

Free research paper on the objectification of women in media

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Introduction

Objectification of women is a trend that is coming up in the entertainment industry especially in movies, music videos, music and television. This development seems to be affecting women more than men. The wave of women stereotypes is dangerous for the society because it is bound to affect how men and women relate to each other and promote unhealthy habits in the masses that are exposed to such incorrect media representation of women. This issue is especially tricky to handle because it is evident that the more the media depicts women as sexual objects, the more viewers seem to be entertained and buy into it. This viewership is not restricted to the men, but women also subscribe to such obscenities. By using incorrect and perverse representation of women, the media is able to shape the societies ideologies on dating, marriage and sex. It is also important to note that this problem falls across the demographic divide, young or old, black or white; they all seem to have fallen for this media craze. The actions of the media have been allowed because sex sells and the society has shown that it has

approved the objectification of women.

Immanuel Kant has been instrumental in contemporary feminist discussions and has shared a lot on this topic. Kant thoughts are that depiction of sex outside a monogamous marriage leads to objectification. He writes in his lectures on ethics that during sexual love making, there is a strong desire for the person being love and when that desire disappears with end of love making and the person is thrown aside like a lemon that has been cast away, then that person is objectified as an object of appetite for the other. (Kant 163)

For Kant, Objectification is the aspect of lowering a person, a being who has humanity, to the status of an object. According to Kant, Humanity is a person's capacity for a rational nature. The main feature of a human being is the ability to make rational decisions and find ways to find their value. Because human beings are unique, unlike animals, they have a sense of dignity and inner worth (Kant 42). It is important for Kant that every person respects humanity in other people and that humanity should not only be treated as a means but rather as an end (Kant 209).

The relationship between men and women is summarized in one sentence by John Berger (1972) documentary ' ways of seeing', Berger says, " Men look, women are looked at". Women in the media have been constantly portrayed as objects of desire and one might be forgiven to think that feminism and women have progressed since the bra-burning days of the 60's and 70's where women in authority championed for women's rights.

Literature Review

In my literature search, the theme that stood out was the effects that objectification was having on different demographics of society and especially women. Women who are being viewed as sexual objects are also buying into this culture. The usage of sexual scenes by the media will continue since the media is making a lot of profit from it, however, the continual of such trends will affect the society negatively and this effect will be both short-term and long-term. Watching a television can lead to the arousal of a person, inhibiting their logical reasoning and the concept of association. It may also lead to lasting change of behavior patterns, representation of sexual interactions and attitude towards the real world. This in effect, has created stereotypes where the society sees men as sex driven and women as their objects of desire.

The media gains a lot of power over this issue because of the immense profit attributed from presenting women in sexual ways. The media shows unrealistic accounts of love, relationships and sex which raise questions on how a society can allow the media to operate under such pretenses.

Objectification of women in media can be very dangerous on the youth of today since they are at that stage of their lives where they are shaping their impressions and ideas of life. This adversely affects their development since the cognitive skills that allow human beings to critically analyze information have not fully developed.

It has been indicated by many feminist ideologists that women are more identified with their bodies than men and are valued by their looks (Bordo 1993, 143; Bartky 19). So that women can be accepted by the society, they

are forced to correct their bodies so that they can live up to the standards of appearance that the media shows (Saul 144). Many feminist writers have argued that, for women to be preoccupied by their appearance, they set themselves as objects to be decorated.

Sandra Bartky, in her book *Femininity and Domination*, uses Marx's theory of alienation and showcases the objectification that comes from women's constant obsession with appearance. Marx's theory deals with the fragmentations of the human nature into a number of parts, Marx explains that the product of labor is the exteriorization of the laborer's being.

However, Marx argues that under capitalism, workers are isolated from their labor and consequently fragmented (Bartky 128-9). Bartky suggests that through fragmentation, women are objectified. However, Bartky states that women can be both the objectifier and the objectified. This is because women feel the need to make themselves objects of desire since they naturally assume that men are driven by their appearance. Women live in their body as seen and objectified by another, an anonymous patriarchal other (Bartky 73). This influences women to objectify themselves. Bartky argues that women will derive satisfaction from her physical, erotic self and will present their body as object to be admired and gazed upon (Bartky 131-2).

Discussion

For this research paper, I will look at a scene in the movie *National Lampoon* which shows guys in a campus party having sex with women. There is also a clip that shows a woman who is lifting a naked leg in an effort to entice a

man into having sex with her. These two scenes highlight the height of women objectification where women can be used for sex only and the guys have no intention of knowing the women. These scenes portray women who are ready to abide to the men's desires and fantasies. Another aspect that is brought forth is the women's desire to be noticed and admired, we see women wearing bikinis, lingerie and many other revealing clothes so that their physical appearance can attract their male counterparts. These scenes depict how the media packages sexual stereotyping by showing that women are ready to satisfy men and that it is not wrong for the men to crave women, this 'ethical' display tries to down play serious issues that amount from such pictures.

The pornographic nature of these scenes highlights the inequality of women. Inequality covers many aspects in the society. MacKinnon believes that inequality is widespread and pervasive in the community. According to Mackinnon, gender and sex are two different phenomena. Gender, he explains, is constructed by the society while sex is defined biologically. In this modern heterosexual society, both men and women have their roles; women are objectified while the men become the objectifiers (Mackinnon 32-45). These gender roles are decorated by the media and brought forward as natural.

The aspect of gender inequality that persists as a thorn to the society and is directly connected to a woman objectification is, Mackinnon believes, promoted by men's constant consumption of pornography. MacKinnon describes pornography as the subordination of women through graphic representation and dehumanization as sexual commodities (Mackinnon 176).

He argues that women's role is reduced to sex objects for male consumption; he states that pornography values women by how they look and how sexually they can be used. Pornography contributes to its audience's erotic experiences by creating an accessible sexual object for male indulgence and is socially constructed to indicate that its possession belongs to the male figure (Mackinnon 173). According to Mackinnon, the conception of women as sexual objects is squarely blamed on pornography.

Mackinnon argues that, even when women accept to their being viewed as sexual objects, it is not enough to make this practice acceptable. For example, Mackinnon says that women who are used by the media to create sexual or pornographic scenes accept this role for lack of options that are available in such a patriarchal society. This means that the women's consent is not true consent. Mackinnon writes, " Money is the medium that drives the consent for sex"(Mackinnon 28). What Mackinnon claims, is that women are not wholly to blame for their objectification, rather, it is the men's need for sexual satisfaction that drives this inequality.

Kant compares women objectification to a lemon that is thrown away after it is squeezed or a steak that is eaten simply to satisfy hunger (Kant 163 and 165). Similarly, Mackinnon blames the media for highlighting to their viewership that women exist to be exploited by men. Mackinnon continues to say that men get their power from the objects they can use (including women) and the continual pursuit for this power will prevent any changes occurring towards women objectification. These feminists believe that objectification is brought about by gender inequality which is fuelled and sustained by the existence of pornography. Mackinnon fears that the

continued use of women in such light may lead to violence and abuse since women are highlighted as things rather than human beings.

Mackinnon notes that the women presented in the media are shown to be enjoying themselves as they are being used and violated by men. The media creates scenes where women intentionally want to be humiliated and bound. Such scenes in the media therefore show its viewers that it is okay to treat women in a bad way since they are shown to be enjoying it.

According to Kant, the only solution to the objectification of women is marriage. This is because marriage represents two people in equal terms, each surrendering to the other. This way, Kant believes that none of them is objectified by losing their person. However, Mackinnon disagrees with Kant and states that heterosexual relationships in the society play a big part of harming the woman's humanity and the only way to fight gender inequality is to cast always the media's portrayal of women as sexual objects.

So far, we have looked at the negative side of objectification. However, there are a few group of thinkers who think that objectification is not an aspect of gender inequality. Alan Soble disagrees with Kant and insists that everyone is an object and thus no one can be objectifies since we all lack the status to be reduce-able by objectification. In another view, everyone is susceptible to objectification because to do so would essentially mean to negate them to their correct level. In the case of treating women as sex objects, Soble claims that there is nothing wrong with them doing what the know best since they do it under their own volition.

Martha Nussbaum disagree with Soble, according to her, someone is objectified when they are seen in one or more of the following seven ways;

denial of autonomy, fungibility, inertness, ownership, violability, instrumentality and denial of subjectivity. According to Nussbaum, objectification is broader than Kant and Mackinnon make it to be. Nussbaum believes that objectification has some good aspects because it shows the beautiful features of sexual life, thus, objectification can be used in a more positive light. Objectification is negative when used in the absence of consent and respects and it is positive when equality, consent and respect are available. Nussbaum believes that when the media portrays sex between two lovers, it is doing so within the boundaries of positive objectification.

Conclusion

Unquestionably, objectification as concept of gender inequality is difficult to define, it turns out to be slippery and multiple (Nussbaum 251). The best way to define objectification is to include benign and/or positive aspects of objectification. This means that the media can do something to avoid the negative aspects of objectification and concentrate on the positive so as to avoid the negative consequences it may have on the society.

What is clear is that the media is responsible for influencing our behavior and outlook in life and their role in eradicating gender inequality, when it comes to negative objectifications, cannot be over emphasized.

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