

Review of angela mcrobbies article titled essay example

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Bridging the Gap: Feminism, Fashion

And Consumption

Abstract

This review analyses the relation between feminism, fashion and consumption as discussed by Angela McRobbie in her article ‘ Bridging the Gap: Feminism, Fashion and Consumption’. The paper will evaluate the arguments that the author presents, focusing on women and consumption as well as the feminization of the fashion industry. McRobbie treats the issue of consumption as a problem that is not getting the degree of attention it deserves. The evidences she provides to prove her point will be noted. She also focuses on the predominance of women employees in the production of fashion products across the globe and the below par conditions that they work in.

On Consumption

McRobbie states that current statistics relating to women and consumption are flawed as they ignore the processes of exclusion which limit and format the ability to consume. This includes disposable income, class and ethnic

background variations and the production of consumption.

McRobbie argues that this exclusion induces a complacent attitude about consumption and misconception of consumer culture.

The author says that American consumerism, in fact, global consumerism, is targeted mainly on white, middle class women and not all women equally. She references several authors such as Pumphrey (1987) , Felski (1995) , Nava (1996) , Bowlby (1 9 8 5) and Reekie (1995) to illustrate how the practice of consumption by women has, for well over a century, been divided between those who buy goods to use them for further production and those who were rich enough to have these women do the work for them.

Eventually, academic feminism has been divided between ' material feminists' or those who view the production of goods, particularly fashion, how they are produced by poor women and children; and ' cultural feminists' or those who view consumption as an act fueled by want and the pleasure attained by fulfilling it. McRobbie challenges the views of these cultural feminists.

The author claims that this segment of feminists is formed by those who secretly crave to consume the very things that they stand against and hence look for ways and means to justify themselves. She backs this view by noting the efforts made through 1980s to mid 1990s to broaden the reach of consumerism to lower middle classes and validate the relation between consumerism and enjoyment. McRobbie further argues this has kept the focus away from questions about the production of consumption.

McRobbie back her claim on the growing divide between consumerism and

production of consumption by quoting Celia Lury where she speaks of the power and authority it gives ‘at least some’ consumers, and quotes her again to reveal how the cultural feminist is actually speaking of privileged social classes when she speaks of the power to consume. The author supports her views on the production side of consumption by given examples of personal experiences with low class women working all night to produce fashion goods.

McRobbie refutes claims that consumerism has grown mainly through the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century due to female consumption driven by feminine pleasures as supported by authors such as Nava (1996), Felski (1995), Bowlby (1985) and Reekie (1995) by pointing that their sources they used were unreliable and limited in nature. She says that even modern day shopping at departmental stores that are supposedly ‘free for all’ is conducted by women who shop for leisure, i. e.: middle class or high society women. Even the shop assistants, she says, still hold a position of servitude, being sacked if they do not show the right level of deference to customers from different classes of society.

McRobbie closes her argument by quotes Nava in several places to show how even the most ‘liberalized’ women were able to carry out work that men deemed suitable for them and these, too, belonged to middle class society or higher. As such, lower class women, who are the main contributors on the production of consumption, have been left out of every analysis of consumerism and feminism, something that the author objects strongly. She argues that it is senseless to assume that women have become prominent consumers in modernity when we are considering women belong

to middle class and higher levels of society and entirely ignoring the plight of those who belong to the lower strata. The authors points out that leads to a false sense of power and authority among women where it does not really exist. She further lists statistics which show just how big an impact these women from lower sections of society have on the country as a whole. She also noted that most studies living women and poverty come from those lobbying against poverty and none from feminists.

McRobbie interviewed several black or Asian women, a section that is grossly underrepresented in consumption data. She found that these women learned how to sew so that they would not have to work in white household. They also passed on this skill to their daughters so they could sew clothes that could not afford to buy. She backs her point by mentioning that majority of black and Asian fashion designing students as well designers come from such households.

The author concludes by pointing out that those like Rowbotham, Phizacklea and Tate, who are concerned about the plight of low cost women and child workers, need to join hands with feminists who are also concerned about the same issues. She also raises the point that using tactics such as boycott of goods produced by such exploitation will have an adverse effect on hundreds of thousands of women who rely on these meagre wages to run their family.

On Fashion

The author makes specific note of the British fashion industry and how the integration of production and consumption will impact it. She calls for better understanding between the actual consumers and the workers who produce

fashion products as well as those mid-level workers who work in departments such as designing and sketching. McRobbie believes that the various components that make up the fashion industry need to be regarded as separate entities so that their inter-dependencies and individual issues with rights of its majority female workers can be evaluated effectively. She goes on to further discuss the issues faced by the members of each component and how their problems can be resolved. Bringing about absolute awareness among consumers may lead to build up of pressure on consumer organizations to have the fashion industry to re-think its processes and provide working conditions and pay scales to the thousands of women they employ in order to manufacture their products.