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### EXAMINING THE FEMALES' OBJECTIFICATION IN MUSIC VIDEOS FROM MARTHA NUSSBAUM'S PERSPECTIVE

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#### **ABSTRACT:**

Using the Feminist Perspective proposed by Martha Nussbaum, we examined the prevailing sexual objectification of women in popular music videos. The researchers operationalized the concept of "Sexual Objectification" and interpreted it according to Martha Nussbaum's theoretical constructs. These theoretical constructs further enabled the researchers to interpret and record the objectification accordingly. Data gathered from randomly selected 177 videos indicated a frequent sexual objectification in the music videos. Moreover, besides frequency calculation, the Chi-Square value (15.978) and significance value of  $p \geq .000^{***}$  also validated a strong significant relationship between music videos and sexualized portrayal of women. Thus, this research recommended more studies investigating the sexual objectification of both women and men in other media content, to highlight objectification in detail.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Entertainment is a substantial part of media content that entices audience attention and engages them for certain aspirations. Here different types of media content such as dramas, talk shows, current affairs, documentaries, and others contain entertainment for the audiences (Ryerson, 2001). Notably mediated entertainment has multiple purposes. It aims to amuse and engage the

individuals along with several cognitive benefits for them (Goldstein, 2017). That is the reason, people also indicate active participation in selecting the type of media content to attain entertainment (Klimmt & Vorderer, 2009). This selection process involves different aspirations such as escape from the stressful situation, mood changing, and also time-killing purposes (Al-Skaf et al., 2021; Ali, 2018). In this regard, music is one of the most prominent and preferred types of entertainment, that always gains much attention. However, besides entertainment, a higher frequency of sexually objectified portrayals in music videos is a high thought-provoking phenomenon (Andrew H. Gregory, 1997). To validate the prevailing sexual objectification especially of women, American Psychological Association initiated a project to examine the extent to which media content contains sexual objectification of women. Findings also witnessed a highly prevalent sexual objectification in media content, raising several concerns towards entertainment as a part of media content (Ali, 2018). It is also notable that, the findings analyzed and interpreted the sexual objectification based on Objectification theory proposed by Fredrickson & Roberts, (1997), which provided a stronger theoretical background to the study results. Similarly, today's sexual objectification of women is an integral component of media content that portrays women as weak, submissive, and inferior "objects", mainly "created" to serve the opposite gender (Grabe & Hyde, 2009; Ali, 2018). Media content primarily attributes women to "physical attractiveness and fascination" by representing them as instruments, prizes that can be won, and aimed only at giving sexual pleasure (Loughnan & Pacilli, 2014). These sexualized portrayals are undoubtedly humiliation of female gender and lead to even adverse outcomes (Rameez et al., 20-15).

In this regard, we can observe an increasing trend of sexual objectification in music content, particularly motion pictures, consumer culture, and music content. This media content portrays women as sexual objects that are mainly accompanied by unrealistic representations. Besides, the irony is they motivate women to develop sexiness, submissive attitude, powerlessness, and passivity to fulfill the criterion of "femininity" (Jon Barber, 2011; Wood, Julia, 1994). As noted by Patricia Aufderheide, (1986), today's modern music is far more than just "listening and enjoying" as it is now a collection of audio and visual components, aimed at enticing the spectators. Due to this narrative nature, now music is even more mesmerizing for the spectators as it provides us with cultural values, social practices, and paradigms regarding stereotypical roles of both men and women (Ali, 2018). Also, society accepts half-naked, sexualized, instrumentalized portrayals of women as normal cultural values that are socially acceptable, as suggested by media portrayals and content (Jordan Levy, 2019; Sukumar Snigda & Venkatesh S, 2011). Thus, the current evidence suggests that music videos are hyper-sexualized, representing women as sexually alluring objects, priming the belief that women are "always" available for satisfying the opposite gender. As a result, sexual beliefs are attributed to women leading to the normalization of women's passivity, and portrayals merely as sexual objects (Aubrey et al., 2011).

Besides, many studies witness a highly prevalent sexual objectification of women in mass media content, this concern is still under observation. Despite the study conducted by Aubrey et al., (2011) on sexual objectification in music

videos, there is rarely any study to examine the relevant phenomenon in contemporary music assessed under Nussbaum Feminist theory. Thus, by keeping in view the prevailing sexual objectification in music videos, we also examined this phenomenon in contemporary music videos mainly selected from the years 2018-2019. Analyzing the contemporary music trends also indicates a research gap as despite sexual objectification has been largely analyzed, during recent years, researchers are giving comparatively less attention to the relevant phenomenon. Hence, for investigating sexual objectification, then we have **first** described the objectification in a broader context, the **second section** contains literature concerning sexual objectification and its occurrence in the realms of mass media content. The **third section** contains the research methods to examine sexual objectification, the **fourth section** contains data manipulation and results. In the **fifth section**, we discussed the results and made the conclusions accordingly.

## LITERATURE REVIEW:

### *Objectification- An Overview:*

By objectification we primarily treating or considering a person as an object that can be used, further manipulated, and evaluated mainly by their physical appearance. We consider such a person as pleasurable and usable in a sexualized manner (R. M. Calogero, 2012). Here we treat an individual based on their private body parts and their physical appearance. We do not treat an objectified person as a human; rather we perceived them as lacking their personal freedom, respect, integrity, and opinion altogether (Rachel M. Calogero & Tylka, 2014). This objectification can be traced back to the Cleopatra Era when she was considered as an ideal "human body with feminine beauty". Men were attributed to dominance and women were considered as passive and beautiful based on their body shape (Balraj, 2015). However, the rise of Second-Wave feminism largely benefitted the critiques who criticized women's sexual objectification and sexualized portrayals. Feminist reaction to women's sexual objectification played a key role to identify and denounce women's sexual objectification in the media content. For example, the bill represented by British MP Claire Short in 1969, was one of the first steps to counteract women's sexual objectification. Short clearly demanded to ban topless, semi-nude, and sexualized pictures of women in three British magazines (Ali, 2019). Likewise, the scholarly writings of Catharine A. MacKinnon, (1982) that were inspired by Andrea Dworkin's ideological grounds also highlighted sexualization in media, particularly pornography as a hyper-sexualized form of objectification leading to even adverse consequences. Here it is worthwhile to mention that, all the criticism and studies by feminist scholars were originally inspired by the Kant's philosophical grounds. According to Kant, objectification is a process where one considers themselves as an "end-in-itself". Or in other words, thinking of ourselves as sexually satisfying and pleasing others (Loughnan & Pacilli, 2014; Papadaki, 2007).

Furthermore, after MacKinnon's scholarly work, Nussbaum, (1995) and Fredrickson & Roberts, (1997) also discussed sexual objectification in theoretical contexts that further strengthen the argumentation regarding sexual

objectification in both social and mediatized contexts. Later in the millennium, researchers also scrutinized the sexually objectified portrayals of women in motion pictures by utilizing the Bechdel tests. Findings also indicated sexualized portrayals of women in films, which further strengthen the notion of mediatized sexualization of women (Ali, 2019).

### *Types of Objectification Under Nussbaum's Theoretical Perspective:*

As mentioned earlier, Nussbaum, (1995) proposed her theoretical perspective on the normative and phenomenological basis, she first discussed objectification in phenomenological realms. For instance, the definition and types of objectification, then she imputed this objectification to non-polarized enactment (Jütten, 2016). Here we can presume that the Feminist Perspective by Nussbaum, (1995) primarily elaborates the "tendency to compare" the women with instruments or objects. Besides, Nussbaum, (1995) further categorized sexual objectification in seven sub-types, that according to Calogero, exist in almost every woman today (R. M. Calogero, 2012).

These sub-types of objectification may involve **instrumentality, denial of subjectivity, denial of autonomy, inertness, violability, fungibility, and ownership** (Martha C Nussbaum, 1995). Later, Langton, (2011) extended Nussbaum's propositions of objectification by adding three more subtypes including reduction to the body, reduction to appearance, and silencing. However, (Nussbaum, 1995) also considers the term "objectification" as hard to determine due to its "slippery" and "multiple" nature. Defining objectification in the best possible terms is problematic as it may also include how we treat each other in everyday lives, yet many media researchers affirm the correlation between media and objectification (Szymanski et al., 2011).

According to Jon Barber, (2011), sexual objectification of women is highly enticing and profitable in mass media. However, it is psychologically disturbing for women as it leads to a feeling of inadequacy and also sexual aggression against them. These consequences were also validated by Alfonseca, (2010) as she scrutinized the impacts of sexualized music videos on the spectators. Results also indicated these sexualized portrayals as resulting in stereotypical perceptions about women as sexual objects, and passive beings.

### *Sexual Objectification in Media Content:*

Today, mainstream opinions about ideal body and femininity are directly associated with mass media as they are the social institutions, source of motivation, and behavioral change and control (Krawczyk, 2013). In this regard, feminists, child protection organizations, and researchers criticize media for sexualizing female bodies. Although several studies focused on the impacts of sexual objectification, a limited one examined certain types of media content sexualizing women. Studies that examined the frequency of sexualization witnessed that sexual objectification of women is highly common and rapidly increasing (Zurbriggen, 2007). These findings are consistent with Wood's propositions as she stated that, media represent women subjected to men's sexual desires. Media encourage women to develop femininity, powerlessness,

sexiness, and passivity to fulfill the social and cultural needs and demands. Besides, media exemplify men with qualities such as hostile, strong, and aggressive, which are similar to those associated with women abuse (Wood, Julia, 1994).

Here Huber et al., (2018) cited an example of women's sexualization in the consumer culture and stated that using sexual objectification as a marketing tactic is much common today. Marketers mostly target young adults as they adopt comparatively faster than the other age groups. Similarly, the drama industry around the world is no exception in sexualizing women (Fallis, 2013). A study conducted by Shafiq, (2018) assessed the sexual objectification of women in the drama industry in Pakistani dramas and validated the relevant phenomenon. Results indicated women as passive, less-educated, thin body, inactive, lacking personal freedom, and belonging to the middle-class family. However, it is also worthwhile to mention that, sexual objectification is not limited to any particular media content today. Along with the conventional media even digital media platforms also contain hyper-sexualization of women (Ravi, 2014). For example, social networking site like Instagram is one of the most prominent yet preferred platforms. The online environment helps people to create their image, post, and share them with millions of online users. These images frequently indicate how youngsters actively post and share sexualized content including pictures and videos with each other (Davis, 2018; Qamar et al., 2020).

### ***Sexual Objectification in Music:***

Music Videos are rapidly progressing and generating revenue due to greater appeal, entertainment, and associated feelings with them, leading to the financial success of artists, composers, and writers. However, misogynistic perceptions regarding women and their exploitation are also associated with this music content. Now, sexualization has become more frequent, intense, and acceptable in music videos, continuing the image of women merely as sexual objects (Apuke & Jigem, 2019). Here Force, (2018) describes women's sexualization as the recent trend in objectified music and videos. Music content portrays men as prioritizing sex and women as fulfilling these sexual needs.

However, studies also witnessed women artist comparatively more objectifying their fellow female artists than men. These artists create music videos having explicitly sexualized acts, and sexual innuendos, resulting in an increased acceptance of sexualization among the audience. A case study conducted by Aubrey & Frisby, (2011) also validated the prevailing sexual objectification in music videos worldwide. Results revealed a higher frequency of sexualized portrayals of women that were mainly accompanied by sexually tempting dance moves. Further, Frazier & others, (2013) cited an example of Beyonce's Supr Bowl's performance in 2013 as people attributed it to hyper-sexualization and due to her extreme "Crotch Thrusting". Deadspin also filed a complaint against Beyonce for showing her "vaginal area to the world". Deadspin also gathered n= 48 complaints from the audience associating Beyonce's performance to sexual objectification and humiliation of women dignity. However, for Moody-Ramirez & Scott, (2015) Rap music contains comparatively more sexual

objectification of females than other genres. Consequently, the music videos also follow the same patterns as from words to the visual content, sexual objectification is a part of Rap music. However, still, the prevailing sexual objectification in other genres is a major concern for all. Rap, Pop, Rock, Jazz, Country, etc all contain sexualized portrayals of women, leading to normalization and acceptance of objectification as a social-cultural practice (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011).

## **METHODOLOGY:**

### ***Research Design:***

In direct quantitative content analysis, the study starts as a guideline for the initial codes through a theory or related research findings. In this regard, the current study is exploratory as we utilized direct content analysis that further helped to acquire the data in a quantitative form from the selected music content (Sivarajah et al., 2017). We found all the sampled videos easily accessible through online websites i.e. Dailymotion, YouTube, Vimeo, Hulu, and Veoh. We selected a time frame from January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018. We also assigned codes to the obtained data for the statistical analysis.

### ***Study Sample:***

The Billboard chart is a map that lists among America's best performers. This data is primarily focused on the weekly physical and digital sales of each album, as well as on airplay on the American radio station and streaming through digital music outlets. Their data, released by Billboard magazine, is compiled by Nielsen SoundScan. The charts display the relative success of songs and albums in the US and elsewhere every week. The analysis is published in the magazine Billboard. Billboard biz, the online extension of Billboard charts, offers new weekly charts and year-end charts. ("Billboard Charts", 2019). Music is divided into many genres, such as Rap, Hip hop, country, rock, jazz, holiday, Latin, Christian. In the current research, we preferred a simple random sampling method to selected music genres that further assigned us to selected the relevant music content. We selected 200 top-rated (bestselling) music videos from Billboard charts under the three selected genres that further resulted in short-listing 177 music videos. Notably, we did not severalize the gender, so we had 54.2% of male and 45.8% of female singers, indicating the majority of male artists in the sampled music content.

### ***Reliability Analysis:***

According to (Salkind, 2010), Krippendorff's Alpha Test helps to examine the coding technique. It mainly indicates the agreement between the coding variables and observers, that further authenticate the coding method. Thus, to validate the reliability of our coding method, we conducted a Krippendorff Alpha analysis as suggested by (Gwet & Ph, 2015). Here we with the value of .71, we found that the coding technique is strongly reliable.

## DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

**Table 1:** Frequencies & Percentage of Music Videos by Genre

S/R	Variables	f	%
1	Pop	76	42.9%
2	Rap/Hip-Hop	92	52.0%
3	Country	9	5.1%

**Table 1** Above further exhibits the Music Videos accordingly to their genres. It is visible that, there were 76 pop music videos (43%), 92 hip hop (52%) and 9 (5%) country music videos were part of the selected study sample.

**Table 2:** Frequency Calculation of objectification in Music Videos

S/R.	Variables	Constructs	f	%
1	Instrumentality	Representing a person as an object	147	83.0%
2	Denial of Autonomy	Lacking personal freedom and will	81	45.7%
3	Inertness	Lacking agency and activity	132	74.5%
4	Ownership	Interchangeable object	128	72.3%
5	Violability	Owned by another person	134	75.7%
6	Fungibility	Lacking boundary and integrity	135	76.2%
7	Denial of Subjectivity	Experiences need not be taken under consideration	133	75.1%
8	Silencing	silent or lacking to speak	138	77.9%
9	Reduction to Appearance	Identifying with their body or body parts	128	72.3%

**Table 2** summarizes the frequency and percentage calculations of the relevant categories of objectification, denoted by f= frequency and %= percentage. We can observe that instrumentality is the highest prevailing variable, as is found in all music genres. 147 out of 177 music videos treated women as an object in their music videos (instrumentality). Further, in 77.9% of music videos, we found silencing as the most frequent type of objectification as the primary role of female models was to silently dance in the background. Moreover, fungibility was the third most frequent objectification as 76.2% of videos portrayed women as lacking integrity and interchangeable with cars, money, jewelry, etc. Similarly, we found violability as the fourth most frequent (75.7%) sub-type of objectification portraying women as own by men, lacking their autonomy. Besides, 74.5% of music videos also represented women as lacking activity or more likely to be decorative objects. Finally, 72.3% of music videos portrayed women with that Nussbaum, (1995) called "reduction to appearance" where the genitals and bodyparts were the main focus of attention for the audiences (See **Table 2**).

*Hypothesis Testing: Kruskal-Wallis Analysis***Table 3:** Kruskal-Wallis Test for testing hypothesis

Genre	Mean Rank	Chi-square	Sign.
Pop	105.94	15.978	.000***
Rap/Hip-hop	75.17		
Country	87.33		

The Kruskal Wallis Test test is used to verify statistical significance. It is a non - parametric test where data is not normally distributed and does not have the same sample size for the analysis of different sample groups (Ostertagová et al., 2014). Thus in the current research, the Kruskal-Wallis H test indicated a statistically significant difference in sexual objectification between the different music genres,  $\chi^2(2) = 15.978$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , with a mean rank objectification score of 105.94 for Pop, 75.17 for hip hop and 87.33for country music genre. Similarly, the results also showed the significance value of  $p \geq .000$  and Chi-square value of 15.978, which indicate a strong, significant relationship between Music Videos and Objectification. **Table 3** above summarizes the results of Kruskal-Wallis Test.

**DISCUSSION:**

According to Nussbaum, (1995), "Treating things as objects is not objectification,"; instead treating a human as an object is "objectification. For example, many things around us for persona use but they are not humans nor we attribute them to human bodies. Here Nussbaum, (1995) directly or indirectly criticized all types of objectification even mass media-based objectification against women, involving one's sexual intention and attitude as an important component of the "sexual realm" (Nussbaum, 1995). It also notable that, despite media content provides a commonplace for the sexual objectification of women, these objectified portrayals are comparatively more prevalent in music content (Goldstein, 2017). However, some music genres practice more sexual objectification in their audio and video content than others (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011).

Findings of our current research also validated the proposition regarding the higher frequency of sexual objectification in some particular music videos. Here we found Pop Music as containing the highest number of sexually objectified portrayals of women (42.9%). For instance, "Rich the Kid by Plug Walk," by Richie Rich contained almost all the types of objectification especially reduction to appearance, silencing, ownership, and instrumentalization. Likewise, the song "Drip too Hard" by X Gunna and Lilly Baby also involved semi-nude female models, silencing dancing in the background with the main focus on their private body parts. Besides, we also found "Lil Tecca" by Ransom as one of those music videos where male models were explicitly represented as sexually abusing women in the gym.

These findings affirmed that music videos frequently represent women as semi-nude, silent, and submissive in front of male artists. Rigorous analysis of the relevant content also indicates that music content never represents women as self-reliant, autonomous, career-focused, and vigorous. Instead, they portray women as hyper-sexualized, striving for male attention (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). For instance, we found a song "Money" by Cardi B portraying fully naked female models roaming around the camera. In the same video, strip dancing was also shown with a closer focus on the strippers' body parts. Here we consider this hyper-sexualized representation what Boccato et al., (2015) called "gender dehumanization" that involves women's bodies merely as "commodity" or prize. This gender dehumanization also portrays women as lacking capabilities and intelligence, which is visible in a majority of music content.

Moreover, many other music videos such as Sucker by Jones Brothers, 7 Rings by Arianna Grande, New Rules by Dua Lipa also involved semi-nude, silent girls dancing in the background. Thus investigating the popular music content from different countries also showed that current music content is still with the findings highlighted by previous studies (see Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Karsay & Matthes, 2020; Rodgers & Hust, 2018; Szymanski et al., 2011; Vandyke & Vandyke, 2011).

As noted by Kallye, (2017), music videos frequently dehumanize women by portraying them as sexualized objects only to serve men for sexual pleasure purposes. Kallye's notion about dehumanization resonates with Nussbaum's assumptions as according to theory, sexual objectification always stays present and is different from each other. Despite many objects are for our pleasure and satisfaction, they are breakable, owned by us, and perceived violable. Consequently, women, objectification is the same as it also involves sexualizing, owning, and misrepresenting women accordingly (Douman, 2013).

However, sexually objectified portrayals of women are socially acceptable in today's world and are linked with misogyny and social dominance. People accept it as normal cultural practice in both social interactions and media content. Media content utilized several appeals to earn revenue by attracting the audience's attention as representing women in a sexualized manner is one of the most preferred tactics to grab the audience's attention (Ali, 2019; Shahzad Ali & Ali Ab, 2016; Xiao et al., 2019).

### **CONCLUSION:**

We examined the potential sexual objectification in music content particularly videos. We utilized the content analysis method for the data gathering purposes and found a strong, significant relationship between music videos and the sexual objectification of women. These results indicated strong compatibility with the objectification described by Nussbaum, (1995). We found instrumentality as the most frequent form of objectification in the music videos. Likewise, silencing, extreme focus on body shape and body parts, all remained explicitly visible in the sampled music videos. These appearances were "morally problematic", which is also validated by Nussbaum, (1995) as she argued that sexually objectifying women is morally problematic and heralds for even adverse

consequences (Szymanski et al., 2011). Besides, mild pornographic content is resonating with Mackinnon's idea behind the "distinctive power of men over women in society" (Catherine A. MacKinnon, 1989). Additionally, the lyrics of music content were also objectifying such as:

"I got red, I got blue, what you want?  
The Chanel or Balenciaga, Louis, and Vuitton  
She knows I got the Fendi, Prada when I hit Milan  
I needed me a die or rider, I need me the one  
I started from the bottom, you could see the way I stunt  
I want all the diamonds, I want that shit to weigh a ton  
The apps, they tryna line me 'cause they hate the place I'm..."

Therefore, from advertising to entertainment, media content contains sexual objectification of women. However, studies also witnessed comparatively stronger sexual objectification in music videos than other content. These objectified representations of women can lead to negative outcomes including increased sexual hostility against women and undermining all the efforts for gender equality (Ali et al., 2020; Szymanski et al., 2011). Scholars like Martha Nussbaum, Germaine Greer, Barbara Fredrickson, Tommy Ann Roberts, Katherine Mackinnon, Andrea Dworkin, and others have much highlighted sexual objectification as a dehumanization of women yet, it is highly prevalent. However, female singers objectifying other female artists is another major concern today as the portrayals are the same. Thus, whether it is the male or female singer, women are represented as what Nussbaum, (1995) wrote: "many things are owned, used and then considered as not usable again".

#### ***Study Contribution:***

Despite previous studies witness the prevailing sexual objectification in music videos, this study is of greater magnitude. As today, media content is diverse, and researchers are investigating pervasive sexual objectification, music videos are obtaining comparatively less attention. Besides, this research also provides a pathway to validate the reasons behind increased sexual hostility and stereotypical portrayals against women. Thus, this research will advance the future observations aimed at examining the mediatized sexual objectification in other different music genres as well.

#### ***Limitation and Recommendation:***

The major limitation of this research is studying only three music genres; however, studies also witness increased sexualization in other genres such as blues and jazz. Further, due to limited resource, we performed the role of coder, that also narrows down the scope. However, we delicately analyzed the data and concluded the study as eradicating personal bias is a core quality of good research. Thus, we assume that mediatized sexual objectification is a highly thought-provoking concern that also involves men. In this regard, we suggest more investigations focusing on the sexual objectification of men in the media content especially music videos.

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