

Analysis of Sexuality,  
Sexual Objectification, and Male Supremacy:  
Stoltenberg's Provocative Depiction

Sexuality is a dynamic phenomenon that materializes in context. The context includes the relative power of the interacting individuals and the social structure that may facilitate or depress certain features of sexual identity and experience. The objectification of women in our culture is made strikingly evident in the writings of Stoltenberg, as the sexual objectifying of men is represented as quite ordinary. The recognition that the function of sexually objectifying in men's lives is normal, and how that degrading act affects women's lives, is a disturbing detection and predisposition of sexuality and supremacy in the public.

In our society, the experience and meaning of sexuality, as encountered by women and men, holds little similarity and much variation. According to Stoltenberg (1990), the standard of male sexuality in and of itself is sexual objectification. This sexual objectifying is "deemed a given, a biological mandate, having the same preordained relationship to male sexual responsiveness that, say, the smelling of food has to a ravenous person's salivation" (Stoltenberg, 45). Men's sexual objectifying is seen as an innate and healthy way of perceiving other people. Inadvertently, this implies that women, who are subject to this objectifying, are being viewed by others in a righteous manner and should be nothing but accepting of it. Stoltenberg (1990) insists further that male sexuality without sexual objectification is inconceivable; male sexuality without it would not be male sexuality. Male sexuality is incapable of being viewed apart from this objectification; it is what characterizes a man's sexual nature. By defining male sexuality in this way, the author is silently implying that female sexuality would not exist if it weren't for the objectifying received by men. In other words, female sexuality without the objectification of males would be obsolete. What defines female sexuality in a sense is the passivity with which women receive this objectification, and this passivity is normal.

As depicted by “Dreamworlds II”, sexuality is represented in a sexual dreamland; a male sexual fantasy world where anything is possible. In most popular media, male sexuality is blatant and projected onto us as a society as normative, while female sexuality is silenced and the desires of women are not conveyed. For men, control of the partner plays an important role in sexuality; male fantasies frequently center on independence, mastery, and physical ability. The naturalness for male aggressiveness and female cooperation and subordination is captured in the context of viewing; women appear ‘normal’ for their submissiveness, and thus the invasion of their bodies is normal. Men and women alike accept society’s notions of sexuality similarly to the ways that videos portray women. Male/female relations and sexuality are products of the construction of gender roles; the dominant submission of women is compared to ‘natural’ and is highly eroticized. Sexuality in the media almost always involves issues of vulnerability and power, and the act of sex itself becomes an expression of dominance rather than of adoration or lust. “The links between power and sexuality can be examined from a variety of perspectives: the interaction between sexuality and status, sexuality as a power resource, the sexuality-reproduction link as a source of power and vulnerability, sexuality as an expression and instrument of male dominance, and sexuality as a positive source of empowerment” (Lips, 1991). Men constantly act as the sexual aggressor and pursuer and women as sexually restrained and passive, and the prize to be won. Yet another difference in male and female sexuality falls in the mannerisms of engaging in sexual encounters. Sexual coercion or violence is much more likely to be utilized by men, and as seen in the video, is accepted and even encouraged.

There are many female-male differences in the occurrence and significance of sexuality. On many measures, men show greater sexual need than women do. This is illustrated by the double standard, which automatically implies sexuality while dictating that women limit and are limited in their sexuality more than men. It is based on the notion that male sexual needs are intense and more

imperative than female sexual needs. Women are often warned about sexuality and are expected to play a 'gatekeeper' role. Aggression is more strongly associated to sexuality for men than for women. Upon describing their own sexuality, men differ in the extent to which they envision themselves aggressive, oppressive, and powerful. They are also more likely to be forceful in sexual interactions. Women describe their sexuality in terms of degradation, conservatism, and self-consciousness. It has been noted (Lips, 2005) that men's sex drive, or motivation for sex, is stronger than women's. Men tend to think about sex more frequently and have more sexual fantasies. On the other hand, while women may like sex, they do not spend a lot of time thinking about it. Females personify their feelings of sexual need; they do not simply desire an elusive emotional experience of sexual connection. Women place more stress than men do on committed relationships as a context for sexuality. Females have more inclination than males to "romanticize" sexual desire; furthermore, their sexual fantasies are more likely than men's to involve love, affection and loyalty. Women's sexuality tends to be more adaptable and capable of shifting over time as well. Suggestive of this notion is the idea that women vary more than men in the *frequency* of their sexual activity. Lips (2005) also notes that changes in social or cultural environments more strongly influence women's sexuality than men's.

By blatantly explaining men's roles in sexual objectification and supremacy, Stoltenberg (1990) insinuates much about female's roles in these two realms. He portrays women as the 'thing' to which the act of sexual objectification is done; unreal objects that are natural recipients of this act. A woman's body is a thing, not another self, and serves only the purpose of sexual arousal for the man. Once objectified, women are downgraded from a person to an entity that the man desires, becoming no longer a real subject. Women must accept themselves as an unequal self who is not really "there", and in turn, are not worth any real compassion; they simply have been selected for man's depersonalization. This depersonalization in sexual objectification is what makes sexual

violence possible; once you have dehumanized a person to a 'thing', you are able to do anything to it you want. Since it is women's predisposition to be sexually objectified (as Stoltenberg assumes), they are naturally symbolic of images of lifelessness, ecstasy and sexual accessibility. Women are presented as objects "displayed like territorial markings that define the turf as a world to be seen through men's eyes only" (Stoltenberg, 1990). The creation and expression of male supremacy is maintained by sexual objectification itself. Stoltenberg (1990) suggests that the habit of males to objectify women functions in part to form the male supremacy of culture, and likewise, the male supremacy of culture pushes males to adapt to normative ways by implementing the practice of sexually objectifying. This in turn aids in the acquisition of 'self' or male sexual identity, in relation to the supremacy he sees in other males. Accordingly implied, women's roles in relation to sexual objectification and male supremacy involve passivity and submissiveness. They are merely the objects upon which men protrude their objectifying habits and exert their dominance. Females feed the notion of male supremacy since their *only* purpose in this patriarchal society is to be the inanimate objects which males aggressively control.

Women's roles in sexual objectification, relevant to the depictions of "Dreamworlds II," are submissive in male fantasies. Women of this dream world have one thing in common – they are all interested in sex with any man that will have them. Nymphomania, characterized as a powerful lust, is a frequent characteristic of the women in these fantasies. They are so driven by desire that they corner men and conquer, until the males have no choice but to submit. In this dream world, there is an inherent danger for women because of constant competition for the men. However, when necessary, women may combine forces in order to take control of their male counterparts. Many roles of the women in relation to the sexual objectification are representative of control and submission. Common roles of women that give way to male supremacy and dominance include those of school teachers, prostitutes, dominatrix, nurses, cheerleaders, and bored housewives. There

is an underlying assumption that all women have a deep rooted desire to strip themselves of all clothing and be taken by a man. Females often present themselves as legitimate objects of gaze and want to be looked at and explored by men. Music videos, among other forms of popular media, treat women as objects. There is nothing else to the definition; nothing that makes them human. Women are simply “legs in heels.” Videos forcefully deny individuality and subjectivity, as women are seen only as silhouettes, outlines, and shapes. Through the frame of objectification and supremacy, they are not seen as unique or ‘real’ people, and thus are interchangeable; one woman is just as good as another, as long as she willingly submits. In another light, the roles of women in videos and films that portray sexual violence support the perceptions of women as inhuman objects and, like robots, ‘things’ waiting to be given life and movement. Females only have the objectivity to define themselves. They are frequently seen locked in cages and behind bars until the men are ready to have them. It is assumed that women desire manipulation by men, and that they *enjoy* being invaded and fondled. An initial refusal really represents a desire to be conquered and taken, further supporting the notion that the objectification they endure, and the invasion on their bodies, is normal. Especially in pornography, a female who is raped, shamed, or abused is usually shown to defy initially but eventually to become sexually aroused by the way she is treated. The common conception of “I’m a guy’s girl” supposedly benefits women’s egos, since the indoctrination into this idea maintains that all women want to be objectified and submit to objectification – they all want to be in subordinate roles in some way. In a culture maintained by male supremacy, women are all too often embellishments and used as décor characterizing their dehumanized roles, and the internalization of women that men are dominant only lends aid to the idea of women as slaves and subordinate.

Most material that is meant to be sexually exciting is produced for a male audience. Women are portrayed as simultaneously idealized, respective of their physical attractiveness and beauty, and

decried, as they are exposed as submissive objects of sexual desire. While many roles are denied to females, that of 'beauty object' is subtly, as well as overtly, expectant. Furthermore, as suggested by Lips (2005), there is a tendency toward the depiction of brutalization and degradation of women in sexually oriented materials that emphasizes myths of male sexual dominance and supremacy, while respectively reinforcing female sexual powerlessness and passivity. The prominence of male supremacy is evident in wrestling as well. When 'sex' is present within this hypermasculine sport, it is rarely used to express affection. The interplay of violent and controlling elements serves to eradicate the compassion in sex, which is seen as feminine and therefore weak. Oppliger (2003) sustains that control and ownership of women is more significant within this realm than sexual conquest. Also represented in wrestling are the ways in which the sexual objectification of females classifies women's anatomy. In *Women, Men and Power*, Lips (1991) suggests that male supremacy in our culture leads us to expect men's dominance of women and their control of sexual partners. Our social environment reinforces the idea that males exert leadership, control, and dominance in the sexual realm; that part of being a man is the sexual dominance of women, whereas part of being a woman is to be objectified and sexually surrendering to a man.

Stoltenberg (1990) suggests that men's tendency to sexually objectify is a determinant factor of ascribed masculinity. Men want to be 'real' men in a society where women should want to be wanted by the 'real' men. It enables a man to define himself in relation to the supremacy and manliness he perceives in other males. Once he has successfully achieved a certain level of maleness, he is said to have obtained a male sexual identity. This sense of masculinity provides a sense of himself as having separating sufficiently from the substandard status of females. Implications here suggest that the absolute value of femininity is independence in growing up *through* dependence and affiliation with a man. The author's conception of femininity is silently framed in the language of opposites. The masculine are independent and the feminine are

affiliative. Females will be automatically feminine, in that they are sweet, gentle, kind, and submissive, thus never attaining a female autonomy. Stoltenberg maintains that there is much entailed in the acquisition of 'masculinity' and that a flood of anatomical action naturally occurs in the context of a society that cherishes the penis as the locus of male sexual identity. The cultural construction of femininity is based tenuously on physical differences that serve as underpinnings for sexual objectification. Furthermore, all male sexual objectifying originates in the common notion of masculinity in a male supremacist culture; femininity is an adaptation to powerlessness, to being oppressed, and to being subjecticated.

The meaning of femininity as depicted in "Dreamworlds II" is seen mainly as female beauty, portrayed in the ways in which women dress and flaunt their bodies. Femininity is not innate in music videos; rather, costumes of femininity are applied. They are often shown showering or 'cleaning up.' Video scenes using water to exploit femaleness by exposing women's bodies are a common tactic in the captivation of 'natural femininity' and beauty. The wardrobes and make-up accentuate gender differences, creating for men a discrete, beautified object on which to project their masculinity. Beauty transformations associate femininity with phoniness. To be feminine is to appear in ways that are contingent with men's fantasies, commonly including the modeling of stalkings with garter belts, thongs, and mini-skirts. Women in the dream world of men aim to tell the male-depicted story of femininity, often serving only to fulfill a sex fix.

Lips (2005) suggests that men, who are permitted more flexibility in terms of sexual self-pleasure, exposure to erotica, and heterosexual activity may begin to perceive sex as a way to establish their masculinity. A tendency toward sexual violent behavior against women is part of the conventional masculine gender role; males are socialized to be dominant. The feminine gender role may contribute to sexual dominance of men, in that females are socialized to be passive, weak, and vulnerable. Stereotypically, we anticipate different behaviors, individual qualities, and physical

appearance from women and men. As a society, we classify people by their natural femaleness or maleness and thus assume that we have also categorized them according to the set of cultural expectations for femininity and masculinity, even though there are few relationships between biological sex and cultural expectations for women and men. Males are molded by the ideals of a society that places an excessive value on “toughness”, exemplified by a hypermasculine range of behaviors and attitudes, including an absence of compassion and a view of women as objects to be conquered (Lisak, 1991).

Stoltenberg’s observations regarding male sexuality and his implications regarding female sexuality can be viewed in light of the social structural/cultural theoretical perspective. Social structural theories concern social organization and culture, concentrating on how associations between women and men are linked to gender roles and stereotypes, thus it stresses the overarching social arrangements that characterize and support gender. This theory explains Stoltenberg’s implications mainly in terms of power and behavioral differences, as well as in the social arrangements within a given societal structure. This social/cultural perspective suggests that power differences exist between women and men in many societies. Accordingly, men develop more dominant behaviors as an accommodation to more powerful roles, and women develop more subordinate behaviors as a way of adapting to available roles with less power. Social arrangements and structures in societies support and maintain differing behaviors for females and males. Lips (2005) notes that “typical gender differences hold only or most strongly when the sexes are in the common male dominant-female subordinate relationship and that much so-called feminine behavior is actually powerless behavior.” Stoltenberg (1990) insinuates that female sexuality would not exist if it weren’t for the objectifying received by men. What defines female sexuality in a sense is the passivity with which women receive this objectification. This theory also supports the notion that sexual aggressiveness does differentiate between the sexes, and that this difference is attenuated or

magnified by the power relations between women and men in a given society. According to Stoltenberg, male sexuality is defined in terms of sexual objectification. This act is directly related to the dominant and aggressive nature of males in that objectifying is deemed a prearranged, inevitable relationship to male sexual responsiveness and supremacy over women. I favor the explanation that this theory provides for the interpretation of Stoltenberg's argument. I feel that the notions of power, dominance, and the social (and sexual) normality of male-female behaviors are highly paralleled between the theory and the author's implications. The theory's emphasis on social and cultural factors in representing the norm is congruent with Stoltenberg's reasoning behind the 'normal' behaviors of males. His depictions of male sexuality and supremacy are conventional due to the preordained acceptance of these by society. Stoltenberg's views of power, and implications of powerlessness, are adherent to the theory's notion of prominent power differences between men and women in society. The theory supports the acquisition of dominant and subordinate behaviors among men and women respectively; this dominance and subordination was portrayed both concretely and abstractly by Stoltenberg throughout his observations.

In a sexist society in which the ideology of male supremacy is represented as normal, to think about the reality and experiences of sexual objectification of women is devastatingly difficult. As our cultural environment imbeds in us normative notions of masculine and feminine sexuality, it is disturbing when something as provocative as Stoltenberg's writings is perceived as possible. The objectification of women in our culture and the sexual objectifying of men are represented as quite ordinary. The function of sexual objectifying in men's lives as normative and the degradation effects on women's lives is disturbing in the portrayal of sexuality and supremacy in our society. Female-male relationships and the societal norms for femininity and masculinity are maintained by differences between the sexes and are emphasized strongly in our culture, and powerful associations are carried in being labeled female or male.

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