

## Analyzing Women's Commodified Sexuality as an Erotic Power

Maria Lourdes ATTIC  
Nikkie Marie AYUSON  
Joan BELO  
Lyndsay PICARDFAL  
Karizza PINEDA  
Karen Lee VIUDEZ-PANELA  
Far Eastern University

---

### *Abstract*

This study examines how the depiction of women in the web show *Who's That Girl* produced by *flippish.com* substantiates the issue of commodification and the implications of such portrayals on women's expression of their sexuality. It emphasizes how the camera visually portrays women and how it affects women's behavior in the show and men's behavior toward women featured as *Who's That Girl* babes—selected female subjects who completed the challenges and dares of the web show's producers. The researchers conducted textual analysis to describe the extent of commodification of women methodologically complemented by focus interviews with a sociologist and with the producer of the web show. Results reveal that women are commodified in the web show and their expression of sexuality show an implicit emerging resistance from male domination and commodification by expressing their sexuality in front of the camera as an erotic power—challenging the so-called powerlessness of women in the hands of men.

**Keywords:** erotic power, women, commodification, web show, patriarchy, sexuality

The rapid advances in information and communication technologies have sparked changes all over the world, not least among which concern a number of new philosophical problems and ways to solve them (Hongladarom, 2011). The growth of new media in particular contributes to these ethical problems which shape a new perspective of one's self via online channels. "Technological change is in large part responsible for many of the secular trends in such basic parameters of the human condition...it influences how the society thinks in direct and indirect ways," (Patil, n.d., para.6). Smitley (2004) posits that the internet represents a powerful platform for women's subversion of gender stereotypes and allows them to express their desires, priorities, values and aspirations virtually. Provided with computer access, "women may create and maintain websites as platforms for feminist activism" (Smitley, 2004, p. 5). Such opportunities in the internet provide women endless connections with a world that dually recognizes their influence with technology but marginalizes their cyber-presence and relevance at the same time. Likewise, the position of cyberfeminism by British cultural theorist Sadie Plant posits how women's association with machines has repositioned their internet presence and calls the internet the domain of the woman (Dragojlov, n.d). However, patriarchal moderation of women's realization seems to create a gap that shapes the mindset of women. Patriarchy has become a prime obstacle that hinders women's development (Sultana, 2010). This obstacle against women has been reflected in the earlier research that examine different media platforms categorizing women as inferior, muted, materialistic, commodified, and sexualized objects (Castro, 2005; Go, Maxion, Sy, & Racoma, 2007; Smitley, 2004; Rajagopal & Bojin, 2004).

Laura Mulvey (1975), views the role of women in cinema as objects of desire by male audiences. Women though held as the center of attention, "are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact...she holds the

looks, plays to and signifies male desire” (Mulvey, 1975, p.62). As for Mulvey, women’s visual presence in film tends to work into two functions: first is to represent women as an erotic object for the male characters within the story; and second, women as an erotic object for the film spectators. Women’s presence does not necessarily dictate the flow of the story but is aimed “to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (Mulvey, 1975, p.62). However, the issue of objectification does not only reside in film and television content. With a less regulated space of the World Wide Web, a sexualized gaze at women continues to permeate indicating that this issue will remain problematized.

At present, the debate about gender stereotypes has been mirrored in the mass media which generates two conflicting concepts—patriarchy and post-feminism. How women want to express their sexuality roused criticism from people who have been used to patriarchal views. Caribbean-American poet Audre Lorde (1984) points out that a woman’s sexuality has been contemplated as a sign of inferiority misnamed by men and used against women. She also believes that women contain power—a resource that lies within them, an unexpressed and unrecognized feeling. She contests that this ‘resource’ has been suppressed by men vilifying it as a sign of women’s lowly place in society. That inner power becomes a mere illusion where women are made to suffer, feeling shameful and apprehensive by the virtue of the existence of their erotic power.

Following Lorde’s work, Mosby (2011) deconstructs the works of Afro-Hispanic female writers who used their fictional characters in their literary works and contextualized the narrative where women used the erotic as their source of power. Similarly, Rashedi (2011) deconstructs the writings of four African-American female writers Audre Lorde, Lucille Clifton, Nella Larsen, and Toni Morrison, who all used their literary texts to empower African-American women in seeing themselves as powerful

members of a patriarchal society. Rashedi (2011) demonstrates how these authors gave a voice to women who were perpetually silenced by culture and society. With the power of women to articulate their erotic advantage over men, women have the liberty to reassess their erotic power not as a demeaning quality but as a demonstration of their innate influence to counter patriarchy and oppression. As reflected in different media platforms, women are still considered passive and submissive to the will of men. Women's sexuality is flaunted as a form of male entertainment which creates a biased definition and visual presentation of women, relegating them as mere sexual objects. Dragojlov (n.d.) questions the so-called "liberating" environment of the World Wide Web. She argues that gender stereotypes from traditional media are simply extended to the internet and that "...even as we are seeing some shifts in the voices of women on the internet, inherited structures still prevail" (p. 27).

Rajagopal and Bojin (2004) define "commodification" in their study as an appropriate metaphor to use in explaining the merchandising of pornography as the pornographic images are disembodied from the real persons whom they represent and merchandise as if they are inanimate objects. It means commercializing relationships previously not encompassed by market relations or by exchange transactions. Their study relates to this present research because both analyze the Web as a medium where women are objectified and commodified. The study of Rajagopal and Bojin (2004) supports this study's premise on the role of the internet as an avenue where women are sexualized and portrayed as commodities. Their study provides the ground to justify that the issue of commodification is also present in the internet. With no proper regulation, business entities use the internet as a channel to promote a product with women as decoys to attract online consumers.

Toffoletti (2008) believes that the internet, among other media, has the potential to shape perceptions of and responses to cultural imaginings of young women's sexuality as he insists that females are being rampantly sexualized in media representations. Similarly, Toffoletti's statement is also supported by Smitley (2004) describing women's bodies as a central commodity of the cyber marketplace. Smitley also believes that the internet commodifies women's bodies and represents women as mentally inferior to men and reflects most strongly a male fantasy of mastery over women. Using a case study of a pornographic website ChickTrick.com where white American men search for unsuspecting women and dupe them to engage in sex, Smitley views the site as a representation of women as easily manipulated and mentally inferior to men. Based on her study about the website, she asserts that the cyberspace is "primarily a tool for capitalism, not feminist social change" (p.2).

As for Smitley's view about the commodification of women in cyber space, both Cronin and Davenport (2001) and Rajagopal and Bojin (2004) similarly support this idea describing the internet as a market medium for small-scale and corporate entrepreneurs seeking profit. With its accessibility, the internet has grown into an inviting "medium as a marketplace for sexual partners and pornographic goods and services of every conceivable kind" (Rajagopal & Bojin, 2004, para. 4).

The study of Rajagopal and Bojin (2004) indicates that women have been commercialized virtually at a low-cost budget where advertising and the channel in which they appear are concerned. The commodification of women as discussed in Rajagopal and Bojin's research shows significant relatedness to this research. The internet's accessibility and unrestricted platforms permit sexual activities and vulgar images to be projected online. Since the internet is accessible and unrestricted, it becomes the marketplace to sell sensual images of women.

### **Who's That Girl as a Web Show on Flippish.com**

Flippish.com is an online Filipino video channel that offers free access, download, and upload of videos, movies, music, and articles, among others. In 2009, it was launched as the country's first online video channel ever made, similar to YouTube. It is the brainchild of Ideal Minds Corporation, an independent production house. Founder Christopher Tan describes it as "a mix of television and chat." *Who's That Girl* is one of the featured web shows on flippish.com where women are featured as subjects for the male audience as explicitly branded by Tan. Hosted by JC "Johnny M." Manikad, the main goal of this web show is to search for "hot girls" in clubs and bars, and get to know them. Eventually, a kiss would be asked from the featured women. The premise of the show, according to Tan, is aimed to boost the confidence of the non-good-looking guys to meet the "hot babes" they desire. From a patriarchal point of view, the web show's main goal is purely male-centric which was, perhaps, created to boost men's egoistic view of their gender. The sex appeal of *Who's That Girl* babes is at the core of fulfilling the show's promotion of male dominance over women, at the expense of the latter.

Similarly, Lillie (2000) sees the World Wide Web as a convenient and unregulated avenue to exploit women with endless offerings of sexually explicit materials produced all over the world, encoded within a wide range of symbolic meanings and decoded within an equally wide range of negotiated understandings among internet users. Though the web show *Who's That Girl* is not considered lewd in the sense that no genitalia are exposed, showing a woman being kissed by men despite her consent could be seen as exploitative and insulting, further relegating women as objects of fantasies of men, thereby impairing the dignity of women. Nonetheless, such exploitation and insult could be read in Dragojlov's study as she presented Sadie Plant's *Cyberfeminism* who predicted that "...men will lose everything—their domination and

power. Technology can now give women something that they never had before—total erasure of the male presence” (p. 26).

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study looked at how women are visually commodified by analyzing the camera treatment and use of clubs and bars as the site of social interaction with men. Such portrayals of women were used to determine their implications on the consequential promotion of the erotic power of women over men. Thus, this research also sought to explain the visual commodification of women’s sexuality as a negation of male dominance. This study primarily presents what the implications of visually commodifying women are on *flippish.com*’s web show *Who’s That Girl* vis-à-vis their expression of female sexuality.

### **Significance of the Study**

As this study analyzed the role that men have played in the web show *Who’s That Girl*, a different reading of the negation of men’s dominance on women could provide men a different gender discourse of women’s emancipation from phallogentric biases. The position that this study has held could encourage men to rethink and recognize the empowerment women have long articulated. Instead of condemning men’s actions and insensitive behavior towards women as contextualized in the way women are regarded as sex objects and subjects of men’s erotic fantasies, this research could help mediate a productive discourse on patriarchy and post-feminism providing an avenue for men and women to socialize where everyone stands on the same level of existence. As interpreted in this study, the patriarchal model creates a cultural text that criticizes women’s bold expression of sexuality as something malicious and degrading. A call to recognize the space where women and men can dually exist sans gendered prejudices would grant them the opportunity to engage in constructive gender discourses that equitably acknowledge and realize a mutually beneficial social existence which this study has explicitly underscored.

### **Study Framework**

Erotic Capital as proposed by Catherine Hakim (2010) is considered to be the fourth element in personal asset which is an

important addition to economic, social, and cultural capital. According to Hakim, women generally have more erotic capital than men because they strive harder to take advantage of such erotic appeal. Hakim presents seven elements of Erotic Capital that, generally, women have more than men. These elements are: *beauty, sexual attractiveness, social graces, liveliness, social presentation, and sexuality*. This theory as pointed by Hakim (2010) recognizes women's sexuality as a form of power that marks their advantage over men.

Commodification, as mentioned in Vincent Mosco's *Political Economy of Communication* (2009), is a process of transforming things valued for their use into marketable products that are valued for what they can bring in exchange. The product is distinguished between the value derived from the satisfaction of a specific human want or need (use value) and those whose value is based on what the product can command in exchange (exchange value). He underscores the distinct relationship of commodification with commercialization and objectification. Commercialization refers to the creation of a relationship between an audience and an advertiser while objectification is a general process that refers to many different ways where dehumanization takes place (Mosco, 2009). It shows that commodification does not necessarily cover dehumanization but instead embodies a life and power for such commodity. He deconstructs a deeper comprehension of how commodity is reified by presenting Karl Marx's analysis of *commodity fetishism* which situates commodity in its own social realm possessing a power of its own.

Figure 1 presents the integrated conceptual framework of this research. The context of commodification is presented outside the circle to emphasize the web show's portrayal of women as its main subject. It is situated outside Hakim's concept of erotic capital to posit that in the process of commodification, woman's values have been laid out and appraised as that of the show's objective in using women. The erotic power of women is contextualized into commodification to represent the women within the space of men.



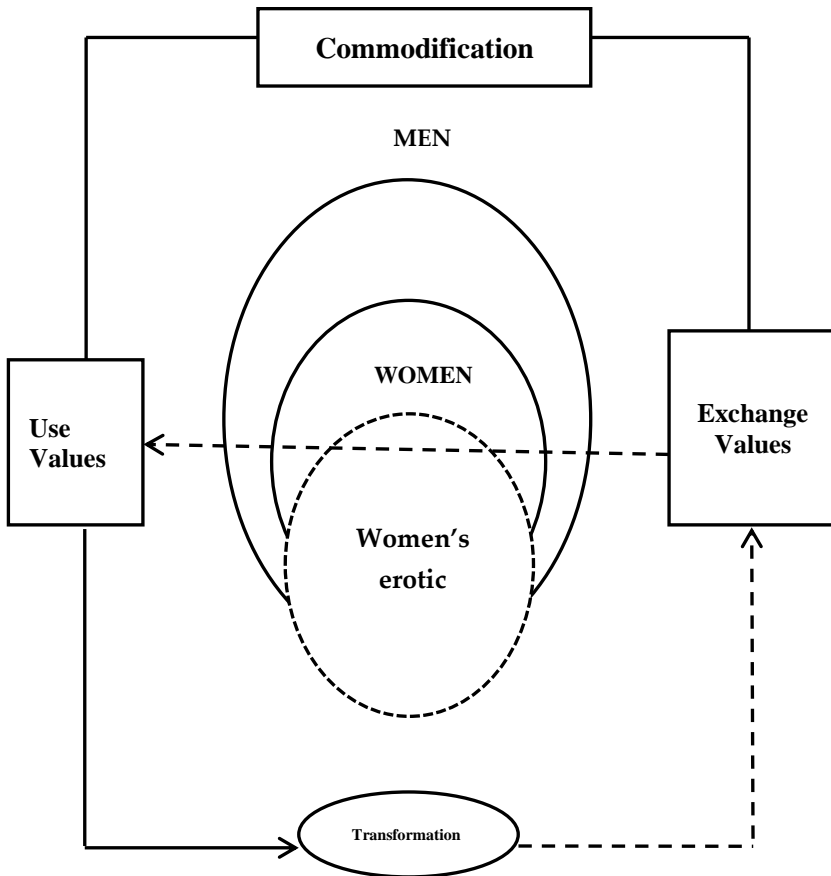


Figure 1. Researchers' Integrated Conceptual Model

Women's erotic capital as presented in a dotted circle signifies women's empowerment and resistance to how men have tried to define them as commodities and sexual objects. The so-called resistance is shown by how women use their sexuality to challenge the superiority that men assert. The broken line-arrow that crosses at the center denotes the obstacle that hinders women's expression of sexuality. Using the erotic capital as power, women are capable of using their sexuality to

counter the patriarchal power of men. The Commodification Model, on the other hand, represents the patriarchal hold of men over women. In this process, women are transformed as marketable where men assess their exchange values depending on how women express their erotic capital.

Commodification and erotic capital could be associated based on how these two posit the value of a specific thing particularly women. Following the *commodity fetishism* of Karl Marx as presented by Mosco in his work (2009), women as commodities position their own social realm and a power of their own that enables them to dictate the economic needs of men.

How the commodification process transforms women's exchange values incorporates women's erotic capital. The more the process packages women as presentable products, the higher the value of their erotic capital. Though commodification places an obstacle on women's advancement based on the framework, it also allows women to realize their value and with it, they are able to go beyond the context that commodification has placed upon them.

### **Methods and Sampling**

Textual analysis was employed in this study to analyze the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in the visual images of the web show *Who's That Girl*. All 13 episodes shown in the web show were analyzed with camera treatment and nonverbal messages as the units of analysis. The messages behind the moving images seen in the videos of *Who's That Girl* were monitored as units of the research and were interpreted using the five indicators: angle of the camera, the show's criteria of selecting women, touching of specific female body parts, men's non-verbal expressions involved in the web show, and women's responses. This study also employed focused interviews to substantiate the findings from the result of the textual analysis. Ideal Minds Corporation's producer and managing director Christopher Tan was interviewed using the same guide questions, to

provide a background on the production of the web show *Who's That Girl*.

### **Instruments**

Monitoring sheets were used for the textual analysis to record the messages systematically observed from the episodes studied. Messages and symbols from monitoring the videos of *Who's That Girl* were noted and analyzed using the five indicators. Coding forms were used to organize and analyze the result of the focus interviews conducted. Each statement by the key informants was decoded to achieve refined data. Focus interview guide questions were used and intended for the two key informants. Each question was formulated based on the objectives of this study that corresponds to the indicators used in the textual analysis.

### **Results**

This section presents the consolidated results of the Textual Analysis and Focus Interviews conducted. The following results of textual analysis are categorized based on the indicators used:

*Camera angle.* Each episode used repetitive camera angles such as medium shot, tilt up/down, zoom in/out, and close up. The use of repetitive camera shots was observed from the first episode that was shot in Manila Ocean Park on August 24, 2011 until the last episode at Prime Upscale Club on May 08, 2013.

It was seen that the camera initially introduces the woman as the subject by showing a medium shot of her and the host, Johnny M., speaking with one another. Subsequent to this is the showcasing of woman's physique from head to toe by means of slowly tilting the camera up and down and vice versa. In the last scenes which are mostly comprised of kissing and touching, the camera found its way to emphasize such acts through zooming in and out the frame. Results showed that the kissing scenes were gradually evolving from kissing on the cheek and hand to abrupt kissing on the lips up to torrid kissing.

*The show's criteria of selecting women.* In order to become a "Certified Who's That Girl Babe," the female subject must be able to surmount the challenges imposed by Johnny M., host of the show. Initially, the female subject must possess the particular criteria that would fit the host's choice. As observed from the second episode to the last one, the female subjects possess common physical attributes; they are sexually attractive, good-looking, and dressed in revealing clothes. However, the first episode which took place at an event hosted by University of Santo Tomas at Manila Ocean Park, featured images of female subjects in their less revealing clothing. Their behaviors were not as sexually explicit when compared to the latter episodes which were held in bars and clubs where most of the female subjects wore revealing clothes that barely covered their bodies.

*Touching of specific female body parts.* Aside from daring the female subjects with a kiss, touching their body parts has been incorporated as a form of sexual exploit of the host and of the selected male participants. In the latter episodes, some male participants were even partnered with female subjects who allowed them to touch their neck, waist, breasts, and other parts of their body. Such contact was mostly done by the host and the male participants while kissing the woman paired with them. Yet, in Episodes 10 to 13, the aggressive participation of female subjects increased. This underscored their manipulative actions towards their male partners.

*Nonverbal Expressions of Men.* Men, being paired with the *Who's That Girl* babes, have different but repetitive expressions upon seeing the women who were about to be paired with them. Forty six male participants including host Johnny M. have indicated pleased reactions before and after they have performed the dare given by the show. In Episodes 1, 2 and 3, it was only Johnny M. who was solely the female subjects' male partner, but in the succeeding episodes, the avid male fans of the web show were given the chance to participate in the show's

challenge. Throughout the episodes, Johnny M.'s behavior was consistent – he looked calm while interviewing the female subjects, always had a big smile on his face, and would sometimes close his eyes while kissing the female subjects.

The male participants' reactions differed from episode to episode. Expressions such as licking and biting their lips; gazing at their partners; closing eyes while kissing; and smiles were observed from the featured male participants. Such reactions could connote the sexual pleasure felt by men which was the web show's main premise. However, there were also some instances where some men seemed hesitant and shy. They looked naïve and submissive as they let the female subjects dominate them in the challenge given to them.

*Women's response.* "You'll kiss me or I'll kiss you?" – the question which simplistically determined how a "Certified Who's That Girl Babe" title was given to the show's female subjects. As observed, the succeeding episodes of the web show have evolved from a simple kissing of hand and cheek to licking, kissing, and touching female subjects' breasts and lips. Primarily, women were the ones who set their own boundaries to featured male participants. As observed in Episodes 1 and 2, most of the featured female subjects declined a kiss on the lips. However, after the second episode, women changed from being coy players of the show to active and aggressive subjects. The female featured subjects have become willing players of the web show similar to how men have consistently behaved. Some girls were able to monopolize men's sexual advances by tickling the men's fancy.

### **Results of the Focused Interviews**

*Camera treatment and the use of clubs.* Tan admitted that the framing and angling of the camera were dictated and guided by the style of the production. He also defined how the camera enabled host Johnny M. to encourage women to accept the challenge of the show. This can be

related to Laura Mulvey's (1975) discussion of how the role of cinema stimulates the visual pleasure of male audiences by turning the female characters in the film as sexual objects.

As for the use of clubs and bars as the place for the show, Tan claimed that these spaces were the only place where the shoot for episodes of *Who's That Girl* was allowed.

*The goal of Who's That Girl.* The web show's main goal was to boost the confidence of any male to meet the "hot babes" in the Metro, as revealed by Tan. This seems to imply that the show is premised to advocate male advantage over women. Tan explained, "We just wanted this guy (Johnny M.) to go around looking for hot chicks. Get a phone number to get a kiss on the cheek." On the succeeding episodes of *Who's That Girl*, the producer himself was surprised with the daring responses of the girls featured on the show. It appeared like the goal had evolved from getting a girl's name and number to daring them with a kiss.

*Women's expression of their sexuality.* When Tan was asked about why women submitted themselves to the challenges of the show, he seemed to acknowledge women's expression of their sexuality. "I bet some women who made out with Johnny M., I don't think they're not necessarily slutty women or loose women that will have sex with everyone. I don't think so," Tan observed. He also recognized women's aggressive demeanor as adventurous and liberal-minded, which he took to mean as women empowerment.

As producer of the web show, Tan admitted that he would not include raw videos of female subjects who did not meet his standards. He explained, "I mean, when I watch the show... some other girls are not really my type. I had to tell him (Johnny M.) to raise his standards." Tan also removed a particular shot where two girls were making out instead of kissing a male subject, something that the web show never positioned itself to be.

## Discussion

*Visual commodification of female sexuality in the web show.* The indicators (camera angle, criteria of selecting women, nonverbal expression of men, touching body parts and women's aggressive responses) answer how women in the web show are visually commodified. At the same time, these indicators show the implication of such portrayals on women's expression of sexuality. The use of repetitive camera shots and angles provides a visual emphasis that seems to impose that anyone who sees the episode of *Who's That Girl* must not miss such visual treatment of women. The admission of a guided camera framing dictated by the producers of the show is a clear indication of how the show is premised—that women are sold to the viewers. These camera shots are applied when the female subjects are introduced by the host, when they are kissed, and when they are touched by the men featured in the show.

The visual emphasis on women and the premeditated camera shots showing sexualized images of women's bodies propose how the camera is used to sell female sexuality to the male viewers. The intentional treatment of the camera geared upon a woman's sexual assets tells the show's selling mechanism to get its target audience. The camera's commodified portrayal of *Who's That Girl Babes* tends to stimulate male viewer's reaction towards the show. Camera angles explicitly promote sex and the sexual appeal of women to men is constantly underscored.

They serve as the peeping hole for male viewers, and how the lens is used to titillate the camera shots seems to ignite male's erotic reactions after seeing the images of women making out with men. Laura Mulvey (1975) explains how 'male gaze' operates by probing the cinematic narratives where men gain pleasure by turning the visualized women characters into their objects of desire. Mulvey's definition of the male gaze associates the objectification of women done by the web show's male viewers who could earn pleasure from watching the female subjects online. In turn, *Who's That Girl* web show earns viewership from its targeted audience and promotion of the show's number of online views. Apparently, women's sexualized images are embodied as

commodity sold to male audiences. As studied, the show had succeeded in winning the attention of its audience; in effect, the web show's uploaded videos have gone viral over the internet and have been shared by YouTube and Facebook users.

The standard of beauty set by the web show *Who's That Girl* indicates how the show intended to visualize a woman's allure to attract male viewers. This standard seems to package women as mere products so that the consumers would buy. The admission of producer Christopher Tan about omitting some of the raw footage of female subjects who failed to meet the requirements he had set implies that the show's producers value women as commodities and must be meticulously selected in order to meet the standards of the male buyers and in this case, the onsite male participants in clubs and bars and the male online viewers who visit flippish.com.

Women are presented in the web show *Who's That Girl* as major commodities in a marketplace dominated by men. The web show primarily appeals to men as seen by its appraisal of women with the primary intention of eliciting the attention of male viewers. Such appraisal of women could be seen in all episodes of the show, where female subjects are selected based on their sexual attractiveness, good looks, and choice of clothing. The theory of commodification posits that things are transformed for their use values into marketable products that are also valued based on what they can bring in exchange (Mosco, 1996), so are the female subjects in the show who underwent outright visual assessment made by the host and by the producers of the show. How the female subjects are appraised suggests the transformation process dictated by the producers of the show, and women's worth or 'exchange values' are decided by the show's viewers and male participants. Likewise, Rajagopal and Bojin (2004) believe that the sexualized portrayal of women in pornographic web sites reflects the issue of commodification which *Who's That Girl* similarly does to women. Thus, the web show has become a market that sells women while the camera serves as the viewing platform which titillates scenarios of sexually attractive women.



The indicator *touching body parts* as visually portrayed in the web show suggests another factor of commodification. *Who's That Girl* presented the featured girls as willing individuals accepting kisses and touches from men they barely know. Featured female subjects were touched on their hips, neck, face, arms and some of them were touched on their breasts. They are positioned as bait to lure men's attention toward the show. Women's bodies are transformed into a form of commodity feasted on by men. The thought of getting a free kiss and a free touch of women draw these men to flock clubs hoping to partake in the show's "giveaway." With that, the featured men seem to take advantage of women who are willing to take the challenge. Nonetheless, men are denied the satisfaction of their urges, teased and are left hanging.

The gratified or pleased expression of male participants in the show including the host could be read also as another form of visual commodification. Based on the textual analysis conducted, results show that almost all men involved in the web show were observed to have gratified expressions before and after their encounter with the female subjects of the show. These gratified men promote women's inner recognition being able to satisfy their craving.

As for the context of patriarchy, women's responses towards the challenges given by the show could be read as denigrating and would brand women as objects of men's sexual desire. Women's daring role in the web show discreetly makes them as commodified individuals as the concept of commodification dictates.

*Potential spaces of resistance for the female subjects.* How the show tries to visually commodify women triggers women's aggressive response to the challenges of the show. The camera pushes women to flaunt their sexuality; in turn women are able to dictate the camera to look at them. Women may have been exploited by the camera but in return, they get the attention they desire. Being the center of attention gives women the authority to monopolize the show and that is clearly manifested in the videos produced by the show. The premeditated camera shots intended for the show's female subject entitle women as

individuals with irresistible charm and attention-grabbing looks that the camera must capture so that every male viewer would see. Women who are visually commodified in the web show have fashioned a power of their own that demands that the camera gaze upon them and follow their every move. Karl Marx's analysis of *commodity fetishism* (Mosco, 2009), suggests that women's commodification situates them in their own social realm where they can generate a power of their own creating a social value of their existence. As commodity, women could be regarded as part of men's economic needs, being part of it, women's values are recognized by men and these values allow women to influence men's necessity.

The women in the web show willingly become a playful cohort of a commodified treatment for them. Using their sexuality, women have found their way to empower themselves and subvert the commodified treatment of the show into them. Their courageous expression of their selves marks their existence and liberation in the space they are moving. The erotic capital theory of Hakim (2010) creates another perspective of how *Who's That Girl* selects its female subjects. The standard of beauty imposed by the show promotes women's erotic capital—the more the show furnished female subjects, the higher the erotic capital these females gain. These female subjects become erotically dominant compared to the male featured participants. How the show aimed to package women becomes women's advantage allowing them to manipulate and tease men by using their physical assets. The commodification that transpires in the web show actually gives entitlement to women as free individuals who are never ashamed of expressing their femininity despite the reproachful look of the society still dictated by patriarchal ideology. Likewise, Lorde believes that the use of the erotic as a power that lies within women offers a replenishing and provocative force to the woman who succumbs to it and reveals it with no fear.

With regard to sexuality, Lorde (1984) defines it as a woman's resource which provides her the power greatly feared by men. Akin to this is Hakim (2010) theorizing the erotic as capital in which women supersede men when it comes to their erotic resource. Baumeister and Vohs (2004) support these views regarding sex as a female resource so

that men must offer other resources in exchange for it. Femininity is actually an opportunity for every woman who knows how to use it; it is actually a gift that marks their advantage over men. This gift allows *Who's That Girl* Babes to capture men's attention and devotion to the show. It is a sign that men are subtly manipulated by women masked by the show's male-centric premise.

Women's self-gratification encourages them to face the challenge raised by the show *Who's That Girl*. Women may think that getting men's attention would give them higher value and would enable them to get ahead of others. A woman's expression of her sexuality in the web show seems to facilitate her transition from being a sexual object to an empowered woman who knows how to use her erotic power to counter men's pride and liberate herself from the reproachful eyes of a conservative society. The use of clubs for the show provides a space for women to sexually express themselves. Selecting the club as the 'space' of the show allows women to flaunt their sexuality without considering the reproachful looks of a conventional society. It gives women the chance to express themselves *sans* moral judgment, and through this, they are able to express their sexuality and explore how their erotic power negates male domination in the web show. Thus, the use of camera and clubs permits women to be able to flaunt their erotic advantage over men. Women command the camera to follow their lead and drive men to go to clubs where they all expect to be recorded and rewarded.

The club serves as a spatial market that sells social accommodation for men who wish to meet the women they desire. *Who's That Girl* web show may have resorted to using the club as a convenient space because it is easier to find a woman who would accept the challenges of the show. The clubs and bars facilitate all sorts of social contact between men and women. They help the show find its female subjects.

*The threats of patriarchy on women's expression of sexuality.* The concept of patriarchy deemed *Who's That Girl* Babes as inferior individuals who have no right to express themselves without the orders

of men. Patriarchy discourages women from freely expressing their sexuality as it criticizes them for being open-minded and self-expressed individuals. Patriarchy denies the erotic power of women by confusing it with a pornographic concept—malice and lasciviousness. Albeit these self-expressive women are portrayed by Ideal Minds' Tan as empowered, adventurous, and expressive individuals, women are still struggling with gender stereotypes issues that impede their advancement in the space they live. Hence, the problem that lies within is that patriarchal society is too afraid to see women who are free—able to subject men to their caprices using their erotic capital as their weapon to subvert the culture generated by men.

Patriarchy with its traditional thoughts hinders women's advancement (Sultana, 2010). Women's behavior is dictated by the society which is patterned with masculine models. The masculine concepts according to Williams (1993) have shaped women's sense of self casting their development as something inferior to men's which relegates women to an unalterably deficient status. For William, the values, expectations and norms associated with gender affect women's self-perception and behavior. In this study, the women in the web show, who become expressive about their selves, would still be criticized by people who are acculturated with patriarchal thoughts.

Subversion, on the other hand, is not the main issue. Post-feminism as contested by Lazar (2009) aims not to compete with the opposite sex but to exercise feminine entitlement where every woman is given the opportunity of pampering and pleasuring the self, being confident in her gender identity. Femininity, long articulated by a feminist or postfeminist concept, should be regarded as an opportunity for a woman who knows her fears and strengths and that expressing her sexuality should not be equated with malicious interpretations.

### **Conclusion**

The commodification of women in the web show defines the passive behavior of women towards the challenges initiated by the patriarchs: Christopher Tan, Johnny M., and the featured males in the web show. Women are used as sex objects to provide sexual gratification for male participants and as commodities to promote viewership for the

web show and advertisement for clubs. However, as these patriarchs have intended to use women for their own benefit, the web show inadvertently empowers the web show's subjects—that is, to play their significant part as the main attraction of the show and get their reward as worshipped beings, a prospect that the producers of the web show may not have imagined in the first place. Women exercise their authority and control over men in their ability to effortlessly gratify men as they eagerly await the opportunity of being selected by the web show as male participants.

How the show emphasizes women's sexuality enables women to discreetly manipulate the show's stakeholders—the males, by teasing them with a kiss or a touch. Men are teased and seduced but never had a chance to completely consume the "goods" given to them. Men's eagerness to participate as subjects in subsequent episodes is an obvious reflection of their reaction as online viewers. In interpreting the videos, men are explicitly perceived as voyeurs fantasizing about these female subjects. Thus, such voyeurism validates how men transform the female subjects to worshipped beings. Aside from obtaining such reward, women subtly have taken for themselves the ownership of choice and control in the web show. Recalling the earlier episodes of the web show, female subjects were not aggressive as was seen in the latter episodes of *Who's That Girl*. If the female subjects say, "no kiss", then men have to respect such assertion of women. Such choice demonstrates that women truly hold the power either to endow pleasure to the male participants or torment men who may have thought of easily winning the opportunity to make sexual advances on women.

Furthermore, the camera plays a big role in the process. The show uses the camera as a significant tool in order to get the attention of both male and female participants. The camera draws people's attention. Men are successful in using such tool since they benefit from meeting sexually attractive women. On the contrary, women are also able to benefit in how the camera has intended to visualize them. Women use such a powerful object for them to express their sexuality that develops as their power—to be worshipped by men.

The *status quo* has yet to allow the inner power of women to be recognized, especially in the Philippines where conservatism reigns. Expressing one's sexuality is a taboo which suppresses women from exploring their inner power. Nonetheless, with the rise of the internet, women have started to associate themselves with the cyberspace where they find freedom to express themselves.

### References

- Baumeister, R.F. & Vohs, K. D. (2004). *Sexual economics: Sex as female resource for social exchange in heterosexual interactions*. Retrieved March 1, 2014 from [www.carlsonschool.umn.edu/assets/71503.pdf](http://www.carlsonschool.umn.edu/assets/71503.pdf)
- Castro, J. (2007). *Political economic analysis of the visual prostitution of women in Idol Ko si Kap and Lagot Ka...Isusumbong Kita!*. Unpublished graduate thesis. College of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines, Diliman.
- Cronin, B. & Davenport, E. (2001). E-Rogenous zones: Positioning pornography in the digital economy. *The Information Society*, Vol. 17, pp. 33–48.
- Dragojlov, V. (n.d). *Cyberfeminism (s): Origins, definitions and overview*. Retrieved March 1, 2014 from [http://www.uat.edu/webmedia/pdf/Cyberfem\\_14066.pdf](http://www.uat.edu/webmedia/pdf/Cyberfem_14066.pdf)
- Go, G., Maxion, J., Sy, J., & Racoma, E. (2007). Filipino women on the cover of Cosmopolitan Magazine. *Far Eastern University Communication Journal*, Vol. 3, pp. 66-79.
- Hakim, C. (2010). Erotic capital. *European Sociological Review*, Vol. 26, pp. 499 – 518.
- Hongladarom, S. (2011). Personal identity and the self in the online and offline world. *Minds and Machines*, Vol. 21, pp. 533-548. doi: 10.1007/s11023-011-9255x

- Ideal Minds Corporation. (2011). *About flippish.com*. Retrieved July 5, 2013 from <http://flippish.com/>
- Lazar, M. (2009). Entitled to consume: postfeminist femininity and a culture of post-critique. *Discourse and Communication*. Retrieved March 2, 2014 from <http://dcm.sagepub.com/content/3/4/371>
- Lillie, J. (2000). *Sexuality and cyberporn: Towards a new agenda for research*. Retrieved July 5, 2013 from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/150782683/Lillie-cyberporn-pdf>.
- Lorde, A., (1984). Uses of the erotic: The erotic as power. In J. Wetzell, M.L. Espenlaub, M. Hagen, A.B. McElhiney, & C. B. Williams (Eds.), *Women's studies thinking women*. (pp. 55 – 59). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.
- Mosby, D.E. (n.d). *The erotic as power: Sexual agency and the erotic in the work of Luz Argentina Chiriboga and Mayra Santos Febres*. Retrieved March 1, 2014 from [www.cromrev.com/volumes/vol30/0-vol30-mosby.pdf](http://www.cromrev.com/volumes/vol30/0-vol30-mosby.pdf)
- Mosco, V. (2009). *Political economy of communication*. London: Sage Publications Inc.
- Mulvey, L. (1975). *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*. Retrieved March 5, 2014 from <http://imlportfolio.usc.edu/ctcs505/mulveyVisualPleasureNarrativeCinema.pdf>
- Patil, P.R.B. (n.d). *Technological advancement and its impact on humanity*. Retrieved March 5, 2014 from [https://www.academia.edu/346486/Technological\\_Advancements\\_and\\_Its\\_Impact\\_on\\_Humanity](https://www.academia.edu/346486/Technological_Advancements_and_Its_Impact_on_Humanity)

- Rajagopal, I. & Bojin, N. (2004). *Globalization of prurience: The internet and the degradation of women and children*. Retrieved March 1, 2014 from [firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1114/1034](http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1114/1034)
- Rashedi, N.R. (2011). *Deconstructing the erotic: A feminist exploration of bodies & voice in Audre Lorde, Lucille Clifton, Nella Larsen, and Toni Morrison*. Retrieved March 1, 2014 from [https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/553033/rashedi\\_Roxanne.pdf?sequence=1](https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/553033/rashedi_Roxanne.pdf?sequence=1)
- Smitley, M. (2004). *Women and the internet: Reflections on cyberfeminism and a virtual public sphere*. Retrieved July 21, 2013 from [www.megansmitley.org/documents/meg-smitley-cyberfeminism.pdf](http://www.megansmitley.org/documents/meg-smitley-cyberfeminism.pdf)
- Sultana, A. (2011). Patriarchy & women's subordination: A theoretical analysis. *The Arts Faculty Journal*, Vol. 4, pp. 1-18.
- Toffoletti, K. (2008). *Gossip girls in a transmedia world: The sexual and technological anxieties of integral reality*. Retrieved July 5, 2013 from <http://www.somerset.qld.edu.au>