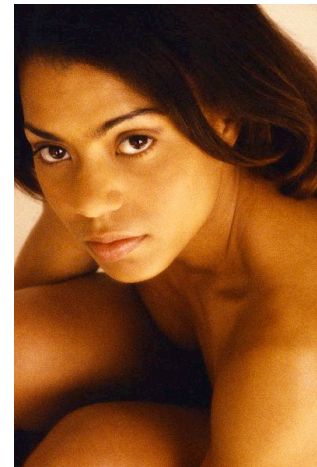


# In a Woman's Body

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## Chapter 7



*Photo courtesy of Royalty-Free/CORBIS.*



# Origins of Objectification

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- ***Objectification***—when a person is perceived not in terms of personhood, but in a way that dehumanizes her, stripping away her identity, reducing her to her body, or even just parts of her body.

# BIOLOGICAL BASES OF OBJECTIFICATION

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- *Evolutionary perspective:*  
biologically, men and women's bodies serve important functions in reproduction, but women's bodies maybe even more so

# BIOLOGICAL BASES OF OBJECTIFICATION

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- *Minimal parental investment:* minimum amount of time men and women must contribute to create offspring—for women, around nine months and substantial bodily resources; for men, a minimum of a few minutes.

# BIOLOGICAL BASES OF OBJECTIFICATION

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- According to Buss and Schmitt (1993), the differences between men and women's minimal parental investment and reproductive potential have produced different mating strategies.

# BIOLOGICAL BASES OF OBJECTIFICATION

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□ Evolutionary theory  
does not explain  
changing beauty &  
fashion standards.

# BIOLOGY AND BEAUTY TRENDS

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*Photo courtesy of Brand X Pictures/PunchStock.*

- Most modifications women make to their bodies' appearances accentuate the characteristics Buss and others say are fertility cues (clear skin, bright eyes, full lips).
- Across cultures and history, however, many beauty rituals seem to have no link to biology.

# BIOLOGY AND BEAUTY

## TRENDS

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- Across cultures and history, however, many beauty rituals seem to have no link to biology.
- Physical Changes communicate beauty and group membership, role, status, and gender.



# CONSTRUCTING GENDER THROUGH FEMALE BODIES

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- The majority of gender construction in contemporary industrialized societies takes place through women's appearance.



*Photo courtesy of Index Stock/Getty Images.*



# CONSTRUCTING GENDER THROUGH FEMALE BODIES

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- Both masculinity and femininity are performances to some extent, but a feminine appearance is more of a put-on than a masculine appearance.

# CONSTRUCTING GENDER THROUGH FEMALE BODIES

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- In the process of assuming a feminine persona, a woman's body becomes more than her means of interaction with the world; it becomes a visible marker to maintain socially-constructed gender differences and gender roles.



# POWER AND OBJECTIFICATION

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- *Men are observers and women are the observed.*
  
- *Male gaze*—women are being observed, on display, under scrutiny
  - Contemporary media images of women are frankly sexual and the assumed spectator is always male.

# POWER AND OBJECTIFICATION

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- The Observers hold social power, & the observed must adhere to their appearance.
- Men's greater social power positions them as surveyors of women, and women's status as the surveyed requires them to be vigilantly preoccupied with how they appear to others (Berger, 1972).



## OBJECTIFICATION IN POPULAR CULTURE: BEAUTY IMAGES & MYTHS

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- The commercialization of feminine beauty reinforces men's dominant status and sustains women's lesser status as objects on display (MacCannell & MacCannell, 1987; Wolf, 1991).
- In American culture, men and women have learned to equate female beauty with an artificial and rigorously-maintained appearance.



## OBJECTIFICATION IN POPULAR CULTURE: BEAUTY IMAGES & MYTHS

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- Most beauty images not only require alteration of a natural appearance, but most are completely unrealistic.
- Beauty industry advertisers can create ideal beauty images through computer integration of features from several imperfect models, digital distortion of real images, or total electronic fabrication.



## OBJECTIFICATION IN POPULAR CULTURE: WOMEN'S BODIES AS SEXUAL ENTERTAINMENT

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- A content analysis of magazines found that 78% of popular women's magazines had messages about women's bodily appearances on their covers—only one third of which were beauty or fashion magazines (Malkin, Wornian, & Chrisler, 1999).
- *Faux lesbianism*—portrayals of women engaged in same-sex liaisons





## OBJECTIFICATION IN POPULAR CULTURE: WOMEN'S BODIES AS SEXUAL ENTERTAINMENT

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- Women's sexual objectification is not about women expressing their own sexual desires; it is about women's bodies presented as sexually alluring commodities for heterosexual men.



## OBJECTIFICATION IN POPULAR CULTURE: DISTORTION & DEHUMANIZATION

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- The sexualization of female cartoon characters has become commonplace.
- Animated computer games such as *Tomb Raider* are marketed to adolescent boys and men and commonly include hyper-sexualized representations of women.



# CONSEQUENCES OF OBJECTIFICATION

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- *Body image*—mental picture we have of our bodily appearance as well as the associated feelings we have about our perception of the size, shape and attractiveness of our bodies

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# CONSEQUENCES OF OBJECTIFICATION

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- Women are more dissatisfied with their bodies than men (Feingold & Mazzella, 1998).
  - Some researchers say men's body dissatisfaction is underestimated, but body esteem is not as strongly related to overall self-esteem in men as it is in women, and men do not feel as negatively about their bodies as do women

# CONSEQUENCES OF OBJECTIFICATION

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- *Social comparison*—idealized beauty images make women feel badly because their own appearance suffers by comparison.
- *Appearance schemasticity*—belief that appearance is a very important part of the self and is a significant determinant of life outcomes.
  - Women who are more dissatisfied with their bodies respond more negatively to ideal images in experiments and in real life (Posavac, Posavac & Posavac, 1998; Stice, Spangler & Agras, 2001).

# CONSEQUENCES OF OBJECTIFICATION

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- Women who are highly feminine report more body dissatisfaction than women who describe themselves as possessing more masculine characteristics (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Rade & Jaberg, 2001).

# CONSEQUENCES OF OBJECTIFICATION

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- African American women report higher levels of body esteem and lower levels of weight concern compared to Caucasian women, and their overall self-esteem is less impacted by their body esteem than it is in Caucasian women (Molloy & Herzberger, 1998; Henriques & Calhoun, 1999).

# CONSEQUENCES OF OBJECTIFICATION

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- Study of college-aged men and women, women indicated that their own ideal was thinner than their current body size.
- Men's ideal was the same as their self-perceived current body size.
- Both women and men misperceived what the other sex finds attractive: men thought women prefer larger men than they do, and women thought men prefer thinner women than they do (Fallon & Rozin, 1985).



# SELF-OBJECTIFICATION

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- *Objectification theory*—in a sexually objectifying culture, girls and women learn to perceive themselves as objects and to adopt an observer's perspective on their own bodies



*Photo courtesy of Don Tremain/Getty Images.*

# CONSEQUENCES OF OBJECTIFICATION

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- *Self-objectification*—habitual and chronic preoccupation with self-surveillance that disrupts a woman's connection to her subjective experiences and divides her attention.



## *Self-objectification*

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- Can lead to shame, anxiety, an alienation from physical self.
  
- Results in self loathing, and self-destructive behaviors.



## *Self-objectification*

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- Beauty has positive effects.
- Can also be a liability.
- Attractive women may be targets of other women's animosity.
- Anti-fat prejudice is widely accepted
- Fat women suffer socially and economically.



# FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT: THE EMBODIED WOMAN

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- *Embodied*—a sense of subjectivity instead of objectification, a feeling of being in one's body physically and psychologically, instead of monitoring one's body from another's perspective.

# FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT: THE EMBODIED WOMAN

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- According to Dowling (2001), it is a restrictive definition of “femininity,” rather than biology, that makes women the weaker sex.
- Title IX is civil rights legislation that prohibits sex discrimination in access to educational programs at institutions that receive federal funds. It mandates equal athletic opportunities for the sexes

# FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT: THE EMBODIED WOMAN

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- Surrounded by discouraging messages such as “throw like a girl,” and lack of support for the development of their physical potential, many girls come to believe that they are the weaker sex.

# FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT: THE EMBODIED WOMAN

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- Historically, femininity has been defined physically weak and none athletic.
- More girls and women are taking advantage of opportunities to participate in sports, and, are behaving in ways that defy the traditional social construction of femininity.



# FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT: THE EMBODIED WOMAN

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- *Gender marked*—the use of terms such as “basketball” and “women’s basketball” to refer to men’s and women’s sports, respectively; the underlying message is that men’s basketball is the norm while women’s is the variation.



*Photo courtesy of Karl Weatherly/Getty Images.*



# FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT: THE EMBODIED WOMAN

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- Commentary about women athletes is not limited to their performance; women athletes are also subject to remarks about their sexiness and physical appeal—or lack thereof (Kane, 1996).

# FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT: THE EMBODIED WOMAN

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- Women athletes are frequently pictured *not* engaged in their sports.
- Femininity cues such as jewelry, makeup, and revealing clothing are common (e.g., *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue).

# FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT: THE EMBODIED WOMAN

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- Although many studies have documented the discrepancies in coverage of women and men athletes, very few have addressed the perceptual and attitudinal impact of them.
- Outdoor recreation is another venue in which girls and women are challenging the limitations of femininity (e.g., hiking).