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Pageantry to Pornography: Gazing at and Selling Female Bodies

Kelsey Wright
kwrig6@u.brockport.edu

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Pageantry to Pornography:
Gazing at and Selling Female Bodies

A Senior Honors Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For Graduation in the Honors College

By
Kelsey Wright
Women and Gender Studies Major

The College at Brockport
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Thesis Director: Dr. Barbara LeSavoy, Director, Women and Gender Studies

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Abstract

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

(Catharine 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 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. Pageantry and pornography only continue to enforce this ideology as the two industries flourish off the femininity of the contestants and actresses. In this paper I argue, we need to abandon these societal standards that control female bodies and behaviors in a heteropatriarchal world. I want to advocate freedom from the “male gaze” for all women.

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Introduction

In an effort to improve the way the female body is viewed, my study looks at how pageantry and pornography (porn) both uphold misogynistic views that women are sexual objects to be consumed by men. The pageantry and pornography 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 all men. These cultural ideals still exist in the twenty-first century and continue to reinforce the societal pressures that women were created for male benefit.

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 produce to the public? When do we cross the line of separation between selling a product and selling the female 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 the female body as my centerpiece, while also understanding how the media twists information regarding women's bodies. Within pageantry, the female body is viewed as an object to produce male pleasure through the "male gaze." In most heterosexual pornography, women are subjected to sexual acts that deem the male porn star to be dominant and in power, making the women a submissive subject. These two popular industries contribute to the ongoing battle of what it means to be a woman in our society.

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 suit, to a two piece, to a bikini is a perfect example of how society

continues to expose more and more of the female body in ways that look at them as capital. Will the swimsuit competitions, as they become increasingly more revealing, continue to undress the women until their naked? What does nakedness mean in the context of beauty pageantry and women's equality? As more of the female body is put on display, women become more vulnerable to society's judgements. 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 ballgowns. The "male gaze," a symbol of women's exploitation, is evident in how women pose onstage and look into the camera. It is the seductive look, the one where the woman looks over her shoulder, that we commonly associate with leaning into the "male gaze."

Although there is much written on the two industries as separate businesses, I have noticed that no feminist scholar talks about the correlation between the pageantry and pornography industries. Therefore, I wanted to compare them to see if pageantry could be seen as pornographic by the audience. To begin, I interviewed one pageant contestant, Isabella, and one dance competitor, Bethany, about their experiences with performing onstage.¹ I chose to interview Isabella because she was able to provide insight into the pageant industry and how female bodies are utilized or experienced by the audience. As a dancer, Bethany gave me an interesting perspective about performing onstage where the female body is as much the focal point as it is in

¹ Pseudonyms so participants remain anonymous.

pageants. For the second part of my research, I administered a survey to an Introduction to Women and Gender Studies class at a public university. This survey included ten erotic advertisements, where the female body is being used for profit, and six follow-up questions about these advertisements to gain a sense of the participants' opinions about the popular images. The goal of this part of my research is to see what messages young adults read into and take from these advertisements, and to assess whether those messages might be detrimental to female embodiment. I will refer back to both of these studies as they relate and integrate into my discussion.

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 consumption of pornography. Mainstream heteropatriarchal pornography, particularly between heterosexual cisgender² men and cisgender women, is geared towards providing male pleasure. Erotic advertisements (Dolce & Gabbana), images in pornographic magazines (*Playboy*), and erotic films portray women porn actresses are subservient to the dominant male actor. I will 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 sex and gender oppressions against women. The saying “the personal is political” states 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 rallying cry

² Cisgender” or “cis” is defined as an individual’s biological sex aligning with their gender identity (Serano, 2007).

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 patriarchy, so women are not oppressed by society's standards of men being superior. Many radical theorists believe that capitalism deems sexuality as a discussion of power (Tong, 2014). Tong (2014) 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. Radical libertarian thought (Millet, 1969; Firestone, 1971 as examples) is sex positive, wants the best of all gender identities, and see pornography and sex work as potentially powerful. Radical cultural thought (Daly, 1978) is a female-centered only space (without male influence), where sex work is seen as oppressive and is anti-pornography because of this. Mary Daly (1978), a radical cultural feminist, wants to replace androgyny with what she calls the "wild female," a woman who is beyond masculine and feminine roles. Daly (1978) 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 (Dworkin, 1981) and legal scholars, like MacKinnon (1989), wanted an end to patriarchy and its sexual harassment. Radical cultural thinkers, such as Andrea Dworkin (1981), use MacKinnon's work.

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 in ordinary heterosexual acts, while on the other hand, MacKinnon (1987) believes that women in patriarchal spaces are coerced into consensual sex. Within most heterosexual pornographic content, you typically see the woman in a very 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. Powerplay, usually defined by dominant and submissive roles between two consenting partners, embraces the powerful versus powerless theme seen in mainstream heteropatriarchal pornography. Radical libertarians may view powerplay as potentially powerful for women in those sexual situations (Tong, 2014). Radical cultural feminists, on the other hand, see sex work as oppressive because male dominance is still rooted in the industry (Tong, 2014). Carolyn Bronstein (2011) states that anti-pornography feminists believe that 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 pornographic 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 to instruments used for pleasure. Catharine 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 (1989) says that any kind of pornographic image is violence sexualized. 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. Both pageantry and pornography are controlled by male patriarchy and have the potential to marginalize women.

The pageant industry is often times associated with a male-centered or patriarchal institution, the 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. The downfall of being rooted in a patriarchal space is that society enforces sex and

gender oppressions upon women. 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 because it embraces all three of these 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, but not all pageants present this. Women should not have to dress provocatively like that in order to get attention! I blame our patriarchal society that focuses on objectifying women's sexuality for the purpose of capitalism and benefit of the men. We see this in how women are modeling the pageant stages to compete in beauty, while men are told to be the breadwinners and are competing in intellect out in the workforce. We can also see how capitalism benefits from women being submissive in relation to porn films through the amount of profit generated, which range from \$4 to \$7 billion each year in the United States for the pornography industries (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). And this profit largely privileges white male power. The pornography industry is very profit driven and it resembles a "support the owner" space. MacKinnon (1989) states that even if pornography is female owned or women agreeably participate, it is still rooted in patriarchy.

Popular industries of pageantry and mainstream pornography have a big influence on 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 beauty standards, gender roles, the "male gaze," sexualization, objectification, and the meaning of male pleasure. I 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 show to the public; the subordinating porn practices lead to inequality among genders, classes, and sexualities in our

society (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). In doing my research, I identified the term “violence” to mean negative views and criticisms of the female body as a result of following societal standards.

The pornography industry props up patriarchal superiority. Pertaining to the films serving as a form of patriarchy and sex and gender oppression towards women, women are oftentimes seen as submissive to men within porn images (advertisements) or films. 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). As Robert Jensen (1998) says, ignoring what privilege means is the ultimate privilege. Men ignore seeing themselves as superior to women, which means that in the porn industry, it is first nature that the male must dominate the female.

Carolyn Bronstein (2011) describes the anti-pornography movement’s focus on the oppression women felt under male sexual power. During the 1976 to 1986 anti-pornography movement, pro-sex feminism was focusing on the freedom of sex for women by encouraging them to discuss pleasure, sexual desires, and lust (Bronstein, 2011). Radical libertarians rose up and argued for women’s sexual freedoms and freedom of expression. The Barnard Conference of 1982 provided the opportunity for pro-sex women to talk about their theory and voices on a national scale, but it also caused an uproar because anti-pornography feminists were not invited to the conference and they too had feminist views on sex (Bronstein, 2011). Anti-pornography feminists protested the *Diary*, a booklet representing the conference, and stood outside the conference location distributing pamphlets of their own claiming the conference only represented a portion of feminist views on sexuality (Bronstein, 2011). This conference started the sex wars, the divide between sex positive and anti-sex of 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). This relates to the view that many anti-pornography groups (MacKinnon, 1989; Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998) have upon the industry that they say is rooted in patriarchal ways, leaving the women in vulnerable and submissive spaces. This also connects to the radical cultural view that sex work and pornography are oppressive towards women.

There are social pressures that women endure relating to perfection in body image. My research deconstructs the issues associated with pageant and pornography industries and how these issues impact the female population directly. The study portrays female embodiment by putting into perspective the oppressions of everyday women. Many women are oblivious to the societal pressures that are enforced upon them and deemed acceptable in modern society. Women are programmed not to recognize them. For example, if a woman is overweight, she is fat shamed and deemed as unattractive and unacceptable in society. This is unacceptable, as every woman's body is different. Capitalism plays a part in fat shaming because women will buy makeup, get procedures done to alter their bodies, and change their physical appearances to be seen as attractive by others. We should not be putting restrictions on bodies because not everyone is the same and each individual should be accepted for who they are, not how they look. This is the reasoning behind my study: people need to be aware of how women are affected within the capitalistic industries of pageantry and pornography that profit off of female embodiment.

Feminist research has recognized the pageantry or pornography aspect of mass media (Bronstein, 2011; Dworkin, 1981). I want to know "In what ways do pageantry and porn relate?" Many feminist scholars (Hester, 2014; MacKinnon, 1989; Valenti, 2016) continually express their dislike with the use of female bodies as sexualized objects in ways that benefit men's desires. Patriarchal views affect women's body image and the future outlook on female sexuality as a

whole (Dines, Jensen, Russo, 1998; Valenti, 2016). The messages regarding the female body and experience, particularly as an entity for men, ultimately provide an insight into an assessment of if and how such portrayals may serve as an oppressing force to young girls and women in contemporary culture. So how close do pageantry and pornography lie in relation to each other, and what societal standards are parallel to both industries? I take these two questions into consideration and focus upon criticism aimed towards the pageant and pornographic industries. Importantly, from the moment women perform onstage and the moment men consume their bodies, when do we cross the line and start seeing pageantry as pornography?

Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall

As a female in twenty-first century society, I have become subjected to the societal ideologies that young girls and women are expected to obey and taught to think it is the “normal” way to look, act, talk, etc. 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). These distort a woman’s body while she changes to be acceptable in society’s eyes. Women have to stop hating their bodies because if they do it will be a revolutionary act in itself (Valenti 2007). As we can see women on pornography or in pageantry as thin, white women, it is also women taking up less space. This represents less power, agency, and voice. The

equation becomes racialized in ways we understand beauty as middle/upper class white women and how capitalism markets and reproduces this beauty to a white female population. Images of beauty focus on the ideal woman as being light skinned and this affects what women and society perceive to be “beautiful.”

What is the true definition of beauty anyway? I believe that the representation of what it means to be “beautiful” is always changing as society changes over the years. 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 talent, the overarching message is the female body being judged on her 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). These distinctions are primarily judged upon physical appearance and what the eyes see. 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 have to be set standards that female contestants or actresses have to meet in order to even be considered a possible participant. Some examples may include being white, having a thin waistline, and representing heterosexuality. These characteristics represent the “ideal” woman in our present society and this has been the pattern for decades. Moreover, women involved in these competitions are there to be judged majorly on their physical appearances rather than their intellect. For the most part, the pageant industry tells women to be beautiful, but does it ask them to be smart? Alison Jaggar (1983), along with many other feminist scholars (Douglas, 1995; Kreydatus, 2008; Valenti 2007) explain that

women's bodies are emphasized over their minds. Again, for the most part, using a societal lens, beauty defines a woman, not her intellectual capabilities.

Women need to value their intelligence, abilities, etc., instead of 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. On the other hand, mainstream pornography also portrays this beauty ideal because it largely represents thin, white women: this is deemed attractive (Russell, 1998). It is not very often that we see a heavier woman taking part in a mainstream porn film or being plastered across *Playboy* magazine. Similarly, the majority of contestants within pageants represent the cis woman who is fair skinned and thin. Heteropatriarchal pornography industries focus on the use of heterosexual intercourse to achieve male pleasure at the expense of female sexuality (O’Callaghan, 2017). Pageantry can be seen as heterosexist in ways that relate to heteropatriarchal porn industries through the ways the women onstage are consumed by men. Pageantry in the United States is frequently young, white women performing their sexuality the same way that pornography capitalizes on this same image (Watson & Martin, 2004). While you can see that pageantry enforces beauty standards upon the contestants very clearly, pornography does the same with the actresses that take part in sexual acts. The typical female contestant or porn actress resembles, a majority of the time, the ideal beauty characteristics of whiteness, thinness, and attractiveness. Both of the industries, yet again, exploit the same image of white, female beauty.

Female bodies are utilized for profit within the advertising industry, plastering their bodies on 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. I focused my research on this area because many advertisements can be seen as erotic or pornographic to the young adult eye. I administered a survey to an Introduction to Women and Gender Studies class, gathering students' experiences and feedback on advertisements, which included Dolce & Gabbana, Suit Supply, Tom Ford, and other similar fashion brands sold to women (See Figures 1-10). My survey intends to examine how the advertising industry utilizes female bodies in the images. The main goal of this research was to find out from participants if they saw these advertisements serving as a form of pornography, while also relating to pageantry in the way advertisers use the female body. Relating to our societal beauty standards I discovered that a majority of the class saw the advertisements as portraying white women who displayed the thinness ideal. Many also mentioned that the women had to perform "sexy" in order to sell the product being shown in the advertisements, and that they served as tools used to bring in capital for the industry.



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



Figure 2: Axe. "Rage against the media, not against ourselves," by V. Rodriguez, 2014 (womenandmediafa2014.blogspot.com/2014/10/rage-against-media-not-against-ourselves.html). In the public domain.



Figure 3: Gucci. "Fashion Ego," by Fiona, 2016 (contemplatingcatastrophes.org/fashion-ego/). In the public domain.



Figure 4: American Apparel. "Rape Culture," by the Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness, n.d.a (stoprelationshipabuse.org/educated/rape-culture/). In the public domain.



Figure 5: Tom Ford. "Controversial Campaigns: 9 Banned NSFW Fashion Ads You Probably Shouldn't See," by M. Stempien, 2015 (www.justluxe.com/fine-living/chatter/feature-1960587.php). In the public domain.



Figure 6: Calvin Klein. "Sexual assault counsellor 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/). In the public domain.



Figure 7: Budweiser. "Objectifying Women in Beer Advertisements," by Timali & Haya, 2013 (<https://sheisnotathing.wordpress.com/2013/11/01/objectifying-women-in-beer-advertisements/>). In the public domain.



Figure 8: Suit Supply. "Whatever Wednesday: Tiiu Kuik for FLARE, Project Runway Winner, Shameless Suit Ads and more," by Beautifully Invisible, 2010 (www.beautifully-invisible.com/2010/11/whatever-wednesday-tiiu-kuik-for-flare-project-runway-winner-shameless-suit-ads-and-more.html). In the public domain.



Figure 9: BMW. "An 'Easy' Ride," by News Activist, 2016 (newsactivist.com/fr/node/11508). In the public domain.



Figure 10: Kit Kat. "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). In the public domain.

The second study I conducted comprised of two interviews with undergraduate students, Isabella and Bethany³, 18-29 years of age, who were participants in pageants and/or dance competitions. My focus for these two interviews was to gain insight into the participants' personal experiences with performing onstage. I wanted to know if as females, they felt objectified or judged upon their physicality. I was also interested in how the participants perceive the production of beauty to tie into the violence, sexualization, and objectification of the female body within pornography. Both participants provided experiential knowledge, as they have experienced onstage performance firsthand. The purpose of this part of my project was to discover what parallels might be present in both the pageant and porn industries by looking at the overarching theme of the patriarchal "male gaze" that is common to both industry platforms.

Although the pageant participant and dance competitor experienced a boost in self-confidence when they competed because they were viewed as a "beauty" onstage, Bethany, the dance competitor, stated that she finds herself always comparing her body to other girls' and how they are more "beautiful" than her. Bethany's feelings convey that young girls and women are

³ Pseudonyms

highly judged when performing onstage and it impacts their confidence in themselves and their own bodies. What contributes to this low self-esteem are the images that the media portrays. These images a majority of the time are unattainable and impossible to achieve for many women (Coleman 2008). Coleman (2008) states that the media serves as a guidebook or a manual on the acceptable appearance of a modern-day woman. Media, whether it's a pageant contest aired on television, an erotic advertisement, or a pornographic film, portrays the acceptable female body, which is usually white, young, thin, and heterosexual. Any other bodies are deemed ugly, unacceptable, or are shamed and do not fit in. Feminist empirical research, examining knowledge and theory with a feminist lens, really tries to focus on this ideal female image and how women react to the representation of it (Coleman 2008).

It is important to note that many women competitors in pageantry experience positivity throughout the competitions. I recognized this when interviewing Isabella who participated in family owned pageants that were more value based, meaning family oriented and focusing on who the contestants are as a person. She stated that competing gave her confidence, but at the same time, she did not feel like herself because she was told what to do and how to look "beautiful" onstage. Isabella saw the pageant industry as an opportunity for her to feel good about herself and this is super important to note. Even though many female pageant contestants may like to compete onstage, I focus on how they are also unaware of what messages the industry produces to the audience regarding female embodiment. Therefore, I am not criticizing the young girls and women who compete, but rather, the industry's purpose for presenting the contestants in sexual ways. Specifically, Isabella mentioned that all the girls who competed had to get their hairstyle changed after every performance and their makeup touched up. This mimics how women in pornography are told how to dress and do their hair and makeup based off of what trends and styles are popular

during that time. This not only impacts women's self-image, but it also continues to bolster capitalism. Isabella claimed she found herself comparing her attractiveness to other girls that were participating alongside her. This again shows that women will compare their physicality to other women in order to achieve a better image. Another important point that Isabella pointed out in regards to beauty expectations was age of the contestants. She stated that Miss America contestants had to be in the age range of seventeen to twenty-four. This enforces young femininity present in the industry, which also 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 a man. If they are deemed as unacceptable because they do not exemplify the ideal version of female embodiment, then they are outside the "norm" standards. Performing onstage or onscreen is a perfect example of being in a place where your body is judged by outside viewers. My findings seek to explain how the industries of pageantry and pornography contribute to the "male gaze" through utilizing female bodies for a focal point.

Pageantry, an industry largely focused on the female body in the swimsuit contests, is a great example of the "male gaze" when the women pose at the end of the runway and look over their shoulder into the camera. This look over the shoulder is symbolic to the definition of the "male gaze" and is commonly done so in a sexual manner. Pageantry also allows viewers to experience their sexual fantasies in ways that influence the production of porn. This takes place through the consumption of women's bodies by the male audience gazing upon them. Heteropatriarchal society gets pleasure from watching the women parade around in their swimsuits and ball gowns. As I have stated before, the history of the swimsuit contests has changed from a

one-piece suit, to a two piece, to a bikini. My question is: Will the pageants continue to undress female pageant contestants until they are naked? I believe this could happen in the future because we see images of naked women everywhere, without their genital area or all of their breasts 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, as they would be out in the open for the audience to view. This could put female contestants at more of a risk of being marginalized and reduced to their sex while opportunities to be anything else would be restricted, as they would be representing a pornographic nature.

In doing my research on the Introduction to Women and Gender Studies class, I found that approximately 75 percent of the class saw the erotic advertisements in some way as unnecessary. Some words that the students used to describe the images were: “demeaning,” “appalling,” “sexualized,” “demoralizing,” “angry,” “disappointed,” “crossing the line,” “rape-like,” “frustrating,” “exploitive,” “provocative,” and “selling sex.” Many of these students who did not have positive experiences with the advertisements were female themselves. From the survey, I concluded that many females in our society today do not find these sort of erotic advertisements as depicted above to be appealing and actually find them to be hurtful to their identities as women (Douglas, 1995; Kilbourne, 1999). Approximately 75 percent of the class also described the models in the advertisements as being sexual in nature and depicted as sex objects used to sell the products. The Kit Kat (Figure 10) and Tom Ford (Figure 5) advertisements got the most remarks out of all the images shown to the students. The Kit Kat advertisement was found to be comical by some male students because it was using sexual fingering to sell the candy, but was seen as too sexual by many female students who did not like the use of a woman being fingered in order to

sell the product. Many young women in the class stated that the sexual use of a woman in the advertisement was unnecessary and demeaning.

Why do women have to be sexualized in order to sell a product? The reason: sex sells. The Tom Ford image of the naked woman hiding her vagina behind a bottle of men's cologne and holding another bottle of cologne between her breasts was said by the majority to be too revealing and unnecessary, and one participant also stated that it is on the borderline of being considered pornography. What message does this image imply to the public? Women are viewed to be for men and this advertisement clearly states that point with the woman having her legs wide open with an erotic expression across her face. To me, this advertisement is saying "Take me!" It is being marketed to men as implied by the men's cologne bottles, which further produces the message that if men buy this cologne, women will come running to them and want to have sex. This frustrates many women because in so many advertisements, like these, women are seen as sex objects to be taken advantage of by men. If advertisements like this Tom Ford one are being publicly displayed for all to see, how is this helping or changing the way society looks at women's bodies?

Interestingly, I did some extra digging and found that images of male genitalia compared to female genitalia is not as highly suggested or exposed to audiences. In mainstream media, the male genitalia is being covered by an object or not fully being exposed, unlike the Tom Ford advertisement (Figure 5) that just barely covers the woman's vagina and breasts. Some viewers even said that they could see through the men's cologne bottle in the advertisement and see the woman's vagina. I also noticed that in many advertisements with men scantily clothed (only boxers

worn), women were usually present and even more undressed and sexualized (See Figure 11). The media continues to produce the message that women's bodies are for the consumption and touch of men, while also upholding the misogynistic view that women are for men only.

Girls as young as five, such as the television reality series *Toddler's & Tiaras*, are now starting to worry about their physical appearances and how to act sexy in order to get a man's attention (Palmer, 2013). Again, there is that "male gaze" factor playing into how a young girl has to act in order to grab a man's attention. First off, a five-year-old should not be worrying about how to act in a sexual

manner in order to grab the audience's attention. 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 in physical appearance, while in pornography the industry wants the women to look younger. Both industries enforce the young woman in her twenties look.

This television series is negatively impacting the way society views young female bodies and could even possibly lead to an increase in child pedophilia. To support this argument Christine Tamer (2011) writes, "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 also explains that many countries outside the United States actually fear American child

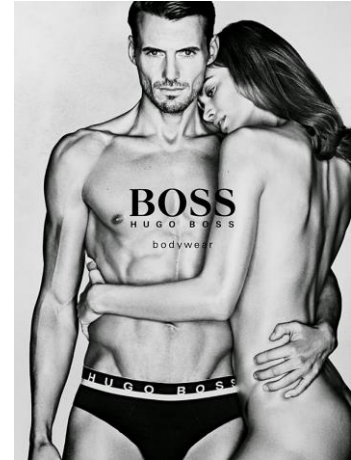


Figure 11: Hugo Boss Bodywear. "Alex Lundqvist Fronts Hugo Boss' Spring/Summer 2013 Bodywear Campaign," by Davide, 2013 (www.thefashionisto.com/alex-lundqvist-fronts-hugo-boss-springsummer-2013-bodywear-campaign/). In the public domain.

pageants and the “glitz” of them (Tamer, 2011). The little girls catch the “male gaze” because they wear sexualized outfits that are age inappropriate (See Figure 12). In the reality television show *Toddler’s & Tiaras*, the girls themselves believe that when they have their physical appearances altered or changed, they become more “beautiful” and valuable to the audience (Palmer, 2013). This importantly points out that young girls and women are always competing to grab attention, particularly men’s. Why does it matter so much as to what men think? The “male gaze” is largely rooted in pageantry because women are to be looked at by men. The “male gaze” supports patriarchal capitalism because society profits off of young girls’ and women’s interests in wanting to look “beautiful” or acceptable in the audience and judge’s eyes.



Figure 12: *Toddler’s & Tiaras*. "TLC's Toddler's and Tiaras: Way Too Much or Just Enough?," by C. Parish, 2014 (tvcriticism2014.blogspot.com/2014/05/tlcs-toddlers-and-tiaras-way-too-much.html). In the public domain.

From one of the interviews I conducted, Bethany importantly pointed out that becoming an onstage performer of any type requires you to accept the fact that you will be gazed upon; it is part of the package. She also described in detail to me that she is a part of the public university’s dance team and that college guys “don’t care about the actual material or the dancers or actual performing, it’s looking at us.” This statement by Bethany shows that women are aware of the “male gaze,” but do not pay any attention to it. Isabella relates to Bethany because she experienced the “male gaze” from her father and her brothers who were in the audience when she was performing in pageants. She specifically claimed that it was awkward modeling in front of them. The “male gaze” is present in both pageantry and pornography because the audience, whether men or women, gaze upon the contestants’ or actresses bodies and consume their physical appearances.

Power Dynamics Prevail

Gender roles are present within pageantry and pornography that set standards women must follow in order to even 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 with a man or physically representing it through beauty standards. The “male gaze” ties into power dynamics because within pageants and pornography you have women performing in different roles, but for the same outcome: to be accepted by men as attractive enough to pleasure oneself or beautiful enough to move forward to the next round. I focus on men looking upon women’s external beauties and physiques. Most of the women on stage have to represent the ideal vision of femininity including heels, 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. Women are viewed to be for men, so their purpose is restricted and confined to an object for male consumption in both industries. This is exactly what Andrea Dworkin (1981) and Catharine 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 the best example of portraying masculine and feminine gender roles because of the dominant and submissive parts each actor and actress plays. Pornography, particularly between two heterosexual individuals, is geared towards providing male pleasure through watching these patriarchal films. Porn is how some young boys learn about sex if it is available to them; making these narratives reinforce a narrow, restricted definition of women (Dines 2010). Power dynamics play a huge role in the objectification of women because men are seen as superior. 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 cis man and cis woman, you typically see the woman in a very submissive role to the male actor. Gail Dines (1998, 2010) and Robert Jensen (1998) discuss how these gender roles can be detrimental and can lead to harsh sexual acts committed by the male actor. Carolyn 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. Masculine and feminine gender roles are programmed and so ingrained in our society based upon your sex that it would be hard for women to escape these social constructions.

Overwhelmingly, a majority of the Introduction to Women and Gender Studies class participants noticed that the women within the erotic advertisements were being overpowered and submissive to the men in the images. The men are portrayed as dominant and in control. These two distinct roles have defined a woman’s position to a man for decades, and continues to imply that women are second class to the male populations. Also, within the advertisements shown to the class, the women are put in vulnerable positions. For example, the American Apparel image (Figure 4) shows a woman with her legs wide open. One survey participant stated that this specific image glorifies rape due to her legs being wide open, and the woman looks sad and distraught. These are the kind of erotic advertisements that enforce the message that women are for men and for their taking. The gender roles and power dynamics prescribed to men and women by society tell women to be obedient, submissive, and weak, while men are expected to be smart, the breadwinner, strong, aggressive, and dominant. As I mentioned earlier, when we think about capitalism and pornography, it is important to note how this industry impacts women’s identities and props up white male power.

Male Pleasure

Sexualization and objectification are two big concepts to consider when talking about the patriarchal lens through which women are viewed. Sexualization is defined as 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: women are viewed as entities for male pleasure. In other words, the female body is used as an instrument to aid in a man's sexual desires. Female pageant contestants are sexualized through the bikini contests that portray women scantily clothed, while objectifying them as objects to be acquired by the male audience and to publicly display their sexuality and bodies for heteropatriarchal pleasure. Howard F. Stratton (1922) and David Glassberg (1990) are two scholars who associate with the history of pageantry and how it has evolved over the decades. The evolution of the swimsuit contests from a one-piece suit to a bikini shows how society continues to expose female bodies for capital. Addressing the nakedness concern earlier about pageant contestants, what would nakedness mean in the context of beauty pageantry and women's equality? Showing more of the female body makes women vulnerable to society's judgements.

Pageantry and pornography allow men in the audience to experience sexual fantasies, whether it be watching the television show *Toddler's & Tiaras*, *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 has watched (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). On the other hand, can men get erections just by viewing pageantry? Jessica 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 because a large amount of skin is showing and the suit highlights the female figure. Another point to consider is the men visualizing that the pageant contestants resemble how all women should look, a.k.a the ideal beauty. This can possibly alter how they view other women's physical appearances.

Carolyn Bronstein (2011) focuses on how women are used as objects and entities in the porn industry and are subjugated to violent pleasures and coercions. Women are dehumanized to instruments used for pleasure, analogous to the way pageantry primarily judges upon external beauty rooted in society's standards. Supporting this is Catharine MacKinnon (1989) who 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). Radical cultural feminists oppose porn because it makes men the subject and women the object (Tong 2014). Rather than being considered sexually equal within the porn industry, there is a major divide amongst men and women, often times leaving the men as dominant because of patriarchy. Andrea Dworkin (1981) and Catharine MacKinnon (1989) both contributed to this argument by saying that porn sexually discriminates towards women. MacKinnon (1989) 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 pornographic producers as objects and entities to be sexually violated by the male actors. Women are seen as passive victims, while the men are aggressive. This sets the stage for sexual harassment, rape, or women battering (Bronstein, 2011).

On the other hand, are women being “raped” if they are only involved in the porn industry for the money? What is true consent in spaces of coercion? MacKinnon (1989) says that women are not able to give sexual consent because when there is force or coercion between the two individuals, like in pornography, women do not consent, rather pornography promotes rape situations.^b If a woman agrees to engage in a certain pornographic act, then yes, it is consent. But if a woman says yes to being an actress in a porn film without knowing what types of acts she will have to endure, then no that is not consent. An example that would support MacKinnon’s above argument would be Gonzo porn. Most women are forced to eat their own vomit, gag, or even engage in penetration through all openings at once, as I have stated before. This type of porn is rooted in severe violence and causes harm to the female body physically and mentally (Dines 2010). Thanatica is also a form of porn where women are treated as literal objects, “disintegrated, dismembered, or disoriented during hate-filled or even death-driven sexual encounters” (Tong 2014). This further implies that women are not human, therefore they can be violated.

Viewers will see women being utilized as objects for male pleasure, while also seeing the horrific acts women are forced to be a part of within violent porn. I am not criticizing some sex acts that may be pleasurable to some porn actresses. I am looking at the negatives of how pornography could potentially hurt the women involved, whether it is physically or how women are viewed by society as objects of nothingness. 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, why gender equality is important to women, and the feminist ideals about women and gender equality. Also, if women are denied other viable education and employment prospects, 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 of 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, the pornographer tells the women what to do in order to please the male actor in pornography.

Conclusion

Women are faced with societal oppressions, such as supporting the thin body ideal within pageantry, everyday. Pageantry opens up the opportunity for women to be looked at as prizes and objects and to be judged upon by their physical appearances, while mainstream heteropatriarchal pornography focuses on a woman's genitalia as a beauty standard. Pornography instills the belief that women are objects to be acquired by men for pleasure. Sexualization is identified in pageantry by how young girls and women dress in bikinis, while they are rated by judges of the competition and their bodies consumed by the audience. Pornography focuses on a woman's genitalia as the main points of mainstream film, making the woman vulnerable to society's judgements upon her body. My research concludes that the "male gaze" is largely rooted in any onstage performance, whether it be a pageant competition or a pornographic film. The "male gaze" leads to femininity being a standard placed upon women's behavior and bodies.

I relate to a radical cultural framework of thinking on pageantry and pornography industries. Male influence impacts our society negatively by oppressing women and continuing to uphold misogynistic views that women are for men. Heteropatriarchal pornography is oppressive for women because of the dominant and submissive roles engrained in the industry. So how far do pageantry and pornography lie in distance apart? I believe not very far, and that in some ways, pageantry can serve as a form of porn itself! We can see how women are sexually unequal to men

and that they live under the constant threat of being sexually abused within the porn industry (Russell, 1998). Radical theory helps us to see this through male influence within pornography that enforces the dominating role that men have over women (Tong, 2014). Pageantry allows viewers, largely men, to experience their sexual fantasies, which might lead to validating harm towards the female body.

So what does all of this mean? There are still issues within the mass media about sexualizing messages aimed towards young girls and women, and the pornography industry is still thriving evermore in our twenty-first century. Industries of pageantry, pornography, and media do not enforce a positive image of the female body and they lack diversity of it. This is not the healthiest world to raise young girls in because it teaches them to value their bodies above all else. In a heteropatriarchal society, women will continue to be marginalized and reduced to their sex. We need to be careful on what messages we produce to everybody, not just women. This grabs at all of us and affects society as a whole.

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 a positive thing. Although there is no sexual contact within the pageant industry, there is a connection in how pageantry and pornography interrelate in terms of sex and gender oppressions enforced upon the female body, turning the body into an object of oblivion.

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