Abstract

This study will investigate Martha Nussbaum’s writings on sexual objectification. There has been much written condemning sexual objectification from Immanuel Kant to contemporary feminism. Nussbaum recognizes that objectification is complex and allows for certain permissible forms of sexual objectification but she limits this within the private sphere between consenting individuals. Yet within the public sphere objectification takes place all the time, in many forms and within many contexts. Social contexts could be quite complex and the process of objectification could be used in various ways to empower individuals. While I wish to support Nussbaum’s argument that permissible or positive sexual objectification relies on the idea of autonomy, subjectivity, and context, yet, I wish to extend these considerations to public acts of objectification. People often embrace the sexual objectifications that are considered negative. By borrowing the objectifications that have once marginalized them in traditional social contexts, these people regain control of their identity and their humanity is eventually promoted. They achieve a sense of autonomy and empowerment
through a form of self-objectification or re-appropriation of objectification within the social context. My objective is to reconsider Martha Nussbaum’s concept of objectification in order to determine the positive empowering functions of sexual objectification within these social contexts. I use various examples from Asian culture.