thwart real women’s choices.”[[28]](#footnote-28) I will later argue that a similar kind of structure can be seen in the Model of Motherhood.

**Objectification and the Model of Motherhood**

The Nussbaum/ Langton account leaves us with ten features of objectification: instrumentality, autonomy-denial, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity. In Nussbaum’s words: objectification is “a relatively loose cluster-term, for whose application we sometimes treat any one of these features as sufficient, though more often a plurality of features is present when the term is applied.” [[29]](#footnote-29) I shall argue that the Model of Motherhood involves *violability*; *reduction to body; ownership* and *silencing* in a relatively straightforward way. It involves *instrumentality*, *denial of autonomy*; *inertness*; *fungibility*; and *denial of subjectivity* in a more complex ‘double-edged’ way. If I am right, the model of motherhood certainly posseses sufficiently many of the features picked out by Nussbaum and Langton to count as objectification.

*Violability; Reduction to Body and Ownership*

Let’s begin with three of the features which the Model of Motherhood seems to most straightforwardly involve: *violability*; *reduction to body;* and *ownership.* I’ll start with two rather long quotes from Rebecca Kukla.

… our culture is permeated by interwoven ideological practices that treat any substantial separation between mothers and infants – and any practices, such as pumping that are conducive to such separation – as fundamentally compromising motherhood. The fetishization of nursing, and the special nurturing powers of the proper maternal body, positions mothers as *uniquely* able to meet their children’s needs with their proximate lactating bodies.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The reign of the Fetish Mother demands of us that we give over our bodies, and especially our breasts, to the unfettered consumptive demands of an infant. Our breasts are figured as food, at the same time as they are targets of eroticization and social and physical vulnerability. Public service images portray the edibility of the maternal breast as part of its natural function.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Kukla articulates beautifully the ways in which the Model of Motherhood combines violability and reduction to body. As Kukla notes, the ideal of the nursing mother whose breasts are available to her infant ‘on demand’ challenges the mother’s bodily integrity. The mother is required to abandon control over – and even the desire to control - the boundaries of her body. Simultaneously, the mother is reduced to her body and body parts. Mothers are “uniquely able to meet their children’s needs with their lactating bodies”: those who are unable to do so are do not have “proper maternal bodies” and are thus not proper mothers. A badly functioning body implies a badly functioning mother.[[32]](#footnote-32) Other imagery, such as that in the “Babies were born to be breastfed campaign” which Kukla highlights as portraying breasts as food, reduces the mother not to a maternal body but to a pair of breasts. The image shows a dish of two adjacent scoops of pale-coloured ice cream, topped with bright red cherries, which are clearly meant to represent breasts. Nearby is part of a spoon and a napkin. The text reads: “Breastfeed for 6 months. You might help reduce your child’s risk for childhood obesity.”[[33]](#footnote-33) As Kukla points out, one problem with this is its portrayal of parts of women’s bodies as edible, treating women’s bodies as both violable and instrumental. In addition, the breast is pictured as separate from the mother, ignoring the fact that breastfeeding requires not just the mother’s whole body, but maternal agency.

Consider also the phrase “Breasts are for babies.” This phrase is often directed towards men. In this apparently well-meaning blog post entitled “Grow up Men. Breasts are for Babies”, the (male) author describes his initial discomfort at his wife’s breastfeeding: “Once my son was born, I quickly realized what I had long dreaded: my wife's breasts had to be shared with someone else, even though he had a greater need for them than me.” The post has what is presented as a happy ending. The author realizes: “Nevertheless, seeing my wife's naked breasts several times a day, even with lessened ownership rights and in a new context, is still enjoyable, as it beats asking for permission.”[[34]](#footnote-34) The phrase “Breasts are for babies” is often uttered as a purportedly feminist claim, a rebuttal to the over-sexualisation of women’s bodies. The above example of objectification (clearly involving violability, reduction to body parts and even ownership) highlights the problem with this. The claim that breasts are for babies, even with a feminist spin, shares troubling features with the assumption that breasts are for men. Breasts are not “for men” or “for babies”. They are parts of a woman’s body.[[35]](#footnote-35)

I am not against breastfeeding or even feeding on demand.[[36]](#footnote-36) I am not against appropriate calls for better breastfeeding support or more information about breastfeeding and its benefits. I also don't claim that the act of breastfeeding itself is objectifying. What I find troubling is the way that breastfeeding features in the Model of Motherhood and in which the Model of Motherhood infuses some breastfeeding promotion. In the Model of Motherhood: one of the key features of the ‘good mother’ is that she breastfeeds directly and on-demand. Those who do not, or cannot, breastfeed directly and on-demand are not good mothers. A mother’s worth is governed by the functioning of her breasts. On this picture, which we see reflected in much breastfeeding promotion, babies have a right of unfettered access to their mothers’ breasts. Those breasts, far from being understood as protected by the mother’s rights to bodily integrity, are seen as separated from the mother’s body, as objects belonging to the baby, as food to be consumed. This of course leaves open the possibility that there could be breastfeeding information, breastfeeding support and even breastfeeding promotion efforts, that lack these objectifying features. It is not breastfeeding, or support of breastfeeding, that is the problem, but, to borrow Kukla’s words again, the “cultural imaginary [that] insists that we allow infants to consume our bodies, and … denies us the moral standing to feel that we should be able to limit or control this consumptive relationship.”[[37]](#footnote-37) It is this way of understanding breastfeeding, and the Model of Motherhood more generally, which involves violability, reduction to body and ownership.

*Instrumentality*

The Model of Motherhood sees mothers as naturally self-sacrificing. A mother puts all of her own needs aside for the sake of her child. Consider the discussion surrounding drinking in pregnancy. A consistent refrain in this discussion is that, even if there is no evidence that small amounts of alcohol are harmful, pregnant women should obviously abstain. Again and again, we hear the rhetorical question: “Why take the risk?” The CDC recently published guidelines that all pregnant women – and indeed any fertile women – should avoid alcohol completely. As Kukla commented when interviewed in response “The idea that the pleasures and routines that make up women’s days are mere luxuries that are not worth any risk whatsoever is patronizing and sexist.”[[38]](#footnote-38) This idea is a key part of the Model of Motherhood: the mother should not only be willing, but should be happy to make any sacrifice (no matter how great) for the sake of any possibility of benefitting to her child (no matter how small either the benefit in question or the probability that it will be secured by the sacrifice).

The Model of Motherhood does make reference to the mother’s own happiness. For, according to the Model of Motherhood, this extreme self-sacrifice makes mothers happy. But the happiness of mothers plays a role only conditionally or instrumentally. Mothers do what makes themselves happy *only if* what makes them happy is benefitting their children. Sometimes they must be reminded to take a break or think of themselves, but this is normally justified as necessary for the children’s sake: happy mothers make happy children. Both the expectation that mothers should be prepared to make any sacrifice for their children’s good and the treatment of mother’s own happiness as only valuable insofar as it is linked to the happiness of her children involve instrumentalisation of mothers: both fail to recognize that the mother is important for her own sake.

*Denial of Autonomy, Denial of Subjectivity, Inertness, Fungibility and Silencing*

On the face of it, the Model of Motherhood affirms the autonomy, agency, subjectivity and individuality of mothers. It presents mothers as autonomously choosing to adopt the described role. We also see repeated references to what new mothers will feel: the almost orgasmic (but, it is stressed, emphatically non-sexual) pleasure of a good latch; the satisfaction of seeing their baby grow sturdy on mother’s milk; the discomfort in the event of separation. These maternal feelings are taken to be both valuable and epistemically significant: the mother’s desire to be with her baby is both a response to, and a sign of, the fact that babies need their mothers.

Far from being treated as lacking in agency, new mothers seem to be subject to a kind of hyper-agentialism: the mother’s behaviour is taken to be the single most important factor in determining her child’s current and future well-being. She is held responsible, and liable for blame and guilt, for her own behaviour – even if constrained by factors such as addiction or social or economic barriers – for the behaviour of others, for the functioning or non-functioning of her biological processes and for her emotional responses.

Far from being fungible, the mother is seen as irreplaceable. She, and only she, is vital to her infant’s well-being and happiness. She is the primary caregiver. If she breastfeeds (and, according to the Model of Motherhood, a good mother breastfeeds!) then only she can nourish the child. Even when food is not an issue, the mother is seen as being the best, or perhaps the only, person for emotional and practical care.[[39]](#footnote-39)

However, the way in which the Model of Motherhood affirms the mother’s autonomy, subjectivity, agency and irreplaceability seems to have a lot in common with the autonomy-affirmation in the service of autonomy-denial that Langton diagnoses in the Deep Throat case. As noted in the introduction, the Model of Motherhood tells women what mothers choose and what mothers feel. Quoting Kukla again: “The rhetoric suggests that if ‘you’ find you *do* enjoy your night out, the flaw is in your maternality not in their parenting suggestions.”[[40]](#footnote-40) To have feelings or desires that conflict with those that the Model of Motherhood ascribes is to be less of a mother. The Model of Motherhood denies the experiences and feelings, and constrains the free choices, of any mothers who don’t enjoy breastfeeding, are happy to leave their baby with someone they trust and enjoy a night out, or find that they retain non-baby-related passions after birth. It does so, first, by purporting to represent all mothers. Second, by suggesting that those with different desires and feelings are not true mothers and thus discounting their testimony. (It thus also involves silencing.) Third, by rewarding the approved choices and the expression of the approved-of feelings and desires and sanctioning alternative choices and the expression of alternative feelings thus incentivising mothers to not only say that they have these feelings and desires but also to have them and to make the associated choices.[[41]](#footnote-41) This way of understanding motherhood also contains a strong element of fungibility. For while the Model of Motherhood stresses the mother’s position as the unique person who can tend to her baby’s needs, it denies that mothers will differ in how they experience motherhood.

In similar ways, the over-attribution of agency to mothers may both mask ways in which the agency of mothers is not recognised and curtail the agency of mothers. Following Kukla, I suggested above that the Model of Motherhood restricts the desires and feelings that mothers are recognised as having: mothers do not have desires to attend classical music concerts, academic conference or board meetings. This also restricts the type of agency that is recognised as compatible with motherhood. Mothers are not recognised as people who appreciate music, who write papers or who run companies. This is one form of inertness: mothers are treated as if they do not possess certain valuable types of agency. The agency of mothers is also seriously curtailed by the way in which we hold mothers responsible for behaviour and conditions that may affect their children’s wellbeing. Mothers are often treated as liable for blame, guilt, social or even legal sanctions for behaviour and conditions that may affect their children’s wellbeing, even when the mother’s control over the relevant feature is questionable at best. When the sanctions include imprisonment, mothers’ agency can be physically constrained. In other cases, the things that the mother can do are restricted by the threatened sanctions and by the burdens of keeping in line. Although this may not exhibit ‘inertness’ as originally defined by Nussbaum – for it does not involve treating women as lacking in agency, it should be recognised as a way of undermining the agency of women and thus as relevantly related to inertness. There is a structural similarity here to Langton’s recognition that some ways of undermining a person’s autonomy involve explicitly affirming that they have autonomy.

**Objectification and Objectifiers**

There is an apparent mismatch between Nussbaum’s description of objectification and the way in which I claim we see objectification in the Model of Motherhood. Nussbaum’s analysis seems to suppose that in objectification we have one person treating another as an object. For Nussbaum, objectification seems to presuppose an objectifier. For example, she describes denial of autonomy as occurring when “*the objectifier* treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.”[[42]](#footnote-42) Instrumentality does not just involve an objectifier but requires the objectifier to “treats the object as a tool of *his or her* purposes.”[[43]](#footnote-43) But if the Model of Motherhood involves objectification, it is not, or not mainly, through specific individuals treating mothers as objects.[[44]](#footnote-44) I have claimed that the Model of Motherhood involves instrumentality insofar as the mother’s desires and wellbeing are only seen as important insofar as they benefit the child. If this treats mothers as tools for another’s purposes, it might seem as if they are treated as tools for the child’s purposes. Yet I certainly do not want to argue that the objectionable objectification involved in the Model of Motherhood is performed by children.

I take it that the objectification involved in the Model of Motherhood is so harmful in part because it is objectification that does not require any individual to do the objectifying. Consider Sandra Lee Bartkly’s account of feminine body discipline: the way in which women’s body, posture, and gestures are constrained. Lee notes: “The disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular.”[[45]](#footnote-45) On Bartky’s picture, the power that pushes women to conform to the standard’s of femininity is widely dispersed and anonymous. It is seen in the friends and causal aquaintances who tell overweight women that they would be pretty *if only they lost weight,* in the admonishments of parents and teachers to be ladylike, in the messages about female bodies as spectacles in the media and in the advice of beauty experts.[[46]](#footnote-46) The objectification involved in the Model of Motherhood works in a similar way. The Model of Motherhood objectifies mothers by providing an influential – indeed pervasive – way of understanding mothers, a model of what (good) mothers are, feel and do that is used as a standard by which real mothers are measured. This model of motherhood is seen in adverts for baby food, for washing power and for Mother’s Day cards. It is presupposed in the judgments about formula feeding on social media and in the laws that govern and restrict pregnant bodies. It is reflected in the guilt that mothers feel for ‘selfishly’ desiring to return to work. It is this general understanding that objectifies mothers.

The instrumentality involved in the Model of Motherhood does not straightforwardly involve an objectifier seeing mothers as a mere tool for his or her purposes. Of course, it might be argued that to require women to sacrifice everything for their children in this way benefits men, or business, or society or some other powerful interest group. But this would not be necessary for the Model of Motherhood to involve objectionably objectifying instrumentality. The Model of Motherhood presents the mother as lacking the kind of importance in her own right that is appropriate for a person. The mother’s needs are seen as important only insofar as they relate to another’s needs (the welfare of the baby). This is objectionably instrumentalising in itself – even if it is not the objectifier’s own ends to which the mother’s welfare is subordinated.

**Non-Objectionable Objectification**

I will now discuss arguments that objectification is not always be objectionable but can, on the contrary, be deeply valuable. Nussbaum is concerned to analyse the concept of objectification in part because she thinks a clearer understanding of this concept might help us to understand whether objectification is always a bad thing. She concludes that although instrumentality is always morally problematic, no other item on the list of features of objectification is always morally objectionable.[[47]](#footnote-47) Indeed, drawing on the work of D.H. Lawrence, Nussbaum describes a type of sexual encounter involving “a kind of surrender of [one’s] own personhood, a kind of yielding abnegation of self-containment and self-sufficiency”[[48]](#footnote-48) which she suggests might be “a wonderful part of sexual life.”[[49]](#footnote-49)  Leslie Green argues that being treated as a tool for the purposes of others might be itself be deeply valuable: “Most people desperately *want* to be of use to others, and they come to understand themselves partly through their uses, actual and potential.”[[50]](#footnote-50) It might be tempting to think that the objectification involved in our understanding of motherhood could be valuable in the ways described by Nussbaum and Green. Pregnancy and new motherhood seem to be paradigm example of cases in which the boundaries between individuals become blurred – and that seems to many to be one of the most amazing things about becoming a parent. Many mothers find deep satisfaction in being needed by their children. Indeed, this sense of indispensability can be a central part of what brings meaning to one’s life. I will argue that these considerations point to some ways in which thinking about motherhood might cause us to revise our understanding of the types of interaction compatible with human dignity. The relationship between a mother and her child or between a pregnant women and her foetus is radically different from that between two independent persons. It is nonetheless an important aspect of human life. Thinking about motherhood should lead us to question the assumption that the conditions for human dignity should be modelled on persons conceived as independent beings with firm external boundaries. Nonetheless, I will argue, the Model of Motherhood still involves objectionable objectification.

The Lawrentian objectification explored by Nussbaum involves a willing renunciation of individual personhood for the sake of a valuable, primitive, sexual experience. Nussbaum comments: “The power of sexuality is most authentically experienced, in his view, when the parties do put aside their conscious choice-making, and even their inner life of self-consciousness and articulate thought, and permit themselves to be, in a sense, objectlike, natural forces meeting one another with what he likes to call "blood knowledge.”[[51]](#footnote-51) As Nussbaum points out, Lawrentian objectification involves five of her seven features of objectification.

*denial of autonomy* and *denial of subjectivity*  (“parties put aside their conscious choice making and even their inner life of self-consciousness and articulate thought”[[52]](#footnote-52)); *inertness* (“both surrender agency before the power of the blood”; *fungibility* (“Lydia’s daily qualitative individuality does vanish before his desire, as she becomes an embodiment of something primal”*;* *violability* (“in the sway of desire he no longer feels himself clearly individuated from her, he feels his boundaries become porous”[[53]](#footnote-53)). She also attributes to it one of the features of objectification added by Langton, *reduction to body* (“a certain type of reduction of persons to their bodily parts, and the attribution of a certain sort of independent agency to the bodily part”). But, Nussbaum seems to argue, the very features which make the behaviour count as objectification, also allow it to be intensely valuable: “The surrender of autonomy and even of agency and subjectivity are joyous, a kind of victorious achievement in the prison-house of English respectability. Such a surrender constitutes an escape from the prison of self-consciousness that, in Lawrence's quite plausible view, seals us off from one another and prevents true communication and true receptivity.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

There are clear echoes of Lawrentian objectification in our understanding of motherhood. Motherhood could also be described as a willing renunciation of individual personhood to become a primitive force meeting another in “blood knowledge”. Pregnancy and early motherhood might seem like the paradigm case of porous boundaries, as it becomes hard to tell where the baby ends and you begin. And this might seem to be something wonderful.

As well as being ‘joyous’, Lawrentian objectification must meet several other conditions, according to Nussbaum. The most important of these for Nussbaum is “the complete absence of instrumentalization.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Remember, on her account, “the treatment of human beings as tools of the purposes of another, is always morally problematic; if it does not take place in a larger context of regard for humanity, it is a central form of the morally objectionable.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Perhaps we might argue that, for all its Lawrentian features, our understanding of motherhood is objectionably objectifying because it involves instrumentalisation.

Leslie Green’s argument cast doubt on this move. Green argues that far from being always morally problematic, understanding oneself as a tool for the purposes of others might be a central aspect of human dignity: “Most people desperately *want* to be of use to others, and they come to understand themselves partly through their uses, actual and potential.”[[57]](#footnote-57) One of the reasons that we fear aging and disability is because we worry that they will prevent us from being useful to others. “[People suffering from age or infirmity] miss not only their diminished agency but also their diminished objectivity.”[[58]](#footnote-58) Again, these thoughts might be echoed in discussing the Model of Motherhood. For one might argue that it is not objectionable objectification to recognize what a mother can do for her child. Being used in this way can be deeply valuable. Indeed, it can be one of the central ways in which we understand ourselves as valuable and our lives as meaningful. One might argue that instead of condemning our understanding of motherhood as objectionably objectifying, we should instead recognize that there need not be anything demeaning about subsuming your needs to another’s. Instead of seeing the instrumentality involved in our understanding of motherhood as incompatible with respect for human dignity, perhaps we should start to respect instrumentality as a valuable part of human life.

Green’s arguments block the simple response that the objectification involved in motherhood is objectionable because it involve instrumentalisation and instrumentalisation is always bad. They also do something even more interesting. They give us reason to be skeptical about Nussbaum’s claim that Lawrentian Objectification is a good form of objectification, and indeed of her argument that objectification need not be morally problematic.

Green argues earlier that Nussbaum’s claim that objectification involves “treating as an object what is not really an object”[[59]](#footnote-59) is potentially misleading. As Green points out, people *are* objects. Objectification occurs not when people are treated as objects, but when people are treated as *mere* objects. “[Objectification] is a matter of treating as a *mere* object something that is more than an object; it is a matter of denying or devaluing their subjectivity, of failing to recognize them as ‘ends-in-themselves’”.[[60]](#footnote-60) In light of these earlier comments, we can understand Green’s argument about instrumentality as showing that people are tools for other people’s purposes and that treating them as such may not involve denying or devaluing their subjectivity. Indeed, being useful in this way may be an important part of a full human life. If this is so, then perhaps instrumentality (treating someone as a tool for one’s own purposes) should not be seen as a signal of objectification. Objectification on grounds of instrumentality requires something stronger. It requires us to treat a person *merely* as a tool for one’s own purposes or, to be more precise, as a tool for one’s own purpose in a way that is incompatible with the appropriate treatment of a person.

This way of thinking allows us to resolve an apparent contradiction in Nussbaum’s discussion of the feature of violability. At times, she seems to have an extremely strong understanding of ‘violability’, according to which an object is only treated as violable if there are no constraints on breaking it or breaking into it. For example, she suggests that ballpoint pens may lack violability because “it might be thought inappropriate or at least wasteful to break up ballpoint pens.”[[61]](#footnote-61) In contrast, when attributing violability to the sexual encounters described by Lawrence, she seems to be assuming that something is treated as violable if there are some situations in which its boundaries may be crossed. In one case, she seems to understand violability as an absolute lack of boundaries, in the other as a lack of absolute boundaries. Neither of these seems quite right for violability as a type of objectification. I suggest that we should see violability as a type of objectification when it involves failing to treat a person as having the kind of boundary-integrity *appropriate for persons*.

We can extend this to the other features of objectification picked out by Nussbaum and Langton. If objectification is treating a person as a mere thing, then treating someone as having a property of objects will only be objectification if it is treating that person as having that property in a way (or to an extent) which is inappropriate for persons. Similarly, treating someone as to some extent lacking a property associated with person will be objectification only if lacking that property to that extent or in that way is inappropriate for persons. Thus, for example, *denial of autonomy* as a type of objectification involves not just treating a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination, but treating a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination in a way that is inappropriate for persons.

Some might worry that this interpretation leaves the concept of objectification unable to do any work in identifying what is wrong with certain types of behavior. Suppose we can only say that certain behaviour counts as objectification if we already know that it involves, for example, treating someone as lacking in autonomy in a way that is inappropriate for persons. Then it seems that we must already know that the behaviour is an inappropriate way to treat a person before we identify it as objectification. Identifying it as objectification does not add anything. I think that this worry is misguided. Identifying behaviour as objectification does indeed help us to understand what is wrong with it. It points to a way, or family of ways, in which this treatment conflicts with appropriate treatment of persons. If there is dispute about whether the behaviour is truly objectifying, this is likely to point to disagreement about the constraints on treatment of persons. We might draw an analogy here with claims that a prosecution did not follow due process or that an election campaign was not conducted with due propriety. Each of these refers to background normative claims, but nonetheless can be useful in explaining what is wrong with the behaviour in question. Nussbaum’s analysis is helpful here, for in helping to bring out the cluster of features involved in objectification, it provides a better understanding of the way in which objectifying behaviour is morally objectionable. This is particularly helpful because in any given instance of objectification we normally see several of these object-appropriate features, intertwined in various complex ways, making it harder to articulate the ways in which the treatment is problematic.

Under my interpretation, objectification is by definition objectionable. Thus Nussbaum’s examples do not show that some objectification is wonderful. Instead, they suggest that not all instances involving denial of autonomy and subjectivity, inertness or violability etc. count as objectification. We may mistakenly identify these as instances of objectification, but we do so because of a mistaken assumption that the ideal for persons is a kind of glorious isolation with maximum autonomy, agency and inviolability. Nussbaum and Green’s discussion shows that this ideal of autonomy may be missing aspects of a full human life. Thinking about motherhood, and the ways in which the object-appropriate features of motherhood might be part of its value, adds another important example to Nussbaum and Green’s argument.

Of course, there is a problem for my argument whether we conclude that not all objectification is objectionable or that not all instances involving denial of autonomy and subjectivity, inertness or violability etc. count as objectification. I still need to defend either the claim that the objectification involved in the Model of Motherhood is objectionable or the claim that the features I’ve picked out count as objectification in these cases. The common underlying worry is that our understanding of motherhood appears problematic because it treats mothers as if they lack certain properties which have long been thought to be crucial for human dignity: autonomy, inviolability, not being treated as a tool for the purposes of others. One response to this problem is to change our understanding of motherhood. Another is to change our understanding of what is necessary for human dignity, to claim that the prevailing understanding of human dignity ignores crucial aspects of human life and, in particular, fails to apply to pregnancy and motherhood. The objection suggests that we should adopt the latter course.

I suggest that we should adopt a middle course, recognizing that both our understanding of motherhood and the prevailing understanding of what is necessary for human dignity need to change. Thinking about motherhood, as well as the examples discussed by Nussbaum and Green, does highlight important inadequacies in the classic understanding of personhood. We should be willing to recognize that part of the value of motherhood lies precisely in the way in which it disrupts our existence as discrete, autonomous individuals, for example blurring typical boundaries between individuals. Nonetheless, there is still (objectionable) objectification involved in the common understanding of motherhood.

The most worrying aspect of the Model of Motherhood is its coercive aspect. As I argued earlier, breastfeeding ‘on demand’ can be lovely, but the type of culture imagery described by Kukla in which women do not feel that they have the right to refuse the use of their own bodies is deeply worrying. The wonderfulness of the willing blurring of boundaries in the examples described by Lawrence seems to absolutely depend upon both parties having control over their own boundaries – having the right to say no. As we have seen, the Model of Motherhood does not leave mothers feeling as if they have the right to say no. The coercion occurs in several ways. First, by explicitly subsuming the mother’s wellbeing to that of the infant and by giving the child ‘ownership’ over parts of the woman’s body. Second, by making statements about what mothers do, feel or want that purport to be descriptive but are also taken to have normative implications i.e. to provide a standard for measuring mothers. These descriptive/ normative statements mean the Model of Motherhood does not simply offer an option for women. It is presented as the only way in which to be a good mother. The way in which the Model of Motherhood limits the choices of all mothers would still be a problem even if, for some mothers, this role represented something ‘wonderful’.

But even if willingly, even happily, adopted, there is something morally problematic about this role. First, the instrumentalisation involved in the Model of Motherhood is extreme. Remember the prescription from that Mother’s Day advert: “If you had a life, we’d really ask you to give that life up.” In the Model of Motherhood, mothers are not just treated as means to the happiness and wellbeing of their children. Instead, their own well-being and happiness is utterly subsumed in the wellbeing and happiness of their children. They are expected to be prepared to sacrifice all other aspects of their life for the child’s wellbeing. This extreme instrumentalisation does not just treat the mother as a means to her child’s happiness, but treats her *merely* as a means, failing to recognise that her happiness and wellbeing matters in its own right. Nussbaum argues that Lawrentian objectification is benign in part because it is symmetrical and mutual, and undertaken in a context of mutual respect and rough social equality.[[62]](#footnote-62) The objectification in the Model of Motherhood does not meet these conditions. For according to the Model of Motherhood, the mother is less important than her children: their needs matter; hers do not.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Differences in time-frame are also important. The voluntary renunciation of individual autonomy and boundaries in the sexual episodes described by Lawrence occurs during a short session of sexual activity, after which normal service is, presumably, resumed. The renunciation of autonomy and boundaries demanded by the Model of Motherhood is long-term. Pregnancy and motherhood takes up significant periods of many women’s lives. Suppose we assume, at a conservative estimate, that the period of intense mothering and utter subsumption of self is supposed to last until the child is five years old. If a woman has one child, then she will be required to live without boundaries for almost six years. If she has two children with an age gap of two years each time, then it will be eight years. If she has three children with a two year age gap, it will be a decade. Clearly there is a huge difference between the temporary boundary softening described by Lawrence ad Nussbaum and this semi-permanent setting aside of boundaries.

Our current understanding of motherhood involves objectionable objectification because it is (a) coercive, presented as the only way in which to be a good mother; (b) extreme, requiring the total subsumption of the mother’s needs and (c) long term. The third feature seems pretty much unavoidable: motherhood should not be reduced to a brief encounter. This means that we need to be extra-careful with the ways in which mothers are treated as objects. If we are to revise our understanding of motherhood so that it doesn’t involve objectionable objectification, we need to ensure that the object-like features of motherhood are compatible with human dignity as long-term conditions of ordinary life. This is an additional reason to ensure that the object-like features of the revised understanding of motherhood are neither extreme nor coercive. Mothers should not be expected to give up all sense of themselves as discrete individuals nor feel as if they have no right to demand respect for the boundaries of their bodies. In addition, it should be recognised that there are many different ways of being, feeling and acting as a mother. This is, I think, compatible with recognising what motherhood can teach us about the value of objectivity in human life and with valuing motherhood, in part because of its disruption of individualism.

**Other Accounts of Objectification**

I have focused on the Nussbaum/ Langton account of objectification. However, the discussion also has implications for other prominent accounts.[[64]](#footnote-64) The classic Dworkin/MacKinnon account puts pornography at the centre of objectification. Pornography reduces women to tools for men’s sexual use: “Pornography *participates* in its audience's eroticism through creating an accessible sexual object, the possession and consumption of which *is* male sexuality, as socially constructed; to be consumed and possessed as which, *is* female sexuality, as socially constructed.”[[65]](#footnote-65) A key criticism of the Dworkin/ MacKinnon account is that it focuses too narrowly on women’s sexual objectification through pornography. Partly in response to this, both Susan Bordo and Sandra Bartky have developed accounts of objectification which focus more widely on the way in which women are treated, and come to treat themselves, as aesthetic objects to be gazed at and decorated. This both reduces a woman to her body and alienates her from her body as she takes the attitude of an outsider towards herself.[[66]](#footnote-66) Sally Haslanger offers a very different account, which takes objectification to be a partially epistemic stance. This stance has two features: first, the powerful take the way the world seems to *them* to be the *objective* view of the world, so that their viewpoint is the ‘objective’ viewpoint and everyone else’s is subjective or biased; second, the powerful then force the world to behave in a way that fits how it ‘objectively’ seems to them. Thus, for example, women are forced to behave in certain way by appeal to some ‘objective’ truth.[[67]](#footnote-67)

We see aspects of all these ways of understanding objectification in the Model of Motherhood. The Model of Motherhood involves objectification in Haslanger’s sense because it claims that women are *objectively* nurturing, focused on their infants, self-sacrificing, without clear boundaries, etc. These claims to objectivity are then used to police women’s behaviour, forcing them to become as the Model of Motherhood pictures them to be, in all the ways discussed above. The Model of Motherhood involves both treating the female body as something to be “consumed and possessed” (as in the MacKinnon / Dworkin understanding of objectification) and causes women to become alienated from their own bodies by coming to see them as objects (as in Bordo and Bartky’s understanding of objectification). However, consideration of objectification in the context of the Model of Motherhood shows that *both* the MacKinnon/ Dworkin *and* the Bordo/ Bartky understanding of objectification are too narrow. Not all gendered objectification is primarily about treating women as aesthetic or sexual objects. For the reduction of women to aesthetic or sexual objects – whose primary purpose is to be looked at – is accompanied by the reduction of women to reproductive tools – whose primary purpose is to have and bring up babies. The existence of a different, but equally troubling, form of objectification should not be surprising. The old dichotomy that a woman must be a Madonna or a whore is well known. Being a Madonna, like being a whore, involves ultimately being for others rather than for oneself.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Nancy Bauer (*How To Do Things With Pornography)* expresses scepticism regarding the usefulness of analysis of concepts such as objectification. On Bauer’s view, terms like “sexual objectification” make sense only from within a particular “worldview” or systematic normative understanding of the world. For those with the appropriate normative commitments, the term “sexual objectification” will “light up” the relevant phenomenon “and you will see it everywhere you look in contemporary culture”.[[69]](#footnote-69) Bauer argues that the ordinary intuitions of people with this kind of worldview will be more reliable in reflecting whether something counts as objectification than attempts to provide a set of criteria. On the other hand, if someone lacks the appropriate normative commitments, no attempt to specify criteria for the term will, from that person’s point of view, pick out any phenomenon at all. People who have not previously understood the concept of sexual objectification come to do so not through reading analyses but through a shift in their understanding of the world and their place within it. Philosophical analysis of objectification is helpful neither for those who already grasp the concept nor for those who lack it.

This paper may serve as response to Bauer. First, it provides an example of why analysis can be helpful. The Model of Motherhood may not “light up” as objectification until the features it shares with other objectionable forms of objectification are pointed out. Second, the discussion in the section on non-objectionable objectification may explain why normative commitments can affect whether one sees a given phenomenon as objectification. If I am correct, recognising certain behaviour as objectifying involves seeing it as treating someone in ways characteristic of our treatment of objects to an extent or in a way that is incompatible with appropriate treatment of a person. This means that your understanding of whether a given behaviour – or indeed any behaviour – counts as objectification will depend upon your understanding of the moral constraints on the treatment of persons. It also provides a response to Bauer’s objection that Nussbaum’s expansion of our understanding to include cases of “benign objectification” distorts the concept, transforming it into “the philosopher’s dummy concept, not the one that helps us make sense of the world in which we find ourselves living.”[[70]](#footnote-70) For, if I am correct, the examples described by Nussbaum should not be recognised as instances of objectification. Nonetheless, as I have argued above, analysis of this concept can still be extremely useful, providing a clearer sense of the ways in which objectification involves inappropriate treatment.

**Conclusion**

It is fruitful to consider our understanding of motherhood in the light of feminist discussions of objectification and to consider the concept of objectification in the light of motherhood. Our understanding of motherhood is influenced by a picture of mothers as naturally, cheerfully self-sacrificing. This picture, which I refer to as the Model of Motherhood, claims to be both descriptive and normative: it uses claims about what mothers naturally do, feel, and are as standards to assess real mothers. I have argued that the Model of Motherhood involves *violability*; *reduction to body; ownership* and *silencing* in a relatively straightforward way. It involves *instrumentality*, *denial of autonomy*; *inertness*; *fungibility*; and *denial of subjectivity* in a more complex ‘double-edged’ way. It thus involves treating the mother as an object. Nussbaum and Green have argued that not all ways of treating a person as an object are objectionable. The object-appropriate treatment involved in the Model of Motherhood is (a) coercive, presented as the only way in which to be a good mother; (b) extreme, requiring the total subsumption of the mother’s needs and (c) long term. It thus involves treating a person as an object to an extent that is incompatible with appropriate treatment of a person. We should recognize it as a case of objectionable objectification.

Recognizing the Model of Motherhood as objectionable objectification helps us to more clearly articulate worries about our understanding of motherhood. It links concerns over our treatment of mothers to a long-established conversation regarding sexual objectification. But considering objectification and motherhood can also shed light on our understanding of objectification. Like the examples of Lawrentian sexual objectification discussed by Nussbaum, motherhood may seem to be wonderful precisely because of some of the features that seem to make it count as objectifying. I suggest that we should only count object-appropriate treatment as objectification if it involves treating a person as an object in a way (or to an extent) incompatible with the appropriate treatment of a person. Consideration of motherhood, like consideration of Lawrentian objectification, shows that in some cases treating someone as an object can be not only compatible with treating them as a person, but a deeply important aspect of human flourishing. Such examples show that we may need to revise the way we conceive of persons.

Although I have focused on the Nussbaum/ Langton account of objectification, the discussion also has implications for other accounts such as the classic Dworkin-MacKinnon account, Bordo and Bartky’s aesthetic object accounts and Sally Haslanger’s epistemic account, and Nancy Bauer’s ‘anti-analysis’ approach.

1. This paper was presented at Edinburgh Women in Philosophy Spring Workshop 2016 and at the “Better Understanding the Metaphysics of Pregnancy” June 2016 Work in Progress Session at the University of Southampton. I would like to thank audiences at both events for extremely helpful comments and suggestions, and in particular my EWIP commentator, Anna de Bruyckere, and Elselijn Kingma who gave extensive comments and advice. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. #hardestjobintheworld Mothers Day advert by American Greetings. Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWcJZ210AaM> (accessed 5th April 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Amy Mullin, *Reconceiving Pregnancy and Childcare: Ethics, Experience, and Reproductive Labour* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2005), p. 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Of course, a significant number of mothers are single parents with little or no outside support. However, first, even for such mothers the picture painted by American Greetings is unrealistic: the period of no time to sleep and no breaks should not last 365 days let alone 365 days a year for many years as implied by the advert. It is only in cases where a child has significant special needs that this is a realistic picture of parenting. Second, the assumption that such a situation is normal or natural is damaging. Our response to a woman in such a situation should not be ‘Her kids better send her a card!’ Our response should be: we need to set up better structures of support so people do not go through this. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mullin, *Reconceiving Pregnancy and Childcare*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Rebecca Kukla *Mass Hysteria: Medicine, Culture, and Mothers’ Bodies*. (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Mullin, *Reconceiving Pregnancy and Childcare*, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For overviews of the use of the term ‘ideology’, see Eagleton, Terry (1991) *Ideology. An introduction*, Verso, [ISBN 0-86091-319-8](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:BookSources/0860913198); Minar, David M. (1961) "Ideology and Political Behavior", *Midwest Journal of Political Science*. Midwest Political Science Association; http://www.semioticon.com/seo/I/ideology.html# [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I am unsure whether Mullin intends to use the word ideology in the Marxist sense as “false consciousness which is functionally explained by reference to its tendency to promote the interests of one social group over enough” or indeed as a form of patriarchal ideology “false consciousness, the occurrence and nature of which we take to be explicable in terms of a tendency to further the interests of a dominant sex (men) over a subordinate one (women)” (Finalyson *An Introduction to Feminism* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016), p. 18). She clearly sees the ideology of motherhood as damaging for women. It may superficially seem that children are the beneficiaries of the ideology of motherhood. However, children and fathers as well as mothers suffer from this picture. The beneficiary, if there is one, seems to me to be the patriarchal system rather than any individuals. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Kukla, *Mass Hysteria*, p. 81 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Kukla, *Mass Hysteria* p. 67 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Kukla, *Mass Hysteria*, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Kukla, *Mass Hysteria*, p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. La Leche League, International, *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, Sixth Revised Edition, (New York, Plume Books, 1997) p. 86, cited Kukla *Mass Hysteria,* p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Rebecca Kukla *Mass Hysteria*, p. 175-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. La Leche League, International, *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, Sixth Revised Edition, (New York, Plume Books, 1997) p. 79, cited Kukla *Mass Hysteria,* p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Kukla, *Mass Hysteria*, p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Kingma and Woollard, ‘Can you harm your foetus? Pregnancy, physical indistinctness, and difficult deontological distinctions.**’** forthcoming. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Does it make sense to speak of ‘*the* Model of Motherhood’, assuming that this will cover all races and cultures? I suggest that the ‘Model of Motherhood’ under discussion pictures ‘a mother’ as white, able-bodied, appropriately aged, middle-class, heterosexual, and thin. Nonetheless, this picture is still understood as a universal norm. Mothers who do not fit this picture are held to the standards of the Model of Motherhood even as it renders them invisible. In Kukla’s terms, those who deviate from the Fetish Mother are all too easily seen as Unruly Mothers, who present a danger to their children. (See Kukla, *Mass Hysteria,* p. 92-97 for discussion of the unruly mother and p. 201 for discussion of the way representations of breastfeeding present mothers as white, able-bodied and middle-class. See Carol Mason and Dorothy Roberts for discussion of the ways in which black mothers are more likely to be suspected of provided poor treatment or prosecuted for alcohol or substance use in pregnancy (Carol Mason, 2000 “Cracked Babies and the Partial Birth of a Nation: Millennialism and Fetal Citizenship.” *Cultural Studies, 14, no. 1 35-60; Dorothy Roberts 1997, Killing the Black Body*: Race Representation and the meaning of liberty, New York Pantheon,cited in Mullin, *Reconceiving Pregnancy and Childcare,* p. 102.) There are also more local Models of Motherhood, for example, the Model of Black Motherhood, Asian Motherhood and Working Class Motherhood. Some of these local Models of Motherhood display local forms of the types of objectification I describe. I thank Aidan McGlynn for pressing me on this and Stella Villarmea, Catherine Mills and Elselijn Kingma for helping to develop my response. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Nussbaum, Martha, 1995, “Objectification”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 24(4), p. 256-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Nussbuam, “Objectification”, p. 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Nussbaum, “Objectification”,, p. 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Nussbaum, “Objectification”, p. 257 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Langton, *Sexual Solipicism*, p. 228-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Langton, *Sexual Solipicism*, p. 236-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Langton, *Sexual Solipicism*, P. 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Langton, *Sexual Solipicism*,, p. 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Langton, *Sexual Solipicism*, P. 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Nussbaum, “Objectification” p. 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Kukla, *Mass Hysteria*, p. 177-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Kukla, *Mass Hysteria,* p. 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. There is a significant amount of empirical research on the guilt and shame felt by women who are unable to, or choose not to, breastfeed. See, for example, (Lee E. (2007) Health, morality, and infant feeding: British mothers’ experiences of formula milk use in the early weeks. *Sociology of Health and Illness* **29**, 1075–1090; Lakshman R., Ogilvie D. & Ong K.K. (2009) Mothers’ experiences of bottle-feeding: a systematic review of qualitative and quantitative studies. *Archives of Disease in Childhood* **94**, 596–601.). See also Rebecca Kukla, “Measuring Motherhood”, *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics* 1 (2008)on the way in which one’s ability or willingness to breastfeed is taken to be determinant of whether one is a good mother or not. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. “Babies were born to be breastfed” campaign, Ad Council 2004. Pictured on Kukla, *Mass Hysteria,* p. 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. <http://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/well-good/4164167/Grow-up-men-Breasts-are-for-babies> accessed 29th July 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See “My Breasts Are for Me, Not Just for Feeding Babies”

    https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/dry-land-fish/201304/my-breasts-are-me-not-just-feeding-babies [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. I thank Elselijn Kingma for help with the ideas in this paragraph and how to convey them. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Kukla, *Mass Hysteria,* p. 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. <http://www.vocativ.com/278919/pregnancy-alcohol-use-cdc/> For a brilliant public philosophy piece on the problems with the ‘why take the risk’ approach to advice on drinking in pregnancy, see also Kukla’s LA Times Op Ed. http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0210-kukla-cdc-alcohol-pregnancy-20160210-story.html [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See Mullin, *Reconceiving Pregnancy and Childbirth,* p. 2, Chapter 7. Kukla, *Mass Hysteria, Chapter 5*. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Rebecca Kukla *Mass Hysteria: Medicine, Culture, and Mothers’ Bodies*, p. 175-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. For discussion of the way in which ideology might shape desire in the particular case of new mothers see Kukla, *Mass Hysteria,* 175-177. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Nussbaum, “Objectification”, p. 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. I thank Catherine Mills for pointing this out. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Sandra Lee Bartky “Focault, Feminity and the Modernisation of Patriarchal Power” In Diana Tietjens Meyers (ed), *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader* (Routledge, 1997), p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid, p. 102-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See Nussbaum, “Objectification” p. 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Nussbaum, “Objectification”, p. 273. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Nussbaum, “Objectification”, p. 274. Here Nussbaum is referencing remarks by Cass Sunstein in a review of Nadine Strossen’s book defending pornography, Cass Sunstein, “Review of Strossen”, *The New Republic*, 9 January 1995, quoted Nussbaum, “Objectification” p. 250-251. Nadine Strossen, *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women's Rights* (New York: Scribner, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Leslie Green, “Pornographies”, *Journal of Political Philosophy,* 8 (1), 2000, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Nussbaum “Objectification”, p.273. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Nussbaum “Objectification”, p.273. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Nussbaum “Objectification”, p.273. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Nussbaum “Objectification”, p. 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Nussbaum “Objectification”, p. 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Nussbaum “Objectification”, p. 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Green, “Pornographies”, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Green, “Pornographies” p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Nussbaum “Objectification”, p.257, quoted Green, “Pornographies”, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Green, “Pornographies”, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Nussbaum, “Objectification”, p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Nussbaum, “Objectification”, p. 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. It was suggested to me in conversation that there is an incoherence at the heart of the Model of Motherhood. The Model treats the needs of children as deeply valuable while the needs of mothers are seen as important. But a significant number of these children will grow up to become mothers, whose needs are then held to be unimportant. I’m not sure that there is a logical incoherence here. One might hold that these children become unimportant either when they grow up or when they become mothers. Nonetheless, they does seem to be at the very least a tension in holding that your daughter’s needs are intensely important until she has a child. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. I give heartfelt thanks to Elselijn Kingma who helped my understanding of both these accounts of objectification and the implications for them of objectification in the Model of Motherhood. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. MacKinnon, Catharine, 1987, *Feminism Unmodified*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, p. 173 [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Bordo, Susan, 1993, *Unbearable Weight*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Bartky, Sandra-Lee, 1990, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, New York: Routledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Haslanger, Sally, 1993, “On Being Objective and Being Objectified”, in *A Mind of One's Own. Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (eds.), Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 209–253. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. There are lots of interesting things to say about the mutual exclusivity of the Madonna/ whore categories and the way in which that causes problems for the ability of mothers to express their sexuality. There are also interesting things to say about the transition that many women report from being all too visible/ sexualized when young to becoming invisible/ asexualised when older. I thank Elselijn Kingma for highlighting this. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Bauer, Nancy, *How to Do Things with Pornography*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 2015) p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Bauer, *How to Do Things with Pornography*, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)