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The United States of Islamophobia

By Amanda Chan

The United States, established on the genocide of millions of Native Americans, built on the forced labor of exploited slaves, and home to the highest incarceration rate in the world, has birthed yet another unsightly and dangerous phenomenon that is unfairly persecuting another minority group in the name of white supremacy, and, perhaps, profit.

The War on Terror has resulted in 350,000 deaths thus far, as well as unsatisfactory results in attempts to “democratize” the Middle East. Today, “terrorism” is a loaded, unclear term, and if one were to rely on the American media for that definition, they would be led to believe that all terrorists are Muslim.

Many people living in the U.S. can distance themselves from the thousands of lives lost in drone strikes sanctioned by Obama or they can ignore the reality that their tax dollars are funding the Israeli military in the genocide of Palestinians. More difficult to ignore is the rampant propaganda sanctioned by US institutions, private or public, converting American citizens into Islamophobic, racist, and violent bigots.

Today, anti-Muslim hate crimes are five times more frequent than they were pre-9/11 because of a blind, undying trust in what the media is telling the U.S. Islamophobia is being taught, justified, and procured by propaganda.

In just 2015, the film “American Sniper” profited generously off of U.S. movie-goers, who were subject to a shameless glorification of highly-regarded war hero, Chris Kyle. In reality, Kyle openly stated that he loved to kill: “I hate the damn savages. I couldn’t give a flying fuck about the Iraqis.” The Bradley Cooper portrayal of a guilt-ridden patriot was a performance designed to win over the gullible hearts of American viewers. Ultimately, the film idealized a national hero, intertwining the needless murder of brown people with American patriotism.

Following the release of “American Sniper,” anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence starkly increased. On Twitter, one broadcasted, “Nice to see a movie where the Arabs are portrayed for who they really are - vermin scum intent on destroying us.”

Recently, as the Chapel Hill murders of Abu-Salha, her husband, Deah Barakat, and her sister, Razan Abu-Salha have made clear, U.S. media outlets are apprehensive to even entertain the thought that Islamophobic hate crimes are an extensive problem in the United States. The New York Times published an article

Trigger Warning: Hateful statements, slurs, and hate crimes are described in this article.

entitled “In Chapel Hill Shooting of 3 Muslims, a Question of Motive.” The killer had anti-Muslim posts on his Facebook and killed all three victims execution style. The Chapel Hill murders, too, sparked an increase of anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Stories ignored by mainstream media outlets litter the Internet; women who have their hijabs torn off by strangers, stalkings, gun threats, mosques vandalized, slurs hurled into the faces of both practicing Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim.

One man spat on a Muslim teenage girl on a bus in New York, calling her a terrorist and a Muslim piece of sh*t. Last December, another 15-year-old Muslim boy was fatally run over by a car; the driver had likened the Qu’ran to being worse than ebola. In Michigan, on February 13th, two men assaulted a Muslim man who was walking with his daughter, taunting him about ISIS.

Six months ago, Obama sent U.S. warplanes back into the Middle East to target the “Islamic State,” and now, he wants permission from Congress to authorize a war. It is perfectly timed with the uprise of hate crime against Muslims, with the massacre at Charlie Hebdo, with the release of “American Sniper,” and social media posts deriding all Muslims for the actions of so very few.

The war, as war always does, will successfully dehumanize the enemy, blind the American people to the civilian casualties, to the innocent children who live their lives in fear of bombs falling out of the sky, and engress American resources and people into another endless, meaningless fight.

Back home, Americans pray for their family and friends in the military who must fight those bastards, savages, goat-fuckers, barbarians, or whatever new terms Fox spouts off these days, to protect their homeland, when ISIS proclaims to be doing exactly the same.

All the while, Americans are stuck in their infamous bubble of ignorance and pride, but of course, Muslim-Americans are the unlucky exception. Not only are their families’ lives endangered if they still live in the Middle East, they of course suffer racial violence in their everyday lives.

These are not isolated occurrences, and they will continue, thanks to the suffocating grip of Islamophobic ideology onto the US people. More importantly than the unsuspecting minds of US citizens, Muslim-Americans have a right to practice their religion without fear of assault, murder, and worse. ♦

The Fourth Wave

We are a monthly feminist publication produced by college students. Our goal is to break gender stereotypes, to write thoughtful and informative articles, and to empower the oppressed through sharing a collection of diverse perspectives. We are answering to a need for a premiere feminist publication on college campuses.

Letter from the Editor

What's up with this name change? After about a year as "Slutciety," we've reinvented ourselves as The Fourth Wave. Same fabulous content, same fabulous writers, but a new title.

The slur "slut" and whether it can, and should, be reclaimed is something that's contentious within the feminist community, and everyone on our staff has a different, personal experience with it.

Despite the still ubiquitous shaming of people for exercising sexual agency, we've made a shift to The Fourth Wave for inclusivity's sake. There are many members of the feminist community who cannot, or who do not feel safe, reclaiming the word "slut."

It is something that is often hurled at victims of sexual assault. It is a word that disproportionately isolates black women and other women of color, as opposed to white women. It is a word that often excludes and threatens trans people and other gender queer people.

It was never our intention to exclude any marginalized communities. Though it grabbed attention, "Slutciety" does not immediately invoke feminist thought, like The Fourth Wave does. We want our intentions, as a publication, to be clear. Thank you for embarking on this journey with us and we hope you enjoy our first edition as The Fourth Wave.

Thank you to our Vice President Zoë Hannah for coming up with the name. And thank you to the FW members that came out and wrote for us this month.

Feminist Vocab of the Month

Latinx (adj, n): A gender-neutral term used in place of Latino/Latina that describes people of Latin American origin or descent.

Example: Gloria's mother is Cuban and her father is Chilean; she self-identifies as Latinx, rather than Latina, in order to avoid unnecessarily gendered language.

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Share with us your questions and comments.

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Special thanks to Ms. Hirsch and Dr. Bishop for supporting our endeavors.

50 Shades of Shame: Our Thoughts on the Glorification of Abuse and Sexual Violence

Released on the day before Valentine's Day, "50 Shades of Grey" has become this year's emblem of sexual curiosity and romantic development. Aside from the terrible acting and the nonsensical plot, this film portrayed abuse, manipulation, sexual violence as normative and even desirable.



Author of the series E.L. James based her writing on Bella and Edward's relationship in the Twilight Series. The portrayal of romance between Bella and Edward also came under fire for being abusive and manipulative.

(Photo by DailyMail.)

"I work at hardware stores, because I'm not like other girls."

- Amanda Chan, sophomore

"The only funny thing she said during the whole movie was when she said she was gonna make pancakes."

- Emma Paschke, sophomore

"Vomit sounds."

- Zoë Hannah, sophomore

"You're here, because I'm incapable of leaving you alone."

- Christian Grey, stalker, abuser, manipulator, protagonist

"Yanking out someone's tampon is not a sexual act. I'm sorry, but I cannot accept this."

- Maureen Jones, first-year

"That movie did nothing for me. It literally elicited nothing. Interestingly, it did pass the Bechdel test."

- Taylor Mulcahey, sophomore

"Nothing says I love you quite like being stalked and having your phone tracked."

- Ana Koerner, sophomore

Trouble in Paradise: Forced Prostitution in Latin America's Tourist Hotspots

By Ana Koerner

Each and every year, the physically and culturally isolated beachfront resorts of many Latin American countries receive hundreds of thousands of "spring breakers," looking to enjoy a few days lying on the beaches and hitting the clubs.

With local economies flourishing and tourists enjoying a relatively affordable vacation, the tourism industry in Latin America appears to be a mutually beneficial situation. However, the hidden impacts of tourism on local communities and its implications for local women and children are rarely showcased: forced prostitution and child prostitution.

Contributing to the invariable success of Latin American tourism and the sexually exploitative businesses are the ever-present and culturally degrading stereotypes of Latin America. The stereotype of Latin America as a giant "fiesta," and the exotification of Latina women are the results of a political agenda promoted by the United States government over eighty years ago.



In "The Three Caballeros," Donald Duck is in love and physically attracted to Aurora Miranda's character.
(Photo by Disney.)

During the political and economic instability of the 1930's, Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented the "Good Neighbor Policy" which sought to secure allies in Latin America by representing the entire continent in a positive light.

North American filmmakers used Carmen Miranda, the beautiful Brazilian enigma, who sang and danced her way through the decades with a fruit basket on her head, to represent the fun-loving, musically talented, and exotic Latin American woman.

In reality, however, this strategy resulted in the superficial portrayal of many Latin American cultures in mainstream American media, void of any political or historical significance.

In "The Three Caballeros," her sister, Aurora Miranda, travels throughout South America, partying with a penguin that arrived in search of warm weather, women, and a good time. Trivial as it may seem, this stereotype has remained a prominent and demeaning depiction of the Latin American woman.

Judging by the demographics of sex tourists in Latin America, the erotic representation of Latin American women appeals mostly to Western males. While Americans make up over 25 percent of all sex tourists worldwide, the numbers are much higher for Latin American countries. For example, ECPAT, a non-profit dedicated to ending child prostitution and pornography, estimates that over 80 percent of sex tourists visiting Costa Rica are from the United States.

Mexican beaches, such as Cancún and Cabo, are also popular tourist destinations, receiving thousands of North American sex tourists daily. The exotic portrayal of Latina women allows

"But most importantly, local and national governments as well as the international community must invest in children.

Providing greater opportunities, especially wider access to education, is crucial."

Western men to overlook the atrocities of the sex tourism industry. In 2005, Unicef estimated that there were over 20,000 child prostitutes working in Mexico's tourist destinations. According to the Organization of American States, most child prostitutes are between 15 and 17 years of age, although some may be recruited and trained as dancers or strippers as young as 12 or 13.

Children and adults from difficult economic backgrounds are lured in by false promises of employment or educational opportunities. Many pimps and traffickers will recruit girls under the guise of jobs with modeling agencies or dance companies, never indicating to their victims that they will actually be selling their bodies as prostitutes.

Without money or documentation, these women and children become exposed to a world of drug addiction, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and constant exploitation of their bodies.

The transgender communities and indigenous populations are most vulnerable to human trafficking and forced prostitution. Often the most ostracized groups of society, these individuals generally have more restricted access to healthcare, employment and educational opportunities, making them optimal targets for pimps and human traffickers.

Dismantling sex tourism industries must be a combined effort on many different sides. The demand for sex tourism, especially child sex tourism, must decrease. Any continued sex tourism should occur only in establishments that protect the rights and freedoms of the workers involved.

But most importantly, local and national governments as well as the international community must invest in children. Providing greater opportunities, especially wider access to education, is crucial.

Children in school are less vulnerable to human trafficking and forced prostitution, as there is less of a need to search for alternative employment or educational opportunities. Promoting education is an important step to eliminating trafficking and prostitution from children's lives worldwide. ♦



Sofia Vergara, loved for her "sexy" Spanish accent and her body, is on a rotating pedestal at the 2014 Emmy Awards.
(Photo by The Hollywood Reporter.)

Check One of the Above

By Maureen Jones

As a biracial person, I've had to deal with my fair share of people playing a guessing game with my identity, trying to figure out "what" I am as if I were a mysterious breed of dog or an exotic lamp. Recently, when a reporter gushed over how "tan" and "tropical" she looked, Rashida Jones, a mixed actress, patiently reminded them that she's black.

However, I lack her patience, and like to make sure people are aware of my race. Almost always, people respond with, "Oh, I thought you were Mexican," or occasionally that they thought I was Asian. What bothers me about these reactions is that I know they were mulling over what my racial background was, and that rather than realizing that I can be more than one race, I must fit into one of the few categories that I very, very loosely fit. I have never had anyone assume that I'm black.

Sometimes, even people who are aware of my racial background take it upon themselves to categorize me. I once had a friend tell me that I "didn't count" as black, as if it this is something for one can just decide. I am black. I am also white. It is nobody's job, or right, to decide which box to put me into.

The eagerness to define my race doesn't stop at an individual level, but is systematic. I dread having to fill in a bubble to sum up my race. Every time I see a standardized test or form where I am able to check multiple boxes, I breathe a sigh of relief, because I don't have to choose which part of my identity to erase.

Unfortunately, I have to ignore one side more often than not, and I wind up feeling like I have betrayed some part of my heritage. Why is it that I can't be both black and white? Why do people who see that I'm not wholly black assume that I'm not black at all, but Asian or Latina? Why do people I hardly know seek out to categorize me?

I've come to realize that it is a discomfort with mixed-race people. I would not definitively call it racism, but at the very least, ignorance. Interracial marriage was not legalized until 1967, so it still carries traces of taboo.

Mixed-race celebrities are sparse, and the representation of mixed-race people in the media even more so. Most of the prominent multiethnic celebrities, like Rashida Jones, Louis C.K., Mariah Carey, Lenny Kravitz, and Ryan Lochte, have a combination of features that allows them to pass for fully white or fully black, which lets the public forget about their complex ethnic background.

Like the undiscovered depths of the ocean, mixed-raced people are completely uncharted. There is a combination of cultures and experiences that the world has not been exposed to, and thus cannot understand.

The solution lies in representation. Biracial and multiethnic people are very populous, but the media does not reflect this. Multiethnic-ness in the media allows the world to dip their toes in the water and ease it into the reality. Multiethnic people are real and we deserve the right to be viewed as multiethnic, not "Latino with black features" or "not really Indian" or "exotic." Stop giving white-passing actors roles as white characters and give them multiethnic characters. Explore the intricacies of multiethnic identities in film and literature; make us main characters where our combination of cultures is important and relevant.

In an America so frequently described as "post-racial," there is still no place for over nine million Americans who describe themselves as mixed-raced. It is time to make a place. ♦

The Problematic Vitality of Vigara

By Kenneth Ward

A woman lies on her stomach in a luxurious, canopied sunbed. The wind is blowing, the ocean in the is a picturesque blue, she's got some reading material on the patio furniture. She looks into the camera with the look of absolute thirst.

"Every woman loves cuddling up with a book, but cuddling up with your man is even better. But sometimes erectile dysfunction gets in the way. Plenty of men face this issue, not just getting an erection, but keeping it. Viagra helps men with ED get and keep an erection," she says suggestively. This is the new strategy from Pfizer, manufacturer of Viagra. Sales of Viagra are down, and in crisis mode, they are beginning to use women to sell erectile dysfunction pills. It's a marketing strategy that propagates the heterosexual standard and the misuse of Viagra as a recreational pill rather than a medicinal pill, in addition to furthering the neglect of the sexual needs of women.

In December 2014, Marie Claire told the story of Cara, a woman diagnosed with sexual interest/arousal disorder, or SIAD. Cara participated in a clinical test of Flibanserin, a pill that brought back the sexual desire and arousal that she lost after childbirth. The pill was a success, and Cara was having the best sex of her life, yet six years later the pill has still not been approved by the FDA. Viagra was approved after only six months of tests back in 1998, and there are dozens of similar ED brands on the market. Only two female sex-aids have ever been approved by the FDA, and they treat postmenopausal vaginal dryness and pain during intercourse, not lack of arousal. So while women who suffer from SIAD are left behind, any male could conceivably get Viagra, regardless of whether or not they actually have ED. Though women are not supplied with their own sex-aid pills, they are now being used to sell them to men.

The ad's insistence that every woman wants a man with an erection, and that every man with an erection wants a woman, sells a false heterosexual narrative. The very existence of cisgender lesbian couples challenges the existence of Viagra: a consumer who does not want an erection for themselves or a partner scares the daylights out of Pfizer, so of course their language denies their existence. After all, every woman loves to cuddle with a good book, but every woman would prefer a man with a hard-on, according to Pfizer.

While the absence of cisgender lesbians from a Viagra ad makes some common sense, what I can't understand is the absence of gay men. An elderly gay couple could potentially mean one household, two prescriptions, but that wouldn't jive with the straight-machismo attitude of Viagra, or Cialis, a brand synonymous with a man and woman watching the sunset in their own private bathtubs.

Back when Viagra ads were just about salt'n'pepper men throwing footballs around and barbecuing, you could comfortably ignore the product as something you wouldn't need to think about until you are in your forties or fifties. However, the placement of a younger woman in the forefront of a Viagra ad just seems too insidious a move to ignore.

Furthermore, there are cardiovascular risks and the infamous longer than four-hour erection, which is actually quite dangerous and painful, and can lead to permanent penile scarring. So if you're on those pills, be careful, take a second to think about how lucky you are for there to be any sex-aid pills at all, and use them responsibly. ♦

The “Forgotten” History in Education

By Taylor Mulcahey

An assignment that was recently given out to six-year-old students at an elementary school in the UK referred to all inventors as “he.” The assignment completely disregards all the women inventors in history, and a six-year-old child isn’t going to recognize this pronoun mistake.

The child will complete the assignment using a male inventor, as will all the students in the class. When the time comes to share what they learned, each child will talk about the man they researched.

The campaign Let Toys Be Toys tweeted an image of this and began the hashtag #SheInvented and #SheDiscovered. The results were astounding: As it turns out, women really haven’t been absent from history, just from our recollection of it.

“It is far less important to understand the minute details of the white man’s history, and much more important to understand the complexities of history as a whole.”

However, while the Twitter campaign certainly drew attention to women inventors in history, it really didn’t combat the issue of sexism in the classroom at all.

As Maureen Costello, director of the organization Teaching Tolerance, explains, “History is more than biography. Highlighting a few noteworthy women... can lead students to think that the exception proves the rule: These dozen or so ladies really stood out, but the rest? Forgettable.”

The way history is taught and dealt with today is implicitly sexist. History in the United States is exactly that, history. The version of history taught in schools, especially in K-12 education, is limiting and discriminatory, and it ultimately hurts the way women view themselves in society. An assignment like this is not created for the explicit purpose of turning girls away from being inventors, but it can contribute to that effect.

History is taught as a narrative, a story that has a start and a finish. We like a story that has a clear beginning and an end, and the classroom molds the material so that it fits this structure. We start with Lexington and Concord and end with Independence. We start with slavery and end with Martin Luther King Jr. We start with Susan B. Anthony and end with the right to vote.

Costello states, “The trouble with Women’s History Month - with all these special months - is that they encourage people to think that problems have been solved. The female heroes of yesterday are acknowledged, the debt paid, and the slate wiped clean.”



Hedy Lamarr, pictured above, was an Austrian-born actress and a beauty icon, but more importantly, she helped to develop a form of wireless transmission that couldn’t be intercepted by the Nazis.
(Photo by WhoIsBane.com.)

As Costello suggests, history isn’t that simple, there are complications to these simplistic narratives, and there is not yet an end to racism or sexism. The achievements of women are often discussed as the few amongst the many, or highlighted them as “alternative histories,” a break from “normal” history. But for most students, these histories aren’t merely alternatives.

The majority of students are not white and male, and they don’t see themselves represented in the dominant narrative. They can benefit greatly from hearing a more comprehensive history, one that does not simply highlight a few noteworthy women or people of color, but instead shows a battle that is ongoing. It gives a narrative in which they can see themselves present for the first time, validating their personal struggles and feelings.

Teaching that sexism has ended allows people to believe that it has. This is more than just negligent, it’s dangerous. It creates an environment where students grow up experiencing discrimination without the language to call it that, where they are disregarded or punished when they try to speak out against it.

Learning a complex version of history that contains the stories that didn’t end happily can have tremendous benefits for all students. It is far less important to understand the minute details of the white man’s history, and much more important to understand the complexities of history as a whole. One that includes everyone. ♦

“Forgotten” History

- Lilly Ledbetter sued her employer for gender-based pay discrimination; her co-workers who were men were earning 40 percent more than her. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of her employer on the grounds that Ledbetter waited too long to sue, even though she hadn’t known she was getting underpaid.
- The Carnegie Institute, under the watchful eye of Andrew Carnegie, served as the foundation for the eugenics movement, which led to the forced sterilization of hundreds of Americans and inspired Hitler’s racial purity ideology.
- Susan Kare, a former developer for Apple, was the originator of most of the first Apple interface icons, many of which we still use today.
- It took nearly 6,000 American deaths, at the hands of AIDS before Reagan acknowledged the epidemic in 1987, towards the end of his second term, due to the fact that AIDS was considered a disease for gay men and drug addicts.
- Today, women hold only 17 percent of Congressional seats, and we have never had a woman elected as President of the United States.
- The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. was proven, in court, to be a conspiracy by the government, both on the state and national level.
- The California prison system sterilized 20,000 people against their will from 1904 to 1964.
- The first winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction was American novelist Edith Wharton for her novel *The Age of Innocence* in 1921.
- In 1916, Margaret Sanger was arrested for distributing information about birth control.

Agency in Pageantry

By Amanda Chan

Last month, Nina Davuluri, University of Michigan Honors student, talented Bollywood fusion dancer, and aspiring businesswoman, was invited to give a speech about diversity and the importance of STEM fields at the University of Pittsburgh. Crystal Lee, who was also invited, is the co-founder of Nanoly Bioscience, an organization developing a heat protectant for vaccines so they can be better transported to difficult-to-reach areas of the world. These two incredible, brilliant women were also winner and runner-up of Miss America 2014, respectively. Davuluri and Lee are on the forefront of innovation and cultural tolerance in this country; their determination, intelligence, and all-around excellence will forever remain unquestioned. They are role models for everyone.

Unfortunately, aside all of the aforementioned traits, they will mainly be remembered as beautiful. This is where the problem lies. The contestants of Miss America must first and foremost look the part, and their other achievements, however great, are an afterthought.

“The overarching issue here is that raising the minimum GPA and asking ridiculously tough on-stage questions does not negate the blatant sexism and objectification in these pageants.”

Actually, it is ironic that Pitt featured the winner of a pageant to speak about diversity, since the pageant has particularly extensive roots in racial discrimination as well as shameless profits based off of the hypersexualization of college-aged women. For example, in 1923, Miss America allowed black women on stage to play slaves in a musical number. Until 1940, all contestants had to be “of good health and of the white race.” The Miss Universe Organization is also transphobic in their refusal to let a trans woman participate in the 2012 Miss Universe Canada competition. Today, contestants must strain to reach the standard of Eurocentric beauty; in the list of Miss Universe or Miss America winners, the few specks of women of color in the sea of white become tokens in a larger, racist money-grubbing organization.

For Nina Davuluri, being a woman of color in a white supremacist competition with an echoing message of self-love and self-confidence is truly remarkable; however, I am furious that America is only willing to praise her intelligence and talent because she is beautiful, or rather, because she satisfies the checklist of desired Anglo features. High schools around the country are only able to listen to her speak about cultural competency precisely because she impressed the judges in her swimsuit.

The readers of this article, myself included, can only commend Davuluri for her inspirational message of self-love solely because she was more “poised” and “elegant” in her private interview than Miss Oklahoma, rather than reading about her innovative work in *TIME* or *The Washington Post*.

Perhaps these women choose to endure these so-called scholarship competitions through their own agency; I am not here to revile other women for the decisions they make for themselves. Indeed, some former-pageant contestants such as Taylor Marsh, in *The Huffington Post*, argued that pageants taught her charisma and provided her scholarships for college, which led to her status as a professional woman today. Similarly, law student and Miss Virgin-

ia 2015 contestant Kiara Imani Williams penned, “Why, may I ask, is it okay for ‘feminists’ to demand that women be given the right to choose their own path, then to place demands on the acceptable pathways to feminism?”

Both women point out that pageantry provided public relations skills, networking opportunities, and valuable experience, and both are adamant that their choice to be pageant girls was completely of their own agency and decision. If pageantry was the best path for them, I am in no position to tell them otherwise, but unfortunately, scholarship or not, they are still complicit in the objectification of women.

However, basing decisions on avoiding complicity in the patriarchal devaluation of women, as March and Williams argued, is not always beneficial for women in order to get ahead. This brings me to my next point: pageant girls are not the problem. Rather, it is both the glorification and legitimization of pageants and the lack of other available popular, well-known and respected opportunities for young women to gain professional skills and get networking connections.

In last year’s popular John Oliver segment, Oliver dissected the Miss America Organization’s claim that they give out \$45 million in scholarship money, when the real amount, with hypothetical scholarships subtracted, was closer to \$4 million. In response to Oliver’s segment, donations for the Society of Women Engineers, The Patsy Mink Foundation, and the Jeannette Rankin Foundation starkly rose, a promising American reaction that could be a sign for hope.

The overarching issue here is that raising the minimum GPA and asking ridiculously tough on-stage questions does not negate the blatant sexism and objectification in these pageants. Having a few winners who are women of color cannot erase the extreme racial discrimination that Miss America, historically and contemporarily, continues to perpetuate. Instructing the contestants to hold hands during the elimination rounds fails to mask that all these talented women are literally being rated and put in competition with each other based upon their physical appearance.

Miss Universe and Miss America’s continued popularity and unimaginable profits are empirical proof that no matter how bright, eloquent, and inspirational a woman is, the first trick she must perform is being pretty enough, or white enough, to participate. Ultimately, the pageants are just another form of sexual objectification, and they sustain a cycle of women-against-women rivalry, not to mention the ugly and racist glorification of Eurocentric beauty. ♦



In 1968, feminists protested the Miss America pageant. The sign above reads, “Cattle Parades Are Degrading To Human Beings.” (Photo by Jo Freeman.)

The Feminist Question in “Fifty Shades of Grey”

By Taylor Mulcahey

The most recent phenomenon, commonly labeled “mommy porn,” has hit the big screen, and many people just don’t know what to think.

The Fifty Shades of Grey franchise has gained a lot of recent attention due to its film release. There has been a lot of negative attention focused on the unhealthy nature of the relationship between graduating college senior Ana Steele and big-wig executive Christian Grey. However, feminist writers screaming “bad” from all directions oversimplifies a franchise whose popularity is unprecedented. It overlooks the reasons for the franchise’s success and popularity, and undermines what can be used as an insight into a complex culture of sexuality in America.

Having not subjected myself to the books, I’m going to focus primarily on the movie, which was released just in time for Valentine’s Day on February 13th. When I watched it, I could not help but agree with many of the critics: It was absolutely awful. The characters were stale and unbelievable, the dialogue felt awkward and scripted, and there was absolutely no way to get on board with the idea that Ana and Christian wanted to be anywhere near each other.

But my real interest lies in the controversies surrounding their sex, as well as the portrayal of sexuality and relationships in the movie in general.

“To claim that she knowingly chose to be with Christian is reductionist in that it overlooks the psychological games he played in order to convince her that the way he was treating her was out of love.”

When the books first became popular, it was not unusual to see the cover in the hands of women everywhere. There were fifty-year-old women sitting in doctor’s office waiting rooms reading about nipple clamps, and there is definitely something interesting to be said about this.

In a culture where discussions of female sexuality are still taboo, anything that makes talking about female desire acceptable deserves some credit. As Katie J. M. Baker from Jezebel states, “If it’s making more women feel comfortable discussing their sexuality, we’re all for it.”

But in this case, making women feel comfortable talking about sexuality does come with a huge price. The relationship that has women everywhere openly discussing their sexual preferences offers a lot more than just kink. But Christian’s and Ana’s relationship is not sexy, it is unhealthy and abusive.

At first glance, one might think that the sex that Christian enjoys falls into the category of BDSM, a condensed acronym that stands for bondage and discipline, domination and submission, and sadism and masochism.

The problem with the film is that it suggests that all of Christian’s abusive acts are simply another facet of his kinky sexual preferences, or his love for Ana.

For example, Christian tracks Ana’s phone and attempts to control what she eats, drinks, wears, as well as what form of contraception she takes. He is constantly showing up where he is not invited, and he talks Ana into sex acts which she is clearly uncomfortable with, but is too shy to speak out against.

The film portrays Ana’s discomfort with some of the sex acts as a result of her inexperience, implying that she simply needs to be

coaxed into pushing the limits of her sexual comfort zone. This is dangerous and reductionist. Being a submissive is not a form of advanced sex that everyone will someday grow to like, but rather a specific sexual preference. Ana’s belief that it is her inexperience that makes her uncomfortable allows her to be manipulated into doing things that she doesn’t like.

The actual BDSM community does not operate like this. While there is a clear emphasis on sexual experimentation, there are also clear boundaries about what people are and are not willing to try, often outlined in a contract. This takes a level of self awareness that Ana clearly lacks, as well as a confidence in one’s preferences, to which Ana never independently gives any thought.

Another major component of true BDSM is communication. Closely related to the issue discussed above, Ana and Christian’s relationship lacks communication on many levels. They do not communicate about the direction of their relationship, and they do not communicate about sex. “Communication is one of the most important parts of kink and BDSM sex, because that’s how partners establish trust,” states Emma Green in an article for The Atlantic.

Many people have tried to justify Ana’s decision to be with Christian, claiming that she had free choice, and that she chose to be with Christian even after she was made aware of his sexual preferences. Justin Garcia, a sex researcher at the Kinsey Institute, points out that there has been a “historical shift from valuing chastity to valuing sexual agency.” This new gauge of sexuality has some benefits, but in this case, it is irrelevant.

Ana may have chosen the relationship at the outset, but she chose it as a young woman being manipulated and taken advantage of by a much older and more experienced man. To claim that she knowingly chose to be with Christian is reductionist in that it overlooks the psychological games he played in order to convince her that the way he was treating her was out of love.

The Fifty Shades of Grey franchise does not have a lot to offer. While it is notable that it facilitated discussions about female desire and sexuality, it still produced more harm than good. It contributed to the portrayal of an abusive and unhealthy relationship as kinky and erotic.

As Amy Adler, a Law professor at New York University states, “There’s an increasing vigilance against rape culture on the one hand and the easy acceptance of pornographic S&M [on the other].” Fifty Shades of Grey is just one example of something produced by a culture so attached to dangerous narratives that it cannot even recognize them. ♦



“Fifty Shades of Grey” made \$81.7 million dollars over President’s Day weekend. It is estimated that 67 percent of the attendees were women and 58 percent were over 25. (Photo by WrathsQueensBooks.)

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