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Is Women's Beauty Used as a Means to Achieve Certain Ends?: Pakistani Women's Perceptions of Body Objectification

By Subaita Zubair¹

Abstract

This qualitative ethnographic paper analyzes women's perceptions of whether their beauty is utilized to achieve certain ends in Pakistani society. It highlights the objectification of the female body particularly in the field of academia and various job sectors. Female participants were both students and professionals. The age range of study participants included late adolescents (aged 18-24) and early adults (24-34) from the area of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan. In-depth, semi-structured interviews (17 interviewees) and focus group discussions (8 respondents, age 20-24) were used, and a thematic analysis was conducted. Results showed that women whose bodies reflect the commodified and sexualized beauty standard are preferred over women whose bodies do not fit into this category. A significant percent of the population believes that women's bodies are seen in terms of ornamental value; their bodies exist for the visual gratification of others and, in some cases, the 'self.' Generally perceived, the 'beautiful body or attractive person' also allows women to attain good marriage proposals, secure job positions, good grades in academia, and be hired by companies and media for generating revenues. Veiled women are not only perceived in terms of modesty but as easily available sexual objects. In this society, people largely expect that good-looking women will be hired over those who do not meet accepted beauty standards. Beautiful women reap social benefits, while women whose bodies are not socially approved may not achieve any positive outcome. Men in this society also understand that they have the power to tell women how their bodies ought to be and behave. Future studies might examine men's perspectives when it comes to identifying socio-cultural roles pertaining to their attractiveness and body marketing in a society known for being patriarchal.

Keywords: Beauty, Women, Objectification, Adolescents, Body image, Perception, In-depth interviews

Introduction

Generally, in a society that is ideal-focused, men and women experience their own and others' beautified bodies in diverse ways. The voices emphasizing to stay fit and beautiful seldom halt, and the double meanings concerning perfections and imperfections continue to prevail. The indirect messages regarding a beautiful and desirable person speak louder than the direct ones, and ultimately, the expectation is for one to become the epitome of 'beauty.'

Anthropologists have questioned what body image and human appearance indicate about culture and the kind of effects culture has on one's image of the body and human appearance (Anderson-Fye, 2012). I believe there is a need to build and expand scholarly knowledge of these

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longstanding and contemporary phenomena of beauty and body as a native person from Pakistan is positioned on the hologram of ideal standards, surrounded by the cultural frame of values, roles, expectations, and societal judgments concerning beauty and body image. Another reason for this need is because beauty and body are symbiotic constructs, and the expectations and definitions linked with them are by different socializing vehicles, which are to be explored in an interdependent society.

This study examines what women's understanding of beauty and the ideal body are, and I aim to study the female body as potentially capable of great achievements. Also, in Pakistan, the importance of physical attributes particularly prevails in the context of mate selection; this has been generally recognized as a concerning matter. This selection is not only about an understanding between two accomplices; however, it is seen as a practice that incorporates culture and religion along with seeking beauty in the partner. The choices of guardians and other relatives are considered exceptionally significant in this matter. The standards of mate selection vary from family to family, depending on their rational perspective. Conversely, physical qualities or facial appeal is an essential element of aesthetic inclination that is expected while choosing a mate of life in various world societies, including Pakistan (Hussain & Gulzar, 2015).

In a nation where religious scripture and doctrines reflect an emphasis on women's modesty, yet the objectification of women and the ideology of male dominance run side by side, questions regarding the actual reflection and perception of women's body and beauty do rise. My research questions have encompassed the expectations held by our society and its people to judge a woman regarding beauty and the body and its objectification and commodification. In our patriarchal society, the perception of women should be considered for exploring the concept of objectification, particularly when it comes to women's bodies and their functionality.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to find out how the female body is perceived by women, and how they think it is perceived by society when beauty is thought to be used to achieve a particular result or attain an objective. The research is also designed to highlight the social construction and reflection of a woman's body in terms of its objectification and its role in Pakistani culture and society.

Objectification Theory

In their *objectification theory*, Barbara Lee Fredrickson and Toni-Ann Roberts (1997) proposed that we are a part of a society in which an individual's sexual attractiveness and outward manifestation are highly rated. This leads individuals to establish their self-worth by determining how well they fit into cultural norms that are set for appearance. The amount of research has likewise authenticated that in everyday living, in contrast to men, women are more regularly battered as objects of sexual desire (Calogero, 2012).

Media technologies tend to establish powerful masculinity concerning the dominant ideology of patriarchy in American culture (Trujillo, 1999). Male controlled society in America is demonstrated by men holding powerful positions, controlling women, and exercising hegemony. Men are depicted as suppliers for the family, aggressive and controlling; however, women are seen as sexual items, fostering parental figures, and caretakers (McCue, 1995; Trujillo, 1999). Women's susceptibility to objectifying themselves when compared with men is hardly astounding because we belong to a culture where women are overwhelmed with media images, and social

communication essentially centers around women's physical demeanor (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998).

Through the lens of objectification theory, this study has examined how society objectifies women's beauty and bodies by using them as means or tools to achieve certain ends. Objectification can happen on several diversified levels, from objectifying interactions on a personal level to broader social messages demanding high standards of appearance. The objectification theory was chosen because it provides a framework for understanding the experience of being a woman in a sociocultural context that sexually objectifies women's bodies. Through the application of this theory, I explored whether, in contemporary patriarchal society, women still have control over their bodies.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was used in which in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted and one focus group discussion was piloted to incisively explore this topic. For interviews, a list of themes was developed to be explored; however, the in-depth semi-structured interview generally unfolded informally, and this offered the participants an opportunity to converse about the issues they thought essential. Thematic analysis was used, and it is regarded as a method that requires the identification of the themes and patterns within qualitative data.

Study Sites

I selected the urbanites of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Islamabad is the national capital and the center for all administrative happenings; Rawalpindi is a much larger and older city and is a hub of commercial, industrial, and military engagements. The reason behind the selection of Islamabad and Rawalpindi urban areas is that both cities represent a multiplicity of cultures, peoples, and ethnic groups. Diversity also entails the cultural and religious views and beliefs, the urbanites' customs and traditions, and dress and food patterns.

Participants

The respondents were female students from college and university. The unit of sampling included seventeen participants that are written off as the *youth* in this research. The sample age ranged from late adolescence (18-24 years old) to early adulthood (24-34 years old) (Newman & Newman, 2012). The participants were interviewed either in a public area such as a coffee shop or their homes as per their convenience. While interviewing participants, during the conversation I tried to read between the lines so that I could understand the intentions and feelings of respondents and their preconceptions and biases. During the interviews, some participants also needed assistance in describing their opinion by requiring appropriate English terms, and they were candidly assisted.

Sampling Technique

In the study, purposive sampling was applied which involves the identification and selection of those participants who are knowledgeable and proficient about the study of interest. For in-depth semi-structured interviews, seventeen females were interviewed, and for the focus group discussion, the number of participants was eight (age 20 to 34 years), thus making a sample size of twenty-five participants. The people on whom in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted were different from those of focus group respondents. The utilization of the purposive

sample involves the following considerations. Participants belonged to Punjabi ethnicity, and demographically, the Punjabis comprise the largest single ethnic group (44.7 percent) in Pakistan's population (Misachi, 2018). Secondly, the chosen sample represents only unmarried people for interviews and focus group discussions. The study excluded married people from the research.

Formulation and Validation of Interview Tool

Based on relevant past and present literature on beauty and body image as well as the theory on objectification, an interview protocol was administered for the pilot study. After the pilot study was conducted, an additional slight revision was prepared. This step assisted in adjusting or adding interview questions. For the in-depth interview schedule, the following themes were covered: body objectification, women, beauty, body and social domains, beauty as a weapon, media and body, and gender and body.

The Rationale for a Pilot Study

According to the preordained approach for the research, the intention was to explore beauty and body image as per the perception of unmarried individuals, which meant the exclusion of married ones. To justify my approach, a pilot study was conducted to establish whether the exclusion of married individuals from the study is reasonable. For this purpose, two married and two unmarried women were interviewed, and the aim was to find how much married versus unmarried life interferes with the concept of body objectification.

The data gathered in the pilot study suggests that most of the married people had reasons for not indulging in body care and hence objectification was not given that much consideration. The significant reasons involved a change in priorities after marriage such as the intensity of responsibilities, job workloads, mental stress, hectic routines, women's post-baby bodies and eight gain after birth, and marriage life that involves kids and household duties. However, one married woman who was also a gym-goer said that those who devotedly look after their bodies before marriage continue to look after the body after the wedding too.

When it comes to the justification for the selection of unmarried women, firstly it was revealed from the pilot study that unmarried women are expected to have bodies that reflect social and economic values, and so objectification happens easily. Secondly, single, childless women don't struggle with postpartum bodies. Hence, they cannot escape objectification by using this reason for gaining body weight as an excuse. It should be kept in mind that in Pakistani society, out-of-wedlock pregnancy is not permissible as per the teachings of Islam. Thirdly, a single female may be dependent on their parents as they live with them until they are married. However, family responsibilities were not reported by unmarried respondents, which may hinder one's attitude towards one's body. In this way, this makes them the ideal sample to study how society can still objectify or affect their body-related thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors.

Results and Analysis

Beauty as a Means to an End

All genders invest, and it is not only women; it seems that women spend more because of more options and endorsement and inflated rates; however, men spend too. Women spend in beauty and body to content themselves and others on the stated and intended standards made by the community as a whole. On the contrary, there are outliers too who either spend as a

habit or join the bandwagon and those who spend because they enjoy the 'art and science behind beauty and body (age 25).

Women have emphasized that in any sector of society, beautiful persons - especially women - are seen with distinct judgments and attention. They indulge in beauty investments and enhancement because they know they are a part of society in which beauty is linked with women. Women are aware that with beauty, many socio-cultural expectations, reactions, and treatments are connected. A thirty-one-year-old expressed her views:

Based on attractive features or personality, females are more welcomed by the employer in any sector than those who deserve it. It is an 80:20² ratio. Sometimes it is a disadvantage to being attractive because people/employers/colleagues ask inappropriate favors from a good-looking person to help them. In return, these attractive people get where they dream of standing in life. Not every person goes down against their dignity, but nowadays, attractive people are taking advantage of being attractive only to survive well in society.

At times, this is a give-and-take relation; the winner remains an attractive individual who moves further towards pursuing those dreams. These favors help women be selected for jobs.

The Professional Domain and Women's Position

It was indicated that in job interviews, biasness, which is observed in the hiring and selection process, is based on attractiveness. Jobs related to human resources, banking, gyms, and airlines are common sites for beauty-based discrimination. This attitude is more towards women than men. The primary reason for this inclination towards beautiful or attractive women entails the foresight and profit of the company's increment in their promotions and sales perspectives:

Attractive people are attended positively regardless of gender. However, beautiful girls are hired, and the company seeks its benefit in this selection, considering an increase in their company's promotion and sales (age 24).

Unquestionably, beauty sells in unimaginable ways in different fields, from the company's first-class positioned employee to the front desk worker at the gym. Banks and marketing institutions have front desks occupied by attractive women, as they believe that attraction itself will play a role in drawing customers towards their schemes and institutional goals. An eighteen and twenty-two-year-old participant stated respectively:

In Pakistani culture, things are done by seeing the beauty or attractiveness element. Mostly in banks and marketing institutes, on receptions, females are seated so that they serve as a source of attraction for customers. In jobs, attractive girls are chosen in customer care, front desk and secretaries are all those who have attractive looks. I believe the owners feel good when beautiful employees are nearby. I have seen people act polite and kind when an attractive girl is around them or is seeking some assistance from them. In airline jobs and modeling, I think attractiveness in both genders is observed. People also believe if a person is beautiful, then they will also be good in nature or personality.

² The distribution signifies that 80% of favors are given to women per respondents' views.

It is generally believed that in job positions in which person-to-person communication is necessary, attractive candidates like front-desk officers or receptionists are highly regarded. Likewise, it was suggested by Wolf (2002) that in many professions for women, 'beauty' has become an additional, unspoken job requirement, even when physical desirability is peripheral for job performance. If this is the case, then in 'front office appearance jobs,' like a restaurant host or office receptionist, beauty, and therefore skin color, must matter even more. The women respondents asserted that in the job field, men, unlike women, are not selected for their attractive attributes. Beauty in women is mostly used to achieve ends in almost every practical or professional field of life in Pakistani society:

In the job domain, boys are not given preference for their physical traits even if he is muscular. Exclusive of occupation, generally favor is given to boys based on their qualities, i.e., belonging to a good family, having a bank balance, being educated, or having any other desired ability (age 33).

Lastly, this objectification further continues in different professional fields that consider the body of a person significant and so gendered objectification is practiced accordingly:

In professions such as doctors and engineers, girls and boys are not objectified. I believe in occupations besides medicine and engineering where body image is the center of attention, the body of both genders is objectified.

The Educational Domain: The Desirable Student and Teacher

Besides these jobs, other professions were also identified by the interviewees in which biased treatment of attractive females prevailed, i.e., students and teachers in academia are cherished for their beauty. Research has also proposed that on student evaluations, attractive college instructors score high (Riniolo et al., 2006). One of my participants expressed, "*Even in the educational sphere; it is considered that beautiful teachers should be hired because as she smiles, she will seem good to her students and this will increase motivation for studying (age 19).*" Their beauty is utilized as a medium to increase motivation in students. Aside from the teaching aptitude of a teacher, their beauty is used to gain positive mental growth in students. It is believed that attractive instructors bring positive vibes and energy to students (interview discussion).

On the contrary, regarding the student's attractiveness, the teacher's attitude is also found to be discriminating:

In academia, good-looking students get a good grade, all out of teacher's biasness (age 30), and Even in academics teachers give a high score to attractive students as compared to rest, it is all about what is beautiful is a good stereotype. They are beautiful, and it is perceived that they must be competent go-getters and intelligent (age 25).

The trend of teacher and student friendships that include informal meetings involving candid conversations, sharing food in the teacher's office, and sitting with students in university cafés are common. This all may be considered normal in another culture, but when it comes to Pakistani society, the scenario is the opposite. The teacher-student informal candidness and in some cases the formal frankness particularly between a male teacher and a female student and even a female teacher and male student is still not approved or considered appropriate by the system.

Men, Women's Bodies, and Society

Men are the providers and breadwinners in Pakistani society, and roles and responsibilities are profoundly expected of them besides considering their family status in terms of goodness. Their looks may be significant in some fields such as that of modeling and airlines, but not in domains where revenue can be easily generated. In this case, only females are employed and regarded. However, women are also not only considered out of their beauty but sometimes another dominant factor plays a role, i.e., frustration and lust on the observer's end:

I remember one of my attractive friends. Whenever she used to go to the canteen in our school, the boy there used to deal with her first and even gave her concession, and nobody cared for us. The reason is that this kind of mindset has been established where we attend to attractive individuals right away. People are frustrated that they only go for beauty and not for the character (age 28).

Being lascivious is not only confined to the public level but in the job sphere, this personality characteristic is also prevalent. It was shared, *“Attractive females are favorably dealt mostly in the job field because people here are lascivious. Out of this nature, they will treat women in an extra polite way (age 22).”* People who give superfluous favors to women because of their attractiveness were considered flirty and lustful by respondents. Moreover, it was believed by one of the interviewees that attractiveness takes you ahead only in the public sphere rather than in a job-related field. The reason is:

Publicly or in social life, attractive people get favored by some lascivious natured people. In the professional domain, confidence, educational skills, and whole personality are counted. I believe where there are professional fields and people, looks and attractiveness do not matter (age 27).

No doubt, beautiful people are shown a kind demeanor, especially women in private or public spheres. However, being attractive is not a golden pass to everything and everywhere. Lastly, if you are good-looking and fair, then you will be considered highly beautiful. Participant (age 30) said:

Even in friends, you also wish to have a stylish, beautiful fellow, and in almost everything, you crave attractiveness. The reason behind all this is that since the beginning, our system is like that. Media has its massive influence, and since childhood, these criteria and standards are instilled in our minds in we regard fair ones as being beautiful.

Beauty in individuals is sought in every possible part of their existence. These expectations are learned from socializing agents, first by the family and later by beauty messages transmitted in mass media. Women are judged on the societal-held parameters of beauty, and this beauty is used and abused in different spheres of life. Beauty has its power, and family, media, and peers create this concept of power.

People who accredit collectivistic standards, in general, participate in social comparison to confirm that they are showing compliance to societal norms. It was indicated that conformity to

certain physical appearance ideals was held by Pakistani society so that women may find a suitable proposal for their marriage. It was also highlighted that for getting marriage proposals, outward beauty is a necessity; in girls, it significantly matters. Worthiness is associated with one's physical appearance. As noted by two women:

Marriage proposals are the reasons girls try to make themselves smart, i.e., toned, and to appear less fatty. They know if they are fat, it will affect their marriage proposals; fat girls are considered the last option (age 22), and It is because of the marriage girls usually go on a diet and exercise because they want to look slim in their wedding dress. They also want to show off their body to their in-laws, conveying that they are slimmer than them (age 28).

In line with my study findings, the thin ideal phenomenon has an impact on this society since it motivates people to transform their bodies. According to McCabe and colleagues (2007), the images portrayed in the media offer a promise of social acceptance for both genders, hence, for women, body types become desirable. Adverse effects are often caused by advertisements, especially on women, who often have this fear of being old or unattractive. A respondent likewise reported:

Media has its hand in motivating people by sending out the message that if a girl will be smart (toned) and fit enough (attractive, in shape, and well dressed), proposal chances will increase, and she can also easily get a job. Smartness and its outcomes are the reasons girls get motivated to diet (age 29).

The images are so fascinating, especially the outcomes that people get effortlessly attracted to, and some struggle to attain them. The achievement of the smart body is proof that this type of body is a means to achieve certain ends, i.e., desired jobs and marriage proposals.

Objectification of Women's Bodies

Women indicated that the presence and manifestation of women, especially in male advertisements, is proof that their body is seen as an object in Pakistani society. It is as if a woman's body is used as a powerful tool for anything to be sold effectively. Other perceptions of respondents involved the following factors, which are discussed turn by turn.

Objectification in Media and Society

"Whatever be the type of advertisement, for all intents and purposes girls will be in it," said a twenty-five-year-old respondent. Females are employed to represent beauty and unattainable ideal body goals in the media. The values associated with such idealism involve getting a perfect mate and a successful career, a happily ever after phenomenon, and objectionable thinking patterns of its viewers towards the other sex. One of the interviewees stated,

If you see cigarettes, shaving, and motorbike ads, all will possibly have females. What does a girl's presence have to do with these objects and advertisements? They are used along the primary object to enhance its sales and image. By creating that perfect image, they win by making people go insane, as they instill such perfect body expectations in them (age 29).

Likewise, another expressed her views,

Objectification is pertaining more to girls' bodies. Women are also hired in shaving cream advertisements, and they just have to say this statement 'smooth shave'. Boys are also objectified, e.g., in a 'care honey cream' advertisement, a male figure is shown in the end, indirectly conveying that if you use this cream, you will easily get a handsome male. Girls are more used in advertisements because they are employed as an object possessing the qualities of beauty and thin ideals. She is just glamorized (age 19).

According to the respondent, "glamorized" means that girls are portrayed as highly desirable and attractive. Research additionally demonstrates that sexual alluring messages convey to women that if they use a specific cleanser, brightening cream, or body moisturizer, they will improve their probability of being associated with an attractive man (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003). In addition to advertisements, women are objectified in different areas of mass media, as the respondent highlighted that the lyrics of songs play their role in women's objectification. She said:

There is a song name أفارين أفارين, which means 'delightful and elegant,' and it is all about the description of a beautiful body and face of a girl. I hate these lyrics because as a woman, I will not like to listen to them, as her whole existence is objectified in a fantasized way. [Movies too contain these images]. In movies, it is always shown that heroines are never fat or overweight; they are always slim, i.e., physically smart and in shape. In modeling programs, they are also communicating that girl and boy models are tall, and you will not see any short models. It means that tall height is idealized (age 19).

Other than the role of media, a male-dominated society was also one of the chief reasons that caused female objectification. In Pakistan, objectification of women, unlike men, is perceived to be usual and expected, i.e.,

"Girls are more treated as an object because it is male dominant society. Men demand that they should be treated as superior and entertained at any cost. Females are continually stared at or gazed at with flirty eyes by most men. Still, at this time, if you see a girl driving with her father beside her or a girl walking alone or standing on the home terrace, a man will stop or slow his walking pace. He would like to have a full view of that beauty even if she is covered by the veil. If you are standing on the road then to avoid others' continuous stares, you will try to cover your bosom, even if it is meant to hide with a book or a file that you are holding on your way to college or university. If you go to some developed area in Islamabad, the case is different. People do not stare at you much in Centaurus³, F-6 Super Market⁴, or Kohsar Market⁵, but if it is Moti Bazar⁶ in Rawalpindi, the male gaze will not spare you. You may seem

³ The Centaurus is a mixed-use real estate development in the city of Islamabad, Pakistan.

⁴ Sector F-6 is surrounded by residential areas where homes and embassies are situated.

⁵ Kohsar Market is a small upscale commercial area located in the northeastern sub-sector of Sector F-6, Islamabad. It is mainly known for its collection of upscale cafes and European restaurants.

⁶ Moti Bazar is one of the oldest bazaars in Rawalpindi city. It is a hub of business activities.

some alien to them who is without dupatta⁷ or chaddar⁸ there, as the area is not developed or posh. The mentality of people and the spatial difference can be the reason to trigger the intense gaze. However, it is not like that in Islamabad, people do not stare at you, but the degree of prevalence is more in backward or less developed areas (age 32).

If an environment is sexually objectifying, then without any doubt, there is an approval and acknowledgment of the male gaze in that setting. It was asserted by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997): “The most subtle and deniable way sexualized evaluation is enacted—and arguably the most ubiquitous—is through gaze or visual inspection of the body” (p.175). Besides holding males and media responsible for objectifying women, other important factors were indicated by women, which I have explained in detail in the following section.

Destiny and the Religious Perspective

Women may foster an obsession with outward physical appearances, seeing themselves as entities that are controllable and can be transformed to fit into social beliefs (Tylka and Hill, 2004). According to this study, the objectification of women has long existed, but it is not just particular cultures or societies that should be held responsible for this. It is often by the will of women that their objectification happens because indirectly, they comply with the standards: ways:

Girls are to be blamed for this objectification issue because they are allowing it to be done with them at the hands of media and society. The image is that a girl should look perfect; the perceptions are prevailing for long and because of this, they are easily objectified.”

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) identified self-objectification as the first psychological consequence to emerge among girls and women because of living in a sexually objectifying cultural milieu. Questions arise that since women are objectified in media and certain professions respectively, then while hiring attractive females versus a male, who is to be appointed? What motive do companies have in their mind if they are allowing good-looking women to handle customers at the front desk and not men? One respondent stated:

Objectification is just for girls because wherever you may go, whatever organization it may be, there will always be girls who are meant for representing it. It is believed that girls are easily listened to and paid attention to (age 25).

Even though organizations and society are playing a successful role in sexual objectification, it was still held that there are some restraints in explicitly practicing objectification. The constraint was generally due to the religion of Islam which is practiced in Pakistan: “*Even if the issue of sexual objectification exists in culture, it is not much exposed because there is an element of religion that restricts it. Islam does not allow objectification because characteristics of modesty, chastity, and consideration are taught (age 27).*” Islam protects women’s modesty and proclaims respect for them. If objectification is practiced, it is not done directly, such as displaying seminude

⁷ A length of material worn arranged in two folds over the chest and thrown back around the shoulders, typically with a salwar kameez, by women from South Asia.

⁸ A large piece of cloth that is wrapped around the head and upper body leaving only the face exposed, worn especially by Muslim women.

models on billboards that society can see. Baring of skin is not openly attempted in songs or serial dramas, but in some movies, it does exist.

Discussion

Beauty Stereotyping as 'A Means to an End'

When beauty is stereotyped, its perception and preference go hand in hand. Differential treatment based on physical attractiveness stereotyping is seen in employment and educational settings. Generally, a positive impression of an attractive candidate is formed out of stereotyping, which results in the recommendation and selection of hiring, as compared to the unattractive one. This approach is also called a 'what is beautiful is good' phenomenon, which was pioneered by Dion and colleagues (1972). The perspective holds the view that a favorable personality characteristic is associated with beautiful and attractive individuals. Based on these qualities, people are naturally inclined to treat women more favorably, and hence, the desired outcomes are effortlessly attained.

Employment Domains

In some job sectors, as mentioned earlier, physical attractiveness is a prerequisite as they hire women with bodily appeal and facial beauty. Employers believe that they will engage consumer attentiveness so that they can be capitulated by their aura, surrendering them to the deal or purchase. Profit is produced, and sales are positively affected. The woman's body is used as social capital and a beautified centerpiece, which is placed on its seat with the motive to be admired, craved and pursued. People associate joy with beauty and naturally incline towards a woman with a beautiful existence as it gives them feelings of ecstasy and gratification.

Educational Institutions

In educational institutions, based on interviewees' responses, at the initial stage, university students are selected for their attractive appearance by those instructors who are considered lascivious⁹ since they lust for beauty, apart from seeing their test results. Selected students are at times considered competent and intelligent based on their appealing physical traits, and this reflects cultural capital. Activeness and energetic qualities are also associated with a smart-bodied person. Cultural appreciation, companionship, and one's social image are affected by the size of the person. Overweight individuals are affected in a university acceptance scenario mainly due to weight-based prejudice, and this leads an attractive individual to achieve favorable educational outcomes. Connotations like laziness and ugliness of appearances are linked with an overweight person regardless of gender.

Two early studies by Canning and Mayer (1966, 1967) showed that despite equivalent performance in high school, students with obesity were less likely to be accepted to elite universities; the authors speculated that these differences may have been due to biases against obese students by educators. In an experimental investigation of the impact of body weight on graduate school admission decisions by faculty members, researchers found that having a high BMI was associated with fewer offers of admission, especially among female applicants (Burmeister et al., 2013). Lastly, the results of a study by Nutter and colleagues (2019) revealed that in samples of teachers and pre-service teachers, the study's review showed that negative

⁹ Based on participants' responses.

attitudes toward students with obesity are pervasive and negatively impact perceptions of student ability.

Why Attractiveness Matters

Nevertheless, why has Pakistani society formed such a positive impression of attractive women? Based on the study findings, these qualities are reflected in movies, television, poetry, and social media platforms that put a greater emphasis on the attractiveness of women than men. In the case of men, their financial status and stability matter for considering them eligible as a perfect soul mate. This picture is painted with the message that with economic strength, basic needs can be fulfilled. The beauty of a man is associated with his functionality and not his appearance, except in rare cases.

Society, therefore, socializes individuals to believe that attractiveness is more important for women. This becomes incorporated into people's attractiveness stereotypes and schemas from childhood. This attitude subsequently affects the processing of information about men and women later in life. Hence, because of beauty stereotyping, a beautiful woman is judged with a positive mindset, hospitable stance, and bestowed favoritism based on her appeal.

The favoritism is not given free of cost; it is believed that this indulgence has its reasons. Some are motivated by the possibility of having a relationship with a beautiful woman at work. In contrast, the same approach consequently entails an unfavorable attitude toward individuals who do not fit the societal standards of beauty. This approach leads to objectification and the internalization of beauty ideals for some men and women. All of this ends up in body and beauty investment to gain favorable impressions and acknowledgment in private and public life while socializing.

The research also found that if one wants to socialize and create a good impact on others, then they should look good head to toe. The necessity of appearing good was dependent on the attitude or personality of a person. It was believed to play a significant role in one's intensive grooming and perceiving others' beauty on its basis. It was candidly stated that *'I should look fresh because I am also attracted to the fresh people. I do not like dull skin, dull face, and dull attitude in people.'* This finding can be validated by the psychological concept of selective perception. The perceptual system of an individual processes only that which it believes to be most relevant. Selective perception occurs when individuals limit the processing of external stimuli by selectively interpreting what he or she sees based on beliefs, experience, or attitudes (Sherif & Cantril, 1945).

Besides being selective, women consciously and unconsciously use their beauty measures so that possible positive outcomes can be achieved. Thorpe (2009) recognizes that "There are women who take advantage of their charm and that beauty has indeed a market value" (p.20). These values involve being the best candidate for marriage by shredding one's fat and weight to attain an ideal figure required in a mate. In the job field, the beauty ladder is used to step up in the succeeding employment status. Economists have long recognized what's been dubbed the "beauty premium", the idea that pretty people, whatever their aspirations, tend to do better in almost everything (Bennet, 2010). The body and beauty are not only perceived by different attitudes and approaches based on stereotypes, shortcuts, prospects, and gender roles. They are further segregated in terms of their sexual appeal.

Women, Bodies, and Veiling

Critic John Berger's well-known quote has been true throughout the history of Western culture. My research on the Eastern side of the world in the main city of Islamabad and Rawalpindi validates this truth. Berger (1972), in his book 'Ways of Seeing,' stated, "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only the relations of men to women but the relation of women to themselves" (p. 48). A man stares because he is a man, a common alibi for this conduct. A woman senses feelings of discomfort signaled by the body, and so the bosom and bottom are covered right away with the *dupatta, scarf, or chaddar*. These body parts are linked with sexuality based on study findings and are not to be revealed per religious and cultural teaching, which introduces the concept of veiling and covering.

The covering of women's bodies triggers a mixture of feelings and connotations. The veil is a sort of identity formation and a sense of security for some women. However, my study has revealed that how the veil 'is' generally perceived differs from how it 'was' perceived by the participants based on a new pursuit associated with the apparel. In general, veiled women were perceived more favorably as a mate as compared to women in jeans. The concept of women in jeans is still comprehended in terms of modernization and is considered an unorthodox way of adornment. Regarding the situational context and body, recently in this society, a woman wearing a veil or burqa while standing in some particular area was not seen as pious but rather considered a promiscuous figure. These girls were available in some specific locations, especially nearby a public road or a particular sector in the evening time. They were using this covering to hide their identity. Research also shows that in Pakistan, the sex trade does exist as an open secret, but it is illegal. Culture and traditions do not allow the exposure of such a profession (Qayyum, 2013). The veil is used to hide this horrendous activity and a person's identity to avert societal condemnation, but the male gaze will still not stop there.

In the context of modest covering, the prevalence of the male gaze was also identified. Even though some women may be in the veil, males will not stop themselves from staring at them. If a woman is considered modest in a veil, she is still a victim of male gazing, and that veil will not stop anybody from looking at her. What is hidden underneath that veil causes a level of curiosity, and that is reflected in the action and intensity of the male gaze.

Being a researcher, I am curious to know whether men have covered their bodies right away if they catch women staring at their private parts. The thought itself seems surprising and hilarious. The image appears in contradiction to male hegemony and manly representation in Pakistan. They are not judged based on numbers regarding the size of the bicep or the circumference of the chest. The reason can be validated by previous research that women are more likely to be picked apart and seen as parts rather than a whole. Men, on the other hand, are processed as wholes rather than the sum of their parts (Gervais et al., 2012). The size may not matter, but description and expectation in terms of chest broadness and tall height reflect the major concept of manliness and dominance in Pakistani society.

Besides perceiving women and spouses as modest in decent clothing, a veiled woman as pious or as a sex trader on the road, responses also showed that in social functions, a well-dressed, smart-bodied spouse was also admired. It was believed that this kind of partner induces feelings of confidence in their men and raises feelings of admiration in others. She is perceived to have a body on which dressing should fit adequately and appear appealing. For this reason, it is necessary and expected for her body to have a proper figure and curves. Curvy is sexy, men find it seductive. However, curves are also not supposed to be visibly perceived in some locations and are deemed to be covered.

Situational cues determine whether a woman is considered well-groomed or seductive in her dress. This attention to context is an intriguing perception that emerged from my study findings and showed a correlation between the public space and the dressed body. If it is an urban or posh area of Islamabad, a woman feels confident and somewhat secure. If it is an old-fashioned area of Rawalpindi, then the image is that men there will be staring at you without any pause; rather, it is a slow play-act. In some cases, both places may trigger discomfort, but the prevalence is much in conservative areas.

Objectification of Women

One significant outcome is that in an indigenous setting, obtrusive sexual typification of women's bodies was carried out covertly. This deterrent was brought about by the factor of religion that related chastity to the body of a woman. In human relations, modesty was likewise seen in an opposing way. In mate choice, objectification not only exists in physical form but also encounters one's qualities of personality. In a transient relationship, girls dressed in jeans are intended for pleasure and are generally in demand; yet, for a girl who is chosen as a spouse, virtuous character and decent dressing are anticipated.

Moreover, a previous research finding says that it is important to note that experiences of sexual objectification occur outside of women's control (Calogero, 2012). Some responses of my study contradict this assertion because it was affirmed that women are themselves playing a strong role in their objectification. Patriarchy or male hegemony was frequently blamed for its hand in women's objectification. Adjacently it was emphasized that if a woman will not allow it in the first place, it would never happen without their will. Hence, the matter of being objectified is utterly in women's control.

Things are not what they appear to be. At the core, culture, society, and media are blamed for women's objectification, but females themselves confess that this is not the truth. There is a statement, 'where there is a will, there is a way'. Women sometimes collude in their commodification, while industry and society make use of women's bodies through revenue-generating processes and in matters of mate selection.

Conclusion

It has been well-established that objectification of the female body is endemic to media practices, mate selection, submissiveness, commodification, commercialization, a focus on the body and appearance, and being an attractive employee. The visual display of a female body is observed with a 3D approach, the 'width, depth, and height' all perceived in one glimpse. While judging a woman on physical presentation, the body is seen with a kaleidoscope containing her gender roles, beauty ideals, stereotypes, and apparel. Reflection based on these portions produces mesmeric revolutionizing patterns that gratify the male gaze and feed hegemonic desire. This puts women in a complex relationship with their bodies. Firstly, women know that their bodies are capable of reproduction and exit as a site of labor. Secondly, women's bodies are vessels, which, if molded correctly by women themselves or by the hands of society, have invincible social, cultural, and capital value. Thirdly, she knows, and she is aware that her body is perceived as a source of pleasure and the enabler of agency. Fourthly, the body and the personality are believed to be noble and virtuous when dressed modestly or covered with a veil.

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