

Socio-Religious Reaction to Counteracting Women's Sexual Objectification

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Abstract: This paper delves into the imperative need for a socio-religious response to address the pervasive issue of sexual objectification of women. Recognizing the diverse dimensions of this problem, the study draws upon the intersection of sociological and religious perspectives to propose a comprehensive framework for change. The aim of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis of the roots and manifestations of sexual objectification, emphasizing its detrimental effects on women's autonomy, mental health, and societal participation. It examines the role of media, cultural norms, and systemic inequalities in perpetuating this harmful phenomenon. This study also focus on the potential contributions of religious teachings and doctrines in reshaping attitudes and behaviors. Drawing from diverse religious traditions, the paper explores scriptures, ethical principles, and historical practices that underscore the intrinsic worth and dignity of women. It highlights narratives and interpretations that promote equality, respect, and empowerment. This paper synthesizes the sociological and religious perspectives to propose a holistic intervention strategy. This approach emphasizes education, community engagement, and policy advocacy as key components. It advocates for collaborative efforts between religious leaders, community organizations, and policymakers to challenge harmful narratives, promote inclusive values, and foster environments conducive to gender equality. In conclusion, this paper contends that a socio-religious response is essential in curbing the sexual objectification of women. By combining sociological insights with the ethical foundations of religious teachings, this study offers a promising avenue for transformative change. The proposed interventions aim not only to challenge existing norms but also to establish a more inclusive and equitable society for women.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Media Influence, Cultural Norms, Mental Health, Ethical Principles, Religious Response and Messages

INTRODUCTION

Sexual objectification is commonly understood as the reduction of a person to his or her body, body parts and/or the instrumentalization of the person as a sexual resource (Bartky 19). Women play many important roles in real life. Sometimes she is a Mother running after her child with food, colouring the family as a Daughter, holding the family together as a Wife. In considering who a woman is, the first thought that comes to mind will be Mother, whom people respect, love care for. Most of the women around the world work both inside and outside the home, usually by necessity. Now increasingly, everywhere

families, rely on mothers and wives for emotional support and care, rely on women for labor in the home. And, families rely on women for income needed to raise family.

Women are symbolized as peace, culture and unity. In spite of this outlook of woman, she is sometimes portrayed as a pretty thing to look at, or just something or someone used to curb a sex urge or projected as one for whom the opposite sex view for pleasure. Women are not object, they are living human beings. This Sexual objectification of women is not only deeply and bizarrely rooted in our cultural subconscious, but it's also something that has to change in order to build a healthy society. The objectification of women is found in every known society

and object status is heavily gendered with men granted as subject status and women is severely objectified. That's the reason why the male dominating mind of our society doesn't evaluate household works done by women as work, nor do they find women's income as worthy as men.

This paper explores the socio-religious response to curbing sexual objectification of women. It examines the current sociological and religious framework that has been used to address the issue in different contexts. This paper looks at how these frameworks have been used in various societies around the world and the impact they can have on attitudes to the objectification of women. Finally, it provides ways on how religious and sociological frameworks can be used in combination to curb the sexual objectification of women.

Objectification Theory

A theory often used by researchers to explain women's sexual health and functioning, is objectification theory. Bernard developed this theory as an explanation for the higher prevalence of depression, eating disorders, and problems in sexual functioning in women, as opposed to men (17). At the heart of the theory lays the pervasive act of Western society to sexual objectify, mostly, women (Heflick 21). To objectify someone sexually, also called sexual objectification, occurs "whenever a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her" (Bartky 35). Fredrickson and Roberts pointed out that sexual objectification, in its most extreme and dehumanizing forms (e.g., sexual abuse, assault or harassment), may negatively affect sexual functioning, pleasure, and satisfaction, which is also supported by more recent studies. Objectification theory complements these findings by proposing that pervasive but less extreme forms of sexual objectification, such as innocent non-verbal or verbal objectifying gestures (Fitzgerald et al., 201), might negatively affect women's sexual experiences through a process called self-objectification. The cultural milieu of sexual objectification functions "to socialize girls and women to, at some level, treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated" (Fasoli 177). This process of self-objectification encompasses the act of seeing, evaluating, and treating one's physical self from an internalized observer's perspective. This can also be explained as focusing on how one's own body appears to others, rather than how one's body can feel and how it can perform actions in the world. Empirical evidence, indeed, supports that sexual objectification leads to self-objectification in women when experiencing objectification directly in interpersonal encounters by, for example, the objectifying male gaze, evaluative comments, or unwanted sexual advances.

Historical Encounter of Women's Objectification

One must understand that woman objectification do not begin in the 21st century, the exact period it began cannot really be ascertain but one can vividly say that this problem has been since ancient time. Looking through ancient historical records, women have always been portrayed as a weaker vessel and an object of sexual appeal. In ancient time the birth of a female child are not mostly recognized as many hold the believe that until a male child is given birth to, a husband and wife have not fulfill their marital duty as female child were mostly being looked down upon and seen as less important in the society, this mindset travels far to our contemporary age where in some tribes the birth of a male child is more important than that of female and they will do anything it takes for a man to have a male child. In some hospitals, it has been observed that the bill of delivering a male child is higher than that of a female child. In history, women have faced a lot of challenges as they were being paraded as a sexual object rather than humans. During the monarchical reign in historical development, the use of females as sex toys to appeal the sexual urge of the monarch and some prominent male figures were seen as a normal act. Females were subjected to a mere thing rather than being recognized as humans, young beautiful ladies were being scouted back then and made to be naked and either dance around the king on his throne to appeal him or even swamping around him to massage him while onlookers are there to witness this great sight.

In ancient Greek and Roman Empire, women were treated similar to how one will treat animal or a doll. They sees female nakedness as game where they organized a huge event that will gather the entire nation where woman will be paraded nude to the public and made to do all manner of things. This act was commonly found in their movies such as Spartacus, 300BC and some other Greek tales that depict their culture and traditions where women were being exchanged on the street between fighters. They usually make the reward of any winner of a duel to be a beautiful naked lady to pass the night with him. Also coming down to the slave trade era, the objectification of women skyrocketed as many beautiful women that were caught on the Slave Trade were being sold to slave masters who in turn sold many to young masters which made them his sex toys. During this era, most ladies were reduced to nothing but a sexual object that appeal to men's sexual urge and emotion. Many ladies sold into slave trade were impregnated, used as experimental apparatus by some gynecologists without proper care. Many were forced into abortion so as to be able to continue their role as sex tool. Also the issue of rape, forced penetration has been in existence for long.

Women have through ages endure all manner of attack against their being and their bodies, many ladies were given into marriage as a means of appealing men's sexual appetite and take care of the home while the men do the important work and

being recognized globally. This act was transferred to the modern world. Although, women sexuality was not paraded the way it was in the ancient time and the era of slave trade have been exterminated, some of those practices against women were still carried along to modern era via civilization and modernization. Many of those acts against women were modernized and given new identity but still the same underlying ideology such that some women have embraced this ideology as their lot. The problem of women objectification has received a lot of attention over the centuries and has spurred many into this research.

Sexual Objectification of Women in Contemporary Nigerian Society

Having examined the historical encounter of women's sexual Objectification, it is evident that some of those encounters were brought into the modern age but has undergone a more advanced process to make it blend with the cultural setting of this age. One perfect example of this is the problem of illicit videos overtaking the media known as pornography. The underlying idea of pornography was derived from the ancient Greek culture. Researches have proven that the way women were perceived in ancient Greek culture as tools for sexuality which were celebrated worldwide within the Greek culture was adapted into pornographic contents. In pornography, the female person is the central focus the male are not that significant as compared to the female, many males were made to cover their faces, being blindfolded or even get their faces blurred while everything about the female is being exposed. Pornography has done nothing good but to reduce female being to a complete object rather than humans. The female body is not being respected, many female got paid handsomely to shoot pornography while they exchange their bodies for money. Seeing this act one will conclude that the female body has become an object that could be bargain for while many sees the female body as an object of trade while reducing it to object of seduction or commercial business.

The disrespect towards female body is on the rise on daily basis. In contemporary society, the value for women's body is seriously declining. Pornography and diverse social media challenge has contributed a lot of damage to womanhood. Going on social media one can hardly scroll two minutes without seeing any semi pornographic images or contents on social media, the way women sexuality is being paraded on media is reducing the value for women's body (Civile27).

Several advertising companies make use of women as their adverts on their big bill board and even on television. A jewelries company in a bid to advertise her accessories will have a beautiful model take some sexual appealing posture with the accessories around their necks. The question is with the manner they portray such images, one would wonder if they are

advertising the model or the accessories because what first appeal to the masses is not the accessories because it's a small object around her neck but rather the female body curves and natural endowment. Several other advertising companies' makes use of women to advertise their products but the problem is that many of these contents are too sexual in appearance compared to the message they intend to depict to the public. Women are being used as a tool of attraction.

Another area women are being objectified is the issue of beauty pageant, this event as beautiful as it is rather than revealing the most beautiful woman as the name implies have seen the abuse of women's bodies. Reports from several ladies that got themselves involved in that contest reveals that before they could have a shot at the contest, many of their sponsors demand for sex and even some of the organizers will demand for sex with a promise to crown them as the winner (Cikara 211). Many ladies have lamented on the sexual abuse they faced in that competition as many ended up being used and later not emerging as the winner even after selling their body to win the competition.

Another area to look at is the problem of fashion and modernity, in African community like Nigeria, modernization and civilization is gradually taking over the culture and traditions of the people. Morality is on the decline. Respect for human body is becoming a forgotten story. Fashion in Nigeria is taking another form and is being targeted against the female body. One beautiful example of this is the current trend of the *Aso-Ebi* being made for women in wedding celebration which has emerged as a current trend in the country. Someone made a post on social media recently that why do women have enough material to sew clothes that will cover their whole body and feet but not enough to cover their breast. This became a trending and engaging post on social media. Some women now sew clothes that reveal their private part on social media with all sort of captions. This has got people to ask if breast is still part of private part because it looks as though many ladies do not care about protecting their private part anymore. Movie industry is also contributing to women's objectification, many ladies are being screened and accepted based on their sexual appeals. There are certain roles in movies industry that demands certain features, those who do not match such features will be neglected no matter their talents and this make some of those ladies feels dejected and lead to self-objectification. In today's society, some women are self-objectifying themselves to meet up with some certain standards the World's system has created.

Ladies go for diverse beauty enhancement surgeries, breast enlargement, Brazilian Butt Lift or hip enlargement, facial surgeries. Some men are not left out of this as some get involved in transgendered surgery just to feel among the classic people that can fit into the media. Many ladies do not feel comfortable with how they are created but are overwhelmed by the judgment of beauty the world has set.

Socio-Religious Reaction to Counteracting Women's Sexual Objectification

Socio-religious reactions to counteracting women's sexual objectification involve complex dynamics influenced by cultural norms and religious beliefs. In cultures with strong religious prohibitions against objectification, individuals view objectification as immoral due to religious teachings (Loughnan et al 125). The interplay between societal messages, religion, and body image impacts how women perceive themselves during sexual situations. As such, Feminist therapists emphasize understanding the origins of these messages and their effects on body image (Andrea 5). The impact of religious practices on women's self-perception during emerging adulthood responds to counteracting women's sexual objectification within socio-religious contexts and this involves considerations of cultural norms, religious teachings, societal influences, and individual perceptions of body image and self-worth (Andrea 5-6).

There are examples of religious messages that can contribute to women's sexual objectification and they include direct instruction, metaphors, and comments, modeling by other women, unwritten curriculum, and harmful/redemptive experiences (Blum 133). Direct instruction often occurs through sermons, lectures, and biblical interpretations focusing on values related to dating, pre-marital sex, and women's roles, embedding moralized messages that may lead to shame and distorted self-views (Madison et al 330). Metaphors, like a Knight rescuing a Princess, can perpetuate gender stereotypes and reinforce traditional roles in relationships (Noa 13). Comments such as warnings about avoiding pregnancy without addressing broader sexual health issues can oversimplify complex matters and contribute to objectification. Modeling by other women and unwritten curriculum, where certain topics like masturbation are gendered or ignored, can also shape perceptions of sexuality and contribute to objectification (Barton 4). Religious communities handle disclosures of sexual abuse as something that can impact women's experiences and reinforce harmful beliefs (Blum 134). Due to this, some religious personalities refuse shy away or avoid addressing issues of sexual objectification. To say the least, such messages do not contribute to religious growth like prosperity message and the likes. Hence, there is no need hammering on such information.

Religious messages about modesty can contribute to women's sexual objectification by emphasizing women's responsibility for men's thoughts and actions, potentially reducing women to objects of temptation. In some religious contexts, teachings on modesty often focus on how women's clothing choices can impact men's behaviour and thoughts, suggesting that immodest dress may lead to improper thoughts or actions in men (Peggy 2). This emphasis on women as the guardians of men's purity

can reinforce the idea that women's bodies are inherently linked to men's morality, potentially reducing women to objects that need to be controlled or covered to prevent impure thoughts in men (Davis 126). The pressure on women to dress modestly to avoid tempting men can shift the focus away from women's autonomy and self-expression, further perpetuating the objectification of women as objects of desire or temptation (Davis 123).

Religious messages about modesty also have the ability to emphasize the sacredness of the human body as a gift from God and the importance of dressing and behaving modestly to honor this gift (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). These messages often stress the idea that modesty is more than just a fashion statement; it is a reflection of one's character and values, influencing how individuals present themselves to the world (Morgan n.p). Religious teachings often connect modesty to concepts of purity, respect for oneself and others, and the idea of dressing in a way that does not draw undue attention or promote impure thoughts and actions (www.askanadventistfriend.com). Modesty is viewed as a means of expressing humility, selflessness, and respect for God, with an emphasis on inner beauty and dignity rather than external appearances (Morgan n.p). Overall, these religious messages aim to guide individuals in living a life that reflects their faith, values, and respect for themselves and others through their choices in dress, behaviour, and lifestyle.

Examples of religious practices that promote modesty include dressing in a way that does not draw undue attention to oneself, grooming in a neat and clean manner, using clean and positive language, and behaving in a manner that brings happiness to those around us (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). In some religious traditions, modesty extends to avoiding revealing or sexually suggestive clothing, such as short shorts, tight clothing, or shirts that do not cover the stomach, to prevent stimulating desires that violate the principles of chastity (www.feministactivism.com). Modesty can be reflected in avoiding extremes in clothing, appearance, and hairstyle, as well as refraining from disfiguring oneself with tattoos or body piercings (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). Women in certain religious communities may be encouraged to wear only one pair of modest earrings if they desire to have their ears pierced, reflecting a practice of simplicity and moderation in adornment (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). Dressing modestly by choosing clothing that does not draw undue attention to oneself is a fundamental aspect of practicing modesty. This includes avoiding revealing or sexually suggestive clothing and maintaining neatness and cleanliness in appearance (Matthew n.p). Expressing oneself through clean, positive language and engaging in actions that bring happiness to others are essential components of modesty. This involves

refraining from using filthy language or participating in inappropriate behavior that may impair one's ability to receive spiritual guidance

(<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/modesty>). Religious beliefs can influence women's experiences of sexual objectification by shaping perceptions of morality and purity. In cultures with strong religious prohibitions against objectification, individuals may view objectification as immoral, possibly indicative of impurity (Loughnan et al 125). Fear, shame, and objectification are used to regulate women's sexuality within religious contexts (Blum 134). Thus, religious beliefs and practices aim to cultivate an attitude of propriety, decency, and respect for oneself, others, and God through modest dress, grooming, language, and behaviour.

The Effect of Sexual Objectification of Women in the Society

The viewing of another person as an instrument to be used for sexual goals is known as objectification. In a report by Carlyle, evidence shows that the learned automatic response to objectify women has become culturally ingrained to such a great extent that choosing not to objectify women depletes self-regulatory resources and decreases performance in cognitive tasks. In support of this notion, study on a sample of 81 women found that over one week, each woman reported being targeted for objectification between 3 to 4 times on average and witnessing sexual objectification of other women 9 to 10 times on average (Carlyle 322). Objectification becomes especially harmful if women internalize these judgments and self-objectify, or consider themselves first as bodies over other personal characteristics. This can lead to negative consequences including heightened body-shame and greater unwillingness to speak in social interactions. Women who are objectified are viewed as less than fully human, perceived to have less of a mind for thoughts or decisions and viewed as less deserving of moral treatment by others. This denial of mental capacity and moral status has been found to have negative repercussions for objectified women, including increasing men's willingness to commit sexually aggressive actions towards them, and decreasing perceived suffering in cases of sexual assault (Marecek 177). Furthermore, some women are objectified more than others: Women who appear sexualized (e.g., more tightly-fitted, revealing or provocative clothing, greater application of cosmetics), in particular, are objectified more than non-sexualized women. Although there is a consensus that sexualized appearance can increase objectification, it is still unclear which judgments based on a woman's appearance (and in many cases a sexualized appearance) influence the degree to which she is objectified by others. This study also investigates how appearance-based interpersonal perceptions of women

affect objectification. Self-objectification is one of the problem facing the society, female are becoming more concerned about their outward appearance and this is making many ladies to feel inferiors outwardly compared to some of their mates, thus they make attempt to become more sexually attractive by wearing some sexually revealing clothes thus this has led to several cases of women abuse in the society. The following problems are associated with sexual objectification of women in our contemporary society;

1. Rape: one challenge that is often associated with women objectification is the issue of rape, several cases of rape do occur annually within every nation. There have been several reports on issues of rape in every quarters of the society. Some victims choose to speak while others have remain silent because of fear, shame or prejudice. While some people are raped despite their innocence, some issues of rape are most times triggered by indecent appearances. This is as a result of some certain ways the female folks dress and revealed their sexuality. Some ladies' appearance and dressings communicate more of sexuality and thus, made some guys who are deprived of self-control forcefully have their way with them.
2. The use of women for commercial enterprise: some commercial businesses such as movie industry, music industry and those into fashion views women as object financial pull rather than being respected as a human being. Most especially music industries, the way women are being projected in musical video shoot portrays most ladies as instruments for pleasure and entertainment through the exposure of stark nudity and the portrayal of several sexual arousal moves thus making women feel nothing but an agent of sexuality in other to get people to buy their music. Also in movie industry, the recent trend in Nollywood have seen most Nigerian movies acting sexual related roles which involves ladies exposing most of their private body on movie set. One recent example that became trending on social media is a movie titled 'Shanty Town' where the lady involved in one of the roles received backlash and several criticism from Nigerians for acting such explicit role in that movie. The play was trying to depict sexual objectification of women as she was forced to undress before a powerful business tycoon, she felt powerless with no choice and option. That scene although received criticism from several Nigerians, it was actually telling the story of how powerless most ladies are and how prone they are to sexual objectification. Many commercial enterprise uses women's sexuality to their advantage as they make handsome money from them, another of such

case is pornography which sees women as object for sexual attraction to get the attention of masses by watching their contents and making money from it.

3. Promiscuity: Another challenge associated with women objectification is promiscuity, several ladies has objectified their bodies in exchange for money. Most commercial sex workers are people of great features who are beautiful and have appealing body. Instead of developing their mental capacity to be enterprising and self-reliant, some feel it is more adventurous and lucrative to 'use what you have to get what you want'. By so doing, they may decide to sell of their bodies in exchange for cash. This act is known as self-objectification. It has diminished the value of many ladies, there is a common say within these group of people that 'use what you what you have to get what you want'. This is to mean that that bodies which they sees as a selling point is capable of fetching them money, by doing so they already objectified that body.
4. Increased surgery: many ladies in other to fits into the kind of community that has been created around them they tend not to be contended with their natural endowments as they seek for medical assistance to boost their physical appearance to enhance their looks. Many ladies has gone through several surgeries just to increase their boobs, curves, nose and hips. Many also wear revealing clothes that display almost everything they wear under, doing this will basically arouse men and thus make men to be sexually threatening to them and this also lead to high level of immorality.

Recommendations

Having examine the concept of sexual objectification against women in our contemporary society and outlining the problems associated with them, it is essential that few possible recommendations be made.

1. There should be more social and religious awareness that will teach female child on their sexuality and how to protect themselves from becoming a social target by male counterparts through their dressings and the kind of company they keep.
2. The need for more feminist activists to protect and fight against women's sexual objectification rather than trying to fight for equal right between men and women. There should be people who will stand up to defend women's sexuality and speak for them so that the society will not view most women as an object of sexual related activities alone.
3. Parents, schools and other social gatherings should intensify their teaching on morality. The continuous

decline in morality in our society is responsible for some of the cases of sexual objectification directed towards women. Ladies should be taught on the importance of decency, as many ladies that face objectification are actually responsible for it. It is certain that some ladies who dress half naked on campus face more sexual assaults compared to those who covered themselves properly.

4. The government should expand their security checks on many activities on media that depicts sexual objectification of woman.
5. Religious institutions and organizations should preach hard on the need for sexual purity, appropriate covering of sensitive female parts even in religious gathering rather than the popular mantra 'come as you are' or 'your outward appearance does not matter as God is more concerned about what you do inwardly'. Such sermons encourage improper cladding of women. Several religious bodies can raise awareness campaigns on the need for women to be appreciated as 'images of God' rather than being an object meant for satisfaction. They can also empower women to be self-reliant rather than exchanging their bodies for pecuniary gain. Although, there have been religious organizations spearheading issues related to this cause, there is still need for more engagement in this regard.

Conclusion

Sexual objectification of women has been an issue from ages and not a recent phenomenon. But with modernization, people are modernizing their attempt to objectify women in the society, many men are with women today because of what they can get from their bodies. Some may marry them and turn them to sexual objects. Others go as far as beating their wives if she deprives them of sex in certain occasions. Women's values needs to be communicated beyond just offering sex to the society. There are several potentials in these women that needs to be unlocked with a collective effort of the society. Women needs to be protected more and also taught to appreciate themselves as beings with exceptional capabilities. This paper explored the socio-religious approach to combating sexual objectification of women. It has proven that religious and sociological frameworks can be combined to effectively address the issue of sexual objectification of women. Religious teaching can provide moral guidance, while sociological factors can provide insight into attitudes and behaviours related to the objectification of women. When applied together, it can be an effective means of combating this phenomenon.

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