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Writing For Social Justice

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Sexualization of Women and Products

The modern day society that we live in has become so infatuated with the exploitation of women, that businesses tend to thrive off of misrepresentation in malicious forms. In the modeling industry, men and women are forced to live unhealthy lifestyles in order to make a career for themselves. Women are morphed into sexualized creatures that become focused on specific parts of their bodies, all while broadcasting sex, money and power. The images that are displayed in front of adolescents in our society, often bring them to the conclusion that if they don’t conform themselves to a similar appearance, then they will not succeed in our modern world. From personal experience, I can state that this is one of the leading causes of depression, eating disorders, and low self-esteem. Within every day endeavors, young girls are exposed to early sexual conclusions made in the places of which are supposed to be the most innocent, such as television, dolls, social media, and ads. This tends to be a result of consumerism and business attempts to make profit.

The biggest problem media expectations force up on young girls (ranging between teenager and young adults) is the effect that it has on the younger generations to come. By forcing young girls to believe that they should devote more time to focusing on looks and feedback from others, than giving more time to schoolwork and wisdom, it causes a backlash of value from the students for the importance of schoolwork and general logic. It can also take away from the validity of some school processes where there is more importance stressed for young girls to focus more attention to receive the scrutiny from their actions or provocativeness, rather than schoolwork and the learning process that should be followed in school.

During a case study in London, England, it was made apparent during a social media experiment that younger girls often post on social media bragging about or related to sexual actions. One fourteen year old girl by the name of Natalia, has chosen the public domain as ‘Slut <Na- Na- Nataliaaaa>’; and her tagline was: ‘AЧЧЧЧЄЄЄЄЄ ..♥ ‘Hi Im Natalia And ii Like It UpThe Bum... Just Like Your Mum! And I Suck Dick for £5’ (Renold, E., and J. Ringrose 396). This young girl willingly referred to herself as a slut. This demonstrates the increasing lack of concern shown for the display of self-worth.

The case study next went on to find the results of another young woman named Tori. She made her background to be the playboy bunny logo, being fully aware of what this symbol is condoning. The dynamic that Tori creates has been thought of as where childishness in young girls is often eroticized, and on the contrary older women are infantilized, often shown in Playboy spreads wearing nothing while holding a teddy bear. It is extremely important to acknowledge the feminist movement to empower women rather than watching them becomes oppressed; the pornography industry does just the opposite. The pornography industry illicitly endorses the 20th century ideologies for self worth and the conventional exploitation, and thus almost obliterating the feminist agenda (Renold, E., and J. Ringrose 397).

Jean Kilbourne’s “Killing Us Softly 4” provided an insight to the often sights in today’s current media. It offers a wide variety of problems and issues that not only models face, but also the average women finds herself handling on a daily basis. Often times, women fall into the “media cult trap” of the belief of which you must present yourself to men as objects (Jean Killbourne 4). This man-made oppression leads to depression, eating disorders, and low self-esteem. Speaking first hand with this topic, growing up I saw three of my best friends suffer from depression, two of them ending up in the hospital due to an attempt to kill themselves. This being said, I can back up the statement that growing up in a society where certain physical attributes are valued more than knowledge, this is an often occurrence. Seeing close friends suffer from the actions made by a society, that of which is the most advanced in recorded history, yet we end up suffering from man made diseases.

Society creates stereotypes to exemplify what is acceptable or often showing what is well liked by the most people, generally people want to have a lot of friends, to be liked. To achieve those certain standards often demands people to act in unhealthy ways and thus resulting in doing things to achieve these unrealistic standards. Nearly 24 million people in the United States alone have an eating disorder, these include bulimia, anorexia, and binge eating disorders. Eating disorders are caused by “a complex combination of factors, including genetic, biochemical, psychological, cultural and environmental,” (www.ulifeline.org). The last two causes listed are the most important, because those are the ones that can be controlled. Controlled settings should not be formulated to cause disorders upon people. These two things (cultural and environmental) can be altered by the people whom participate in both of these settings can change the way it effects people.

I have stressed how important it is to acknowledge the way that current media and modeling expectations are imposed upon people, but not to be misunderstood, I believe that it is your choice to make your body look the way you want it to as long as you are doing it in a healthy way. There is a clear difference between being healthy, and being skinny. Being skinny can be compared to the women in the magazines that have literally starved themselves to fit into a size double zero. And on top of this, the many steps that are taken to photo shop after the pictures have been taken, is innumerable. But, above all these statements, being healthy should make people happy. The positive outcomes of being healthy are along the lines of treating your body the way it should be treated, and thus in return will bring good outcomes. Not only are you providing your body with the nutrients that you need, but by exercising you are releasing a certain bodily chemical by the name of endorphin, which causes your body to be happy. Being healthy is one of the best things you can do for your body, both physically and mentally.

Besides the significance of good health and being happy, I find it important to bring to attention how the media portrays products. While using various types of strategies, some physical things that messages are placed upon are things such as billboards, ads on TV, or magazines. These three things alone can get a message out to an enormous amount of people. The images that they portray within these forms of advertisements can include very many things. The most notorious attention grabber is sex. Sex is one of the few things that can be brought into play in any form of advertisements.

Bringing sex into advertisements is powerful because it leads young girls to also believe that they should be portraying this image, and causes them to dress and act provocatively at a young age. When advertisement companies paint the image that women can be used as billboards, by nature it links sex and products. Linking sex and products is a strange thing to do, because by disposition, it links the expectations that the product being advertised will also come with the sex linked to it. This being said, now that products are linked to sex, it brings in a new nature to people that value products more than their partners.

To further endorse the idea that products have become sexualized, an ad directly from a Cheez-it box: “Watch TV with the arm around someone that you love.” This is hinting that you can love a box of Cheez-its more than you could love a partner. The point that this company is attempting to make is by saying that someone would rather watch TV with their arm around a box of Cheez-it’s than a human-being, this proves how much we have linked products to sex. This being said, I believe that this style of advertisement is not effective, and not politically correct.

Women and children in today’s media advertisements are portrayed way too often as an over sexualized objects. Whether the product being shown is food, perfume, clothing, or even alcohol, women are depicted as sexual objects. Some of the most well known clothing companies such as American Apparel, and Dolce & Gabbana have shown interest in the modern day advertisement belief that “sex sells.”

About 8 years ago, this published ad on the left broadcasted a man pinning a young woman to the ground by her wrists with three guys in the background watching this astounding act unfold. The ad was so racy that is was banned in several countries such as Spain and Italy. The woman in this photo appears as if she is purposefully, looking like she might be drugged due to the absence of alertness in her face. Since the perfume cannot be portrayed through advertisements and these media types, the goal of the campaign was not to endorse the perfume, but rather the fulfillment when seeing how these guys react to her, to inflict upon women seeing this ad to buy it.

The next picture worthy of your attention is one published by American Apparel. The product that they are advertising is the unisex button up shirt. As you can notice, the person modeling the shirt is pictured *spreading open a women’s legs*, endorsing the idea that wearing this shirt will lead to an outcome such as this. This ad is completely out of line, and there is no reason to add this part into the advertisement other than to oppress women. The idea that this company is putting into people’s head is that you can wear a simple button up and spreading a girls legs becomes this easy.

The two photographs shown have specifically pointed out one thing that we have learned from our society, which is that women are generally portrayed while engaging in “domestic activities intended to seduce or please heterosexual males.”

There is a young girl by the name of Thylane Loubry Blondeau, whom has posed showing much promiscuity in French Vogue. At the age of 10, she is shown in one picture with no shirt on, while in another she was ‘erotically’ posed on a bed wearing high heels, and a dress. This helps confirm the idea that sexualization of children in our society is growing way too common.

It is safe to assume that childhood is often sexualized, but it is more important to acknowledge one common thing that is found substantial to how a child is raised, which are dolls. Dolls are frequently used for imaginative purposes for young girls and boys to play with and make their own scenarios. In the recent decade or two, dolls are more commonly seen as provocative, having thin waists, a big butt, large breasts, and over emphasized eyes. Most commonly these dolls are known as Barbies, or Bratz. Bratz are the extreme version of Barbies, though the typical Barbie is seen wearing the minimalist of clothes, this has become associated to what our culture defines as the perfect body. This is another example of how common it is enforced into young children’s minds of what standards and general expectations as to what a pretty girl would look like.

Sarah Burge is a fifty-year old from Britain, who is known as a cosmetic surgery proponent because of the fact that she has spent nearly 1 million dollars to undergo surgeries to make her look like a “real life Barbie.” This woman is so infatuated with looking like a Barbie, that this extends to how she chooses to raise her daughters. An instructor from a family familiar pole-dancing class exposed that she enrolled her *seven-year-old* daughter in her class (The Daily Mail). Beyond this disgusting fact, she is quoted saying “Poppy wants a boob job when she is old enough, and what my daughters want, they get.” It is one thing to allow older women to act like this, but to inflict their opinions and actions on their young children is beyond aggravating and goes to prove that our culture has grown to feed into the demanding consumerism economy that forces young girls to debase any ideas of self-worth.

Beyond dolls, it is just as important as our society is just as infatuated with television culture, and social media. “During a study undergone by the Parents Television Council (2010), it paints an even bleaker picture: among the 25 most popular shows for 12-17 year-olds, 86 % of female actors in sexy prime-time scenes are high school age, more depictions of sexual behavior in these shows contain underage teen girls (47 %) than adult women (29 %), and girls in these shows typically display positive or neutral responses to their sexualization.”

Another surprising finding during this experiment is how big of an influence that the environment young girls are raised in. Maternal influence generally played a role in these findings of the religious beliefs, and overall standards that mothers inflicted upon the young girls. The quantitative value of the weekly media consumption by these girls was found to be unrelated to how they self-sexualized themselves, but rather their self-objectification and personal religiosity moderated its effects on the young girls (Starr and Ferguson 2012). “High maternal personal religiosity was both a protective factor and a risk factor based upon girls’ level of media consumption. High media consumption in the presence of high maternal self-objectification or low maternal religiosity puts girls at greater risk for early sexualization.”

Overall, the effect that advertisements in this day and age have on people is unhealthy, and off-putting. The physical consequences that people take to reach these unrealistic expectations such as anorexia, bulimia, and low self-esteem, have been shaped into our societies list of norms. Not only do these negative side effects come hand in hand with present day advertisements, they force relationships to be valued less than they should be, thus causing a standard in our society causing harmful effects upon younger generations (and older.) The consumerism economy that we reside in forces people to devalue their self-worth, in the same way that when physical attributions are paid more attention to, general knowledge become worthless. The oppression that is caused by the consumerism economy makes us believe that we are not worthy of others love but rather becoming selfish in wanting all the attention from products, and exploitation of women.

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