Short Communication

The aftermath of female sexual objectification: Evidence from restaurants and beer lounges in Harare, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The paper sought to assess the effects of female sexual objectification in restaurants and beer lounges in Zimbabwe. A qualitative research design was used. Thirty three employees were interviewed and purposive sampling method was used in selecting participants. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis. It has emerged from the study that female objectification leads to negative mental, psychological and social effects ranging from eating disorders, drug abuse and being viewed as outcast in the society. Some participants expressed doubts on some of the alleged effects citing that maybe they are yet to experience the effects. As recommendations, employers must inform females before hand on the negative effects of sexual objectifications.

Keywords: Objectification, Self-objectification, Prevalence, Sexual dysfunction, Political efficacy.

Introduction

Female objectification remains an interesting issue in Zimbabwe because it has generated a lot of debate in as far as its effects are concerned. It has become a common practice and belief among restaurants and beer lounge owners in Zimbabwe that a women's appearance has an impact on consumer buying behaviour. Zimbabwean women hired in restaurants, beer lounges, hotels and hospitality management have generally increased over the last two decades. It has been observed that physical appearance and beauty of sales teams is used as taste that may affect sale increase, reputation of the firm as well as creating brand loyalty of customers. For individuals who enter service work, they may or may not be aware that by agreeing to work in certain jobs, they subject them to sexual objectification, and other sexualized behaviors as part of their jobs[1]. Numerous studies were conducted on the effects of female objectification in advertising, beer lounges, restaurants, and hotels. In a study conducted by Adkins in the British tourism industry, she found that women employees were often subjected to verbal harassment, physical harassment, and gaze[2]. As such, women became objects of male gaze in which the observer has the right to gaze at for as long as, and in whatever way, pleases them.

Dirks believed that certain organizations such as restaurants may also enhance women's working roles as sex objects, thus institutionalizing sexual harassment and sexual objectification in the service sector[1]. Zimbabwean females are not spared from objectification. A study by Mazuruse and Musasa at Mutare Teachers college on the effects of negative women portrayal in advertisements and its impact on Shona culture revealed that female objectification has negative social consequences[3]. The

Herald published a headline entitled "Naked Weapon". The story shows that surely females are used as a marketing tool[4].

Underlying theoretical framework: Emmanuel Kant is said to be the father of the objectification theory, in his teachings of Ethics[5]. Pakadi argues that both men and women can be objectified, but he was well aware that in practice women are the most common victims of objectificatio[6]. For Kant, in order to gain social acceptability, women are under constant pressure to correct their bodies and appearance more generally, and make them conform to the ideals of feminine appearance of their time, the so-called 'norms of feminine appearance' (the standards of appearance women feel they should be living up to)[7]. Furthermore, Fredrickson and Roberts, borrowing from Kant, proposed the objectification theory as an integrative framework for understanding how women's socialization and experiences of sexual objectification are translated into mental health problems[8]. Fredrickson and Roberts asserted that women to varying degrees internalize this outsider view and begin to self-objectify by treating themselves as an object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance[8]. Furthermore, drawing from objectification theory, Szymanski et al postulate that sexual objectification may be a risk factor for substance use and/or abuse in women via exposure to sexually objectifying media, the internalization of media and cultural standards that link a woman's thinness, beauty, and sexiness with substance use, and interpersonal experiences of sexual objectification[9].

Effects of female objectification: Researchers revealed that females in service industry are at risk of being objectified, harassed or discriminated against given the informal work atmosphere and highly sexualized nature of this type of

customer service work[10]. The following are the effect of sexual objectification:

Reduced life enjoyment: Fredrickson and Roberts are of the view that treating females as objects reduced their life enjoyment[9]. They further state that life enjoyment can be affected by the psychological and cultural effects of objectification. In addition; Sulik argues that objectification means that society can look down upon the objectified female[11]. Having this, it means reduced life enjoyment of the females being objectified. Seconding is Szymanski who state that skills and capabilities of women being sexually objectified will never be recognized by the society as they are viewed as outcasts[9].

Eating Disorder: Multiple studies have found a relationship between sexual objectification and disordered eating. Harned found that sexual harassment, which is often comprised of sexually objectifying behaviors, was a significant predictor of most disordered eating symptoms, even after controlled previous physically violent sexual experiences[12]. Most research on objectification theory has focused on disordered eating as the outcome variable[13]. Supporting the findings of Harned, a study done by Augustus-Horvath and Tylka found that self-objectification is positively correlated with body shame, and body shame is correlated with greater tendencies toward maladaptive eating habits[14]. Even self-objectifying women who report to enjoy being sexualized have still been found to engage in negative eating attitudes[15]. Self-objectification and its possible outcomes of depression and disordered eating may in turn hinder women's overall productivity.

Substance abuse: Szymansiki et al states that sexual objectification leads to substance abuse[9]. They further state that sexually objectifying environments increases the degree of drug and alcohol abuse. Stice et al. state that substance abuse comes with depression and eating disorders[12].

Increased market share: Advertising is used as a tool of increasing sales and in turn profitability. However literature has shown that there are social costs which come with advertising. From a marketing perspective, advertising is a promotional technique used by marketers to increase their market share. Advertising promote awareness and once customers are aware of the product, they will buy it. In support, Robert and Sut Jhally are of the view that advertising through objectification promote the sale of goods and services[16]. Sharing the same sentiments is Gwakwa who propounds that female objectification has economic gains[17].

Social effects: A study by Mazuruse and Musasa in Mutare Teachers College on the effects of women objectification in advertising revealed that sexual objectification results in women being despised in society[3]. According to Thurm, women who are not satisfied by their physical appearance end up being depressed and lose hope of ever achieving anything in life[18]. In addition, it also emerged that domestic violence and divorce are some of the problems being faced by women. For example,

those female employees in beer lounges, some customers may pass lewd comments, gaze, and even touch the woman while serving the customer in front of their husbands.

Methodology

Qualitative research approach was used. The researcher used qualitative research because it compliment interpretive research paradigm used in this research. Harare was chosen as the research site because the researcher stays in Harare.

Data Entry, Collection Instruments and Sampling techniques: Purposive sampling technique was use and thirty interviews were conducted.

Table below depicts responses on the effects of female objectification.

Table-1: Responses of Participants.

Item	Effects of female objectification	Participants
1	Mental effect	R1, R2, R3, R5, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R13, R14, R15, R16, R17, R18, R20, R21, R22, R23, R24, R26,R28,R30,R31,R32,R33
2	Social effect	R1, R2, R3, R4, R6, R19, R20, R21, R22, R23, R24, R25, R26, R27, R28, R29, R30, R31, R32, R33
3	Economic effect	R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R13, R14, R15, R16, R18, R19, R24, R25

Results and Discussion

Effect 1 which focused on mental effect showed an affirmative response rate of 82%. The same sentiments were echoed by Roberts who posits that sexual objectification has negative effects ranging from disorder eating, body shame and substance abuse[8]. Participant number R17 says:

"*I don't care, to be treated as a sex object is part of my job…as long as am able to bring sugar home for my family*".

These sentiments goes in line with the argument by Aubrey and Frisby who state that if sexual objectification is a choice made by females, then it means objectification has little or no mental impact to the incumbent[19].

Effect 2 showed that 61% of the participants are of the view that female sexual objectification affect them socially. The majority of the participants agreed that sexual objectification actually contributes to some negative social effects. Participant R19 says, "*It's because societal values and expectations differs … due to differences in cultures and age groups, some elderly people disapproves it and you will be disrespected by such a society.*

The above sentiments were also echoed by Zucker who posits that female objectification causes serious social effects leading to substance abuse. On effect 3,52% of the participants state that female sexual objectification has economic gains. In support, Gwakwa propounds that organizations are using females as advertising baits for the benefit of the organization[16]. In addition, Robert and Jhally argue that mass media and advertising companies use female objectification as a way of promoting goods and services[17]. Participant R10 has this to say,

 "my friend, our economy is the contributing factor to sexual objectification" she pleaded _"...we are forced to do this regardless of its effects because we want to survive._

Conclusion

The study sought to unravel the effects of female objectification in restaurants and beer lounges. It has emerged from the findings that female objectification is used in Zimbabwe as an index for marketing products and services. The research showed high sexual objectification conditions leads to social and psychological disorders.

Recommendations: Management of restaurants and beer lounges must review their marketing strategies if they wish to market their product that is to assess the effects of their strategies both to the customers and marketing teams. Females must also be made to realize that sexual objectification has negative effects ranging from economic, social, mental and psychological effects.

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