



THE SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN FASHION MEDIA: A CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Equality between women and men can never be achieved by legal change alone. How our society, our culture, our media, communities and individuals, view women and women's equality will make a huge difference. In other words, people – including women ourselves– have to believe in and support the idea that men and women are of equal value and worth. We need to see an end to tapered or downbeat attitudes about women and obsolete stereotypes that maintain inequality and limit both women and men.

One of the most popular influencers of such attitudes is media and popular culture; to be more specific, the fashion industry. The fashion industry is popular culture because it deals with trends and vogue. The fashion industry through media has forced an unrealistic image of women on society, worldwide. Fashion media is constantly widening the gender gap through use of sexualised images, promotion of skimpy clothing, beauty enhancers and publicising flesh revealing fashions through on vogue campaigns and as popular designs.

Fashion is a current trend or style or manner in which something is done or manifested. Fashion is generally favoured for its frolicsome manner, however if this manner is sexist, it triggers questions.

Media on the whole is TV, radio, the internet, advertisement and broadcast. This may also include narrow-casting medium such as newspapers, magazines, billboards, direct mail, telephone and the fax.

From the upshot of celebrity fashion culture and beauty, to advertising on young women's and girls' body images, to the stereotyped portrayal of rape victims, to a chronic under representation of female news subjects, society's attitudes are moulded by these media and wider cultural representations of women. Moreover, the leadership and therefore the shapers of media and cultural industry are still predominantly men.

When media portrays women in a manner that reveals their sexuality as a display commodity on sale, aren't women right to affirm that it is bigot. Especially because media at large gives platform for that form of display that not only objectifies women

as commodities but also as sex-awes and its norm. If fashion designers and fashion ads objectified men the way they do women, it could be a fair game. However, it's not the case. Moreover mainstream media always depicts this objectification of women at an alarmingly higher rate than it does men.

Society does not seem to see anything wrong with a half naked woman's body as the cover picture for a fashion magazine. Neither is it bothered when all women's on vogue fashions are flesh revealing and sexually arousing. It is cultural and normal. It is part of everyday life and an acceptable expedition- that's what media suggests.

This is confirmed by a one Isingoma (not real name) when asked about his take on the sexist fashion exploits in style today; "How else would women want to be portrayed and appreciated? Everyone knows that exposing a little bit of their flesh will send the public queuing for just a glimpse and a little more- and that's what fashion producers want."

The general fashion paradigm shift involves the wear of more revealing and permissive clothing. This cultural shift has often been presented as being "fashionable ". Arguably, the cultural shift has led to greater emphasis on a physical criterion for women's perceived self worth augmenting a marginalized and sexist perspective. Sexy is fashion. If it is not arousing and sexual, it's off vogue.

We should all understand that "Sexual objectification is objectification of a person." It occurs when a person is seen as a sexual object and when their sexual attributes and physical attractiveness are separated from the rest

of their personality and existence as an individual, and reduced to instruments of pleasure for another person.

Frivolous fashion culture advertises to women and girls a hurtful fiction that their value lies in how sexy they appear to others. Girls learn at a very young age that their sexuality is for others.

So if contemporary society is queuing up for a glimpse of the glistening thigh, the nipple, the sugar candy lips, rosy cheeks and shimmering bosoms, does it make it right? And is it the right portrayal of the woman? Does the woman in the picture, in the movie, in that skimpy dress along the red carpet think so of herself? Is that her personality? Do media and fashion designers and producers ever ask themselves these questions?

Magazine editors and their advertisers (fashion designers and producers as well as trend setters) have adopted a "technology of enchantment" as a means of exercising control over their audience i.e. society and consequently culture at large. Magazine and advertising language is imbued with "magical" power, and the structure of beauty advertisements closely parallels that of magical spells used in healing rituals. The efficacy of such enchantment is borne out by society in many aspects.

Take for example a perfume ad with a half naked woman all silky, greasy and sensationally leaning on (not against) a male counterpart, who on the other hand is bold and powerful and

built for strength! As a matter of fact, the woman here is weak and needs redemption from her strong male partner. The woman is desirable too and a seduction. It is ultimately saying that when you wear this perfume, the man will like you and remember you. Or that the perfume has a sensation and a scent which could draw a man to you.

The entire imagery portrays the woman's sexuality other than her mind or power or strength. It's as though her mind were detached from her body.

Other portrayals of women in fashion ads for instance normally present a woman touching self, caressing an object, lying on the floor, sitting on a bed or chair, eyes closed not alert confused, vulnerable, body contorted, dressed like a child, holding an object or a man for support, sexy and sexually available, seductive, playful, careless. These are positions of powerlessness and timidity. This can be clearly seen when women are shown lying on the floor as men are standing over them, literally depicting women as being beneath totally at the mercy of men. The female body – is always inevitably controlled by patriarchal norms and the commoditisation of the body through industries such as fashion and beauty that exhibit 'femaleness'.

Men on the other hand are often portrayed as alert and conscious of their surroundings: standing upright, eyes open and looking around, their bodies are controlled, mean expression on the face, gripping things tightly or, hands in pockets, seriously and physically active. Bravery, adventurousness, being able to think rationally, being strong and effective, for example, are all "manly" traits that are usually encouraged. So also is the

ability to think independently and take initiative. Fashion media images supporting these behaviours include the strong, silent man and military ads telling young men to be 'all they can.' But, you will rarely come across such a manifestation of women.

The excessively coercive nature of appeal to strong sexual instincts to sell fashions, products and trends or promote media downplays the woman's role and image in society and has permanent risks on and for women in general. For instance, young girls' understanding of the importance of appearance in society may translate to feelings of apprehension, humiliation, and aversion during the transition from girlhood to womanhood because they (girl-children) begin to sense that they are becoming more visible to society as sexual objects; It is a dreadfully disgusting feeling and very shaming for girls in this change-over to know that they are becoming more visible to society as sex points other than able contributors to their society.

Sexed-up culture not only objectifies women, but also encourages women to objectify themselves. Women self-objectify in terms of body watch by adopting a form of self-consciousness in which they habitually screen their own body's outward appearance and spend significant amounts of attention on how others may perceive their physical appearance. These in turn shade unrealistic expectations by men of how women should look or behave. The woman's stand in society then ceases to be about her herself but others, as well as pleasing society and established perceptions.

Increased ill air fashion manifestation of women, also increases the likelihood, acceptance and serious-

ness of sexual exploitation in our society. This is because each of the on vogue fashions has a sexual allusion to it and society knows it. Products like artificial bosoms and bust enhancers, anklets, extremely skimpy outfit and arousal make up shades connote that women are not serious enough for anything other than fronting sex.

Since fashion media is obsessed with skinny models, women and girls go to all miles to achieve the TV model fashionable size. Girls and women internalize all fashion trends' messages as what society deems beautiful and equate that with their self worth. The results are usually scaremongering. Among others are psychological disorders such as body dysmorphic (a mental disorder characterized by an obsessive preoccupation that some aspect of one's own appearance is severely flawed and warrants exceptional measures to hide or fix it), anorexia (an emotional disorder characterized by an obsessive desire to lose weight by refusing to eat) and bulimia (an emotional disorder involving distortion of body image and an obsessive desire to lose weight, in which bouts of extreme over-eating are followed by depression and self-induced vomiting, purging, or fasting).

Women were not created for that kind of manifestation and the 21st century woman has proved that her femininity is stronger and has a virtuous and yet impactful purpose. She is strong willed, independent, informed and on the go and capable of so much more and would love to be portrayed so. This image of a totally



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unrealistic woman, of women who are not allowed to be themselves is all a wrong.

Fashion media has given way to a new set of properties by which men are distinguished from women. This is through a new assemblage of the woman's body as some daft fashion display and inappropriate for any sober vocation. Rarely will the fashion celebrate the business like administrative hardworking woman manager, doctor, lawyer or worker at large. The representation of the latter will be either so metallic or ineffectual or rather as mere ridicule and this has got to stop.

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