THE FEMINIST CURE: FEMINIST IDENTITY AS A SHIELD FROM HYPER-SEXUALIZED MEDIA INDUCED SELF-OBJECTIFICATION IN COLLEGE WOMEN

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this ***disquisition*** complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

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This paper explores the impact of hyper-sexualized media on college women in terms of inducing self-objectification and/or inhibiting feminist identity. The survey and resulting analysis showed participants' feminist orientation ostensibly affected their inclination to self-objectify after watching and responding to a slideshow of common images of women in our culture. By comparing the reactions of women with high feminist orientation and low feminist orientation, suggestions were clear about connections between an identification with feminism and a propensity to value the self and other women for characteristics beyond those of appearance and sexuality.

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PROLOGUE

An oppression so private would turn out hard to uproot~ Howard Zinn

As the pieces of this paper came together, I began to realize that they were the pieces, in part, of my own story, as it is the story of most women who exist in this mainstream, American culture. We are women who, "live in sexual objectification like fish live in water", as Catherine A. MacKinnon puts it in "Sexuality" (484). What I observe when I consider the lives of women is what seems to me the result of the way in which we were raised, immersed into patriarchy, unprotected by our mothers—vulnerable to what Helene Cixous describes in "The Laugh of the Medusa": "the greatest crime against women.... to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves" (163). As a gender, women are still exceptionally constrained by the demand to prove their worth, and then only to do so by partaking in their own sexual objectification. So, I "write woman" (162) because I believe we regain our strength, our movement, only through examination of our chains—in this case the chains of performative, gender-rigid hyper-sexuality; we are constrained by the notion that as "liberated" women, we seek nothing more than sexual freedom and that freedom affords us only the desires that satisfy men.

We constantly battle the expectations between chastity and expertise: we should look and act like we turn a good trick, and we better substantiate the show that we want nothing more than to do just that. But if we actually give it up, we have failed to maintain our marital worth. Emphasis on virginity constitutes a major piece of the training many of us received from our mothers during adolescence—but now, through my feminist lens, I

see this as another way to focus our attention on just our bodies and how we use them to perform sex. What happens when we are told and are *eroded by* the implications behind, "the greatest gift you can give your husband is your virginity"? In *Full Frontal Feminism*, Jessica Valenti illuminates: "if you want to attach young women's worth to their virginity, you can't be surprised when they follow suit and attach all their worth to their sexuality. You can't have it both ways" (26). This truth is obscured for many of us by messages from sources like the church and abstinence only education programs.

When we begin so young and in virtually every way to be valued for our sexuality, how are we to resist not only the culture, but the early boyfriends who have been raised in it too, "brought up to think that they have open access to women's bodies and sexuality" (Valenti 62)? When mothers teach us to guard our virginity at the cost of stifling curiosity or even desire, how do we speak up when we have been victims of stolen sexual consent? After all, our bodies are *already appropriated* to sell items, to sell sex, to sell ideology thousands of times a day, and we don't even consider that it isn't essential and natural to our identity to replicate what we are fed by our culture as normative femininity. Any analysis is muted.

Those same mothers who want so much to garner value for us in this patriarchal system are some of the same who are wounded when we look to feminism for a path out of oppression. Uma Narayan shares in "Contesting Cultures: 'Westernization', Respect for Cultures, and Third-World Feminists *from* Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminisms" that her mother's pain under a system of sexism is what inspired Narayan to embrace feminist movement. She writes, "I heard all your stories of your misery. The shape your 'silence' took is in part what has incited me to speech" (544). I

too, remember my mother's pain; I am a mother; mothers see what they don't like about life for themselves, and they work to change it for their children. But when I looked to feminism for support, my dissent from my mother's religiously sanctioned patriarchal belief system fostered contention between us. Narayan expresses, partially, my experience when she explains,

> [mothers] tend to regard their feminist daughters as symptoms of their failure to raise us with respect for 'our' traditions, as daughters who have rejected the lessons they were taught by their mothers and mother-cultures. In seeing us in this mode, they fail to see how much what we are is precisely a response to the very things they have taught us, how much we have become the daughters they have shaped us into becoming. (545)

My own mother exemplifies a failure to accept that I am what she shaped me to be by trying to understand me—or prepare for the danger that is me, with a copy of Mary A. Kassain's *The Feminist Mistake* stored on her bedroom bookshelf. By her annotations, it is clear my mother agrees that feminists are responsible for, as one of my male students once wrote, *every major problem in society*. From children to marriage and the family, from the church and throughout the whole of society, the "tsunami of feminism" (7), my mother believes, has wreaked havoc on every facet of our culture.

Aware of what I went through to navigate the landmines of my mother's incensed suspicions exploding amidst my boyfriends' pleasures, I have set out to deconstruct these messages, this culture, the mountains of media that objectified the valleys of my body, and

enticed everyone to do the same. Ideally, I am providing a piece of writing like Cixous describes—writing that is "the invention of a *new insurgent* writing, which, when the movement of [my] liberation has come, will allow [me] to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in [my] history." All this work grew from the prospect that my writing could be as she envisions: "precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (164). So because of my mother, in spite of my mother, and born out of my own mother*hood*, I write "in white ink" (166), and rather than remaining invisible on this white page, I hope this disruptive work will inspire change. As Cixous indicated, this writing is what resulted from the messages my mother fed me, and is in response to what I wish to feed my children—it is mother's milk. My inscriptions flow from my deepest desires that, as a mother, I carry constantly: rather than allowing them to consume the standards the culture presents as cool, I want to protect my babes by nourishing them on ideas that are *mine* and honest and challenging.

INTRODUCTION

I doubt that my experiences of development in this culture are too far removed from those of many other women, but taking a moment to consider them is a bit depressing: much emphasis on the value of my body, whether praised for its abundance of desirable feminine characteristics, or shamed for its gawky and "un-lady-like" presentation; lessons on desirability (boys like you if you're pretty and they show this by picking on, and later forcing themselves on you); contradictions concerning religion (men are in charge but women have to keep them in line and are culpable for all failure to do so); and much pressure (from all sides), about sexuality. As a mother, my desire to interrupt the same messages that informed my adolescence about the value of women has been informed by trends I locate in media: a hyper-sexualization of the images of women that seem to manifest themselves in self-objectification among many young women. Some in the conservative media believe blame for this situation falls on feminists, as Carol Platt Liebau writes in her book *Prude*: "Several long-standing social trends account, in part, for the current public obsession with sex. They include radical feminism" (8). But I argue against blaming feminists as I observe that young women are more and more unwilling to align themselves with the emancipatory goals of feminism and move out from under the standards of sexuality.

A conversation I once had with a teenage girl has led to much of my research throughout graduate school. Although I don't recall *how* the subject of feminism arose, I do remember that this girl snorted with disdain, "*I* would *never* be a *feminist*." Never mind advancements like an amendment rendering her the right to vote, Title IX allowing her to play school sports, sexual harassment laws that (should) provide her a safe working

environment; she would never be a feminist. It is common to meet girls today who balk at being called "feminists". In her *Guardian* article "You're not a feminist but.... what?", Chloe Angyal comments: "'I'm not a feminist, but ...' is a way of telling the world that we don't pose too much of a threat. It's a way of saying that we don't plan to rock the boat too much, that we will play nice" (3-4). I am interested in examining connections between messages that value women for their sexuality and the ensuing displays of identity by young women who read those messages: the juxtaposition of an acceptance of rigid display strictures and a resistance to the feminism that has provided young women myriad freedoms they don't even comprehend or *take advantage of* as they preen for the male gaze.

Some young women seem so uncomfortable identifying with feminism, yet eager to embrace hyper-sexuality because their cultural literacy socializes them to accept their overarching value as something inextricably linked to their performance of overt sexuality. In "Supersexualize Me! Advertising and the 'Midriffs'", Rosalind Gill quotes Michelle Lazar to better explain "power femininity", as "a 'subject-effect' of a 'global discourse of popular post-feminism which incorporates feminist signifiers of emancipation and empowerment as well as circulating popular postfeminist assumptions that feminist struggles have ended, that full equality for all women has been achieved, and that women of today can 'have it all'" (103). In reality, what we have done is surrender feminist goals of political, personal, social and economic equality for what we are made to believe is the all-important sexual "freedom" of our generation. How could we even achieve said sexual freedom when we are bred from infancy to perform as someone else's sexual object? Ariel Levy, in her book *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, explores this trend: "it is crucial that [girls]

seem sexy—raunchy, willing, wild" (146). Rather than demanding through feminist movement the recognition of personal value that is inherently theirs, young women are ready to *work* for their status through displays of eager sexuality.

Lest we succumb to the lie that gendered displays of hyper-sexuality *prove* that men and women are different, remember what Simone de Beauvoir posits in an excerpt from "The Second Sex": "she seems to us to be already sexually determined, this is not because mysterious instincts directly doom her to passivity, coquetry, maternity; it is because the influence of others upon the child is a factor almost from the start, and thus she is indoctrinated with her vocation from her earliest years" (185). Each young woman in our society is immersed into this hyper-sexualized pressure, and, now, before she even leaves the womb, each girl could be injected with steroids to ensure that her genitals are aesthetically pleasing and her sexual presentation appropriately feminine upon her arrival into the world—a guard against intersexuality or even homosexual desire, according to John Byrne's report "Doctor Testing Dangerous Drug to 'Prevent' Lesbianism?" Earlier than she can even speak, the young girl will be subjected to images of women using their bodies to gain status in our culture—like Jasmine, from Disney's *Aladdin*, who flaunts her body to seduce and distract the villain. Jean Kilbourne notes in *Can't Buy My Love*, "Teachers report a steady escalation of sex talk among children, starting in *preschool* as our children are prematurely exposed to a barrage of sexual information and misinformation through advertising, television shows, music and films" (146). This problem is compounded for girls, who already are learning that their bodies are meant to be handled and appropriated by others. In "Becoming a Gendered Body", Karin A. Martin writes about her study to determine how children's bodies are gendered, even in preschool,

and she found, as well as extra attention to making little girls smaller and quieter, that teachers would often lift up girls' skirts to determine warmth or dryness (223). This repeated control over their bodies by another, the expectation that their private areas can be inspected without permission, prepares women for a life of subordination.

The little girl will grow up to see toy catalogues in which some of the advertisements feature a "Peek-a-boo Dance Pole" for girls ages 8-14, (CNN Money) complete with a garter belt, sexy music and fake dollars to stuff down her "part-time stripper" tee-shirt. Levy reveals, "from the very beginning of their experiences as sensual beings they are conceiving of sex as a performance you give for attention" (163). She will learn when she looks up "girl" in the thesaurus that an acceptable synonym for her is "piece" (Roget)—a term not even considered slang because, as Susan Bordo reminds us in *The Male Body*, we have made it essential and "feminine to be on display" (173). This young girl will read fashion advertisements and learn to excuse sexual violence in favor of admiring the female model's glamour. Through all this, she will be socialized to accept that her worth lies in her ability to be sexually available. Sut Jhally warns in "Image-Based Culture" that we can never "confuse these portrayals as true reflections of gender. In advertising, gender (especially for women) is defined almost exclusively along the lines of sexuality. The image-system thus distorts our perceptions and offers little that balances out the stress on sexuality" (253). We can hope the young woman will learn to resist, but "Try to reassure a fifteen-year-old girl that her success in life doesn't require a slender body, and she will think you dropped from another planet. *She* knows what's demanded; she's learned it from the movies, the magazines, the soap operas" (Bordo 216). These hyper-sexualized images imbue every facet of this culture, reminding women that they will

be valued only as skilled sexual vessels—a practice which alters their very bodily construction. Lise Eliot reports for *Scientific American Mind* in the article "The Truth about Boys and Girls": "early experience, we now know, permanently alters the chemistry and function of the genes inside cells, leading to significant effects on behavior" (23). It is easy to understand, then, why there seem to be essential gender differences that perpetuate the socialization of boys to be hyper-masculine and girls to be hypersexual.

Mainstream American society enculturates girls into a system where women's ostensibly equal rights and responsibilities are never fully realized because they are viewed as sex objects. Conceptualizing women as saliently sexual is prevalent, as John Ashbery revealed when he wrote: "Nude women seem to be in their natural state; men for some reason merely look undressed.... When is a nude a nude? When it is male" (qtd. Bordo 179). Women's body parts are the currency that keeps the propaganda machine well oiled; even more, our bodies are so fully pilfered, "it is almost impossible to imagine what our popular culture would look like if women's bodies weren't objectified and dismembered" (Kilbourne 259). So much is women's displayed sexuality seen as their "natural state", we are unable to realize what is actually happening is the use of our bodies *as* commodities, and not only to sell products, but to *become* products themselves. In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf points out a parallel: "An economy that depends on slavery needs to promote images of slaves that 'justify' the institution of slavery" (18). For women, the images are pornographic posturing infiltrating everyday consciousness. Diana Crane explains in "Gender and Hegemony in Fashion Magazines", "Fashion photography has incorporated blatantly sexual poses from pornographic publications.... that include sexual cues, such as closed eyes, open mouth, legs spread to reveal the genital area, and nudity or semi-nudity,

particularly in the areas of the breasts and genitals" (317). Such an image infiltrates the constitution of identity, and this pornography in advertising, "represents a more 'advanced' or pernicious form of exploitation.... because the male gaze is internalized to form a new disciplinary regime.... Not only are women objectified as they were before *but through sexual subjectification they must also now understand their own objectification as pleasurable and self-chosen*" (Gill 107). Through ingestion of the images, young women may be tricked into reading the messages as portraying women's empowerment, and subsequently accept their societal role as one where they derive enjoyment only through inspiring an external response from an outside party.

These real young women who live off the pages of magazines and outside the realm of the television screen are the ones affected by ravenous corporate greed that colonizes even their sexualities in the quest for gold. They are misdirected away from interest in gender equality through the conniving manipulation of advertisers who "wrap old sexual stereotypes in a new feisty language of female empowerment" (107) or, as Rebecca Munford puts it in "*BUST*-ing the Third Wave: Barbies, Blowjobs and Girlie Feminism: "raunch culture polices female sexuality through its hyper-sexualization rather than its repression" (193). Because the desires of women are not the focus of these images—in fact women's desires are never even explored, the young women who read these texts learn through implication to self-objectify. Advertisers try to teach us to read these images as women's expressed sexual desire, a move from objectification to subjectification, but it is crucial that we consider Gill's resonating critique: "How is it that women's arousal has come to be tied so closely to pleasing men?" (101). Although this attempted shift to young women as subjects is something new, the silencing of the young woman's genuine desire is

nothing new, as Kilbourne notes when she writes about the unabated absence of women's authentic faces and bodies from our media landscape (51). We don't see images of women represented honestly—rather we learn to idolize the elongated neck made possible by Photoshop, the stiff-peaked breasts sponsored by plastic surgeons, and yes, even the hypersexual displays of desire brought to us by pornographic fantasies.

Doubtlessly, there are effects when we are subjected to these images thousands of times a day; we are, in all actuality, "interacting" with them, posits Kilbourne (qtd. Gill 95). When we understand these texts to be active and our subsequent responses to be internalized, locating conclusions about how we are turning the objectification upon ourselves grows imperative. Wolf asks,

> What does that imagery do to women's sexual attitudes toward themselves? If soft-core, nonviolent, mainstream pornography has been shown to make men less likely to believe a rape victim; if its desensitizing influence lasts a long time; if sexually violent films make men progressively trivialize the severity of the violence they see against women; and if at last only violence against women is perceived by them as erotic, is it not likely that parallel imagery aimed at women does the same to women in relation to themselves? (141)

We must consider the ways in which these messages manifest themselves for young women who are working to construct identity. In Margaret J. Finders' study *Just Girls*, she notes that girls misread advertisements in magazines and instead interpret them as "proof"

of what is beautiful and *instructions* for how to *be* that kind of beauty (64). This marketing works to convince young women that marking themselves as subordinate objects provide them the utmost value in this culture. Imani Perry asserts in "Who(se) Am I?": "Magazines geared toward young women have given such instructions on how women should participate in their own objectification for decades" (138). It is possible then that hyper-sexualized images become fastened to elements of young women's burgeoning identities. In *Beauty and Misogyny*, Sheila Jeffreys explains, "by adulthood they are seen by those who practise them as 'natural'. The learning process is forgotten. The behaviours of space, touch and eye contact that are required of subordinates are then understood as the 'natural' behaviours of femininity" (25). The grip of self-objectification cannot be easily untied from identity when the images are presented before one has the ability to analyze and evaluate them.

Most women who make themselves available through hypersexual displays don't realize that while they think they are reflecting the femininity around them, in reality they are reflecting the systems of domination that rule their lives, and those systems continuously tell women that they have to conform, that they are undesirable in their natural states. And remember—all of those changes are made to their bodies by individual women who *choose* to purchase stilettos or silicone enhancements because "all women are socialized to objectify themselves in order to be desirable" (Levy 181). One of the problems, then, is that the choice is a manifestation of an identity informed by hypersexual ideals.

The cultural representations of women dictate what kind of woman is valued. Even advertisements themselves proclaim, "You don't just shape your body. You shape your

life", Bordo points out in "Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body" (250). And those ads burrow into the consciousness of each of us, indoctrinating us to police our bodies, a practice that governs the evolution of identity. It seems as though women are conforming, possibly without even understanding what they are doing: "This request for display behavior is unspoken. It is subtle enough so that the woman cannot point to it, credibly, as an example of harassment (to be credible about being harassed, in any case, a woman must look harassable, which destroys her credibility)" (Wolf 47). Young women are locating their value in the lust they inspire, a consequence of internalizing the images in ways that negate their value as persons. That's why, "Many, if not most, women also are willing (often, enthusiastic) participants in cultural practices that objectify and sexualize us" (Bordo *Unbearable Weight* 28). Because the sexism is internalized, some women experience an inner compulsion to imitate the images that are sold to us through the sexualized use of our bodies in media. Internalized sexism teaches us to perpetuate the oppression. Kate Millett in "Theory of Sexual Politics" from *Sexual Politics*" explicates: "Through this system a most ingenious form of 'interior colonization' has been achieved.... sexual dominion [is].... perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power" (219). This is a power that keeps women focused on how they can perform like porn stars rather than moving toward feminist ideals that will value them for their intellectual and societal contributions. These unspoken requests for sexual display thrive within us and we cannot escape the sexual ideal we are pressured to be. Jeffreys asserts: "women are being scrutinized and remarked on as sexual objects and 'the women's sexuality is with them all the time'" (31). When she is taught that sexual availability is all that is valuable about her, when even "her careerism

will not prevent her from assuming the stereotyped sex-object role assigned women in a male supremacist society" (80), according to bell hooks in *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center*, each woman is pushed to obsess over her sexuality and how to display it.

Sandra Lee Bartky explains in "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" that such obsession, such "discipline can provide the individual upon whom it is imposed with a sense of mastery as well as a secure sense of identity" (39). There's little point in young women considering much else, as became clear to me when I listened to one of my students defend her desire to grow up and be a M.I.L.F (Mother I'd Like to Fuck). Although she was attending college, she expected she would become a mother, (with no discussion of any other career). She revealed her belief that her mothering work would not be enough if other people didn't still want to "fuck" her—"because who wants to grow up to be ugly?" She had swallowed the hypersexual ideal: at all times she must be beautiful, and if she were beautiful, someone would look past her personal characteristics and use her for a sexual receptacle, and *then* she would know she still had value.

Where second wave women made gains, we now have to make a sacrifice: "it is precisely because women no longer have to exhibit traditionally 'feminine' *personality* traits—like being passive, helpless, docile, overly emotional, dumb and deferential to men—that they must exhibit hyperfeminine *physical* traits—large boobs and cleavage, short skirts, pouty lips" (Douglas 17). Young women have been sold this hyper-sexualized product—a representation of what the culture provides as our ideal selves for so long, it seems perfectly natural and essential to their gender, they don't even notice that it was concocted anywhere.

In fact, it was conjured by other women, as Juliann Sivulka reports in her extensive study of the advertisement industry, *Ad Women*: "Women, not men, had been responsible for the increasing amount of women-centered advertising" (11). These executives misunderstood feminism: "They stressed that advertising had done much to liberate women. Certainly it helped *make the best of their looks*" (297, emphasis mine) and Sivulka notes the "sexual adventurism" of Rochelle Udell, who conceptualized many of Calvin Klein's controversial ad campaigns—beginning with Brook Shield's "Nothing comes between me and my Calvins" (358-9). This research makes it clear that work in advertising could not be considered beneficial to the women's movement and Gill reveals in "Empowerment/Sexism: Figuring Female Sexual Agency in Contemporary Advertising" some of the work of Frederick Jameson and what he "calls the 'cannibalization' of ideas, including radical ones". She uses his ideas to "guard against the somewhat naïve notion that, in appropriating feminist ideas, advertising has in some sense 'become feminist'" (40). In fact, we need to acknowledge that advertising executives (the majority of whom were women by this point) ran into a problem with "media-savvy consumers" who suffered from "sign fatigue" (39)—incase we would be misled to believe that they suddenly adhered to a moral code rather than an economic one.

Media researchers have been studying these effects of advertising and visual images on women and their sense of personal worth for several decades. Lakoff and Scherr, in 1984, noted the growing trends of increasing nudity and the practice of models depicted in "exaggerated poses that characterize 'ritualization of subordination'" (Crane 317). Later, in 1997, Fredrickson and Roberts introduced their important "Objectification Theory". Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, in her article "The Impact of Sexually Objectifying Media

Exposure on Negative Body Emotions and Sexual Self-Perceptions: Investigating the Mediating Role of Body Self-Consciousness", explains: "The main contention of objectification theory is that individuals can be acculturated to 'internalize a viewer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves', a tendency called *self-objectification*" (3), often abbreviated to "SO". This theory would indicate a connection between young women seeing hyper-sexualized women in our culture and how those same young women have learned to respond. It doesn't matter what their desires actually are—their desires become those reflected by the image and the culture and in the end, they know little of their true desires. As Fredrickson and Roberts found, "it is not just any kind of media consumption that influence body self-consciousness. Rather, the focus is on media that are high in sexual objectification of bodies, which occurs whenever a person is treated *as* a body, 'valued predominately for its use to (or consumption) by others'" (4). And if these images cause, as objectification theorists posit, "interruption of cognitive functioning, as well as distal outcomes, such as depression, eating disorders, and sexual functioning" (5), young women may be internalizing hypersexual ideals and constructing identities around external attractiveness rather than their own internal characteristics.

Consider what this constant stifling of desire might mean for the *other* desires a young woman has—those outside of her sexuality. The ways in which we are constantly objectifying women's bodies make it impossible for them to feel embodied (Kilbourne 269); so all ambitions are squelched in the process. Deborah L. Tolman studied the inner longings of teen girls in *Dilemmas of Desire*. She writes about the gravity of this situation,

> "'The psyche cannot cut off one kind of desire without affecting another. When sexual desire is truncated, all desire

> is compromised—including girls' power to love themselves and to know what they really want'.... When a girl does not know what her own feelings are, when she disconnects the apprehending psychic part of herself from what is happening in her own body, she then becomes especially vulnerable to the power of others' feelings as well as to what others say she does and does not want or feel. (21).

It is terrifying to think of a generation of women cut off from their own minds: "the creation of 'femininity' in women in the course of socialization is an act of psychic brutality" (Rubin 284). As they become acceptable women, they remove themselves further and further from the core of who they are. "The more you subtract, the more you add", advertisements tell us (Kilbourne 136), and young women buy that idea, but in reality, the more we subtract from young women's agency in desire, the more we are constraining them from *any* kind of significant prosperity.

Most of the current media research has focused on the long-term effects of self-objectification and has relied on self-reporting by subjects, but as Tolman's study helps to suggest, sometimes we may need to dig past a woman's reported response to discover more about what is happening to her in a hyper-sexualized culture. Aubrey addresses one of these issues in another of her studies: "A Picture is Worth 20 Words (About the Self): Testing the Priming Influence *of Visual Sexual Objectification* on Women's Self Objectification" when she cites Harrison and Fredrickson who, "argue, 'the most important question to ask is not how long media-caused state SO lasts, but how frequently it is induced in the average day'. If it is activated frequently, we might think of the overall

picture of women's life to be that of chronic SO" (25). Constant self-objectification would have extenuating consequences for the development of identity among women. Importantly, if they learn to respond only to the external evaluation of their physical characteristics, and if they become so practiced at creating selves in response to the pleasure of *others*, they may not even know the voice of their *own* desires. Their ability to know or express themselves may be abbreviated since they have become professionals at internalizing the gaze and thinking in the language of patriarchy.

Since we cannot conceptualize a reality outside of that which we have the ability to communicate, since "gender is a language made up of bodily codes" (Bordo 103), and "When there are sexist language and sexist theories culturally available, the observation of reality is also likely to be sexist" (146), as Dale Spender argues in "Language and Reality", then a woman's body becomes one "on which an inferior status has been inscribed" (Bartky 33). The ways our society teaches us to read, comprehend and imitate value are such that hyper-sexuality becomes essential and any aberrations indicate a failure, a lack of value. Thus, we need to consider an important question: "Just because someone loves what they're doing, does that mean they're not being exploited?" (Harris 53). Young women are compelled to participate in their own self-objectification because they lack a framework to think about themselves in ways that don't revolve around their sexuality. Women read external signs and learn to interpret their own internal value; after all, as Voloshinov reminds us in "Multiaccentuality and the Sign", "A sign does not simply exist as a part of a reality—it reflects and refracts another reality.... Wherever a sign is present, ideology is present, too" (40). So the ideology insinuates that women have no value, no desire beyond what *men* desire them to be.

Because women's value is synonymous with their sexuality, because young women are submerged in an environment of hypersexual images that are sold to them to create an attitude of acceptance, young women read the images and build identities around them: "first in the world, then in the head, first in visual appropriation, then in forced sex" (MacKinnon 476). James Paul Gee is a theorist who authored "Literacy, Discourse and Linguistics: Introduction" which explains that people procure identity through acquisition of the discourses surrounding us: "We acquire this primary Discourse, not by overt instruction, but by being a member of a primary socializing group (family, clan, peer group). Rather, aspects and pieces of the primary Discourse become a 'carrier' or 'foundation' for Discourses acquired later in life" (8). Most forms of media contribute hyper-sexualized images to the culture in which girls develop. What they are acquiring, then, is a discourse of hyper-sexuality.

Gee enlightens us: "A Discourse is a sort of 'identity kit' which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk.... so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (7). Consider the "costume" could be body alterations like breast implants or vaginal "reconstruction", or even just short skirts and low cut shirts, and it becomes clearer that these choices are part of *who we are*. A discourse dictates how we act and talk. If we appropriate the discourse of overt sexuality into our psyches, how profoundly does that affect our identities, especially as we are choosing how to design them? Gee posits, "At any moment, we are using Language we must say or write the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs, and attitudes. Thus, what is important is not language.... but *saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations*" (6). In our culture, these

combinations are sometimes manifested in a specific presentation of sexual identity in order for many women to feel valued. If women have to accept a hypersexual identity to be valued, they will espouse the validity of such ideals and then be cut off from being able to report their own subjectification.

Another important study that addresses problems with previous research in terms of relying on self-reporting is "Beauty in the 'I' of the Beholder: Effects of Idealized Media Portrayals on Implicit Self-Image" by Inbal Gurari, John J. Hetts and Michael J. Strube who illuminate, "previous research suggesting small effects of advertising's portrayal of women may have underestimated such effects by relying primarily on explicit, self-report measures of body image." They promblematize self-reporting by pointing out the mixed messages that are daily sent through media and claim that researchers need to rely on expressed response behavior, rather than conscious reporting "whereas people may be able to adjust, correct and protect their self-evaluations on an explicit level, they may be less able to do so on an implicit level" (273). Beyond being able to locate, identify and clearly express what they think and feel about internalized sexism, women may not understand that this atmosphere is even harming them. Bordo comments on the same, "Studies that rely on viewers' *own* reports need to be carefully interpreted too. I know, from talking to women students, that they sometimes aren't all that clear about *what* they feel in the presence of erotic stimuli, and even when they are, they may not be all that comfortable admitting what they feel" (*The Male Body* 178). But comprehending the situation is not necessary for it to be affecting us, as Rebecca Whisnant explains in her article "Confronting pornography: Some conceptual basics", "Whether a person is harmed or not does not depend on how she feels. In fact, she can be harmed without even knowing about it" (22). As the young

women of this culture learn to internalize the gaze and produce hypersexual identities in response, they are taking in the parallel and contradictory lesson that their outward beauty shouldn't be important. Again, girls learn how to regurgitate that message too and they will at times *report* that they don't value their beauty and sexuality above all else, but when the overarching and implicit message of the culture imprints them with value only in those areas, they cannot fully accept both messages. They aptly learn which message to display at the proper time, all the while their inner voice is lost and they are unable to express the harm done to them in this sexually saturated culture.

Gurari, et al found study participants evaluated not only their own attractiveness on an implicit level, but also that of their female gender as a group (279) and they believe, "These findings offer support to the assertion that certain images may indeed lead participants to behave in ways different than they otherwise would even when their explicit self-evaluations are unaffected" (280). After compiling an extensive set of findings from many studies related to SO, Bonnie Moradi and Yu-Ping Huang found in "Objectification Theory and Psychology of Women: A Decade of Advances and Future Directions" that overall, sexual objectification experiences led to self-objectification, which research supports relates to greater body shame, greater appearance anxiety, lower internal bodily awareness and, importantly, a disconnection from body functions (392), all of which could alter the construction of identity, but in any case, keep young women focused on how their appearance presents a sexualized persona. This practice keeps them separated from their own legitimate sexuality and pleasure. More specifically, Aubrey cites studies concerning television, which found that "men valuing and selecting women based on their physical appearance.... was the second-most common theme in the entire sample" and Garner,

Sterk, and Adams, who found the main category of advice for readers of teen girl magazines "was to be 'ready' for sex by treating the self as a sex object" ("Impact" 4). As these studies attempt to prove, the hypersexual themes resonating through all aspects of our media are changing the way young women relate to themselves.

Many women desire to be valued in the common way we assign value to women in this culture: through use of the body. Crane reports, "Younger participants.... seemed to find it natural to make comparisons between themselves and the models in the photographs. They were inclined to identify with the models and seemed disappointed when they were unable to do so" (325). Such desire primes readers to participate in self objectification, as Kilbourne puts it, SO is "this tendency to view one's body from the outside in—regarding physical attractiveness, sex appeal, measurements, and weights as more central to one's physical identity" (133). She connects this to the fact that, "Studies at Stanford University and the University of Massachusetts found that about 70 percent of college women say they feel worse about their own looks after reading women's magazines.... a preoccupation with one's appearance takes a toll on mental health" (133). These studies are reinforced more recently by Aubrey who finds, "women who exhibited a lot of body display, i.e., showing a lot of skin, are the most likely.... to illicit state SO in college women" (24). Therefore, "those in the body-display condition had less positive things to say about their appearance" (21). Barbara B. Stern makes an attempt to explain similar findings in her study, "Feminist Literary Criticism and the Deconstruction of Ads: A Postmodern View of Advertising and Consumer Response": "Female consumers may be more inclined to identify with characters in action and to participate imaginatively in their lives" (564) and she cites another study that found "female response to be participatory in that women tended to see

(experience, feel or empathize with) a story from the inside" (559-60). She explains that young women readers of the advertisements "interpreted the meaning of the text as its meaning *to them*" (560) which can provide implications for my study in terms of viewers ingesting media images of women as relating specifically to them, causing a deeper connection to the messages and a stronger reaction in terms of identity construction.

All of this theory and research illuminates a culture that hides behind the slogan "sex sells" while causing further oppression through almost constant degradation in the sale of women's bodies. Because women feel they have to comply with the system or lose significance, they cannot profess agreement with the perceived tenets of feminism. My study attempts to fill a gap in the previous research by working to uncover any possible connections between women creating an identity that highlights their displays of sexuality, and their inability to call themselves "feminists" for fear of the connotations of the term sticking and creating for them an ugly, unwanted self. Where books like *Prude* and *The Feminist Mistake* work to blame feminism for the current situation, my study shows that feminist orientation can provide that protection against patriarchy that many young women were denied by their parents. It can generate a stronger sense of self-worth among women and lift the veil from the pressure to conform to hyper-sexuality.

METHODS

Performing overt sexuality is one manifestation of femininity as internalized sexism. In *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, bell hooks names the concept of internalized sexism the "enemy within" (14). Hypersexual images are so common in our everyday lives that women read them internally as a prescription: feminine (not *feminist*) is beautiful, beautiful is sexual; sexual is powerful and therefore valuable. Young women will seemingly interpret sexual images not only as standards of beauty, but also as standards of *value*. My study elicited responses from women about the connections between several issues of identity: the internalization of hyper-sexualized imagery, the development of self-value and identification with feminism.

Since women read in these images that their greatest value lies in their ability to perform as sexually available, the identity they might most think about displaying is their sexual identity and they design it to mirror the hyper-sexualized examples around them. According to Levy, "Sexiness is no longer just about being arousing or alluring, it's about being *worthwhile*" (31 emphasis mine). Because our thoughts ignite physical responses, an important thing to understand here is that this "*beauty myth is always prescribing behavior and not appearance*" (Wolf 14). It tells us what to do in order to become a "real woman", and Levy found, among the teenagers that she interviewed, "appearing slutty and getting recognition for it.... are the fast track to heightened female stardom right now in, in high school *as in life*" (144, emphasis mine). Not only the self esteem, but the complete identity of young women is in jeopardy when, "Makeup and high-heeled shoes, labiaplasty and breast implants are the result of the value placed on women and girls in the west, where women's bodies are changed and decorated to show that women are members of a

subordinate class that exists for men's delight" (Jeffreys 32). While other theorists and researchers have studied the male gaze, my survey is meant to take a different turn because, as Jhally tells it, "images having to do with gender strike at the core of individual identity; our understanding of ourselves as either male or female (socially defined within this society at this time) is central to our understanding of who we are.... an area of social life that can be communicated at a glance and that reaches into the core of individual identity" (253). My study intended to find relationships between consuming these images and the identities that women consumers then develop and exhibit.

To test this argument, I sought the answers to these research questions:

- Do hyper-sexualized media images promote self-objectification among women?
- What is the relationship between a woman's desired identity and feminist orientation?
- Does feminist identification help inoculate women against the seduction and self-objectification of hyper-sexualized images?

For the purposes of my study, I define "hypersexual" (positioning) as: body posture of which part or all is borrowed from sexualized positions of or like pornographic positions "that include sexual cues, such as closed eyes, open mouth, legs spread to reveal the genital area, and nudity or semi-nudity, particularly in the areas of the breasts and genitals" (Crane 317).

In addition, I define "feminism" as: the belief that men and women should have equal access to political, economic and social rights and responsibilities. I chose a definition that most broadly and least controversially expresses feminist ideals so that the participants in my study would be most likely to agree with the paradigms presented. That

way, I am able to best decipher if they hold even a small identification with feminist movement.

There were 12 slides in my survey, with 6 prompts about each one. I separated the answers into three groups: high feminist orientation (those who ranked themselves 4 or 5 for "I am a feminist"), low feminist orientation, (respondents who chose 1 or 2 for the same question) and all the 3 responses, which were discarded.

Survey Design

This cross-sectional, structured observation showed early college women 12 images of women in the media and asked them to respond, using a five point scale, to specific prompts about each woman's beauty, power, value, and attractiveness to men. The respondents also rated how much they wanted to look like and be like the woman in the photograph. See Appendix A. The images were displayed both on PowerPoint slides and as thumbnails on the hard copy of each survey. As the slideshow played, participants could follow along and rate their responses to the individual images.

The image analysis was an integral part of my research because I was gathering responses about how the women of my community interpreted and reacted to the media depictions of sexuality that infiltrate our lives. We know that exposure to representations of violence desensitizes us to violence; similarly, I expected to find that women have become desensitized to the hypersexual ideals of our culture.

When the test group finished responding to the images, they were prompted to rate their own beauty and value to society. Participants also answered questions about how much they value themselves and how they view feminism versus feminist ideology. In the study, I provided for the participants two prompts (among others) with which they were

asked to rate their agreement. The first provided a broad definition of feminism and the second stated "I am a feminist." I was interested to see how these responses would relate to each other since young women now live with the benefits from feminist movement in their everyday lives but seem resistant to *be* feminists. Their responses to these questions also helped me understand how much their willingness to acknowledge an association with feminism may be connected to their beliefs about how valuable displayed sexuality makes women in our culture.

In order to gather data about how the images affected the women participating in the study, I decided to use a control group. I presented the same set of demographic questions to respondents in the control group and I used their answers to compare against those of women who had seen the images. Specifically, I looked for differences between the control and study groups in terms of how much they liked themselves and their appearances, and how valuable they felt they were to society.

I asked 10 self-evaluative and demographic questions in both the test and the control group and received tidal wave of data. Without being exposed to the images, each person in the control group was asked to rate her self-value and her personal association with feminism. This group reported having a better self-image than those who viewed the photographs, and I could draw probable conclusions about the direct ways that hyper-sexualized images of women affected the respondents' perception of themselves. Their responses also provided information about how feminism is viewed versus beauty/sexuality and whether or not identifying with feminist ideals could help women maintain a more positive self-image in this culture.

Population

Although the survey was distributed to and answered by both women and men, I worked with responses provided by participants who identified as female. My participants were, only in part, a convenience sample made up of 219 women students (107 in the control group and 112 in the study group) from first-year composition classes. This number of respondents helped me make strong connections between common reactions and I was then better able to gauge the importance of their answers. Both groups answered demographic and self-perception questions, but the study group also responded to the 12 images from the survey.

Once I had their responses, I sorted them according to the way they rated their agreement with the statement, "I am a feminist." Those who marked a 4 or a 5 are grouped together with high feminist orientation (HFO) and those who ranked themselves a 1 or 2 were grouped as those with low feminist orientation (LFO). I set aside the surveys on which respondents marked a 3 for that question and only compared the results of those women with HFO and those with LFO. I ended up with 68 responses in the control group, and 60 in the test sample—a total of 128 participants. Interestingly, the categories of women with high feminist orientation (HFO) and women with low feminist orientation (LFO) have the same number of members: 64 each.

I planned to ask for the participation of this sample because I have easy access to them, but more importantly, they are an appropriate sample for my purposes. First of all, they are the demographic on campus that is (for the most part) the youngest and may provide the most insight into the identity development of young women today. Importantly, since these first year students are newly out of their parents' houses, they will be still under

the influence of that particular lifestyle which might provide implications between responses to the images and comfortability with a hypersexual cultural atmosphere. In addition, they are a demographic that is like me: mostly white, attending college, and living in the Midwest.

Instrumentation

As I began to search for images that represented the hyper-sexualized posturing I find common among current media, it was hard to narrow them down to a set of just 12. See Appendix B. I determined a few criteria, that the images be:

- Easily accessible in that the participants could possibly see them everyday and will probably recognize the subject of the photograph/image.
- An even distribution of white women and women of color.
- Inclusive of women who are not generally depicted as hyper-sexualized and do actually possess social, economic or political power.

Not only did I match each woman of color with a white woman, I tried to choose ones with equal status—for example Halle Berry is paired with Scarlett Johansson from the respective covers when they were named "Sexiest Woman Alive" by *Esquire* magazine. I was also careful to pair women that were in similar postures so that the level of sexuality exuded would be proximate.

In addition, the survey includes a range of celebrities, from politics, music, acting and modeling. This provided the respondents with several choices when deciding if there were any images with which they identified.

While the slides played, I waited for participants to mark their responses.

A Note about IRB

When I applied for IRB clearance to complete this project, I submitted a color copy of the survey I would be administering to the respondents. Interestingly, the IRB process was extraordinarily prompt—considering the hypersexual nature of the images I planned to display in classrooms and to students individually, it is worth noting that the review board deemed nothing disturbing in my sample of images. Even though, as the researcher and professor, I was uncomfortable showing some of these images (and so were some of my colleagues), as I asserted, these images have become so commonplace in this society that even considering possible harm to subjects viewing them caused the IRB committee little, if any, pause.

FINDINGS

The resulting data provided insight into each of my three research questions and possible conclusions about the impact of hyper-sexualized media and the effects it has on women's identity and propensity to self-objectify. I begin in this section by relating the demographic information that the respondents provided me and follow that by attempting to guide my readers through the results from the participants about the beauty, power, value and attractiveness to men of the women in each of the images. Where applicable, I have related how the respondents rated themselves.

Demographics

In both the control and test, the majority, or 83%, of respondents were 18 or 19 years old and the rest were between 20 and 25.

When participants were asked to note the education level of their parents, women with HFO showed a disparity from women with LFO in that fewer of their mothers had only a high school education and more had at least some college, but the numbers were pretty even for college graduates. See table 1, noticing the bolded numbers for a large margin between responses from women with HFO and LFO.

Table 1. Education Levels of Participants' Mothers

	HFO: Mother Education Total=63		**L**FO: Mother Education Total=64	
	%	#	%	#
High School	**15%**	**10**	**29%**	**19**
Some college/ Tech/ Other	**38%**	**24**	**26%**	**17**
College Degree	39%	25	37%	24
Graduate/ Doc.	6%	4	6%	4

Responses also show that more of the respondents with LFO had fathers with only a high school education; fewer of their fathers had a college degree. See table 2 and note bolded numbers indicate a large margin between responses from women with HFO and LFO.

Table 2. Education Levels of Participants' Fathers

	HFO: Father Education Total=62		**L**FO: Father Education Total=63	
	%	#	%	#
High School	**19%**	**12**	**30%**	**19**
Some college/ Tech/ Other	25%	16	23%	15
College Degree	**46%**	**29**	**36%**	**23**
Graduate/ Doc.	8%	5	9%	6

The participants with HFO showed both their parents had higher education levels; in particular 58% of their fathers had completed college and/or held advanced degrees. Only 46% of participants with LFO had highly educated fathers. Fathers' high level of education seemed to be an important factor in producing HFO in the respondents and having a parent with only a high school education seemed the strongest parental factor in predicting LFO.

Race and Ethnicity

Almost all of the respondents in my control and survey groups identified as white or Caucasian. The interesting thing is that every respondent of color, save one, rated herself with HFO and this includes women from several different races. See table 3 and note that the bolded numbers emphasize a woman of color who indicated she had HFO. Although the sample is small, seven out of eight, or 87.5% of women of color indicated HFO.

Table 3. Race Identification of Participants

Race you identify as:	**H**FO Total=63		**L**FO Total=62	
	%	#	%	#
White	90%	56	98%	61
Native American	**1%**	**1**	-	-
Hispanic	**1%**	**1**	1%	1
Black	**3%**	**2**	-	-
Asian	**4%**	**3**	-	-

Feminist Orientation

One of the most surprising things that I discovered was that almost all of the participants believed they almost totally or totally agreed with the *definition* of feminism. Where the previous graphs indicated percentages of respondents from participants, all of the following charts will provide the mean numbers. See table 4 and notice that bolded numbers point out the extreme difference between the responses of women with LFO to these two questions. While all four groups rated themselves high for supporting the ideas behind the feminism, there was a giant disagreement in terms of adopting the term "feminist" as part of one's belief system.

Table 4. Feminist Orientation of Participants

	Test: **H**FO Total=29	Test: **L**FO Total=31	Control: **H**FO Total=35	Control: **L**FO Total=33
Men & women should have equal access to political economic and social rights & responsibilities.	4.75	**4.38**	4.91	**4.66**
I am a feminist.	4.37	**1.54**	4.25	**1.45**

Beauty

Participants were asked not only to rank how beautiful they thought the women in the images were, but also themselves with the statement, "I like how I look". Young women with HFO rated themselves higher for liking their looks in both the test and the study, but the respondents who saw the slide show had the highest rating overall. See table 5 in which the bolded numbers reinforce that women with HFO had higher opinions of their looks than those with LFO.

Table 5. How Well Test and Control Participants Liked Their Looks

	Test: **H**FO Total=29	Test: **L**FO Total=31	Control: **H**FO Total=34	Control: **L**FO Total=33
I like how I look.	**4.0**	3.64	**3.92**	3.75

Even after watching the slides, respondents with HFO seemed to feel positive about their own appearances, .25 more than respondents with LFO who didn't even scan the images. It is also very important to point out that the participants with LFO had an even lower opinion of their physical beauty *after* they watched the images than the young women with LFO who didn't see the images at all, whereas those with HFO had an even higher opinion of their appearance after they viewed the photographs.

When we combine the numbers across the study and control groups for women with HFO and LFO, there is a distinguishable margin. See table 6 in which the bolded number indicates the higher score. Women with HFO had more positive responses than did those with LFO.

Table 6. Overall How Women With HFO and LFO Liked Their Looks

	Total: **H**FO Total=63	Total: **L**FO Total=67
I like how I look.	**3.96**	3.69

Among all the respondents, the same three women (Beyonce, Jennifer Lopez and Oprah Winfrey) were ranked as the top three most beautiful, in the same order, and "Lolita Lee" was positioned the least beautiful by both groups, as was Hillary Clinton. But, for the women with LFO, Clinton was significantly more unattractive than she was for the women with HFO. See table 7 in which the bolded numbers indicate the difference in responses from women with HFO and LFO to Hillary Clinton's appearance. Hillary Clinton was rated in the bottom three for young women with both HFO and LFO, but was listed .45 less attractive among the young women with LFO.

Table 7. 3 Women Rated Most and Least Beautiful

	HFO: Least beautiful	**L**FO: Least beautiful
I think this woman is beautiful.	Lolita 1.93	Lolita 2
	Miller 2.89	**Clinton 2.51**
	Williams/ **Clinton 2.96**	Ariel 3.09

These responses can be connected to the women in the images who were ranked highest when respondents were asked how much they would like to look like each woman. Their lowest choices were similar (Lolita and Serena Williams), but they disagreed over Marisa Miller. See table 8 and note the bolded numbers that highlight the difference in responses between women with HFO and LFO.

Table 8. 3 Women Rated as Ones Participants Most and Least Want to Look Like

	HFO: Most look like	**L**FO: Most look like	**H**FO: Least look like	**L**FO: Least look like
I would like to look like her.	Beyonce 3.34	Beyonce 3	Lolita 1.34	**Lolita 1.56**
	Winfrey 3.1	**Ariel 2.8**	Williams/ **Miller 2.03**	**Clinton 1.58**
	Lopez 3	Lopez 2.77	Clinton 2.13	Williams 2.12

Although Hillary Clinton is on both lists of women the respondents would least like to look like, she is still rated .55 higher among women with HFO—note that for women with LFO, she is only .02 more attractive than Lolita, the woman with the most negative responses! Respondents with HFO did not want to look like Marisa Miller in the iPod advert, yet according to the respondents with LFO, she isn't an undesirable option. The results for this image helped me answer my research question relating to identity and feminist orientation—who respondents want to look like may sometimes help indicate the kind of identity they desire to project.

Power

Physically, Serena Williams may be the most powerful woman who appeared in the survey. Undoubtedly, she had a powerful body, but women with LFO ostensibly tied "attractive to men" to "powerful", and thus sexual objectification to power, when they were rating how powerful each woman was. Respondents with HFO connected power with a strong physique, and political or financial clout in this case. See table 9, noting the bolded names and numbers that illuminate this discrepancy in the perception of participants with HFO and LFO.

Table 9. 3 Women Rated as Most and Least Powerful

	HFO: Most powerful	**L**FO: Most powerful	**H**FO: Least powerful	**L**FO: Least powerful
I think this woman is powerful.	Winfrey 4.55	Winfrey 4.9	N/A	Lolita 1.73
	Clinton 4.37	Clinton 4.54		Miller 2
	Williams 3.13	**Berry 3.06**		Sharapova 2.09
				Williams 2.19

It is interesting that Halle Berry is in the top three most powerful for young women with LFO, but she doesn't appear among the top three for young women with HFO. Instead, they name Serena Williams as the third most powerful woman when she is just shy of making the list of the *bottom* three for participants with LFO. The responses here are helpful in determining a relationship between hyper-sexualized and self-objectification. When participants see more power in postures like Berry's images, I note that reading such hyper-sexualized messages does seem to contribute to self-objectification.

Value

Since I am curious about the ways that beauty/sexuality, power and value all intersect in our society, I asked the participants to rate their own value to society. The women with HFO in the test had the highest rank of the four groups. Although the responses from all of the groups were about equal, women with LFO who saw the slideshow really stand out here. They reported the lowest perceived value to society, much lower than women with HFO who saw the same slides. See table 10 and notice the bolded numbers that emphasize the wide gap between responses in the test group from participants with HFO and LFO.

Table 10. How Valuable Participants Felt to Society

	Test: HFO Total=29	Test: LFO Total=31	Control: HFO Total=34	Control: LFO Total=33
I am valuable to society.	**4.06**	**3.5**	3.94	4.03

The women with LFO felt the lowest value after watching the images, and in this, I locate a clear correlation to my third research question—feminism did protect viewers from the ideology of hypersexual images. The women who pondered the (mostly) hyper-sexualized images and did not have the cushion of feminism to help remind them of their

value beyond what they may offer sexually—those with LFO—were more damaged by the influence of what they saw in the survey images.

The question for the test group about how attractive they felt men would find each woman is one meant to investigate value. Since I am proceeding with this study knowing the omnipresent patriarchy that shapes our social systems, I saw this question as one that partially indicates the value of the person in the image.

Both groups had a lot to say about these images and by far this was the question with the highest rated responses. For the most part, all participants agreed that men would most find Beyonce and Adriana Lima, the Victoria's Secret model, the most attractive, but they did not agree on their third choice: Ariel or Jennifer Lopez. Women with LFO also list Berry and Miller as the top women most attractive to men, when these are two of the most objectified women in the survey. See table 11 and note that the bolded numbers emphasize the differences in responses from women with HFO and LFO.

Table 11. 3 Women Rated Most and Least Attractive to Men

	HFO: Most	**L**FO: Most	**H**FO: Least	**L**FO: Least
I think men would find this woman attractive.	Beyonce 5	Lima/ **Lopez 4.67**	**Williams 2.17**	Clinton 2.29
	Ariel 4.89	Beyonce 4.58	Clinton 2.68	Winfrey 2.93
	Lima 4.86	**Berry/ Miller 4.54**	Winfrey 3.27	**Lolita 3.7**

The bottom three are also almost the same, except for the difference of Serena Williams and Lolita; additionally, I noticed that even though Lolita is in the bottom three by respondents with LFO, she is still ranked very high—she may not be thought of as the most attractive to men, but respondents with LFO believe that men will still be very attracted to the image this model projects. In fact, even though she is in the bottom three,

Lolita is still ranked .29 higher by the young women with LFO than she is by the women with HFO.

Correlations

Although these data are meaningful when looking at individual questions, when compared they offer more complex conclusions. For instance, even though Marisa Miller is ranked low much of the time, participants with HFO had her in their bottom three 83% of the time, but participants with LFO only put her in the lowest three 50% of the time. See table 12, using the bolded number as guides to which group ranked Miller in the bottom three. I realized that in five of the six categories, the image of Marisa Miller was ranked in the bottom three for women with HFO. In fact, the only time she was not in the bottom was when she was ranked according to what the respondents perceived men would think of her. They felt she was one of the least beautiful, powerful, or valued women and they did not want to look like or be like her. On the other hand, women with LFO only felt she should be in the bottom three half of the time.

Table 12. Results for Marisa Miller in iPod Advertisement

	HFO	LFO
I think this woman is beautiful.	**2.89**	3
I think this woman is powerful.	**2**	**2**
I think men would find this woman attractive.	4.68	4.54
This woman is valued by our culture.	**2.51**	**2.32**
I would like to look like her.	**2.03**	2.32
I would like to be like her.	**1.7**	**1.83**

Not surprisingly, there are interesting findings across other responses as well. It is really provocative that the same three women that young women with HFO rated as *most powerful* are *the same* three that they rated as least attractive to men. See table 13.

Table 13. Ratings by Women With HFO of Serena Williams' and Hillary Clinton's Beauty and Power

	HFO: Top 3 rankings		HFO: Bottom 3 rankings	
I think this woman is powerful.	***Winfrey***	**4.55**	N/A	
	Clinton	**4.37**		
	Williams	**3.13**		
I think men would find this woman attractive.	N/A		***Williams***	**2.17**
			Clinton	**2.68**
			Winfrey	**3.27**

These findings further illuminate how respondents with HFO viewed the power of women in the survey images. Not only did they rank women with financial, political and physical strength as powerful, they listed the same three women as the three most unattractive to men.

Although beauty and power don't seem to correlate in the responses from women with HFO, beauty and value do. I found that Oprah Winfrey and Jennifer Lopez were rated most beautiful and the participants with HFO wanted to look like them, but also that they were valuable and the respondents wanted to *be* like them. See table 14 in which the bolded numbers emphasize the same two women that were ranked most beautiful and valuable, and also that those were the same two women that respondents with HFO would like to look like and be like.

Table 14. 3 Women Ranked Beautiful, Valuable by Those With HFO; 3 Women They Most Want to Look and Be Like

	HFO: Top 3 rankings	
I think this woman is beautiful.	Beyonce	3.96
	Lopez/ Winfrey	**3.86**
	Sharapova	3.44
This woman is valued by our culture.	**Winfrey**	**4.44**
	Clinton	4.06
	Lopez	**3.44**
I would like to look like her.	Beyonce	3.34
	Winfrey	**3.1**
	Lopez	**3**
I would like to be like her.	**Winfrey**	**3.44**
	Clinton	2.68
	Jennifer Lopez	**2.34**

Both groups agreed about the value of two women: Hillary Clinton and Oprah Winfrey. However, there was a notable difference about their other rankings in response to who the respondents would and would not choose to *be* like. See table 15 and note the bolded numbers that emphasize the placement of Scarlett Johansson. Not only is Scarlett Johansson in the top three women the young women with LFO find valuable, she is just .3 lower than Hillary Clinton with a relatively high score of 3.4. Importantly, she is listed in the *bottom* three for women the young women with HFO would choose to *be* like.

Table 15. 3 Women That Participants with HFO Would Least Like to Be Like; 3 Most Valuable Women for Women with LFO.

	HFO: *Lowest* 3 rankings		**LFO:** *Top* 3 rankings	
This woman is valued by our culture.	N/A		Winfrey	4.7
			Clinton	3.7
			Johansson	**3.4**
I would like to be like her.	Lolita	1.34	N/A	
	Miller	1.7		
	Johansson	**1.86**		

There are many correlations between whom the respondents felt men would find attractive and whom they did or didn't want to be like. Women with HFO did not choose *any* of the three women that men would find attractive as the three they would like to be like. See table 16 in which the bolded numbers highlight Beyonce and Berry who appear on both lists for women with LFO.

Table 16. 3 Women Rated Most Attractive to Men and Those That Women With HFO and LFO Most Want to Be Like

	HFO: Top 3 rankings		LFO: Top 3 rankings	
I think men would find this woman attractive.	Beyonce	5	Lima/ Lopez	4.67
	Ariel	4.89	**Beyonce**	**4.58**
	Lima	4.86	**Berry**/ Miller	**4.54**
I would like to be like her.	Winfrey	3.44	Winfrey	3.45
	Clinton	2.68	Clinton/ **Beyonce**	**2.45**
	Lopez	2.34	**Berry**	**2.41**

Although none of the women that the participants with HFO wanted to be like were the same women they thought men would find attractive, those with LFO show that they want to be like Beyonce and Halle Berry who they ranked in the top three scores for women men would find attractive.

The two groups differ in other important ways concerning their views of Beyonce. See table 17 and note the bolded numbers that indicate a difference in the way women with HFO and LFO ranked her.

Table 17. 3 Women That Participants Would Like to Be Like

	HFO: Top 3 rankings		LFO: Top 3 rankings	
I would like to be like her.	Winfrey	3.44	Winfrey	3.45
	Clinton	2.68	Clinton/ **Beyonce**	**2.45**
	Lopez	2.34	Berry	2.41

What is important here is that while women with LFO do *not* think that Beyonce is powerful or valued, they would still like to be like her. Conversely, the high feminists feel that Beyonce is completely attractive to men, but they do not rank her as powerful or valued and they do not want to be like her—so men's desire for certain kinds of women don't seem to influence women with HFO. They don't want to be like a woman who they see as neither powerful nor valuable, indicating internal characteristics are more important to them.

Lastly, it is intriguing to look at the responses for each group about two specific people. Often, many of the same names show up for both the respondents with LFO and HFO, so one could assume that they pretty much perceive the images in the same way, but when I looked carefully, I noticed an interesting discrepancy. See tables 18a and 18b in which the bolded numbers emphasize the different responses for Winfrey and Clinton from women with HFO and LFO. When the name is italicized, it indicates the highest score between the two groups.

Table 18. a. Rankings for Oprah Winfrey and Hillary Clinton

	HFO: Top ranked	**L**FO: Top ranked	**H**FO: Bottom 3	**L**FO: Bottom 3
I think this woman is beautiful.	Beyonce 3.96	Beyonce 4.03	Lolita 1.93	Lolita 2
	Lopez/ ***Winfrey 3.86***	Lopez 3.8	Miller 2.89	**Clinton 2.51**
	Sharapova 3.44	**Winfrey 3.77**	Williams/ ***Clinton 2.96***	Ariel 3.09
I think this woman is powerful.	**Winfrey 4.55**	***Winfrey 4.9***	N/A	N/A
	Clinton 4.37	***Clinton 4.54***		
	Williams 3.13	Berry 3.06		
I think men would find her attractive.	N/A	N/A	Williams 2.17	**Clinton 2.29**
			Clinton 2.68	**Winfrey 2.93**
			Winfrey 3.27	Lolita 3.7

Table 18. b. Rankings for Oprah Winfrey and Hillary Clinton

	HFO: Top ranked	**L**FO: Top ranked	**H**FO: Bottom three	**L**FO: Bottom three
This woman is valued by our culture.	**Winfrey 4.44**	***Winfrey 4.7***	N/A	N/A
	Clinton 4.06	**Clinton 3.7**		
	Lopez 3.44	Johansson 3.4		
I would like to look like her.	Beyonce 3.34	N/A	Lolita 1.34	Lolita 1.56
	Winfrey 3.1		Miller/ Williams 2.03	**Clinton 1.58**
	Lopez 3		***Clinton 2.13***	Williams 2.12
I would like to be like her.	**Winfrey 3.44**	***Winfrey 3.45***	N/A	N/A
	Clinton 2.68	Beyonce/ **Clinton 2.45**		
	Lopez 2.34	Berry 2.41		

These ratings are very interesting because they show that even though both groups recognize Hillary Clinton in a similar way, she is not valued (in terms of numbers for each question) as much by the young women with LFO. In fact, these tables show every question for which her name was a top or bottom three answer, except for one, and I recognized that, without fail, her numbers are lower among the young women with LFO than HFO. Even for power, value and whom they would like to be like, she is ranked number two by both groups, but the participants with LFO have rated her below those with HFO.

Then, notice the numbers for Oprah Winfrey. She and Clinton appear on many of the lists, but in *this* case, the women with *L*FO often rate Winfrey higher. Apparently, women with LFO may be more in tune with Winfrey where the respondents with HFO are keen on Clinton.

ANALYSIS

These findings offer support to my contention that feminism can provide a thread for girls to follow out of the spider web of hypersexual media that would have them believe their greatest value lies in pleasing men. I found that women with HFO wanted to emulate the women they found powerful and valuable, but women with LFO seemed to internalize the male gaze and desire the status of women that men would find attractive. In offering an analysis of my data, I begin with an overview responding to my research questions, and then focus on the individual images, comparing the difference in responses from women with HFO and those with LFO.

Research Questions

My first research question was: do hyper-sexualized media images promote self-objectification among women? I was curious to discover what kinds of links might exist between self-objectification in women and their exposure to highly-sexualized depictions like the ones I used in my survey and I believe there was indeed a connection between the two, best proven through the responses by women with LFO to the prompt about how much they would like to *be* like each woman in the image. They rated Beyonce, with a mean of 2.45 and Berry, with a mean of 2.41, in their top three, but they found neither of these women valuable. In addition, they did not list Beyonce as powerful. Through their responses we can see that the characteristic they most prize is beauty, allure for men: Berry's mean was 4.54 and Beyonce's 4.58. See table 19 in which the bolded numbers illuminate the responses of women with LFO to Berry and Beyonce.

Table 19. Women with LFO Want to Be Like Beyonce and Berry

	LFO: Top rankings	
I think this woman is beautiful.	**Beyonce**	**4.03**
	Lopez	3.08
	Winfrey	3.77
I think this woman is powerful.	N/A	
I think men would find this woman attractive.	Lima/ Lopez	4.67
	Beyonce	**4.58**
	Miller/Berry	4.54
This woman is valued by our culture.	N/A	
I would like to look like her.	**Beyonce**	**3**
	Ariel	2.8
	Lopez	2.77
I would like to be like her.	Winfrey	3.45
	Clinton/**Beyonce**	**2.45**
	Berry	2.41

Since those are only external elements, it is clear that the respondents with LFO would like to be like women who are objectified. That is, although they may *know* that judging themselves against media produced standards of beauty is illogical, "women cannot avoid and may very likely still learn the powerful implicit societal association between extreme standards of physical attractiveness and success, acceptance, and ultimately self worth" (Gurari, et al 274). As the respondents with LFO demonstrate, no matter what we are *told*, women will probably still internalize the male gaze and react by self-objectifying. What's more, when we examine the list of who women with LFO say

they would like to look like, their answers seem to support the same trend. Beyonce, Ariel and Lopez are their top three, but these women, again, do not appear on their list for power or value.

The positive connection is further supported by the response to Hillary Clinton from women with LFO. Even though they labeled her as one of the most valuable with a mean of 3.7 and one of the most powerful, with a mean of 4.54, her worth, in their eyes, is negated: they ranked her the very lowest for women men would find attractive (2.29 mean). They thought she was *not* beautiful, with a mean of 2.51 and they did not want to look like her, with a mean of 1.58. See table 20 on which the responses for Clinton are bolded.

Table 20. **Women With LFO Do Not Want to Look Like Clinton**

	LFO: Top ranked		**LFO:** Lowest ranked	
I think this woman is beautiful.	N/A		Lolita	2
			Clinton	**2.51**
			Ariel	3.09
I think this woman is powerful.	Winfrey	4.9	N/A	
	Clinton	**4.54**		
	Berry	3.06		
I think men would find this woman attractive.	N/A		**Clinton**	**2.29**
			Winfrey	2.93
			Lolita	3.7
This woman is valued by our culture.	Winfrey	4.7	N/A	
	Clinton	**3.7**		
	Johansson	3.4		
I would like to look like her.	N/A		Lolita	1.56
			Clinton	**1.58**
			Williams	2.12
I would like to be like her.	Winfrey	3.45	N/A	
	Beyonce/**Clinton**	**2.45**		
	Berry	2.41		

It's not only Clinton—women with LFO do not want to look like *any* of the women they listed as valuable to society, and they don't want to look like most of the women they saw as powerful. It seems this is just another manifestation of a problem Mary Wollstonecraft articulated long ago: "Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its guilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison" (qtd. Bordo *Unbearable Weight* 18). When it is clear through their responses is that beauty is what they value in terms of how they want to fashion their looks and identities, the answers from women with LFO seem to suggest a connection between seeing hypersexual images and a self-objectifying reaction.

These data also respond to my second query: what is the relationship between a woman's desired identity and feminist orientation? Young women with HFO wanted to be like the women they thought were valuable and powerful: Winfrey, Clinton, Williams and Lopez, and *not* like the ones they believed men would find attractive: Beyonce, Ariel, Lima. Their HFO apparently helped them feel more secure to make some choices based on characteristics that were not solely external; they were more comfortable *being* like women with actual political, economic and social power like Hillary Clinton, and more at ease with bucking societal expectations by choosing completely separate women to emulate than the ones they thought men would be attracted to. In this connection, participants with HFO were ostensibly more sheltered from self-objectification. See table 21 and note the bolded names and numbers for Winfrey, Clinton and Lopez.

So a strong identification with feminism seems to help women make more confident choices about modeling their identities after people with other important characteristics besides conventional beauty or hyper-sexuality.

Table 21. Women with HFO Want to Be Like Powerful, Valued Women, Not Like the Women Men Would Be Attracted To

	HFO: Top rankings	
I think this woman is powerful.	**Winfrey**	**4.55**
	Clinton	**4.37**
	Williams	3.13
I think men would find this woman attractive.	N/A	
This woman is valued by our culture.	**Winfrey**	**4.44**
	Clinton	**4.06**
	Lopez	**3.44**
I would like to be like her.	**Winfrey**	**3.44**
	Clinton	**2.68**
	Lopez	**2.34**

Lastly, I wondered if that same feminist orientation that guided young women with HFO in making different choices would make a difference in the ways they interpreted the images overall. Since respondents with HFO who saw the slideshow reported the highest overall self-value with a mean of 4.06 (table 10), it seems that their resistance built up as the images continued and perhaps their feminist orientation *did* protect them against the seduction of the images. Such a conclusion is further supported by the data that indicates women with LFO scored themselves lowest in this category after they watched the images, with a mean of 3.5. Possibly, because they did not have the base of feminism to support their inherent value to society, they ingested the hypersexual images, judged themselves harshly against our sexualized beauty standards and saw less value in themselves. That is, not only did they feel less beautiful, which we might expect, but they may have equated that "lack" as a deficiency that made them less valuable to society. They did not have the

help that feminism provides in guiding women to cultivate characteristics that speak to their individuality or specific talents and that could bring them *actual* value in society.

Winfrey versus Clinton: Responses to Feminism

One woman with such value, and also power, that extends beyond her sexuality is Hillary Clinton; she embodies the complex responses we have to women of power in our culture, probably even more for someone of my generation than that of the women in the study. As I was growing up in a conservative, religious and subliminally patriarchal home, she was Hillary *Rodham* Clinton, a woman who retained her maiden name (and independence). My parents did not support the Clintons. I remember standing next to the refinished hutches in my living room and paying a bit of attention to a news story on some Clinton scandal when my mom emphatically told me, "Dad thinks they're *really* gonna get him this time." I was surprised by how many of the respondents with LFO in my study actually believed in valuing and wanting to be like Hillary Clinton because for me, such admissions would have been equivalent to rebellion against my family—something I wouldn't have been as comfortable with as a teenager. A readiness to accept Clinton signals to me a shift in the cultural consciousness in which she now resides as a more respected, less threatening (and therefore more valuable) person in our society.

It is important that participants with LFO ranked her lower than participants with HFO on their lists of most valuable and of women they would like to be like. She appears a full point lower than Winfrey by women with LFO in both categories and so is perceived more closely to Johansson, Beyonce and Berry. See table 22 and note the bolded numbers for Clinton that highlight the difference in how women with HFO and LFO esteem her.

Table 22. Responses of Women with HFO and LFO to Clinton

	HFO: Top rankings		LFO: Top rankings	
This woman is valued by our culture.	Winfrey	4.44	Winfrey	4.7
	Clinton	**4.06**	**Clinton**	**3.7**
	Lopez	3.44	Johansson	3.4
I would like to be like her.	Winfrey	3.44	Winfrey	3.45
	Clinton	**2.68**	Beyonce/ **Clinton**	**2.45**
	Lopez	2.34	Berry	2.41

It is as if the women with LFO know how they *should* feel about Clinton, but don't quite accept her position. Robin Tolmach Lakoff writes about this conundrum in her book *The Language War*: "Everything we feel about her [Clinton] is distorted or exaggerated. Responses to her are provoked less by her actual behavior and more by the symbolic function she plays" (193). The members of our society, whether or not they are feminists, understand the symbol that is Hillary Clinton; they understand she is meant to be accepted as an example of advancements women have made, and like so many other imperative elements of feminist movement, she cannot be despised but she cannot be exalted—"the best way is to neutralize her" (185). This seems to be what the respondents with LFO have done because they acknowledge her value, but they rank her very low when they *can*: beauty, and attractiveness (see table 20). Again, Clinton represents our responses to women in power: "As women (albeit a small minority of women) begin to realize an unprecedented political, economic, and sexual self-determination, they fall ever more completely under the dominating gaze of patriarchy" (Bartky 43). So, the respondents can acknowledge her value and power, but they also can criticize her for failing to please society according to the standards of beauty that please men. If we understand that gaze to

be the one constantly imposing standards of beauty, one of the strongest ways to sanction Ms. Clinton is to shame her through her appearance—something that was practiced when her husband was president. In *Enlightened Sexism*, Susan J. Douglas catalogues derogatory jabs about Clinton's voice and housekeeping abilities, asking readers to "note how all of these comments are not substantive criticisms, but are trivializing and seek to reduce her to her physical features or to liken her to famous female villains" (269). Since the young women with LFO might adhere more to the strictures of patriarchy, indicated by their desire to be like the women they think men would find attractive (see table 15), the value they even allow Clinton is .36 lower than the young women with HFO who have more freedom to accept her and gave her a mean of 4.06 (see table 18). Participants with HFO did rank her in the bottom three in the beauty (2.96 mean) and attractiveness to men (2.68 mean) categories, but they scored her from .39-.55 higher than participants with LFO. Women with HFO seem less concerned about sexual beauty as an important and desirable characteristic because they found Clinton more attractive than the respondents with LFO. Women with HFO ostensibly have less of a problem with women who look older, wiser and more powerful.

It is also intriguing to note that where respondents with *HFO* usually rank Clinton higher than respondents with LFO, the young women with LFO often rank *Oprah Winfrey* higher than young women with HFO (see table 18). While these groups have similar answers, it seems they have a different perspective overall on their more valued role model. Along with Hillary Clinton, participants with LFO ranked Oprah Winfrey high on their lists of beauty, power, value and they wanted to be like her (but again, they still don't want to *look* like this woman they feel is so beautiful, powerful and valued). Regardless of her

fortune and fame, I was also a bit surprised by these responses, due to her age and her race. But Douglas enlightens us that Winfrey "has almost transcended race" (146), and explains that she is so popular among white women because she "let us in" the black counter-culture, so to speak, she "includes the white audience in her hip community" (148). But I'm not sure this idea fully explains why women with LFO are more comfortable with Winfrey.

Instead, the data (see table 18) from women with LFO indicates, "The Oprah dynasty affirms—indeed demands—that women turn within and improve themselves instead of turning outward and storming the barricades. Women's advancement is a solitary, narcissistic process, not a mass cooperative one" (Douglas 151). To better accept the tenets of this patriarchy, women must tightly control the body. Winfrey provides them a "hip" and entertaining way to do that—again without challenging the power structure, they can focus inward on their flaws, they can push themselves toward greater command of their appearances and identities, they can believe they are enacting social change all the while altering themselves. It is comfortable and, above all, safe for young women with LFO to identify with Winfrey—then they don't have to identify with something like feminism, a move that would introduce them to societal criticism.

Beyonce, Halle Berry and Serena Williams: Evaluations of Power

This discrepancy in responses is made clearer when we notice whom the respondents with LFO want to *be* like. Beyonce was very popular in this survey. Both groups of participants thought she was the most beautiful: women with HFO rated her with a mean of 3.96; women with LFO gave 4.03 (see table 8). The all believed men would find her attractive: participants with HFO ranked her number one with a mean of 5, women with

LFO gave a 4.58 (table 7). All the respondents wanted to look like Beyonce the most: women with HFO had a 3.34 mean and women with LFO a mean of 3 (table 8), but notice the other responses. Again, they agreed that she was not valuable or powerful, but importantly, the young women with LFO wanted to *be* like her (table 19). It is not surprising that they read the image of her as weaker and less valued—she is pictured in a glittering bronze bikini with all possible cleavage displayed (only a string holds the cups together), and she is contorted, sprawled on the beach. One hand is entwined in her fluttering tresses and she is leaning on her other elbow. This posture—both unnatural and uncomfortable—perfectly emphasizes the contrast between her hips and waist, creating a sloping curve. The readers' eyes run along the contours of her body from her voluptuous breasts to the arrow made by the bikini covering her genital region. According to analysis like Bartky's: "one thing is clear: woman's body language speaks eloquently, though silently, of her subordinate status in a hierarchy of gender" (36). I argue that such body language could very well be one like Beyonce displays here: hyper-sexuality.

Kilbourne explicates about images like Beyonce's: "Today little girls constantly rate the supermodels high on their list of heroes, and most of us know them by their first names alone. Imagine—these woman are *heroes* to little girls, not because of the courage or character or good deeds, but because of their perfect features and poreless skin" (60). How can this be? Bordo writes,

> the large numbers of women who are having implants purely to enlarge or reshape their breasts and who consider any health risk worth the resulting boon to their self-esteem and 'market value'.... take the risk not because they have been

> passively taken in by media norms.... but because they have correctly discerned that these norms shape the perceptions and desires of potential lovers and employers.... their overriding concern is their right to be desired, loved, and successful (*Unbearable Weight* 20).

We could take the responses from young women with LFO about wanting to be like Beyonce regardless of her lack of power or value as an anomaly, except that this group responded to another woman in a similar way.

On the cover of *Esquire* magazine, Halle Berry is shown in black and white—all the better to emphasize the color of her lingerie instead of her skin— and is surrounded by text in blue (blue balls, anyone?). The large letters lead the reader to understand the cover as, "If you had two days with HALLE BERRY what would you do?.... HAVE MORE SEX". On the other side, not right at her pubic area, but just above, is the word "BUSH" at the beginning of a headline. The straps of her corset-like top are slipping off on one shoulder, being pulled off by her on the other side, (the text adjacent to her arm partially reads "A Hot Available Woman") and her underpants dip low in the front, essentially creating that arrow to the genitals again. Her body is further sectioned by thigh-high stockings that leave enough of the top of her leg exposed to further pull the reader's gaze to her private parts. The text (placed just below the bolded "HAVE MORE SEX") stands next to this bare part of her leg reads, "Would you listen?", perhaps in reference to rape. *This* is an image that women with LFO rated as one of the top three *most powerful* with a mean of 3.06 (see table 8). Of course, they did choose two authentically powerful women for their top three, but including Halle Berry (especially in this image) somehow

problematizes the amount of power or value they assigned to Clinton and Winfrey. Additionally, the suggestive copy that envelops Berry's image necessitates analysis as it brashly articulates for readers what photographs like this are meant to imply. When we consider how the text wrapping evokes use of Berry as a sex object, willing or not, it is shocking that she is seen as powerful *at all*, but then, as Jeffreys points out in *Anticlimax*,

> Women may be born free but they are born into a system of subordination. We are not born into equality and do not have equality to eroticise [sic]. We are not born into power and do not have power to eroticise [sic]. We are born into subordination and it is in subordination that we learn our sexual and emotional responses. It would be surprising indeed if any woman reared under male supremacy was able to escape the forces constructing her into a member of an inferior slave class (302).

So the reading of this image by young women with LFO shows clearly that they misunderstand—where they see sexual power, in reality photographs like this one are, as Douglas posits, "little more than fantasies of power.... the wheedling, seductive message to young women is that being decorative is the highest form of power" (5). These depictions indeed represent fantasy all around: male sexual fantasy personified simultaneously with female's power fantasy belied. Accepting, without critique, such a subordinate position deprives women of agency in any other area of life—left with nowhere to go, we slide farther down the rabbit hole. Here is where feminist orientation may offer support to analyze the situation and move toward change.

And yet, what *kind* of power are they seeing on Berry's cover? It seems to me that this picture embodies the overarching idea that

> it is precisely through women's calculated deployment of their faces, bodies, attire, and sexuality that they gain and enjoy true power—power that is fun, *that men will not resent*, and indeed will embrace. True power here has nothing to do with economic independence or professional achievement.... it has to do with getting men to lust after you and other women to envy you" (Douglas 10, emphasis mine).

After all, as Bordo notes, "it's the "business" of *all* of us to be beautiful" (*The Male Body* 197). So our success arrives through the art of restraining and displaying what we can—through stifling desire and talent for the benefit of patriarchy. Perhaps they are, as Luce Irigaray writes in "This Sex Which is Not One", "experiencing [themselves] only fragmentarily" (320). As each woman belongs to the patriarchy, "'She' is indefinitely other in herself" (319). Regurgitating what they observe, without the benefit of feminist criticism, the participants with LFO are removed from identity outside of a sexual one.

Am I making too much out of the responses from women with LFO here? Jeffreys asserts, "The idea that women gain power over men by being clothed as prostitutes or dominatrixes, is a pernicious myth" (*Beauty and Misogyny* 98) and that myth is what Douglas deems the exchange we made for freedoms gained by feminist movement (156). That is, the logical goals involved in gender equality that feminism pursues have been swapped for the belief that we have *sexual* autonomy. This is a necessary exchange if women are to continue to be dominated. As Dr. M. Gigi Durham explicates in *The Lolita*

Effect, "myths, as we define them in media studies, are the *dominant* ideas at a particular point in time—the ideas that are in the best interests of the most powerful groups in society" (188). Here in my study, Halle Berry is "typical of the mixed messages so many ads and other forms of the media give girls. The young woman seems fierce and powerful, but really she's exposed, vulnerable" (Kilbourne 140). We *need* to address all the implications of the reading of this as a powerful image. Otherwise, "To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom the disciplines have been imposed" (Bartky 27). The respondents with HFO seem to be more protected against this imposed powerlessness, as they did not read this photograph in the same way respondents with LFO did.

Young women with HFO also read the image of Serena Williams differently than those with LFO: not only is she one of their top three most powerful women, expressed by a mean of 3.13 you can find her among the *lowest* ranked powerful women by participants with LFO, with a mean of 2.19 (see table 9). Several things are interesting in this contrast between their ratings: the more obvious non-whiteness of Williams here, the dissimilarity of the expressions on Berry's and Williams' faces, the consideration of Williams' versus Berry's career. Remember, almost all women of color that participated in my study ranked themselves as having HFO (see table 3). Perhaps the darker shade of Williams' skin accounts for the difference in the way this image was read by both groups. It is also curious that women with LFO find Williams particularly *not* powerful when, according to *Tennis News Online*, she can pound a serve up to 189 km/hour. She also appears more powerful in this composition due to her happy, engaged expression—she looks like she is *choosing* rather than vacantly inviting as Berry and Johansson do with their stoned, open-

mouthed expressions. And there is no text swarming Serena that suggests forcing intercourse with her.

Serena Williams ranks with Hillary Clinton and Oprah Winfrey as one of the three most powerful women for respondents with HFO. See table 23, noting the bolded numbers that emphasize the position of Williams from women with HFO and LFO. I was very intrigued when I noticed that these were the *same* three women who young women with HFO thought would be the *least* attractive to men—what's more, these same participants did not want to *be* like *any* of the three women they thought men would find most attractive: Beyonce, Ariel or Lima (see table 16).

Table 23. Serena Williams Is Powerful for Women with HFO

	HFO: Top rankings		**HFO:** Lowest rankings		**LFO:** *Lowest* rankings	
I think this woman is powerful.	Winfrey	4.55	N/A		Lolita	1.73
	Clinton	4.37			Miller	2
	Williams	**3.13**			Sharapova	2.09
					Williams	**2.19**
I think men would find this woman attractive.	Beyonce	5	**Williams**	**2.17**	N/A	
	Ariel	4.89	Clinton	2.68		
	Lima	4.86	Winfrey	3.27		

In response to my research question, a strong identification with feminism seems to have taught them to understand which women have *actual* power, rather than "the sexual power to bring men to their knees" (Gill 103). In fact, two of the women they listed as *least* beautiful are two of the same they listed as *most* powerful. Women with HFO seem more comfortable with powerful women and more comfortable defying the desires of men, as they clearly do not consider what men want when deciding who they want to be.

Respondents with LFO did not respond in the same way. They did not want to be like all the women they found valuable and powerful, but they did want to be like Beyonce and Berry, both of whom they ranked as one of the top three women most attractive to men (see table 16).

Clinton versus Johansson: How We Mark Ourselves as Valuable

Who *did* the young women with *H*FO want to be like? The women they found valuable: Oprah Winfrey, Hillary Clinton and Jennifer Lopez are their top three in both categories (see table 21). They also ranked Clinton, with a mean of 4.37 and Winfrey, with a mean of 4.55 as powerful, and Winfrey wins the contest by being beautiful too, with a mean of 3.86. Intriguingly, for the young women with LFO, in addition to Clinton and Winfrey they find Scarlett Johansson, with a mean of 3.4, one of the most valuable (see table 15). Not only is she in the top three for participants with LFO, we should note that she is in the *bottom* three for women the participants with HFO want to *be* like, with a mean of 1.86. Again, how can we have such disparity between responses from women with H and LFO? What do they each pick out of Johansson's image to cause such strong responses?

As I look at her image, I wonder as Elizabeth Cady Stanton did, "Why is it at balls and parties, when man comes dressed in his usual style, *fashion requires woman to display her person, to bare her arms and neck*? Why must she attract man's admiration? Why must she secure his physical love? (qtd. Jeffreys *Beauty and Misogyny* 88). Because otherwise she wouldn't be "The Sexiest Woman Alive", duh. But valuable? It is challenging to decipher what indicates Johansson has any value in this image: her head is tipped back (one can only guess in orgasmic ecstasy), just one of her eyes is visible, and

hardly—that is, she is nearly anonymous. She is wearing an inexpensive-looking white tank top, which maybe is meant to look like a borrowed from a man, it is so short. One of her hands is tousling her hair (the covering of her face, then, is her own doing) and the other is resting on her upper thigh and her thumb has slipped between her legs. She doesn't appear particularly seductive, rather just dazed. In "A Woman's Worth" Javacia N. Harris asks an imperative question about images like this one: "Of course women should feel comfortable in our skin, but do we need to pose for *Playboy* to prove we do? Do we really need to put our bodies on display for someone else's sexual pleasure (and Hugh Hefner's economic gain)....?" (55) Exchange "*Esquire*" for Hugh Hefner and maybe we get a clue about what makes Johansson valuable here, although I don't think that is what the women with LFO meant in their responses.

Even then, "portraying a woman's body and sexuality as merchandise, as entertainment, is more than disrespectful. It's dangerous because it becomes much easier to demand, even force a woman to give you her body once she's been transformed from a person into property" (62). And if this kind of sexual commodity is who young women want to *be*, the danger is just as palpable for them. When she can barely even see what is coming at her, in this image we can find the embodiment of Bartky's assertion, "In the regime of institutionalized heterosexuality, woman must make herself 'object and prey' for the man: it is for him that these eyes are limpid pools" (34). Respondents with HFO seem somehow insulated against this image, since they ranked Johansson, with a mean of 1.86, as one of the three women they do not want to be like (see table 15). They must understand the real value this picture encapsulates: that of a cog in the patriarchal machinations.

Where young women with HFO don't want to *be* like Scarlett Johansson, those with LFO don't want to *look* like Hillary Clinton—she is in their bottom three with a mean of 1.58 (see table 7). The really amazing thing about the choices made by participants with LFO is that they *do* want to look like Jennifer Lopez and Ariel, yet, when I took a minute to locate what characteristics they found in these women, I could only find that they thought Lopez was beautiful with a mean of 3.8 (see table 7) and that men would think she was attractive (4.67 on table 11). That means that neither Ariel nor Jennifer Lopez appeared on the lists for power or value—yet these are the women participants with LFO want to look like, while they particularly *do not* want to look like Clinton, a woman they charted as one of the most powerful, with a mean of 4.54 and valuable, with a mean of 3.7 (see table 18). Sadly, this partly demonstrates what art historian John Berger argues, "A woman's *appearance*.... has been socially determined to be 'of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life'" (qtd. Bordo *The Male Body* 196). When it becomes clear that women like the respondents with LFO want to look and even *be* like women even they deem weak and devalued, when women they *do* value and see as powerful are the women parading for the sexual excitement of men, when they distinctly *don't* want to look like women who are powerful and valued, we should note that disconnect.

Women with LFO want to *look* like Ariel (a top 3 image women with HFO thought men would find attractive)—Ariel is a cartoon person. She is not even an actual woman whose image was photo shopped to look "perfect". In this case, Ariel *is* an actual fantasy, both in myth and in conception. She is a child; she is a character that is so desirable and beautiful that the man she loves doesn't need to hear anything she *thinks*, he only needs to

see her to want her. Ariel is the ultimate example of a female whose identity is entirely encapsulated in her appearance. Bordo writes, "What matters is the gap between the self and the cultural images. We measure ourselves not against the ideal of health, not even usually (although sometimes) against each other, but against created icons, fantasies made flesh. Flesh *designed* to arouse admiration, envy, desire" (70). Perhaps they are incapable of noticing the embedded sexism in these images because they have never known a society without the privileges provided them by earlier feminist movement and they live, as many of us do, under the assumption that we "can't possible undermine women's equality at this late date, right?" (Douglas 9). Or maybe they are confused about the power and value these women have—not any that "in any way discomforts men or pushes feminist goals one more centimeter forward" (10). Perhaps they've swallowed the line that "women are fundamentally different from men and can never be equal to them" (11). Whatever is invoking these responses from women with LFO, it carries over even to the women that are in their bottom three rankings.

Marisa Miller and Lolita: Screwed as the Ultimate Commodities

Two of the women most often ranked in the bottom three by both groups were Marisa Miller (naked on the beach but for an iPod vibrating on her private parts) and "Lolita" from a Lee jeans print ad in which the logo is placed as if about to breach the very jeans advertised. It was challenging, when first writing about these women, to keep from calling them by the brand names that are, ostensibly, about to penetrate their bodies. Jhally writes, "people construct their identities through the commodity form, and in which commodities are part of a supernatural magical world where anything is possible with the purchase of a product" (252)—like if you lie and arch on the beach in nothing but your

iPod, everyone will want you so bad, the iPod will *make* you a sex goddess (which is, of course, the ultimate achievement).

Miller's faint, innocent smile in this image seems to indicate that her only joy, even though she is lying nude on the beach, comes from the music playing through the iPod covering her genital region. This picture implies that when women listen to the commands of the consumer culture (in this case the messages coming through the iPod, as well as the message that the only thing one needs in the world is an iPod), these commands will be what brings them joy as the women consume, all while letting themselves be sexually consumed. The iPod masks Miller's authentic, inner desire, which she is unable to hear over the noise of the culture, the noise of the iPod. The goods serve to satisfy all our needs—as if she wouldn't need anything or anyone else to fulfill even her sexual desires, she's got it all covered by allowing consumer culture to penetrate her identity.

I have to admit, I didn't expect to see such consistent rejection of these images, but I suppose it can be explained by one of the unspoken standards of beauty: "Women should be sexy, not overly sexual" (Douglas 206). However, it is necessary to note that yes, Marisa Miller, IPod lover, was in the bottom three for women with LFO, but only half of the time (see table 12). Compare that amount to the women with HFO who ranked her as not beautiful with a mean of 2.89, and who do not want to look like her (see table 8). They said she is not powerful, not valuable and they do not want to be like her (see table 16). Yet, respondents with LFO were not so repulsed, unaware as Kilbourne asserts, "many people do not fully realize that there are terrible consequences when people become things" (27), and that "women are especially vulnerable because our bodies have been objectified and commodified for so long" (132). Images like this are common in this culture (which is

why I chose them for my study) and many people don't have negative responses to them. One important way to understand how the rising level of value assigned to sexuality is possible is to consider the work of Post-Structuralist theorists and how they explain our lack of ability to separate ourselves from the images that construct cultural standards of beauty—an inability to differentiate between images and reality. This is known as "hyper reality", in which comprehension of the real and imaginary are blurred—what's more, Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Lina Leavy explain in *Feminist Research Practice*, we even substitute *signs* for the *real*. For our media-centered generations, texts are active (88-90). This is critical because it indicates that it can be nearly impossible to comprehend that hyper-sexuality is not *reality*.

This is another case, as with Hillary Clinton, where it seems the respondents knew what they were *supposed* to say, but they didn't necessarily completely ascribe to the sanctions. As Durham explains, young women are programmed to know the *proper* response to such images, but that doesn't prevent the ideals from being internalized: "'Paris Hilton is a skank,' a girl might say, but she would also admit that Hilton's slender, busty body, blonde hair, and long legs epitomize women's desirability today. Moreover, because this type of body is endlessly mirrored in all forms of media, it becomes the standard against which all others are judged—and found lacking". She quotes Rosalind Wiseman who further explains, "Girls know they're manipulated by the media to hold themselves to an impossible standard of beauty, but that doesn't stop them from holding themselves to it anyway" (181). The participants with LFO carried out another problematic reading in this survey when they rated the image of "Lolita" in the Lee jeans commercial. Yes, they rated her in the bottom 3 often, but her numbers are still very high for attractiveness to men

(which we know is ultimately important to them). Additionally, in some cases her numbers are almost even with how the women with LFO rated Hillary Clinton.

Many decriers of this ad campaign likened the images to child pornography and the situation of her body juxtaposed with the positioning of the Lee logo does seem particularly invasive. The ad depicts a teen girl, her shirt unbuttoned to her sternum, revealing the absence of a bra—the full area of her right breast and even nipple exposed. On her side, she reclines raised up on her elbow, licking a red lollypop while gazing seductively for the camera. Her hips face front and she has one leg raised so that her genital region is indeed revealed. And the Lee logo is placed there, between her legs, a stark, white object about to enter. We could further explore the issues of sexually commodifying children's bodies if we reconstructed the same image but with a teenaged boy. It would "look ridiculous, because the [boy would] have been divested of [his] social status through the medium of inappropriate [display]" (Jeffreys *Beauty and Misogyny* 88). Such a switching of roles and a subsequent questioning of what we accept in this culture should make it clear that, as Bartky claims, "The subordination of women, then, because it is so pervasive a feature of my culture, will (if uncontested) appear to be natural—and because it is natural, unalterable" (qtd. 8). And that is how our culture has become "pornified" (Valenti 41): "It is not always so easy to recognize the oppressive character of pornography and its popular culture manifestations precisely because it is so normal. These notions have exerted enormous pressure in shaping our sense of ourselves as women or men, teaching us to become aroused in and by oppressive situations" (Jhally 435). Young women with LFO did put "Lolita" in the bottom some of the time, for instance women they would like to look like (with a mean of 1.56, but when they did, their scores for her were almost

synonymous with Clinton's mean of 1.58 (see table 8). They also rated her with a 3.7 for men finding her attractive, less than a point behind the women in their top three (see table 11). That becomes even more important if you recall that the women participants with LFO wanted to be like were not the women they found powerful or valuable, but women who men were attracted to. Their responses exemplify what Kilbourne points out, "At the very least, advertising helps to create a climate in which certain attitudes and values flourish, such as the attitude that women are valuable only as objects of men's desire" (290). Further, "Instead of the modern economy leading to any decrease in harmful practices it exploits them, as in cosmetics and fashion, to make very considerable profits. In this way the modern economy greatly increases the difficulty of eliminating harmful practices" (Jeffreys 33). And these harmful practices take the toll on the women of this culture, proven in small part by the study I conducted.

CONCLUSION

This study begins to shed light on what positive connections feminism could make with women, but obviously there were limitations and elements I would implement in the future. Through feminism, we have the ability to disrupt the way young women interpret or even accept the common hyper-sexualized imagery swamping their consciousnesses. I'll talk about those limitations and ideas I have for future research before summarizing the most important findings from my study.

Limitations

I conducted this survey over one semester of my graduate career but, to truly validate the study, I would prefer an even larger sample. Although I visited over 35 classes and had more than 400 participants (including male students), I was only able to work with the responses from about 120 students. I would like to see a larger sample to make my conclusions more concrete and I would like to conduct the study over a longer period of time so that I could note changing attitudes, both toward feminism and hyper-sexuality.

Another important limitation to consider is that this study relies on the self-reporting of participants. As earlier research suggests, respondents may not be able to accurately assess situations or relay the effects that the imagery has upon their self-perception and this could lead to misperceptions about how sexist ideology is internalized.

Future Research

It would be very interesting to use this study to follow women's attitudes about feminism and hyper-sexualized imagery as first year and later as graduating students. Such comparisons would allow me to look at how education affected their perceptions, in addition to the ways the images make an impact on their self-perception.

I would also really like to provide a space for some different types of questions. I think it would be important for participants to be able to list the top three characteristics that define them because I might be able to draw further conclusions about what elements of identity are important to them, and what elements they believe others notice in them. Additionally, I would provide them an opportunity to choose for themselves a woman they would like to be like and a woman they would choose to look like. Perhaps when they are limited to certain women, their responses are more constrained and don't accurately represent their feelings about women they would like to emulate.

Considering how often women are in groups as they page through magazines and interpret what they see, it would be interesting to have focus groups of women with high and low feminist orientation and note the ways they discuss hyper-sexualized imagery. It would give a different view of how young women internalize the messages about sexuality and using the variable of other feedback could provide intriguing data about how women help to police themselves and each other.

Summary

When I set out to do this study, I narrowed the focus of my research questions to finding out about the relationships of hypersexual images and feminism to the identity of young women. I wanted to see if hyper-sexualized images promoted self-objectification and if feminism could protect young women against such internalized sexism. I found strong connections between the ways that women with HFO and LFO responded and my research questions. Four things stand out about the survey results:

- Women with HFO rated themselves with the highest value to society after they watched the slideshow and considered the images. Women with LFO rated themselves the lowest of all four groups after they saw the hypersexual images.
- Participants with LFO rated Halle Berry as one of the three most powerful women in the survey, even though she is arguably the most sexualized.
- Respondents with HFO do not want to be like any of the women they believe men would find most attractive; the same women they find most powerful are the ones that they also think will be the least attractive to men.
- Women with LFO most want to be like women who have no other characteristics than attractiveness to men.

These findings were very important in terms of providing me possible answers to my research questions and interpreting the data to show the positive impact feminism may have upon young women.

Consider that women with HFO who watched the slideshow rated themselves of highest value to society out of all four groups, and a half a point higher than the women with LFO who sat through the same slideshow, and rated themselves the lowest. My study shows that we need to take more seriously the trends expressed in our cultural landscape, rather than dismissing the effects that hypersexual ideology create in our consciousness. In the film "Mickey Mouse Monopoly", Sociologist Dr. Justin Lewis purports:

> I think it's a mistake to imagine that the only way media affects us is through an immediate impact on the way we think....it is much less a sort of straight forward impact on the way we think and is much more a question of creating a

> certain environment of images that....we become used to. After a while these images will begin to shape what we know and what we understand about the world....That's a slow, accumulative effect and much more subtle.

The swarming of a sexual standard of beauty from every facet of media is one of the main ways value in women is sexualized and thus naturalized so that it is nearly impossible to disassemble.

After all, as even advertisers admit, "only eight percent of an ad's message is received by the conscious mind; the rest is worked and reworked deep within the recesses of the brain, where a product's positioning and repositioning takes shape" (qtd. Kilbourne 59). So young women are being systematically, carefully coerced to *practice* self-objectification, something terribly detrimental to them, even according to the American Psychological Association. In 2007 it issued a report that, "the rampant sexualization of girls was undermining their self-esteem and jeopardizing their physical and psychological health because they were learning at ever younger ages that their value came primarily from their sexual appeal and behavior" (Douglas 184). Such undermining is made obvious when we look at the responses from my participants when they rated their value to society.

It is also clear that these types of images induce young women to self-objectify and we can see this concretely in the results from the study: young women with LFO rated Halle Berry, displayed among sexually objectifying language, as one of the top three most powerful women in the entire survey. That means that when they see a woman who is singularly valued for her sexual appeal, they believe she is strong and in control of the sexual desire in the situation. As it is, "the object is allowed to desire, if she desires to be

an object" (MacKinnon 481). Pictures like the ones in the survey are so powerful because "images having to do with gender strike at the core of individual identity; our understanding of ourselves as either male or female (socially defined within this society at this time) is central to our understanding of who we are" (Jhally 253). What are our messages about women's gender then? What are the central concepts about *who we are*? Most writers reiterate: "nothing—nothing—[is] more important then turning yourself into a sexual commodity" (Douglas 8). When participants with LFO ranked Beyonce and Halle Berry among the top women they would like to *be* like, they made this connection clear. The only other characteristic that both of these women were rated highly for was attractiveness to men—the women with LFO seem to be successfully self-objectifying by "connecting 'me' and 'men', suggesting there is no contradiction—indeed no *difference*—between what 'I' want and what men might want of 'me'" (Gill 101). That is, for the young woman, "sexual *pleasure* is actually irrelevant here" (104). The young women of our culture are surrounded by pressure to conform, and not to express, or even have the *capability* to know, their own desire. Fundamentally, we need to work against the acceptance of hyper-sexualized images so that we can provide young women the power to desire again.

And although some will claim that this hypersexual expectation is empowered feminist expression (Lady Gaga? Christina Aguilera?), let's be careful and clear: "just because an individual woman enjoys something like posing nude doesn't mean that it's a feminist act that's empowering for women as a gender (Harris 56). What it *does* do is create even stronger oppression: "The appearance of choice or consent, with their attribution to inherent nature, are crucial in concealing the reality of force" (MacKinnon

481). How can we be sure? Because this is a sexuality that is *packaged* to us through *myriad* mediums that commodify our sexuality and use the images of it for the purpose of economic gain, and because, let's not forget, this is a sexuality that is oddly reminiscent of someone *else's* desire.

It's actually *amazing* what we'll buy! Douglas reveals the current cultural perception: "In fact, now that women allegedly have the same sexual freedom as men, they actually prefer to be sex objects because it's liberating" (12). How is that possible when the only liberty we have is to perform like nymphomaniacs? Janice Turner cajoles, "to speak to men's magazine editors, it is clear they believe that somehow in recent years, porn has come true. The sexually liberated modern woman turns out to resemble—what do you know! —the pneumatic take-me-now-big-boy fuck-puppet of male fantasy after all" (qtd. Gill "Supersexualize Me" 102). Hyper-sexuality is so pervasive that even the perpetrators of its commodification have buried the truth about how we've been manipulated and abused, proving what Gayle Rubin explains in "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex": "From the standpoint of the system, the preferred female sexuality would be on which responded to the desire of others, rather than one which actively desired and sought a response" (280). It is nearly inconceivable to conceptualize women's sexuality that *doesn't* function this way, because we have no tools with which to imagine and carry it out.

All the time, money, energy, and resources that are used in the upkeep of this hypersexual ideal are wasted against the work of important social change. Many young women, who don't even know what *has* been achieved, have no idea that there are things that still *need* to be done. Besides issues with jobs (women still predominately work in

service and retail positions) and subsequent economic problems (we are more likely to live in poverty), there are issues with politics (women hold only about 17% of national political appointments) and motherhood (America is rated low for the best places to be a mother due to high maternal death rates and aversion to breastfeeding). We still must work to eradicate the epidemic levels of intimate partner violence, rape and even street harassment in this country; just the other day, my 12 year old daughter was out walking our dog in front of our house when a car circled the block twice before the passenger hollered to her, "You're a fuck in the ass, little girl!" Her initiation into the value system in this country and her place within it was, from the outset, coupled with sexual violence.

Feminism offers a way to help young women believe in the value of themselves as individuals and then take pride in their societal contributions rather than sexual abilities. With feminist movement, an entire half of the population would be set free to use their talents to enact important, necessary change—to return to things that *matter*, including, but not so limited to, *actual* sexual agency. We have to remember that our ideals did not just encompass freedom; we have to remember our responsibility to work toward better situations. We can't forget that we have sacrificed significant goals to accept our place within the sex/value structure of American society. When we keep young women trapped with images of hyper-sexuality wrapped in false feminist sensibilities, everyone suffers. Feminism can help protect young women from this ideology touting the sexual value of women and can give them purpose and direction so that they become valued for their unique, individual contributions to society and social justice.

We need to return to feminist movement to help young women find inner qualities to value over their sexual abilities to satisfy their *partners* so that they can become whole,

and help make progress for everyone. That's why this kind of research can be so important—we need to deconstruct what we take for normality in everyday life because "We cannot dismantle something that we underestimate or do not understand" (Rubin 285). If we ignore the exploitation swallowing the women of our culture, we cannot make strides toward making social change.

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APPENDIX A

Please rate these statements about the following images on a scale of 1 to 5;
5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

1

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

2

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

3

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

4

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

5

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

6

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

7

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

8

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

9

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

10

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

11

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

12

I think this woman is beautiful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think this woman is powerful.
5 4 3 2 1

I think men would find this woman attractive.
5 4 3 2 1

This woman is valued by our culture.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to look like her.
5 4 3 2 1

I would like to be like her.
5 4 3 2 1

Please rate these statements on a scale of 1 to 5;
5 = strongly agree, **4** = agree, **3** = neither agree nor disagree, **2** = disagree, **1** = strongly disagree

1. I am valuable to society
   5 4 3 2 1

2. I like myself
   5 4 3 2 1

3. I like how I look
   5 4 3 2 1

4. Men and women should have equal access to political, economic and social rights and responsibilities
   5 4 3 2 1

5. I am a feminist
   5 4 3 2 1

Please take a minute to fill out a little demographic information.

6. Age _____

7. Mother's highest level of education _____

8. Father's highest level of education _____

9. Race you identify as _____

10. Gender_____

APPENDIX B

The test survey consists of 12 images:

1. Ariel, The Little Mermaid

   Ariel is from the Disney movie and in this picture is depicted after she received legs but could no longer breathe in her native environment. Her head is thrown back as she gasps for air, her breasts are emphasized and she is nude from the waist down.

2. Adriana Lima, a Victoria's Secret model

   Lima is pictured very often in Victoria Secret advertisements. Here, she is on the cover of the Christmas catalogue with giant angel wings and an intensely seductive expression. The bra she is wearing barely covers her nipples, but it does lift and press her breasts together. One of her hips is lifted to provide a view of her thigh and in this, her posture is contorted.

3. Halle Berry

   Berry's photograph is black and white and she wears black lingerie that she is beginning to remove. Her expression is one of understanding what she is evoking, but she looks like she takes no pleasure in what is happening. The text in this picture is inextricable from Berry's image and alludes to intercourse, sexuality and sexual violence.

   I do much more analysis of Berry's picture than some of the other images because the text that surrounds her on the cover of the magazine is very suggestive of how to treat and think about her. It cannot be disentangled

from the way that this image is interpreted, so it necessitates more discussion.

4. Scarlett Johansson

   Johansson's eyes are mostly covered in this picture and her hand is on her thigh, with her thumb falling between her legs, so it appears as if she is in the throes of passion. Her clothing appears to be a man's tank top, but her red bra straps show from beneath it.

5. Hillary Clinton

   Clinton is pictured on the campaign trail with her posters as a backdrop, so her power and prestige are implicit. She is modestly clothed and her expression portrays happiness and intellect.

6. Oprah Winfrey

   Winfrey is seated at what appears to be a panel discussion and her logo is the backdrop, her name on a place card in the foreground. She is dressed modestly in a pink color that compliments her skin tone and her expression is one of joy and intelligence.

7. Jennifer Lopez

   Lopez is presented here in a very animalistic pose—she is lying on the ground, in an animal print swimsuit. Her weight is rested almost solely on her shoulder, so she has to crane her neck to look up at the camera, which is held by someone standing above her. Her body is covered in sand, as if she has been rolling like a dog, and her posture is very contorted so that her thighs, buttocks, stomach, breasts and arms are all visible. Her expression is

inviting and seductive, but she appears to have no pleasure in what she is doing.

8. Marisa Miller

   The only items Miller is wearing are accessories: several bracelets that connote an exotic lifestyle, and an iPod covering her genital region. Her forearms not only cover her nipples, but serve to create more bulge in her breasts. She is lying in the sand and has some of it on her shoulder, her hip and between her legs. Her expression shows a very slight smile, but not an awareness of her state of undress. It is as if the only pleasure she has is in the music coming through her iPod.

9. Maria Sharapova

   On the beach, Sharapova assumes a diminutive pose: on her knees, with her sandy feet supporting her bottom, she holds her arms close to her body with her hands under her chin. Although her eyes are seductive, she appears to be trying to protect herself from the viewer; yet, because of the way her swimsuit disappears, it seems as if the front of her would be naked. A silver heart rests at her hip area, keeping together the pieces of her swimsuit. Apparently, her heart lies with her sexuality.

10. Serena Williams

    On the cover of ESPN's "The Body Issue" (their response to Sports Illustrated's Swimsuit issue), Serena Williams appears totally nude. Her skin is pretty dark and glossy, her arms hide most of her breasts, and the strategic crossing of her legs keeps her genital region from view. Her

expression displays happiness and confidence—she is not necessarily seductive.

11. "Lolita" from the Lee Jeans ad

A very young looking girl, this model's dull expression portrays a stoned child. Her body is contorted and her shirt unbuttoned enough to reveal one of her nipples as she licks a red lollypop. The Lee logo is placed between her legs like a phallic object. She doesn't look particularly seductive, but instead as if she is responding to the commands of the photographer, whom is visible in the mirrored background.

While working with findings, I did some searching to discover the name of the model in the Lee jeans ad, but I was only able to find articles about the controversy the campaign caused. In many of the reports, she was called "Lolita", and that is how I refer to her.

12. Beyonce

Beyonce is on the beach, in a sparkling amber bikini, lying on her side and raised up at the elbow to emphasize her waist and hips. Her breasts protrude from the swimsuit top, and as she twists her long hair, her expression is seductive, but with no personal pleasure for her implied.