

Sexy Bodies Sell... Inequality: Objectification makes people more tolerant to economic inequality

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Abstract

Objectification is omnipresent in marketing (e.g., advertisements, TV shows, magazines, costumes, bodybuilding pills). Objectification occurs, among others, when people are treated as bodies or objects, or when people are valued only by their physical appearance. The exposure to objectifying content causes consumers to adopt an “objectifying mindset” (i.e., a tendency to objectify others). This affects their moral judgments because objectified targets are dehumanised and people feel less empathy for them. Empathy influences judgments regarding inequality. Hence, we argue that adopting an objectifying mindset increases tolerance to economic inequality. We propose that empathy mediates the effect. The results of 3 studies support our reasoning. Large economic inequalities harm people and society. Public acceptance of economic inequalities perpetuates them. Given the role of marketing in spreading objectification, it is important to understand how it shapes consumer’s moral judgments.

Keywords: *Objectification; Empathy; Inequality*

Track: Transformative Consumer Research