Watching Girls

by

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Thesis

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Introduction

I was the little girl with hundreds of Vogues stashed under her bed. I'd put color coordinated sticky notes on every page, pointing out my favorite outfits, my favorite models, my favorite photographers. British and Italian Vogues were holy, while Teen Vogues made up the bread and butter of my collection. I'd search Style.com for hours, meticulously printing out and bookmarking show after show of Prada, Dior, Galliano, Loewe. I'd cut out my absolute favorites and put them in my special shoe box, safe from creases and prying eyes. It wasn't just the clothes I liked—it was all of it. The beautiful models who I wanted to grow up and become. The front row. The photos are full of movement and excitement and the stress of the runway. It felt important. It felt like the future. I could see myself there, taking it all in. This is just to say that fashion never felt like a choice. It has just always been my thing. By age 10, I was the go-to events stylist for my mom and dad, and occasionally for my older siblings in their twenties. At 13, my bat mitzvah theme was "runway" and involved not only a makeshift runway I twirled on, but flashing photos of collages I had made from clippings of my favorite shoots. By 16, I was working in New York at my favorite magazine, *Nylon*. My not-so-secret aspiration was to become a nicer version of the notoriously bitchy Anna Wintour.

Because of this early obsession, I've always viewed everything through a fashion lens. I automatically see the reference photos that went into creating everything around me, the runway looks from 2 years ago that inspired the clothes my friends wear. I kid

you not, it's like that scene in "The Devil Wears Prada" where Meryl Streep tells Anne Hathaway about the lifecycle of a cerulean sweater, but in my head all the time.

Sometimes when you see how the sausage is made, your passion stops being fun. I went from magazine to magazine in my early years at NYU, hoping that my unhappiness and perpetual anxiety was not a result of where I was working but due to my lack of academic involvement or inner turmoil leftover from high school. I couldn't pull myself away from the industry that I had wanted so desperately to be a part of for so long. And on the outside, I was doing well. *V Magazine, Nylon, CR Fashion Book, Milk, Comme des Garcons*. I worked really hard and didn't do coke in the daytime, which got me major points when compared by superiors to my peers. I tried and succeeded in being known as nice. I never complained. Even when the shoot went until midnight, or I didn't get invited to the company Christmas party I helped plan, or I had to spend my own money to Uber home from a Brooklyn studio an hour away from any train lines.

I transferred schools to get out, knowing that I would never make myself leave the industry if I stayed in the city. Fashion sucks. The advertisements of skinny blondes have huge effects on body image and make women dislike their own appearance (Apeagyei; Kay; Lunde; Shaw; Tiggemann; Turner). Fashion is one of the most polluting industries in the world, producing 10% of global carbon emissions, 20% of wastewater, and 20% of all industrial water pollution worldwide (McFall-Johnsen; Ro). Thousands of interns around the world work for no pay and endure daily verbal and physical abuse from stressed bosses (Elliott; Fleming; Odell). But the second the lights go down at a runway show, time stands still. I have a massive goofy grin on my face. It's time. This is it. It's

the performance of everything humans have ever tried to understand. It's sex and it's culture and it's race and money and gender and abuse, all wrapped into this fucking beautiful package and I feel like the luckiest person in the whole world to be there.

I will always love fashion because it's the daily and extraordinary performance art of clothing, but, of course, it's complicated.

Asking For It

Fashion has very real consequences. “What were you wearing?” is a question often asked of sexual assault survivors by police, partners, parents, and friends. “How drunk were you?” As though drinking in a bikini invites sexual violence. A 2010 poll conducted in London found that one in eight women thought that dancing, flirting, and wearing revealing clothing made rape victims partly to blame (“Poll Finds Most Women Blame Some Rape Victims”). A 2019 UK poll found that 41% of women agreed that “revealing clothing invites unwanted sexual advances” (Oppenheim). Upon hearing the allegations of rape made again Harvey Weinstein, fashion designer Donna Karan commented during a red carpet appearance “Are we asking for it by presenting all the sensuality and all the sexuality? . . . You look at . . . how women are dressing and what they are asking by just presenting themselves the way they do. What are they asking for? Trouble” (Malkin). This is a woman who has designed and sold bestselling tight, feminine clothing for over 30 years.

We saw more headlines dedicated to sexual assault during 2018 and 2019 than many thought was possible. From Roy Moore, the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama and republican congressional nominee, allegedly assaulting girls under 18 in his 30’s (McCrummen), the more than 90 allegations of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape made against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein (North; Ransom “Harvey Weinstein’s Stunning Downfall: 23 Years in Prison”), Jeffrey Epstein and his decades-long sex trafficking scheme (Read; Watkins), to Judge Brett Kavanaugh’s angry

and, honestly, clumsy testimony before the senate's judiciary committee ("Kavanaugh Hearing: Transcript"), the subject has become that of everyday normal, dinner conversation. At first, when Dr. Blasey Ford's recollection of high school trauma went public, women everywhere felt a deep sense of discomfort ("How Americans Across the Country Are Reacting to Christine Blasey Ford's Testimony"). If you haven't yet been the girl at a party made to suffer at the hands of a boy "just having fun" then you probably know at least a dozen women who have been.

Then, came another round of triggering statements, this time from the Republican and "old boys club" in Washington, saying things like "who hasn't done this" or "if this can hurt him, we're all in trouble" (Cook; Aldridge). President Trump, who has been accused of sexual misconduct by more than 25 women (Relman), Tweeted "Judge Brett Kavanaugh is a fine man, with an impeccable reputation, who is under assault by radical left wing politicians who don't want to know the answers, they just want to destroy and

delay" (Trump). Can you be a "fine man with an impeccable reputation" if you've been accused of assaulting multiple women? Yes. Is Kavanaugh, indeed, "under assault" as his own senate testimony implies? I don't think so. But President Trump's choice of language is clear: it is Dr. Ford's *fault* for not reporting the incident sooner, and the Democrats' fault for not immediately insisting on an FBI hearing. Judge Kavanaugh isn't to blame for bipartisan feuding. Trump also Tweeted that morning, "I have no doubt that, if the attack on Dr. Ford was as bad as she says, charges would have been immediately filed with local Law Enforcement Authorities by either her or her loving parents. I ask that she bring those filings forward so that we can learn date, time, and place!" (Trump). This sends a national message that boys will be boys, and their actions are only wrong if reported and confirmed by law enforcement. History has spoken: Kavanaugh is now an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Perhaps the female reaction to Dr. Ford's description of the alleged account, and why she waited 36 years to speak about it, can be summed up by Patti Davis, President Ronald Reagan's daughter, who published a story that same week in the Washington Post titled "I was sexually assaulted. Here's why I don't remember many of the details." In it

she recounts her own rape and why she waited close to 40 years before telling anyone (Davis). She defends Dr. Ford and explains the never-ending psychological trauma that occurs in a victim-blaming society (Davis). Like many people who have experienced assault, Dr. Ford's outline of the event is dangerously familiar.

Victim blaming begins at an early age in the United States, and is often taught to middle schoolers around the same time they're taught sexual education (Smith; Sneed). When I was in 6th grade our 80 person grade was divided into "girls" and "boys" without warning and led to two separate classrooms. In the girls' room, the teachers, all women, began with an explanation of what it would be like for a boy to see us wearing short-shorts and short skirts in class. They may get distracted, and we would be putting them in a difficult situation. The teachers used this term "shazam," pronounced "shaaaazaaaam!!" with an example that went something like "Johnny is minding his own business in class, when Sally walks by and...shazam!"

It was a private school without a dress code or uniform of any kind, a very "anything goes" and "hippy liberal school" kind of place. Even in middle school kids had piercings and dyed hair, so I was surprised that my shorts' length was so important. Simultaneously, I didn't want to distract my guy friends or put them through a shazam moment, nor did I want them looking at me like *that*. It felt like I had done something wrong, and it would be my fault if they formed a crush because of my legs.

Sin and flesh have long been intertwined. German theologian Erik Peterson points out in his article *Theologie des Kleides* (translating to "Theology of Clothing") that it's only on their way out of the Garden of Eden, after committing eternal sin and eating from

the tree of knowledge, that God gives Adam and Eve animal pelts to wear, and clothing appears for the first time in a Judeo-Christian text (Peterson 560-568). He makes a distinction between Adam and Eve's state in the garden, free of sin, and today's "nudity," saying:

> Nudity appears only after sin . . . The perception of nudity is linked to the spiritual act that the Scriptures define as the "opening of the eyes" . . . Once man's being had been "stripped" through sin, the body's "nudity" required the covering of dress. The "uncovering" of the body made "shame" apparent. Hence, the covering of the body became an imperative for the "sense of shame." (560-561)

Clothing, especially so-called "slutty" clothing that eroticizes flesh, only highlights this age-old shame. Sin has been present while looking on uncovered or 'unveiled' arms and legs since the birth of Judeo-Christian religions. Italian philosopher and theorist Giorgio Agamben, whose work is heavily influenced by social theorist Michel Foucault, builds on Peterson's theories in *Nudities* (2011). He writes, "Nudity can never satiate the gaze to which it is offered. The gaze avidly continues to search for nudity, even when the smallest piece of clothing has been removed, even when all the parts that were hidden have been exhibited in a barefaced manner" (Agamben 66). The unveiling of the body is exciting, and we search for nudity in a sea of clothing. I've often been catcalled in a turtleneck and tight pants, and I always wonder how my aggressors can so conveniently ignore my massive sweaters to focus on the outline of my nipple or one piece of clothing that barely hints at sexuality or nudity. In this sense there is not erotic pleasure in the body itself, but rather in the act of unveiling (Agamben 85-90). When faced with nudity,

we either look away, as though it's a sin to even look upon the body, or wonder where the "real" nudity is, and what else lies underneath, searching for more (Agamben 55-65).

Agamben's text explains why, even as a twelve or thirteen year old, it always seemed like people wanted to see me, or anyone, naked, an underlying feature of the ever-sexualizing "male gaze." I was incredibly uncomfortable in my body growing up. Never above a size XXS, I had the type of hypersexualized frame that my friends complained about. I hated my body and the attention it received. By 8th grade I had developed a sort of neurosis where I'd overeat in excessive amounts in social settings to prove that I wasn't anorexic. It felt like I was doing something wrong just by living inside my body, with boys staring, and girls giving me side-eye, at pool parties. In retrospect, it was an incredibly odd problem to have before I had even hit puberty. As I grew up, it felt like I could walk into a room, and there'd be me and my body, two entities that didn't have much in common. My body often betrayed me, somehow conveying sexual desires that I did not have.

How on earth did this become normal, and why does it seem that women's bodies are always defined in their relationship to those sexualizing the body? Why was I taught as a sixth grader, high schooler, and college-aged woman that my body belonged to men, while my mind and internal thoughts were my own? Countless writers have tackled this topic, but Simone de Beauvoir may very well be my favorite. In her seminal 1949 text *The Second Sex*, the French philosopher, writer, and feminist theorist articulates the complicated relationship between female and male bodies and explains the "male gaze." She paraphrases a Monsieur Benda in "Le rapport d'Uriel" ("Uriel's Report"):

> ‘A man’s body has meaning by itself, disregarding the body of the woman, whereas the woman’s body seems devoid of meaning without reference to the male. Man thinks himself without woman. Woman does not think herself without man.’ And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called ‘the sex,’ meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him she is sex, so she is it in the absolute . . . she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other. (De Beauvoir 26)

If women are “other” and defined by sex while men have been the subject of western culture for hundreds of years, of course the national conversation centers around male opinions of female clothing, bodies, and intentions. And of course female victims do not feel that they can speak out: they are told from an early age that to be an “other” means that one’s very word and truth can be negated by the subject, the man, the law. This was true in the case of Dr. Blasey Ford and Judge Kavanaugh. It’s as though the sheer fact that Judge Kavanaugh has female friends, believes in God, and cries, should imply that he couldn’t assault a woman (Paschal). Dr. Ford may not have definitive proof, but he has even less. The “male gaze” is specifically gendered because men have been a subject, the subject, for thousands of years, able to look upon the female sex as “inessential” and an “oject” (De Beauvoir 27). This eliminates the possibility of female authority, autonomy, or entitlement, making women’s word less than men’s and women’s actions inherently sexed.

Within this context, “no” or “stop” has little to no meaning and few consequences, and it becomes easy to blame a female victim, defined by her sex. Ford

now moves from house to house, avoiding physical threats to herself and her family, and has had to hire a crew of three full-time bodyguards, which she pays for using a Go Fund Me set up during the debacle (Durkin). Judge Kavanaugh is a judge on the Supreme Court, the nation's highest court.

This brutal paradox often crystalizes during college years. I've watched my friends go through rush in southern schools and attend fraternity parties on the condition that they will have sex with a specified brother, the girls' very existence in a university space hinging on their sexual relationship to men. United States Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, who has held her role since 2017, continues to gut sexual assault guidelines for schools across America, bolstering the rights of the accused and arguing for the importance of a presumption of innocence in cases of sexual assault (Meckler). Changes include higher standards of evidence and allowing the accuser and the accused to cross-examine each other (Gersen; Ortiz; Stratford). Things are not looking bright legally, especially for the minority groups statistically most vulnerable to assault. Although primarily white cis-women have been getting news coverage, over one out of every two trans people of color will be assaulted in their lifetime (Stotzer), and 46% of bisexual women have been raped ("NISVS: An Overview of 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation").

What has been uplifting, and shows no sign of slowing, is the ever-growing dialogue surrounding assault. #Metoo has expanded into almost every industry, and men and women who used to avoid the topic can't any longer if they want to discuss politics. We may be finally holding each other socially accountable, even if the law won't.

Journalists everywhere, inspired by Ronan Farrow's work on the Weinstein accusations, are listening to victims who have never had a voice before, and readers are clicking on the links and asking for more (Farrow; Rock; North). The question will become what will we do with this newfound discussion, and how can we use it to bring about long-lasting change. How can we move #metoo beyond partisan politics to improve the lives of everyone, everywhere, regardless of gender or orientation? It may unfortunately mean that for every Judge Kavanaugh, we'll need an equally strong Dr. Ford, who is able to remind little girls everywhere that they are not alone, that they are right, and that there is a way out. However, there are very few Dr. Fords in the world, and their work is tiresome and lonesome and excruciating. In trying to create change, we're up against almost all of human history.

In February, a New York jury of seven men and five women found Harvey Weinstein guilty of a first-degree criminal sex act and third-degree rape, and he was sentenced to 23 years in prison (O'Connor; Ransom "Harvey Weinstein's Stunning Downfall: 23 Years in Prison"). Furthermore, the two women who faced him in court were not "perfect" victims. Aspiring actress Jessica Mann had agreed to several sexual encounters (which did not include sex) with Mr. Weinstein before he raped her repeatedly, and the two exchanged friendly emails soon after (Ransom "Former Actress Testifies in Graphic Detail How Weinstein Raped Her"). Miriam Haley testified that Weinstein forcefully performed oral sex on her as she told him "No, no, no, don't do that" (Ransom "Weinstein Trial: 'I'm Being Raped,' Recalls 'Project Runway' Assistant"). She maintained a professional relationship with him for years after, including

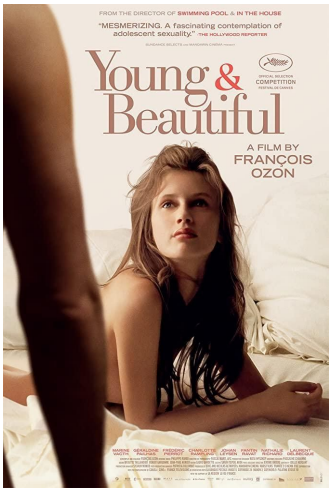
emails signed “Lots of Love Miriam” (Ransom “Weinstein Trial: ‘I’m Being Raped,’ Recalls ‘Project Runway’ Assistant”). The judge allowed multiple women to testify in order to establish a pattern of behavior, even though most of their allegations are outside the statute of limitations (Ransom “Weinstein Trial: ‘I’m Being Raped,’ Recalls ‘Project Runway’ Assistant”). Lawyers worried that these complicated narratives would not be convincing to a jury, and yet, against seemingly all odds, it worked. The seven men and five women were able to understand that rape and assault can occur within a relationship. That a woman can consent to some things (kissing, emailing) and not to others (oral sex, penetrative sex). Weinstein is in prison. Juries everywhere might not have put Weinstein in jail, but this one did. Things are changing, slowly but surely. There is hope.

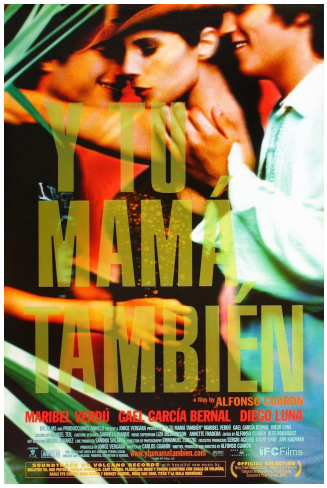
McQueen's Woman

I want to write about what it feels like to be up against all of human history. I want to write about living in my skin because for the longest time, and even now, it didn't and doesn't feel like mine. It felt like it belonged to the boys who stared, to the society that created, maybe even to my parents and their community, but it never felt like mine or like it was under my control.

It always felt like something that betrayed me. Communicated thoughts that I wasn't having. Told boys I want you when I didn't. Told my friends that I was better than them when I wasn't. Told the world I was desirable when I did not yet have desire to give. Made me a woman when I was just a girl.

If I was going to be forced into a sexualized world, I was going to be good at it. I studied up. *Blue is the Warmest Color*, *Love, Sex and Lucia*, *Y Tu Mama Tambien*, *Nymphomaniac: Volume I* and *II*, *Juene & Jolie*, *Valley of the Dolls*, *Room in Rome*, *Pauline at the Beach*, and hundreds more. I watched them all around 15 or 16. These women were demure and quiet, yet tantalizingly out of reach. Never tried hard but always looked beautiful. And, above all else, comfortable exploring—exploring their sexuality, exploring drugs, exploring a boundless world where the rules didn't apply to them. Skinny, impeccably dressed brunettes.





Simone de Beauvoir writes that at the pubescent age the girl "refuses to reveal to those around her the hidden self that she considers to be her real self and that is in fact an imaginary character" (De Beauvoir 407). She tries on new characters, always pretending in her head that others are obsessed with her. "Because she is doomed to passivity and yet wants power, the adolescent girl must believe in magic: her body's magic that will bring men under her yoke, the magic of destiny in general that will fulfill her without her having to do anything" (408). She can be anyone beautiful: the ballerina in *The Nutcracker*, a famous model, an elegant neighbor. Perhaps she stands in front of the mirror for hours practicing her makeup, her smile, her giggle. I wasn't sure if I was in love with the girls in the movies or just obsessed with versions of who I might one day be, trying damn hard to dream them into existence and escape the present. De Beauvoir reminds me that the girl cherishes "this body that fascinates her as if it were someone else's," some beautiful woman's from porn and fashion advertisements (405). In Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, the beautiful young heroine Natasha remarks, "'How lovely

that Natasha is!' she said of herself again in the words of some collective male third person . . . some very intelligent man saying it about her, the most intelligent and best of men . . . 'There's everything in her, everything,' this man went on, 'she's extraordinarily intelligent, sweet, and then, too, pretty, extraordinarily pretty, nimble'" (De Beauvoir 406). I did Natasha's routine as a young girl. Sometimes I catch myself doing it now, commenting on my imaginary self, that skinny, impeccably dressed brunette.

I get anxious about looking. Who is looking at me, and what do they want from me? Being looked at feels intimate, violating, a kind of touching or probing that I do not want from that stranger on the corner or the man in the truck at the stop sign.mMaggie Nelson writes in *The Argonauts*:

> If you're looking for sexual tidbits as a female child, and the only ones that present themselves depict child rape or other violations (all my favorite books in my preteen years . . . as well as the few R-rated movies I was allowed to see—Fame, most notably with its indelible scene of Irene Cara being asked to take her shirt off and suck her thumb by a skeezy photographer who promises to make her a star) then your sexuality will form around that fact. There is no control group. I don't even want to talk about 'female sexuality' until there is a control group. And there never will be. (Nelson 66)

Nelson recognizes that there is no "normal sexuality" for women who grow up surrounded by depictions of beauty and abuse their entire lives. How could there be in a world that buys and sells sex, a world which Preciado refers to as the "pharmacopornographic era," where the young and beautiful are most valued. Maybe that

was part of the lure of the girls I admired on screen—watching hypersexualized women supposedly explore their sexuality in ways that felt elicit and went far beyond procreation, including lesbianism, sexwork, and three-ways. Seeing them experience pleasure made me believe pleasure for pleasure's sake, far from the realms of destitute prostitution and mundane housewivery, was possible. Little did I know that so many of those films were made for and popularized by horny men getting off on female pleasure.

A friend of a friend at the Rhode Island School of Design was almost kidnapped a block from my apartment on Ives. They tried to pull her into a white van, but she got away. Whether it's time at home alone, where a break-in could happen; fun at a bar with friends, where I could get drugged; or standing on a street corner, where white vans prey on school girls, it never feels safe to live within this body. Sex, violence, and autonomy are inextricably linked for me. No one, in my opinion, better unites sex, violence, and autonomy, and represents the inherent contradictions that society's sex obsession forces upon women, than Alexander McQueen.

Working in the 1990's and early 2000's, both on his own line and at the helm of the house of Givenchy, Alexander "Lee" McQueen's first line in 1993 sent models down the runway in muslin and dark, splotchy patterns, seeming to depict the scene of a crime or some kind of violence done to the models (Arnold 85). Subsequent lines featured women with red contacts and braided muzzles, terrifying wolf masks, and splattered blood-like paint (Arnold 81). The onlooker fears McQueen's woman and the grotesque underbelly of sexual desire that she represents, afraid for her safety while fearing his own castration (Bancroft 96). They say that in the modern world women are free, and that

fashion's voyeuristic advertisements are more than acceptable (Ambrosino), but McQueen reveals that our fears of sex as sin result in a need to control desire. While the glossy images of the 1980's sexy powersuit are acceptable, this brutal form of sex being paraded down the runway is certainly not (Arnold 79). The chutzpah!

McQueen shows us the result of our desire for flesh—bodies that are both sexualized, given their "model" status and scantily clad appearance on a runway, and

decaying, deathly ill and brutalized. By displaying both what Freud refers to as the "life force"—or sex, energy, and life—and the "death drive"—decay, violence, and death—on a single, scary female body (Freud 40-41), McQueen forces onlookers to confront their own sexual ideals and our society's surveillance of the female body. In *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety,* Rebecca Arnold observes:

> Flaws and decay are displayed as the battlescars of mortality, erotic but disrupting the dream of hygienic, sanitised sex in a culture that worships unblemished youth. The body represents a site of conflict, where frustration and anger is inscribed on the skin in contradictory images of anguish and pleasure, the flesh symbolically punished for the desires it provokes." (89)

Judith Butler points out in her celebrated queer book *Gender Trouble* that there is a fundamental disconnect between glossy images and the corporeality of the body, in its oozing and bruising (Butler 173). McQueen challenges this disconnect, forcing us to see the corporeal consequences of the idealization of sex. In his collection "The Hunger," McQueen presents women in suits open to breastplates where worms appear to crawl on the skin, hinting at the decay of the body after death while also playing on the usual "sexiness" of breasts on stage. Alison Bancroft writes in *Fashion and Psychoanalysis: Styling the Self* that "the gap between the body and clothing, and the body and the self, is usually denied by couture, with its taxonomy of completeness, but it is exploited in creative terms by the avant-garde" (Bancroft 100). Finally, in the 1990's this gap is ruptured, and McQueen, amongst other creatives like designer John Galliano and photographers Sean Ellis, Jeurgen Teller, and Davide Sorrenti, begins to admire signs

that the body is real and alive, capturing them and holding them out for us to see. McQueen subverts the narrative about perfect sexuality and femininity that fashion has endorsed for the past 200 or so years and breaches the social contract that has allowed couture to exist—pretty little things bouncing on a stage for men to ogle. Instead of showing us the sexy models we hope to see, he shows us a frightening body with the power to harm the onlooker at any point. As Bancroft notes, McQueen "provides a site of resistance in which the disruptive potential of feminine jouissance can make its appearance" (Bancroft 99). These bodies subvert the perfection of modeling, instead telling the stories of scars and brushes with death.

Fashion is not only a performance of gender, sex, and sexuality, but also a reflection of societal anxieties around the female body. In the case of McQueen, it can be a way to express and symbolize these contradictions, inscribing them on the form itself and creating a kind of freedom from this recognition, a release from perfection, an artistic account of what it would look like to renounce societal expectations of women. He has quite literally structured deconstruction. And because so many of his collections are grounded in historical events, such as Scotland's relationship with England (which he aptly titled "Highland Rape"), Spain's bull-fighting culture, and Elizabethan garb

(Mower), his clothing can be seen as a BDSM-style revision of history's account of subdued and powerless women.

Not only do his models appear to be the site of a crime scene, but in many shows they are terrifyingly powerful. In one scene they are surrounded by fire, she-devils on Earth able to harm at a moment's notice. As Bancroft states, "This framing of the conflict of co-existence of the phallic and the castrated that exists in the contradiction of femininity is McQueen's visual reiteration of Lacan's 'there's no such thing as a sexual relation' (Bancroft 101). Able to harm, and yet rendered silent on a stage, these models represent both the height of sexualized bodily forms—invoking BDSM and dressed by a male designer—and the apex of feminine power—scaring all men nearby with her ability to evoke violence, and maybe even castration (Freud 154). She is wanted and feared, representative of the inherent contradictions of female sexualization. She is the primal scream in the face of the male gaze throughout human history. She is my alter ego,

protecting me in my vulnerable skin. She looks at the male gaze head on, scaring the shit out of Moore and Epstein and Weinstein and van drivers everywhere. She is proof that woman can live and thrive in her mass of contradictions, that she can be powerful and sexual, that the private can be public, that she can move from object to subject and back again. She is enough, on her own, no relation to motherhood or reproduction. She is.

The Daydreaming Girl

Of course we are never *only* the victims. We are constructed by other women, including our own family, who first give us the pleasure of their gaze and then give others permission to the gaze.

Take the little girl in Sally Mann's photograph *Jessie at Five* (1987). She's staring back at you. Confident and defiant, she's wearing her mother's pearls and a pair of clip-on earrings. Her ribs protrude below tiny nipples, revealing a round belly marking

her childish age. She is certainly naked, but with a five-year-old subject it seems grotesque to assign the photo any markers beyond innocence and childhood. And yet, by the time Jessie is 15 or 16, only 10 years later and not yet full grown, she will represent an erotic fantasy and will be rendered a being with sexual potential. We'll consider her sexual prowess to be far closer to that of a 25-year-old than a five-year-old. Both the young girl and older girl have little autonomy and live under a male gaze. While they are perceived to be at entirely different stages of sexual maturity, they still maintain the identity of "girl," a precursor to "woman."

Children sit squarely in the world of the innocent, the sex-less, the pure; girls, on the other hand, are constituted as passive entities waiting for womanhood, marriage, and ultimately, sex. Jessie is both a child and a girl, straddling the confines of each identity in a liminal temporality that can only be punctured by the arrival of "woman," whenever that supposed state may be. Girlhood aids in constructing the myth of reproductive bliss, creating the rules by which the social world necessitates the asexual passivity of the girl-child. Taking into account Eve Segwick's definition of the "Masturbating Girl," Sally Mann's photograph *Jessie at Five* is an erotic image, so why do we recoil from the sexuality of her body?

In his Introduction to *Eroticism*, Georges Bataille quotes the Marquis de Sade, who wrote that "there is no better way to know death than to link it with some licentious image" (24). Here the licentious image is one of a child performing "woman" and motherhood in pearls (although another image that comes to mind is that of McQueen's woman). Mann's image is fundamentally erotic if we consent to Bataille's understanding

that “eroticism is assenting to life even in death” (11). The mapping of womanhood onto a little girl is the acknowledgement of death, insofar as it highlights both the eventual form she is to take as she ages and dies, and the fundamental role a child plays in the system of reproduction, as both a product of sex and a predecessor of what is to come (20-24).

The photograph represents a breaking of social norms to establish the performativity of gender and the ways in which children are inherently representative of death, sex, and the human life cycle. Although perhaps we hope to ignore the sexuality of the photograph, it would be a futile exercise. Bataille claims “eroticism always entails a breaking down of established patterns, the patterns, I repeat, of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separate individuals” (18). It is only through these licentious images that we can understand the societal boundaries that constrain western society, including a fear of death, and eventually experience pleasure as individuals in breaking these binds (18). Sally Mann’s photograph forces viewers to confront this question about the sexuality of children, challenging the very rationale of “childhood innocence.” Jessie’s confrontational gaze and naked body clearly makes viewers uncomfortable, as Mann has faced backlash her entire career (Mann; Woodward). After seeing her naked photograph of her daughter Virginia printed in the Wall Street Journal with black censor bars across the little girl’s eyes, eyes, nipples, and groin, Mann said “it felt like a mutilation, not only of the image but also of Virginia herself and of her innocence. It made her feel, for the first time, that there was something wrong not just with the pictures but with her body. Heartbreakingly, the night after seeing

the picture with the black bars, she wore her shorts and shirt into the bathtub" (Mann). It was not Mann, Virginia's mother, stripping the girl of her innocence, but the pornography and sex-obsessed public.

The 1938 Balthus painting *Therese Dreaming* depicts a young girl, aged 12 or 13, lifting her leg and exposing her underwear while deep in thought, perhaps daydreaming as the title suggests. In late 2017, a petition circulating online gained over 10,000 signatures calling for its removal from New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art due to its perceived promotion of pedophilic content (Bellafante). But what is so noteworthy about the reaction to the painting is that she is not nude. No, the viewer must do the imagining—like Mann's photography, we are forced into the pedophilic role. How dare we notice that her underwear is visible.

In his 1998 queer theoretical article "The Future is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive," Lee Edelman puts forth the image of a child as a symbol of social order and a future worth living for. He writes that "the child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and been enshrined as the figure for whom that order must be held in perpetual trust" (21). With an ever-changing, tumultuous present, the child is a promise of a utopic future. In referencing the dystopian novel *The Children of Men*, Edelman explains that the book "gives voice to the ideological truism that governs our investment in the child as emblem of fantasmatic futurity" (21). We believe in the purity of children to retain hope for a better future and our own everlasting existence; put another way, our future rests in our children. Childhood sexuality fundamentally disrupts this narrative, and turns it on its head. Edelman theorizes that "the child . . . fixes our identity through identification with the futurity of the social order" (28). Our children are insurance of our own identities. Before puberty little girls have no ability to procreate, rendering them sexually useless. Accepting the existence of a child's sex drive involves admitting that the significance of sex is far greater than procreation. Edelman writes that "the heterosexually-specific alibi of reproductive necessity covers up the drive beyond meaning that drives the symbolic's machinery of sexual meaningfulness and erotic rationality" (22). Without children, we would have to admit that we have sex for pleasure, for destruction, for eroticism—that we are primal animals, and that pleasure does not have to be generative. That our society founded on Puritan ideals needs sex. The erotic image of a child threatens our social order; it threatens the Christian

conceptualization of marriage, heterosexuality, and parenthood. “Do it for the children,” the cliche reason to donate to a charity or to be more productive in society, becomes an utter lie, an excuse for pleasure-making, an excuse to lose ourselves in sweat and stimulation. We seek to transcend death through our children (Edelman 21). Ann Cvetkovich writes in *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* about heteronormative culture’s phobia of the queer figure that cannot reproduce (49-51). Her argument helps explain phobia of the sexual child, the daydreaming girl. If a child can have sex without procreation, then our very existence in life and death, and our role on earth, is put into question. And, if adults can have sex without procreation, then they could very well have sex with children, creating the disgusting and disarming possibilty for abuse. Inherent in this argument is the very real understanding that children cannot consent, and that horrific sexual, verbal, and physical abuse of children by adults is rampant; however, it is worth questioning in the first place why the theoretical sexual child, removed from an abusive adult and sexual only in their *own* daydreams, is indeed so frightening.

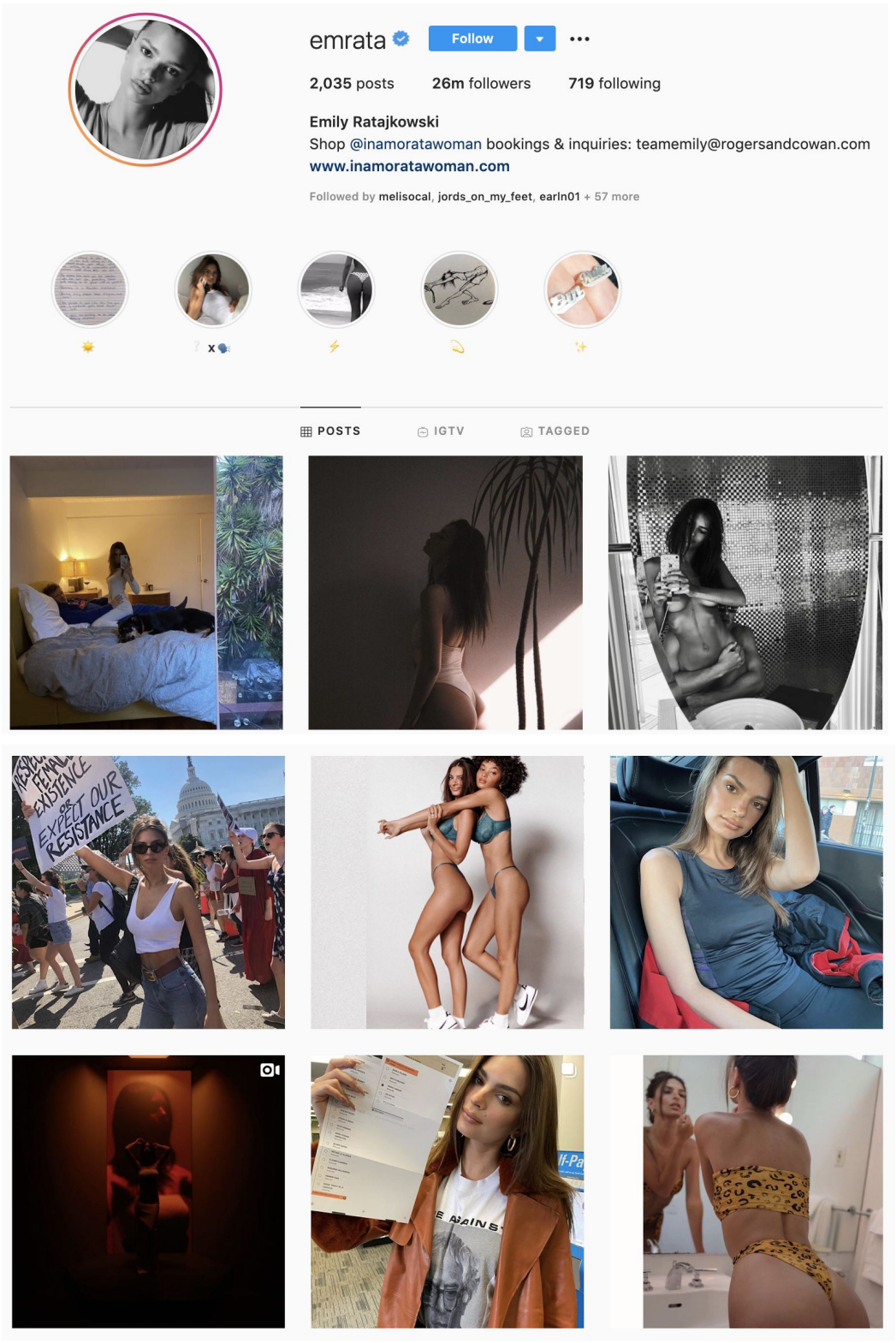
In today’s context, teenagers often educate themselves about sex through Snapchat. They exchange nude pictures, primarily taken by and for other adolescents. It is a means of proving and performing one’s sexual desires and acquiescing to others’, regardless of how physically prepared participants are. For young women, it may be their first foray into sexual experience.

Speaking on her experience using Snapchat in high school, Brown University senior Ella[1] commented out the value, and cost, of naked imagery. “It was a way for girls to gain social status. But then it also became a way for guys to boast about their interactions with girls . . . and of something went wrong in the relationship, leaking a nude would be used as a tool to break down the girl. Guys would send it to their friends, and then their friends would send it to other people.” Naked photographs become a tool of blackmail and a way for young men to assert power and take revenge. In thinking about why nudes are so valued and sought after, Ella points out that “I think it’s because it’s a private thing that becomes more public . . . when something goes from the private realm to the public it almost loses its value in a way, so it’s like once guys see it, it’s done. The act itself of getting the nude is valued more than the nude itself.” A nude’s very value lies in the intimacy with which it was shared. In her Marxist feminist rethinking of Freud’s essay “A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Theory of the Disease,” which details a female who fears her lover and colleague may blackmail her with naked photographs, Dr. Jennifer Doyle comments that, unlike men, who can occupy both the “home and office, . . . the sexual and the social, . . . the private and the public,” women are positioned on “one side of the line or the other: unlike the man in this story, she cannot be in both worlds at once” (8). In the case of sexual harassment at work, leaked nudes, or naked models on a runway, when “the private is made public,” the sexual is made social (Doyle 10). Doyle continues, “What could be worse, we gasp, than the circulation of the image of your sexual self? We seize up with anxiety at the idea of it,

[1] Name has been changed

as if these different worlds were not always already entangled in each other" (8). A public nude requires the social acknowledgement of a sexual self—a fraught task that undermines the importance of childbearing and highlights our need for pleasure. But, sometimes I think times are changing, and that a social and sexual self might be possible. Many of my friends feel empowered when sending nudes. Sarah[2] points out "Now I take [nudes] without the intention of sending them to anyone, usually after I come back from a run and I'm like 'oh my god my abs look so nice!' My nudes aren't very sexual—I just happen to not be wearing clothes. I'm like 'oh I really like my body right now.'" Emily Ratajkowski's nude-filled Instagram feed occasionally includes photographs of herself being arrested at a march against the nomination of Justice Brett Kavanaugh, pictures of difficult theoretical texts she is reading, and screenshots of published essays she has written on gender and identity (Ratajkowski "Emily Ratajkowski (@Emrata) on Instagram • 2,034 Photos and Videos"). I think maybe I *can* have it all, until I remember the death and rape threats Ratajkowski receives on a daily basis.

[2] Name has been changed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EXPECT OUR RESISTANCE

Ratajkowski reminds us of Sally Mann's photograph of Jessie, where her sexuality is not limited to her costuming or pose. She is a sexual being in her very humanness, but she lives within a societal male gaze that renders her passive, not only in sex, but in life. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir says young girls are rendered "a passive object" growing up (403). They are told to wait for a happy future of marriage and motherhood, unlike boys, who are motivated to seek out a future of their choosing. A man is positioned as the indispensable means to achieve future happiness. De Beauvoir asserts, "from childhood, the little girl, whether wishing to realize herself as woman or overcome the limits of her femininity, has awaited the male for accomplishment and escape; . . . he holds the keys to happiness, he is Prince Charming" (395). Powerless in the present, she passively imagines a future of autonomy through marriage, of becoming the pretty doll who is pampered and loved. De Beauvoir notes, "she anticipates that in his caress she will feel carried away by the great current of life as when she rested in her mother's bosom; subjected to his gentle authority, she will find the same security as in her father's arms" (395). In the arms of a man she will finally find a reason for years of passivity (De Beauvoir 409-410); she will realize her dreams of becoming her mother and marrying her father (Freud 273-275). She will fulfill her designated place in the human life cycle, handed down to her by her parents. This renders adolescence as a period of waiting for the next chapter—for womanhood. No longer a little girl and not yet a woman, she waits for the big reveal. De Beauvoir summarizes the wait for a fantastic, and ultimately illusory, dream of woman:

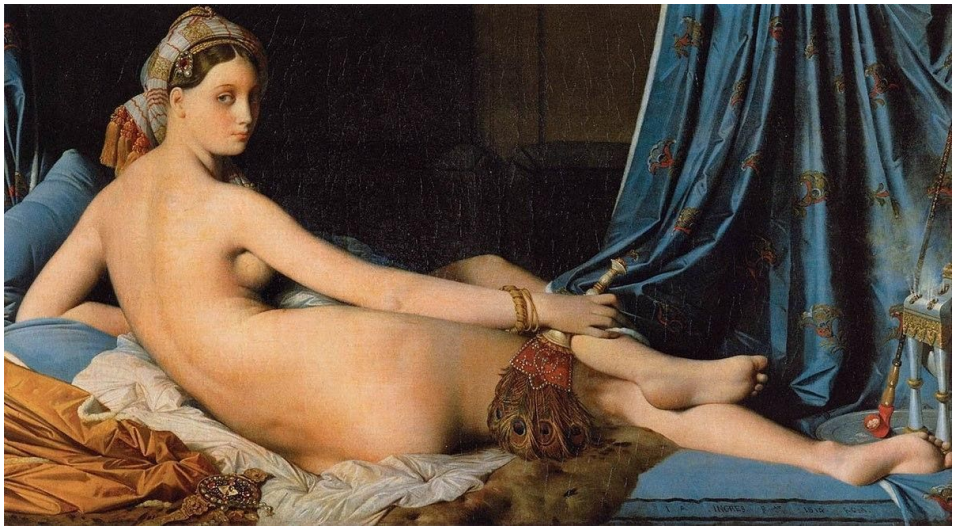
> While the adolescent boy is actively routed toward adulthood, the girl looks forward to the opening of this new and unforeseeable period where the plot is already hatched and toward which time is drawing her. As she is already detached from her childhood past, the present is for her only a transition; she sees no valid ends in it, only occupations. In a more or less disguised way, her youth is consumed by waiting. She is waiting for Man. (395)

Perhaps Balthus' Therese is participating in this very activity, daydreaming of the future handed down to her as she waits for its, or rather His, arrival. She is experiencing "reality in the form of a fantasy," to take a phrase from Edelman (19). She is waiting for sex to arrive, all the while imagining its presence from afar.

Reading Mann's photograph of Jessie in a different way, we can understand her as living in an imaginary future. De Beauvoir notes that "at an early age, the little girl already dreams she has reached the age of love; at nine or ten, she loves to make herself up, she pads her blouse, she disguises herself as a lady" (354). The object of her affection is not in the present or tied to a boy her own age, but dependent on a man waiting for her in the distance. De Beauvoir acknowledges, "she does not, however, look for any erotic experience with little boys . . . The partner of her amorous dreaming is an adult, either purely imaginary or based on real individuals: in the latter case, the child is satisfied to love him from afar" (354). She is rendered passive and without autonomous decision-making power, and her sexuality is inherently tied to reproduction. Perhaps de Beauvoir is unfairly snatching erotic daydreams out of the possession of the girl, claiming them to be part of some societal scheme.

The girl's fantasies are all but dismissed by de Beauvoir as being unimportant and futile, when in reality they constitute her only form of sexual autonomy and experience. On the other hand, de Beauvoir is right: this girl's understanding of the future, sex, and love is directly appropriated from a myth dictated by adult society, not from her own involvement or know-how. This is the very heart of the issue of autonomy—whether the girl's daydreams can be constituted as erotic and legitimate, or if they are merely representative of her being ushered into the lie of womanhood, of something greater lying in the distance (407-412).

The history of naked images of little girls dates almost to the invention of the camera. Modern-day fiction lovers might be surprised to learn that Lewis Carroll, the children's fiction writer and author of *Alice in Wonderland*, kept a list of young girls he hoped to photograph. One of his favorite models was a little girl named Evelyn, who found her way into his lens around age six or seven. Portrait of Evelyn Hatch, c. 1878 by Lewis Carroll features a nude girl with glassy eyes sprawled out with her hands behind her head. She invites you to look, and is reminiscent of Manet's *Olympia* or Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque*. She makes direct, unwavering eye contact, unafraid of meeting the viewer's gaze. She subverts our concept of a shy, sexless, asexual, and pure little girl, and seems to be in command of her own sexual autonomy. It is unsurprising, then, that this image makes so many uncomfortable.



Art historian Carol Mavor writes about the history of scholarship surrounding the image in her 1995 book *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs*. Mavor claims that due to the illicit nature of the photograph, only one scholar has dared to approach the difficult portrait. She quotes Nina Auerbach as writing that "'some embarrassed viewers have tried to see no sexuality in these photographs, but it seems to me needlessly apologetic to deny the eroticism of this beautiful little odalisque . . . Carroll's Evelyn Hatch . . . is allowed to be at one with her own implied powers" (Mavor 12). It seems almost revolutionary that Auerbach admits to and promotes the sexuality of little Evelyn. She adds that "the eroticism, along with the passionate and seditious powers this had come to imply, belongs to the child; the artist merely understands it" (13). Rather than Evelyn's confidence being created and fetishized by the male viewer Carroll, Auerbach imagines that the sexual nature of the photo radiates from the girl herself; Carroll is just capturing her natural attitude (13). The reality of this claim is arguable, considering the long history of pornographic images featuring

prostitutes sprawled in the physical position that Evelyn takes, plus her passive position in comparison to the active photographer, but it is nonetheless incredible that Auerbach and Carroll do not shy from Evelyn's portrait.

Mavor writes that "Carroll was attracted to the image of the little girl caught before the contamination of adolescence . . . Carroll was a photographer who undercut the typical representation of the pure little girl. He exposed her . . . as a neological: sexual, sexualized, innocent, childlike, and womanly" (14). As horrible as this image may appear to be at first glance, its vulgarity is the reason for its importance. She is represented as a child-woman, and repulses us into recognizing the absurdity of the asexual child, teaching us that quite literally any child can strip naked and pose as a sexually viable woman would. By studying this image taken by a pedophilic man, perhaps we can begin to give Evelyn some autonomy back.

Other, older, authors support the recognition of the existence of childhood sexuality, namely Sigmund Freud. In "The Sexual Life of Human Beings," he remarks that educators have sought to guide the "sexual will of the new generation" by influencing them from an early age (312). "With this intention almost all infantile sex activities are forbidden to the child or made distasteful to him; the ideal goal has been to render the life of the child asexual . . . The child is supposed to be pure and innocent, and whoever says otherwise may be condemned as a shameless blasphemer of the tender and sacred feelings of humanity" (312). Again and again we see that to render the child as sexual is to disrupt the very fibers of human society, and to disturb our own visions of a sacred future. Any man who does it must be chided to preserve society as we know it.

Freud believes, “to suppose that children have no sexual life—sexual excitations and needs and a kind of satisfaction—but suddenly acquire it between the ages of twelve and fourteen, would (quite apart from any observations) be as improbably, and indeed senseless, biologically as to suppose that they brought no genitals with them into the world and only grew them at the time of puberty” (311). Freud not only acknowledges childhood sexuality, but he points out the absurdity of ignoring it. He also guesses why girls grow more sexualized with age, arguing that “What does awaken in them at this time is the reproductive function, which makes use for its purposes of physical and mental material already present. You are committing the error of confusing sexuality and reproduction and by doing so you are blocking your path to an understanding of sexuality” (311). By separating sexuality from reproduction, Freud is admitting to the normality of non-procreative sex. He is acknowledging the unacknowledged, the lie we tell ourselves.

This primal instinct to lie is evoked in any gaze upon a young, female naked body. Giorgio Agamben’s *Nudities* (2011) considers the ways in which the very concept of nudity is soaked in sin. His particular focus on images and photographs of nude women provides interesting commentary in looking at images of nude girls. Describing one image of nudity, he writes:

> the image, inasmuch as it expresses naked being, is a perfect medium between the object in the mind and the real thing. As such, it is neither a mere logical object nor a real entity: it is something that lives (‘a life’); it is the trembling of the thing

> in the medium of its knowability; it is the quivering in which the image allows itself to be known. (Agamben 83).

Naked images are by nature unstable, and they occupy a different reality than their subjects. It is not nakedness we see, but the performance of gender, and the exposing of man's banishment from the garden of Eden and subsequent fall from grace (Peterson 560-568).

We cannot be fully naked, as we are always veiled in the very shock and inherent sin of the "nude." These girls are veiled in innocence, age, and eroticism; it is not them we see, but some imagined version of them, heightened and distorted. The person in the image wavers between reality and fantasy, and lives within a contradictory and imaginary space. As Bataille explains in his Introduction to *Eroticism*:

> the whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives . . . Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession . . . it is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self . . . Obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognized and stable individuality. (17-18)

It is extremely uncomfortable to destroy the asexuality of children. Allowing a girl to occupy a legitimate erotic state involves communicating with her about arousal and disrupting her passive status of waiting and the myth of Prince Charming. Confronting her naked state necessitates a relinquishing of male authority and possession; it means the future would be in children's hands, rather than ours. In Freudian terms, she would gain

the power to penetrate, which is terrifying to the adult world: women would gain the autonomy that only penises are allowed (Freud 153, 156-157). Rather than being passive and castrated, she would be an active being.

Erotic girls can contribute positively to altering patriarchal culture by breaking the boundaries of female passivity and forcing us to recognize the possibility that women can choose their own futures and fulfill their own fantasies. Nude images of women, both historically and today, present what seem to be confusing, shocking, and obscene forces of female autonomy by rendering their subjects as active participants in sexual realities. Yes, we must admit that these images may fulfill pedophilic fantasies, but they also do the important work of disrupting a narrative of asexual purity in adolescence. They force us to confront the meaning of sex in adult society, and recognize our own sexual drive beyond reproduction. The truth is that these girls, Jessie, Ella, and Sarah, are not only passive playthings for men; they have erotic fantasies of their own. It is adults who define these fantasies as either disgusting, or hormonal adolescent agitation. Perhaps childhood is only another part of adulthood, and our attempt to protect girls from the sexual reality of "woman" ultimately works to strip them of sexual autonomy and enforce the myth of "woman." What we fail to admit to children, and what the girl doesn't know, is that she is waiting for both a prince and a future of pleasure that will not come to her—it is only her own action to produce pleasure, whether in masturbation, penetration, or another action entirely, that she will experience that beautiful self-shattering that we, and she, yearn for (Sedgwick 836-837; Bataille 18-19; Cvetkovich 61-65).

Satisfaction

Of course, we can never be satisfied. For some, pleasure is a repulsive, bodily distraction. In Buddhism pleasure is a major roadblock on the path to happiness. The constant need to have more sex, more clothing, more wealth causes suffering, and many adherents to Buddhism recognize that the small bit of pleasure we receive with each seasonal couture purchase, whether from the runway or a vintage store, does not last. Rather, momentary pleasures move our minds to worry about the future as we contemplate the inevitable loss of the pleasure, and consequently we are unable to focus on the present. One example of this problem might be demonstrated after opening a gift from a significant other. Immediately the recipient begins to worry about future-focused events like damaging the gift, or what they'll do with the item if the relationship ends, distracting themselves from the present moment. The Buddhist solution to the issue of pleasure is a practice called "mindfulness." To be mindful is to be completely present, both in body and mind. It is a state in which practitioners drop all judgement of the self and others, bringing their complete attention to the exact space they are living in, moment-by-moment. It is living in the present, without the filters and barriers we put between ourselves and experience. Mindfulness is traditionally the seventh part of the Eightfold Path of Buddhism, which is the Buddhist's means to Enlightenment. Instead of attempting to maximize pleasure, which Buddhism recognizes as impossible, we can use mindfulness to minimize pain, and therefore minimize suffering.

Unsurprisingly, mindfulness has scientific and psychological underpinnings that help explain why the practice has been effective for thousands of years. Philip Brickman, Dan Coates, and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman wrote in their 1978 essay "Lottery Winners and Accident Victims: Is Happiness Relative?" that "gradually even the most positive events will cease to have impact as they themselves are absorbed into the new baseline against which further events are judged" (Brickman 918). The researchers found that one year after winning the lottery, participants were no happier than the average person, and that recent victims of paralysis were not as unhappy as might be expected (Brickman 921). Brickman and his colleagues lay out two fundamental components of adaptation: contrast and habituation.

In this case of this particular study, winning the lottery is a highly positive event, and would shift the winner's adaptation level upwards. As a result, everyday activities would seem far less pleasurable in comparison to winning the lottery, demonstrating short-term contrast effects. Eventually the excitement of the big win would wear off, and a new baseline would be established where the winner can buy luxuries. The individual would get used to these expensive pleasures, and each additional good would not bring them very much pleasure in the new, post-lottery state, demonstrating a long-term process of habituation. In the case of paralysis, or any other painful event, there would be a short-term contrast effect, where simple pleasures seem fantastic compared to the normative state established by their downward-shifted adaptation level (Brickman 925). In the long run, they will "get used" to paralysis due to the habituation effect, and it will be absorbed into their new baseline (Brickman 924).

Buddhism makes the assumption that pain is always present, and is a fundamental part of the human condition, while pleasures come and go. Those who practice mindfulness keep their minds focused in the present on each moment, forcing them to observe their own pain and suffering, and shifting their adaptation levels downward. With painful existence acting as an anchor, simple and daily pleasures seem that much more wonderful. Furthermore, by focusing entirely on the present moment, those who are mindful are not as worried about the future or past, lessening the contrast effect and helping to prevent worries about the future, i.e. the loss of the pleasure.

Schopenhauer took much inspiration from Buddhism, which promotes asceticism, and he was one of the first Western philosophers to share and affirm Eastern philosophical tenets. Like Buddhism, Arthur Schopenhauer recognized the human condition as being fundamentally painful. He observes in his magnum opus *The World as Will and Representation* (1819) that an immense focus on inward feelings, thoughts, and identity causes us to perceive the violence of every moment of frustration and the suffering in daily life (Schopenhauer 576). He is also concerned by our constant and unending need for pleasure, and he observes that the more we gain, the more we want. He writes that "in proportion as enjoyments and pleasures increase, susceptibility to them decreases; that to which we are accustomed is no longer felt as a pleasure. But in precisely this way the susceptibility to suffering increased; for the cessation of that to which we are accustomed is felt painfully" (575). Motivated by a direct recognition of what I am calling contrast and adaptation, Schopenhauer developed his theories with the

goal of describing and disrupting the pleasure cycle he observed. He notices that a desire for pleasure often rules our decisions, rather than logic, and he calls this preference "The Will to Live." The Will to Live is the animalistic drive to gain all that we can with the intention of further reproduction, resulting in a preference for hedonism over reason (589).

Schopenhauer's proposed means of transcending human strife and the need for ever-increasing pleasure is a form of self-denial called ascetic renunciation, where the practitioner voluntarily becomes chaste and gives up most worldly possessions. Schopenhauer theorizes that by forcing oneself to refuse all pleasures, and inflicting the pain of the loss of pleasure onto oneself, man can move from a subject-focused experience to a universal state of experience. The ascetic voluntarily gives up moral consciousness and pleasure for a life of poverty of both the body and mind in the hopes of achieving a higher level of enlightenment unknown to those who let their desire run free. Schopenhauer claims that asceticism is the denial of the Will to Live because asceticism is the overcoming of an individual's desires to reach a universal understanding of time and space.

I began meditating on recommendation from my therapist, who claimed the practice was life-changing. I'm not sure if it's the breathing or the sitting still or the little cartoon characters in my meditation app or some other magic, but now I can take a deep breath in anywhere and feel calm. At ease. Okay in my own skin. When I breathe, the world melts away. In and out. In and out. I am suddenly alone and okay, without any reminders of somewhere else I need to be. In contrast, when I am anxious I shop online.

Time flies by as I move from discounter to discounter online, seeking out the perfect pair of Manolos and adding them to my basket, imagining myself as sometime who has both the time to attend social functions and the energy to wear heals to said social functions, before eventually deleting the contents of my basket and starting over again. As Rebecca Arnold observes, "Walter Benjamin pointed out, 'in fashion the phantasmagoria of commodities presses closest against the skin'" (Arnold 81). My mother calls me, alarmed about my stress levels, when she sees online clothing purchases on my bank account.

Schopenhauer's observations of adaptation, which he used to develop philosophical theories, later influenced evolutionary psychologists. Philip Brickman and Donald Campbell's 1971 paper "Hedonic relativism and planning the good society" defines the concept of the "hedonic treadmill," demonstrating that humans adapt so quickly to change that any increase in pleasure must be temporary (Brickman). Each additional pleasure becomes the new benchmark, so future pleasures must necessarily be "better," creating a cycle where we need more and more to make us temporarily happy. The minute we buy a new luxury good, say Manolos, I begin adapting to it, and I soon need a new shiny item even better than the last to keep me happy. The hedonic treadmill model provides an explanation for both Schopenhauer's instincts on pleasure, and a basis for why asceticism can be effective. The longer we endure painful conditions, the easier they are to endure, and the less we focus on them. As she becomes accustomed to unwanted sensations, the ascetic no longer tries to get rid of them, lessening the urges of desire. While we adapt to pleasure on the hedonic treadmill, we adapt to suffering in the case of asceticism.

F

Although it can create pleasure, materialism makes us unhappy. Fashion is killing the planet. It helps to create and model insane racial, gender, and sexual normatives that little girls attempt to adhere to. Fashion accounts for rapists claiming women were "asking for it" and for children being ogled and fantasized. But fashion is also a means of constructing powerful women on the catwalk, women who can act as heros to middle school Megans everywhere. Clothing is a means of dealing with the sexualization of women, inscribed on the body by men, and for subverting narratives of passivity, heteronormativity, and femininity and masculinity. Fashion is a means of making the private public, and the public private (Doyle 10). Fashion is a surefire way to get men's and the media's attention. Fashion is a performance. My chance at performance, your chance at performance. It is an opportunity. Run with it. It is a means of adorning oneself in daydreams, making visible that which society refuses to accept. Fashion is an active protest, the body a site of resistance. As Freud points out "Probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital" (154). And to every young woman I say: castrate away, you have my permission.

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