

THE ETHICS OF NUDITY AND WOMAN DIGNITY IN THE MEDIA

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Abstract

This paper looks at the ethics of nudity and woman dignity in the contemporary society. The woman is seen as a person with dignity, rights, will (*voluntas*) and reason (*ratio*), hence should be valued and respected. The ironical, troubling and perplexing issue as well as question raised is centered on the way the media uses the nudity of the woman for various purposes. The media uses the woman nudity for commercial/ money making ventures, entertainment, pleasurable object and son on. This paper therefore questions the morality of such activities and maintains that the media should realize that womanhood and woman value is beyond entertainment and pleasure, hence should be restricted. It further argues that the nudity of a person is respected, regardless of the sexes, and if this is addressed, affects the personhood, image, perception and dignity of the woman. it therefore concludes that as women occupy a greater percentage of the populace, they should be respected as humans and persons, for there to be peace and sustainable development.

Keywords: Nudity, woman, woman dignity, ethics, media.

Introduction

Philosophy, etymologically entails the love of wisdom. It questions and investigates into the nature of reality and reality resolves round nature and being. The aspect of reality that investigates into nature/ universe is said to be Cosmo centric, while the other aspect that is interested in being/human, is said to be anthropocentric.

Anthropology is therefore concerned with the nature, meaning and study of humanity (human beings) in aspects ranging from biology and evolution to culture and society. In other words, anthropology incorporates the concept of person and personhood in the society. The person is therefore seen as a being characterized by consciousness, rationality, intentionality and a moral sense, and traditionally thought of as consisting of both a body and a mind or soul. In other words, a person . Both the male and female are seen as persons, that should be valued and respected as such.

However, it is troubling when the nude image of a woman is used for various dehumanizing ventures and purposes in the media. Based on that, the questions become, what does nudity connote? What happens to woman dignity? Are the human nudes no longer sacred in the society? Are there no regulation in the media? These questions and many of its kind are the major concern of this paper.

Nudity: A Conceptual Analysis

Nudity is one of the concepts that is as old as humanity and it is associated with human sexuality, philosophy of sex and human nature.

The word nudity entails the condition of being naked, nude, bare or without clothing. It is derived from the French word *nudité* nakedness or directly from Late Latin *nuditatem* (nominative *nuditas*) "nakedness, bareness," from Latin *nudus* "naked, bare" Avicenna uses the Arabic word

'*tajrīd*', literally, 'disrobement' or 'stripping', to speak of an 'abstraction' or what is 'abstracted' (*mujarrad*)(www.etymonline.com).

Nudity, nakedness, naturism are synonymous in so far as both words are related to the unclothed body. According to Ogochukwu Okpokwasili (2021: 156), nudity is defined as a state of indecent dressing which expose in the public or in the open the breast, belly, waist and lap of a female above the age of 14 years, as well as any part of the body from two inches below the shoulders downwards to the knee.

Nudity is a social practice in which the sexes interact freely but commonly without engaging in sexual activities generally for some reasons (for [health](#) or comfort). In other words, it may be perused as a socio-cultural way of life. Chizoba Oriaku (2020:45) explains:

In the primitive era, near nudity or nudity was the lifestyle because of the absence or the existence of a few clothing items. The available items included a piece of spun fabric tied round the groin, for the men. The women covered the privates while the girls that have reached puberty had dresses in the form of ritualized and significant body decorations accompanied with waistbeads.

However, the origin of the practice in [Germany](#) in the early 20th century coincided with a rebellion against the rigid [moral](#) attitudes of the late 19th century. The first known nudist club, Freilichtpark ("Free Light Park"), appeared about 1903 near [Hamburg](#) and was soon followed by Richard *Ungewitter's* [seminal](#) work *Die Nacktheit* (1906; *Nakedness*), which went through several printings. Nudism spread through Europe after [World War I](#) and became established in [North America](#) during the 1930s. The American League of Physical [Culture](#) was founded in 1929 to promote nudism. In the [United States](#) and [Canada](#) the practice has remained restricted to a few secluded camps and beaches. The atmosphere of these camps is generally deliberately non-erotic, and most are governed by strict rules of conduct. Although public nudity of varying degrees became increasingly common in the latter part of the 20th century, nudism still is not widely accepted. Most nudists are adults, although families sometimes participate. Adults who practice nudism have been found to be psychologically healthy, but the impact of nudism on children is a subject of dispute among psychologists.

Biblically, there are cases of nudity from the bible days and is always associated with something evil. The concept has been associated with morality right from the bible days when Adam and Eve noticed their state of nakedness as a result of them sinning against God. As of the time of creation, nakedness was not in the world. It came to be because of sin. The bible said in Genesis that "then the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings". The sins of Adam and Eve were one that was so great in the sight of God that he opened their eyes to see their shame. Nakedness or nudity is equated with a shameful thing and sin. A nudist is therefore a person who engages in the practice of going naked wherever possible.

However, figures of women with no clothes are peculiarly common in the art of the Western world. This situation might seem perfectly natural when one considers how frequent the state of undress is in every human life, from birth to the bath to the boudoir. Bezemer Elspeth (1999:33) point out that:

The female nude in art can be categorized in various ways. As a 'tradition' the long and consistent historical presence of images of the unclothed human body indicate a chronology of artistic interest in the human body.

Naked female figures are shown in very early prehistoric art, and in historical times, similar

images represented include the fertility deities, and the Greek goddess Aphrodite belongs to this family. Aphrodite was imagined as life-giving, proud, and seductive goddess. For many centuries, the Greeks preferred to see her clothed, unlike her Near Eastern counterparts, but in the mid-fourth century B.C., the sculptor Praxiteles made a naked Aphrodite, called the Knidian, which established a new tradition for the female nude. . . In addition, her pose, with head turned to the side and one hand covering the body, seemed to present the goddess surprised in her bath and thus fleshed the nude with narrative and erotic possibilities. The position of the goddess hands may be meant to show modesty or a desire to shield the viewer from too full a view of her godhead. . . . Since the nudes of ancient Greece and [Rome](#) became normative in later Western art, it is worth pausing to consider what they are and are not. They express profound admiration for the body as the shape of humanity, yet they do not celebrate human variety; they may have sex appeal, yet they are never totally prurient in intent. The nudes of Greco-Roman art are conceptually perfected ideal persons, each one a vision of health, youth, geometric clarity, and organic equilibrium.

Understanding Woman and Woman Dignity

The concept of woman is best understood in the context of a woman's sexuality. According to Chidimma Ukaulor (2013:7), the idea of a woman can be understood from the notions of gender and sex. As a child, a woman belongs to the group of girls and as an adult; she belongs to the women-folk. In other words, a woman is the opposite of a man.

Biologically, women are different from men and as a result women have been interiorized, subsumed, made inferior, subordinated to men and relegated to the background, as they are seen as the weaker sex; physically, mentally, sexually, spiritually and otherwise. Menarche therefore marks the beginning of womanhood.

The idea that women are defined by their bodies and that female body is defined by sexual and reproductive functions has a long history. Jean Jacques Rousseau argued that a man could transcend his sexual nature but a woman remains female, her whole life, dominated by processes such as menstruation, child bearing, nursing and nurturing. Menstruation, defloration, childbirth, lactation and biological preparedness differentiate a woman from a man. In other words, she menstruates, becomes pregnant, she has no penis as such cannot make anyone else pregnant but someone else can make her pregnant. . . . She can be pregnant, give birth and can suckle an infant. These characteristics therefore make a woman powerful, unique and mysterious in her being.

A woman is a female biologically; women biologically are feminine. Females are typically feminine in nature. An individual femininity is determined by combination of factors such as the genes, chromosomes (X,X), hormones etc. The female develops with ovaries, a uterus or womb, a vagina and a clitoris and these characteristics become defining aspects of her nature or femaleness.

The general (most common) and natural way of speaking for most women include softness/tenderness of voice, reticence, and extreme politeness (there are women who are tom-boy and do not have some of these features); hence they are judged and defined in terms of their personality traits, behavior, and appearance. There is a distinct, consistent and significant difference between men and women. In other words, they differ physically, genetically, biologically and otherwise.

Fertility, (ovulation) and sexuality impact important meaning to the woman's body. During the second half of the 19th century, the view flourished that the female body was entirely organized for sex and reproduction, but the essence and the *raison d'etre* of a woman's existence form the expression of the cause of her existence as a woman(I996:34)

Women have two X chromosomes and men have two X and Y chromosomes which are expressed in hormonal and psychological contrast. Men and women also differ in primary (genitalia and reproductive organs) and secondary (breast, voice, hair) sexual characteristics but in average, weight, height and strength and are seen as tender, soft, feeble in their emotional make up, hence they are called the weaker sex. For these reasons, a woman can therefore be a wife to a man and a man a husband to a woman but not conversely.

Biological difference does not have to mean that females or women inferiority, for biology is not destiny. Women and men have the same shape, size of brain relative to the rest of the body, that is to say that apart from reproduction, men and women have the same biological structures, system and function.

The woman is a person, hence rationality, self consciousness, transcendence, rationality, openness, intentionality, spirituality, awareness, freedom and communication and transcendence are the main qualities of a person. Rationality (*homo sapiens sapiens*) distinguish human (man and woman) from other lower animals. With self consciousness a person recognizes itself, socializes and perfects itself. With communication, s/he communicates and rapours with others in love, friendship, grief, hatred etc while it penetrates the realm of the eternal and absolute with self transcendence(1964:257)

However, the notion of human dignity, arises from human/self-awareness, experience, evaluation and worth. Human dignity therefore centers on honour, glory, distinction and value attributed to humans, that is, something thought to be first, a highest value.

Woman dignity is therefore associated with the worthness, honour and respect attributed to women. In other words, it points at the value women possess for respect, hence, what is due to them as women. Mary Wollstonecraft used the notion of dignity to articulate her demands for the change in women's status. and tradesmen live truly dignified lives.

Overview of the Current State of Nudity Portrayal in Media

There are several ways female nudity is portrayed in media; artistic expression, commercial interests, and social values.

Television shows and Streaming platforms; These are seen in various television shows, film industry, and various social media platforms, like Big Brother Nigeria (BBN), games of thrones, euphoria where explicit/obscene scenes are shown. Nudity is often used to depict realism or to enhance storytelling, and this obscene trend keep growing and spread through the media.

Advertisement. Some advertisements still rely on sexualized nudity to sell products, perpetuating stereotypes and objectification. On the other hand, there is a growing movement towards using nudity in advertising to promote body positivity, self-acceptance, and empowerment.

Social media. Social media platforms like Instagram, facebook, X and TikTok are avenues through which nudity is marketed. Hence, influencers, content creators and activists use social media to challenge and market beauty standards and promote nudity, so as to get followers, especially young people.

Ethical Considerations of Nudity

Ethics examines the rightness or wrongness of human actions. In other words, it considers human act as moral, amoral or immoral. The interest of this paper is to look at the negative impacts of female nudity on the society.

Western culture sees nudity as a matter of choice and right and a woman expressing her sexuality in the way she deems it fit. Generally, in African culture and particularly in Nigeria it is a taboo, shameful and depicts insanity for one to express one's sexuality in such daring manner. Women have a stipulated way of behavior, mapped out by the society, as stipulated in their *modus vivendi*. Exposing one's nudity was never part of the African culture. The issue of expressing one's sexuality via nudity affects every member of the society, as it has more harmful and negative effects. These negative effects include:

Reification. Exposing the female obscene pictures can lead to her reification or objectification. That is, reducing women as mere things, objects of attraction, sexual desire and satisfaction, rather than portraying them as whole individuals with thoughts, feelings, and agency. By so doing, women are seen as means to an end rather than an end in itself. This also contribute to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and unrealistic beauty standards, leading to body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem among women and girls who do not conform to these ideals.

Cultural and social stigma. Nudity portrayal in media can contribute to stigmatization, body-shaming, social stigma, especially for women who do not conform to societal expectations of modesty. This can limit women's freedom of expression and contribute to social marginalization and discrimination

Sexualization and exploitation. The oversexualization of female nudity in media can reinforce the notion that a woman's worth is tied to her physical appearance and sexual appeal, rather than her intelligence, skills, or accomplishment. This can create a culture of exploitation where women may feel pressured to conform to narrow beauty standards or engage in behaviors that compromise their dignity, value and autonomy. Sheila Jefferys (1997:45) explains:

The sex industry has become immensely profitable, providing profitable resources, not just to individuals, and networks, involved in trafficking women but to government who has to depend on sex industry for revenue.

Normalization of gender-based violence. The exposure of female nudity can lead to the normalization of gender-based violence, such as sexual violence, domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment, perpetuating harmful attitudes and behaviors towards women. In other words, it affects the psychological, sexual, and social wellbeing women. E.E. Emedo (2020:33) explains that it becomes dangerous when certain issues are not in the society:

The failure to address this issue of sexual and gender-based violence entail a significant cost for the future. Numerous studies have shown that children growing up with violence are more likely to become dangerously violent or perpetrators of violence in the future.

One characteristic of gender-based violence is that it knows no social or economic boundaries and affects women and girls of all socio-economic backgrounds: this issue needs to be addressed in both developing and developed countries.

It can also reinforce gender inequality and discrimination in the society. Andrey Shastri laments (2022:86) over the situation of the women;

Women face every kind of discrimination in this society. They are deprived from the basic facilities like education. Women's lives are shaped totally by our customs that are centuries old. They had many boundation also. Well as described by the Manu in 200 BC, "by a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons, women must never be independent.

The unequal representation of male and female nudity in media, with women often being objectified and sexualized more frequently than men, reinforces gender inequality and power imbalances.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Having made an expository analysis of nudity and woman dignity in the media, it is therefore necessary to state some possible solutions to curbing female nudity in the media. Some of these include:

Regulation and implementation of strict guidelines regarding nudity in media content can help reduce gratuitous or objectifying portrayals of women. This includes age restrictions, clear labeling, and penalties for non-compliance.

Education and media literacy. Educating the masses and Promoting media literacy and can empower individuals to critically analyze and challenge portrayals of female nudity in the media. This includes teaching about media representation, body image issues, and the impact of unrealistic beauty.

Encouraging media producers, content creators and influencers to include diverse representations of women in terms of body types, ages, races, and abilities can help challenge stereotypes and promote gender balancing.

Empowering women and girls. Supporting female creators, writers, directors, and producers can lead to more authentic and respectful portrayals of women in media, including their uses of nudity and female images. The church, sects, non-governmental organizations can also help to foster this in the society.

Reorientation. There is the need for re-orientation, from the family to the society. This will help the society in recognizing and challenging cultural norms and attitudes towards female nudity can lead to more progressive and respectful representations in media.

The society would not just achieve development but sustainable development, when women are respected, valued, and honored as persons in the society.

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