In the broadest sense possible, objectification involves treating an abstract idea as though it is concrete. Objectification can also involve the oversimplification of a complex concept. By forcing an object or an idea to be experienced by the senses, one is objectifying that object or idea.

In the context of Joyce’s article, objectification refers to the treatment of the human body as a purely physical entity. Joyce’s article contrasts an “objectified body” with an “active embodiment,” the difference being that objectifying a body focuses on external traits, whereas embodiment focuses more on abstract concepts. Thus, studying a culture from an objective standpoint would involve viewing the body as an object with no deeper meaning beyond that. Objectification involves seeing the body as entirely separate from the mind. However, embodied subjectivity views the body and mind as one because subjective thought controls the body. Embodied subjectivity asserts that since subjective thought is intertwined with the body, the body cannot be objectified.

Objectification is often discussed in a sexual context. Sexual objectification is when the body is thought of as an instrument for sexual exploitation, and the personality of the individual is not considered. At the risk of gender stereotyping, women sometimes claim that men are objectifying them when they are discussed in purely sexual terms.

Resources:

Joyce, Rosemary A.
2005 Archaeology of the Body. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34: 139-158

Van Wolputte, Steven