

Self-Objectification as Representation of Women Empowerment in The Era of Post-Feminism in Fifth Harmony's Music Videos

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ABSTRACT

This research attempts to describe the image of women empowerment in the era of postfeminism that is represented by Fifth Harmony's self-objectification image in their four music videos; Work from Home, Boss, Worth It and That's My Girl. This research is descriptive qualitative. The method employed consists of watching, classifying and analyzing the data that are collected by selecting the scenes, lyrics and other elements of music video representing the image of self-objectification and postfeminism. From the analysis, Fifth Harmony in their music videos use their self-objectification image to portray the values of women empowerment in post-feminism era. The music videos are portraying the issues of domesticity (femininity and sexuality) as women's choice and source of power, confident and successful independent women as a symbol of Girl Power and sisterhood as source of women's power in the era of postfeminism..

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last several decades, the sexualization of women in popular media has been the subject of intense cultural and political debate. This debate came to the fore in the 1960s and 1970s, as second-wave feminists made sexualized images of women an explicit target of their political activism (Hollows and Moseley, 2006). Popular media in the United States began to modify their portrayal of women in the late 1980s and 1990s. Popular representations of the image of women in the postwar era have been replaced with images of women who aggressively expose their bodies and their sexuality. These new representations of women as sexual aggressors are often marketed with the feminist language of agency, choice, 'girl power', and empowerment (Goldman 1992 as cited in Gill 2007)

Postfeminism is best understood as a distinctive sensibility, made up of a number of interrelated themes. These include the notion that femininity is a bodily property, the shift from objectification to subjectification, an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline, a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference (Arnett, 2002). In the postfeminism point of view, women are not directly objectified but are portrayed as active desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves as seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so (Gill,2007). This phenomenon represents a modernization of femininity that includes a new "technology of sexiness" (Radner, 1999) in which sexual knowledge and practice are central. Furthermore, it represents a shift in the way that power operates: from an external, male judging gaze, to a self-policing, narcissistic gaze (Gill, 2007).

Since the emergence of girl group Spice Girls in the 90's and its grasp of popularities in the early 2000's, girl group had become a representation of girl power in music industries. It is explained by Dafna Lemish (2003). Girl group is also a perfect figure to portray the image of empowered and sexualized girls in the media, especially music videos, rather than a diversity of different media, platforms, genres and productions. Girl group has different kinds of representations of girls and young women, in which girls are increasingly involved as active producers, not merely consumers. It indicates that young girl is a tool of sexualization in the media, which is called "adolescent girls' sexual empowerment" (Lemish, 2003).

Regarding the previous research about women in media, Collins (2011) has some arguments about the image of women in the media. First, Collins states that women are under-represented across a range of media. Second, when women are portrayed, it is often in a circumscribed and negative manner. Women are often sexualized,

typically by showing them in scanty or provocative clothing. Women are also subordinated in various ways, as indicated by their facial expressions, body positions, and other factors. Finally, Collins finds that women are shown in traditionally feminine roles (Collins, 2011).

A research about women in popular music by Bretthauer, Zimmerman and Banning (2007) concluded that female artists deliver the messages in their music lyrics by showing that women are not inherently valuable and also do not deserve respect. This finding results from the content analysis of top 20 popular music songs from 1998 through 2003 listed in "Billboard 100". Other messages from female artists in popular music lyrics are the followings: sexual appearance can be utilized to attract attention, staying in a relationship despite hurtful treatment is acceptable, and to continue to stay with a man despite feeling used, unappreciated, and ignored is tolerable.

This article also explains that by using 6 indicators of sexualization, it could be said that women are told they have no power, are objects, are valued for sex, and are victims of sexual violence.

An article about image of women in media especially music videos by Benton (2015) revealed that not only male artist display a lot of misogyny themes but female pop artists and female hip hop artists also demonstrate large amount of misogyny in their music videos.

Surprisingly, based on this study, female artists display higher rates of misogyny than expected. It is proven by the data where women are predominately portrayed as sex object through their dress and actions. This finding is in contrast with previous study which uncovers that male artists are more likely than female artists to objectify female actors in their music videos.

Wallis (2012) has found that significant gender displays primarily reinforced stereotypical notions of women as sexual objects, and females as subordinate and males as aggressive. In her research, Wallis investigates 34 music videos on U.S. cable stations MTV and MTV2. She argues that the images of female lead performers dancing suggestively or touching themselves in a sexual manner indicate that women are sexual objects, ready to be consumed by men.

Discussing objectification of women in music videos, Firsby and Aubrey (2012) have found that much of the sexual objectification of women comes from female artists objectifying their own bodies. In their research, Firsby and Aubrey investigate the extent to which female artists participate in the sexual objectification of their bodies. Instead of examining women being sexually dominated and objectified by men in male artists' videos, they examine the extent to which female artists sexually objectify themselves in their own music videos. The result of their studies shows that female artists are more likely to sexually objectify themselves in their own music videos than male artists are to feature the sexual objectification of female characters in their music videos.

Additionally, Sommers and Flanagan state that "female characters in music videos were more likely than male characters to exhibit behaviors meant to elicit sexual arousal (e.g., lip licking, stroking one's body, pelvic thrusting)"(cited in Firsby and Aubrey,2012). It is also supported by Arnett's finding that another way that women in music videos attempt to be sexually alluring is through seductive dancing, typically for male observers (cited in Firsby and Aubrey,2012).

Firsby and Aubrey (2012) support the objectification theory by Fredrickson & Roberts. They found that contemporary music videos serve to reinforce the cultural notion that both Black and White female artists, representing both the pop and hip hop R&B musical genres, are valued for their bodies and their appearance. In general, Firsby and Aubrey suggest that in the world of music videos, female artists' role are constrained to their sexuality. Women's bodies exist for the consumption and pleasure of the viewers.

Following the previous research conducted by Willis and research by Frisby and Aubrey, the image of women empowerment in Fifth Harmony's music videos are analyzed in order to examine how self-objectification represents women empowerment in music videos. By using purposive sampling, four music videos by Fifth Harmony on its Vevo's Youtube official channel as the main source of data are analyzed. The videos are *Work From Home*, *Boss*, *Worth It*, and *That's My Girl*. The four Fifth Harmony's music videos which portray the image and messages of postfeminism are analyzed whether the image and messages are in their song lyrics or the scenes of the videos.

2. METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive research aims to make a systematic, factual, and accurate description on certain facts and on characteristics of certain places and population. Qualitative research means any kind of research that produces result which is not obtained through statistical procedures or other means of qualification. It can be research about person's lives, stories, behaviors, and also about organizational functioning, social movement, or interaction relationship. It includes observation and interviews, but might also include documents, books, and videos (Strauss and Corbin,1990, p.18).

The main sources of data for this research are four music videos of Fifth Harmony on its Vevo's YouTube official channel portraying postfeminism and self-objectification. Meanwhile, the sources of secondary data are trade from publications, online documents, and internet websites that are used to provide supporting data. The data

of the research were gained from both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were taken directly from the primary source of data. In addition, the secondary data were obtained by doing library research.

The first music video is entitled "Boss" which is mainly about empowerment. As the group speaking to MTV, they stated that the whole idea behind the track was for girls who share the same age as the group to "turn" the song on and "feel confident and empowered" because insecurity is a "common occurrence" in this age (Garibaldi, 2014). The second music video is "Worth It", which Florino (2015) from Artistdirect praised, giving it a five out of five star rating, claiming that the song has 'an empowering refrain that's impossible to shake, especially when coupled with a slippery beat.' The third music video is "Work From Home". It has a message about women, feminist, and equality as the group's member Camila Cabello told SPIN, 'I think that's what's helped with this new social awareness of what it means to be a feminist and what it means to be a woman and what it means to fight for equality and destroy all the gender- institutionalized thinking that existed before about gender roles.' (Carley, 2016). The last music video is "That's My Girl", which is all about empowering women and young girls. It receives positive reviews from music critics, with some noting its horn samples and theme of female empowerment. Gerrick D. Kennedy calls the song a "horn driven bombast" and states that it delivers a punchy message of female unity. (Kennedy, 2016)

The data in this research were collected by watching and identifying the music videos of Fifth Harmony that represent the image of self-objectification and postfeminist issues. In order to identify self-objectification image, some indicators were used, including body part exposure, seductive gestures or dance movements, provocative outfits and or combination of some of them. Then, the scenes related to postfeminist issues were identified to understand the relation between those images. All the images were recollected and arranged into groups based on the postfeminist issues that become the main topic of each music video. After that, the scenes in each music video were gathered into some parts based on the appearance order and how they match the lyrics. All of the data were analyzed deeply by using relevant approaches and methods.

There are several ways of analyzing the data. First, each of the music video was observed repeatedly to find the significant images representing self-objectification and postfeminist issues. Then, the data that had been gathered into some groups were examined. The signs regarding self- objectification and postfeminist issues in each music video were identified. Then theory of music video by Carol Vernallis was applied to examine the elements of music video. In order to find out the meaning of the context, semiotic theory was applied as a method. The result of the meaning representation was analyzed by using socio-cultural approach and other theories under American Studies such as feminist theory, postfeminist theory, objectification theory and previous researches regarding the representation of women in postfeminist era.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

3.1.1. Self-Objectification and Domesticity As Freedom of Choice in Work From Home Music Video

In March 2016, Fifth Harmony released their single featuring American Rapper Ty Dolla Sign entitled "Work from Home" as their first single in 7/27 album as well as the lead single of the album. "Work from Home" became the first top-five single in the United States by a girl group in ten years. The music video was released on February 26, 2016 on Fifth Harmony's Vevo channel. "Work from Home" won the award for Best Collaboration at the 2016 MTV Video Music Awards and the American Music Awards, winning the group's first award on this network. It also reached one billion views in October 2016, and became the most viewed music video of 2016.

A popular culture image of women in the late 1990s and early 2000s in America is sometimes connected with the dilemmas of work, family, and female identity in the age of postfeminism. Most often, it focuses on the prominent cultural dilemma of the work environment and life balance. In "Work from Home" music video, the concept of domesticity as expression of freedom of choice is represented by the scenes and the lyrics. They use their domestic role (femininity and sexuality) as a positive value in the era of postfeminism instead of a backlash.

Backlash propaganda itself aims to separate women's private and public, feminine and feminist aspirations, splitting their lives into half-lives. Moreover, the backlash not only warns women that they cannot 'have it all' and must choose between home and career, but also makes the choice for them by promoting domesticity as a full and fulfilled existence. In other words, women are told that they need to give up the unnatural struggle for self-determination in order to regain their natural femininity. Women always thought they wanted equality, but realized instead that they could not have it all. Attempting to live up to an ambitious super woman image, working women have been positioned in a no-win situation as they are either condemned to a 'double-day/second-shift' existence or recognise that their professional success has come at the cost of relationships and marriage (Genz and Brabon, 2009, p. 55).

The new traditionalist discourse centralises and idealises women's apparently fully knowledgeable choice to abstain from paid work in favour of romance or family. The domestic sphere is rebranded as a domain of female

autonomy and independence, In particular, the female homemaker is no longer portrayed as a political prisoner held captive in the 'comfortable concentration camp' of the family. Instead, home becomes the site of 'mystique chic'. As an escape from the drudgery of the corporate workplace' (Genz&Brabon, 2009).

The scenes and lyrics of "Work from Home" music video depict how self-objectification of the members of Fifth Harmony and domestic values they show in the scenes represent the notion of postfeminism which is freedom of choice. The way they objectify themselves is freely chosen as they are free agents in order to express their sexuality and femininity. The notion of freedom of choice can also be seen from the artists that highlight the idea that women in post-feminist era have a freedom to choose their domestic role (sexuality and femininity). It also highlights that post-feminism is a mixture of second wave feminism and modern femininity, as Gills (2007) has stated that post-femininity carries echoes of past, present and future femininities

3.1.2. *Self-Objectification and Confidence as Girl Power Value in Postfeminist Era in Boss Music Video*

"Boss" is a lead single of Fifth Harmony from the group's debut studio album, Reflection (2015). "Boss" is a dance-pop song with additional instrumentation including trumpets, handclaps, horns and heavy bass that create a rhythmic militaristic sound. Lyrically, the song focuses on themes of feminism, female empowerment, confidence, and reversed gender roles. In terms of scenes, "Boss" music video portrays the images of female empowerment as well as sexualization image as the representation of Girl Power. "Boss" has received positive reviews from the critics. Jason Lipshutz (2015) from Billboard stated that the song brings female assertiveness and confidence that could give positive impact for young girl.

Young women are frequently described as more confident, assertive, self-assured to see and get opportunities than either their male peers or their foremothers. There is a sense in which feminism is seen to have done its job in empowering this generation to succeed and in creating positive and ambitious girl. McRobbie (2004) argued that the aim of Girl Power especially in American society is to modernise the political right by articulating ideas of success, wealth and individualism with those of female empowerment. In the music video, it can be seen from the empowering phrases which are written in white letters with a black color as the background in the scenes of the music video, which give the sense of being outstanding and confident.

With their provocative dance movements, Fifth Harmony tries to use their sexual freedom as the key to female independence and emancipation. Female sexual objectification and pornography have long been the subjects of feminist debates, from the 1970s onwards, with critics defending both anti and pro-pornography stances. In the opening scenes, it can be seen that the group blend the conflicting ideologies of women's liberation and the sexual revolution by heralding sexually provocative appearance and behaviour, including exhibitionist stripping as acts of female empowerment.

3.1.3. *Self-Objectification and Successful Career Women as Symbol of Girl Power in Worth It Music Video*

"Worth It" by Fifth Harmony featuring Kid Ink is the third and final single from the group's debut studio album, Reflection (2015). The music video is directed by Cameron Duddy and was premiered at the 2015 Kids' Choice Awards on March 28, 2015. The music video has the theme of female empowerment with Fifth Harmony dominating men as business executives. It has reached over a billion views on YouTube. The video shows the ladies who are the personnels of Fifth Harmony as business and career women representations.

These scenes are sign that women could work and succeed in a workplace that is dominated by men such as Wall Street, as it shows the stock market as the background. The stock market shows statements such as "women in power", "feminism is sexy" and "glass ceiling". Those statements seem to describe all of the personnels who are dancing and wearing career women outfits. When they walk in front of the men, the scene shows that all men in the workplace respect the women. These scenes that show the domination of women and the equality represent the characteristic of postmodern feminism.

These ideas about choice and freedom are central to contemporary notions of individuality in the era of postfeminism. In today's society individuals are expected to be flexible, adaptable, resilient, and ultimately responsible for their own ability to manage their lives successfully.

These are the key ideas in differentiating late modern young people's identities from modern, late-nineteenth century.

Postfeminism gives young women new opportunities for choice, individual empowerment, personal responsibility, and the ability to "be what you want to be." Young women are thus doubly constructed as ideal flexible subjects; they are imagined as benefiting from feminist achievements and ideology, as well as from new conditions that favor their success by allowing them to put these into practice. (Anita Harris, 2004)

By interrogating the new era of young women and focusing specifically on the idea of girls' success as a publicly displayed, mainstream experience, Girl Power in new times appears to be personal responsibility and effort, the kind of effort best illustrated by the way all girls are now apparently leading their lives. The scenes

which show one of the members, Camilla as a successful career woman are the great example and hope for the future. In the United States, educated, young, professional career women with glamorous consumer life styles appear to be everywhere. This scenario is a reality for a small number, but the image also functions as a powerful ideal that suggests that all young women are now enjoying these kinds of lives and that this is what it means to be successful. (Zaslow, 2009)

Worth It music video points out the depiction of modern career women in America who show their power and authority in the workplace using their femininity (make up and fashion). This music video holds the same values from the previous music video (Boss) which is Girl Power and female agency in the context of American society. The artists really highlight that the ideas of success and young femininity are connected with the notion of choice, beauty and cleverness. With their successful career, women are able to express their sexuality and femininity. Their sexuality is portrayed and demonstrated through their self-objectification manner of each member of Fifth Harmony. Thus, Worth It music video shows self-objectification image of the artists to represent successful career women as a value of Girl Power.

3.1.4. *Postfeminist Heroes and Sisterhood in That's My Girl Music Video*

"That's My Girl" is the third and final single from Fifth Harmony's second studio album, "7/27" (2016). "That's My Girl" is mainly an R&B anthemic track with elements of electro-pop and lyrical themes focused on female empowerment, encouragement and feminist influences.

The music video is directed by Hannah Lux Davis and was released on September 19, 2016. The song is mainly about women empowerment and sisterhood, as Camilla said during the interview of the music videos' behind the scene, "It's all about women coming together, we are saving people and we are doing good" (Fifth Harmony, 2016). Normani also gives her opinion about the song, "Every song that we record, we try to empower other women to do the best they can and cheering each other no matter what size, culture and background". (Fifth Harmony, 2016)

Over the past three decades, female action heroes have risen to the surface of American media and captured the attention of viewers and feminist scholars. While traditional heroes of the past have been made tough via their individualism and their ability to confront obstacles by themselves, modern women grow as heroes because of their female friends. (Inness, 2004, p.231). In the music video, each member of Fifth Harmony encourages one another to push the limits of what it means to be a hero. In particular, they stress that a woman can be "tough enough" to fight the injustice society when a woman learns to listen to other women's perspectives on the world and when she values her emotional bonds with other females as a source of strength. In this scene, the struggle of feminist movement (second wave) is represented.

The scenes in "That's My Girl" music video symbolize female sisterhood as integral to redefining heroism in several ways. First, sisterhood contributes to each woman's better understanding her purpose as related to the problem and situation around them. Second, sisterhood is a source of protection against social injustice that attempts to separate these women from each other. Third, sisterhood is a source of empowerment that helps these women survive. Bonds between women are represented as a source of toughness; they provide the strength needed to resist oppression and effect change. One woman's heroism is connected to another's, and women's interlocking lives are critical to heroism operating effectively.

"That's My Girl" music video portrays the image of sisterhood through female heroes in the era of postfeminism. Fifth Harmony members portray how their self-objectification image represents the values of sisterhood in the music video. The idea of sisterhood is reflected through the lyrics, narratives and the scenes of the music video that tell about women who empower each other in order to survive and fight. Meanwhile, the image of self-objectification is reflected from their sexual and provocative gestures in the scenes.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

All of the music videos that have been analyzed combine self-objectification image and postfeminism values by using editing which has important roles in making the scenes, lyrics and narratives connected to each value to create a complete meaning of the music videos. All of the music videos also show that through self-objectification, women are able to present themselves as powerful and empowered that matches the values of postfeminism.

To sum up, the four music videos discussed in this research show the image of women empowerment in post-feminist era that is represented by self-objectification of the artists. It shows that in postfeminist era, the sexualized image of women in the media is something that is freely and fully chosen by the artists to show their power, authority and agency. Fifth Harmony uses their self-objectified image in their music videos to deliver their messages about power, confidence, authority and agency that match the values of postfeminism.

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