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By Beauty Damned: Millennial Feminism and the Exploitation of Women's Empowerment in Pop Culture and Corporate Advertising

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BY BEAUTY DAMNED: MILLENNIAL FEMINISM
AND THE EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT
IN POP CULTURE AND CORPORATE ADVERTISING

By

Maria L. Carreón

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, the City University of New York

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Maria L. Carreón

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in
satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Masters in Liberal Arts.

Date

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ABSTRACT

By Beauty Damned: Millennial Feminism and the Exploitation of Women's Empowerment in Pop Culture and Corporate Advertising

Advisor: Blanche Wiesen Cook

Feminism has become a trendy cultural identity, leaving it open to exploitation by capitalists. Notions relating to “women’s empowerment” are used by capitalists to sell products to women, and yet many of those capitalists fund political campaigns that directly seek to quash or inhibit the advancement of women’s rights. With a little effort, any consumer can find out who their big purveyors are supporting politically. For example, Procter Gamble, who makes many products bought by women, gives the majority of its political contributions to republicans who oppose women’s reproductive rights. The same is true of McAndrews & Forbes, the parent company of Revlon Cosmetics, which despite its breast cancer awareness initiatives and various women’s philanthropy, was founded by men, continues to be run primarily by men, and gives the majority of their campaign contributions to extreme conservative anti-choice candidates. Their fundraising for breast and ovarian cancer research is nothing more than a marketing tool. Many might argue that if money is making its way to funding research, we should not be too concerned with what is happening on the other side of the curtain. But what if women put their feet down and refused to buy Revlon products until the company and their parent corporation pledged not to give money to anti-woman candidates? What if women refused to buy Tide and Crest until Procter Gamble pledges to support woman friendly politics?

Women uphold a massive economy and unfortunately receive very little in the form of reciprocity from the companies and corporations that they support with their hard-earned dollars. Meanwhile, feminism is touted as a great thing by the mainstream, and yet the real fight for women’s rights is mixed up with a lot of nonsense “empowerment” that has more to do with

selling products than having a real impact on policies that affect women. Simply declaring, “all women are beautiful” and “all women are sexy” does not grant real rights to women.

It is the responsibility of women, as the world’s main consumers, to know where our money is going and what kinds of politics are funded by our purchases. Publications aimed at women, particularly magazines, which serve as the vehicle for advertising, and, by extension, the capitalist culture that exploits women, simultaneously sell feminism and more politically socially content in what might be called an unholy union. Women’s magazines play a very strong role in setting positive standards and examples for women and supporting feminist notions, yet they simultaneously participate in the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and help to create many of the problems that they then purport to challenge/solve by waiving the feminist flag. Women need to really examine what they can do personally to challenge a system that uses them for massive gain and gives them very little in return, starting with their pocketbooks.

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INTRODUCTION

In an age in which the mantra “all women are beautiful” is embraced as the ultimate self-affirmation necessary to claim liberation from harmful beauty standards, in which advertisers have created a brand of “empowerment” which is fully marketable, a time when many young women insist strenuously on social media that wearing makeup is an integral part of their own personal female empowerment and a feminist statement of its own, when posting selfies of one’s fitness routine, diet progress, and long narratives about motivation, commitment and empowerment gained through physical means is a dominant pastime among women, it is an opportune time to question where such ideas come from, to examine the possibility that these ideas tie right back into the system that they purportedly challenge—the patriarchal system projected through various types of media which mandates that women must be “beautiful and sexy” in the first place. Is it okay for women to be unattractive, just as it is okay for men? Is it okay for women to grow old, as it is for men? Would we not find it patently ridiculous if ads for men’s products started declaring that “all men are sexy” and “all men are beautiful”?

The purpose of this paper is not to put down or criticize women who are inspired by beauty and fitness routines, but, in part, to argue against the idea that a woman’s worth exists entirely in her physical being and her appeal to others.

In examining how incredibly harmful expectations of youth and beauty can be to women, it is important to note that men are never told that in order to get through the day they need to tell themselves that they are “all beautiful” or “all sexy.” Men are allowed to just *be*. Women are not permitted to just *be*. Instead, we are constantly urged to “be beautiful,” “be skinny,” “be sexy,” “be young,” “be smart,” “be real...” And yet, real is something we are never allowed to be, no matter what the advertisers or magazines say. Social media is filled with the status feeds of

women and girls who express pervasive feelings of inadequacy and the struggle to accept themselves in the face of unattainable beauty standards.

The reason these absurd affirmations exist for women is because we have so frequently been given the impression by myriad forms of media and advertising that if we are not beautiful and young and thin, we are not worth anything. What if the same entities that tell us “all bodies are beautiful” committed to elevating women economically and politically? What if all of the companies that use women’s empowerment to sell their products actually stood up for women’s empowerment within their own corporate structures and political activities? What if women did not need to tell ourselves and each other that we are beautiful, because we are busy accomplishing real progress for women and have divested from the notion that physical beauty is of such a disproportionately high value for women?

The discrepancies between femininity and feminism have long formed a tangled web for women and feminists, and there has been little agreement among us about what really empowers and what is actually counterproductive to empowerment. Some women say the freedom to wear makeup or not wear makeup, and not to be pigeon-holed as “anti-feminist” for choosing the former option, is an important topic of feminist thought. Some say that any female empowerment is positive, even if it is a marketing scheme concocted by the corporation that is trying to sell you lipstick or a gym membership or meaningless entertainment.¹ Some think the very notion that makeup empowers women is one created by the very industry which seeks to sell those products, an industry which depends on women buying into the idea that makeup gives us power, an industry, not inconsequentially, designed and dominated by wealthy and powerful men. One might go a step further to say that women’s mainstream media as a whole, which claims to have

¹ Vaglanos, Alanna. “How Feminism Became Trendy and Why We Should Care.” *Huffington Post*. May 3, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/how-feminism-became-trendy-and-why-we-should-care_us_5727b5fde4b0b49df6ac0ce4

the best interests of women at heart in all matters and often hails the empowerment of women as a cherished value, has also served as a vehicle for the intermingling of women's supposed empowerment with the marketability and desirability of products that will make a woman feel "her best."

What is the harm of buying into the idea that any kind of empowerment, even that which is attached to product advertising, is a positive? If makeup improves the self-esteem of the wearer, does it matter where that product comes from and who is ultimately making money off of the consumer, and what path that money travels, to where and to whom, once it leaves the hands of the consumer? Should we accept every scrap of so-called "empowerment" that is tossed our way without thinking critically about what feminism is today, what purpose it serves and who is setting the terms of the conversation about women's objectives? Is it likely that if women are so occupied with the debate over what constitutes feminism or anti-feminism, arguing amongst ourselves and blaming one another for the failures of feminism and other women's objectives, obsessing about our bodies and how best to communicate one's empowerment on social media, women are in the meantime failing to engage in more serious activism which would relegate those topics to a lower shelf? The idea that women's empowerment is acquired by fulfilling beauty standards (even if they are purportedly our own) muddies the conversation between women about what is really important in our lives.

This naturally leads to an exploration of women's media and politics, specifically, how women's activism fits into the picture right now and what it could look like if women refocused on a truly political brand of feminism and stopped buying in to faux empowerment. Capitalists have been taking women for a ride for a long time—and the millennial feminist seems fairly sold on the whole message of so-called empowerment that has been co-opted by advertisers and

women's media. Many girls and women are all too ready to congratulate any company for "empowering women," when the reality is that an array of companies and advertisers use a message of female empowerment to sell products or services which actually demonstrably fail to empower women, particularly if one starts to delve into the higher levels of influence at work.

The continued focus on a woman's appearance as the source of her worth, power, and identity enables advertisers who market cosmetics and other vanity products to continue selling lipstick as a surrogate for women's real empowerment. The myopic focus on making feminism all about dealing with and conquering physical insecurities serves as a distraction from the real fight for education, justice, reproductive healthcare and wage parity, among other matters which pose the greatest tangible consequences for real women and girls. Companies that sell beauty products perpetuate harmful beauty standards at the same time that they use faux empowerment to sell those products, keeping women and girls in an endless loop of self-scrutiny and looking to the same sources that created the basis for that scrutiny to be the ones to cure us of the damage. We must avert our collective gaze. We must not be made impotent as stone by the companies and advertisers that keep us in an endless loop of consumption and self-defeat. Mobilization is the only means by which women are going to have success in really influencing the configuration of our world and the policies and politics that impact the lives of girls and women.

What can or should we do to address this problem of the branding of feminism as being entirely to do with women feeling good about ourselves and cultivating positive body image and nothing to do with the real political and social problems of women? Allowing advertisers and capitalists to control the terms and definitions of women's empowerment has deprived us of the *real* empowerment that we might otherwise have as a political movement. We must pay mind to the purposes of feminism. We must push for better early education in the history of women's

achievements and struggles so that young women know what they are worth as far as their minds are concerned, not just as far as their faces and bodies are concerned. And we must embrace the notion of feminism as an activist stance and a political position—one which inherently demands reproductive freedom, wage parity, and social justice for all people, while rejecting capitalist notions of our individual worth.

Feminism has transformed from a social and political movement of the 19th and 20th Centuries into a trendy cultural identity in the 21st Century, leaving it open to exploitation by capitalists. As I will discuss further, many of those capitalists fund political campaigns that directly seek to cripple the advancement of women’s rights. With a little effort, any consumer can find information about who and what most of their big purveyors are supporting politically. For example, Procter & Gamble (“P&G”), who makes many products which are purchased regularly by women, including Tampax tampons, Tide laundry detergent, and Crest toothpaste, gives the majority of its political contributions to republicans who oppose women’s reproductive rights.²

P&G exhibits no shame about using women’s supposed empowerment to sell its products. A visit to its website reveals a feel-good milieu of claims about P&G’s initiatives from “environmental sustainability” and “social responsibility” to “being an everyday force for good in the world.” These claims are often accompanied by photographs of girls and women who look like P&G is making their lives better.³ However, P&G does not boast any initiatives specifically for girls or women, despite women being its primary targeted consumer.

A recent social media campaign for Tide washing detergent used a blatantly exploitive image of African American female empowerment in order to reach this coveted demographic.

² “Procter & Gamble Contributions to Federal Candidates, 2016.” *Center for Responsive Politics*, Accessed Dec. 29, 2016. <https://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/pacgot.php?cmte=C00257329&cycle=2016>

³ *US.PG.Com*, <http://us.pg.com/>, Accessed January 16, 2017.

The ad featured the silhouette of a Black woman wearing an afro in a swirl of primary colors, her large hoop earring composed of the Tide brand emblem. Simply using the image of a particular demographic and imposing a company logo onto that image does not empower that demographic, particularly if the entity using the image does nothing substantive for that targeted group in a political and economic sense. That is, by definition, exploitation. And exploitation is what advertisers do best.

Other than depicting women of color in their ads in order to appeal to women of color as a demographic, what does P&G do for women? Does P&G give money to women's causes? Does P&G pay its female employees and executives an equal wage to those earned by men in equivalent positions? Does P&G support women's health and reproductive resources? P&G boasts its efforts to increase employment and opportunities for women, yet it is not specific about wage parity, and its political contributions would indicate a lack of commitment to real change and support for women at the policy level.

As for the publications and media that host such advertising, there does not seem to be any real scrutiny of the companies that are permitted to use that media as a platform for their advertisements. Furthermore, the fact that men sit at the upper levels of all products, advertising and content that are marketed to women is a fact that should give any self-professed feminist pause when consuming anything.

The exploitation of women's empowerment is also a strategy used by McAndrews & Forbes, the parent company of Revlon Cosmetics, which, despite its breast cancer awareness initiatives and various women's philanthropy, was founded by men, continues to be run primarily by men,⁴ and gives the majority of its political campaign contributions to extreme

⁴ "McAndrews & Forbes." *Wikipedia*, Dec. 29, 2016. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McAndrews_%26_Forbes

conservative anti-woman candidates, as I will detail further.⁵ Revlon's website features the quote from its founder, Charles Revson: "In the factory, we make cosmetics. In the drug store, we sell hope."⁶ I would argue that in the factory, Revlon makes poisons. In the drug store, Revlon sells faux-empowerment and takes advantage of women's insecurities in order to sell those poisons.

Revlon's fundraising for breast and ovarian cancer research is nothing more than a marketing tool, and a slightly hypocritical one considering that Revlon manufactures many products which are harmful to women, often containing ingredients that actually cause cancer.⁷ A review of the ingredients in almost any Revlon products reveals a concoction of harmful poisons and chemicals. Despite promises from Revlon that it would "overhaul" its ingredients to make safer cosmetics, Revlon continues to manufacture harmful products.⁸ Many might argue that if funds are making their way to research and treatment, we should not be too concerned with what is happening on the other side of the curtain. But nothing is paramount to what is happening on the political end of the capitalist spectrum when it is human beings that are the engine serving their own exploitation and disenfranchisement. What if women refused to buy Revlon products until the company and their parent corporation pledged to stop giving political donations to anti-woman candidates and peddling products that cause cancer?

Women support and represent a massive economy and unfortunately receive very little in the form of reciprocity from the companies and corporations that we support with our hard-earned dollars. Feminism is touted as a great thing by the liberal mainstream, and yet the real

⁵ "McAndrews & Forbes Contributions to Federal Candidates, 2016." *Center for Responsive Politics*. Accessed Dec. 29, 2016. <https://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/pacgot.php?cycle=2016&cmte=C00432856>

⁶ "Legacy." *www.Revlon.com*. Accessed January 16, 2017. <http://www.revlon.com/behind%20the%20color/legacy>

⁷ "Revlon Under Fire for Cancer-Causing Chemicals in Makeup." *www.breastcancerfund.org*. Accessed January 16, 2017. <http://www.breastcancerfund.org/media/press-releases/revlon-cancer-causing-chemicals.html>

⁸ "Revlon Eliminating Toxic Chemicals From Cosmetics." *Campaign for Safe Cosmetics*. Accessed January 16, 2017. <http://www.safecosmetics.org/about-us/media/press-releases/revlon-eliminating-toxic-chemicals-from-cosmetics/>

fight for women's rights is mixed up with a lot of nonsense "empowerment" that has more to do with selling products than having a real impact on policies that affect women. Simply saying, "all women are beautiful" and "all women are sexy," as if those declarations somehow grant women real rights, has proven ineffective in furthering political causes that concern women. Saying, "all women are valuable as human beings and we have economic power that should enable us to challenge a system which still does not treat us as equal to men," might be more meaningful.

Women buy everything. That's a fact we are all familiar with. Women buy everything from lettuce and tomatoes to shampoo and toilet paper to pet products and makeup to food and home improvement products to automobiles and...well, everything. And we don't buy things just for ourselves. We buy them for our families and friends and co-workers. During the holidays it is not uncommon to see women suffering under the weight of purchases for everyone we know in life. Women are the number one consumers in the world, and that crosses all class and color lines. On her website, www.she-conomy.com, or "A Guy's Guide to Marketing to Women," Stephanie Holland culls a comprehensive trove of information and statistics regarding women's buying habits. Holland reports that 85% of all brand purchases are made by women, while only 3% of advertising executives are women.⁹

Without women fueling the capitalist economy, that economy is non-existent. So it doesn't really make sense that women are a disenfranchised class, that women should be fighting for equal pay and equal treatment, that women should still be so underrepresented in politics and in the higher echelons of every major institution in the world, that women would be denied the recognition and accolades of the highest academic order. When we are the engine that makes the

⁹ Holland, Stephanie. "Marketing to Women Quick Facts." *www.she-conomy.com*. Accessed January 16, 2017. <http://she-conomy.com/report/marketing-to-women-quick-facts>

global economy continue chugging along, we should have an equal stake, an equal say, and most unequivocally, equal pay.

My primary purpose and conclusion here is to argue that it is the responsibility of women, as the world's primary consumers, to know where our money is going and what kind of politics are funded by our purchases, to shake the fog of faux women's empowerment begotten through advertising and "self-care" in favor of real empowerment in the form of political action, to refuse to be taken advantage of while receiving nothing of substance in return. This is, in a way, a manifesto more than it is a research paper. In fact, it is not a research paper at all. It is a call to action.

Women's magazines, which serve as a major vehicle for advertising, are an important point of focus. Women's publications have long played an important role in setting positive standards and examples for women and, historically, supporting feminist objectives,¹⁰ however, women's media has simultaneously participated in the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and helped to create many of the problems that they then purport to challenge and/or solve by waiving the feminist flag. My hope is that women will make it more of a priority to examine what we can do to challenge a system that uses us to make untold profits and gives us very little in return, that women will do more to demand that the products we purchase are harm-free, and that the media which we rely on for fashion, news, entertainment, and intellectual substance, take more of a stand against product makers and practices that operate contrary to women's best interests.

¹⁰ "...Contemporary to the Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine was the Englishwoman's Journal, which explicitly campaigned for women to have a legal, economic and social identity outside the home." Hughes, Kathryn. "Zeal and Softness." *The Guardian*. Dec. 19, 2008. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/dec/20/women-pressandpublishing>

I. Problems and Purposes of Modern Feminism

It is often repeated that women have come a long way and that, especially in America, women should feel very grateful for how much *better* things have gotten for us over the past hundred years, and how much better things are for women in America than they are in the rest of the world. “You can’t have everything,” they say, and if things don’t improve for women, “That’s just the way things are, they’re not going to change, so what are you going to do? Be glad you don’t live in Saudi Arabia!” That women are treated as second class citizens in the United States is not an acceptable fact to which we should resign ourselves. And that we are fortunate not to live in a place that treats women even worse, should not be a comfort to anyone, but rather a catalyst for more action on behalf of all women everywhere.

I take for granted that my reader understands approximately how women have been regarded in general, in most known parts of the world, throughout the ages, and has a basic understanding of what feminism aims to achieve. Whether it be the biblical tale of Adam and Eve, which describes women as an evolution from one man’s rib, the assertions by almost every popular religion that woman has a certain “place” which is separate from and unequal to the place of man, or in the treatment of women throughout the world as currency in arrangements from sex and marriage to war and real estate, women have borne the burden of being deemed the lesser sex. Patriarchy is an ancient and persistent social construct, something that was established forcefully, the purposeful stamping out of woman’s influence by a male power structure for its own benefit. It has been extremely successful and continues to hold strong in the face of our inadequate attempts to level the playing fields.

The status of women has of course changed over time and women are no longer to be kept in the home attending exclusively to child-rearing and household maintenance, but it is

certainly no thanks to the men who continue to claim to prefer traditional roles. Women dominate the workforce and yet we still struggle to hold equal standing in government, the workplace, and, incidentally, the home. In a world that has become increasingly secular and astute to principles of psychology and social construction, feminist ideals have maintained, and gained, substantial popularity. Women are an indisputably massive part of the American workforce and the consumers of all things big and small. And yet we are still not where we should be in terms of our liberties.

A younger generation than ever before is embracing feminism. There is still a lot to fight about—women’s bodies and reproductive lives are literally under siege and at the center of some of America’s biggest political debates. The internet is a powerful medium for change and has encouraged and allowed more people than ever before to take up the call to feminism. That said, the “trendiness” of mainstream feminism as a commodity undermines its political power and its ideal message of inclusivity, equality and fair treatment for all.

In 2016, Feminism as a political and cultural phenomenon reached a feverish pressure and ended up deflated and yet, perhaps with the potential of becoming more galvanized than before by the understanding that the fight is not one that can be won by saying “all women are beautiful.” The running of Hillary Clinton for the presidency brought women’s actual political empowerment into focus, and since her loss in the Electoral College, there has come about a real sense that feminism “lost.” Throughout the entirety of 2016 women such as myself fought and truly believed that we would triumph in ushering in the first woman to the presidency of the United States. On the first day of 2017, The New York Times published an op-ed entitled, “Feminism Lost. Now What?”¹¹ I suspect that there is a bit of hyperbole in that headline for the

¹¹ Chira, Susan. “Feminism Lost. Now What?” *The New York Times*. Dec. 30, 2016.

sake of website clicks, but it is not an overstatement of how many self-identifying feminists have felt since Donald Trump won the Electoral College vote despite his well-documented history of sexual harassment and generally boorish behavior, his lack of truthfulness with his audience throughout the race, and his obvious unfitness to lead the United States.

This view of Trump as obviously and fundamentally unfit continues to be one shared widely by a healthy majority of academic and journalistic sources, and is evidenced and further justified by his extremely infantile behavior on social media.¹² Trump's *acquisition* of the Presidency was a defeat for women who see him as emblematic of the kind of sexism and disparagement and disenfranchisement that many women endure in the United States, as a rule. Trump's infamous Howard Stern interviews and his much publicized comments about the freedom with which he felt he could kiss women without their consent, and grab their "pussies," as a fringe benefit of his fame and stature, among many other revelations, served as more than enough evidence that he has no respect for the conventions of decency and respect towards people in general, and especially women. In fact, that he values women as no more than sexual objects, trophies and sycophants.

Progressive feminists did, in fact, fail to stop this person from taking the controls. However, we were not solely responsible for stopping him. It is frequently pointed out that many women voted for Trump, which is unfortunately true. But I would ask why that is any more shocking than the fact that so many people, in general, voted for Trump. We were up against the as yet indomitable force of patriarchal, sexist attitudes which continue to pervade many aspects of the lives of most women, and the willingness of women as well as men to accept the

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/30/opinion/sunday/feminism-lost-now-what.html>

¹² Hess, Amanda. "Trump, Twitter, and the Art of his Deal." *The New York Times*. Jan. 15, 2017. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/15/arts/trump-twitter-and-the-art-of-his-deal.html>

mistreatment of women as collateral—a female sacrifice, if you will—to other, more compelling ideologies.

One of the most oft-repeated statements of the present day when the topic is sexism is that women participate in sexist attitudes and the oppression of women just as much as men do and sometimes even more so and in worse ways. In his article “Women’s Magazines Objectify Women Just as Much as Men’s Do,”¹³ Noah Berlatsky says that “men's magazines are mostly based around heavily eroticized images of women. And women's magazines are also based around heavily eroticized images of women.” He argues that in the latter it is okay because women share in the objectification of *one another* while men’s magazines exert a *gaze upon* women that is unreciprocated and therefore less acceptable.

While Berlatsky is clearly doing his best to concoct a premise in which he can swoop in to defend women’s magazines from being conflated as equally harmful to women as men’s magazines, he (perhaps unsurprisingly) misses the point of women’s magazines entirely. They do not serve to objectify women as sexual objects in the same way that men’s magazines do, but instead they *use* women as a commodity, as a tool to sell products and more magazines. The dynamic at work is not “women objectifying women the same way that men objectify women.” It is, in fact, “male advertisers exploit women consumers by presenting idealized versions of beauty and femininity and manipulating women into believing that they should spend whatever is necessary to emulate such idealized notions.” Women have historically been exploited as a form of currency, and women’s magazines are simply one of the best examples of the successful commodification of women by male power structures. The phenomenon of women gazing upon other women in fashion magazines is very different from men gazing at naked women in

¹³ Berlatsky, Noah. “Women’s Magazines Objectify Women Just as Much as Men’s Do.” *The Atlantic*. Mar. 25, 2013. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/03/womens-magazines-objectify-women-just-as-much-as-mens-magazines-do/274330/>

pornography or hypersexualized images in Maxim or GQ or Esquire presented for the exclusive delectation of men and their sexual appetites. Women's magazines seek to exploit the spending power of women. By depicting perfect, idealized images of women and implying that emulating that ideal can give us power and, ultimately, happiness, women's magazines tap into a vulnerability that is uniquely problematic for women. Berlatsky does not fully grasp the harm, only what he perceives as the operating phenomena, about which he is actually mistaken. Women are not the controlling entities of women's product advertising.

The assertion that women hurt other women as much or more than men do is frequently stated in order to subvert blame from men who understandably do not wish to shoulder the responsibility of their entire gender for the victimization of women throughout the ages. That said, it is not untrue that women have failed in forming an allied front and it is indeed complicated and insufficient to say that men are the perpetrators of sexism and patriarchal assumptions and women are the victims. It is often said, and it is in this author's opinion, undeniably true, that sexism is harmful to everyone, to the whole society that hosts it, and it lives, just like racism, in the very minute fibers of a vast array of societies and cultures to such an extent that casting blame on one faction for its existence would be pointless and inaccurate. The word "patriarchy" is sufficient to describe the power source of sexism which afflicts and affects both men and women. Women who "play the game" or "sell out other women" are no less victims of patriarchy than those who defy the conventions of sex and gender in protest and practice. Men who believe that their masculinity can shield them from pain, that their whiteness can be their safeguard against poor treatment within the judicial system, that their religion and status make them superior, that their heterosexuality is never questionable regardless of

proclivities—these are the men who invest in reinforcing a status quo that is inherently hostile to women and other minorities.

Sometimes a man will inquire (far less articulately than what is set forth here): “Why feminism? Why does it seem so duplicitous and self-negating? Why does feminism require a turning of the tables? Do women (does *society*) not value chivalry any longer? Do women not like being considered the fairer sex and being afforded special treatment, and being regarded as weaker yet morally superior beings in need of protection but unfortunately less entitled to equal rights under the laws of citizenship?” This line of inquiry regarding the motives of feminism comes with the implication that we couldn’t possibly want to live without all of the “perks” of traditional womanhood, that is, having men open doors for us and wait for us to enter and exit the elevator ahead of them. The idea that we would do away with these amazing perks in order to have instead equal pay, civil rights and the ultimate right to determine what happens to our bodies, seems ludicrous to many people who proudly call themselves, “old fashioned.”¹⁴

Understanding that “all men” are not to blame for the existence and negative effects of patriarchy does not alter the fact that all men are beneficiaries as well as victims (at drastically varying levels and in myriad forms) of patriarchal assumptions which weave throughout many aspects of society and culture and throughout the entire world. This is confirmed by a multitude of studies and statistics regarding conscious and unconscious gender bias, including the examination of the most glaring problems that confront women: the disparity in treatment in the professions, the gender pay gap, the treatment of female victims of rape and abuse, and the control over women’s reproductive rights by the many, many republican politicians who continue to see birth control, abortion, and fetal rights as their domain to legislate. In the age of

¹⁴ Jordan, Chris. “Has Feminism Killed Chivalry and Good Old Fashioned Manners?” www.alphamom.com. Accessed January 16, 2017. <http://alphamom.com/parenting/has-feminism-killed-chivalry-and-good-old-fashioned-manners/>

the web, it has never been easier to become educated about how gender bias is substantively affecting people and institutions all over the world.

Feminists are often accused of hyper-sensitivity. Such hyper-sensitivity does exist. It is partly a result of a reality that has forced the issue, partly a result of a simple lack of nuance or education on topics concerning women. It goes without saying that there are a range of feminist activist voices out there. Are all of these voices valid? Yes. Are they all helpful or intelligent? No, probably not. But a conversation is happening. It may not cover many of the important aspects of feminism, but the simple fact that feminism is a popular topic of discussion is, in itself, somewhat encouraging for feminism overall.

Most women have become well accustomed to hearing men at some point or another say, “Well that’s just the way the world is. It’s a man’s world and it’s not going to change.” Sometimes those men think they are your friends. They think they are helping to clarify the issues for you, when in reality they are reinforcing patriarchy. Many men are still mystified by feminism and do not fully understand its necessity. Recently, a male colleague said, “Women are flipping the script on men. What is a man supposed to think when a woman flips the script?” He was upset at what he described as scornful reactions from women at his performance of traditionally chivalrous acts like holding a door while ushering a woman through with the line, “Ladies first.” Well, now here is a complicated question, mostly because we don’t know what the script is or who wrote it or how women are flipping it. Is it that suddenly women are turning to men and saying, “No, please, after you, men first.” Are women suddenly, out of the blue, demanding to pay for things, open car doors, cover a man’s shoulders with a jacket when it gets a little cold? Is this the worst that could happen to the human race? Well, some would say yes.

What becomes abundantly clear during these conversations is that people would prefer not to question already established notions of gender.

Challenging these notions and the import of their sustenance is one of the most herculean tasks of the 21st century. But it is being done. Millions of teenage girls are proclaiming themselves “feminists.” Boys are exposed to the ideas that motivate feminism at a younger age than ever. Gay marriage is legal. Transgender discrimination is widely decried, even while it continues to be contested. When the governor of North Carolina introduced and passed the HB-2 law which requires transgender people to use bathrooms corresponding with the sexual organs of their birth, numerous companies and franchises and artists refused to do business in North Carolina until the law is vacated. It remains in effect today, as republican lawmakers have failed to govern in any reasonable fashion. But the response to it, and the outrage of corporate entities which has brought about a punishing economic crisis for the state of North Carolina, has been unprecedented.¹⁵

Women’s health clinics are being shuttered every day without so much as a word from the multitude of corporate entities that make their money off of the purchasing power of women. Women’s reproductive rights are melting away at roughly the same rate as the polar ice caps and under continued attack in many states, including Indiana, the home state of our new Vice President, Mike Pence, which, with his leading support, has introduced a measure to ban abortion in the state entirely.¹⁶ And despite the amount of money women spend, the power and political capital that our economic strength should confer upon us as a demographic remains mostly untapped. Yes, women have failed to come together, much to the chagrin of feminist activists,

¹⁵ Phillips, Amber. “What The Heck Just Happened with North Carolina’s ‘Bathroom Bill’?” *The Washington Post*. Dec. 22, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/12/22/what-the-heck-just-happened-with-north-carolinas-bathroom-bill/?utm_term=.4c345188d493

¹⁶ “Total Abortion Ban Proposed in Indiana.” *IndyStar*. Nov. 16, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.indystar.com/story/news/politics/2016/11/16/total-abortion-ban-proposed-indiana/93954670/>

but no more than any other minority demographic has failed to come together. And women have not failed each other anymore than the entire world has failed us for centuries.

While an argument can be made that the popularity of feminism and “women’s empowerment” in capitalist contexts has had some positive reverberations,¹⁷ I would argue that it is not the preferable manner in which to go about promoting real progress for women, as it is too prominently negated by the widespread cultural objectification of women. Women would benefit from a culture in which we are not the target of every campaign to sell pantyhose or deodorant or multivitamins and our worth is not exploited while our needs continue to go ignored by those who profit. The companies that market products to women have little to no incentive to really take a stand on behalf of women. There is almost no pressure at all. In a capitalist society, companies generally are not required to do the ethical thing if it means risking their bottom line, unless actual laws are being broken or people take a big stand as they did with marriage equality.

Any ethical obligation to the consumer is secondary. Corporate entities do not, as a rule, ethically regulate themselves or take it upon themselves to make sure the same politicians that help their bottom line are not also working to pass laws which hurt the consumer. But the exploitation of the consumer, such as that used by the typical “women’s empowerment” advertising strategy, constitutes a profound violation of consumer trust, when those same companies do not stand up for income parity or women’s reproductive rights the same way they might stand up for LGBTQ rights. There is tremendous political and economic support for same-sex marriage and gender equality. The same does not hold true for parity in women’s pay, employment opportunities, and reproductive rights.

¹⁷ See Vaglanos.

Millennial feminism has been heavily characterized by its concern with beauty standards and the constant scrutiny of women's bodies in pop culture which has dehumanized all women. This is a worthy concern. The self-esteem of girls and women plays a central role in whether or not we will succeed in a world which has been built to discriminate against us. But in the process of trying to dismantle harmful standards and challenge the very resilient egocentric patriarchal power structure, we have succumbed to something else; that is, a shiny brand of feminism that is defined by consumerism and focuses so obsessively on beauty standards and the endless assertion that "all women are beautiful," that I can't remember the last time Dove really came out and defended a woman's right to choose her own reproductive destiny or that Revlon ever insisted on pay equality.

In her New York Times article, "How Empowerment Became Something for Women to Buy," Jia Tolentino synthesizes the conflict:

A company's sudden emphasis on empowerment is often a sign of something to atone for. Searching online for the word, I kept being served two advertisements by Google. The first was for Brawny paper towels, tagged #StrengthHasNoGender; the other was for Goldman Sachs ("See how Goldman is committed to helping women succeed"). Brawny is a holding of the Koch Brothers, who have spent millions of dollars funding anti-abortion initiatives; Goldman Sachs is, well, Goldman Sachs.¹⁸

Revlon champions women's breast and ovarian cancer research, which, while appearing quite noble, serves as a splendid tool for selling products. Meanwhile, Revlon's parent company continues to be controlled entirely by men who demonstrably support anti-woman political candidates.¹⁹ A company which makes massive profits off of women as consumers clearly

¹⁸ Tolentino, Jia. "How Empowerment Became Something For Women to Buy." *The New York Times*. Apr. 12, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/17/magazine/how-empowerment-became-something-for-women-to-buy.html?_r=0

¹⁹ See Center for Responsive Politics, *McAndrews & Forbes*.

neglects the serious practical, political and judicial matters which are emblematic of women's disempowerment.

Let it not be said that I disapprove of strenuous fundraising for cancer research; just the opposite. But as importantly, all women should have access to cancer screenings, testing for sexually transmitted diseases, information about abortions and prenatal care, as well as being covered for all other eventualities related to fundamental womanhood such as menstruation and childbirth. Funding Planned Parenthood and other women's health organizations, particularly by way of the power of political constituency, rather than funneling money primarily to the upper echelons of "research" is the best way to make sure that all women have the care they need, require and deserve. Instead, while Revlon raises money with its annual "Run/Walk for Women," and makes big money off of touting this initiative, its parent company neglects many important ways that they could really be helping women at the political level.

Dove champions self-esteem initiatives seeking to increase positive body image and self-esteem for young people. Once again, without diminishing the importance of positive self-esteem and the magnitude of the potential benefit to be gained from such programs, Dove has a long way to go before they can really claim to be standing up for all women. There is, in fact, more to being a person than feeling good about your body, such as having total control over decisions relating to that body. The female body is at the center of most legislative debates involving women's rights. With the exception of matters of pay inequality, women's bodies are at the top of discussion: Do we have the ultimate right to make our own decisions involving our bodies, even where a fetus is concerned? Are our insurance companies obliged to provide us with preventative reproductive care? In making rape allegations, should women be guaranteed a thorough investigation and full justice under the law, including the expedient testing of rape kits?

Women’s bodies define us at almost every level. Feminism might have a better chance of making real progress if we moved to define ourselves as more than bodies. Like with a Dove ad that says, “It’s okay if you’re not beautiful, or sexy, because you’re a human being, and your beauty and sexuality do not define you. Now run for office!”

Jia Tolentino addresses the issue of faux empowerment:

Aerie, the lingerie brand of American Eagle, increased its sales by 26 percent in the last quarter of 2015 primarily on the strength of its “#AerieReal” campaign, which eschews Photoshop and employs models of a slightly larger size — and is described as “empowering” as if by legal mandate. Dove, the Patient Zero of empowerment marketing, has lifted its sales to the tune of \$1.5 billion with its “#RealBeauty” campaign, cooked up by executives who noticed that few women like to call themselves beautiful and saw in that tragic modesty a great opportunity to raise the profile of the Dove brand.²⁰

Women are the target of a multi-billion dollar advertising industry and a multi-billion dollar product industry that ranges from everything you can think of to everything else that you can think of. As advertisers have spied the endless opportunities presented by the popularity of feminism, or pseudo feminism, and the susceptibility of so many to ideas of self-empowerment and the manipulation of big advertisers, feminism in the United States, in its current incarnation, has become subsumed in the commodification of itself.

We look to publications to authenticate our perspective, to create and confirm the legitimacy of our thought processes. Women have long looked to women’s magazines to lead the way, to tell us what to do, how to be complete. The results have been mixed. While women’s magazines have been extremely influential in promoting activism for women’s causes, they have also served as the vehicle by which women are served a heavy dose of idealized femininity and an endless appeal to our senses for the purpose of selling products.

²⁰ Tolentino.

If every substantive story in a women's publication is flanked by ads, how do we separate the methods of capitalism and the pitfalls of consumerism from the genuine experiences and concerns and interests of women? Have these things become too intertwined—our wants and desires and needs all connected to products designed to enhance everything in our lives, from the surface of our faces to the bottom of our ever-loving souls?

Women's rights have perhaps never faced such a major setback as the one we potentially face today with Donald Trump and Mike Pence entering the highest offices and installing anti-woman, anti-choice cabinet members as a rule rather than the exception. Never has it been more relevant who our dollars are supporting in terms of political candidates. Never has it been more crucial to scrutinize the corporations and businesses that exploit our needs, desires, insecurities, and consumer habits.

The president-elect's daughter, Ivanka Trump, whose business is in designing and manufacturing products for women, is currently a persona non grata of women's groups. Given her power and position as the executive of a large company and a major beneficiary of women's consumer habits and loyalties (a position she holds while simultaneously supporting in numerous substantive ways the campaign and presidency of her father), women's rights activists are feeling understandably adversarial towards Ivanka and her brand. There has been a visible effort on the part of women activists, many of whom are simply individuals and not necessarily part of any women's group, media outlet, or organization, to post on social media their letters of protest to the retailers that sell Ivanka Trump products (products that are sold under her name and manufactured in countries that her father condemns on twitter as damaging to American trade).²¹

²¹ Taylor, Kate. "An Anti-Trump Movement is Calling for the Boycott of 30 Retailers Who Sell Ivanka's Apparel." *Business Insider*. Dec. 15, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.businessinsider.com/ivanka-trump-related-businesses-boycotted-2016-12/#6pm-1>

The boycott against Ivanka Trump's brand has reached out to retailers like Nordstrom and Amazon, asking them not to sell a brand that supports hate speech and sexual assault by way of the presidency of the United States. One would have to defy the bounds of reason to think that large retailers will, as a rule, take to scrutinizing the practices or political leanings of the makers of every single product that they sell, in the attempt to satisfy the political leanings of every customer, but it is important for retailers to acknowledge the presence of dissent in its customer base, even if those retailers choose to continue current practices of remaining "neutral" on matters of public policy. The onus is upon the consumer to make the effort to become informed about the origins of the products we buy, and the private and political entities that our dollars support.

Women have a great deal of power to change the political and cultural landscape by speaking out. Cultivating an awareness of this power and an inclination for improving conditions for women is key to mobilizing a real shift with regard to what we buy and how we buy and how we respond to concerns about who and what benefits from our purchases. It is up to us to choose not to buy products from companies that do not have our best interests at heart. But we must first care about and have faith in our role as leaders.

That the topic of this paper is primarily the way that women's buying habits are cultivated and exploited by capitalists using feminism and women's empowerment as a lure should not give anyone the impression that I fail to recognize the many positive and productive aspects of modern feminism, the many organizations and individuals who are extremely devoted to helping to elevate women all over the world. The notion that there is a need for a feminist movement has never been more broadly embraced by women of all ages than it is in the current day, and media for women, about women, and claiming to speak truth to power on behalf of

women, has never been more prevalent or important. However, women are still being subjected to a host of injustices in the socioeconomic spectrum which are not only failing to be resolved, but in some cases are actually getting worse. Now, with the Trump's ascent to power, threats to women's rights are looming larger than at any point in recent history (which is actually saying quite a bit considering that republicans have always been quite rabid in their efforts to eliminate services and rights for women).

In the United States, where one would hope that we would be leading the world in championing progress for women, legislation aimed at minimizing a woman's right to choose an abortion or to obtain crucial reproductive health services has ramped up considerably over the past 10 years.²² There is still very little institutional support from corporations for women's fight for reproductive rights, rape victims are still regularly treated as suspects by the judicial system, there is still no consensus on equal pay, and there is still no Equal Rights Act.

While women are the biggest consumers in the world, the companies that make their lion's share of profits off of the buying habits of women are still unwilling to take a stand for our rights. I can only conclude that this is because they don't have to; they have not been pressured enough. Women in general, but particularly low income and women of color, continue to be the last to garner true and meaningful loyalty from the economy that they eagerly prop up, and the last to really stand up and object to being exploited. Companies advertise a plethora of products to women and we buy them all, believing all of the lines that we are fed about the necessity of those products in our lives despite evidence that the real purpose of most products that are marketed exclusively to women is to enslave us to harmful myths about a woman's worth so that we will buy more products.

²² "H.R.3134 - Defund Planned Parenthood Act of 2015." *Congress.Gov*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/3134/all-info>

Women may not be pining for suffrage, but we are still a long way from having real political power, from declaring ourselves free and equal, and, it seems, from recent losses in the battle for reproductive rights, that we are only getting further away from securing the autonomy of our bodies. Women are still deeply vulnerable to a wide range of abuses, still enduring attacks upon our freedoms, still being deprived of fair wages and proper treatment by the corporations we work for and buy from, and still suffering in untold ways within and far beyond American borders as a result of gender inequality.²³ But that is not to say that feminism has achieved nothing. If anything, its successes are evidenced by widespread conversations about topics that concern women and the attempts at outing the establishment that both perpetrates and profits from making sure that women continue to be second class citizens.

An incredible number of websites, social media feeds and online publications host regular discussions of feminist issues. Women and girls do, in fact, have sources of empowerment at their fingertips that do not tie in to advertising or products, such as “School of Doodle,” a forum established in 2014 for teenage girls to explore their personal creativity and feminist ideas.²⁴ These conversations and challenges to patriarchal control are happening all over the world and among many different kinds of women and people. Still our heads barely bob above the surface of our various predicaments as we struggle to recognize and confront the sources of our oppression.

One highly insidious threat to women—and, really, to all people—is an idea which remains pervasive to this day in the still common practices of sexism and racism; the idea unquestioned that one sex, one race is biologically superior to all others. Women and people of color fight this seemingly unkillable idea every single day in America like it is our own personal

²³ “The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap (Fall 2016).” *American Association of University Women*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>

²⁴ *School of Doodle*, <http://www.dailydot.com/irl/school-of-doodle/>

Terminator. We face a massive backlash of opposition to assertions of equality and allegations of ill treatment, a virulent opposition which is practically impossible to avoid coming in contact with due to our exposure to the internet and the number of individuals who—for whatever reason—use it to espouse their sense of victimization at the very thought of Female and Black and Muslim and LGBTQ empowerment, and to assert the notion that the true victim is the white male and the real scourge is the collective equality movement.²⁵

Feminism has changed dramatically since the invention of the word,²⁶ but women are still in many of the same predicaments that we have always been in. Theoretically, we should have more power, but in reality we are heavily underrepresented in every aspect of the word. The expectations of gender have shifted, but the options for women are still fairly limited and circumscribed: go to school, get a decent job, get married, have children, pay a mortgage, do what media tells us we must do to be attractive to men and other women. Women have massive unfulfilled potential, but we have also been deprived of recognition and opportunities on par with men. We have, in fact, been thwarted by the very media which we embrace and call friend, media designed specifically to appeal to women.

While women have made more headway in the bid for rights than many might have imagined less than a hundred years ago, and more people in the United States support a woman's right to make her own reproductive choices than ever before (including the right to have an abortion), these rights continue to come under siege by rightwing republicans and “the religious right.” Worse still, women implicitly support and condone policies which defeat their best interests, by engaging in commerce which ultimately benefits conservative politicians, and by

²⁵ Rohrer, Judy. “Trump and the Narrative of White Male Victimhood: ‘It Hurts’.” *The Feminist Wire*. Nov. 7, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2016/11/trump-white-male-victimhood/>

²⁶ “Feminism.” *Wikipedia*. Accessed Feb. 1, 2017. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminism>

voting for those politicians.²⁷ Throughout the history of woman's suffrage, women have faced opposition every step of the way.²⁸ Feminists have also undermined and defeated their own purposes by failing to understand how issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and economic welfare, among other statuses which affect women, intersect with feminism as a movement. White feminists have a long shameful history of using racist rhetoric and outright ignoring the problems of women of color.²⁹ Feminists must address these failures in order to form a more cohesive movement.

II. Advertising Versus Real Content in Women's Publishing

In order to understand what feminism is today and how it can be more successful going forward, I look here at women's media, particularly magazines and internet publishing. Many women's magazines are now accessible on the internet, but it is important to look at hardcopy for the special, unique experience that a real magazine offers readers. Women have long looked to publishing as an outlet and to reflect and satisfy our interests, desires, needs, and concerns. Even in the age of advanced technology, books and magazines that appeal primarily to a female audience continue as a thriving industry.

Women's magazines are glossy, beautiful, sexy, smooth (and hairless!)—all the adjectives that describe all of the things women are supposed to want to become, embody, and maintain.

Women's magazines and other media designed specifically for women have played a major role in how women in America view ourselves, and in how we spend our time and money.

²⁷ Cottle, Michelle. "Why White Women Continue to Back the GOP." *The Atlantic*. Nov. 14, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/white-women-support-gop/507617/>

²⁸ Lange, Allison. "National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage." *National Women's History Museum*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.crusadeforthevote.org/naows-opposition/>

²⁹ Sanghani, Radhika "The Uncomfortable Truth About Racism and the Suffragettes." *The Telegraph*. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11914757/Racism-and-the-suffragettes-the-uncomfortable-truth.html>

Magazines, in particular, have been a double-edged sword: while they have for decades stoked women's impulses to pursue autonomy, independence, financial success, fair and equal treatment, and sexual and reproductive freedom, they have also played an outsized role in reinforcing feminine stereotypes.³⁰ Women's magazines project a whole universe of images and ideas that women are supposed to aspire to and emulate. Women's magazines shape the discourse of empowered femininity at the same time that they perpetuate some of the most damaging depictions of womanhood and femininity that plague popular culture, and indeed, which plague regular women in their real lives.

I, like many American women, was successfully inculcated to the culture of women's magazines as a young teen. Magazines like *Sassy* and *Jane* and *Seventeen* appealed to a generation of young American girls who came of age in the late 80s and early 90s. While I remember these magazines as mostly being filled with "most embarrassing" incidents, advice on various matters of import to teenage girls, including how to deal with boys, hair and makeup tips, I also remember that we found them "empowering." These magazines treated young girls as an important topic of attention and focus. They also introduced us to the notion that women have value, that our bodies were normal and our struggles were real.

I had a very "natural" upbringing that pitted me somewhat against beauty routines. Since my pubescence came to an end, I have generally found regular makeup application to be more of a burden than it is worth. It is a routine that I perform sparingly. However, there is no limit to what advertising and propaganda can achieve. While spending a great deal of time looking at women's magazines for the purpose of writing this thesis, I witnessed my own behavior and outlook changing—particularly with regard to beauty and fitness. Reading fashion magazines in

³⁰ Ross, Janell. "The Remarkable Political History of Women's Magazines." *The Washington Post*. Aug. 14, 2015. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/08/14/womens-magazines-go-political-but-really-theyve-been-political-since-1792/?utm_term=.8850509810ef

my late 30s inspired me to spend a huge amount of money on makeup, to feel compelled to wear makeup more regularly. Looking at magazines also made me feel that I should be working out more and spending more time on my hair and nails. But I also couldn't help notice how, despite the copious ads and cosmetic tutorial pages, magazines like *Glamour* and *Marie Claire* seek to reach greater depths, socially and politically speaking. The paradoxical effects produced by the consumption of women's magazines is not a new phenomenon.³¹

Of course, mainstream fashion and lifestyle magazines are not the only types of publishing out there for women. There are so many different women's magazines currently in print that the list would span many pages and challenge any pronouncements that print media is dead. There are a few feminist magazines which still maintain hardcopy publication and web presence. *Ms. Magazine*, which was founded in 1971 by so called "second-wave" feminists and sociopolitical activists Gloria Steinem and Dorothy Pittman Hughes, boasts circulation to 110,000 readers.³² *Bitch Magazine* is a feminist publication out of Portland, Oregon that has been in print since 1996 and circulates to approximately 80,000 readers.³³ *Bust*, a "women's lifestyle" magazine "from a feminist perspective," has been around since 1993 and covers a range of topics including body image, crafting, book, film, and music reviews, and all manner of miscellany that presumably interests women.³⁴ These magazines are actually published by women and buck the usual conventions of women's magazines, focusing more on the actual substance of articles rather than serving as a vehicle for advertisers, yet their sales are evidence of how effective that model is on a monetary scale. These are magazines designed to appeal to a small segment of the

³¹ See Ross.

³² "Ms. Magazine." *Wikipedia*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ms._\(magazine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ms._(magazine))

³³ "Bitch Magazine." *Wikipedia*. Accessed Jan, 16, 2017. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bitch_\(magazine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bitch_(magazine))

³⁴ "Bust Magazine." *Wikipedia*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bust_\(magazine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bust_(magazine))

population which yearns for a different type of narrative and outlook for women other than the one presented by the average fashion and beauty magazine.

Magazines and publications tailored specifically for women have been around in the United States since at least 1792 (and much earlier in some other parts of the world, such as Britain where the first women's magazine, "The Ladies Mercury" was published in 1693).³⁵ Mainstream print media is still a uniquely successful industry, albeit less so than it once was. While the internet has given space to a new brand of journalism—individual blogging, feminist action and news websites, as well as millennial news websites such as Jezebel, Gothamist, Gawker, BuzzFeed³⁶ (all maintaining a decidedly leftist, millennial feminist slant), there is still no sign of the women's magazine industry slowing down or becoming irrelevant with the rise of online content, as it still occupies a niche, which for now, remains lucrative.³⁷

While millennials *are* less interested in print magazines and get most of their media from the web, there is still a demand for print publishing. While there is no question that the industry has had reason to be concerned and to change its approaches to selling magazines, the formula has remained fairly consistent and newsstand sales are still strong enough that it is not uncommon to find a wall of women's magazines staring at you while you browse the supermarket or drugstore or while standing in line to pay.

Women may have more options than ever before when it comes to media targeted specifically to us, but magazines continue to hold a special place in the zeitgeist and in our habits

³⁵ See Hughes.

³⁶ BuzzFeed is an important media outlet in that it covers an incredibly broad range of topics and masterfully harnesses its advertising in the form of sponsored articles. Advertisers can sponsor specific content, including quizzes and personality assessments which serve to provide advertisers with opportunities to gather even more information about their targeted consumer.

³⁷ Matthews, Laura Isabella. "How Do Independent Magazines Make Money?" *Business of Fashion*. Jul. 23, 2015. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/how-independent-magazines-make-money>

of consumption. The global women's magazine industry has succeeded in marketing content designed to appeal to every type of woman, the world over. Vogue, Glamour, Marie Claire, Bazaar...are all published in multiple countries and regions.³⁸ Scores of magazines are published regularly and designed to appeal to women. While the editors of these magazines are most frequently women, their parent companies are all run by men.

Conde Nast, the publishing giant that publishes Vogue and Glamour, is chaired by Robert A. Sauerberg, Jr. (CEO and President), Charles H. Townsend (Chairman), Samuel Irving Newhouse, Jr. (Chairman emeritus) and Anna Wintour (Artistic Director). Hearst, which publishes Marie Claire, Cosmopolitan, Elle, Good Housekeeping, and myriad other women's magazines, is run by William Randolph Hearst III (Chairman), Frank A. Bennack, Jr. (Executive Vice Chairman), and Steve Swartz (President and CEO). The idea that these magazines genuinely attempt to reflect the concerns of women and are not, in fact, designed primarily for the purpose of marketing, would be a misguided one. If you take a visit to Conde Nast's website you can click on a tab titled "23 Stories," where Conde Nast announces their partnership with 23 Stories: "Your Story...Told By Our Brands," demonstrating the manner in which reality, entertainment, and advertising, have become irrevocably intertwined and indistinguishable. Your story has been branded. Your story IS a brand. There is no getting this ad out of your story!³⁹

Women's magazines have so much potential to mobilize women. Instead, real content gets squeezed out by ads selling women fake empowerment in the form of a tube of moisturizer for the profit of a bunch of male executives and investors. Any progress that is made for women between the pages of the average mainstream women's magazine is automatically negated by its ad content. One reason that women's magazines continue to flourish is the magazine is itself an

³⁸ "List of women's magazines." *Wikipedia*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_women's_magazines

³⁹ "23Stories x Conde Nast: Your Story Told by Our Brands." <http://23stories.com/>. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017.

appealing product; an artful, attractively produced object which can be held, flipped through, followed from beginning to end, taking a reader on a kind of journey, one issue at a time and one leading into the next. A magazine is an ongoing story which appeals primarily to desires, of which human beings are never in short supply. In her excellent piece in the Guardian, “Zeal and Softness,” Kathryn Hughes says:

The fantasy, if not the practice...is that a reader of a women's magazine may become its co-author at any moment. What's more, although a title may present itself as tightly defined (in the rhetorical world of women's magazines, “the Cosmo girl” could never be confused with the Bella reader) ...although the casual reader would be hard-pressed to say exactly why.⁴⁰

Magazines appeal to a reader’s sense of individuality. A reader starts off perusing letters and comments pertaining to issues past. Perennials such as the September Issue of Vogue and The 25 Women of the Year Issue of Glamour recur year after year, serving as a comforting tradition in women’s lives. Magazines still have that aura of comfort and familiarity, while the internet can be disconcerting, overwhelming, even scary and unsafe. One never knows what they might run into around the next corner on the internet. Reading one article can lead to any range of experiences and emotions, as the dynamic and often chaotic nature of plunging the internet’s depths can be all consuming. One swipe down any given webpage could land you reading a string of comments that will cause stress and inner malaise. Magazines and print publications are a respite from this in the sense that they present a more controlled, contained form of media which can be taken in a much more measured, logical, non-chaotic way.

Women’s fashion magazines are a very “safe,” tightly controlled realm. We trust the publishers of our favorite magazines to espouse the kinds of views that are in keeping with the world as we want to identify with and relate to it. Aside from the “letters from readers” section

⁴⁰ Hughes.

which magazines frequently contain, there is no uncontrolled speech throughout. The publishers have the reigns. An interview with Jennifer Aniston will not be followed by an unabated stream of invective or adulation from readers. This is the unexpected advantage of continuing to read hardcopy over digital literature: safety from the intrusion of the masses upon one's happy experience of consumption.

The experience of reading or looking at hardcopy is uninterrupted by anything other than advertising—the expected and accepted intrusion into our experience, and yet it is also a part of what we want out of the experience. Advertisements are filled with desirable products and objects and we are easily intoxicated by the idea of acquiring new things that will make our lives better. We understand that ads are a necessary evil to keeping a publication afloat and that while this has perhaps corrupted art, information, and entertainment more than anything, we can successfully overcome any misgivings while engulfed in a temporary fantasy of beauty and fulfillment—one that incidentally inspires a few purchases, all of which are justified by the popular doctrine of “self-care.”⁴¹

Women's print magazines exploit women with endless advertisements for beauty and hygiene products that are “musts” for those who would wish to be included in the grand institution of womanhood. These publications create, perpetuate and reinforce pervasive beauty standards. One only needs to spend a few minutes with a fashion magazine to understand what is considered physically beautiful for a woman in the culture, even while these depictions are interspersed with the obligatory insistence that “all bodies are beautiful.”

Contrary to fears and projections that the internet could kill off magazine publication, this fate has yet to transpire. Magazines continue as a vehicle for disseminating marketing and

⁴¹ Beck, Julie. “The Internet Wants to Help You Take Care of Yourself.” *The Atlantic*. Oct. 2, 2015. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/10/internet-self-care/408580/>

capitalist propaganda to women in a manner that has always worked quite well, as the loud, glossy covers call out and lure passersby. As long as women are the ones buying the majority of products that are produced in the marketplace worldwide, mainstream women's magazines will be filled with ads.

Despite the many ways that women's magazines appeal to women, we should be very skeptical of the idea that the publishers of these magazines have women's best interest in mind. While it is easy to get sucked into the call to women's empowerment which can be bought with just the right shade of lipstick or by supporting advertisers that validate "a variety of appearances and body types," these so-called attempts to empower women are really just part of a strategy to gain consumer loyalty for hundreds and thousands of products showcased within the slick pages of what is essentially, another product.

Magazines are one of the most effective ways to introduce and market ideas, particularly to women. Men's magazines are very interest oriented/topic specific ("Hunting & Fishing," "Cars," "Guns & Ammo," "Woodworking," etc.) and no doubt also filled with advertising for things like fishing rods, car parts, guns and ammo, and lathes. However, women's magazines are more generalized and there is almost nothing that cannot be marketed to women somehow. Products such as dish soap, laundry detergent, food products, bath and beauty products, toys, clothes, a vast universe of children's products, and pretty much anything else you can imagine that Americans are encouraged to buy, are marketed specifically to women. There are very few women's magazines that eschew hyper-consumerism and physical beauty as the main standards for happiness, even those that feature more substantive articles. The first several pages (and a great many pages throughout) of almost any magazine appealing to women as the primary

demographic are inevitably filled with ads for jewelry, makeup, and other products or services that women purportedly can't live without.⁴²

Women's fashion magazines are a complicated form of media in that they are presented as a woman's "best friend," yet the advertisers they sell space to, are quite possibly her worst enemy. We know that they are "just advertisements," but do we really? So much of the content of women's magazines is bound up with the advertising that sometimes the two are not entirely distinguishable. The focus on the body and product consumption and celebrity worship is deeply pervasive. And yet there are also many sincere attempts to delve into the lives of real women between the most vapid seeming covers. Marie Claire describes itself on its website as providing "information on fashion, style, hairstyles, beauty, women's issues, careers, health," etc.

The July 2015 issue of Marie Claire boasts the headlines: "Look Hot Now—Summer-Proof Your Hair"; "Flawless Skin (No Faking It)"; "Kate Moss' Beauty Secrets"; "Fashion Gets Fresh: Pretty New Trends to Try Right Now"; "How Long Can You Really Put Off Having Kids?"; and "My Dad Was A Serial Killer."

The first four are the stereotypical tripe, however, while the title leaves something to be desired, "How Long Can You Really Put Off Having Kids?" starts off with a compelling proposition:

Getting married and having two kids just isn't the American story anymore. Now, almost half of U.S. women are not mothers, whether by choice, biology, or ambivalence, and the other half might have a child via any number of methods. Maybe it's with a committed life partner, but increasingly, it's not: There's a dizzying array of options for creating a family—some so new that statistics about them don't yet exist (like the growing number of women having children with male friends, gay or straight). We sort

⁴² Nemirovsky, Galina. "A Magazine Audit: Content-to-Advertising Ratio." *Blogger.com*. Mar. 24, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.blogger.com/magazine-audit-content-advertising-ratio>

through those options, along with fertility fears, baby desires, and maybe-mommy madness.⁴³

While this is not the most subversive or rarefied topic for a women's magazine, it does present some controversial ideas and challenge traditional perceptions of women and child-bearing. The simple fact that it acknowledges that there are women who might not wish to have children is encouraging, and overall the piece is far more useful than a hairstyle tutorial.

In "My Dad Was A Serial Killer,"⁴⁴ Maria Ricapito interviews the daughters of serial killers: Melissa Moore, the daughter of Keith Hunter Jespersen, who confessed to taking the lives of 160 women; Taalibah Muhammad, whose father John Allen Muhammad was dubbed the Beltway Killer after he took the lives of 10 people in a random killing spree; and Rebecca Lafferty, whose father is Dan Lafferty, the Mormon fundamentalist who participated in the murder of his sister-in-law, Brenda, and her 15 month old baby. This is an example of an article that explores women's challenges and real life experiences in a meaningful, compassionate, and informative way, content which is buried among the ads for Dolce & Gabbana, Cartier, Lancome, Revlon, CoverGirl, Sunglass Hut, etc. and other vapid content which serves no purpose other than to market various products.

A visit to Marie Claire's website displays the top headlines: "What It's Like to Smuggle Yourself Out of Syria," "The Donald Trump Cabinet Tracker," "Inside the Lives of White Supremacist Women," and "On Regretting Motherhood," followed by an endless scroll of news stories, ranging from "President-Elect Donald Trump Just Endorsed L.L. Bean" to "How to Finally Get Rid of Those Dry Skin Patches (Because Sometimes Moisturizing Isn't Enough)."⁴⁵ The online version of Marie Claire is far more dynamic and engaging than the print version. The

⁴³ "How Long Can You Really Put Off Having Kids?" *Marie Claire Magazine*. July, 2015 Vol. 22 #7.

⁴⁴ Ricapito, Maria. "My Dad Was a Serial Killer." *Marie Claire Magazine*. July, 2015 Vol. 22 #7.

⁴⁵ MarieClaire.com. *Hearst Corp.* Accessed Jan. 16, 2017.

advertisements are more covert, as they do not take up entire pages that the reader is forced to flip through to get to “real” content. Still, reading the hardcopy magazine has the advantage of feeling like a guilty pleasure, an indulgence which leads to more indulgence, a special physical experience more satisfying than scrolling.

The November 2015 issue of *Women’s Health*⁴⁶ announces cover stories such as, “Your Best Abs”; “Lea Michele’s Hot Bod: No Gym. No Trainer. Her Secrets.”; “Wrinkles? Spots? Pores? Poof! The One Product That Solves It All”; “Sexy in Fall: 75 Coats, Bags, Shoes!”

Women’s Health is a fitness magazine published by Rodale, which is one of the few magazine publishers with a female CEO, Maria Rodale, and whose executive team consists of exactly 6 women and 6 men. While these facts are comforting, the magazine itself is chalk full of ads for everything under the sun, including, the Isopure Protein Drink, the Windows 10 Upgrade from Microsoft, Aveeno Tone Corrector, Tacori Jewels, Eddie Bauer Fitnesswear, Aveda hair products, LaraBar Fruit & Nut Food Bars, Philosophy skincare, Smartwater, cookbooks, Toyota Camry, various fashion, several brands of dog food, women’s vitamins, Westin Hotels & Resorts, Fitbit, Energizer Batteries, Quaker Granola, Dove Bodywash, Covergirl cosmetics, Women’s Rogaine, Clairol’s Natural Instincts hair products, Burt’s Bees Lip Balm, toothpaste, toilet paper, California Almonds, moisturizer, antiperspirant, Geico insurance, pharmaceuticals, Nyquil, California Walnuts, and Stauffer’s Lasagna, to name just a few. Any feature on fashion, nutrition, or beauty, will likely contain suggestions of what and where to buy the styles and solutions that *Women’s Health* and their advertisers propose will solve women’s many, many purported needs, problems and predicaments. There are some helpful tidbits here and there, but *Women’s Health* can feel like one big ongoing advertisement.

⁴⁶ *Women’s Health. Rodale Inc. Nov. 2015.*

Glamour is published by Conde Nast. The format is similar to Marie Claire, except that there are subtleties which are difficult to pinpoint that make them *feel* different. Glamour has more of a slick, mainstream, gloss. They subscribe to a liberal and progressive tone and dialogue, but the deeper topics are not quite central to the Glamour format the way they are to the Marie Claire format. Again, these distinctions feel minute upon attempting to describe them, but feel very noticeable within the publications themselves.

From the March 2016 issue of Glamour:⁴⁷ “Spring Fashion Your Way”; “500 Shortcuts to the Style, Hair, Body & Life You Want Now”; “What Are You Wearing To Work Today? Panic Solved.”; “I’m Not Straight, and I’m Not Gay...I’m Just Me’: Uncensored: How Women Are Redefining Their Sex Lives.”

While fashion, makeup, weight, sex, and current events are the bread and butter of women’s magazines, the substance is hard to find among the many pages of glossy depictions of women in ridiculous poses with various luxury items. And the headlines we see on the cover are never an accurate representation of everything that is inside. In fact, those cover stories are simply bait, thrown out like chum to sharks. What successfully sells is a fantasy of wealth, youth, fitness, beauty, and irresistible sexuality, the myth of having “the style, hair, body and life you want now.” The “real content” gets lost but if one really looks for it, it is there.⁴⁸

Women’s magazines remain an extremely effective form of media, if media’s success is measured primarily by how successfully it sells both ideas and products. Magazines succeed in making us believe that we should look a certain way, buy certain things and live our lives according to certain standards and ideals which come from...somewhere. Who sets those standards and ideals is an important question. Who benefits from women’s faith in the media,

⁴⁷ Glamour. *Conde Nast*. Mar. 2016.

⁴⁸ See Nemirovsky.

which is tailored to and creative of women's likes, dislikes, needs, wants, and priorities, is an important piece of the puzzle of women's progress that is not analyzed heavily enough in the usual feminist discourse. Advertisers are the primary creators of desires that we did not know we had and they are an important part of setting the standards of beauty and success.

Many aspects of life in America are designed to appeal to women as consumers, but the actual power structures that control those aspects are disproportionately controlled by men at the very top. A search of almost any large corporation in America that makes products and services which are marketed to and purchased by women will produce one board of directors after another filled with men, with the very occasional woman peppering the highest levels of the corporate landscape. Women still vie for an equal share of power in the corporate world, in science, academia, and in governance. We still vie for an equal share of the benefits of that for which we are the very engine. When women take control of media and their own marketing they are frequently criticized. The Kardashians are often described negatively as being "money hungry monsters" for trying to build a media and product empire, as if women should forever work exclusively for men.⁴⁹ Men, on the other hand, are never criticized for running massive media, cosmetics and product empires. Men make billions off of the sales of various poisons and potions and cheap entertainment, and, well, no one blinks.

The types of images and ideas set forth in mainstream women's magazines can be extremely damaging to women, reinforcing the idea that we must be young and thin, beautiful, well dressed and perfectly made up, desirable but not too desirable, not just to men, but to everyone. Different women's magazines serve up different cultures and ideas, but all mainstream publications include advertisements which tend to promote unreasonable and imaginary

⁴⁹ See Ross.

expectations for regular women who are just trying to live their lives and probably wouldn't think twice about putting on makeup or perfume if we were not constantly reminded by advertisements that we are not complete without those things, that we need this product now in order to fulfill our true potential.

Most magazines which are supposedly for and about women are filled with advertisements for products whose underlying reason for existence is to separate one from one's money, claiming the ability to transform every woman into a more perfect woman. These magazines and their advertisers sell women something called "empowerment" and "celebration of self" which will supposedly counteract the damage done by being told that we must be some perfect imaginary thing. It is very incongruous—all of these conflicting messages being delivered by the same sources and entities simultaneously, which use our supposed empowerment to sell us the keys to becoming that perfect imaginary thing, the striving towards which is exactly what cripples so many girls and women. This vicious cycle of advertising and pop cultural imagery of idealized beauty and desirability is exactly what has led our girls and women to the need to proclaim in anguish that all women are beautiful, to post expository social media posts about personal body image as a form of self-empowerment and catharsis, and to be distracted from concrete activism and political involvement regarding issues that are really impacting girls and women because we are so wrapped up in healing the damage that has been done by so many unrealistic portrayals of women in every form of media in existence.

Women try constantly to adhere to the unreasonable expectations presented to us but are then scrutinized and blamed for being too body obsessed, beauty obsessed, money obsessed, too petty and inconsequential in our interests, and too materialistic. This is women's media, so are not women responsible for it? The answer is that women *are* partially responsible for it, in that a

multitude of women do the actual work of creating women's magazines. However, women are not responsible for it, institutionally speaking. Women work for men who are responsible for it. The editors of all the top women's magazines are women, but the parent companies of those magazines were all established by and continue to be run by men. Whether or not women have editorial power over the content of women's magazines, men are still at the helm of all of the largest media conglomerates in the world. The same is true of nearly all of the major cosmetics giants. They are almost exclusively founded by and run by men to this day, as I will discuss further below. The money women spend with these companies often flows towards causes that defeat women's interests.

When ads make up an average of roughly 40%-50% of a magazine and are integral with the remaining content, one might wonder which aspect of the publication is really most powerful.⁵⁰ What is delivered into our hands is little more than a tool for disseminating advertising a/k/a capitalist propaganda to women for the purposes of profit. What we get is an Oreó cookie swirl of printed material, where part of the cookie is "actual content" and part of it is advertising, but it does not really matter which is which, as one cannot be extricated or often even distinguished from the other. One might even conclude that the advertisements we are constantly subjected to are the central feature of our media, and it is everything else, all the supposed substance, which is actually peripheral. The advertising is not incidental to the main product—it *is* the main product. The product is the advertisement of further products.

Walk in to any pharmacy or supermarket in the U.S. and one will inevitably be confronted by numerous colorful and attractive displays designed to appeal to women, who have, for the most part, been successfully trained to harbor a limitless capacity for consumption. There

⁵⁰ See Nemirovsky.

is no shortage of representations and projections of women's supposed desires in the racks and shelves of every retail outlet.

Cosmetics and anti-aging products dominate the pages of women's magazines. The same publications that are supposedly "empowering" women are those that are in existence solely because of advertising dollars from companies that profit from telling women that being old, unattractive, overweight or otherwise physically imperfect by common beauty standards are problems that need to be fixed, that there is a product for whatever is getting in the way of women "feeling beautiful."

Campaigns such as those championed by Dove (a subsidiary of Unilever, a company which does, incidentally, give a good deal of money to democrats)⁵¹ continue to perpetuate the assertion that a woman's worth is determined by her beauty. By saying, "All women are beautiful" and "All women are sexy," it is not said that it is okay to *not* be beautiful, but that there is room within established beauty standards for all women. That seems nice, but it misguidedly purports to announce that we define the standard, the standard does not define us, but that does not mean we are doing away with the standard of beauty entirely, only that we are *expanding* it. That which is designed to be "empowering" often fails to actually empower, as it reinforces the idea that women must call themselves "beautiful" and "sexy" in order to feel valuable, and that with a good body wash, a foundation that matches your skin tone, a diet that makes you "feel good inside," a dress that is "made for a woman your size," you too can feel "beautiful" and "sexy" and "empowered." But the standards of beauty as defined by the advertisements remain the same, however "inclusive" they are made out to be. A woman must

⁵¹ "Unilever: Money to Congressional Candidates: 2016 Cycle." *Center for Responsive Politics*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <https://www.opensecrets.org/orgs/toprecips.php?id=D000030608&cycle=2016>

still strive to be young, fashionable, preferably thin, properly made up, shaved, maintained, manicured, etc.

Enter the highly marketable “women’s empowerment,” neither practice nor praxis, nor really theory, but a glossy, dizzying product instead. Women’s empowerment borrows the virtuous window-dressing of the social worker’s doctrine and kicks its substance to the side. It’s about pleasure, not power; it’s individualistic and subjective, tailored to insecurity and desire.⁵²

Beauty is an industry dependent on making women terrified of aging so that they might run into the arms of Revlon or Aveeno or Oil of Olay, terrified of being fat so that they might join Weight Watchers or buy the multitude of products and programs that will make a woman “feel and look younger and slimmer,” terrified of any perceived imperfection, however slight, so that we will look to remedy it somehow and find ourselves vulnerable to advertising for products that will repair our flaws.

Companies which produce cosmetics and other beauty products are well aware that many women will pay whatever they can afford and much more in the bid to remain in the good graces of a society which evidently has no use for women who fail to maintain a requisite level of youth and attractiveness regardless of age. Incredibly, advertisers succeed in playing both sides, by also purporting to support all body types and positive self-image for all. We accept the fake empowerment that is sold to us through a multitude of mediums and entities, but we bypass any inquiry about where our money is going. Who is really running the companies that we look to for all of the conveniences of life and the fulfillment of every conceivable desire or inclination? It is a lot of work to investigate the source of everything we consume. But cultivating an awareness of where our products come from, and letting that information influence our purchases, is one of the few endeavors that could change the whole system of consumption and the plight of women

⁵² Tolentino.

and people everywhere, for the better. We have a choice. Small purveyors are everywhere. No consumer is forced to buy Tide or Tampax or any other big name product. Alternative options abound. One must only be curious and proactive in seeking out those alternatives.

Fashion magazines like *Vogue*, *Glamour* and *Marie Claire* (a different category than tabloid magazines like *InTouch*, *InStyle*, and *UsWeekly*) tend to strike a positive note in general, but the message for women is a mixed one. The content that these magazines publish give rise to pervasive insecurities in women (lose weight, firm your abs, sculpt your brows, find the foundation that perfectly matches your skin, ad nauseam), but all of this is presented as innocent advice on self-improvement, rather than as criticism designed to make one vulnerable to manipulation. In reality, these messages are designed for profit and very few are looking out for women's interests.

All women's magazines are not equal, however they do share many of the characteristics discussed earlier. While glossy fashion and fitness magazines take a much more positive, empowering tone, tabloids—also primarily marketed to women—are a huge culprit of negative scrutiny and commentary about women. Tabloids speculate about the personal details of celebrity lives, “investigate” celebrity events, delve into the dramas of reality television, and keep one apprised of the latest television, movies and pop-culture fads. Tabloids exist for the somewhat indiscriminate pop-culture junkie who craves to know what is going on with favorite celebrities and media products.

The fashion magazine is much less about who is marrying who, who is having a baby, and who looks better in any given outfit. The typical fashion magazine is about how to be beautiful, how to be sexy and desirable, it is about alluring products and interesting people and women who are accomplishing great things and doing it all. Fashion magazines are about

arousing desires and stoking ambitions that will lead to more marketing opportunities for advertisers. Fashion magazines evolved as media for “the independent, self-made woman” who wants to know what to wear, who to read, where to go, what to buy and what is happening in an “elevated” or more “elite” culture. While fashion and self-improvement magazines encourage women to “be their best selves,” tabloids often criticize women’s bodies, sensationalize the private affairs of celebrities, and generally perpetuate negative stereotypes about the sexes and about women’s bodies and aging.

While Glamour would never have a feature devoted to closeups of celebrity body flaws (complete with circles and arrows), they would do a feature titled, “Katy Perry is Beauty Obsessed.” But it would be difficult to say which type of women’s magazine is more insidious: the weekly that unashamedly advertises its cheap, lowbrow subject matter and basic products, or the monthly that claims to want you to be empowered, independent, and to become your very best self, which advertises expensive products to help you get there, all putting money into the pockets of executives and corporate entities that do not appear to concern themselves when it comes to real-world matters that effect women.

Tabloids such as InTouch, Star, USWeekly, The Daily Mirror, consist mainly of the scrutiny and exploitation of women, predatory journalism, and pop culture gossip. Some topics that appear in the typical tabloid targeted to women consumers, and which are in no small part internalized by a huge number of women and inflicted on society as a whole are: The “bad mother” stereotype; the “bad wife” stereotype; the “too fat” admonishment; the “too skinny” admonishment; the “too old” admonishment; the “too much plastic surgery” admonishment; the “botched plastic surgery” judgment; the “looks bad without makeup” admonishment; the “looks good without makeup” scrutiny; “how much weight has she lost?”; “how much weight has she

gained?"; the "when will they get married?" question; the "when will they have babies?" question; the "when will they get divorced?" question; "Did he cheat?"; "Was it her fault?"

These topics all rely on the perpetuation of heteronormativity, the insistence that women's lives are incomplete without marriage and children, and a disproportionate focus on the glamour, wealth, and perfection of celebrities. Every aspect of what these publications do is predicated on the accepted notion of women being fodder for a kind of criticism and scrutiny that men are simply not subject to. Fashion magazines manipulate and exploit women's buying potential while simultaneously "empowering" us with affirmations and energizing us with desires, while tabloids feed the hunger to consume all of that which the rich and famous consume and stoke our worst instincts to criticize and judge others.

All this said, women's magazines, with the exception of tabloids, have, despite the extent of their advertising content and blaring front page bait, been extremely influential in popularizing feminist objectives, even while they continue to espouse ideal womanhood, contrary to the best interests of women.⁵³ While it is important to talk about the negative effects of women's magazines, the ideas that are perpetuated by them and why they are perpetuated, and by whom, it is also important to recognize how women's magazines have contributed to the popularization of feminism and the advancement of causes which are important in the lives of real women. Women's publications have always been an extremely integral part of publicizing topics such as suffrage, abolition, harassment and discrimination, and inequities in the home and workplace.⁵⁴ It is notable that while most big product makers give the majority of their political campaign donations to Republicans, most companies that control women's publications give the majority

⁵³ See Hughes.

⁵⁴ See Hughes, Ross.

of their political donations to Democrats. Here lies the unholy union between advertisers and the publications which serve as vehicle for those advertisements.

Ms., Bitch, and Bust are by far some of the most respectable feminist publications still in print. There are no advertisements for the typical products which are targeted to women. In Bitch you will not find ads for foundation, perfume, jewels, shoes, handbags, diet pills, yogurt or household products. You will not find the latest rundown of who is hot and who is not. You will not find a feature on the “must haves” of anything. You will find thoughtful, well written articles about things that concern women and self-described feminists. These publications offer a welcome contrast with the typical mainstream women’s magazine. Women would be better served to support magazines and online publications that make a point of supporting women by eschewing advertising that seeks to exploit its audience only as consumers rather than serving us as readers, and to demand that the magazines we love and enjoy pay more mind to the wellbeing of their readership when it comes to the advertisements displayed.

III. Where Does My Money Go?

So who are the people at the helms of the companies who are reaping the profits from the buying habits of women? What kinds of ideas would they benefit from having us believe? And what are they really giving to women in return for the loyalty of our minds and pocketbooks?

Revlon, one of the largest cosmetics companies in the world, was founded by Joseph & Charles Revson and Charles Lachman and has always been headed by men throughout its storied history. It continues to be run today by Lorenzo Delpani (President and CEO) and Roberto Simon (Executive Vice President and CFO).⁵⁵ Revlon has long used women’s empowerment as a marketing tool and continues to do so.⁵⁶ Revlon has long championed breast cancer research and

⁵⁵ “Revlon.” *Wikipedia*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revlon>

⁵⁶ “Legacy.” *www.Revlon.com*. Accessed January 16, 2017.

treatment and been on the cutting edge of many developments in women's health such as mobile mammography clinics. But they have also created a great many products that are harmful to women both physically and culturally, if one considers the idea that a woman must endlessly strive to be young and beautiful, or at least, properly made up.

While Revlon can boast these impressive initiatives, their parent company, MacAndrews & Forbes, founded by Ronald Perelman and chaired by Perelman, Barry F. Schwartz, and Paul G. Savas, are “global leaders in cosmetics and digital entertainment, biotechnology and military equipment.” The McAndrews & Forbes website homepage features a picture of a military tank.⁵⁷ MacAndrews & Forbes runs an official PAC called “MacAndrews & Forbes Incorporated Political Action Committee,” which in 2016 gave \$208,178 to federal candidates. 43% of that money went to Democrats, while 57% of it went to Republicans. A sampling of recipients and details about their politics concerning women's reproductive rights are described below.

Susan Brooks (R-IN) received \$2,500. She has voted for the repeal of the Affordable Care Act and to defund Planned Parenthood.⁵⁸

Cheri Bustos (D-IL) received \$1,000. Her priorities, as listed on her website, are: “Balancing The Budget, Creating Jobs & Growing Our economy, Protecting Medicare & Social Security, and Fighting For Our Veterans.”⁵⁹

GK Butterfield (D-NC) received \$1,000. Butterfield places a great deal of emphasis on equal rights and helping the poor and disenfranchised and his website boasts his help in founding

<http://www.revlon.com/behind%20the%20color/legacy>

⁵⁷ McAndrews & Forbes, <http://www.macandrewsandforbes.com/>

⁵⁸ Brooks, Susan. <https://susanwbrooks.house.gov/>. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017.

⁵⁹ Bustos, Cheri. <https://bustos.house.gov/>. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017.

the Wilson, NC branch of the NAACP and championing diversity. Butterfield has voted for pro-choice, pro-women's health measures time and again.⁶⁰

Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) received \$5,000. Chaffetz is a scourge to politics in general, abusing his power in matters from the Hillary Clinton email investigation to the defunding of Planned Parenthood. Chaffetz is personally responsible for an untold number of American tax dollars being wasted on political witch hunts by Republicans against Democrats and Democratic institutions.⁶¹

Tom Cole (R-OK) received \$1,000. On August 10, 2015, after blatantly fabricated propaganda videos of allegedly nefarious Planned Parenthood activities were released to the public, Cole released a statement on his website expressing his dismay at “the horrors contained therein, the stomach-churning conversations and horrific images.” He went on to say, “Like most Americans, I am appalled and disgusted by the evidence recently brought against Planned Parenthood by the Center for Medical Progress.”⁶² The statement remains on his website today, even after investigations by 12 state governments found no evidence of wrongdoing on behalf of Planned Parenthood and the individuals who made the videos were criminally charged with tampering with a government record.⁶³ Cole is incorrect that “most Americans” were appalled and disgusted. Most Americans support a woman's right to make her own reproductive choices and are skeptical enough that we waited before rushing to judgment about the Planned

⁶⁰ Butterfield, GK. <https://butterfield.house.gov/>. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017.

⁶¹ Lithwick, Dahlia. “Jason Chaffetz Doesn't Care About Ethics.” *Slate*. Jan. 13, 2017. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/jurisprudence/2017/01/jason_chaffetz_is_ethically_bankrupt.html

⁶² Cole, Tom. “Planned Parenthood Should Be Defunded.” *Cole.house.gov*. Aug. 10, 2015. <https://cole.house.gov/planned-parenthood-should-be-defunded>

⁶³ Gillin, Joshua. “U.S. Rep. David Jolly says he voted against House Planned Parenthood investigation.” *Politifact Florida*. Apr. 26, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2016/apr/26/david-jolly/us-rep-david-jolly-says-he-voted-against-house-pla/>

Parenthood videos.⁶⁴ Tom Cole is not a politician who pro-choice women want anywhere near our pocketbooks.

Gerry Connolly (D-VA) received \$2,500. Connolly's website publicizes his support of "Protecting & Growing Northern Virginia's Economy," "Ensuring a World-Class Education System," "Standing Up For Women's Health," "Protecting Social Security & Medicare," "Improving Northern Virginia's Transportation Network," "Fighting for Federal Employees & Retirees," "Protecting Our Troops, Veterans, & Military Families," "Reforming the Health Insurance System," and "Energy, the Environment, & Public Health." Connolly has been vocal in his support of Planned Parenthood and other women's health organizations and extremely critical of republicans who have sought to defund those organizations.⁶⁵

Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ) received \$5,000. Frelinghuysen voted to defund Planned Parenthood. His stance has become progressively more hostile towards women's health protections over the years.⁶⁶

Kay Granger (R-TX) received \$2,500. Like Tom Cole, Kay Granger has kept a statement on her website since fall of 2015 denouncing Planned Parenthood for "horrific and shocking allegations" against the organization. As with Cole, the facts as they have been revealed have not prompted her to remove this statement from her website. Granger opposes a woman's right to choose abortion, and has voted to defund Planned Parenthood.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Totten, Gloria. "Americans Overwhelmingly Support Abortion Rights." *The Hill*. Oct. 13, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/healthcare/300703-americans-overwhelmingly-support-abortion-rights>

⁶⁵ Connolly, Gerry. <https://connolly.house.gov/>. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017.

⁶⁶ "Rodney Frelinghuysen." *Wikipedia*. Accessed. Jan. 16, 2017. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodney_Frelinghuysen

⁶⁷ Granger, Kay. "Weekly E-Newsletter: A Woman's Take." *Kaygranger.house.gov*. Sept. 22, 2015. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <https://kaygranger.house.gov/womans-take>

Crescent Hardy (R-NV) received \$2,500. Hardy has been put “On Notice” by Emily’s List, a fundraising platform for pro-choice Democratic women candidates, for what they call his “radical anti-woman and anti-family agenda.” Hardy has voted repeatedly to defund Planned Parenthood.⁶⁸

David Jolly (R-FL) received \$10,000. Jolly introduced legislations “to fully defund taxpayer support for Planned Parenthood until a thorough investigation is completed, and instead transfer that funding to other providers of critical non-abortion women’s healthcare in underserved communities.”⁶⁹

Michael Roberson (R-N) received \$2,500. A NVDems.com press release states that in an interview with Steve Sebelius, “Roberson talked at length about his opposition to an earned path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, his opposition to Wall Street reform and his plan to defund Planned Parenthood.”⁷⁰

Jackie Walorski (R-IN) received \$10,000. Walorski’s fundamental ignorance with respect to abortion practices and her disregard for facts is on full display in a WNDU article, where she is quoted saying, “I am thoroughly disgusted that Planned Parenthood, the country’s largest abortion provider, would engage in selling baby body parts. As a former state legislator, I’ve continually voted to protect the sanctity of life by defunding Planned Parenthood...It’s completely inhumane that anyone would want to profit from the death of children, first by

⁶⁸ “Congressman Hardy Kicks Off 2016 with Vote Against Women’s Health.” *Emily’s List*. Jan. 6, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://emilyslist.org/news/entry/congressman-hardy-kicks-off-2016-with-vote-against-womens-health>

⁶⁹ See Gillin.

⁷⁰ Nevada Democrats. “Roberson’s Primary Woes Continue.” *NVDems.com*. May 23, 2016. <http://nvdems.com/press/robersons-primary-woes-continue/>

dismembering them and then by selling their organs piece by piece. This horrific abuse demands a response from Congress immediately.”⁷¹

Lee Zelden (R-NY) received \$5,000. Emily’s List put Zelden “On Notice,” with the statement that “From praising... Donald Trump to cosponsoring a national abortion ban himself, Congressman Lee Zeldin has made it clear that he has no interest in looking out for women and families in his district.”⁷²

McAndrews & Forbes is not alone in making contributions to a huge number of anti-choice republicans. Procter Gamble made contributions totaling at least \$326,350 to a PAC which gave 36% of it to Democrats and a whopping 64% to Republicans. Recipients include anti-choice and anti-LGBTQ lawmakers such as Ralph Abraham (R-LA), Lou Barletta (R-PA), Rob Bishop (R-UT), Diane Black (R-TN), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), Michael Burgess (R-TX), Steve Chabot (R-OH), Warren Davidson (R-OH), Bob Dold (R-IL), Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ), Bob Goodlatte (R-VA), George Holding (R-NC), Lynn Jenkins (R-KS), Bill Johnson (R-OH), Jim Jordan (R-OH), David Joyce (R-OH), Jim Renacci (R-OH), Tom Rice (R-SC), Peter Roskam (R-IL), and many, many more.⁷³

The companies that own women’s magazines make fewer political contributions and lean a little bit more to the left than these giant product makers. The Hearst Corporation gave just slightly more money to Congressional Republicans than Democrats, however, it donated \$32,737 to Hillary Clinton for President, \$2,495 to Bernie Sanders, \$1,000 to John Kasich, and only \$260 to Donald Trump. Hearst also gave to Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), Nydia Velasquez (D-NY),

⁷¹ “Rep. Walorski, Sen. Coats Respond to Controversial Planned Parenthood Video.” *WNDU.Com*. Jul. 15, 2015. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.wndu.com/home/headlines/Rep-Walorski-Sen-Coats-respond-to-controversial-Planned-Parenthood-video-315391511.html>

⁷² “Congressman Lee Zeldin Puts Extreme Agenda Ahead of Women and Families in New York State.” Emily’s List. Sept. 18, 2015. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.emilyslist.org/news/entry/congressman-lee-zeldin-puts-extreme-agenda-ahead-of-women-and-families-in-n>

⁷³ See McAndrews & Forbes, *Center for Responsive Politics*.

Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Martin O'Malley (D), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Scott W. Taylor (R-VA), Paul Ryan (R-WI), and Nancy Pelosi (D-CA).⁷⁴ While there are some serious opponents of women's rights on this list, such as Kevin McCarthy, John Kasich, Scott Taylor, and Paul Ryan, they pale in comparison to the multitude of anti-choice politicians supported by McAndrews & Forbes and Procter Gamble. However, there is little separation between Hearst and these companies when one considers the companies advertise in all of the magazines published by Hearst. There is a fluid exchange between the advertisers and the magazines. Should those magazines not be discriminating and held accountable in regards to what kind of companies they are propping up within their publications? Should women not be righteous in demanding that the publications we look to for news, information, entertainment, and yes, advertising, do not host advertising from companies that demonstrably oppose women's rights by way of their political donations?

Conde Nast gives almost no money to Republicans. In 2016, Conde Nast gave nearly \$100,000 to Hillary Clinton, \$6,237 to Bernie Sanders, and made donations to Kamala D. Harris (D-CA), Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ), Jason Kander (D-MO), Anna Throne-Holst (D-NY), David Orentlicher (D-IN), Joe Kennedy III (D-MA), Tony Cardenas (D-CA), Mike Lee (R-UT), PG Sittenfeld (D-OH), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Lindy Li (D-PA), Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), John Kasich (R), Russ Feingol (D-WI). Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Jonathan Chane (D-FL), and Zephyr Teachout (D-NY). As is the case with Hearst, Conde Nast is host to advertising from companies that throw a massive amount of money behind conservative candidates who vote against women's interests. If women harnessed their potential power to

⁷⁴ See Hearst Corp., *Center for Responsive Politics*.

influence advertisers, we could impact the kind of advertising that we are exposed to in purchasing our favorite magazines and maybe even the products themselves.

And it is by no means just the giant cosmetics and media companies and producers of household products that are exploiting women's empowerment for profit. The fitness chain, Equinox, recently released a social media ad campaign that features graphic images of a breast cancer survivor revealing her naked mastectomies and being tattooed by another woman. These are powerful images—albeit slightly confusing when the viewer considers that women's actual breasts are still considered pornographic and taboo, while images of a woman with her breasts removed by scalpel are considered empowering. That is not to say that seeing unfiltered images of women who have had mastectomies is not important for the purpose of educating and promoting awareness and acceptance surrounding breast cancer, but that these images are heavily glamorized and being used in the context of advertising by a company that otherwise does nothing demonstrable for women's causes, is a concern. It reveals a strong disconnect between the use of advertising that exploits women's empowerment as a lure, and furthering women's progress in real and substantial ways.

This is a manipulation of the consumer, not an empowerment for the people. An empowerment for the people would be if this image of a woman post-mastectomy was not glamorized and exploited for the purposes of garnering gym memberships, and was instead connected to an actual effort to benefit real women. Equinox's social media advertisements were immediately lauded by many women as “powerful,” “moving,” “inspiring,” and “totally groundbreaking,” among other things.⁷⁵ An earnest search of Equinox's initiatives on behalf of women produced nothing.

⁷⁵ @Equinox. *Instagram*. Jan. 3, 2017. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017.

Equinox Fitness is a subsidiary of The Related Companies, a major real estate developer which was founded by Stephen M. Ross and is chaired by Ross, Jeff T. Blau (CEO), and Bruce A. Beal (President).⁷⁶ Out of 15 top executives at Related, just one is a woman, Kimberly Sherman Stamler who, among other things, sits on the board of a nonprofit called Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW).⁷⁷ That was as close to supporting women that I could find evidence for on behalf of Equinox. Neither Equinox nor Related claim to put any real focus on issues that pertain to actual women. They simply profit off of the exploitation of breast cancer survivors.

Curves International, a gym designed “specifically and exclusively for women,” uses an extremely corny brand of women’s empowerment to sell gym memberships at a place where everything is pink and “special” just for women. The founder of Curves, Gary Heavin, has been a controversial figure due to his well-known support for anti-choice activism. In 2004, Heavin was criticized for revoking donations to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation (“SGK”) after he found out that SGK allocates funds to Planned Parenthood. Curves’ business was noticeably impacted by the controversy, proving that when women are informed about the ways that companies are working contrary to our interests, we are powerful in choosing to respond.⁷⁸ While these companies and many others use women’s empowerment in their advertising, they remain complicit in the disempowerment of women at the highest levels.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BOzZiIhgyz5/?taken-by=equinox>

⁷⁶ “The Related Companies.” *Wikipedia*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Related_Companies

⁷⁷ Stamler, Kimberly Sherman. Accessed Jan. 16, 2016. www.Related.com/our-company/executives/24/Kimberly-Sherman-Stamler

⁷⁸ “Curves International.” *Wikipedia*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curves_International

In the article, “How to Destroy the Business Model of Breitbart and Fake News,”⁷⁹ Pagan Kennedy discusses the ways in which activists can influence companies to remove their ads from websites that promote hate speech, bullying, and violence. The only thing Kennedy fails to mention in the article is that, conversely, websites allow many ads and endless “clickbait” to occupy the periphery of their news content, which directly contradicts its message. If one is reading an article about a mass shooting, a promotion for NRA membership seems inappropriate, but that is what occurred recently while I was reading an article in DailyKos. There is a serious problem with advertising which is incongruous with the content that it accompanies, as well as the problem of advertisers indiscriminately supporting abhorrent content, as Kennedy discusses.

Kennedy demonstrates the opportunity which is arising for consumers and voters to influence the news and media landscape and, possibly, to effectuate political change through consumer activism.

[A] Twitter group called Sleeping Giants became the hub of the new movement. The Giants and their followers have communicated with more than 1,000 companies and nonprofit groups whose ads appeared on Breitbart, and about 400 of those organizations have promised to remove the site from future ad buys...[T]hey sent screenshots to companies like Chase, SoFi and Audi to prove their ads appeared next to offensive content. Within hours, they received their first response, and they realized that they had stumbled across a potentially powerful tactic.⁸⁰

This group is an example of how, when people organize an activist stance, it is actually possible to influence media, advertising, and the overreaching forces in our lives which seek to take advantage of a general lack of awareness in the consumer.

They say [it is] about giving consumers and advertisers control over where their money goes...[T]he screenshot activists are

⁷⁹ Kennedy, Pagan. “How to Destroy the Business Model of Breitbart and Fake News.” The New York Times. Jan. 7, 2017. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/07/opinion/sunday/how-to-destroy-the-business-model-of-breitbart-and-fake-news.html>

⁸⁰ See Kennedy.

forcing companies to pick a side. After pressure from consumers, Kellogg's became one of the first big brands to announce it would remove its ads from Breitbart News...[A] new consumer movement is rising, and activists believe that where votes failed, wallets may prevail...[C]onsumer activism might be especially effective because so many people feel they have no other way to express their opposition to Trump-ian values.⁸¹

The key is “consumer activism.” By the same principle that Kennedy discusses, women could hold a much greater degree of sway over the interests of advertisers and product makers, if we insisted that they support the women who support them.

IV. The Internet is a Place (Where Feminism Happens)

The advent of the internet enabled, among other things, many advancements in accessing and disseminating information, provided more opportunities for people to devote themselves to causes of every variety, criminals and hackers a new universe to conquer and utilize to their advantage, and a new age in feminism which has come to be embraced by millions of people, men and women, despite plenty of disagreement about what feminism means and what it aims to achieve and whether or not there is a need for it at all. The internet (and the invention of smartphones) has changed journalism, news, and social dynamics across many spectrums. The internet has given voice to anyone who wants to have one—an equally beautiful and terrifying thing. It has given us something that magazines could never give us, and that is the ability to truly participate, and to ignore a large portion of the advertising that is directed at us. Online versions of some of the magazines I have mentioned, such as Marie Claire and Glamour explore much more serious subject matter, having bandwidth far exceeding the normal pagecount. While reading those publications online, one is exposed to far less advertising for products from big purveyors and we are instead targeted by focused, algorithmically derived advertising which

⁸¹ See Kennedy.

frequently becomes almost invisible to us. There is also a more democratic sensibility about the medium itself. If “the medium is the message,” then the message of women’s magazines is that beauty is the key to independence, power and wealth, and the message of the internet is that the medium is what you make it, that so long as the internet is free, democracy lives. The message of the internet, no matter how deranged it gets, is that justice is sought and those who seek it will not rest.

The easily accessible power to speak to a potentially vast audience has prompted the voices of women and others who have felt marginalized by misogyny, patriarchy and governments that ignore the voices of the disenfranchised despite the impact on the economy and the role of those disenfranchised classes in furthering the general well-being and survival of the human race.

The internet has been a successful platform for establishing awareness and fueling activity of the masses regarding a number of important civil rights matters, at the same time that it has been a battleground and continues to be so. Same-sex marriage may never have gained the support that it has, which was necessary for it to be legalized, had it not been for the internet’s immense reach and potential in building consensus. Racial issues which have plagued America since its beginnings are right now being discussed and argued by millions who are concerned about racial inequality and police violence. And women’s civil rights, which for so long were fought in the home and in the streets and in the workplace and eventually in the battlefield (and continue to be), are now fought on the internet as well. There is so much potential to close divides on the internet, to fill in the gaps of distance and difference, if we could just find a way to build the bridges that we need to cross.

It would be impossible to measure the degree to which women's objectives have actually been advanced due to internet activity, that is, as a result of all of the blogging, the fighting, the petitioning, the youtubing, the posting, the emailing, the founding of serious women's activist websites, and the organizing of events such as the Women's March on Washington which took the whole world by storm on January 21, 2017, the day after Donald Trump's inauguration.⁸² But it is safe to say that the internet has made women's rights, and questions about what feminism means and why it is a relevant political movement, more common and more central topics of daily conversation in any given company in a way that no other medium has succeeded in doing in the past. The internet made it possible to spread the word of the Women's March far and wide, resulting in over 600 marches in solidarity worldwide.⁸³

At the same time that it has given women and feminists the ability to speak and be heard more widely than ever, the web has given the same ability to those who are threatened by women's progress. Unfortunately, the discourse of the internet is not always of the highest order, and many find it not uncommon to experience feelings of anger, disgust and disappointment at the behavior and attitudes of some of our fellow human beings while perusing the web. Even the President of the United States has seized on the power of communicating with the whole world via the web. The internet is a participatory medium, a realm of wide-ranging activity, so that consuming content on the internet is a completely different experience from consuming hardcopy. As I have discussed previously, magazines and print media are a "safe space." The internet is, essentially, the Wild West. However, it is that frontier quality that makes it ideal for activism (if not, unfortunately, despotism).

⁸² "Women's March on Washington." Jan. 21, 2017. <https://www.womensmarch.com/>

⁸³ "Women's March on Washington: Historic Protest Three Times Larger Than Trump's Inaugural Crowd." *Democracy Now*. Accessed Jan. 23, 2017. https://www.democracynow.org/2017/1/23/womens_march_millions_take_to_streets

Never before has the fight for women’s rights been more public, more popular, or more diverse in its participants than it is now that it is also being played out on the internet. Never has the word feminism been more ubiquitous or more heartily embraced by youth culture, even at the same time that it continues to be heavily maligned by its opponents, of which there are many.⁸⁴ In the age of the internet and in the hands of a generation of millennials, feminism may see its golden age yet, but it certainly will not be without a valiant and enduring effort on the part of feminists dedicated to real political action.

In 2001, when I was 22 years old I joined a now defunct group blog called HormonalBitch.Com. It was no more complicated than a page with changing “skins” written in HTML with web-based Movable Type self-publishing software, but to those of us who were discovering the capabilities of the internet for the first time, it was pure magic. I was given the password and allowed to write anything I felt like. Amazing, I thought. I had always loved to write, always felt that I had something to say, yet had very little public outlet before the internet came along. Sudden I had the power to broadcast my thoughts and opinions to the whole world. And so could other women who had something to say. I eventually started my own blog, ByBeautyDamned.Com, where I wrote about politics and whatever was in the news and, again, anything that was on my mind. I was a member of a group called “The Progressive Blog Alliance,” bloggers who all spoke out regularly against the practices and policies of neo-conservatives and the George W. Bush presidency. I quickly discovered the ease with which I could provoke the White Christian Male and Female to distraction by posting my opinions about politics. They made it very clear to me that I had no business speaking at all. But speak I did. And I could not be stopped. The internet is a place where, as of now, we cannot be stopped. Not

⁸⁴ Reid, Rebecca. “Welcome to the Red Pill: The angry men's rights group that ‘knows what women want’.” The Telegraph. Nov. 13, 2015. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/red-pill-mens-rights-anti-feminist-group-who-know-what-women-want/>

that it prohibits the White Christian Male and Female from telling us to shut up, but we do not have to shut up. And consequently, neither do they.

The internet is fraught with unknowns and potential volatility. It is impossible to examine in the same way that one can examine a magazine. Cyberspace is a whole galaxy while a magazine is a small, self-contained planet. What is the internet good for as far as feminism is concerned and where does it succeed where women's magazines fail? The answer is in activism. But the kind of activism that we engage in on the internet is hard and often feels pointless, even if it keeps the dialogue going and allows us to exercise our voices and influence. So sometimes we just want to flip through some glossy, beautiful *thing*, even if it is filled with propaganda and faux-activism. I understand, I get it, but the opportunity exists for us to challenge our exploitation. The internet is one very important place where we can convene and organize, speak truth to power, as well as facilitate in-person protest.

V. Feminism in Politics and Activism

When I began writing this thesis, I was certain that by the time I finished it, we would have our first woman president. Despite the fact that Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by 3 million ballots, she lost to Donald Trump in the dastardly Electoral College. This fact is to many, myself included, an actual travesty of justice. Throughout the weeks since the election, many people, me included, have grappled with a sense of shock and genuine horror at what has transpired during and as a result of this election. As I write, Donald Trump is getting ready to install his cabinet of genuine reprobates into the highest offices of the United States government.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ "Donald Trump's Cabinet Is Taking Shape." *The New York Times*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/politics/donald-trump-administration.html>

In the aftermath of what was, to many, one of the most painful and drawn out presidential elections in history, in which (much to the dismay of many feminists) a majority of white women (many of whom consider themselves feminists) voted for Trump, but the majority of women and voters overall voted for Hillary Clinton,⁸⁶ in which gender played a central role in all aspects of the presidential race, feminists endeavor to find a way forward. We, that is, those of us who strive to define ourselves in a world still dominated by wealthy white men, are left with a sense that perhaps the battle is insurmountable. Many feminists feel that we faced down the patriarchy and the patriarchy won.⁸⁷ Others feel that Trump does not pose a threat to women's rights at all.⁸⁸ Both sides find it very difficult to understand each other or to forge any sort of unity. Feminism is, and always has been, beset with conflicting ideologies about what feminism is supposed to achieve and how common objectives can be met despite strong disagreement among women about what those objectives are.

Entering the Whitehouse in January 2017 is one of the most anti-woman presidential cabinets most Americans have ever seen. The new Vice President, Mike Pence, has pursued an extremely conservative agenda that has pitted the governorship of Indiana against women, minorities and the LGBTQ community.⁸⁹ His presence in the new administration can only be a negative omen for upholding any progress that has been made by the Obama administration—

⁸⁶ Foran, Clare. "Women Aren't Responsible for Hillary Clinton's Defeat." *The Atlantic*. Nov. 13, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/hillary-clinton-white-women-vote/507422/>

⁸⁷ Goldberg, Michelle. "The Empire Strikes Back." *Slate*. Dec. 26, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2016/12/_2016_was_the_year_the_feminist_bubble_burst.html

⁸⁸ Chira, Susan. "'You Focus on the Good': Women Who Voted for Trump, in Their Own Words." *The New York Times*. Jan. 14, 2017. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/14/us/women-voters-trump.html>

⁸⁹ Schumaker, Erin. "Mike Pence's Defining Moment As Governor? Enabling An HIV Outbreak." *The Huffington Post*. Oct. 6, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/mike-pence-indiana-hiv_us_57f53b9be4b002a7312022ef

however it be judged by history—over the past 8 years. Other Trump cabinet picks, such as Jeff Sessions, are equally disconcerting with respect to women’s rights.⁹⁰

If we, feminists, human rights activists, can cultivate a better understanding of our power as citizens, and harness our influence as voters, as protestors, as patriots who love our country and cannot abide a government of tyrants, we may stand a chance against an administration which has already all but excluded us, the opposition, from its agenda. But we cannot allow ourselves to be distracted.

Who we elect for office throughout the nation—not just to the presidency, but to all of the factions of municipal and state government, is one important way that we can make an impact on the big political moves which are affecting women’s lives. But what to do when so many women vote contrary to women’s interests? Feminism is not just a cultural phenomenon, it is a political position (whether or not those who claim the label of feminism actually view it as such). The failure to elect Hillary Clinton constitutes an important historical moment for feminism and for women as a demographic, whether one views it as good or bad or neither. Naturally, controversy is plentiful, and the heroines, anti-heroines and icons of women’s media figure prominently. Gloria Steinem, Whoopi Goldberg, Oprah Winfrey, and many other famous and influential and controversial women came out in support of Clinton. However, many young feminists were ardent Bernie Sanders supporters who, in the end, found themselves preferring Trump over Clinton.⁹¹

To feminists who felt that electing our first woman president was imperative, it was evident that sexism played a major part in the election, but that sexism ran deeper and wider than

⁹⁰ Kelly, Hillary. “Attorney General Nominee Jeff Sessions Is Lying Through His Teeth if He Says He’ll Protect Women’s Rights.” *Glamour Magazine*. Jan. 10, 2017. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.glamour.com/story/attorney-general-nominee-jeff-sessions-is-lying-through-his-teeth-if-he-says-hell-protect-womens-rights>

⁹¹ See Chira.

many anticipated. While we were certain many men would vote against Clinton simply for the sin of being a woman, “never-Trump” feminists banked on the assumption that women would be so offended by Trump’s abhorrent language about women and his history of abuse and infidelity that they would feel obligated to vote for Hillary Clinton, if not for her qualifications, at least to take a stand against the disrespect of all women that Trump represents.

We were wrong. If anything, the revelation of him as a “typical man” prompted a different line of thinking, one that relies on long-held and well-cherished stereotypes: He is disgusting, yes, but that’s what men are, what they are supposed to be, and it is a comfort to know that he is exactly what he is supposed to be, a man. In a recent New York Times piece profiling women who voted for Trump “in their own words” quoted one woman as saying, “Trump’s not a perfect man, by any means. He kind of reminds me of my ex-husband. I think he’s a really good man, deep down.”⁹² Other women cited his success as a business man. He is a great success by his own dubious standards and can be trusted to be as good of a man as any man, which is pretty terrible if the general cynicism of the American people is to be taken as representative, but still better than any woman.⁹³ A woman running for President of the United States is a woman trying to be something that she is not supposed to be. And apparently there is nothing any man can do that is worse than a woman trying to occupy a space to which her sex prohibits her.

There are undoubtedly other lines of thinking that led people to vote for Donald Trump, however, through the lens of the political, activist feminist, the subliminal and subconsciously sexist mentality of the American voter, both man and woman, played an undeniable role in the failure to elect our first woman president.

⁹² See Chira.

⁹³ Bush, Daniel. “The Hidden Sexism That Could Sway the Election.” *PBS.Org*. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/features/hidden-sexism/>

Almost half of eligible Americans chose not to vote in the 2016 election. The reasons for this poor turnout are numerous. Unfortunately, they can generally be summed up to the pervasive sense that politicians never do anything for their constituents, that they are entirely self-serving, arrogant and morally bankrupt, that the entire system is rotten at its core and there is nothing that anyone can do to change it given the options that continue to appear on our ballots. Many American women admit to voting for Donald Trump because they feel that even if he “wrecks the system,” it could not be worse than the system as it currently stands.⁹⁴ Convoluting matters even further is the high approval rating of our outgoing President, Barack Obama and the simultaneous repeal of the Affordable Care Act by Republicans.⁹⁵ What seemed like logical presumptions at one time, have turned out to be skewed or flat-out wrong.

It is important to recognize the ways in which victimized groups do not necessarily understand or relate to one another nor do people necessarily group themselves or identify with others who suffer many of the same injustices and/or indignities. There are nuances to every experience that are not universal to all. For this reason all women don't agree on matters of gender and feminism, all Black people do not agree on issues of race, all Jews do not agree on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, all Latinos do not agree on immigration, and so on.

A part of white privilege is the lack of necessity or expectation of agreement between Caucasians. There has never been a need for Caucasians to form a movement as the White Christian Male and [Happily Subjugated] Female (“WCMHSF”) have always had the upper hand (of course, this has not stopped them from forming the KKK, the NRA, and the Alt-Right). Now

⁹⁴ McCrummen, Stephanie. “Finally. Someone Who Thinks Like Me.” *The Washington Post*. Oct. 1, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/finally-someone-who-thinks-like-me/2016/10/01/c9b6f334-7f68-11e6-9070-5c4905bf40dc_story.html?utm_term=.a303d8ff9ed7

⁹⁵ Jackson, David M. “New poll has Trump approval rating at 37%, Obama at 55%.” *USA Today*. Jan. 10, 2017. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/01/10/donald-trump-barack-obama-quinnipiac-poll/96397974/>

that the WCMHSF's unshakeable majority is beginning to crumble, ever so slowly, like molasses, really, it has not been a pretty sight to see the reaction among those who would wish to maintain the status of a White Christian Majority. The backlash has been staggering. The WCMHSF power structure is at a literal apex of delamination, and it is not coming to heel without an ugly fight nor does it appear to be losing the battle in any sense of the word.

The election demonstrated all too clearly the enduring appeal of the white male dominated system of politics and capitalism as a dependable strength to “guide America [back] to greatness.”⁹⁶ Donald Trump's purported acumen as a salesman seemed to appeal to voters more than just about anything.⁹⁷ The American people have been trained to buy, and buy they did. Aside from those who bought into Trump with confidence, the country is full of young people who are disillusioned with the America that they have inherited, young people who found it very difficult to put their faith in Hillary Clinton of the old guard of politics, no matter how new her gender to the office of the presidency.⁹⁸ Despite her many qualifications, her appeal was limited in parts of the country that still have strong reservations about women taking power.⁹⁹

So where do we start in addressing the problems that became so starkly revealed during the election and that have long plagued this country, such as sexism, racism and xenophobia? We have plenty of work cut out for us. Many women (and even some men) see a need for feminism as part of the necessary framework for addressing the problems we face. Corporatism and capitalism have become the very foundation of our culture, politics and economy in the U.S. The

⁹⁶ Beinart, Peter. “Fear of a Female President.” *The Atlantic*. October 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/10/fear-of-a-female-president/497564/>

⁹⁷ See Chira.

⁹⁸ Bazelon, Emily. “Why Did College-Educated White Women Vote for Trump?” *The New York Times*. Nov. 15, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/20/magazine/donald-trumps-america-pennsylvania-women.html>

⁹⁹ See Bush.

only logical way to achieve any kind of cultural, political or economic change is through that system.

While feminists have not, historically speaking, ever formed a cohesive voting block or truly stood as one ideologically aligned movement, millions of women marched on Washington and in marches in over 600 locations across the world on January 21, 2017, the day after Donald Trump's inauguration. More than ever, women have made it clear that they will continue what has been a long, hard fight for women. There has never been a more important time to elect people, particularly women, who will stand up for women's rights. The fact of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's death and the matter of a replacement who will now be appointed by Donald Trump should make women who support women's health and reproductive rights, equal pay and justice for all, especially determined to elect leaders who will prioritize the defense and progress of these endeavors.

Many young women do not prioritize the importance of women coming to power in order to achieve political representation specifically for women, and they find themselves more drawn to socialist ideals than feminist ideals.¹⁰⁰ Feminism has never been one unified camp. It has always been a fractured and deeply imperfect movement, and the current politics of our country have never been more illustrative of the divide in thinking that exists between women. And yet feminists have still accomplished a great deal despite a historic lack of cohesion.

If feminists continue to neglect the imperative topic of how we spend our money and how we can tap into our economic power to help ourselves and other women, as long as we continue with navel gazing and the gullible consumption of faux empowerment, as long as we fail to commit our energy to women's education, healthcare, income and employment equality, human

¹⁰⁰ Bruenig, Elizabeth. "Why Are Millennial Women Gravitating to Bernie Sanders?" *New Republic*. Feb. 9, 2016. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <https://newrepublic.com/article/129483/millennial-women-gravitating-bernie-sanders>

rights within the judicial system, and the election of women to public office, much of the progress that women have made in the past 100 years could be dismantled by a resilient white male hegemony. There are no compromises to be made. Women must be galvanized, not by notions of beauty and sexuality and the power of the pout, but by the promise of equality and justice, of adequate female representation within the system that wields so much power in our lives, and by our own untapped potential.

We must also look beyond media, at real people who are working every day to help women gain standing in society and in the world. We must evaluate the concrete ways that we can be a part of that work. Numerous organizations exist to assist women in challenging or disempowered circumstances. Many law firms and nonprofits in the United States work together and foster initiatives to provide pro bono legal assistance to women as well as broader women's outreach programs. Immigration Equality helps LGBTQ people from regions throughout the world to seek and gain asylum in the United States from persecution in their home countries.¹⁰¹ Her Justice provides legal assistance to indigent women with regard to family and matrimonial matters.¹⁰² The Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund provides a wide range of services to transgender individuals, including legal name changes.¹⁰³ These are just a few of the organizations that exist for the purpose of evening the playing field for women and the LGBTQ population.

One topic of feminism that is not discussed nearly enough is the curriculum of women's studies and women's history, which should be taught in school at the earliest stages. If gender studies, women's studies and women's history were taught in schools, feminism would be a much stronger movement by default. We often see feminists called out for a lack of shared

¹⁰¹ Immigration Equality. <https://www.immigrationequality.org/>. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017.

¹⁰² Her Justice. <http://herjustice.org/>. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017.

¹⁰³ Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund. <http://tldef.org/>. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017.

purpose and message, and yet it is just one more success of the patriarchy that educational texts detailing women's achievements have been omitted from most school curriculum in this country. There has been a total failure in the United States to teach women's achievements on par with men's achievements, and the common perception is still extremely skewed in favor of the assumption that women have simply not achieved the great things that men have achieved. Any women's history major can tell you that this is just not true. But the average person is not being educated in this respect.

Feminism is not about beauty routines or "self-care," but about self-respect and the respect of others, it is about all people being treated fairly at work, at home, at the supermarket, and in the halls of power. Feminists are coming to understand our power at the same time that we are confronted with the limits of it. The 2016 election has shaken many Americans and left many others feeling apathetic. Those who are systematically holding women and minorities back from achieving truly equal treatment under the laws and constitution of the United States have been operating in that interest for centuries. They have done their best to preclude women and minorities from parity with white men in business and politics.

We do not always have control over where our money goes. But what we do control, unequivocally, is what we consume and utilize in our homes and in our daily lives. Consumers are becoming more conscientious in these times of global warming and the serious depletion of resources, becoming more wary of the pesticidal contamination and genetic modification of our food, and more concerned with the people, places, and processes that produce the products and goods that we consume. Civilization still has a long way to go in converting to truly sustainable methods of living, but there is a dialogue to address the vividly exploitative and eco-draining means that have long governed capitalist ventures. This change is beginning on the small scale

where real social and political changes always begin: in the average household. More families are mindful of recycling, composting and the basic principles of preservation and conservation, and more people in general are cultivating concern for where their products come from and how they are made and who our purchases benefit.¹⁰⁴

But with the very sharp push from the conservative right to assert that climate change is not real, women's health is not imperiled, racism is not a concern except in that the very mention of it in any discussion is a threat, polluters nor ethics violations need to be investigated or regulated, conservation and preservation are hogwash where an oil pipeline is concerned, and women certainly are not in any way deprived of equality or services, there is a call to apply a more conscientious attitude towards the products we buy, particularly those that are marketed specifically to women and whose proceeds go to funding anti-choice, anti-woman politicians. If we stood up to the many companies that exploit women, we might really achieve meaningful improvements. The ways that we can do this are limitless and remain largely unexplored and untapped.

¹⁰⁴ Baker, Jessi. "The Rise of the Conscious Consumer: Why Businesses Need to Open Up." *The Guardian*. Apr. 2, 2015. Accessed Jan. 16, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2015/apr/02/the-rise-of-the-conscious-consumer-why-businesses-need-to-open-up>

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