



## IMPACT OF FEMALE SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION IN ADVERTISING ON WOMEN

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### ABSTRACT

*Sexual objectification is a state where women are viewed only as objects of sexual pleasure. Women in advertising and media are sexually objectified to sell various products and services and to attract the attention of the consumers. And sexually objectified images of women in advertising have increased causing a very bad impact on young girls and women leading to various problems like depression, low self esteem etc.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Objectification, Sexual Objectification, Self Objectification, Women in Advertising.*

### INTRODUCTION

Women held very important position in ancient Indian society. There are literary evidences to suggest that women power destroyed kingdoms and mighty rulers. As compared with past women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way. As far as showing women in advertisements is concerned things seems to have worsened overtime. In most of the advertisements of recent times a women is either washing clothes and utensils, cooking, serving food to family members or trying to make her husband feel better who at that time reading a news paper or suffering from cold . The media still portray women as objects showing who in certain way can catch the attraction of people. Advertising is one of the most effective media of communication used to influence individuals to purchase products and

services which are newly introduced into the market. Human beings especially women are used to represent these products in the advertisements. Maximum advertisements which we come across daily are focused on women and family needs since women are the perfect home makers, and she is the one who makes majority purchases for her family. The advertisements basically depict the image we shape of women in our culture. Since 1990's and subsequently advertisers are continuously making an attempt to build multiple possible identities for women in an effort to change their stereotypical image of a mere house wife. Advertisements have started portraying women more frequently as career oriented and in non traditional roles and are constructing the persona of the new Indian women. On the other hand there are certain groups of people who are misusing this image by portraying women in sexual roles and as a decorative object. There are advertisements which are showcasing that if a woman wants to explore her talent she has to display her physical attributes. In the advertising industry whether a woman is promoting cosmetics, jeweler, fabrics domestic gadgets or any other products; she is always projected as an object of sexual pleasure. The women in present day advertisements are highly sexualized. Empirical studies have indicated that women are overwhelmingly targeted more for sexually objectifying treatments than men.

### **SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION**

Objectification is an attitude that regards a person as a commodity or an object for use with out any regard to a person's personality. Sexual objectification refers to the practice of treating a person merely as an instrument or object towards the person's sexual pleasure. In simple it is an act of regarding a person as an object for sexual purposes (Bartky, 1990;Fredrickson & Roberts 1997) and may occur in several forms. Some of the most commonly recognized forms include those often perpetrated by men in their relations with women, such as visual inceptions of the body, whistles or cat calls, sexual comments about body parts, and socially in appropriate sexual comments. In visual media common forms include still photos of women wearing revealing clothing and positioned in sexual manners.

The concept or the idea of Sexual objectification of women is derived from the feminist theories and psychological theories. The concept of sexual objectification is important from the feminist point of view that raised their voice against the sexual portrayal of women in media and their ideas varied widely on what constituted sexual objectification. Some feminist such as Naomi wolf found the concept of physical attractiveness to be problematic where as some radical feminist opposed the evaluation of person's sexual attractiveness based on physical characteristics. According to John Stoltenberg any sexual fantasy that involved visualization of woman was considered to be wrong full objectifying. Radical feminist view objectification as playing a central role in reducing women to what they refer to as the "sex class". They also referred pornography as playing an important role in habituating men to objectify women.

Sexual objectification of women may be defined as an act of disregarding the personal and intellectual abilities and capabilities of a female, and reduction of woman to an instrument of sexual pleasure in the mind of another person, generally assumed to be a man. Sexually oriented depictions of women in advertising, pornography, strip clubs, prostitution, and men evaluating women sexually in public spaces are examples of sexual objectification, and Female body parts are used to represent various products in advertisements.

## **SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION AND SELF OBJECTIFICATION**

Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997) reveals that the most profound affect of daily exposure to sexual objectification is that it may lead to a state of consciousness where woman adopt or internalize the perspectives of observers who objectify their body and thus begin viewing themselves primarily as objects. In other words self objectification is a pervasive trait- like tendency to adopt a third person view of the self. As such self objectification actually involves a propensity to perceive and describe one's body through observable (e.g. what do I look like?) rather than intrinsic characteristics (e.g. what am I capable of). For women who tend to engage in trait self objectification, a far greater value is placed on observable characteristics such as one's physical attractiveness, sexual appeal, weight, and the like at the expense of non- observable traits such as physical health, emotional, intellectual and moral capacity, muscle strength, physical coordination and stamina (Noll & Fredrickson 1998).

Thus in case of self objectification girls and women adopt a peculiar view of self where both of them to some extent, treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated and they often adopt an observer's perspective on their physical selves which is the effect of continuous exposure to sexually objectifying treatments. Various types of media to some extent are responsible for the effects of female sexual objectification.

## **SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION AND MEDIA**

Traditionally, sexually objectifying images has been one way to describe how women are portrayed in media. Although men appear more often than women in general media advertisements, women's body exposure is greater (Hall & Crum, 1994; Sullivan & O' Connor,1988). Several content analysis of magazines and other media have found that women are far more likely than men to be portrayed as nude, scantily clad, or sexualized in some way (Hall & Crum, 1994; Hawkins & Aber, 1988; soley & Reid,1988). In Hall & Crum,'s (1994) study of body-isms the author's definition of camera shots focusing on specific parts of the body-in beer commercials, there was a 49 percent chance that a commercial contained at least one camera shot focusing on the chest for women and only a 24 percent chance for men. Overall, the body-isms of women were greater than of men, a finding similar to those of Archer, Iritani, Kimes, & Barrios (1983) and Dodd, Harcar, Foerch, & Anderson (1989) who found that women's body parts are featured more than women's faces in print advertising.

Advertising which is one of the most powerful media play a very important role in reinforcing beliefs and attitudes among consumers. And most of these advertisements portray women to represent their products and services. And advertisements use the body parts of women to sell their products. And studies have indicated that though men are often used in advertisements women's body exposure for the purpose of attention getting and selling the product is greater. And sexual objectification of women in advertising and media causes a very bad impact especially on women leading to different types of problems.

## **EFFECTS OF SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION**

Stereotypical sexual portrayals of women can have a detrimental impact in a number of areas. Sexually objectifying advertisements have been criticized as fostering female stereotypes

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and images that women are things rather than individuals. Cultural critics (Kilbourne,1999) have argued that the most harmful aspect of sexual objectification in media are the use of fantasy constructions to understand relationships in the real world, such as when music videos or advertisements resemble a rape scene. Similarly, Bem, (1993) argued that portraying women as sex objects strips them of their individual identities, causing others to view them as "things, objects of male sexual desire, and/or part of the merchandise rather than people". According to kilbourne (1999), "women's bodies are dismembered, packaged, and used to sell everything from chain saws to chewing gum. Kuntjara (2001) studied the different types of images of women portrayed in advertisements by taking into consideration a few advertisements from some famous women magazine and came out with the findings that the images of women portrayed in advertisements usually created artificiality that established an impossible standard of physical perfection for women. And women in advertisements were depicted as an object chosen by men for their sexual gratification. Women were often portrayed as sexual object and the images of women in advertisements gave the message those women who had qualities of intelligence, cheerfulness, who was young, sexy, rich educated and lovable was considered as an idle women. Campbell (2003) conducted a research study and came out with the findings that "the respondents with high levels of exposure to fashion magazine advertisements exhibited significantly higher degrees of liking for ultra thin fashion models than did those respondents with low levels of exposure to fashion magazine advertisements". They found that the visual images depicted, had an impact on women's emotional status, when their bodies did not match the idle type shown in the images. This led to the development of eating disorders. Natalie and Covell (1997) examined the impact of print advertisements on attitudes towards women and the impact of seeing sex images and progressive advertisements on attitude towards feminism and the women's movement and came out with the findings that there was presentation of women in advertisements as objects for sexual gratification which encouraged attitudes supportive of sexual aggression among young adults. And the exposure to sex image advertisements affected acceptance of feminism and the women's movement. Based on the findings the researcher suggested that the continuous exposure to such advertisements among young adults would hinder women's efforts of obtaining true equality with freedom from sexual aggression. Kyra, Covell (1995) made an attempt to assess the influence of sexiest advertisement portrayals of women and came out with the findings that the media portrayals of women can influence sexual attitudes and beliefs. And males who see print media advertisements in which women are presented as sex objects are most likely to evidence increased sex role stereotypic and rape myth beliefs, and are likely to be more accepting of interpersonal violence(primarily against women),than are males exposed to other types of advertisements.

The effects of sexual objectification are very harsh. Women are viewed as objects without any regard to their personal and intellectual capabilities. It also leads to many problems like depression and eating disorders among young girls when their bodies do not match with the models depicted in advertisements. But many people do not realize the terrible consequences when people become things. Self esteem is deeply affected. Not only is women's self esteem affected, but so are sexual behavior attitudes among men and women. Though sexual objectification cannot be claimed to cause violence and rape directly, it may be an intermediate step in the dehumanization of women and disinheriting of aggression among men. At the same time it is important to understand the reaction of women to sexual content in advertisements.

## **WOMEN'S REACTION TO SEXUAL CONTENT IN ADVERTISING**

Researchers have always been interested in the way women respond to sexually objectifying advertisements. Michael La Tour (1990) made an attempt to analyze female nudity employed in print advertisements and differences between men and women compared through self reported dimensions of arousal and impression of advertisements employing female nudity through an experiment and came out with the findings that men were more energized by female nudity, while women were tensed and fatigued. Men had positive feelings associated with the nude model advertisement where as women had negative feelings towards such portrayals. Similarly In another research study conducted by (Reichert 2003) the researchers' claims that men and women perceive sexual appeals in advertisement differently. Women were tensed when they were shown a print advertisement showing explicit female nudity. In the study conducted by (Richins 1991) the researcher examined the impact of using attractive models in advertising on the females and came out with the findings that young adult females do compare themselves with models in advertising. The initial response of all participants was that they envied the models because of their beauty.

When it comes to the depiction of women in sexual ways, women perceive advertisements more negatively than men or adolescents do. Modern female role portrayal is more effective in selling a product than a traditional portrayal. women are usually tensed when they are exposed to sexually explicit advertisements and young girls compare themselves to the models depicted in advertisements and envy the models because of their beauty and they will be dissatisfied with their own body.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Women have been increasingly portrayed as sex idols in advertising and media. Sexually objectified images in advertisements contribute to body dissatisfaction, decreased self esteem and confidence, feelings of guilt, shame, depression, anxiety, insecurity, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorder in adolescent girls and adult women. Advertising and media alone cannot be blamed for such effects. Women must avoid unrealistic media images and understand that "perfect" models are actually air brushed and "photo shopped" pictures. Girls must be educated by providing information on the effects of cosmetics, lighting, and photographic retouching in producing media images which leads females to perceive models as in appropriate targets for social comparison. Women and girls must be aware of unhealthy and unrealistic portrayals of women in media.

And finally we can propound:

1. Girls should be taught to appreciate themselves for their physical capabilities and intellect rather than their appearances.
2. Females must be educated on the benefits of receiving a good education, exercise and team sports, and importance of participating in extra curricular activities.
3. Women and girls must be exposed to images of women whose success has not depended on their appearance.

4. There must be a positive and decent portrayal of women in advertising and media.
5. Women in advertising and media must be shown in a variety of roles like a decent house wife, in carrier settings, as professionals etc .

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