Abstract
An examination of Ovid’s Ars Amatoria, an Ancient Roman elegy, can help a modern audience better understand how sexual objectification of women occurs today. Ovid promulgated problematic gender roles and ideals, which created a systemic culture of objectification of women. Using modern sexual objectification theory and psychological research, we can gain insight into the often-forgotten experience ancient Roman women had. Although written in a vastly different culture and society than today, Ars Amatoria is still relevant to a modern audience and illustrates how ideas put forth by Ovid about gender are not so distant from modern ones.

Ars Amatoria
- J books written by Ovid, an Augustan Age Roman poet
- Circa 1 B.C.
- Gives love advice to men and women
- Serves as an example and offers insight into modern sexism and objectification of women

Gender Roles Propagated by Ovid
Active & Passive Roles
- Men take on the active roles and women the passive roles. Women take in the passive roles because they exist as objects (passive role) for men to use and benefit from (active role).
- Characteristics for women and men are based on active and passive gender roles (e.g. women as incapable and dauntless and men as strong and dominant). These gender roles do not overlap despite the fact the fact that women and men are more similar than different.
- “Women don’t brandish flames or ered bows”

Rape Myths
- Are stereotyped and false beliefs about sexual assaults, rapists, and rape victims. They are encouraged by traditional gender roles. Used as a justification for sexual violence and sexual objectification.
- “Though she might not give, take what isn’t given. Perhaps she’ll struggle, and then say ‘you’re wicked’: struggling she still wants, herself, to be conquered.”

Traditional gender role endorsement—Sexual objectification of women—Higher rape myth beliefs
Example: Men should always take the active role and women the passive role. Men know what women want without them explicitly saying—Women say no but they mean yes

Violence
- Traditional gender roles (e.g., men always being dominant) encourage violence against women and justify it.
- Dehumanizing people endorses aggressive behavior because it is easier to disrespect and be violent toward people who are not seen as humans.

Culturally Constructed Roles Conflated with Biology
- Biology is used to justify gender roles but gender roles are relative to culture. How men and women should be is culturally constructed, but is often conflated with biology.
- “Men often cheat: it’s seldom tender girls”

Objectification
- Objectification: When people are dehumanized and diminished to entities lacking thoughts and feelings
- Sexual Objectification: Dehumanizing and diminishing women to a body or body parts, whose primary purpose is for use by men

Ovid’s Ars Amatoria through the Lens of Modern Psychology: The Static Culture of Sexually Objectifying Women
Noa Raskin
Union College

Male Hyposexual Ideal
- Men expected to always want to be with women physically and, if they do not, they are looked down upon. But for men to meet this standard they need to be sexually active in order to satisfy women. This ideal is used as an excuse of why men objectify women, like the modum “boys will be boys” argument.
- “Who takes a kiss, and doesn’t take the rest, deserves to lose all that were granted too”
- “We advertice our nocturnal acts, and nothing’s bought if it can’t be boasted off”

Female Beauty Standards
- Standards are created by men to benefit men and align with gender roles. Women are mainly valued on their physical appearance. Ovid says women should have elegant fingers, slender feet, pulmoness, youthfulness, not have leg or armpit hair, have good hair and hairstyles, and look elegant.
- Women adhere to these standards and perpetuate the culture because it is validating in the short term, but the long term consequences outweigh the short term benefits.
- Women shouldn’t dress or act extravagantly because it is immoral and male attention seeking.
- “You too shouldn’t weight your ears with costly stones...nor show yourself in stiff clothes sewn with gold, wealth which you court us with, often makes us flex”
- Women should “take good care that they don’t appear old”

Different Standards
- While men are mainly valued on their appearance, men are not. Instead they are valued based on their personality and wealth, according to Ovid. Women are also expected to improve their appearance for men, but men are not expected to do the same.
- Essentialism in female ideals are primarily physical and objectify women, while male ideals do not objectify men.
- Barbarians themselves are pleasing, so long as they’re rich
- Women criticized for being manipulative but men are allowed to be
- “If tears (they don’t always come at the right time) fail you, touch your eyes with a wet hand”

Behavioral Ideals
- Expected to act femininely in all aspects of life (e.g., walking, eating, singing, writing, laughter, etc.)
- Women are also expected to be seen out in public for men to objectify them.

Emotional Ideals
- Women are expected to control their emotions (such as jealousy, impulsivity, pride, and anger). These emotions are not passive and not attractive to men, so they are expected to contain them.
- “It is important to banish looks of anger from your face”
- We hate (believe the expert) extravagant disdain: a silent face often sows the seeds of our dislike. Glance at a glance, smile tenderly at a smile”

Impossible Standard
- Beauty standards are exhaustive and impossible to achieve, yet women are encouraged to achieve them in many ways.
- The fact that women are expected to work on their appearance implies that women are not good enough for men naturally. It also conveys that women must suffer to be considered attractive.
- “Taking pains brings beauty: beauty neglected dies”
- “Beauty’s granted or denied by a hand’s touch”

Contradictory Standard
- Women can never win because their standards are contradictory, so they can be criticized no matter what.
- Women are judged if they are not solely feminine but are seen as less than human if they adhere to this standard.
- Women are criticized for being attention-seeking, but also if they do not show themselves off enough.
- Women are criticized when young for being immature and wasteful but criticized when old for being unattractive and undesirable.
- Ovid tells women to alter their behavior for men but conflictingly says men will not want them if they change how they act.
- Women are expected to be pure but also sexual for men.
- Women are viewed as passive and incapable, but are capable of deceiving men.
- “Some will attack you with a lying pretense of love, and through that opening seek a shameless gain”

Theme of Control
- Strict standards exist for women so that men can control women by socially dominating them. Men want to control women because they are taught to hate and be scared of femininity.
- Men are also expected to dominate women based on traditional gender roles and when they cannot meet this standard it frightens them.

Objectification When people are dehumanized and diminished to entities lacking thoughts and feelings
Sexual Objectification: Dehumanizing and diminishing women to a body or body parts, whose primary purpose is for use by men
Objectification is a systemic issue that is pervasive for all women and has a variety of consequences that decrease women’s quality of life.

Evaluating Ovid’s Ideas about Gender Ideals

Misogyny
- Men dislike women but are attracted to them. They dislike women because they are taught to be threatened by and hate femininity.
- This is why Ovid associates love with pain and suffering and compares love to violence, hunting, and battles.
- “Love is a kind of warfare”

Modern Relevance of Ovid
- Sexual objectification of women is still a systemic problem that is often overlooked.
- Through reading and analyzing this text, sexual objectification of women can be more readily understood.
- Sexual objectification has so many detrimental consequences on women’s quality of life, and this was likely the case in Ancient Rome, as well.
- Many fundamental ideas about gender from Ancient Rome have remained static to this day.

Acknowledgements
- Thank you to my advisor, Professor Stacie Ranucci
- Full thesis and/or references available upon request (raskinn@union.edu)

Presented at Parilla
Shidmore College
April 22 2022