

Object

There is a creeping presence that haunts women around the world: in the streets, bedrooms, courts, and countless other institutions. We live in a society whose values are forever evolving. In the wake of the Me Too movement, women are coming out about their injustices and empowering others to do the same. Growing up in New York City, Jessica Valenti has often been the object of degrading behavior from the men around her. She is a girl who spent her high school years drawing attention to herself, flirting with lots of boys, making vulgar jokes with her friends, and walking around numb to the words around her. In her memoir, *Sex Object*, she recounts the many occasions in which men made her feel small. While some of these actions against her were illegal, the others were silent crimes that go un-dealt with every day. Valenti is an outspoken, caring, and self-aware woman who uses her power as a renowned feminist as a platform. In doing so, Valenti takes a surprisingly cynical approach to expose dysfunction and empower people to act. Yet, she also allows herself to become vulnerable by reflecting on sensitive subjects with an undeniable sense of honesty, to engage both men and women around the world.

Valenti shares graphic and personal experiences living in New York City, without filter, to captivate her readers. She uses vivid anecdotes and strong descriptions to make her stories as relatable as possible, to engage all audiences. She internalizes these struggles and keeps her reactions buried, as it is not illegal actions taken against her. She speaks from smaller objectifying comments such as “smile” or “fuck me”, to physical actions against her. At a young age, she learned to “put [her] headphones on and look straight ahead and don't smile even when” she is told to (67). She goes further into recounting the time she got off the subway and noticed a wet substance on her back pocket from a man who “accidentally” bumped into her the whole ride. She finishes this story with her thoughts that she had to “walk through the rest of the day knowing that our discomfort gave someone a hard on” (66-67). Her use of the word discomfort acts as at total understatement. She spends little over 2 pages recalling this story, further reinforcing her objective, numbed, and cynical tone. From the subway, to school — including strangers, peers, and teachers — Valenti brings attention to overlooked injustices.

Valenti's graphic stories, lead to underlying impacts that most people can understand. Fears and insecurities are things everyone struggles with, Valenti uses this notion to help readers who may not relate to the content of this book, understand the impacts she felt. She goes beyond public settings into more vulnerable, private experiences. Valenti, today, Valenti is a self-proclaimed and renowned feminist. Early in to her book, she remarks proclaimed “[her] refusal to keep laughing or making you comfortable may seem like a real fucking downer, the truth is that this is what optimism looks like.” She goes on to claim that “naming what is happening to us, telling the truth about it-as ugly and uncomfortable as it can be- means that we want it to change. That we know it is not inevitable” (18). Valenti is a woman who fights for others, yet when she was raped in her 20's, she had a hard time naming it. After telling the story in a disturbingly casual way, she admits she has “never called this assault... I realized then, that by definition penetrating someone while they are unconscious- even if youve had sex before with this person- is rape. I just have never wanted to call it that... at the time I barely considered myself a person”

(114). She dehumanizes herself, saying that although she doesn't understand why and may even judge herself for it, she does not believe she is a person deserving of rage.

Sharing stories of objectification will inevitably be personal. No matter how sensitive the experiences Valenti shares, she uses words such as "we" and "you" to reinforce the idea that we are all part of the problem, and that we are in this together. Whether you are the cause or effect, this book serves as a call to action for all. This same story changes completely depending on who is reading it. Valenti uses her standing as a celebrated writer to communicate to the privileged that, better off or not, they are blind to the issues. The patriarchy walks head high through Wall Street, telling girls to smile on their way to work. Sex Objects serves as a reminder that it is time to bring down the barrier of silence and make all conscious of the invisible yet in no way insignificant weight women carry.