

Women's self-esteem in the social media age



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America is a patriarchal society with sexist values, which influences social media and popular culture. Although America is moving toward becoming a less sexist and patriarchal society, these influences still affect our culture. These effects can be seen all over social media and popular culture, in particular in the way women tend to be displayed. How social media depicts women can influence what pop culture defines as beautiful, and these depictions can have negative impacts on women's self-esteem

Before discussing American popular culture, American society needs to be examined to understand how it shapes popular culture. American society can be defined as a postindustrial society, "in which technology supports service and information-based economy" (Kendall). America can also be considered patriarchy. Patriarchy is "a hierarchical system of social organization in which culture, political, and economic structures are controlled by men" (Kendall). While America is continuing to move towards a society where women and men are equal, our history and continued use of patriarchy have privileged men over women. Patriarchy is evident in politics, big corporations, and even within family settings. Historically, there are many more men than women elected into political offices, men are typically in charge of companies, and men are traditionally the head of households. Americas patriarchy society also has sexist values, which devalue women and the knowledge and resources they can offer. The values of American society all influence American culture.

According to Diana Kendall, culture can be defined as “ The knowledge, language, values, customs, and material objects that are passed from person to person and from one generation to the next in a human group or society” (3-1). It can be understood how culture influences the American people in the way they think, act and speak with this definition. Culture is the framework of our lives. Within American society and culture, there is cultural diversity. The United States is referred to as a heterogeneous society (Kendall, 3-3b). Not everyone follows the same customs, behaviors, or beliefs because there is a broad representation of different social categories (Kendall, 3-3b). It is essential to understand that even though someone may not act, dress or believe the same as the next person, they still have a culture which influences their lives.

There are different cultural forms, and it is important to understand the difference between the two. One cultural form is what is called High culture. According to Kendall, “ High culture consists of classical music, opera, ballet, live theater, and other activities usually patronized by elite audiences, composed primarily of members of the upper-middle and upper classes, who have time, money and the knowledge assumed to be necessary for its appreciation” (3-5a). Within the United States, high culture is seen as international, brought over to the United States by other countries of the world (Kendall, 3-5a).

In contrast to high culture, there is popular culture (pop culture). Unlike high culture, which came from other countries, pop culture is from the United States. According to Kendall, “ Popular culture consists of activities, products, and services that are assumed to appeal primarily to members of

the middle and working classes" (3-5a). Products and services of pop culture include movies, sports, fashion, and even social media. Since America does tend to have sexist views towards women, women can be portrayed poorly in the media, thus influencing what pop culture defines as beautiful. For example, this portrayal could be a "hot girl" in movies or a "dumb girl" on television. American society and culture are moving towards becoming more inclusive with women in the media by giving them more important roles, but there is still a considerable amount of stereotypical sexist work women do, especially in the press.

One type of the technology used every day by many Americans, especially the younger generations, is social media. Social media can be classified as a part of pop culture because it is an activity, and offers products and services. However, it is utilized by people of all social classes, and has the ability to influence pop culture in all classes. Social media can influence pop culture in such a way that, for example, a piece of clothing is fashionable one week, and then the next week it is no longer fashionable. Social media also can influence what pop culture considers beautiful and can determine if someone receives attention online or not. Beauty is a subjective term, and changes from person to person. However, even though every person may not agree on a standard definition of beauty, their human nature pushes them to fit in and conform to what pop culture defines as beautiful.

Combining America's patriarchy, sexism, and social media creates a formula for how women are portrayed on social media. Objectification is a term that means "to treat an individual not as a person with emotions and thoughts, but as a physical being or object" (Krauss Whitbourne). The way

objectification is being discussed in this paper means treating someone as a sexual object. On social media, women post objectifying images of their body regularly, because it gains attention. Companies participate in this objectification as well. Companies will offer large amounts of money to influencers or celebrities to promote their products with an image (Arnold). The companies selling the products want their advertisement to look attractive to the viewers because they know sex sells. For example, many weight loss/detoxification products are commonly promoted on social media. This is typically done by people who are in shape and showing a large amount of skin. This can cause followers and pop culture to view this as what beauty looks like, and aspire to look the way the picture depicted.

All posts on social media are not paid sponsorships. Even though peers, influencers, and celebrities have no one telling them what to post at times, they will still post pictures of themselves with minimal clothing, in provocative positions, and in a way that will get others attention. The images may be published just because these women are confident in themselves, and that is perfectly fine, but they may also be posted because they want attention and want to be seen as beautiful. All of this is evident when the popular page on the social media site Instagram is opened. Scrolling through the photos, there are many images of women as described above. This types of images are viewed by millions of people day, of all ages, and make impressions upon what people and pop culture deem beautiful.

Not all women are objectified through social media images, but when it is so familiar to see your best friend or favorite movie star posting objectifying photos, women's self-esteem is affected. According to Susan Krauss

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Whitbourne, " A byproducts of women's objectification can occur when certain women become reluctant to look to competent... and so dress in a way that they think men will find sexy" (psychologytoday. com). When a woman's self-esteem mainly relies on how sexy one looks, this can create self-esteem issues for women. Some women may start to see value only in their physical appearance, and in a study by de Vries and Peter, women were more likely to describe themselves in an objectifying manner when they first viewed an objectified female model (1483). When a woman posts an objectifying photo, it also gets the attention of women, even though they may not be sexually attracted to the woman in the picture. The viewer will see the attention the photo has received and may want to start looking like the model in the photo to also receive attention (Krauss Whitbourne). This is a vicious cycle and can damage many women's self-esteem and self-worth with the need to feel beautiful in the eyes of others. This reveals how dominant pop culture and social media are, and how much of a negative impact it has on women's self-esteem.

Objectification of women's bodies is prominent in social media, partly due to pop culture, and the patriarchal society and sexist values Americans hold towards women. Women's objectification of social media is commonly witnessed, and that creates of definition for what pop culture defines as beautiful. Women post self-objectifying pictures and post to receive attention and feel valued, and others use it to sell products. No matter the manner of the post, these images have an impact on women's self-esteem and self-worth because it degrades their intelligence, kindness and other essential qualities, and focuses on their physical appearance.

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