

Are Women Nothing More than Sexual Objects?

If an attractive young woman walks down the street wearing lewd, revealing clothing, that does not give anyone the right to touch her or abuse her or rape her. Absolutely, categorically, not. And if an attractive young actress who is willing to appear nude on film meets with an influential producer or director, she is not thereby empowering that person to take advantage of her sexually. Absolutely, categorically not. This is beyond debate or discussion.

The Harvey Weinstens of this world are guilty as charged (assuming the charges are true), and there is no excuse or justification for their actions. Period. Case closed. End of subject.

My question, though, is this: Isn't it hypocritical for a woman to present herself as a sexual object—clearly, intentionally and unambiguously—if she doesn't want to be seen as a sexual object?

To repeat (and I request that my critics quote me fairly): I am not saying that a woman who presents herself as a sexual object deserves to be abused or is asking to be abused. Those who abuse her are guilty, plain and simple, and they are responsible for their actions. No woman in her right mind is asking to be raped or molested.

My question has to do with the larger psyche of our culture, one which ridicules the sexual abusers (rightly so) but then rewards those who sexualize women.

Think of the celebrities who heaped praise on Hugh Hefner when he died on Sept. 27 (from Larry King to Norman Lear and from Jenny McCarthy to Kim Kardashian), and then ask yourself: How can a society that condemns Harvey Weinstein glorify Hugh

Hefner?

To be sure, there were many who were not praising Hefner's legacy, including feminist writer Meghan Murphy who tweeted: "HUGH HEFNER IS GONNA OBJECTIFY US ALL TO FREEEEEEEDOM" and, "The amount of people treating a porn mogul as some kind of civil rights leader who 'empowered women' online rn is gonna make me barf."

And there were more than enough articles written by other women with headlines like these: "Yes, Hugh Hefner was a pioneer—in the objectification of women and the lie of the Playboy lifestyle"; and, "Hugh Hefner Was My Enemy"; and, "Hugh Hefner damaged countless women's lives. Let's not pretend otherwise. Civil rights supporter or not, the *Playboy* icon was a sexual predator, hardly better than Bill Cosby."

But I find it odd that the same voices that are rightly condemning the sexual predators of Hollywood are not at the same time condemning the larger sexual culture of Hollywood, one which makes billions of dollars from female sexuality, often of the most degraded type. (It's not just HBO that glorifies prostitutes and pole dancers.)

Fathers and husbands, would you want your wives or daughters taking their clothes off for millions of people to see? Would you want them doing anything else to flame the fires of male fantasies? Is that not just another form of voyeurism, if not prostitution? And what of the massive abuse of women through pornography?

To say it once more: If women choose to make a living by stripping or having sex on camera, that is between them and God. It does not give anyone the right to touch them without their consent or coerce them into unwanted sex. That, to repeat, is a separate subject.

But what of the hypocrisy of the larger culture? Are we not trying to put out fires with one hand while starting new fires

with the other hand?

Put another way, why are we (wrongly) cultivating a culture that objectifies women as sex objects while (rightly) criticizing those who treat women as sex objects?

Let me give you a case in point.

In response to Taylor Swift's recent music video, "Ready for It," my colleague Larry Tomczak penned an article titled "7 Guidelines for Youth after Taylor Swift Near-nude Video."

He wrote, "As a father and a grandfather, it grieves me to convey some breaking news regarding music superstar Taylor Swift. This multi-gifted artist has now decided to advance her career further by disrobing to a nearly nude image in her just released music video, 'Ready for It.'

"This sweet young starlet who's been a role model and inspiration to millions of youth portrays a sci-fi cyborg prancing around in a state of seeming undress. I viewed the 'shock' presentation one time in order to raise awareness and caution moms, dads, and youth leaders."

Yet Taylor Swift was one of the women honored by *Time Magazine* as "Silence Breakers" for their role in the #MeToo movement. And while her inclusion on *Time's* cover sparked some controversy, none of it that I'm aware of (see here for example) focused on the contradictory messages she was sending.

Tomczak added, "Many of us, upon reading this, ask the legitimate question, 'Why is Taylor doing this?' Her persona has always been distinct from that of a Miley Cyrus, Katy Perry, Nicki Minaj or BeyoncÃ©. We always felt comfortable recommending her music, posters and YouTube videos. Why?

"Your guess is as good as mine, but in today's competitive music world, compromises and concessions are made for fame and

fortune. It's a sad reality.

"What's unsettling is that Taylor is doing this despite her past statements affirming modesty and responsibility to young girls who admire, imitate and look up to her in such an adoring way."

To say it once more: No matter what kind of video Taylor Swift (or anyone else) puts out, no one has the right to force themselves on that person sexually. Ever. Under any circumstances. Have I made myself clear?

But I seriously doubt that a culture wanting to bring about a much-needed moral reform in the sexual abuse of women will reach its goals without looking at the larger issues as well.