

Self-Objectification May Inhibit Women's Social Activism

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Women who live in a culture in which they are objectified by others may in turn begin to objectify themselves. This kind of self-objectification may reduce women's involvement in social activism, according to new research published in [Psychological Science](#), a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#).

Psychological scientist Rachel Calogero of the University of Kent, Canterbury hypothesized that women who self-objectify — valuing their appearance over their competence — would show less motivation to challenge the gender status quo, ultimately reducing their participation in social action.

In a survey study with undergraduate women, Calogero found that women who reported higher levels of self-objectification were less likely to have participated in gender-based social activism in the previous six months. This association was explained, at least in part, by increased justification of the gender status quo, supporting Calogero's original hypothesis.

A second study provided experimental support for these findings: Women who were primed to engage in self-objectification showed greater support for the gender status quo and reduced willingness to participate in social action that would challenge gender inequality.

Together, these studies suggest that self-objectification may be part of a wider pattern of behavior that maintains gender inequality.

Although previous research has examined the effects of self-objectification on women's self-evaluation, physical health, mental health, and cognitive performance, these studies are the first to examine its effects on women's engagement in gender-based social action.

The findings reported in these studies are limited to the university population studied, but Calogero believes that this research may have much broader implications.

“Given the number of opportunities for women to experience self-objectification in their daily lives, it is troubling that such experiences appear to thwart women's engagement in activism on their own behalf,” Calogero writes.