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## OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN AND ITS IMPACT ON THE INDIAN SOCIETY

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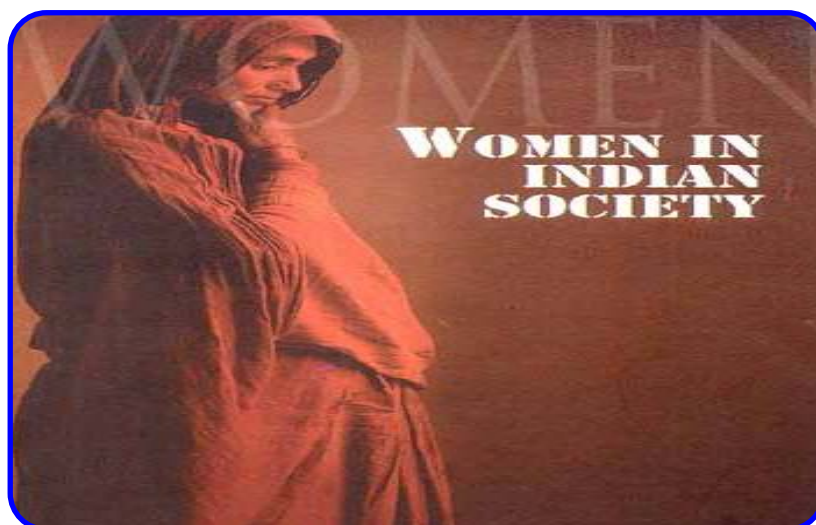
Manisha Chotrani

### ABSTRACT

Advertisements of both kinds, print as well as television is an influential method, used by the marketers to persuade, manipulate and shape the psychology of the viewers. This is known as media ecology. The marketers create a delusionary environment, which influences most of us. The images

and videos of women in such advertisements are objectified in a manner, which has a negative influence on the society, leading to problems such as lower self-esteem, depression, distractions, psychological disorders and sexual crimes. Objectification happens commonly in advertisements in magazines, on billboards, in music videos and on television, revolving mostly around the sale of a product, ranging from cosmetics and clothes, to cars and tools. The present paper will consider the objectification of women, the mounting pressure to which she lives uncomfortably in her own skin and in what manner does it affect the young girls and women.

**KEYWORDS** :media ecology, advertisements, sexual objectification and depression.



### INTRODUCTION:

To begin with, it is relevant to ponder over what environment is. The sum total of all surroundings of a living organism, including natural forces and other living things, which provide conditions for development and growth and also of danger and damage is what we call environment. Over last many years the influence of mass media has grown with the advancement in technology. It's not unusual to wake up, check the cellphone for messages and look at the TV or newspaper for news, read emails, take meetings, make phone calls and take decisions based on the information that we gather from the television as well as print media sources, through out the day. In short, both television

and print media form an integral part of our environment today, shaping our opinion in different ways depending on the content. The present paper takes into consideration the effect of this media portrayal of women as an object and its impact on the society as well as on the psychology of females.

Media Ecology, a term introduced by Neil Postman (1970), is defined as the study of media and its role in human affairs. Many media ecologists have studied media environments and their impact on culture and social settings. For example, Postman's (1985) classic book "Amusing Ourselves to Death" suggests that in America, television transforms information into entertainment. Other such studies on media ecology are Harold Innis's (1951) "The Bias of Communication", Marshall McLuhan's (1962) "The Gutenberg Galaxy", Walter Ong's (1982) "Orality and Literacy", and Lance Strate, Ron Jacobson, and Stephanie Gibson's (2003) "Communication and Cyberspace". These studies discuss the influence of media on culture.

Objectification can be defined as when "a woman's body, body parts, separated out from her, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her" (Fredrickson, 2009). In addition to being reduced to just a body, objectification places value on women in relation to their body's use to others (Fredrickson, 2009).

Women in advertisements are portrayed as fair, young, thin, blemish free and absolutely perfect. They have toned body, flat stomachs, beautiful faces and curvy hips. They are portrayed as the perfect ideal that all other women should strive to be like. This perfection, which is depicted in the advertisements, is near impossible to achieve and makes sure that cosmetic industries continue to make profit. Now, it is airbrushing or photo-shopping or technical manipulations that achieves the perfect imaging of female models in such advertisements. Airbrushing can be defined as "the process of manipulating a photograph to hide flaws and create a better image" (Tartakovsky). Tartakovsky states "often, magazines defend their retouching decisions by saying that these airbrushed photos are just images". It gets difficult for a woman to identify what exactly has been airbrushed and what is untouched. The problem is not only such technical manipulations but that, the photo-shopped images replace the original faces and slice off the extra fat of an actress to make her look more curvy, revealing our difficult relationship with the female body and infusing a sense of low self esteem when compared to the near impossible figure. The problem is that, in their pervasiveness, photo-shopped images have changed our standards of comparison.

#### PORTRAY OF WOMEN IN INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS:

In 1970's women were portrayed as homemakers and rarely as professionals. Studies have shown that advertisements portraying women as homemakers may activate the belief that, women are nurturing, communal and domestically minded (Clifton, McGrath, & Wick, 1976; Nose Worthy & Lott, 1984; Six & Eckes, 1991).

In 1980's the feminist movement that started in America had a great influence on the world including India. Indian women finally had the potential to portray herself at places besides the kitchen. Advertisers realized that their audience would react best to advertisements that portrayed empowered women. "Changes in advertising are, of course, changing as society changes" (Taflinger, 1996). The marketers were very closely scrutinizing factors that influenced women consumers. The advertisements in 1980's introduced the attractive independent woman.

In 1990's advertisements attempted to construct multiple possible identities for women in an effort to change their stereotypical image and enhance their spending power. Advertisements projecting woman as sex object for promoting cosmetics, jewelry, fabrics, domestic gadgets or any other product; started flooding the television. These advertisements started showcasing that if a

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woman wants to explore her talent she has to display her physical attributes. The investigators and commentators have long speculated the impact of such images in advertising and media on broad range of social problems, including sexist attitudes and beliefs, sexual harassment, violence against women, eating disorders etc. (Beckwith, 1994; Kilbourne & Lazarus, 1987; Lazier-Smith, 1989).

In the current scenario, women are portrayed much as sexual and decorative objects. In a research study conducted by Lin (1997) demonstrated that women more often than men were shown in a state of undress, and exhibited more "sexiness", and were depicted as sexual objects. In an analysis of women appearing in advertisements in time and vogue from 1955 to 2002, Linder (2004) reported that an average of 40 percent of advertisements featured women as decorative object.

### EFFECTS OF OBJECTIFICATION:

The most common effect is the constant rise in women's conflict with dieting and eating anomalies. Kyra, Covell (1995) made an attempt to assess the influence of sexiest advertisement portrayals of women by using four subscales of Burt's (1980) and concluded that media portrayals of women can influence sexual attitudes and beliefs. While males witnessing advertisements, where women were objectified are most likely to evidence increased sex role stereotypic and rape myth beliefs and are more likely to be accepting of interpersonal violence against women. In another study conducted by Natalie and Covell (1997) the researchers came out with the findings that objectification of women in an advertisement encouraged attitudes supportive of sexual aggression among young adults. 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. Kilbourne (2000) in her study concluded that dismemberment advertisement focuses on one part of the body. Sexist advertisements as well as dismemberment advertisements employ female body parts for the purpose of selling a product. Such dismemberment advertisements promote the idea of female body parts as separate entities. These advertisements encourage women in viewing their body as many individual pieces rather than a whole and make them feel that their entire body lacks attractive features. Females are conditioned from a very young age to view their body as something in constant need of alteration. In a study conducted by Kuntjara (2001) it was concluded that advertisements usually created artificiality that established an impossible standard of physical perfection for women. Most women in advertisements were depicted as an object chosen by men for their sexual gratification. Campbell (2003) conducted a research concluding that "the respondents with high levels of exposure to fashion magazines 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". In an attempt to match the ideal type of image depicted, women undergo through a lot of emotional pressure. This leads to the development of eating disorders, negative psychological effects, such as depression, dejection and eating disorders among the youth as well as the adults. This can give women negative self image because of belief that their intelligence and competence are not being acknowledged.

Women begin to view themselves from an observer's perspective, that is self-objectification (Fredrickson and Roberts, 2009). Women become more aware of how they move and the amount of space their bodies take up and they begin to worry. This, in turn, makes a woman's body movements unsure and can hinder mental concentration (Fredrickson and Roberts, 2009).

Rates of depression in women and girls doubled between 2000 and 2010; the more women tend to self-objectify themselves, the more chances of them being prone to depression and hopelessness exist. Both the cosmetic surgery and the cosmetic industries (example anti-ageing

products, fairness creams, slimming teas etc.) are growing fast. These cosmetic industries, along with the fashion houses, the diet companies, and the food conglomerates combine to create a climate in which females come to feel that their bodies are not okay.

#### CONCLUSION:

Both the dismemberment and the objectification of women in advertisement and media and can be harmful to the women that view these images. The female model in advertisements is airbrushed or photoshopped or technically manipulated to make the women look perfect to sell the product. The female viewer with least or no idea about such technical manipulations is negatively affected about her own image after comparing it to her body. Self-objectification is detrimental to a woman's well being. Have the young urban girls and women of India started hating their bodies because of reality TV makeover? There is a difference in the message of "being healthy" and "being happy in one's skin". This paper is an attempt to impart the later. We need to unpick the media we consume, and talk about it. Interactive programs in schools and colleges, encouraging young people to speak out against the unrealistic ideals of beauty they see, should be encouraged.

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