

Objectification and Self-Objectification of Women in Current Society

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Abstract

This paper aims to analysis and explains that the objectification of women in society makes women begin to objectify themselves, which leads enormous negative impacts on women's identity. Specifically speaking, when the reality becomes that people only valued how women look, many women choose to accept it and try their best to adapt to it through physically changing themselves. For example, they use photoshopping apps like Meitu to revise their facial structure, putting on garish makeups, or doing the plastic surgery (the sentence is too long). Without considering all the negative impacts those ways of changes may bring about, many women yearn for catering to the dominant culture of society that tends to objectify women/highlight women's looking. This study elaborates the issue of self-objectification into three perspectives—impact of social media, peer pressure, and the diversity definition of beauty. It also brings up the theorem of self-efficacy to explain why improving and strengthening self-confidence and self-understanding can be the best way to change the problem of self-objectification.

Keywords: *objectification, female stereotype, women's self-objectification, social media, self-efficacy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Self-objectification of females has drawn plenty of research attentions for decades. Researchers devoted themselves in reasoning the causes of this phenomena. Along with the development of power of modern communication and media, in recent years, magazines, website, or televisions all fulfill advertisements about makeups and plastic surgeries, which passes a message that women's external look is so important. Thinking the importance of appearance, more and more women spend excessive money on ways that can help them change their appearance, which causes many issues on one's economic management. Thus, they run risks for changing their appearance. Even more, news explored that some colleges students could not redeem debt the made for doing plastic surgery, then choose to suicide, which becomes a huge topic of social issues. Moreover, some women only focus on being products for changing their appearance rather than improve the internal self-development, which pushes the whole society to a superficially stage.

In order to analyze these problems discussed above, this paper is going to conduct the researches on how women been objectified and the discussion on relieving women been objectified. According to the literatures, we will summarize the definition of objectification and understand more specifically on women's objectification. Then, we will discuss deeper about the causes of women's objectification. By applying the self-efficacy theory from Albert Bandura, the potential solutions to the objectification problem will be explained.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the women's self-objectification and the objectification in general becomes a serious issue in nowadays, tons of scholars in different fields has been researching this topic through different perspectives. Lots of scholars analyzed the cause of women's self-objectification by finding out the social phenomena. Sociologist Rosalind Gill believes a social stereotypy has been made for figuring beautiful women, which the society creates a typical female figure, such as wearing stiletto heels can evaluated as a high sexual attractiveness regardless the pain it bought to female. She believes this "feminist orthodoxy" itself can be called the objectification towards female [1]. Moreover, the effective power of social medias has been noticed. In Rosalind Gill's another article, it mentioned that "Magazines played a crucial role in furnishing information about what is hot", which implies the magazines also play a role of giving standards of beauty [2].

From the perspective of the outcome of the social objectification on women, lots of researches reveals the negative consequences. Sociologist Rachel M, Tantleff-Dunn, Thompson, J. Kevin together came up with the research that Modern industrialized society objectifies the female body, and many women treat and view themselves as an object, habitually monitoring their own appearance whether fit in public or private standards. Body shame, appearance anxiety, depression, and disordered eating—all are consequences from self-objectification [3]. What's more, another two sociologist Jennifer J. Muehlenkamp and Renee N. Saris-Baglama also did similar research to prove that self-

objectification has a direct relationship to restrictive eating, bulimic, and depressive symptoms [4].

To sum up, the recent researches corporately enforce the idea that the objectification of women in society makes women begin to objectify themselves, which leads enormous negative impacts on women's identity.

3. CAUSES OF FEMALE OBJECTIFICATION

3.1 Impact of Social Media

Social media, a bridge that connects individuals and the society, deeply effects people's daily life. The ideologies deliver by media—especially newspapers, magazines—can be widely spread into the society. When social medias start asking women to physically fix their appearance, it gives women a message to self-objectify. Asian women's fashion magazines also highlight more cosmetics and facial beauty products than clothing. Most of the magazines increase the articles of makeups or add a huge part of makeup advertisements. The main topics appear on the magazines are always about the theme of Beauty Myth, such as dieting, beauty products, or cosmetic sugary. Also, the articles about women on newspapers are always emphasis on their appearance. For example, when a Chinese news agency published an article online that talks about Angela Dorothea Merkel who is a German politician serving as Chancellor of Germany, the writer focused on the makeups and clothing of Angela Dorothea Merkel rather than discussing her deeds as a great politician. These articles that focus on the appearance only would give female readers a wrong concept that a person's appearance is more important than one's other characters. All the articles of beauty also relate to the ideology of pleasing man. The magazines brainwash the female readers by saying that "Women are presented as fundamentally alone in the world, and must hold their own by using the power their bodies and sexuality afford them" [5]. The fake truth that women need to become attracting for catering man adds the pressure to women, which let more and more women treat themselves as a beauty products. Based on the research, "women stressed the magazine's role as a 'professional journal' for the home, featuring recipes, patterns, tips, and so on, and informing them about important topics from film and book reviews to new beauty products" [6].

3.2 Peer Pressure

Group thinking plays an important role on women's self-objectification. Based on reading Dawn Currie's (1999) study of 48 Canadian teenagers, she found the appearance was not used as a way of self-expression anymore, instead, it becomes an indication of group membership and of social status. Students in school, or friends in a friend group begin to use appearance as a standard to evaluate a person's value. In some

schools or companies, for instance, there are lots of beauty contest about who has the most beautiful face or who has the perfect body; there are some competitions online about voting for the top 10 beautiful female faces. The so-called judges superficially provided a definition of beauty such as, big eyes, long legs, or pointed chin which includes nothing else but the face and body. When one group of people treat the level of beautiful appearance as their standard of making friends, people, especially women, could only force themselves to change their appearance as a way to make friends. Therefore, pursuing physical beauty and changing one's appearance become normal things in the society. For example, a girl, named Abby, has started doing plastic surgery since 18 years old and spent 4 million RMB or so on Plastic surgery. She suggested, "it is not your fault to look ugly, but it is your fault if you don't make yourself look beautiful and cater to the so-called beauty appearance and slim body shape, since doing plastic surgery could achieve such dream" [7, 8]. The experience of Abby is just a miniature of all people who take initiative to do plastic surgery. More and more women are willing to make physically change on their appearance, like buying beauty products, keeping diet, doing plastic surgery, etc., in order to make new friends.

3.3 Diversity of the Definition of Beauty

In people's nature, it contains a part about the longing of beauty. In Kant's words, "the pursuit of beauty is the pursuit of pleasure" [8]. The beauty here definitely includes the beauty of appearance, that it is only human to love beautiful appearance. However, People each as an independent individual all have different definitions of beauty, which include beauty of appearance. These various definitions of beauty make the standard of beautiful appearance become ambiguous. Therefore, uniform definition of beauty could be aberrant. The reason why people call "beauty" is just the diversity of beauty itself. And beauty should be defined by each individual, not by others. Otherwise, if there is a standard of beautiful appearance coming out, and women all try to achieve that standard regardless the distinguishing feature that a woman supposed to have as an individual, it can be called the process of self-objectification. Like, in some Asian countries, under the influence of culture such as women always dress up for their beholders, women are being pushed to pursue the physical beauty.

4. SELF-EFFICACY

Psychologist Albert Bandura once published a concept called self-efficacy system. This system influences people on how human perceive situations and how human response to varied situations. According to Albert Bandura, self-efficacy is "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations." The development of self-efficacy happens throughout a person's whole life, which also been separated into four major sources [9].

4.1 Mastery Experience

"The most effective way of developing a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences," Bandura explained. People are more easy to success on a task that they used to succeed before. More specifically, when a person do well and succeed at a particular task, he or she believe that it is highly possible to succeed again at this task. When a person fail in the past that he or she will fail again in the future again on that same task.

4.2 Social Modeling

According to Bandura, "Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities to succeed". In other words, witnessing others failures or successes on one task can effects a person's decision on whether doing that task. If one person similar to you succeeds, you may come to believe that you will succeed too.

4.3 Social Persuasion

Bandura asserted, "people could be persuaded to believe that they have the skills and capabilities to succeed". The verbal encouragement helps people to believe that they have the abilities and skills to success. Normally, when people say something positive and encouraging, it helps others to overcome problems and to put lots of efforts on doing a task.

4.4 Psychological Response

Bandura believes that "people experience sensations from their body and how they perceive this emotional arousal influences their beliefs of efficacy". Be more specific, physical reactions, and stress levels can all impact how a person feels about their personal abilities in a particular situation. For instance, a person who feels extremely nervous before taking a test may develop a less strong sense of self-efficacy in these situations.

5. DISCUSSION

Self-efficacy can be perfectly applied to the topic of this research that the ability of self-efficacy plays a major role on society's women objectification and self-objectification. Women's self-objectification are influenced by themselves and people around them. For example, if a girl did plastic surgery once and she thinks it helps her gain more attention from others or give her benefits in working environment, it is more easy for her to do plastic surgery again since she believes this let her become success, which corresponds to the *Mastery Experience* from self-efficacy theorem. Moreover, when other people see that the plastic surgery brings social success, it urges them to believe that if they do

the same thing, they will also gain success, which let the *Social Molding* in self-efficacy apply into social objectification. The physical standards and requirements towards women in the society heavily effects women 's behaviors on treating themselves, which shares the same concept as social persuasion. All in all, the self-efficacy theorem makes impacts on everything from psychological states to behavior to motivation, which helps explain how social objectification can affects women's behaviors on self-objectification.

6. CONCLUSION

The problem be analyzed throughout the whole paper is about how society objectified women then causes women to the stage of self-objectification. The main solution of relieving this problem is to create a strongly stable self-cognition system for individuals. Having self-cognition means people have their own definition of beauty and standards of right or wrong. Knowing that when the society or others ask a person to change their physical appearance as being a better self is a totally wrong requirement, people can keep them away from changing appearance for catering others and can realize the not-right social phenomenon of objectification. People, themselves, can build their own definitions of beauty, which rather defined by the appearance but defined by the inside. This solid definition of what is beauty can also protect people from being objectified. When a person with strong self-cognition sees an advertisement of plastic surgery with a slogan about catering man, he or she will understand that this is just one way of objectification and he or she won't let themselves fall into this trap. For the next time, when he or she sees this kind of advertisement again, he or she definitely won't attract by these advertisements again, which fits the *Mastery Experience* idea. Moreover, corresponding to the social modeling idea that when people seeing others' success, they would more willing to follow that people's path. For example, if a women passed an interview due to her fully prepared portfolio rather than her delicate makeup or outfits, it spreads a signal that a person's learning is much more important than his or her appearances. In this way, more and more people will focus on enriching their knowledge more than changing their physical appearance as a method of self-development.

With an strong and table self-cognition system that knowing the negative impacts of objectification, people can not only affect people around them to become a better self, but also drive the whole society to make some improvements. When more and more people, especially women, realize the causes and effects of objectification, them will build self-cognition and believe in themselves, and knowing the more importance facts of becoming a better self by learning rather than changing appearance. More women start finding ways of gaining knowledge, such as join book club, audited classes in universities, etc. These positive phenomena of improving one's self-cognition will let women feel a stronger independent personality exists in them, which creates a beneficial cycle for women to pursuing strong self-cognition system and widely learnings. People all can see the positive

consequences from these women who enrich themselves with knowledge will let more people focus on the inside development than changing the appearance.

All in all, a stable self-cognition with the theorem of self-efficacy can let the society becomes a better one that minimize the objectification of women, which causes the less oppression on women's self-objectification.

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