

Feminization or Homoeroticism: The Double Standard of Male Body

Sharmila Adhikari

Student of M.Phil

Degree in English

Department of English

Pokhara University

Kathmandu, Nepal

adhikarisharmila77@gmail.com

Abstract

The representation of human body in popular culture has always been a matter of controversy. This controversy applied and still applies in women's body, particularly in commercials. The feminist critics accuse that women are objectified in the popular culture. The feminist movement of 1960's did not only raise the issues of female rights upon their own body; however, it brought change in the meaning of men's body as well. The meaning of men's body came in equal manner in-line with female body in social landscape. The objectification of male body in popular culture remains crucial. The male's body has become a matter of gaze, which is not only a female gaze but voyeuristic gaze of males themselves. The sexually overloaded images of males in fashion magazines, newspapers, commercials have changed the way we see the males' body as brave, strong, and tough. The male's body, however, has been feminized as an erotic body along with masculine adjectives in Paco Rabanne's perfume commercials.

Keywords: Objectification, Homoeroticism, Gaze, Sexualities, Masculinities

Feminization or Homoeroticism: The Double Standard of Male Body Human body embodiment in the mainstream media appears after the rapid growth of different types of media technology. The development of media technology after 1960's to 1980's remained crucial and at late 1980's, the brand new concept in technology came that is the internet. These development in media and technologies helped advertisements directly. The advertisements in media had focused on women. The representation of women body in media had been taken for granted in past decades. Females' depiction in the media was visual pleasure for male audience where male audience look female and females are looked at. In other words, male audience were spectators and females on screen were spectacles. Laura Mulvey observes this condition as "male gaze." The females became an object to be looked at for the pleasure of certain group of people. But, this scenario of "gaze" has been changed after the rapid growth of media that demands males as both spectacles and spectators as the result of different movements, particularly feminism.

The 1960's Second Wave of Feminism brought massive change in body ownership and right of women's body, however, this shift in body implies in men's body as well. This feminist movement during late 1980's brought the new literary criticism, Men's Studies which demanded the study of men as women are being studied. They put the men in forward to study because men are also objectified in the mainstream media like women. The half-naked, sometimes naked, images of men in media attract both male and female audience. The men bodies have become object, specifically the sexual object. The men in media, on the one hand, provides some feminine representation where they have become a fashion accessory for male and female audience simultaneously. These images, on the other hand, has most influential effects to men than women that modern men follow the images of screen body to look perfect. The latter aspect of male body representation delivers homoerotic

concept because men watch to men. This paper explores that how Paco Rabanne's *Invictus* and *Pure XS* perfume commercials show sexual objectification of male bodies. This objectification of male body as the portrayal of femininity in on aspect, however, the similar objectification embodies the homoerotic relationship between men.

The sexual objectification of women in the advertisements was very familiar concept. The feminist theory strongly criticizes against it. But, in modern time, the dilemma appears that is what to say if men are also sexually represented in the different commercials? Is this objectification? If it is then what of kind of objectification men have in advertisements? The objectification refers to, "the depersonalization of the individual in a manner that is dehumanizing and demeaning. It occurs when advertisers present sexually suggestive body parts or do not include the person's head in a photograph" (Kolbe and Albanese 4). Here, Kolbe and Albanese argues that the objectification means the depersonalization of an individual. In other words, human beings are dehumanized. They are treated like some nonliving, lifeless and motionless items. Though, Kolbe and Albanese claim that this process of objectification of human in advertisement occurs when head of a person is not included in the photograph. I want to argue that if the person's head is included, it is still an objectification of the body. In the two advertisements of Paco Rabanne's, one is *Invictus* and another is *Pure XS*, both of the male actors' head is included, yet they are still objectified.

In the *Invictus*, the male actor enters in the stadium very confidently from a dark hallway in half-naked condition. Actually, his pant is little bit down from waist, almost a bit upper then his genital organ. He is being captured by the cameras and with very indifferent look he moves forward toward playground. The other players have been shown in very sculptured like figure painted in white and by waving his both hands he defeats all of them. So, while he was walking alone in the ground a godly figure of a lady abruptly appears and tries to touch him. At the end, he appears with award and goes in a room where five ladies are

waiting for him with their naked bodies. The ending narrative of the video is like this, "7 athletes- 7 projects- 1 winner: Discover the Invictus award" (Invictus 0: 00: 46-50). This kind of representation of the male in the presume ad shows that the perfume is not something to spray on human body, rather it is something that arouse your sexual desire. If a male used this perfume, the females are always ready for the sexual relation. This sexual connotation is not limited to normal females, but the godly figure or let's say Goddess would appear in the earth to touch that male body. The body is the production of media as desire worthy by women,

"Given late capitalism's tendency to commodify everything, the increasing prominence of women and women's issues has served merely to offer a further opportunity for commodification, in this particular instance, of male body, produced by the media as "desire-worthy" by women: The assumption seems to be that women desire in the same way as men" (Buchbinder 221).

Buchbinder explains that development in capitalism creates the tendency of commodifying everything. So, the male bodies also come under this everything which were not in past decades. As females were/are desired worthy by men, in the same way males also have become a desire worthy by women. The male body project on the screen are now targeted to female audience. The desire that was typically masculine. However, the meaning of the male body has changed into the "haptic pleasure" which is typically feminine desire to touch male for their satisfaction, sexual satisfaction. The haptic pleasure towards the screened-male body somewhat is opposite of Laura Mulvey's term "male gaze." I want to name this gaze where males are looked at and females are lookers as female gaze.

In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey asserts that women are images on the screen and men are the bearer of look who gets pleasure to women on screen. The representation of women on screen is in binary between male and female,

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure of looking has been split between active/male and passive female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. 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*. Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-up to strip-tease, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire" (Mulvey 837).

Here, Mulvey states that women are an erotic spectacle who are seductive and sexually suggestive. The main purpose of erotic expression on women on the screen to satisfy male gaze. This scenario, however, has been changed in reverse manner. The males are equally styled as *to-be-looked-at-ness*. In *Invictus*, six pack curve body and biceps of male actor is being looked at by female spectators. The body of the actor is somehow near to the stripper although it does not denote dance directly. The man in the commercials holds both the look inside the ad and outside the ad. Many female actors inside the ad are dying to touch and have sexual relation with the actor. So, females are the bearer of the look inside and outside the screen. The similar kind of representation can be found in another perfume commercial by same company.

Likewise, in *Pure XS*, an actor comes in a library like room, takes off his coat and shirt, a lady watches him from the eyes of painting. Then, he opens a tap of bathtub, here two ladies watch him behind a book shelf. The stands in front of the mirror and rub his body. Behind that mirror there are seven ladies, but this male actor is completely unaware about this. After that, he takes *Pure XS* and sprays over his body. The ladies, who are behind the mirror have wide open eyes. The actor takes out his pant and sprays some perfume on his genital organ as well, then all those ladies become faint. These two perfume commercials are

the erotic representation of male body. Like in *Invictus*, in *Pure XS*, the man is sexually suggestive and inviting females. Similarly, both of male actors have been presented as an object replacing their actual identity. They are presented in terms of object what they have rather than who they are. The metonymic representation can find that is they are replaced by the penis they do have. Therefore, they are not human and do carry any individual identity, whereas they are penises and are defined by keeping their penises at the center. The ladies inside the screen and outside the screen would demand for penis not for the body of these men.

In addition to the metonymic representation, the wide open eyes, haptic behavior, excitement, hysteric representation, sexually availability of these ladies indicate that the body represented in the ads is just the substitution of a demand for penis. Teunis in his essay, *Sexual objectification and the construction of whiteness in the gay male community*, writes "the expected large penis is itself metaphoric for a presumed hyper-sexuality that is both pleasurable to the white man as well as being dangerous" (267). In this sense, now the situation has been changed that the representation of the bodies on screen is not limited to male gaze but the female gaze as well. In other words, females are lookers of erotic male body images, which satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking that this gaze in present context implies to men. This capitalist notion of representation over bodies and particularly the male bodies is the demand of consumer culture, which is both directly and indirectly related to conspicuous consumption of body images. The conspicuous consumption of male body images through media in another instant is emasculating men.

The erotic objectification of male body in these two advertisements provides the emasculation of male gender roles. They are castrated men. Keith Green and Jill LeBihan rework on Freudian psychoanalysis that sexual identity is constructed on the basis of guilt and lack. They borrow Freudian idea that girl children suffer from castration because they do

have penis, "the girl discovers that she has suffered castration already; she lacks penis, and the masculine power that this represents" (Green and LeBihan 155). In this respect, the masculine power rely in penis, in psychoanalysis penis is phallus. The masculinity means the power, the men do hold. But, in *Invictus* and *Pure XS* the phallic depiction of males are eroded just because of the displacement of the body by the phallus. They are male biologically because they do have penis, but they are not masculine enough. The tradition notion of masculinity has weakened in these two commercials. In *Invictus*, the actor enters in the ground so gently, he is alone and without any macho work like fighting with others, without showing any bravery, and he wins an award.

Further in *Pure XS*, the actor enters in the set in very female demeanor: with innocent face, slightly pouting his lips, in catwalk like walking on a ramp, puts both of his hands in his waist, takes out his dress in mild manner and so on. These behaviors embody non-masculine traits. He does nothing just scented his body and even his genitalia that indicate the fragility of a man. He is not enough masculine character rather just an emasculated man without masculinity. This non-masculine aspect of men feminizes them. They are in line with females and feminization of their bodies. Similarly, these emasculated men are New Men. Rowena Chapman calls the New Man an invention of consumer capitalism, "the new man is a rebel and an outlaw from hardline masculinity" (Keith and LeBihan 259). These new men are not like traditional men, rather they are feminine version of men who are not courageous, not aggressive, not powerful, non-dominant and non-authoritative. They are, in contrast, bodily disembodied and resist the patriarchal ideology of masculinity and falls down toward feminine representation of their body. So they are burlesque of masculinity. To borrow Susan Bordo's term, these new men are pathological men.

Bordo discusses about female bodies and how these bodies have become docile bodies in the culture and society. The society and culture want female body in very perfect,

beautiful and flawless manner. To achieve this perfection, women suffer from various disorders like hysteria, anorexia, agoraphobia, "loss of mobility, loss of voice, inability to leave the home, feeding others while starving oneself, taking up space, and whittling down the space" (Bordo 2365). She asserts that all these pathologies of the body do have political meaning, which shows the construction of gender. Similar position implies to new men. The construction of the gender comes from media images, the shape of the body that men must have and their facial expression. The construction of gender is no longer given in the verbal description. Rather, people learn, "the rules directly through bodily discourses: through images that tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements, and behaviors are required" (Bordo 2366). The men's bodies in the media discharge the political and symbolic meaning as the female bodies used to do. The construction of masculinity in the media shows that the new men's masculinity is the work of cosmetic conceptions and the hard work they gained from gym work like in *Invictus* and *Pure XS* rather than an overnight achievement.

Similarly, both of the bodies of male actors in the ads show that the construction of their bodies is not natural rather they are sponsored by cosmetic signification and their bodies are political which the society wants to see and the media want to show. In this respect, the male bodies in the media have been represented in-line with female, the way female had been represented. They do have dissatisfaction with their own body, "the dislike for the body becomes pathological and has very real consequences such as low self-esteem, distorted self-image, eating disorders, and even changing the body through painful plastic surgery" (Rohlinger 70). To get very perfect body men are getting manicures and facials, coloring their hair, spending money for different surgeries for this erotic look. This erotic representation of the male body as fashion accessories delivers the message that the capitalist consumer culture emasculates the male body and feminizes it for maximum profit. This kind of feminization of male's body with "to-be-looked-at-ness" shows that males in popular culture are a crisis of

traditional notion of masculinity, on the one hand. On the other hand, these objectified bodies through the media portrays the homoerotic relationship that is men watch men. The gaze, therefore, which was only fixed to men to women and later it was women to men, but this gaze is now men to men. A man is the bearer of the look and a man onscreen is looked at.

These televised advertisements of perfume suggests homoerotic desire as it involves gaze at maleness. As Mulvey argues, "the cinema offers numbers of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia. There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at" (835). To interpret Mulvey here, scopophilia denotes that gaining of sexual pleasure by watching others when they are naked or engaged in sexual activity. This kind of assertion shows men are reflecting in the ads and at the same time, they are reflected. In other words, the act of reflecting and reflected is voyeurism. These two concepts scopophilia and voyeurism provide the homoeroticism conveys by these two perfume commercials because the ads disseminates the message that these male models do have very unknown sexuality. Their overspread sexuality on the screen appeals multiple meanings as more audience it invites. Thus, the male bodies becomes a blank paper where audience can inscribe different meanings in their sexual situation, "the male body becomes a blank canvas on which the viewer can project meaning. The viewer is free to imagine the male body in any sexual situation, heterosexual or homosexual, and advertisers do not offend the heterosexual male viewers" (Rohlinger 71).

Rohlinger asserts here the sexual representation of male bodies in the media is for every kinds of audience, and they formulate meaning per se. For him, male on screen sexuality is a mix bag. In one instance, the sexualized images of men resonate the homosexual audience and, in another instance, these images are the by-product of capitalist enterprise for consumption of goods where male are presented as good to be consumed. In addition to homoerotic images, the Invictus and Pure XS can be read in the disruption of the

gaze and as the construction of gay image which brings shift in hegemonic masculinity from the realm of aggression, bodily force and competition to homosexual men who are attracted toward the maleness of another men,

"one might read this ad in other ways, as men to men, perhaps the striking man in the mirror attracts the gaze of the homely man, doubly disrupting the gaze, and transforming the ad into a potentially gay image This queer perspective finds homoerotic overtones in the gaze between the two men—one reflecting, one reflected—who wink at themselves while wooing others" (Schroeder and Zwick 38).

Schroeder and Zwick discover that the male modeling advertisements trouble the male identity as it spreads the gay images. The male audience who watch the male modeled ads desire to have the similar kinds of body shape, muscles, young, thin, attractive, and ideal body. The young men's plea for body perfection corrodes the traditional notion of masculine images that they are not proper men and in similar way, it reveals same sex desire and pleasure watching the naked men on the screen, thus these images of males on the screen exposes the double stander of male body.

In conclusion, the shift in body meaning in social milieu of consumer culture objectifies the male bodies. This objectification is not new but only the body is different. The erotic representation of male body in media suggests the feminine portrayal of male body images because they are projected in the similar manner as females are projected. Moreover, the feminization of male bodies is castrated body where they are prevented from very hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, this erotic objectification of male bodies substitutes the masculinity of men with the products they represent. So, the sexual identity is exchanged with the goods. Likewise, these erotic images on the screen evokes for male gaze and rises

the sense of homoerotic relationship. Thus, male bodies in advertisements to hold the double standard: they project the feminine quality and homosexual desire in the same body.

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