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WOMEN IN 21ST CENTURY MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

News broadcasters are generally responsible for bringing awareness to topics and events of importance at the time in society. However, when it comes to feminism, the topics can become heated and very opinionated which can cause trouble for the news channel. Therefore, the topic of feminism tends to be somewhat regulated because of controversies associated with broadcasters being "too feminist" or "too sexist". Nevertheless, in the last decade or so, news stories regarding feminist actions have become more frequent as feminism has become more mainstream.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

In Hollywood Feminism has seen an increased representation in film in the 21st century. Female characters as well as non-heteronormative characters are more readily represented than they have been in the traditionally patriarchal Industry. This upswing of feminist films has been in no small part due to the momentum gained by the feminist movement and the recognized change of the film-going demographic.

An example of a 21st century film that discusses the issues of feminism is Big Eyes, a biographical American film starring Amy Adams and Christopher Waltz. The film is set in American 1950's and is about a talented female artist and her disgruntled and sexist husband who decides to market her artwork as his own because he believes society doesn't want to buy female artwork. While the film includes tremendous acting by both actors, it also raises the important topic of feminism and the rise of the feminist movement during that era. Along with many Hollywood films that use strong, independent female leads to promote an ideal of feminism, the labels actor and actress have also become de-sexualized and reduced to the unisex term actor for both male and female. This change possibly has occurred because of prejudice against female actors.

In 21 Century the internet has created a "community" where societal opinions and discussions can occur all in one location, linking people across the world by the click of a mouse. Feminist theories and movements are promoted through Facebook pages, social media posts on Twitter, Blogs posts, chat room discussion boards etc. By simply searching feminism on Instagram, 1, 045, 463 posts had been made under "most recent", that's a lot of talk regarding feminism. There are also popular Instagram accounts such as Feminist Problems run by, "just another feminist dealing with the everyday stupidity of society & trying to change the world one photo at a time." This account makes light of more serious feminist issues through jokes, quotes, and memes, yet it also promotes talk about pressing feminist issues of 21st century, such as equal pay in certain job sectors. The internet and social media have become an important medium for the messages surrounding feminism.

Debra Beck argues that modern day media is rarely friendly towards feminism. Her article explores how the media frames feminism and causes a warped social view of what feminism is. Beck says that while most women support feminist ideals, they do not label themselves feminists, which she believes to be because they want to avoid the negative image associated with being a feminist (Beck, 1998). The media (TV shows, News, Talk shows, Advertising etc.) has re-imagined feminists as disagreeable, bristly women who would rather stay single and alone forever than be with a man who doesn't agree with their "hard feminist ways". Because of this extreme idea of feminism, women and men who identity as feminists have become cautious to convey their ideologies for fear of more false labelling.

Media and Pop culture has created a medium with which individuals can share ideas, styles and opinions at the touch of their fingers. The ability to spread information around the globe at the click of a button has become a modern day phenomenon. Social media platforms such as "Instagram", "Facebook" and "Twitter" not only provide celebrities with the ability to share their lives but can also lead to everyday people gaining overnight fame by their post going "viral" and gaining hundreds of thousands or even millions of views in a matter of hours or days.

Lady Gaga "Born this way" foundation, is an example of how a particular figure in pop culture can make a difference in the lives of everyday people and strives to empower youth, particularly female youth, in building better communities.. She founded the foundation as her way of advocating for the struggles that many youth face such as bullying, racism and appearance. During the launch Gaga stated that her organization would be based on "The three pillars of the Born this Way Foundation are SSO. The first "s" is safety. The second "s" is skills. We want kids to feel safe in their schools or safe in their home environments, so that they can acquire the skills to be a tolerant accepting and loving person. And then we believe that this will lead them towards the "o" which is opportunity."

'Essena ONeill, was an Australian Instagram star who quit unhealthy social media. She is an example of how pop culture can be detrimental to some women. While many women are able to use social media to share their interests, it can become overwhelming and obsessive tool for others. O'Neill is an example of a young "social media celebrity" who developed an unhealthy habit with her online presence. On October 31st 2015, O'Neill launched the website http://www.letsbegamechangers.com in order to share her story about breaking away from social media; her recent re-upload of her video titled "Dear 12 Year Old self" has gone viral on the internet, and she discusses her personal experiences with social media and how it lead to her unhealthy addiction to having a perfect online presence.

On December 21st 2014, the pop-star figure, Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter released a Youtube video presenting her perspective on the way that young woman portray their own body, how she controls her body and the way that she was able to embrace her true values through her marriage with the Pop icon Jay-Z. Beyoncé elaborates on how she views herself as a feminist "I've always consider myself a feminist, although I was always afraid of that word because people put so much on it. When honestly it's very simple, it's just, you know, a person who believes in equality for men and woman." The star created an accepting atmosphere and considered the struggles that all social groups go through, especially women as well as other minority groups. Knowles-Carter has accomplished many things that could easily be related to the feminist movement: she often performs with an all-female band, promotes gender equality, (GQ's interview, February 2013 issue), has written many feminist-oriented songs ("Independent Women" (2001), "My, Myself, and I" (2003)) promoting female empowerment. However, she often faces criticism over her scantily-clad outfits and sexually-charged performances.

Ellen DeGeneres, a popular comedian turned talk show host in the

United States, seeks to promote confidence within women and takes a feminist stance with a comic twist. Ellen is a popular icon in modern day pop culture and is someone who many young and middle aged women look up to. Ellen is a selfless individual who is known for her inner and outer beauty; this is seen through her own COVERGIRL makeup line. Her humanitarian work and desire to build a global community makes her a role model who people can relate and strive to be like. In her "Woman on twenties" skit, she showed her support when she said "It's important for young woman to have a constant reminder that there are amazing female role models, and that they can do anything."

Orange Is the New Black, a hit television series consists of most, if not all of the actors and actresses raising awareness on important issues on feminism off-screen. Actress Samira Wiley told The Guardian and The Huffington Post on her social role. "I feel a responsibility to young girls who want to follow in our footsteps. I feel a responsibility to the prison community."To examine stereotypical depictions of women in 21st century advertisements content analysis was usedThe researcher and a research assistant coded a total of 12,458 advertisements from 2000 through 2007 from Time, Newsweek, BusinessWeek, and Forbes, of which 89% or 11,134 contained at least one stereotypical depiction within the nine categories. Advertisements containing one or more females, either in the absence of men or the presence of one or more men, were coded in this study. Women were shown as objects, whose function in the advertisement was to be looked at the highest frequency. Women were shown inhibited by their movement at the lowest frequency.

Leaving aside the assumption that working-class women can't be experts, the compelling evidence from studies on role models suggests that having women in the public eye matters. Some might argue that ads just appeal to consumers' desires, they are in fact based on societal assumptions (I don't think I'm going out on a limb in suggesting that many young women dream about success beyond boys at prom. However, these assumptions are self-perpetuating: visions of "ideal" womanhood, as defined by the matrimonial-maternal construct, influence women's own definitions of success through a seductive matrix of peer and societal pressure.

It's astonishing to think that women in today's world could still be portrayed by the media as objects rather than as thinking beings. The media pervades a huge portion of woman's daily experiences in the twenty-first century, making this supposition even more worrying.Indeed, gender objectification is not something which is restricted to such obvious territory as Playboy magazine or the staff who work at establishments such as Hooters. Even cosmopolitan, a monthly magazine which targets modern, cultured career women, still buys into the standardised Western idea of beauty. Any number of similar magazines will highlight this – in most cases unattainable – standard with the photo they use on their front cover. These images of toned, tanned and attractive women are used in magazines are not aimed at men.

Not only in modern media but in visual art from the Renaissance onwards, women are portrayed as recipients of a male 'gaze'. In other words, men are viewers and women are the objects to be viewed. We need to look at Botticelli's Venus or the waitress in Manet's A Bar at the Folies-Bergeres to see the accuracy of his claims. In these two undoubtedly very different paintings, the women featured are both aware of being watched by a spectator. Berger maintained that this spectator is generally assumed to be a heterosexual male, so the women depicted are merely there in order to be seen by the opposite sex. Men are active in their role of what Berger calls the 'sexual protagonist', whereas women remain static and passive as this is all their role requires them to do.

Although the John Berger ideology dates from the 1970s it still very much resonates today, particularly if we consider contemporary advertising. Adverts, films and TV shows aimed at a female audience are more prevalent than they might have been forty or fifty years ago but this does not mean the spectator's gaze has lost any of its masculinity. That same idealised beauty is presented in commercials by the seemingly flawless models who are shown using products such as anti-ageing creams or hair treatments.

The images of women in adverts are not necessarily for a female audience in a straightforward sense, but rather are subverted. The woman watching at home imagines herself as the attractive model she sees, who is in turn being watched by the opposite sex. In all cases, the commodity available to buy is, in effect, the woman, since having improved her figure, rid herself of unwanted weight and perfected her skintone, she now represents a desired object for the male audience and a model for the female audience to aspire to.

The exploitation of women in mass media is the use or portrayal of women in the mass media (such as television, film and advertising) to increase the appeal of media or a product to the detriment of, or without regard to, the interests of the women portrayed, or women in general. Feminists and other advocates of women's rights have criticized such exploitation. The most often criticized aspect of the use of women in mass media is sexual objectification, but dismemberment can be a part of the objectification as well.

Many contemporary studies of gender and sexualization in popular culture take as their starting point Goffman's analysis in Gender Advertisements.Among them, later research which expanded empirical framework by analyzing the aspects of women's sexualization and objectification in advertisements, M.-E Kang examined the advertisements in women's magazines between 1979 and 1991 and found out there are still showing the same stereotyped images of women: Nude or partially nude images of women increased nearly 30% from 1979 to 1991.[5] Lindner further developed Kang's analytical framework in a study of women in advertisements and found out magazines rely on gender stereotypes, but in different ways, particularly in terms of sexualization. For example, in Vogue, sexualized images of women are the primary way of portraying women in positions of inferiority and low social power.

Researchers argue that the simple presence of images of sexualized men does not signal equality in media representations of women and men. They may legitimize or exacerbate violence against women and girls, sexual harassment, and anti-women attitudes among men. They concluded that similarly sexualized images can suggest victimization for women but confidence for men, consider the implications when women are sexualized at the same rate as men are not sexualized.Clothing designer Calvin Klein was criticized for using images of young, sexualized girls and women in his ads. He has also received media attention for its controversial advertisements in the mid-1990s. Several of Calvin Klein's advertisements featured images of teenage models, some "who were reportedly as young as 15" in overly sexual and provocative poses.

In considering the way that films are put together, many feminist film critics have pointed to the "male gaze" that predominates in Hollywood film-making. Budd Boetticher summarises the view thus: "What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance." Laura Mulvey's germinal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (written in 1973 and published in 1975) expands on this conception of the passive role of women in cinema to argue that film provides visual pleasure through scopophilia and identification with the on-screen male actor.

She asserts: "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness," and as a result contends that in film a woman is the "bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning".Mulvey

argues that Lacan's psychoanalytic theory is the key to understanding how film creates such a space for female sexual objectification and exploitation through the combination of the patriarchal order of society, and 'looking' in itself as a pleasurable act of voyeurism, as "the cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking".

Additionally, the sexual objectification of women in film has a detrimental effect on girls and young women. Research shows that when girls had extended exposure to films in which female super heroes were dressed in over-sexualized costumes, they became more aware of their own body competence. Additionally, the exposure impacted their view of the female gender and female roles. Such over-sexualization in popular Hollywood films takes away from girl's self-esteem and encourages them to want to alter their bodies to look more like the actresses in films and media.

Recently, television has come under fire for the sexual exploitation of women on screen, particularly when teenagers are involved. In 2013, the Parents Television Council released a report that found that it was increasingly more likely for a scene to be exploitative when a teenage girl was involved. The report also found that 43 percent of teen girls on television are the targets of sexually exploitative jokes compared to 33 percent of adult women. Rev. Delman Coates, a PTC board member said, "Young people are having difficulty managing the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate sexual conduct". This report is of a series that's about media sexualization of young girls.

The researchers from the study claim that "[i]f media images communicate that sexual exploitation is neither serious nor harmful, the environment is being set for sexual exploitation to be viewed as trivial and acceptable. As long as there are media producers who continue to find the degradation of women to be humorous, and media outlets that will air the content, the impact and seriousness of sexual exploitation will continue to be understated and not meaningfully addressed in our society."

A 2012 study led by sociologist Stacy L. Smith found that in both prime-time television and family films, women were highly likely to be depicted as thin and scantily clad. They were also vastly underrepresented in STEM fields when compared to their male counterparts, and had less speaking roles. According to this study, only 28.3 percent of characters in family films, 30.8 percent of characters in children's shows, and 38.9 percent of characters on prime time television were women.

According to a report by the Women's Media Center (WMC), it found that the gender gap has not declined and that in some industries it has gotten worse. In television, it found the percentage of female TV characters has decreased and that the ones who make it on-screen are not likely to get the lead roles compared to the male characters. "According to the Center for the Study of Women in Television & Film's 'Boxed In' report, CW Television Network is the only TV network where women can be seen in accurate proportion to their representation in the U.S. population".

Women's roles in many modern games usually are less important to the game and rely heavily on stereotypes.Critics of the prevalent portrayals of women in the mass media observe possible negative consequences for various segments of the population.Stereotyping of women who are positively portrayed by or sexualized in the media is limiting the societal and career opportunities for people who fit these stereotypes.

This exploitation of women in the media has on the mental health of young women, but recently the studies have focused on aging women in western societies. It has been observed that the exploitation of young attractive women in the media causes aging women to feel a variety of emotions including sadness, anger, concern, envy, desensitization, marginalization, and discomfort that their appearance was being judged by others.

It is an inherent feature of the media to continue to objectify women, even in what is broadly thought to be an enlightened age. If an object – however beautiful or desirable – has no thoughts or feelings, then it is easy to see why issues such as sexual violence and negative body image will remain as long as we continue to perceive women in this way.

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