

**Can we empathize with objectified women?
How the perception of others shapes our feeling toward them**

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Extensive research has been conducted to investigate how individuals empathize with other humans [1]. However, people are likely to rely on their own emotional state to infer other's emotions, consequently this could lead on to biased judgments (EEB) [2]. Although it has been assumed that individuals show empathic reactions towards humans but not towards nonliving entities, no experimental research has addressed this issue. The first aim of the present research is to shed lights on empathic feelings and EEB toward human and objects. The second aim of this research is to investigate whether those processes can be moderated by the objectification of humans. Indeed, when women are objectified (i.e., represented by their physical appearance over mental states), they are represented as less human [3], and processed in an analytic mode like objects [4]. In this study, male and female participants took part into the *touch paradigm* [2]. Specifically, it is based on the simultaneous visuo-tactile stimulation of the participant and a confederate. This paradigm allows for assessing the affective component of empathy and the EEB, as a measure of self-other distinction. Depending on the experimental condition, the confederate could be a mannequin (object condition) or a female individual. The female confederate could be either dressed in an objectified fashion (objectified condition) or in a non-objectified manner (personalized condition).

Results showed that the EEB seems to be a hardwired process not susceptible to modulation. On the contrary, higher empathy toward human than non-human has been found. Interestingly empathy did not differ between objectified women and mannequins, while it is higher when interacting with a personalized woman than with mannequins. Furthermore the EEB is not associated to empathy.

In conclusion the process of objectifying women leads to a cognitive shift from human to object-like processing, thus assimilating women to inanimate entities and dampening the empathic responses, but not the EEB, that are typically recruited when processing human beings.

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