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A Woman's Question: Reclaiming True Womanhood in the Age of Sexual Promiscuity

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Sasha Grey is the porn industry's biggest star. She is twenty-one years old, five feet six, 110 pounds, and *Rolling Stone* recently published an article about her entitled "The Dirtiest Girl in the World." Grey boasts in her interview that she "likes it rough" and proclaims to be liberating women one gangbang at a time. Director Dave Navarro describes her as "intimidating, powerful, and introspective," and the *Rolling Stone* article calls her both "shocking" and "business-savvy" in the same sentence. Says Grey, "I want to tell young women that sex is ok. It's ok to be a slut. You don't have to be ashamed." Grey has recently started her own company within the pornography business, she does her own makeup, and she updates her photos through her own website so she doesn't have to rely on anyone else (Grigoriadis).

Perhaps the most paradoxical aspect of Grey's feminism is that, were she to be told that the word pornography literally means "the graphic depiction of women as vile whores," she would likely applaud the definition (Dworkin). "I am a pervert," Grey says in the article, "If I am working out any issues through porn, it's anger at society for not being open about sex." She derides softcore porn as "boring" and good only for "a Valium housewife," and she claims that she came to the porn industry to be "a commodity that fulfills everyone's fantasies." While Grey is certainly seizing power within the porn industry, she is advocating the continuation of sexuality that favors masculinity—that is, she is working within a system that inherently devalues women. When pornography is believed to be realistic depictions of sex, the valuation of women in general is perceived to be low and whorish, because this is how they are represented by pornography (Dworkin).

What Grey does not consider is that her contributions to the pornography industry further perpetuate the idea that debasing women is the real pleasure of sex. She might feel

empowered, but only because she is winning a game that was invented by men. Indeed, Grigoriadis comments in the article that Grey seems “to have obliterated her feminine self in favor of a masculine one.” In the long run, she is contributing to the further degradation of women in the name of empowerment. The last sentences of the article emphasize this misogynist attitude. The author writes,

As heartbreaking as it is to think of sorority girls trapped in dorm rooms with boyfriends who expect them to act like Grey, it’s just as sad to think of Grey as a repressed office drone who has to live out her fantasies in secret on Craigslist over the weekends. Someone is going to lose here, and it’s not Grey. “I’m standing up for myself,” she says (Grigoriadis).

In the middle of this overtly misogynistic statement, the author makes one beneficial point: someone is indeed going to lose. Many people, men and women alike, are going to lose because of Grey’s twisted assertions of female empowerment. Her ideology perfectly reflects the long-term outcome of the post-sexual revolution and its treatment of traditional true womanhood: the further debasement of all women.

Traditionally, the perception a true woman has been a pious, pure, submissive, and domestic creature whose primary work is to maintain her family’s well being. She remains at home where she tends to household tasks, and she is the primary caregiver for her children, while her husband enters the workforce and takes care of the financial needs of his family. As the definition of a true woman has expanded and shifted in the last fifty years, this foundational identity has met much criticism, mockery, and outright scorn. Many feminist movements tell women that they can be whatever they wish to be: they can work, they can be single, they can date other women, they can run for office, they can go to

medical school. The assertion that a woman can remain a housewife, however, is something modern women rarely advocate.

Sasha Grey's assertions of power readily echo these sentiments, as do countless other feminist writers and icons. Pop sensation Madonna achieved fame through flaunting her vulgarity and crossing sexual boundaries, proclaiming her sexual liberation through her self-proclaimed whoredom. Black feminist author, bell hooks, provides further demonstration of this exoneration of female promiscuity by praising Madonna's "subversive feminist spirit" (11). The theory may be different, but the sentiment is the same: Women have to seize power and they have to reject the traditional values of femininity to do it. Piety? Gone. Submissiveness is an outrage. The idea of remaining pure (that is, virginal) until the wedding night is an abomination to the cause of womanhood, according to the Sexual Revolution. While ideology and action points may vary under the umbrella of feminism, one assertion remains almost unanimously the same: a traditional woman is a bad woman, and she will be crushed under the oppression of patriarchy. We have abandoned the idea that a woman can be pious, pure, submissive, domestic, *and* empowered. But she can. She does not have to live according to these principles, nor is she less of a woman if she does not, but a woman can live under the constraints of the cult of true womanhood and still be a healthy, empowered, intelligent contributor to society. It would be a hasty mistake to dismiss her as anything but a legitimate and important contribution to feminism.

First-, Second-, and Third-Wave Feminism: A history

Most scholars agree that there have been three distinct movements of feminism in the United States. The first-wave took off in the 1830s and includes events like the Seneca Falls Convention, the Declaration of Sentiments, and concluded with the Nineteenth Amendment, women's suffrage, in 1920. The first-wave includes activists like Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, women who were all wives and mothers, deeply religious, and adherents of traditional womanhood. It was also during the first-wave that Virginia Wolfe published her famous "A Room of One's Own," in which she argues that a woman needs her own personal space in order to develop intellectually to the level of men (Siegel 52). First-wave feminism was a political movement above all, arguing that women should have equal rights under the Constitution.

The second-wave of feminism began in the late 1960s and mainly focuses on women's rights concerning reproduction, the workplace, and sexuality. Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, a book that questioned a woman's satisfaction in the home, and laid the groundwork for the second-wave. Friedan, along with others formed the National Organization for Women in 1966 as a way to fight for women's civil rights, and she also began the crusade for reproductive rights in 1968 with the National Abortion Rights Action League. At the same time that women were speaking out against their injustices concerning reproduction and working rights, the Sexual Revolution was sweeping the nation. The movement heralded a new culture of "free love," and with it the idea that sexuality was beautiful, natural, and should never be repressed. This shift in ideology brought experimentation in open sex in and outside of marriage, contraception and the pill, public nudity, and liberalization of abortion (Siegel 52).

Third-wave feminism is the current movement of feminism in the United States. The movement began in the mid-1980s with the publication of *The Third Wave: Feminist Perspectives on Racism*, an anthology focusing on multiracial alliances among women. In 1992, one hundred young feminists gathered in New York City to form a national network for young feminists—they called this network “The Third Wave” (Orr 30). Young women soon became the presumed target for third-wave feminism, and that emphasis has remained for the duration of third-wave’s movement.

On a theoretical level, third-wave feminism is a response to widespread postfeminism, or disenchantment with feminist activism and ideology. Postfeminists deem the feminist movement no longer necessary, and third-wave feminism’s primary goal is to demonstrate why women’s activism is still healthy and important (Siegel 53). The movement heavily relies on postmodern ideals, which allows the movement to embrace almost limitless viewpoints, or as Ednie Kaeh Garrison comments, that “the simultaneous confidence and uncertainty about what constitutes feminism doesn’t have to be conceptualized as a ‘problem’” (Siegel 53). As a result, contradicting principles and ideologies can still exist under the umbrella of third-wave feminism; positively, this helps the movement include many more women than the second-wave, but negatively, it makes the movement’s goals somewhat hard to define.

Neither the Sexual Revolution nor the Feminist Movement with its subsets is entirely responsible for the sexually promiscuous culture developing among women in contemporary times. Influences from both movements, however, have contributed to ideas that women must become like men in order to be equal and that a viable way to be like to men is to be as sexual as them. Of course, not all feminists believe that sex is power and not

all free-lovers care about equality between men and women. It is the combination of feminism with free love that has resulted in the miscommunication that a pious, pure woman is not self-actualized. Again, not all feminists and sexual revolutionists have forwarded this theory, but ideas from both movements have furthered the acceptance of overt female sexuality outside marriage.

The Cult of True Womanhood

One may very well ask how purity and innocence even play into the female narrative. In other words, where did these ideas even come from that contemporary feminists have come to reject them so strongly? Of course, the Bible has played a significant role in defining the male as the spiritual leader of his household, and also for proclaiming purity and righteousness as moral traits for which to strive, men and women alike. The New Testament is full of verses like Philippians 4:8, which reads, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Additionally, Jesus proclaimed the crowds on the Sermon of the Mount, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” The Bible emphasizes purity and goodness for all God’s creatures, men and women alike. How these characteristics become specifically applied to women is a result of The Cult of True Womanhood.

The Cult of True Womanhood, most upheld from 1820-1860, is a collection of four attributes—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity—which, according to Victorian culture, every woman should uphold in order to be a true woman. A woman judged herself and her husband judged her by these cardinal virtues, looked upon as a pillar of hope and

stability in tumultuous and uncertain times. Writes Barbara Welter, “It was a fearful obligation, a solemn responsibility, which the nineteenth-century American woman had—to uphold the pillars of the temple with her frail white hand” (152). With these virtues, a woman was promised happiness and power; without them, Welter says, “all was ashes” (152).

The Cult of True Womanhood wielded its greatest influence during the mid-nineteenth century, but the 1950s saw a great resurgence of these ideals. With the return of the soldiers from World War II, the women that had taken up work in their absence were encouraged to return to their proper place in the home. Television shows like *Leave it to Beaver* and *The Donna Reed Show* featured nuclear families with full-time housewives to encourage the American family to “return to normal.” Just like in the 1800s, cookbooks reaffirmed women’s traditional roles, reiterating that a woman’s place was in the kitchen. One cookbook reads as follows:

You have been strengthening your country’s defenses as plane workers, as flyers, as members of the armed forces, as producers in war plants and homes and in Red Cross and Civilian Defense activities. But whatever else you do, you are, first and foremost, homemakers—women with the welfare of your families deepest in your hearts (Neuhaus 532).

This wave of the cult of true womanhood, sometimes called the cult of domesticity, was one of the foundational causes of the second-wave feminist movement. Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* about the growing discontent among housewives, “the problem that has no name.” Friedan concludes the first chapter of her book by saying, “We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: “I want something more than my

husband and my children and my home" (78). The Sexual Revolution brought a foundational change in American culture that is still strongly resonating today; perhaps the long-term effects of the Free Love Movement are finally taking root.

Getting Some Definitions Out of the Way

Before going further into the examination of the traits of true womanhood as inherently bad, it is important to define the terms piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. If, indeed, the Cult of True Womanhood can empower women in contemporary culture, it is crucial to define these terms independently of what they meant two centuries ago and examine them based on their denotative meanings rather than the connotations they may have based on Victorian culture.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines piety as relating to devotion as, "Reverence and obedience to God (or to the gods); devotion to religious duties and observances; godliness, devoutness" ("piety" II.2). Subsequent definitions include, "Senses relating to the quality of feeling or showing pity," "Faithfulness to the duties naturally owed to one's relatives, superiors, etc.; affectionate loyalty and respect, esp. to parents; faithfulness, dutifulness," (II.3) and "An instance of reverence or faithful devotion; a pious act, observance, or characteristic; (also) a sanctimonious statement, a commonplace" (II.4). The Cult of True Womanhood describes piety as the source of a woman's strength, and the primary characteristic by which a man should judge his potential mate. In Victorian culture, religion tied a woman to the home and kept her responsible for the spiritual well-being of her family, which ironically, counters the Bible's assertions that the man should be the spiritual leader of his household. Such is an example of how the 1830s culture shaped

piety; such devoutness looks much different in the postmodern age.

The dictionary definition of purity reads “The state or quality of being morally or spiritually pure; sinlessness; freedom from ritual pollution; ceremonial cleanness; innocence; chastity” (“purity” 1) and additional definitions read, “The state or quality of being physically pure or unmixed; freedom from impurities, contaminants, or foreign matter; cleanness. Also: an instance of this,” “A pure substance or part,” (2) and “The state or quality of being free from extraneous or foreign elements, or from outside influence; the state of being unadulterated or refined; clarity” (3). The cult of true womanhood, of course, emphasizes chastity as the primary indicator of chastity, and based on the Bible’s assertion to remain chaste until marriage, it is a safe assumption that a current “true woman” should also abstain until she is married. Victorians believed that a woman who could withstand male assaults on her virtue could demonstrate superiority and power over men. While a greater commitment to purity would certainly heighten mutual respect between the sexes, I am not sure the idea of moral superiority is beneficial in the 2000s, nor is it a necessary component of purity according the dictionary definition.

Submissiveness is “The quality or condition of being submissive,” (“submissiveness”) and submissive is, when speaking about people, “Disposed or inclined to submit; yielding to power or authority; marked by submission or humble and ready obedience” (“submissive” 1.a). The definition of the word submit reads, “To place oneself *under* the control of a person in authority or power; to become subject, surrender oneself, or yield *to* a person or his rule, etc.” (“Submit I.1). According to the Bible, a wife should submit to her husband in the same way that she submits to the Lord. While the 1800s

emphasized passivity and blind obedience as foundational to submission, the actual word means to be “under” a mission, a cause, a purpose, etc. The idea is that a wife should stand by her husband without trying to usurp his power and actively support him in his various endeavors. Subsequent verses make similar requests of husbands, that they “love their wives as their own bodies” (Ephesians 5:28).

“Domesticity,” as it refers to human beings, is defined as “The quality or state of being domestic, domestic character; home or family life; devotion to home; homeliness” (“domesticity” 1.a.). Domesticity was the virtue most prized by women’s magazines of the mid-1800s. One article reads, “As society is constituted, the true dignity and beauty of the female character seem to consist in a right understanding and faithful and cheerful performance of social and family duties” (Welter 162). In the nineteenth century, domesticity meant master of all things inside the home: primarily the cooking, but also the cleaning, sewing, raising the children still in the home, etc. The cultural definition of domestic tasks has not changed too drastically, and the picture of a domestic wife also remains quite similar in contemporary culture, if not quite as repressed and optionless.

The Cult of True Womanhood in Contemporary Culture

It does not take a deep look into second- and third-wave feminist literature to find an overt rejection of all things pious, pure, submissive, and domestic. The Riot Grrrl movement, a subset of third-wave feminism, proudly declares its goal to “subvert the image of girlhood innocence” and exonerates angry, expressive, and personal rhetoric. *Outlaw Culture* by bell hooks spends a significant portion of time criticizing Madonna—not because she is too sexual, but because she has ventured too far from “that radical risk-taking part of

my/our female self," the "sexy, seductive, serious, and strong" Madonna that was a symbol of unrepressed female creativity and power (hooks 11). The pop star herself, when talking about Christianity, said, "It is difficult to believe in a religion that places such a high premium of chastity and virginity" (hooks 27).

Feminist writers like Veena Careros-Sud go too far in their devaluation of the Cult of True Womanhood. Careros-Sud blatantly demeans the whole population of white, middle-class homemakers, calling them a "lustless, cookie-baking June Cleaver in drag. A combo Stepford Wife/Virgin Mary. The polite, 'good' woman who goes eek at the mousies" (Walker 44). Another example is Sasha Grey, who, when describing softcore porn as boring, claimed it was for "Valium housewives" (Grigoriadis). Such pejorative discussion of such women is not only unnecessary and inappropriate; it is directly antithetical to a feminist movement that claims as its goal the empowerment of all women, including middle-class housewives.

Alongside with the disparagement of homemaking, the Riot Grrrl Movement demonstrates the cultural rejection of innocence and purity. Based on the contemporary punk music scene, Riot Grrrl is a community through zines, music, and spoken word where participants can express themselves loudly, honestly, and straightforwardly (Rosenberg 310). "Riort Grrrl empowers girls to become angry and speak and provides a community in which to do so," writes Jessica Rosenberg (311). Riot Grrrl zines aim to be shocking and offensive; one zine is called, "Aim Your Dick!" and includes an article called, "Why Pro-Life 'Feminists' Are Full of Patriarchal Bullshit" (Rosenberg 822). Another Riot Grrrl zine is called "Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture" (Rosenberg 830).

In an email conversation between two self-proclaimed third-wave feminists, Jo Trigilio and Rita Alfonso discuss a punk band, Tribe 8, and how it reminds them of the Riot Grrrl movement. Tribe 8 performed at a dyke punk show, one a “sexy femme complete with a low-cut shirt” and the lead singer performed “bare-breasted and with a big black dildo hanging out of her pants zipper.” At the end of the show, she cut it off with a giant knife and threw it into the audience (Alfonso 12). Similar riot grrrl antics include dressing up in baby doll dresses with combat boots and writing “slut” on their bodies. According to Alfonso, they are “putting on” the girlishness and innocence preserved with the societal ideal of femininity, “while simultaneously writing over and naming the performance of femininity as such, revealing femininity to be exactly its opposite—slutishness” (Alfonso 13).

Further contributing to the debasement of the cult of true womanhood is the cultural phenomenon, *Sex and the City*, a television show on HBO that ran from 1998 to 2004 and featured four women in New York City who, in the first episode, made a pact to “have sex like men.” Feminist writer Naomi Wolf, in an op-ed article for *Guardian* in December 2008, wrote of the show, “Did not thousands of young women...breathe a sigh of relief or even liberation watching Samantha down another tequila, unrepentantly ogle the sex god at the end of the bar, and get richer and more beautiful with age, with no STDs or furries pursuing her?” What is alarming is that women are beginning to believe that this can be their reality; according to research, the typical female resident of Manhattan has 20 sex partners during her lifetime and gets married later on average than almost every other woman in the country (Allen).

When feminist writers demean the traditional housewife, when Riot Grrrls and bands like Tribe 8 claim to empower women by making a mockery of femininity, and when television shows exonerate women who openly convert to a more masculine form of sexuality, they contribute to post-Sexual Revolution ideals by encouraging a woman to empower herself by being sexual, overt, and demanding. But how does this translate in terms of actually gaining respect and making strides for all women?

John Mayer, Tucker Max, and Female Promiscuity

Certain post-Sexual Revolution feminists take pride in their anger, obnoxious natures, and sexual promiscuity, viewing their new rawness as empowerment. But how does this attitude affect those outside of their ideology? Are anti-feminists persuaded to join feminism because of their extremism? Perhaps more importantly, what do men think of women that are reclaiming their independence through force, activism, and sexual promiscuity?

Most advocates of overt sexuality and loud, obnoxious women would likely argue that empowerment has nothing to do with how it is received by outsiders. However, on a societal level, it seems necessary that women's empowerment be universally recognized in order to be legitimate, if empowerment is women's primary objective. When first-wave feminism sought suffrage, they did not consider themselves successful until the government passed the Nineteenth Amendment, and second-wave feminists crusaded until women began to receive better treatment in the workplace. Many second-wave feminists still consider themselves a failure because some of their objectives have not been met—the Equal Rights Amendment, for example. To claim that a woman is empowered just because

she says she is is incongruous with the foundations of political and social activism. Thus, women need others, particularly men, to legitimize their attempts at empowerment in order to have truly gained it.

Male response to third-wave feminism's ideology clearly demonstrates its failure to accomplish empowerment. Tucker Max serves as a particularly poignant example—a famous blogger, aged 33, Max chronicles his sexual exploits with vast numbers of eager women on his website. The home page of his blog reads

My name is Tucker Max, and I am an asshole. I get excessively drunk at inappropriate times, disregard social norms, indulge every whim, ignore the consequences of my actions, mock idiots and posers, sleep with more women than is safe or reasonable, and just generally act like a raging dickhead. But, I do contribute to humanity in one very important way. I share my adventures with the world. They are known as: The Tucker Max Stories (tuckermax.com).

In one entry, Max talks about visiting his cousin at the University of Tennessee, where three women, two of them attractive and the other one “fat,” walked into a bar where he and his cousin were drinking. Max boasts about how, as a prank, he made the overweight woman think that his cousin was interested, and then he discusses how the two other women were “battling” over who was going to go home with him. He eventually decides to pick “the tall one,” even though he was “rooting for the short girl; she had the better face, and seemed somewhat intelligent” (tuckermax.com). Nowhere in the entry does it mention the names of any of these women; Max describes them solely by their physical characteristics and low levels of intelligence. Countless other entries on the blog

detail similar exploits, all of them holding in common Max's boasts about the droves of women pandering to sleep with him.

Tuckermax.com has caught the attention and rage of many contemporary feminist groups. Feminist Jaclyn Friedman, in a September op-ed for the *Washington Post*, accused Max of both "unapologetic misogyny" and contributing to a campus atmosphere that allows 150,000 young women to be raped every academic year. When Max appeared at Ohio State University in May 2009, he had to get a police escort to escape the mobs of feminist picketers. Furthermore, feminist blogger Amanda Marcotte accused Max of sexual assault because he bragged in a blog entry about sleeping with a drunk girl while a friend filmed the encounter (tuckermax.com).

If Max's stories are indeed true, he certainly deserves the title of unapologetic misogynist, but if anything appears to his credit, it does seem that all of these women are readily available and willing to have sex with him. It seems fairly obvious that if these women did not reward Max's chauvinism, he could not continue behavior the way he does—in other words, it is the women that sleep with him that perpetuate his mistreatment of the female race. Of course, that is not to say that Max does not have responsibility to treat women differently, but certainly as responsible are women to demand that men treat them with dignity.

In an article called, "The New Dating Game: Back to the Paleolithic Age," Charlotte Allen describes Tucker Max's antics in reference to the new sexually exploitive generation of men and women. According to Allen, one of Max's biggest assets is "the feminist-driven academic and journalistic culture celebrating that yesterday's 'loose' women are today's

'liberated' women, able to proudly 'explore their sexuality' without 'getting punished for their lust'" (Allen). This culture has told college students that the hookup culture is "harmless college folly" which young women will outgrow with no lasting scars (Allen).

What this reasoning blatantly ignores is that the "booze-fueled hooking-up" last far beyond a few harmless years and affects more than just the individuals partaking in the copious sexual escapades. As women become more sexually assertive, men scramble to gain skills that will get these women into bed with them, hence Tucker Max's success with books like *The Definitive Book of Pickup Lines* and *Assholes Finish First*. Other bestsellers in recent years include "seduction manuals" like *How to Pick Up Girls* and *How to Get the Women You Desire Into Bed* (Allen). Erik James Horvat-Markovic, also referred to as Mystery, puts on weekend-long bootcamps to teach attendees how to seduce women; he claims he can teach "average frustrated chumps" how lure a female into their bed after just seven hours in her company (Allen).

It does not take much extrapolation into these antics to see that they are manipulative, condescending to women, and blatantly obvious. But because of the new female sexual culture, they are effective. "The whole point of the sexual and feminist revolutions was to obliterate the sexual double standard that supposedly stood in the way of ultimate female freedom," Allen writes in her conclusion. But the result has been the wreaking of havoc on men and women alike who are unwilling to go to all extremes to obtain a sexual partner, as well as the further debasement of women as objects, and all the more because they are now easier to manipulate into the bedroom. These sexual women may assert that they are not being manipulated because they are choosing to be sexual, but

men do not respect them or admire them more for this decision—they are just relieved that they do not have to work as diligently anymore.

In a recent issue of *Playboy Magazine*, rock star John Mayer shared his thoughts on pornography, masturbation, and romantic relationships in a very Tucker Max-esque fashion. The thirty-two year old mega-star displays unapologetic misogyny throughout the article, calling his penis a “white supremacist” in his description of the ideal woman and claiming that there have been days when he has seen “300 vaginas” before he got out of bed. “During sex,” Mayer reports, “I’m just going to run a filmstrip. I’m still masturbating...Rather than meet somebody new, I would rather go home and replay the amazing experiences I’ve already had” (“John Mayer”).

In a somewhat contradictory manner, Mayer later makes the following statement:

Here’s what I really want to do at 32: fuck a girl and then, as she’s sleeping in bed, make breakfast for her. So she’s like, ‘What? You gave me five vaginal orgasms last night, and you’re making me a spinach omelet? You are the shit!’ So she says, ‘I love this guy.’ I say, ‘I love this girl loving me.’ And then we have a problem. Because that entails instant relationship. I’m already playing house. And when I lose interest she’s going to say, ‘Why would you do that if you didn’t want to stick with me?’

When the interviewer asks Mayer why, indeed, he would do that, the musician replies, “Because I want to show her I’m not like every other guy.” Mere minutes after he has ranted about the pressure of meeting someone new, he tells the interviewer before he has sex he needs to know somebody, that is, “unless she’s a 14 out of 10” (“John Mayer”).

Mayer cannot seem to decide if he wants no relationship or a meaningful relationship, but his comments do coincide on one front: they are all overtly sexist, save one small section in which he discusses ex-girlfriend Jennifer Aniston. After admitting that he still loves her, Mayer calls her “the most communicative, sweetest, kindest person” and later interrupts the interviewer to say, “I love Jen so much that I’m now thinking about how bad I would feel if she read this and was like, ‘Why are you putting me in an article where you’re talking about someone else? I don’t want to be in your lineage of kiss-and-tells.’” Because the artist loves and respects this woman, he refuses to talk badly about her. However, as far as porn stars and sexually promiscuous ex-girlfriends and one-night-stands are concerned, Mayer makes no apology about defiling them.

The sexual escapades that Mayer has had are, by his own confession, a mere filmstrip in his mind for his own gratification. Aniston, however, a woman the artists knows, respects, loves, stands out among these nameless women. She is different to him, more important, more respected. Maybe she did not adhere perfectly to the constraints of the cult of true womanhood, but she certainly held herself to a higher standard than the women who sleep with Tucker Max or Mayer’s line of vaginas. Logically, it is she, and not these other sexual exploits, that gains more respect from the musician.

Can a Feminist Embrace Purity? Naomi Watts’ “Brideland” and Sydney Callahan’s Pro-Life Feminism

Within the pages of *To Be Real*, among articles like “getting off on feminism” and “kicking ass” Naomi Watts examines the current phenomenon she calls “Brideland,” or the female obsession with weddings. Why, Watts asks, do women want to willingly subject

themselves to an institution that allows a man to rape his wife in fourteen states, that until recently conveyed the woman over to her own husband as property, that as often as not leaves women struggling in sexist courts for money and custody of children (37)? For the author, the answer lies in *The Dress* and what it recaptures concerning female sexuality. “We live in an age in which female sexuality is held incredibly cheaply,” Watts writes, “it is on tap; you can gain access to it at the flick of a switch” (39). When women don a sparkling white gown with the bell-shaped crinoline, the corsetlike bodice, and the sweetheart neckline, they are taken back to High Victoriana—a time when a woman’s virtue was held in the highest regard (also when the Cult of True Womanhood was at its peak).

Watts comments that there is terrible spiritual and emotional longing for social behavior that respects female sexuality and reproductive potential (39). Women are no longer Goddesses of their own sexuality; instead they spend far more time trying to separate themselves from their bodies’ natural phenomenon: pregnancy and childbirth. Watts concludes with a beautiful picture of virginity:

In *Brideland*, unlike with our boyfriends at the beach, we are hard to unbutton, to get at, to even feel through the whaleboning. We are made into treasure again, and jewels adorn our breasts. In white, we retrieve our virginity, which means metaphorically, the original specialness of sexual access to us...This is a very old archetype that the modern world has banished in the rush of the sexual revolution and the least-common-denominator leveling of *Debbie Does Dallas* on cable: in *Brideland*, men worship the goddess of female sexuality once again (40).

In another article, "Pro-Life Feminism," Sydney Callahan similarly discusses feminine sexuality. To delve into a discussion on abortion would derail the argument to a point that is not beneficial, but Sydney Callahan's thoughts on pro-life feminism incorporate some important ideas about female sexuality that further the examination of purity and innocence as valuable assets for women. Callahan asserts that sexuality needs to be feminized by rejecting "the aggressive male-orientation that has been harmful to women and children by promoting pornography, venereal disease, sexual abuse, adolescent pregnancy, divorce, and abortion" (*Philosophy of Sex*). Her statements are strikingly reminiscent of Dworkin's article on pornography when it says that porn makes the devaluation of women the norm for sexual encounters. When we masculinize female sexuality, Callahan argues, we make masculinity the standard to which men and women alike should adhere. The author writes, "I think women will only flourish when there is a feminization of sexuality, very different from the current cultural trend toward masculinizing female sexuality" (122).

Callahan argues that young women will not develop self-esteem, self-discipline, and self-confidence as long as they have access to abortion. If abortions are legal, society can tell women they are not strong enough to handle a pregnancy, they can shrug off paternal and communal responsibility (leaving pregnant women isolated), and they can justify a single mother's hardship because "if she refuses to get rid of it, it's her problem." Again, a discussion of pro-choice versus pro-life is hardly relevant to the discussion of traditional womanhood, but Callahan's viewpoint is extremely beneficial: women do not need to operate in a society where they are told they are weak because of their ability to bear children. Instead, society needs to reorganize itself around the principle that a woman's

morals, standards, sexuality, etc. are valuable and do not need to be altered in order to compete with males who are operating according to patriarchal traditions. Competing with men at a man's game is hardly the solution; as Callahan suggests, women need to play to their strengths by feminizing society and sexuality.

A Feminization of American Society

Capitalist patriarchy defines success namely in terms of position in the workplace and annual salary. Without a job and a paycheck, one cannot be considered a valuable contributor to his or her capitalist economy. Obviously, this definition of success sidelines housewives and stay-at-home mothers, but few feminists have defended the cause of remaining in the home as a righteous one. As discussed before, mainstream feminism heartily rejects the institution of patriarchy, but their ideology does not seem to stretch to definitions of success. For example, NOW.org lists six main priority issues, among them reproductive rights, the constitutional equality amendment, and economic justice, all of them having to do with making women more equipped for the workplace—nowhere is there mention of the homemaker, a profession that 40% of American woman actively choose, according to the Department of Labor (Dept. of Labor). Of course, making strides for women in the workplace is not a shameful pursuit and has certainly benefitted countless women who work outside the home. It is of critical importance that sexism in terms of salary and promotions be eradicated. It seems peculiar, however, that feminists reject patriarchy so staunchly, yet there is no rejection of the standards of success that patriarchy has clearly created.

By focusing solely on wage earnings and promotion rates of women as compared to men, *they are still making masculinity the standard*. Why not instead say, “Money does not determine a successful person” or “Women don’t need to work to be empowered.” It is men, through patriarchy, that have decided that a person contributes to society through working in the marketplace. Why do women have to place the same standards on themselves? Is this not a willful subjugation to patriarchal oppression in the same way that is staying in the home against one’s will?

Lucia Valeska similarly defends motherhood and childraising in “If All Else Fails, I’m Still a Mother.” The feminist author writes, “The crunch in childraising comes when you realize that poor mothering and faulty childcare are currently built-in givens in the North American social and economic system” (71). Valeska speaks of how the feminist movement has made motherhood “out”; as feminists encourage rebellion, “supermom after supermom throws in the towel of her discontent” (Valeska 71). Socially, American culture devalues motherhood by telling women that they need to look elsewhere to be a solid self; in other words, failure is inescapably intertwined with childraising.

The devaluation of full-time childraising has brought along with it a disregard for the nuclear family, where the man works and the woman is wife, mother, and homemaker. Valeska examines the consequences of killing an institution that provided stable family units for the advanced industrial state for a number of years. The author writes, speaking of the nuclear family:

The U.S. government has failed to salvage an institution that served it well. The stopgap adjustments have not been sufficient. Psychiatrists no longer even attempt to “save” marriages: they help people through “transitions.”

The divorce rate soars, giving the nation a new choice and women and children a new deal. Either the old nuclear provider supports two, three, or four families, which most men can't or won't afford, or middle-class women join the labor force with unmatched vengeance, at a time when the number of jobs is rapidly shrinking (73).

Not only is the rejection of the nuclear family socially detrimental, but Valeska explicates why undervaluing a homemaker is detrimental economically. Single parenthood, divorce, and alimony payments excessively deplete financial resources on an individual level, and parents also spend a significant portion of their income on day care, when a mother could just as easily, and more effectively, take that responsibility. The problem is that motherhood is no longer valued as a route to social and economic well being (Valeska 74); in fact, it has become a detriment, and children have become a burden rather than a joy.

It is difficult to pinpoint specific women in contemporary American culture that display these qualities, because the majority of them live humble existences that are not widely recognized or celebrated. Though she was not a wife or mother, Mother Teresa exemplified piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity through her lifelong missionary service in Calcutta. Her spirit of self-sacrifice and humble service, though not feasible for every woman, effectively demonstrates a meek woman's ability to contribute to society constructively. Mother Teresa's accomplishments will live far past Madonna's showy assertions of power, and they will stretch far wider across the world, as well.

Susan B. Anthony: A Real Feminist Talks About True Womanhood

Susan B. Anthony, perhaps America's most famous feminist, wrote an article in 1869 that appeared in *The Revolution*, a weekly journal she published with Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The article is titled "Marriage and Maternity" and in it, Anthony offers a total mind-shift from the ideology of the Sexual Revolution. Instead of advocating that women should claim their rights, she implores men that they must give women their rights back. "God has never given woman's individuality into the hands of man," she writes. "If man takes her individuality he must also take her responsibility. Let him suffer."

I can only imagine bell hooks' and Madonna's reactions to the idea that she should politely ask a man to give her back her individuality. But the idea makes quite good sense. Which is more dignified: to hit and yell at someone who has taken your possession or to assertively request that they return what is rightly yours? Furthermore, no one can force another person to adopt any particular mindset, whether it is religious, social, psychological, or otherwise. Indeed, a person who feels forced or manipulated will evade the pushed worldview all the more actively simply because he or she feels the pressure of another trying to control them. This is precisely why many strands of third-wave feminism have created more opponents than supporters; their anger and in-your-face methods make outsiders averse to being forced into a particular ideology, correct as it may be.

Rather, as Anthony suggests, respect and equality must be freely given in order to be legitimate. If men do not recognize that women should be treated as equals, it matters little how much women try to claim equality. Patriarchy has, albeit unfairly, placed power in the hands of men, and unless they offer power to women, women will never obtain it. Similarly, if someone holds one hundred dollars in their hand, and someone comes and steals it, the first person will never acknowledge that the money belongs to the thief. If,

however, the possessor of one hundred dollars decides that it rightfully belongs to someone else, they will happily acknowledge the recipient's ownership of the money. Contrary to mainstream feminist activism, men will not give women power until they respect women, and they will never respect women who conform to a male pattern of lifestyle and morality. Female promiscuity, therefore, is hardly a means of liberation.

Anthony writes on, "Teach man to respect womanhood whether in the person of his own wife or the wife of another; teach him that as often as he outrages his wife he outrages Nature and disobeys the Divine Law, then you will have accomplished still more." Anthony does not tell women that they can do whatever men can do; in fact, she does not speak to women at all. She does not tell women to rise to the standards of manhood—she tells men to rise to the dignity of womanhood. Such is true feminism—she is not moving from where she is to compete in a game that was made up by men. She does not say, "I am down here but I will get to where you are;" rather she calls down from her esteemed position, "I am up here; won't you join me?" She is proud of her position as a mother and a wife, proud of her body's capability to carry and grow a human life, and proud that she can operate as an individual outside a male system of accomplishment.

These are Susan B. Anthony's closing words:

But let every wife dare to be honest, let her open her heart freely to her husband, and I know there are few whose better natures would not be touched, few who would not be awakened to a nobler life, to a more exalted view of marriage. Then would marriage assume its high and holy place. Then would our children be truly olive plants, types of peace, lovingly desired, tenderly cared for, body and soul. Then the wife, looking with love

and respect upon the husband, who has never caused her to fear his manhood, 'could say: "I am thine, and these are they whom God at our desire has given us.'

A Woman's Question

Do you know you have asked for the costliest thing,

Ever made by the Hand above?

A woman's heart and a woman's life,

And a woman's wonderful love.

Do you know you have asked for this priceless thing,

As a child might ask for a toy?

Demanding what others have died to win,

With the reckless dash of a boy.

You have written my lesson of duty out,

Manlike, you have questioned me.

Now stand at the bars of my woman's soul,

Until I have questioned thee.

You require that your mutton shall always be hot,

Your socks and your shirts be whole;

I require that your heart be as true as Yah's stars,
And as pure as His heaven, your soul.

You require a cook for your mutton and beef,

I require a far greater thing.

A seamstress you're wanting for socks and shirts,

I look for a man and a king.

A king for the beautiful realm called Home,

And a man that his Maker Yah, could,

Look upon just as He did at the first,

And say, 'it is very good'.

I am fair and young but the rose may fade,

From this soft young cheek one day;

Will you love me amid the falling leaves,

As you did 'mong the blossoms of May?

Is your heart an ocean, strong and true,

I may launch my all on its tide?

A loving woman finds heaven or hell,

On the day she is made a bride.

I require all things that are grand and free,
All things that a man should be;
If you give this all, I would stake my life,
To be all you demand of me.

If you cannot be this, a laundress and cook,
You can hire and little to pay;
But a woman's heart and a woman's life
Are not to be won that way (Lathrop).

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