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# Sexual Objectification of Female Bodies in Beauty Pageants, Pornography, and Media

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# Sexual Objectification of Female Bodies in Beauty Pageants, Pornography, and Media

“All women live in sexual objectification the way fish live in water.”

(MacKinnon, 1989)

*Have you ever watched a beauty pageant contest? What about mainstream pornography? These two capitalistic industries continue to enforce the misogynistic view that the female body is to be consumed by the male population. I argue that the societal standards we commonly consider to be the norm affect female embodiment and what it means to be a woman in contemporary society. Beauty standards, gender roles, sexualization, objectification, and the male gaze all point towards this ideology that the female body is to be consumed by men. I argue we need to abandon these societal standards that control female bodies and behaviors in a heteropatriarchal world and advocate freedom from the male gaze for all women.*

## Introduction

In an effort to improve the way the female body is viewed, my essay examines the ways pageantry and pornography (porn) uphold the misogynistic view that women are sexual objects to be consumed by men. Both industries continue to enforce patriarchal

ideologies upon members of our society. Men are viewed as strong, powerful, and full of intellect, while women are seen as inferior, weak, obedient, and submissive to men. These cultural ideologies still exist in the twenty-first century and continue to reinforce the belief that women exist to benefit men.

My research asks: How does the production of beauty tie into violence, objectification, and sexualization of the female body within pageantry and pornography? What aspects of pageantry are reflective or parallel to pornography and vice versa? What cultural messages do pageantry and pornography relay to the public? When do we cross the line of separation between selling a product and selling the woman's body? What societal standards are present in both pageantry and pornography that may put the female image at risk in a male-dominated society? These are all questions that I researched by focusing on women's bodies as my centerpiece, while also seeking to understand how the media twists the view of women's bodies.

The history of pageantry serves as a reminder that women's bodies are restricted by the measuring tape and judge's approval of their physicality.

The evolution of pageantry swimsuit contests from a one-piece bathing suit, to a two-piece bathing suit, to a bikini is a perfect example of how society continues to expose and objectify women's bodies. Will swimsuit competitions, as they become increasingly more revealing, continue to undress women until they are naked? What does nakedness mean in the context of beauty pageantry and women's equality?

As more of women's bodies are put on display, women become more vulnerable to society's judgments. Howard Fremont Stratton (1922) states that a pageant was "an evolution of thought, of history, of aspiration, to set before the eyes events of life, and possibilities of art" (p. 208). This statement could not be more opposite to how pageantry is viewed today: The female body, as subject, is the main focal point rather than the focus of her identity as a contestant. Pageantry also allows viewers to experience their sexual fantasies in ways that influence the production of pornography. People within a heteropatriarchal society derive pleasure from watching women parade around in their swimsuits and ball gowns. The "male gaze," a symbol of women's exploitation, is evident in how women pose onstage and look into the

camera (Dow, 2003). It is the seductive look, the one where the woman looks over her shoulder, which we commonly associate with leaning into the “male gaze.” A main focal point for my research is the messages pageantry and pornography broadcast to the public regarding female embodiment and in turn, how women are viewed by society.

### Literature Review

My research focuses on the similarities and parallels between pageantry and heteropatriarchal pornography. I define heteropatriarchy as the norm of being in a male-dominated and heterosexual society (Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers, 2016). Capitalism is profound within both industries that use the female body for profit, whether it is through a national pageant competition aired on television or the consumption of pornography. Mainstream heteropatriarchal pornography, particularly between heterosexual cisgender<sup>10</sup> men and cisgender women, is geared towards providing male sexual pleasure. Erotic advertisements (see Figure 1), images in pornographic magazines, such as Playboy, and erotic films

<sup>10</sup> “Cisgender” or “cis” is defined as an individual’s biological sex aligning with their gender identity (Serano, 2007).

portray women porn actresses as subservient to the dominant male actor.

I analyze the pageant and pornography industries through a radical feminist lens. Radical feminists want to achieve liberation through disrupting patriarchy (Tong, 2014). This framework focuses on the sex and gender oppressions of women. The saying “the personal is political” refers to the theory that women’s experiences and problems are the result of many political and societal oppressions (Hanisch, 1969). This 1960s and 1970s phrase was used as a rally cry by feminists to declare the issues that affected women’s personal lives such as household work, childcare, equality in the workplace, sex, abortion, and appearance (Hanisch, 1969).

Radical feminist theory states that we need to dismantle the patriarchy so that women are not oppressed by society’s



Figure 1. Dolce & Gabbana From "Beauty in the Media," by S. LeComte, n.d. ([beautyinthemedia.weebly.com](http://beautyinthemedia.weebly.com)). In the public domain.

standards of men being superior. Many radical theorists believe that capitalism deems sexuality as a discursion of power (Tong, 2014). Tong discusses that radicals strive to get to the root of sexism in society and believe that there is nothing salvageable in the patriarchal sexist world we live in.

There are two branches in radical feminist thought: Radical libertarian and radical cultural. The radical libertarian philosophy is sex positive, wants equality for all gender identities, and sees pornography and sex work as potentially empowering (Millet, 1969; Firestone, 1971). The radical cultural philosophy is female-centered (without male influence), where sex work is seen as oppressive and is anti-pornography (Daly, 1978).

Mary Daly, a radical cultural feminist, wants to replace androgyny with what she calls the “wild female” (1978), a woman who is beyond masculine and feminine roles. Daly rejects the terms of masculinity and femininity as products of patriarchy and she tells women that they must remain radically apart from men. She, along with many other radical thinkers and legal scholars, like MacKinnon (1989), wanted an end to patriarchy and its’ sexual oppressions (Dworkin, 1981). Radical cultural thinkers, such as Andrea Dworkin

(1981), use MacKinnon’s legal writings on sexual harassment. Women are used as objects and entities in much of the porn industry and are subjugated to violent pleasures and coercions (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). Dworkin (1987) states that men invade and occupy women’s bodies during heterosexual acts, while on the other hand, MacKinnon believes that women in patriarchal societies cannot consent to heterosexual sex.

Within most heterosexual pornographic content, you typically see the woman in a submissive role compared to her male partner. Power dynamics play a huge role in the objectification of women’s bodies because men are seen as superior. The dominant and submissive roles between two consenting partners embrace the powerful-versus-powerless theme seen in mainstream heteropatriarchal pornography. Radical libertarians may view the powerful-versus-powerless roles as empowering for the participating women (Tong, 2014). Radical cultural feminists, on the other hand, see pornography as oppressive because male dominance is still rooted in the industry (Tong, 2014). Carolyn Bronstein (2011) states that anti-pornography feminists believe women who participate in power-versus-

powerlessness sexual behaviors are encouraging female sexual objectification, male domination, and female submissiveness.

Violence towards women can also be seen within Gonzo porn, which is rooted in sexual violence (Dines, 2010). Women in Gonzo porn are violated by enforced gagging, vomiting, or vaginal, oral, and anal penetration all at the same time (Dines, 2010). These acts dehumanize women into instruments used for pleasure. MacKinnon (1989) states, men want “women sexually accessible, have-able, there for them, wanting to be taken and used, with perhaps just a little light bondage” (p. 327). MacKinnon says that any kind of pornographic image is sexualized violence. Her work is not talking about Gonzo porn specifically, but rather helps explain the objectification that we see in advertisements like Dolce & Gabbana plastered across billboards and television screens that marginalize women.

The pageant industry is associated with a male-centered or patriarchal institution of mass media that uses sex and gender oppressions against women. We see this through television shows such as *Toddlers & Tiaras* and the *Miss America Pageant*, streamed live every year. Most women are told that they can

only act, dress, and talk in a feminine way. This is where gender comes into play because pageantry is the ideal feminine lifestyle a woman can pursue. It embraces all three of the ways in which women must perform. Some pageants emphasize fake hair, makeup, skimpy clothing, and thin body as examples of how women present themselves to society within this business. Women should not have to dress provocatively in order to get attention!

I blame our patriarchal society that focuses on objectifying women's sexuality for the purpose of capitalism and the benefit of men. We see this when women model in pageants to compete in the beauty industry while men are told to be breadwinners and compete intellectually in the workforce. We can also see how capitalism benefits from women being submissive in relation to porn films through the amount of profit the United States pornography industry generates, which ranges from \$4 to \$7 billion dollars each year (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). This profit largely privileges white male power. MacKinnon (1989) states that even if women own and agreeably participate in pornography, it is still rooted in patriarchy.

Popular industries of pageantry and mainstream pornography have control over what cultural misogynistic messages they produce. By viewing societal influences through a patriarchal lens, we can see the pressures that women conform to or abide by in order to fit in our male-dominated society. Such factors include the standards of beauty, gender roles (Ferree & Wade, 2015), the “male gaze,” sexualization, objectification, and male pleasure. I next explain how these factors exist within both pageants and pornography and how the female body is used for profit.

The link between pornography and violence is what many feminists want to publicize. The subordinating porn practices lead to inequality among genders, classes, races and sexualities in our society (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). In my research, I identify the term “violence” to mean negative views and criticisms of the female body as a result of following societal standards. Pertaining to films and porn images (advertisements) serving as a form of patriarchy and sex and gender oppression towards women, women are seen as submissive to men. Most pornography between a cisgender man and a cisgender woman deems women as the objects men must acquire in

order to reach full satisfaction or pleasure because most pornography is produced by men, bought by men, used by men, and made primarily for the benefit of men (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). According to Robert Jensen (1998), ignoring what privilege means is the ultimate privilege. Men are ignorant to their superiority in society; therefore, in porn, men have a compulsion to dominate women.

Carolyn Bronstein (2011) describes the anti-pornography movement and its focus on the oppression women felt under male sexual power. During the 1976 to 1986 anti-pornography movement, radical libertarian pro-sex feminism focused on sexual freedom for women by encouraging them to discuss pleasure, sexual desires, and lust (Bronstein, 2011). The Barnard Conference of 1982 provided the opportunity for pro-sex women to talk about their theory and voice their opinions on a national scale, but it also caused uproar by the anti-pornography feminists who were not invited to the conference (Bronstein, 2011). Anti-pornography feminists protested the *Diary*, a booklet representing the conference proceedings, and they stood outside the conference location distributing their own pamphlets, claiming the conference only

represented a portion of the feminist views on sexuality (Bronstein, 2011). This conference started the “sex wars”, the divide between sex positive and anti-sex women of the 1980s, but it also opened up the discussion on female sexuality and challenged the anti-pornography debate on sexuality, making it more complex (Bronstein, 2011). The history of radical libertarians and radical cultural feminists influence the ways pornography is viewed in contemporary society.

There are social pressures that women endure relating to the perfection of body image. Many women are conditioned to not recognize the societal pressures that are enforced upon them. For example, if a woman is overweight, she is fat-shamed and deemed unattractive and unacceptable in society. Capitalism plays a part in fat-shaming because women will buy makeup, surgically alter their bodies, and change their physical appearances to be seen as attractive. We should not be putting restrictions on bodies. Each individual should be accepted for who they are, not how they look. Society needs to be aware of how women are affected within the capitalistic industries of pageantry and pornography that profit off of female embodiment.

Feminist research recognizes the pageantry or pornography aspect of mass media (Bronstein, 2011; Dworkin, 1981). Many feminist scholars continually express their dislike with the use of female bodies as sexualized objects in ways that benefit men’s desires (Hester, 2014; MacKinnon, 1989; Valenti, 2016). Patriarchal views affect women’s body image and the future of female sexuality (Dines, Jensen, Russo, 1998; Valenti, 2016). The messages regarding the female body and experience, particularly as an entity for men, ultimately provide insight into if and how such portrayals may serve as an oppressing force to young girls and women in contemporary culture.

### **Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall**

As a woman in twenty-first century society, I am subjected to the ways young girls and women are expected to act, talk, look, and so on. According to Jessica Valenti (2008),

We see images of unattainable beauty norms everywhere -- in magazines, television, advertisements, movies, you name it. All touting the same image of what’s supposed to be an attractive woman: white, thin, blond (usually), big boobs, the whole package (p. 30).



Beauty standards make young girls and women think they must conform to characteristics of whiteness, thinness, and attractiveness. Women are constantly told that they have to be thin but also have curves with a big bust. Beauty expectations have

... become so normalized! Oh, don't like your tits? Shove some new ones in there! Hate your nose? Cut it off. Feeling chubby? Suck that fat out! You don't actually *want* that vagina, do you? Trim trim (Valenti, 2007, p. 211).

Women have to stop hating their bodies, because if they do, it will be a revolutionary act in itself (Valenti, 2007).

Women in pornography and pageantry are thin; they are taking up less space. This represents less power, agency, and voice. The way we understand beauty is racialized in the ways that beauty is ascribed to middle/upper class white women, and how capitalism then markets and reproduces this beauty to the white female population. Images of beauty focus on the ideal woman as having light skin. This affects what women and society perceive to be "beautiful".

What is the true definition of beauty anyway? The representation of what it means to be "beautiful" evolves as society progresses. The history of

pageantry serves as a reminder that women's bodies are restricted by the measuring tape and the judge's approval of their physicality. Although there are competitions based on other forms of talent, the overarching message is the female body being judged on physical looks. According to young boys, there are six different types of "girl": The cute girl, the pretty girl, the hot girl, the sexy girl, the fat girl, and the ugly girl (Valenti, 2016). After I read this statement in Valenti's *Sex Object: A Memoir* (2016), I found myself asking the question: Who/what determines if a girl is considered "ugly?" My answer: Society, patriarchy, and capitalism.

Within both pageantry and pornography there are set standards that women have to meet in order even to be considered a possible participant. Some examples may include being white, having a thin waistline, and performing heterosexuality. These characteristics represent the "ideal" woman, which has been the pattern for decades.

Women should be taught to value their intelligence, abilities, etc., instead of just valuing themselves for looking hot in a bikini and making themselves available to men (Valenti, 2007). In most pageants, women are valued for their beauty and physical appearances

above all else, while the male population watches on and “gazes” at the exposed female bodies. It is not very often that we see heavier women taking part in a mainstream porn film or being plastered across *Playboy* magazine. While you can see that pageantry enforces beauty standards upon the contestants very clearly, pornography does the same with actresses who take part in sexual acts. Heteropatriarchal pornography industries focus on the use of heterosexual intercourse to achieve male pleasure at the expense of female sexuality (O’Callaghan, 2017).

Female bodies are utilized for profit within the advertising industry, plastering their bodies in advertisements in a sexual way to draw in consumers. Rebecca Coleman (2008) points out that bodies are not separate from the media, but rather, are understood through the images displayed to its audience. In other words, consumers understand and experience female bodies through the advertisements portrayed to them. Many advertisements can be seen as erotic or pornographic to the young adult eye. Some examples include Dolce & Gabbana, Suit Supply, Tom Ford, and other similar fashion brands sold to women (see Figures 1-10). My research



Figure 2: Tom Ford. From "Controversial Campaigns: 9 Banned NSFW Fashion Ads You Probably Shouldn't See," by M. Stempien, 2015 (<http://www.askmen.com/entertainment/galleries/tom-ford-for-men-2.html>) In the public domain.



Figure 3. American Apparel. From "Rape culture," by the Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness, n.d. ([stoprelationshipabuse.org/educated/rape-culture/](http://stoprelationshipabuse.org/educated/rape-culture/)). In the public domain.



Figure 4: Axe. From "Rage against the media, not against ourselves," by V. Rodriguez, 2014 ([womenandmediafa2014.blogspot.com/2014/10/rage-against-media-not-against-ourselves.html](http://womenandmediafa2014.blogspot.com/2014/10/rage-against-media-not-against-ourselves.html)). In the public domain.



Figure 5: Budweiser. From "Objectifying Women in Beer Advertisements," by Timali and Haya, 2013 (<https://sheisnotathing.wordpress.com/2013/11/01/objectifying-women-in-beer-advertisements/>). In the public domain.



Figure 6: Calvin Klein. From "Sexual assault counselor asks: Why is it OK to use sexual violence as a marketing tool?" by M. Tankard Reist, 2010 ([melindatankardreist.com/2010/10/sexual-assault-counsellor-asks-why-is-it-ok-to-use-sexual-violence-as-a-marketing-tool/](http://melindatankardreist.com/2010/10/sexual-assault-counsellor-asks-why-is-it-ok-to-use-sexual-violence-as-a-marketing-tool/)). In the public domain.



Figure 7: Kit Kat. From "I don't believe this is an official Kit Kat ad (nsfw-ish)," by M. Copyranter, 2012 ([copyranter.blogspot.com/2012/03/i-dont-believe-this-is-official-kit-kat.html](http://copyranter.blogspot.com/2012/03/i-dont-believe-this-is-official-kit-kat.html)). In the public domain.

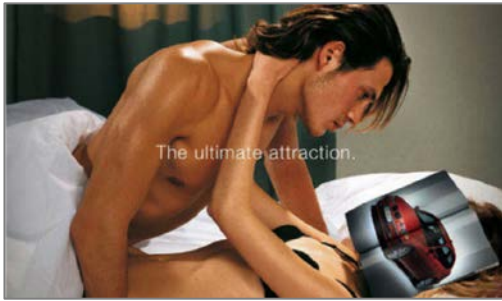


Figure 8. BMW. From "An 'Easy' Ride," by octobersveryown, 2016 ([newsactivist.com/fr/node/11508](http://newsactivist.com/fr/node/11508)). In the public domain.

is interested in whether these advertisements serve as a form of pornography while also relating to pageantry in the way advertisers use the female body. The majority of the advertisements I look at portray white women who display the thinness ideal. The women have to perform “sexy” in order to sell the product being shown in



Figure 9. Suit Supply. From "Suit Supply shameless ad campaign: Distracting," by G. Hudson , November 1, 2010 [blog]. (<http://opendoor.blogspot.nl/2010/11/suit-supply-shameless-ad-campaign.html>). In the public domain.

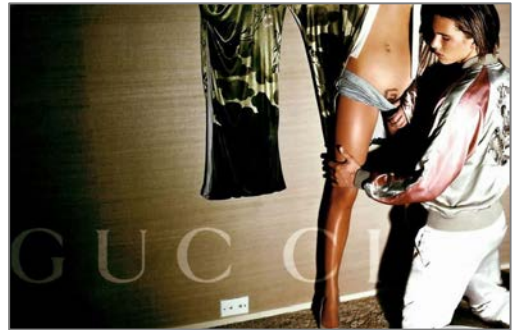


Figure 10. Gucci. From "Fashion Ego," by Fiona, 2016 (<http://contemplatingcatapostrophes.org/fashion-ego/>). In the public domain.

the advertisements, and they serve as tools to bring in capital for the industry.

Although some pageant contestants and onstage performers may experience a boost in self-confidence when they compete, they are still viewed as a “beauty” onstage. Young girls and women are highly judged when performing onstage and it impacts their confidence in themselves and their bodies in negative ways. The portrayal of unattainable media images of women contributes to low self-esteem in young girls and women (Coleman, 2008). Coleman - states that the media serves as a guidebook or a manual on the acceptable appearance of a modern-day woman. Media, whether it is a pageant contest aired on television, an erotic advertisement, or a pornographic film, portrays the acceptable female body.

Any other bodies are deemed ugly, unacceptable, or are shamed and do not fit into society.

It is important to note that many women competitors in pageantry have a positive experience when competing. Some compete in family owned pageants that are more value based, meaning family oriented and focusing on who the contestants are as a person or viewing pageantry as a lifestyle. Competing may give some young girls and women confidence, but at the same time, they are told what to do and how to look. Even though some pageant contestants may like to compete, I examine how they might be unaware of what messages the industry produces to the audience in regards to their bodies.

I am not criticizing girls and women who compete, but rather, the industry's purpose for presenting the contestants in sexual ways. Women in pornography are told how to dress and do their hair and makeup based on what trends and styles are popular during that time. This not only impacts women's self-image, but it also continues to bolster capitalism. Women will also compare their physicality to other women in order to achieve a better image. The age of the contestants is also very important. Miss America contestants have to be in the age range of

approximately seventeen to twenty-four years. This enforces young femininity in the industry and contributes to the image of ideal beauty as young and vulnerable.

### **Undress Me with Your Eyes**

One of the most important aspects to address in a patriarchal society is the "male gaze." Bonnie J. Dow (2003) identifies the male gaze as a societal factor in which women want to be seen as acceptable through the eyes of men. If they are deemed unacceptable because they do not exemplify the ideal version of female embodiment, then they are outside standards. Performing onstage or onscreen is a perfect example of being in a place where your body is judged by outside viewers.

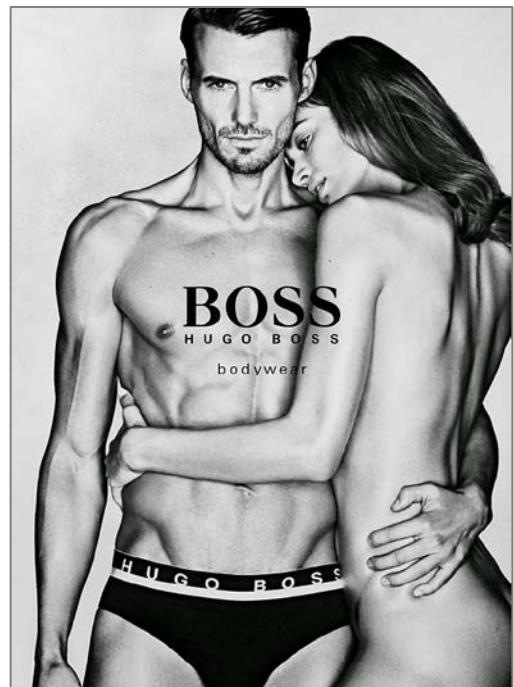
Pageantry, an industry largely focused on swimsuit contests, is a great example of the male gaze when women pose at the end of the runway and look over their shoulder into the camera. This look over the shoulder is symbolic of the male gaze definition and is commonly done so in a sexual manner. My question is: Will the pageants continue to undress female pageant contestants until they are naked? This could happen in the future. We see images of naked women everywhere, without their genitals or nipples

showing, so the next step would be to show these areas. If this did happen, I believe that the meaning of the male gaze would be more focused on female genitalia and breasts, due to the exposure to the audience. This could put female contestants more at risk of being marginalized and sexualized, and opportunities to be anything else would be restricted, as they would be representing a pornographic image.

Many women in our society today do not find erotic advertisements to be appealing. Actually, they find them to be hurtful to their identities as women (Douglas, 1995; Kilbourne, 1999). The models in the advertisements are being portrayed as sexual by nature and depicted as sex objects used to sell products. Why do women have to be sexualized in order to sell a product? The reason: Sex sells. The Tom Ford image (Figure 2) of the naked woman hiding her vagina behind a bottle of men's cologne and holding another bottle of cologne between her breasts, is too revealing and unnecessary, and it could potentially be seen as borderline pornography. What message does this image imply to the public? Women are to be viewed only by men, and this advertisement portrays this with the woman having her legs wide open with an erotic expression on her face. To me,

this advertisement is saying, "Take me!" It is being marketed to men and implies that if men buy this cologne, women will come running to them, wanting to have sex. If advertisements like this are being publicly displayed for all to see, how is this helping or changing the way society looks at women's bodies?

I did some extra digging and found that images of male genitalia is not as



*Figure 11.* Hugo Boss Bodywear. From "Alex Lundqvist Fronts Hugo Boss' Spring/Summer 2013 Bodywear Campaign," by Davide, 2013, ([www.thefashionisto.com/alex-lundqvist-fronts-hugo-boss-springsummer-2013-bodywear-campaign/](http://www.thefashionisto.com/alex-lundqvist-fronts-hugo-boss-springsummer-2013-bodywear-campaign/)). In the public domain.

highly exposed to viewers as compared to female genitalia. In mainstream media, the male genitalia is covered by an object or not fully exposed, unlike the Tom Ford advertisement that just barely covers the woman's vagina and breasts. In many advertisements with men scantily clothed (only boxers worn), women are usually present and even more undressed and sexualized (Figure 11). The media continues to produce the message that women's bodies are for the consumption and touch of men, which upholds the misogynistic view that women are for men only.

Girls as young as five, such as the girls on the television reality series *Toddler's & Tiaras*, worry about their physical appearance and how to act sexy (Palmer, 2013). Again, there is that male gaze factor playing into how a young girl has to act in order to attract a man's attention. A five-year-old should not be worrying about how to act in a sexual manner in order to grab the attention of the audience. For example, "A two-year-old named Ava is told to mime taking off her clothes and to 'shaky shaky' by her father while on stage" (Palmer, 2013, p. 133). The reality television show makes young girls look older (see Figure 12), while in pornography the women look younger.



Figure 12. *Toddler's & Tiaras*. From "TLC's *Toddler's and Tiaras*: Way Too Much or Just Enough?," by C. Parish, 2014, ([tvcriticism2014.blogspot.com/2014/05/tlc-s-toddler-s-and-tiaras-way-too-much.html](http://tvcriticism2014.blogspot.com/2014/05/tlc-s-toddler-s-and-tiaras-way-too-much.html)).

In the public domain.

Both industries, in different ways, enforce the young-woman-in-her-twenties look.

*Toddler's & Tiaras* is negatively impacting the way society views young female bodies and could possibly lead to an increase in child pedophilia. Christine Tamer (2011) supports this argument, writing,

A government official in Thailand recently ordered the removal of the swimsuit category from a child beauty pageant because such a ‘contest could stir sexual fantasies in some audience members while others might be tempted to have sex with a child prostitute’ (p. 87).

She explains that many countries outside the United States fear American child pageants and the “glitz” factor (Tamer, 2011). The girls who participate in the reality television show *Toddlers & Tiaras* believe that when they have their physical appearances altered or changed, they become more “beautiful” and valuable to the audience (Palmer, 2013). The male gaze supports patriarchal capitalism because society profits from young girls’ and women’s interests in wanting to look beautiful or acceptable in the eyes of the judge and audience.

### **Male Pleasure**

Sexualization and objectification are two major concepts to consider when discussing the patriarchal lens through which women are viewed. Sexualization is making something sexual in nature or character. For example, women are sexualized because of their bodies; typically, their breasts and vaginas are the focal points. Objectification is similar but this deems someone or

something as an object. There has been research reported on the history of bathing suit competitions in pageantry. Scholars Howard F. Stratton (1992) and David Glassberg (1990) studied bathing suits in pageantry and how they started from a one-piece and over decades evolved into a bikini. Society continues to expose female bodies for capital. Addressing the nakedness concern about pageant contestants, what would nakedness mean in the context of beauty pageantry and women’s equality?

Pageantry and pornography allow men in the audience to experience sexual fantasies, whether it be watching *Toddlers & Tiaras* on television, *Miss America* live in person, or an adult film at home. Men can start to blur reality and fantasy as a result of pornography. For example, a man is having sex with a woman while fantasizing about another woman in a pornographic film that he watched earlier (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). Some men even watch pornography while performing the same act on the woman they are having sex with (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). Can men get erections just by viewing pageantry? I absolutely think they can. Valenti (2016) stated that in her own encounters she has noticed men taking pictures of a woman’s bare back when it is exposed to use later for



their own pleasure. This relates to pageantry in how anyone can view the women's bodies onstage. The bathing suit contests make it very easy for men to fantasize about the contestant's bodies due to large amounts of skin showing and the suit highlighting the female figure.

Catharine MacKinnon (1989) states, "It is to argue that the excitement at reduction of a person to a thing, to less than a human being, as socially defined, is its fundamental motive force [sex]" (p. 130). MacKinnon and Dworkin (1981) both contributed to this argument by saying that porn is sexually discriminatory towards women. MacKinnon states, "It constructs women as things for sexual use and constructs its consumers to desperately want women to desperately want possession and cruelty and dehumanization" (p. 327). Women are viewed by the pornography producers as objects and entities to be sexually violated by the male actors. This sets the stage for sexual harassment, rape, or violence against women (Bronstein, 2011). On the other hand, are women being "raped" if they are only involved in the porn industry for the money? Can women give consent if they participate in pornography? MacKinnon believes that women are not able to give

sexual consent, and therefore, pornography promotes rape situations. If a woman agrees to engage in a specific sexual act, then yes, it is consensual. But if a woman agrees to be an actress in a porn film without knowing what type of acts she will have to endure, then that is not consent. An example that would support MacKinnon's argument would be Gonzo porn. This type of porn is rooted in severe violence and causes harm to the female body physically and mentally (Dines, 2010). This further implies the false ideology that women are not human; therefore, they can be violated.

I am not criticizing the sex acts that are pleasurable to some porn actresses. I am looking at how pornography could potentially hurt the involved women, whether physically or how women are viewed by society as objects. Just like bell hooks (2014) wanted feminist theory to be accessible to everyone, I want people to be aware of what feminist equality means and the potential exploitation pageantry and pornography introduce. I want people to be familiar with what it means to be a woman in society and why gender equality is crucial. If women are denied viable education and employment, then consent to engage in pornography is

coerced by a patriarchal market that legitimizes the work of men as part of capitalistic production. So capitalism does, in many ways, create a sex class where women are relegated to service work in which sex work and pageantry are a part. This relates to how MacKinnon (1989) states that sex is forced upon women and they have no choice when it comes to engaging in sexual activities when the pornographer tells women what to do in order to please the male actors. If a woman does not have the viable resources to provide for herself, she may be forced into doing pornographic acts that she does not wish to.

### **Conclusion**

Within pageantry and pornography, gender roles set standards that women must follow in order to be considered as a contestant or porn actress. In both industries, women are told to embrace their femininity, whether it be acting out their heterosexuality on camera or physically representing it in pageantry. The male gaze ties into power dynamics because within pageants and pornography women perform to be accepted as attractive enough to pleasure a man or beautiful enough to move forward to the next round. The women on stage represent the ideal

vision of femininity that includes wearing heels, having fabulous hair, elaborate gowns, and makeup. While pageantry focuses on the physicality of women's bodies, pornography focuses on the dominant and submissive roles played by the male actor and female actress that lead to power-versus-powerlessness relationships. A woman's purpose is restricted and confined to an object for male consumption in both industries. This is what Dworkin (1981) and MacKinnon (1989) object to. Other feminist scholars like Gail Dines (1998), Robert Jensen (1998), and Susan Douglas (2010) also view this as objectionable.

Pornography is a great example of the portrayal of masculine and feminine gender roles. Pornography between two heterosexual individuals is geared towards providing male pleasure. By watching porn, young boys can learn about sex and sexuality, which reinforces the oppressive view of women (Dines, 2010). Power dynamics play a role in the objectification of women. Gayle Letherby (2007) states,

Women are considered naturally weak and easy to exploit and, as the subordinate sex, women's psychological characteristics imply subordination – i.e., they are submissive, passive, docile,

dependent, lack initiative, are not able to act, to decide, to think and so on (p. 23).

Within most pornographic content involving a cisman and ciswoman, you typically see the woman in a very submissive role compared to the male actor. Dines (1998, 2010) and Jensen (1998) discuss how these gender roles can be detrimental and can lead to harsh sexual acts committed by the male actor. Bronstein (2011) supports their argument by stating that anti-pornography supporters focus on the oppression of women by patriarchy and the continuous rise of sexual violence that ensures the domination of male power and female exploitation. These masculine and feminine gender roles are programmed and so ingrained in our society based on sex that it is hard for women to escape these social constructions.

Overwhelmingly, women in erotic advertisements are being overpowered and submissive to the men in the images. These two distinct roles have defined women's position to men and continue to imply that women are second-class in society. The women are

put in vulnerable positions. For example, the American Apparel image (Figure 3) shows a woman with her legs wide open. The woman looks sad and distraught. These kind of erotic advertisements enforce the message that women are for men, for the man to take, and the image implies a rape scene. The gender roles and power dynamics society prescribes to men and women tell women to be obedient, submissive, and weak, while men are expected to be smart, the breadwinner, strong, aggressive, and dominant.

The pageant and pornography industries have no right to tell women how to be beautiful, how thin of a waistline they must have, how they have to be obedient and submissive to the male gaze, or how using their bodies to produce capitalism is positive. Although there is no sexual contact within the pageant industry, there is a connection in how pageantry and pornography interrelate in regards to sex and gender oppressions enforced upon women's bodies, turning them into an object of oblivion.

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