

Prettier When Pink

by Zenobia Chan

Last month while window-shopping, I found that pink nipples are the new measure of femininity in Hong Kong. New products and a new emphasis in advertising are creating a new social expectation of the ideal sexually attractive woman, and are telling women that nipples are important sites for representing their sexuality.

Advertisements for shower gels or fashions feature semi-visible nipples to manipulate the interest and attention of both men and women. Men like to see the nipples of these pretty women for the sexual titillation it provides. Women like to look at other women's nipples to compare theirs with the so-called perfect ones of these supermodels.

As for the new products, one of them—"Nipple Pink: Essence-Deluxe from France"—claims that it can turn dark nipples pink. Its ingredients include hydroxyethylcellulose, avocado oil, licorice extract, tocopherol, retinol, vitamin C, lactic acid and ammonia. I cannot report on this product's effectiveness because no one I know has tried it, but the more important issue is how the product is presented to the female market.

In this situation, a new feminine discourse is created around pink nipples, which come to symbolise the attractiveness of women during sexual intercourse with men. After holding conversations with six housewives, I learned that four of them believed that they have to regain their sexuality for the sake of their husbands in order to ensure their roles as ideal wives. A wife serves as a sexual object for her husband in many male-dominated socie-

ties. Especially, objectification of the female body and commodification of sex are the ongoing gender process. After pregnancy, a woman's nipples naturally turn dark due to hormonal changes. However, this natural process cannot fight against the cultural force that insists the female body exists to fulfill male sexual desire. Culturally, for the interpretation of women's breasts, pink nipples represent youth, romance, fantasy, and elegance, whereas dark nipples mean old, dirty, rigid and dull.

The distinction between women as actors in the private sphere and men as actors in the public sphere forms the core perspective for the justification of subordination of women to men. Women are considered closer to nature because of their reproductive function. Through cultural processes, women's bodies have been devalued due to their social roles of childrearing and housework. Society tends to praise work done in the public domain as productive work, and men are socialised to participate in it as if it is their nature to do so. The dichotomy between providers and nurturers is influenced by both nature and culture, which are not value-free concepts. "Women's work" is considered inferior and women are forced to take on a societal passive role.

It is a fact that the Confucian ideology of female subordination reflected in the Three Obediences and Four Virtues is deeply embedded in Chinese societies. Traditionally, Chinese society produced virtuous mothers and good wives, who were locked into the family sphere and had only a family identity, paying little attention to their individual one. Now, consumerism creates an image of a sexy woman with pink nipples. The commercialisation of femininity continues to transform women into objects for profit-making. The construction of female sexuality is a discursive formation—pink nipples are promoted as sexy for men, and through the process of normalising subjects, women feel they have to strive for pink nipples to restore their femininity and fulfill the sexual desire of men. Pink nipples present women as always sexually ready, willing, able and eager—as vehicles for the imposition of socially constructed female sexuality, rather than a means for the expression of autonomously self-determined sexuality. In the end, pink nipples are created for disciplining female bodies and for ensuring they are treated as objects to serve men.

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