

Final Report

CG # 1: The Tops

Abstract

Whether it is examined on a television show, movie, news article, news report, or even within a simple picture, the epitome of sexism directed towards women is truly prevalent within daily forms of media. Sadly enough, the objectification of women has become a dominant narrative that has gained the power to decimate the female persona and to marginalize those who identify as women. Daily, the average human is bombarded with advertisements that range from Burger King commercials to images of slaughtered women used by the fashion industry as a form of marketing for their new lines of apparel. While this begs the question as to why this is appealing to the masses, it more importantly asks us what impacts these mediums have on women and what the consequences are. Throughout our paper, we explore, navigate, and argue that sexual objectification within the media could be detrimental to women in the real world through a different lens. As part of our research, we use various scholarly resources providing examples about the effects of negative media portrayals, as well as data collected through a video that we created showcasing current examples of sexual objectification in the media, and a survey asking our peers' own opinions and perceptions of images of women in the media.

Introduction

Whether it is examined on a television show, movie, news article, news report or even within a simple picture, the epitome of sexism directed towards women is truly prevalent within daily forms of media. Sadly enough, the objectification of women has become a dominant narrative that has gained the power to decimate the female persona and to marginalize those who identify as women. Daily, the average human is bombarded with advertisements that range from

Burger King commercials to images of slaughtered women used by the fashion industry as a form of marketing for their new lines of apparel. Yet, this begs the question as to how this is appealing to the masses, but more importantly, how impactful are these mediums of media on women and what are the consequences?

Literature Review

Within the world of marketing, the use of sexual objectification of the female figure has been the go-to technique for advertisements simply because marketers believe that sex sells. Yes, sex does sell, but, within the realm of women in media, it can be argued that sexually objectified advertisements influence the behavior, attitudes and perspectives of women in regards to their own image. Throughout this literature review we will be exploring, navigating and arguing that sexual objectification of women within media could be detrimental to women in the real world from different lenses. We will emphasize our analysis on four scholarly resources in particular.

A recent study conducted by DeBraganza and Hausenblas (2010) observed if body dissatisfaction and mood of women who have seen sexually objectified advertising were different depending on their ethnicity. The participants of the study were from two ethnic groups of women, Caucasians and African Americans. They answered a pretest and a posttest measure of depression, anxiety, anger, and body dissatisfaction, before and after seeing two collections of slides (showing thin-idealized women and controls). The main finding of the study was that while the Caucasian women had higher body dissatisfaction after viewing the slides (featuring a thin-idealized woman), the African American women did not report alteration from pre-to posttest. In the discussion of the study, the authors said that this result can be explained because most of this type of advertisement features a white woman, and the African American women did not identify themselves with the women in the advertisements. The strength of this study was

to show how the ethnicity can have an impact on how women will feel after seeing this type of advertisement.

In *The Disease of Sexual Objectification*, Bernard Moran explains how women have begun to view themselves as objects of others' desire because of portrayals in the media, and this can lead to mental health problems, eating disorders, body shame, sexual dysfunction, political efficacy, an increase of rape culture, and for both men and women to view women as less competent. Society is telling women that their value is in how "sexy" they look to others, yet being sexual is stigmatized for women. Since we get the majority of our information today through the media, these conflicting images can hurt many perceptions that girls and women have today. The article explains that there are still many people claiming how there are more serious issues to worry about; however, we argue that much of gender equality depends on women's portrayals in the media, and sexual objectification is one of the biggest perpetrators of lowering women's own confidence and expectations of their self and their abilities.

In *Women in the Media*, Nina Bahadur (2012) explained how the lack of influential female role models in the media, with women often being stereotyped, sexualized, and sidelined, can influence children's views on gender roles and job aspirations. There is also a clear employment imbalance in the media, such as a small number of women shown working in STEM fields, and only about 30% of film characters being women. Increasing the number and diversity of female leaders and role models in the media could positively impact girls' perceptions of their selves and their future aspirations.

Does framing things in the media cause an advancement or retardation of women's participation in "public life"? Political stories tend to be written and presented in a more masculine way. Whenever a media story covers a woman leader, they tend to accentuate women

as pioneering outsiders that are “political change” agents. Women who are the subject of journalism do contribute to how the news stories are framed; yet female candidates are typically more successful when they emphasize issues that are stereotypically associated with their gender. The way in which feminism is framed also effects how women are understood or supported in their movements. It can be concluded that media stories often focus more on women trying to defy stereotypes than they do on the actual woman who is the subject of the article/story, and this affects how women can be involved in “public life.” Media can be identified as a specific problem in the portrayal of women in the media, with clear pieces of evidence.

Above, we have discussed how females are portrayed in media and how this can impact a female’s self-perception as well as gender inequality. One place gender inequality can be clearly observed is in the workplace. Even though there lacks a significant amount of information regarding the statistics on male presence in management positions, a different source shows equal employment opportunities, the number of women, Blacks, and Hispanics in management has quadrupled since 1970, while the number of Asians has increased eightfold. Interestingly, the rate of upward movement of women & minority managers still shows continued racism and sexism in the workplace. White women and people of color constantly encounter a “glass ceiling” in management. Women do not fare any better in management in government or educational institutions, and at higher occupational levels, women are less satisfied with their pay than men are. It is certain that there is unequal opportunity in the employment world due to structuralized bias towards people of color and women. A clear connection of the intersectionality between gender and race exists amongst the included examples.

Method

A short video of about one minute was presented during the Global Scholars Program symposium. Global Scholars Program is a University of Michigan living learning community with a global social justice focus, and symposium visitants consisted of US-domestic and international students who self-selected into the program and their parents. After watching the video, visitants were asked to answer anonymously an online questionnaire of eleven questions. The questions asked about the respondents' gender, what they think about privilege, if their opinions changed after watching the video, who they think is the intended audience of the video and how interested they are in the issue of female empowerment and equality. The last question asked the last four numbers of the respondents' school ID number in order to be entered in a raffle. We chose to do a raffle to motivate participants to answer the questions, although the limitation of including a raffle is that the respondents are not randomly selected to participate in the study.

Results

According to our survey results, 30 out of 34 people indicated they notice the sexual objectification of female in the media. Nevertheless, as one respondent wrote in the survey: "While watching the video, I realized that I am aware of the overuse of photo shopping to portray unrealistic images of beauty. What I didn't really notice is how much women are overly sexualized and their attractiveness is only defined by their physical beauty." Most people might have known about the issue but they didn't know how serious it could be.

Discussion

The study would have been better if a larger pool of people were surveyed. A more accurate implication can be achieved through a more detailed survey. During the study, we

discovered that parents were actually more concerned about the issue than students. The original target was mainly student body. However, the study result indicates that questions should have been more flexible in the target range. Parents reflected that some questions were hard to answer because of their experience due to age gap.

Implications

Sexual objectification in media has become a widespread problem and young girls start to internalize the “societal standard for women” without realizing it. The portrayal of women in the media has caused much more concern among adult groups since they are the witnesses of the change of beauty standard. Therefore parental care can be a solution to minimize the effect of female portrayal in media to young girls. Also, reduction of sexual objectification is necessary to help females establish personal values rather than focus on the appearance and internalize themselves as a sexual object.

Conclusion

To conclude, how females visualize themselves is dependent upon multiple factors such as race, ethnicity, and media portrayal. A lot of media portrayal nowadays is objectifying women, which might lead to lower self-confidence and mental health issues. Also, lack of positive portrayals will impact girls’ views on themselves during childhood and further affect their career choice in the future. Lack of advocacy for females in diverse careers also hinders the progress of gender empowerment. If people were to eliminate gender bias, it would be significant to set up a positive media and public environment to establish more positive female attitudes towards themselves.

References

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