



An Analysis of Female Body Alienation in Consumer Society

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Abstract. Along with the beauty of a women's appearance and good shape widespread application in the television advertisement media, through the facial plastic surgery, fitness, such as ways to reshape the female body, in order to make it more conform to the social reform movement is aesthetic body, with the consumer culture, patriarchal, female closely related to the social aesthetic standard to become. The consumer society desalinates the spiritual connotation of women, simplifies women into different bodies, makes women blindly follow social aesthetic standards to transform their bodies, thus losing the autonomy of the body and causing female body alienation. It is extremely urgent to enhance women's control over their bodies and their subjective consciousness, and to build a pluralistic and inclusive society.

Keywords: Consumer society · Female body · Body alienation

1 Introduction

Baudrillard wrote in *Consumer Society*: After the rapid development of industrial civilization, western society stepped into the era of excess production. The large technological ruling group must constantly stimulate people's consumption desire to maintain, stimulate and drive social production, which is the "consumer society" [1]. In traditional Chinese society, the female body was regarded as a productive entity, and the rulers suppressed people's body desire and consumption in order to maintain their rule. However, in modern society, the consumption of female body is increasing rapidly. According to the 2018 White Paper on China's Medical Beauty Industry, 22 million people in China opted for cosmetic surgery in 2018, and more than 60 percent of them were women aged between 20 and 45. According to the 2021 China Gym Industry Report, the market size of China's fitness industry has been expanding in recent years, and it is predicted that in 2021, the market size will further expand and reach 377.1 billion yuan, with women accounting for 60%. It seems that behind the rise of female subjectivity and the release of desire, the society's invisible discipline for women is hidden.

Marxist feminists put forward the theory of gender alienation, believing that women are no longer independent and complete social individuals, but are filled with a strong sense of fragmentation and meaninglessness. Women are deprived of the possibility of defining themselves, that is, their living state deviates from their consciousness and

nature, which is a state of female alienation. The male social spirit has been instilled into the female spiritual system since the day when women became conscious, thus making women act according to men's vision in society. The so-called "female beauty" is defined and measured by men's eyes. Women constantly improve themselves in order to get the knowledge of men and strive to make themselves conform to the standards set by men [2]. It is of great significance to analyze the social forces that promote female body remodeling in the consumer society to construct female subjectivity and reduce female body alienation. This paper mainly analyzes the performance of female body alienation in consumer society, the power of female body discipline, and the process of female group internalization of social aesthetic standards, and further puts forward suggestions and conclusions.

2 Commercialization of the Female Body

In a consumer society, women's bodies and sexual symbols are objectified to promote consumption, and the value of women is simplified into bodies and young and beautiful looks that conform to social aesthetics, and appreciation becomes the standard for evaluating women [3]. The commercialization of female body is closely related to mass media, capital and patriarchal culture.

2.1 Female Body Consumed

In the Consumer Society, Baudrillard described the female body as "the most beautiful consumer goods among the things possessed, manipulated and consumed in the mind [4]. "A survey shows that female images alone or together with other images account for 70% of the commercial advertisements in China's media. In the rising advertising industry, female images are increasingly used. Advertising = goods + women, women become an "eternal theme" of advertising creation [5]. In the consumer society, women with young and beautiful faces and concave convex bodies are widely used in TV advertisements, newspapers and magazines and other commodity publicity media, or pictures are printed directly on the outer packaging of commodities to attract consumers.

In the consumer society, the female body is not only widely appeared in the advertisements of beauty care products and washing products, but also in the advertisements of products with male as the main consumer audience, such as razors and men's suits, etc. Women are endowed with "value" in the "look" of men [6]. The female body is transformed into a commodity for male consumption by commercial media [7], thus realizing the objectification and commercialization of the female body. At the same time, the mass media also sent messages to society, that the value of women lies in their young, beautiful looks and thin, stylish figure, and that women are judged by their beauty. This makes women constantly follow aesthetic culture, but also constantly subvert their own aesthetic standards to form "social aesthetics" [8].

2.2 The Symbol of Sexual Desire Consumed

In a consumer society, the sexual symbols implicit in the female body are also consumed [9]. In many advertisements, the straight and smooth legs, smooth and delicate shoulders

and neck and other parts of the female body are magnified to satisfy consumers' sensory enjoyment. The female body has experienced from being covered and ashamed to being widely seen and discussed in the consumer society. It seems to be the rise of female subjectivity, but it is still the product under the control of patriarchy. Just as Bourdieu said, "Male desire is possessive desire and eroticized domination; Female desire is the desire for male domination, erotic submission, or, strictly speaking, erotic approval of domination [10]".

women's bodies have been domesticated by male desire, whether it is a traditional society's foot-binding, "huangdi zhuxue" to meet the deformation of "morbid beauty" aesthetic in the patriarchal society, or in a consumer society, the commercialization of the female body to meet men aesthetic of women as a whole or partial body to meet the demand of sexual desire of male dominance, is a product of the male-dominated system under the control. In the process of commercialization of female body, sellers only objectify and commercialize female body, and use its symbols to stimulate consumers to promote the sales of goods, while the spiritual connotation of female individual is ignored, resulting in the alienation of female body.

3 The Reconstruction of the Female Body

The social aesthetic body propagated by mass media has become the standard for women to measure their own bodies, leading to a large number of women to reshape part or the whole of their own bodies. As Bourdieu points out, "A trait plays a distant, non-physical role because it conforms to the 'collective expectations' of society. An order was given, and the order was obeyed. It was almost a strange act [11]."

3.1 The Fragmented Remodeling of the Female Body

The female figure standard publicized by the mass media makes the female body parts split and measured by the standard circumference of each part. Under the influence of this invisible and powerful aesthetic standard, women take the initiative to compare themselves with the standard figure, find out the gap with the standard figure, and find various ways to narrow the gap, in order to achieve the ideal figure standard of the society. Moss believes that body technology refers to the various ways in which people in different societies traditionally know how to use their bodies [12]. In today's era of consumer society and technological monopoly, female body image is fragmented [13], and reshaped by technological means to produce body parts that meet social aesthetic standards.

According to the statistics of the International Association of Plastic Surgery, the female population of plastic surgery in China keeps increasing. In 2016, women underwent 20,363,000 plastic surgeries, accounting for 86.2% of the total number of plastic surgeries. From 2014 to 2018, the average annual growth rate of consumption in the medical beauty market in China was 23.6%. It is one of the fastest growing countries in the world [14]. It is predicted that by 2022, the number of plastic surgery patients in China will exceed 10 million each year. The body has become the pain bearer of women's pursuit of "standard beauty", and at the same time, it has erased the unique individual

characteristics of women, resulting in the blurred boundary of women's "natural" body and deepening the degree of female body alienation.

3.2 Overall Shaping of the Female Body

At the same time, women's bodies as a whole are framed by BMI. BMI, which is calculated by dividing weight in kilograms by height in meters squared, is one of the most commonly used standards in the world to measure obesity and health [15]. BMI was originally invented to estimate people's health status, and within the range of health, women's weight and thinness can be varied. Commercialization and patriarchal culture constrain women to form a concept of thinness as beauty.

Women are also taking action on this concept. Statistics show that in 2020, 70% of the consumers in China's weight-loss products market are women, and the sales of weight-loss products for women are increasing by 50% year on year. The number of women in fitness and weight loss activities is increasing, and women hope to shape their body shape in order to have the ideal body recognized by social aesthetics. As Bourdieu said, "for women today, mirrors and scales have replaced altars and stools". The transformation of women's body will make female groups that cater to social aesthetics more popular, while female groups that do not cater to social aesthetics will be excluded. This will make the aesthetic standards of women's body brought by the patriarchal culture more popular, and even more demanding on women's body, so that women's independent control of their own body will decline accordingly, the dominant position of the aesthetic standards of the patriarchal society will be consolidated, and the fate of women's body alienation will be more difficult to change.

4 Symbolization of the Female Body

Turner proposed that in the consumer society, the body has become the object of transformation and development by the social power system, and has become a symbol. "Beautiful, sexy bodies are desirable in a consumer society, where western values have shifted from the former emphasis on inner control to the present emphasis on physical control [16]." Women's inner qualities and abilities are ignored, and their bodies become the standard for evaluating women, forming a symbol of self-identity and exchange value with women.

4.1 Form a Body of Self-identity

According to the 2021 Chinese Working Women Insight Report, more than 50 percent of working women have facial anxiety. The top three reasons for appearance anxiety are: "when taking photos with others", "when interviewing for a job, good-looking people are more likely to get a job" and "when attractive colleagues come to the department, they are more likely to be appreciated by leaders and colleagues". In the consumer society, people attach more importance to the body in the aspect of self-construction, and the external appearance of the body becomes the symbol of people's self-value [17].

External evaluation of women mostly comes from their body appearance. The body becomes the focus of women's self-staring and others' staring, and the mirror of social evaluation and self-evaluation of women, thus affecting women's self-identification and causing appearance anxiety. The social evaluation and self-evaluation based on appearance and figure make women only pursue the external image in line with aesthetic standards, ignoring the cultivation of personal inner quality and the construction of other abilities, aggravating the alienation of female body.

4.2 A Body with Exchange Value

Bourdieu believed that there is "cultural capital" in the body, and the acquisition of cultural capital is usually reflected by some kind of practice pointing to the external body, which can be invested in various markets to obtain material or symbolic profit returns [18]. Some studies have found that good looks have a positive impact on employees' earnings, which is known as the "beauty premium". The labor market in China also discriminates against women in terms of their appearance. Being overweight has a significant negative impact on women's salary and employment [19].

Recently, a series of challenges based on women's figure, such as A4 waist, putting coins in the collarbone, backhand touching the navel, cartoon waist challenge and so on, have sprung up on the Internet, which has attracted a large number of women with standard figure to imitate. Women who challenge success receive more welcome and enjoy more praise. In the consumer society, beautiful and slender women have more exchange value, and obese and unaesthetic women are treated unfairly in many ways. Under the impetus of this invisible injustice, more women shape their bodies according to social aesthetic standards and give up the autonomy of their bodies in order to obtain more exchange value.

5 Conclusions

While shaping the ideal female body standard, the consumer society has also transmitted to the society the idea that the value of women lies in the aesthetic appearance and body, so that women reshape their body appearance by means of plastic surgery, weight loss, fitness and so on, in order to obtain others' recognition, self-recognition and more exchange value. Behind this is the manipulation of capital and patriarchal culture, which reflects the discipline of social culture and patriarchal culture on female body [20]. So that women put a lot of energy, time and money into the shape of figure and appearance at the cost of health and comfort, ignoring the construction of personal quality and ability, resulting in the loss of women's control over the body, but also into the trap of male power center.

In order to reduce the alienation of the female body, a pluralistic, equal and inclusive social atmosphere should be cultivated and formed in the social aspect, respect the individuality and diversity of appearance and body beauty, reduce excessive attention and evaluation on the female body, and eliminate the female stereotype of "thin as beautiful". In terms of women, they attach importance to the internal beauty of women, transfer the time and energy invested by excessive attention to external beauty to the establishment

of personal quality and ability, break the bondage of body standard beauty defined by others, love the natural female body itself, and gradually establish women's control over the body.

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