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SHAME, GUILT AND SOCIETY'S CONCEPTION OF SEX

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B.A., University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 2002

Thesis

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There is a dominant conception of sex in American society that has profound effects on our sexual lives. Often this can be a negative influence because our society's conception is distorted. My thesis considers how this skewed view on sex and sexuality results in the presence of shame and guilt in our sexual lives. I first define society's conception of sex and present it visually through fashion advertising. Each of the pornographic elements (objectification, submission, hierarchy and violence) utilized in advertising are explained. The advertisements are meant to provide a visual portrayal of society's conception of sex, which is relevant to the concept of the gaze; an important aspect of shame. Second, I provide a philosophical account of shame and guilt. I illustrate how our society's conception of sex can instigate these emotions into our sexual lives even though they are often unfounded. Finally, I attempt to resolve the "invalid shame" and "baseless guilt" we experience in our sexual lives through the notion of "sexual self-respect," which is a variant of the philosophical concept of self-respect. As individuals we have some influence in diminishing the "invalid shame" and "baseless guilt" we experience in our sexual lives. However, society has a responsibility to formulate a conception of sex that is more conducive to our actual lived sexual experiences. Therefore, the solution resides in the give and take relationships between the individual and society, between self-respect and respect and between society and the media. I present these changes in society's conception of sex as the possibility of seeing advertising that utilizes erotic elements rather than pornographic elements, and the use of models that more accurately portray us as sexual beings.

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I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Christopher Preston for his guidance, support and encouragement throughout this project. I would also like to extend my appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Stephen Grimm, Dr. Sean O'Brien and Dr. Casey Charles, for their insights and comments.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mom and step-dad for their love and support; to my sister Anna for her never-ending encouragement and love, to Mickenly for his patience and “positive thinking;” to Andy for his friendship and motivation; to Skye for his 800 miles; and, to all of my friends who endured me through this.

Thank you all. I love you.

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CHAPTER ONE: SOCIETY'S CONCEPTION OF SEX

How society views sex often influences how we view our own sexual lives and ourselves as sexual beings. We are often told by society at large what is sexually appropriate, who is sexy and how one should behave in one's sexual life. Society's construction of sex is idealistic and often fails to include the realities of sex and sexuality. Yet, we are expected as sexual beings to conform to this construction. Complications arise however when we realize that our sexual desires, choices and experiences do not coincide with society's standards. This disjunction between the ideal standards and our actual lived experiences causes us to feel alienated, disconnected and confused about our sexual lives. We begin to doubt who we are as sexual beings and eventually feel shame and guilt associated with our sexual experiences and how we identify ourselves sexually.

This chapter considers the visual representation of American society's construction of sex through magazine advertisements. By emphasizing the visual component of advertisements we find ourselves gazing at the representation of sex in the advertisements that is a reflection of our society's construction of sex. My claim is that viewing this representation, which does not signify our actual lived experience as sexual beings but rather the ideal we aim for, results in a disconnection between the reality of our sexual experiences and the ideal construction we are expected to live, and this produces an emotional reaction of shame and guilt. This has been offered most famously in a feminist context by Simone de Beauvoir's idea that women's identity is constructed from the outside by society's expectations. Beauvoir claims that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the

figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (Beauvoir, 1989, 267).

The chapter will begin with a discussion on advertising in general and how it reflects the views and beliefs in society, with emphasis placed on sex and sexuality. The concept of disconnection will then be introduced and a description of how it affects women, their sexuality and their sexual relationships will be discussed. A description of the representations of society’s conception of sex in magazine advertisements and the use of women and men to portray that conception and their sexual roles within that conception will then be presented. Following the representations a discussion on disconnection and its affects on sex and sexuality will be provided. The female experience will serve as a model to illustrate the effects this disconnection has on how we define our selves as sexual beings and formulate our sexuality. The chapter will conclude with a brief statement on the feelings of shame and guilt that result from the disconnection we experience in our sexual lives due to the representation of America’s conception of sex in magazine advertisements.¹

Evaluating magazine advertisements provides an insightful perspective on the construction of sex in America. In general there is a give and take relationship between the media and American culture. In one respect the media mirrors the American culture by emulating what the ideal is. In another it has the power to influence that culture to change in accordance with how the media portrays that ideal. Advertisements are often

¹ Throughout this chapter society’s conception of sex will be defined and illustrated through examples. The chapter’s discussion will primarily focus on the female experience because women have been sexually portrayed in advertising for decades, and therefore the implications and effects are easier to see through the experience of women.

used to present an image that evokes feelings, moods and ways of being. Sociologists Michael A. Messner and Jeffrey Montez de Oca² term this advertising approach as “lifestyle branding.” Lifestyle branding presents a product through an image or a series of images that creates a desirable and believable world in which consumers are encouraged to place themselves into and see themselves living, experiencing and identifying with (Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005, 1880 and 1882). This constructed world tends to represent the ideal rather than reality, yet it is presented in such a way that makes it seem attainable to the viewer. Lifestyle branding can be used for a plethora of products, such as beer, liquor, perfume, makeup, a clothing line, etc. When this tactic is used more than the product is being promoted; a way of life or of being is also endorsed. This can be seen in magazine advertisements that provide a visual representation of society’s construction of sex. It is not only the product that is for sale, but also the American conception of sex. Advertisements can use lifestyle branding to influence how society views sex and sexuality, and can encourage change to take place in society so that we are pursuing the ideal sexual state rather than accepting and enjoying the actual sexual experiences in our lives.

Advertisements also mirror how the American culture views sex and sexuality. In her essay titled “Where are the clothes? The pornographic gaze in mainstream American fashion advertising” (2006) Debra Merskin claims that “...advertising is a powerful source of information and relator [*sic*] of culture. As a form of cultural text, advertising provides insight into the culture within which it resides and is a useful barometer for measuring sexual permissiveness of a particular era” (Merskin, 2006, 203). Thus what we

² From their article titled “The Male Consumer as Loser: Beer and Liquor Ads in Mega Sports Media Events” (2005).

see in magazine advertisements is accepted by society on one level and reflects the sexual views of society on another. The meaning we derive from advertisements is constructed from widely held beliefs, perceptions and values of society (Merskin, 2006, 204) and advertisements manipulate these in order to create a certain meaning to the viewer.



Image 1: This is an example of a sexual image found in a popular fashion magazine. Society's construction of sex encourages female viewers to relate to such images and incorporate the sexual concepts portrayed into their own sexual lives.³

Ads that provide a visual representation of society's conception of sex build their images upon the existing conception, while at the same time pushing beyond it. Jean Kilbourne argues in her essay "Sexuality and disconnection" (2003) that because mass technology has made it possible for us to be constantly surrounded by sexual and erotic images advertisers have to continuously "push the envelope in order to attract our attention" (Kilbourne, 2003, 180). The result is for us to view ads that are exceedingly

³ This image was found in the March 2008 issue of *W* magazine. It is a part of the issue's "Pin Up" series. It was accessed from www.wmagazine.com on March 6, 2008.

more and more sexual. When we view them we are not only trying to connect to the representation of sex that is accepted by society, but we are also feeling a disconnection to the images because they present a sexual depiction that is not what we actually experience in our sexual lives.

Kilbourne's concept of disconnection is an important aspect of this chapter.

Kilbourne's disconnection can be summarized as the distance, or the breaking of contact, that occurs between our sexual self and our sexual experiences, as well as the distance from ourselves and other sexual beings, because advertising presents sex and sexuality in a way that undermines and devalues it, and does not account for the actual experience of sex that takes place between two, real people, or for the emotions, feelings, fears and pleasures that we each encounter as sexual beings (Kilbourne, 2003, 173 – 180).

Although in her work Kilbourne places emphasis on the use of drugs and alcohol as a result of the disconnection we experience, I would like to argue that shame and guilt is another consequence, and possibly is what precedes the drug and alcohol use Kilbourne addresses. Thus, this chapter will incorporate Kilbourne's concept of disconnection with emphasis placed on shame and guilt resulting.

Using the female experience we can see how disconnection occurs in our sexual lives. As women view advertisements that sexualize females they are trying to connect with the feminine aspect of the ad as well as derive meaning from the ad into their own lives. "The ubiquity of highly sexualized renditions of women further normalizes unrealistic goals and ideas. In this way, advertising takes meaning from a particular context and then uses it to re-create meanings or *re-present* it" (Merskin, 2006, 204).

When one is trying to relate to an ideal representation of sex, sexuality and sexiness it is

necessary to redefine oneself, as none of us are living the ideal. As women we find ourselves aiming toward the goals and ideals that advertisements set for us; no matter how unattainable they may be. Thus we reshape our bodies, refigure our faces and redefine our sexuality in order to be in accordance with the female representations in advertising. The problem is that we are never successful because the depictions are constantly changing and are overall unrealistic.

The relationships women attempt to build with men are affected by advertising and our society's conception of sex. The result is a sexual disconnection between the genders. Fashion advertising is particularly significant in the representation of gender differences. Merskin argues that "[b]y constructing what is sexy, fashion advertising works to reinforce gender differences and sex roles and to perpetuate an ideology of the naturalness of female submission and male dominance" (Merskin, 2006, 204). The representation of submission and dominance in fashion advertising presents a visual depiction of how women and men should act in a sexual act or relationship. This representation has become mainstreamed in the sense that other media utilize it and perpetuate the depiction. The result is that this sexual representation of women and men has come to indicate "normal" and "natural" interactions between the genders (Merskin, 2006, 214). Once again, a disconnection occurs because this representation of gender roles is unacceptable to many of us (both women and men) and it does not relate to how we actually live or interact with each other. Yet the message in advertising is that society supports this relationship of submission and dominance between women and men.

To fully understand and appreciate how our society's construction of sex causes a disconnection and the feelings of shame and guilt in our sexual lives it is helpful to

evaluate the visual representations of society's conception in fashion advertisements.

Through this evaluation we will see society's conception of sex represented in the use of voyeurism and the pornographic elements of objectification, hierarchy, submission and violence commonly found in fashion advertising.⁴

Voyeurism is an important aspect of advertising. This is particularly true for fashion advertisements (Merskin, 2006, 207). In her book titled *The male body: A new look at men in public and private* (1999) Susan Bordo states that fashion magazine advertisements have resulted in a cultural permission to be a voyeur (Bordo, 1999, 170). As voyeurs we are allowed to stare at the models in the advertisements. Our gaze is fixed upon them and we have no constraints in how long or intently we can look. Cultural permission to use the voyeuristic gaze was first permitted to men to gaze upon the sexual depictions of female models (Bordo, 1999, 170). The result is that women who gaze upon an advertisement of a sexualized female are looking at the ad through the gaze of a man. She is seeing the depiction of a female as the male sexual fantasy sees her. Consequently, the female gazer is required to relate to the depiction of a female as a man would, which is sexually, not as how a woman would typically relate which would be on a relationship or emotional level. In addition, women are expected to accept this voyeuristic gaze. They only have anxiety about being stared at if they are considered too old, fat or flat-chested (Bordo, 1999, 173). Our construction of sex supports the notion that a beautiful, thin, sexy woman will always enjoy the gaze of an other.⁵ Finally, women are not only to be

⁴ This discussion on voyeurism and the four pornographic elements used in fashion advertising is based on the work of Debra Merskin's essay "Where are the clothes?" The topic will be revisited in the third chapter.

⁵ In order to maintain a consistent style when another being is referenced it will be presented as "an other". This is relevant to the second chapter when the significance of the gaze of an other is discussed in detail.

comfortable with the gaze of an other but are also socially encouraged to define their self-worth through an other's gaze, and this includes their sexual self-worth.

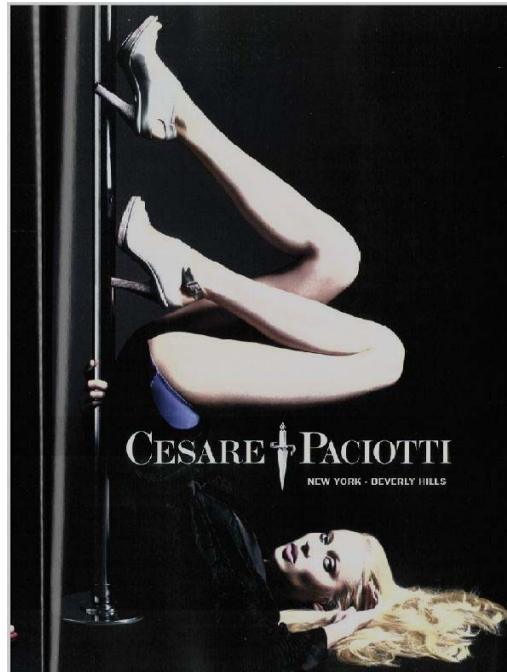


Image 2: This image encourages the gazer to continue looking. The viewer is a voyeur because they do not have to look away. The model is aware of the viewer, but she is going no where. She is in a vulnerable position (upside down) and she is not challenging the viewer; she is simply there to be looked upon.⁶

Voyeurism has the potential to result, for the one being viewed, in the pornographic element of objectification. The experience of objectification is something women are quite familiar with. However, the objectification of women in fashion advertising often takes a pornographic twist. The presentation of women is sexual, but many ads also provide depictions of women cut into pieces reducing them to body parts. Minimizing the whole of a woman is a common theme in pornographic portrayals. This is usually expressed through the separation of the self or being aspect of the woman from her actual body. It is the specific body parts that are of importance, not the woman as a

⁶ This advertisement is part of a series for Cesare Paciotti clothing label. It was seen in the March 2008 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*.

whole. In such depictions “the woman in the picture, and by extension all women, are interesting because of their body parts” (Merskin, 2006, 207). Objectification results in a disintegration of the woman who is equal only to her body parts, and very specific ones at that. Objectification then takes those parts and “re-presents” them as the “whole” of the woman (Merskin, 2006, 207).



Image 3: This advertisement provides an excellent example of the minimization of women common in pornographic advertising. Note how her body is necessary for the ad, but her head is not. Her identity, autonomy, ideas and voice are irrelevant. She is silenced and reduced to her body parts.⁷

Objectification is evident in an ad for Kieselstein-Cord. “In the ad, we see a woman wrapped in two leather belts and nothing else. Her naked torso is shown from head to hip. She is looking forward with wet and parted lips. In addition, the model’s breast and nipple are revealed in the crux of her elbow. Obviously, she is displaying belts,

⁷ This image is from an ad for Taryn Rose clothing. It was found in the March 2008 issues of *Harper’s Bazaar* and *ELLE*.

but she is equally displayed as a sex object” (Merskin, 2006, 207).⁸ When a female views such an ad she is receiving the message that she is not a complete being, but rather only valued for certain aspects of her body. Disconnection begins here, but it could turn into alienation if the female is repulsed by her own body in comparison to the body depicted in the ad. Due to the nature of the ad the female will look at her own breasts, stomach, buttocks, etc. independently as an object. She will not see her body as a whole and therefore will not see how her breasts, stomach or buttocks look in relation to her whole body, her whole being and her whole self.



Image 4: This is an ad for Marc Jacob’s fragrance “Daisy.” The objectification present is an almost nude model lying in a field of grasses and weeds holding a huge bottle of perfume. None of the elements of this ad are related to one another. The model is as much an object as the bottle of perfume.⁹

An additional consequence of objectification is the effect that it has on a woman’s sexuality and desire (Kilbourne, 2003, 173). When women see a female presented as a sexual object she sees females limited to being merely sexual objects. A female’s

⁸ Unfortunately, I could not find the Kieselstein-Cord ad discussed. However, the analysis presented applies to the Marc Jacobs advertisement as well. When a woman views this ad she is comparing her body to the model’s and the ground work for disconnection is established.

⁹ This advertisement was found in the March 2008 issue of *ELLE*.

sexuality, as defined by society's conception of sex, does not go beyond this presentation of being an object. Women are restricted as sexual beings and refrained from experiencing their complete sexuality. Also, when a female sees that society only views women as sexual objects her desire for sexual experiences is diminished, as there is nothing sexually arousing about being viewed as a thing. Furthermore, the objectification of women's bodies in magazine advertisements restricts the relationship a woman has with her body. Kilbourne argues that this "make[s] it more difficult for her to feel safely 'embodied' and thus further[s] a sense of dissociation" (Kilbourne, 2003, 179). The relationship of the female with her body as hers is halted. She is being told how her body is defined by society and ultimately how she is defined as a sexual being; as an object.

Hierarchy, another pornographic element often used in fashion advertising, is typically portrayed through the representation of power and control. In many of these ads the woman takes on a childlike image. Her dress and pose is childish and she is "...partially concealed, coyly turning away from the camera, or appears psychologically disengaged from the situation" (Merskin, 2006, 206). If a man is present in the advertisement he is usually standing over her or behind her in the shadows (Merskin, 2006, 206). Another type of hierarchy is a woman in a vulnerable pose inviting the reader to watch her, to look at her and to evaluate her.

A two-page ad for Marc Jacob's shoes presents a woman on her back, positioned sideways to the viewer. She wears a black-strapped dress and black high-heeled shoes. Her right ankle has a tattoo. In both images, she looks directly at the viewer. In the first, she has partially lifted her hips as if to roll over backward like a ball. In the process, her dress has slipped to her waist revealing a tease of white underwear. Her arms are bent over her head, suggesting she is about to roll up and over. In the second image, she has rolled further up and onto her shoulders, elevating her hips, and revealing her bare bottom. In both photographs, she meets the reader's gaze and invites him or her to watch. She is available. She is not walking away. (Merskin, 2006, 206-207)



Image 5: Although this is not the Marc Jacobs ad discussed the pose the model takes in this photo is the same as the one discussed in the above description, except for the gaze of this model is not directed toward the viewer.¹⁰

In this ad a woman is knowingly exposing herself and allowing herself to be watched. She is not challenging the viewer to look away in any capacity. Nor is she empowered by the situation. The impression of the scene is that she is complying willingly, but her indifference and lack of emotion eliminates any sense of ownership of herself on her part. The reader does not look at this ad and think that they are looking at a woman who is doing what she wants and is confident with that. There is no sense of security, assuredness or empowerment in the woman. Rather, when looking at her one can almost hear the request for the pose she is in simply so she can be viewed as long as the viewer wishes. She has no complaints, concern or opinion about the matter. She is void of all feeling and life. It's as if she has come to know and be comfortable with the fact that she

¹⁰ This image was found in the March 2008 issue of *W* magazine. It is a part of the issues "Pin Up" series. It was accessed from www.wmagazine.com on March 6, 2008.

has no choice. That she has no voice. She has come to know compliance and her place in the world, which is minimal, if anything at all.

Merskin argues that the use of “[t]he classic stereotype of deference...is a typical representation that appears to be so normal, that dominant group’s [*sic*] use of power over the less powerful seems normal and natural” (Merskin, 2006, 209-210). In the case of advertising it is the female models that are deferring themselves physically to the male models or to the camera. Women in society who view such ads receive the message that men are hierarchically more powerful than women not only in a social context, but also in a sexual context. Female sexuality and sexual experiences are second to men.



Image 6: This advertisement subtly illustrates a power and control, or dominance and submission, relationship between a man and a woman. The male has full control of the situation while the female is looking down and away. She stands in a corner while he begins to undress her. The male will determine what will happen next.¹¹

¹¹ This is an advertisement for Elie Tahari clothing line. It was seen in the March 2008 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*.



Image 7: This is the Yves St. Laurent ad described below and is an example of submission found in advertising. It is very similar to Image 12 in that both models are in the midst of an orgasm and both are unaware of being watched by the viewer.¹²

Submission is represented through the loss of power. “The model is unaware of the viewer’s gaze, her eyes are usually closed, she faces away from the camera, her body is open, her genitals just barely concealed” (Merskin, 2006, 210). The woman is usually very sexual in the ad and she thinks she is enjoying her sexuality alone without any awareness that she is in fact being watched. What she is experiencing, whether it is appreciation for her body, a moment alone with herself, or an orgasm through masturbation, etc. is being diminished, minimized and stolen from her. Her experience is not hers. It is not valid unless she is being caught in the moment and act of it. Only another observing her can determine if the woman is sexual or not. A 2001 Yves St. Laurent Opium perfume ad depicts a

¹² This advertisement was accessed from Advertising Standards Authority UK website www.asa.org.uk on June 21, 2007.

[n]ude, reclining, red-haired 'ghostly-white' model Sophie Dahl ... from the side wearing only a necklace and a pair of high-heeled strappy sandals, 'caressing herself into a state of ecstasy.' Dahl is languidly reclining on her back, fondling a breast, and apparently enthralled in sexual rapture. Her lips parted, she is clearly 'caught unawares' as she enjoys her body and is transported by her pleasure ... She is made available for viewing and faces away from the viewer, whom she seems unaware of since she is so caught up in her own passion. (Merskin, 2006, 208-209)

This ad is clearly a visual representation of masturbation; an act that is typically done alone and in private. However, this ad takes a sexual act and manipulates it in order to sexualize it even more. The masturbation in the ad is only sexual because others are gazing upon it. This woman is not sexy or sexual unless she is being spied on by the viewer. Her sexual worth and ability is determined through the judgment of the viewer. Thus the definition of her sexuality, sexual experience and sexual enjoyment is dependent upon the viewer. The viewer has the power in this situation and the model is submitting to the viewer in order to attain self awareness, self understanding and a self concept. However, this will never be achieved for her because an other cannot define these aspects of the self for someone else. Therefore, she remains undefined, irrelevant and co-dependent. She is essentially forgettable except for the position of her body and the sexual act she is engaged in.

Violent pornographic representations in advertising are accomplished by bringing voyeurism, objectification, hierarchy and submission together into one portrayal (Merskin, 2006, 210). Violence has become an unexpected, yet dominant theme in advertising (Merskin, 2006, 213). This too has consequences on the understanding of our sexual experiences and sexuality. "In violent representations, the woman is not in control, or if she is, she is aggressive and working to dominate other people in the ad and, of course, the viewer" (Merskin, 2006, 210). This can be seen through a series of Versace

ads which offers an excellent, yet disturbing, example of how the previous three pornographic elements (objectification, subordination and hierarchy) along with voyeurism can produce an advertisement that is unsettlingly violent toward women.

...[T]hree women are shown in various states of dress and undress, wearing 3- to 4-inch aqua high heels, lying across beds, some with skirts on, some off, some with blouses and some without. The viewer sees the faces of only two of the models; the face and body of the third are turned away. She is seen only from behind. The focus drawn to her exposed buttocks, emphasized by her black lace thong panties, garters, and hose. Her body is draped across a pillow, slightly raising her hips, making her available for pleasure. The other somnolent women in the cheaply paneled motel room are on beds or in chairs, clearly available and clearly willing to be involved with each other. In one of the ads, a fully clothed man is shown watching. (Merskin, 2006, 211)

The element of domination in the Versace ad is troubling. The faceless, and therefore metaphorically speaking, voiceless woman is being dominated not only by the man sitting to the side watching whatever implied sexual acts are about to take place, but she is also being dominated by other women. She is at their mercy and they can and will do to her whatever they please. The ad takes away any sense of safety a woman may have. It is the potential violence to a woman by a woman that makes this ad so appalling.

Through the four elements of pornography in fashion advertising women are asked to relate their sexual lives to those of the models who represent society's conception of sex and female sexuality. The result is a questioning and judgment of the sexual self based on visual representations rather than the enjoyment and acceptance of the lived sexual experience.



Image 8: This photo is a part of a series for clothing line Dsquared's 2008 Spring ad campaign. This is one of several photos that lead up to the grand finale (Image 9). The implication is that the models are moving at a high rate of speed in a car crash test simulator. The women sitting in the simulator look to have no control.¹³



Image 9: This is the final photo of the series for Dsquared's 2008 spring ad campaign. What is particularly disturbing in this image is the sexual acts occurring with parts of the test dummies.¹⁴

¹³ This advertisement was found in the March 2008 issue of *ELLE*. Ads in this series have similarities to the Versace ad discussed in the sense of lack of control, impending violence and the potential for disturbing sexual acts.

¹⁴ This image was seen in the March 2008 issue of *Flaunt*.



Image 10: Another common violent pornographic depiction is portraying the model as dead.¹⁵

The challenge to female sexuality and experience is further propagated through the representation of men as aggressive and challenging sexual fantasies. These ads typically have a man staring right into the camera challenging the viewer to look away or dare them to keep looking. “Many models stare coldly at the viewer, defying the observer to view them in any way other than how they have chosen to present themselves: as powerful, armored, emotionally impenetrable” (Bordo, 1999, 186). This starring of the model is often a portrayal of male dominance (Bordo, 1999, 187). When his gaze is challenging it takes his objectification away because he is defining how the viewer will see him. He is no longer a sex object but rather an aggressive, assertive male. This is an element of sexuality that is denied to women in magazine advertisements and possibly society itself. If a woman has an assertive, challenging gaze it still does not eliminate her

¹⁵ This image is from a two page ad for Blumarine clothing. It was found in the March 2008 issues of *Harper's Bazaar* and *ELLE*.

as a sexual object. Through his aggression the male model portrays a sexually aggressive male. Once again, this is the ideal. The lived sexual experience of most men does not involve sexual aggression and dominance. Therefore, men are being asked to relate to a sexual experience that does not coincide with their actual sexual experience. In addition, they are trying to relate and incorporate a representation that does not favorably reflect men.

Besides the aggressive sexual fantasy portrayal, another use of men in advertising represents them as sexual losers. Though men are portrayed differently in these ads, the portrayal of the sexualized woman is consistent with what has been previously discussed in regards to women. The sexual loser ads are dependent on the female portrayals to reinforce the comic situation of the male loser. The male loser is a man who “hangs out with his male buddies, is self-mocking and ironic about his loser status, and is always at the ready to engage in voyeurism with sexy fantasy women but holds committed relationships and emotional honesty with real women in disdain” (Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005, 1882). Men know that these sexy women are not available to them and even if they were the women would most likely humiliate the men (Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005, 1906).

The ads further a construction of real women as attempting to “...ensnare men into a commitment, push them to express their feelings that make them uncomfortable, and limit their freedom to have fun...” (Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005, 1906). Thus there is an element of victimization in the ads that feed men’s insecurities. This provides them with rationalizing anger at their victim status, which is ultimately transferred toward women resulting in revenge against women (Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005, 1906).

An ad for Captain Morgan rum that spanned over four pages in the 2003 *Sports*

Illustrated swimsuit issue illustrates this portrayal of revenge. Messner and Montez de

Oca describe it as follows:

On the first page, we see only the hands of the cartoon character ‘Captain Morgan’ holding a fire hose spraying water into the air over what appears to be a tropical beach. When one turns the page, a three-page foldout ad reveals that ‘the Captain’ is spraying what appears to be a *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue photo shoot. Six young women in tiny bikinis are laughing, perhaps screaming, and running for cover (five of them are huddled under an umbrella with a grinning male character who looks suspiciously like Captain Morgan). The spray from the fire hose causes the women’s bathing suits to melt right off their bodies. The readers do not know if the swimsuits are painted on or are made of meltable candy or if perhaps Captain Morgan’s ejaculate is just that powerfully corrosive. One way or the other, the image suggests that Captain Morgan is doing a service to the millions of boys and men who read this magazine. Written across a fleeting woman’s thigh, below her melting bikini bottom, the text reads ‘Can you say birthday suit issue?’ Two men – apparently photographers – stand to the right of the photo, arms raised to the heavens (with their clothing fully intact). The men in the picture seem ecstatic with religious fervor. (Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005, 1902)





Image 11: This ad illustrates the male loser approach in advertising.¹⁶

This ad sends a couple of concerning messages. First and foremost it is telling the male viewers that they are, in effect, the two men in the ad who are celebrating their good fortune of seeing the women models nude, or almost nude, because neither these men nor the male viewers would ever see such beautiful women nude in reality. What is disturbing about this ad is that the women are being tricked into nudity. Basically, the male sexual loser cannot view women like these because they are losers and no beautiful woman would willingly show herself to a loser. Thus revenge is used.

This leads to the second message that these women deserve to be stripped naked because they tease and arouse men, yet are never attainable. “The relational gender and sexual dynamics of this ad – presented here without overt anger and with cartoonish humor – allegorize the common dynamics of group sexual assaults” (Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005, 1902). The ad is disturbing in this light and perpetuates the sexual loser concept of the American male only this time he has to use shrewdness to get the

¹⁶ Accessed from the electronic version of the article by Michael Messner and Jeffery Montez de Oca titled “The male consumer as loser: beer and liquor ads in mega sports media events.”

woman. The message to viewers is that because men are sexual losers they must use voyeuristic tactics in order to get remotely close to a woman.

The implications of the representation of women in advertising and the conception of sex is a diminished sense of confidence in female sexuality and sexual experiences, as well as a disconnection between our selves and our sexuality. Kilbourne maintains that magazine advertisements are exploiting sex and sexuality more than ever before (Kilbourne, 2003, 173). These sexualized representations occur along a continuum, from the mild, erotic versions to the violent, pornographic portrayals. Women are being asked to relate to the images that fall along this continuum. That may be possible in the milder portrayals that illustrate sexuality and equality, but it seems almost impossible for women to relate and feel a connection to the explicit, pornographic portrayals. In these women are trying to relate to females that are sexual objects, sexual fantasies, submissive, overpowered and at times exceedingly violent.

In the representations of the American conception of sex a “temporal and special plane” of the female fantasy is provided (Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005, 1883). In this context “...desire can be explored and symbolic boundaries can simultaneously be transgressed and reinscribed into the social world” (Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005, 1883). The ads do not present a portrayal of the way men and women actually behave sexually; instead they are about the ways we *think* men and women behave sexually (Merskin, 2006, 204), and how we think they behave is based on the conception of sex in society.

Any depiction of sex being a profound and important aspect of our lives is missing; instead we are presented with a cold and passionless sex that lacks joy, pleasure

or happiness (Kilbourne, 2003, 175). When one sees a portrayal of sex in magazine advertisements they see a "... constant state of desire and arousal – never ... intimacy or fidelity or commitment" (Kilbourne, 2003, 174). Sex in advertising is trivialized, narcissistic, degraded and devalued; rarely does advertising represent the union and awe sex can create (Kilbourne, 2003, 174-176). This diminished representation of sex being the ideal sexual experience is perpetuated through other forms of media, such as film and television (Kilbourne, 2003, 205). This only makes breaking the ideal and presenting a more realistic conception of sex in advertising all the more difficult. When the conception of sex is endorsed by several different media types it only strengthens that conception, which continues the disconnection and alienation. Kilbourne states, "[s]ex certainly cannot and does not always have to be sacred and transcendent, but it is tragic for a culture when that possibility is diminished or lost" (Kilbourne, 2003, 175). This possibility is being diminished however, through society's conception of sex in conjunction with the visual representations of the conception in magazine advertisements and other media.

Looking at the sexual portrayals of women and men in advertisements we can begin to see the effects America's conception of sex and its representation in magazine ads has on sex and sexuality. Sex that is objectified, hierarchical, submissive, and violent is stunted. Sexual images define what is and who is sexy (Kilbourne, 2003, 174). Rarely, if ever, are we presented with images of "...older people, imperfect people [or] people with disabilities" (not to mention average people) engaged in a sexual act or expressing their sexuality (Kilbourne, 2003, 174). What we see in these ads is the young and beautiful having sex (Kilbourne, 2003, 174). Yet, this is a cold, distant, indifferent, bored

sexiness. “Real sexiness has to do with a passion for life, individuality, uniqueness [and] vitality” (Kilbourne, 2003, 175). It does not have to do with the dull stare of a model (who is emphatically defined as sexy by advertising and society) who is in a sexual position (most likely submitting or being objectified) and relaying a version of sexuality that is unattainable and undesirable to many.

In magazine advertisements we are “...offered a pseudo–sexuality, a sexual mystique, that makes it far more difficult to discover our own unique and authentic sexuality” (Kilbourne, 2003, 174). This is of particular significance for women who have been subjected to sexual portrayals in advertising for decades. The vast majority of female portrayals define female identity in terms of female sexuality (Merskin, 2006, 203). Thus as women we are limited to only our sexuality. Yet, this is the sexuality that society constructs, not the sexuality that we relate to or actually live. Furthermore, advertising constructs images of femininity and ideal female beauty which is presented to the viewers to help them read and understand what being a woman means (Merskin, 2006, 204). This is once again the femininity and female beauty as established through society’s construction of sex; not the actual experience of women who define themselves as feminine or beautiful.

The actual lived experience of female sexuality, femininity and beauty is of no consequence in society’s construction of sex or the advertisements’ representations of sex. Instead of society being told by those who actually live the experience of a sexual female, those living it are being told by society how to construct it or how it should be. Therefore when a woman looks at a magazine advertisement she sees women “...portrayed as sexually desirable only if they are young, thin, carefully polished and

groomed, made up, depilated, sprayed, and scented...and men are conditioned to seek such partners and to feel disappointed if they fail” (Kilbourne, 2003, 174). It is not just women being told what a sexual woman is, men are told as well and they are being told to pursue this woman, this ideal, whom none of us know or relate to whether we are female or male, because she simply does not exist except for on a glossy page in a magazine. And what must women feel, experience and think when they see this ideal on a page? How does she relate to this ideal woman, to this notion of sexy, and to this construction of the feminine? Kilbourne continues with this thought by asking: “How sexy can a woman be who hates her own body? She can act sexy, but can she feel sexy? How fully can she surrender to passion if she is worried that her thighs are too heavy or her stomach too round, if she can’t bear to be seen in the light, or if she doesn’t like the fragrance of her own genitals” (Kilbourne, 2003, 174)? In these representations women are being asked to relate to an aspect of the female that is impossible to relate to because the reality of the female is far more complex than the ideal representations.

The result of women, sex and sexuality being portrayed to promote the ideal is the feeling of disconnection. This disconnection spans across our sexuality, our sexual experiences and how we define ourselves as sexual beings. Advertising promotes the disconnection, but it does not cause the disconnection (Kilbourne, 2003, 179). Rather the rift between our conception of sex of the ideal and our lived experience of the actual is the cause. That is not to say that the visual portrayals do not reinforce the disconnection. Between the conception of sex and the visual depiction we find ourselves “...surrounded by images of young, beautiful heterosexual couples with perfect hard bodies having sex” (Kilbourne, 2003, 174) and “[w]e’re subjected to a steady barrage of messages telling us

that all that matters is the immediate fulfillment of our needs and desires” (Kilbourne, 2003, 175).

An additional component to the disconnection in our sexual lives is that the conception of sex in America is an external construction, yet we apply it to our internal selves. We try to define who we are as sexual beings within this external, social definition. Thus the disconnection is reinforced. “The disjunction between self-conception and external judgment can be especially harsh when the external definitions carry...gender stereotypes with them” (Bordo, 1999, 172-173). Most women do not consider themselves as objects, yet they are being told that they are not only objects, but sexual objects. A contradiction exists. “[Advertising] creates a climate in which disconnection and dissociation are normalized, even glorified and eroticized” (Kilbourne, 2003, 179). The distance the conception of sex produces between our sexual experiences and society’s construction of sex perpetuates and expands because that distance is used to further promote the conception. It is a cycle we find ourselves in. Our personal sexual experiences differ from the social conception and visual representations. Yet what we are told is not what we experience. For individuals sex and sexuality is an internal construction that changes with age, experiences, priorities, etc. We try to define ourselves as sexual beings through what we actually experience sexually. Yet society is working from the outside telling us that sex, sexuality, sexiness and sex appeal is something that is established from without not from within (Kilbourne, 2003, 175). It is an issue of actual versus ideal and as long as we strive for the ideal we will never completely value our actual lived experiences as sexual beings.

As we compare our real sexual lives to the lives portrayed in the media we notice an incongruity. We can't help but ask ourselves, "Why don't I look like the models in this ad," "Why can't I be that sexy," "Why doesn't anyone look at me like that," etc. etc. etc.

Sexual images in advertising and throughout the media define what is sexy and, more important, who is sexy. To begin with, sex in advertising in the mass media is almost entirely heterosexist – lesbian, gay, or bisexual sex is rarely even implied in the mainstream media... (Kilbourne, 2003, 174)

Advertising plays an imperative role in raising questions of our sexual inadequacy and inability, as well as the sexual identity and worth in the lives of individuals. Advertising sets the cultural tone of who is sexy and what sexuality is. When we fail to meet these almost impossible requirements we feel as if we fall out of the "norm" of sexuality. We are told by advertisements as to what our sexual lives *should* be like and if they are not we feel abnormal and inadequate.

The gods have sex, the rest of us watch – and judge our own imperfect sex lives against the fantasy of constant desire and sexual fulfillment portrayed in the media... We never measure up. Inevitably, this affects our self-images and radically distorts reality. (Kilbourne, 2003, 174)

Sexual images in advertising are used to sell products, but with that comes the "...unintended consequence [of the] effect these images have on real sexual desire and real lives" (Kilbourne, 2003, 179). When individuals try to emulate the sexual messages of the media they feel failure because they cannot attain that ideal. "And many who choose not to act on these impulsive sexual mandates nonetheless end up worrying that something is wrong with them, with their flawed and ordinary and all-too-human relationships" (Kilbourne, 2003, 179). We are judging ourselves compared to a conception of sex that does not account for our lived experiences and to the visual representation of that conception. We are also being judged by others who are comparing

us to the conception of sex. We feel like there is something wrong with us when we think about our sexual life compared to the sexual lives of others and the belief that some of those other sexual lives mirror the sexual depictions in advertisements (Kilbourne, 2003, 178). Once we have determined that we are “inadequate” sexual beings or lead “abnormal” sexual lives we begin to question and doubt our sexual selves. This doubt opens the doors for shame and guilt to enter our sexual lives.

Drawing on the representations presented in this chapter we can begin to see how the visual representation of society’s conception of sex in magazine advertisements can bring us to shame and guilt. For example, what does a woman feel and think when she sees the advertisement for Yves St. Laurent Opium perfume? Here is a woman in the ad who is so completely comfortable with her beautiful model body that she can simply touch herself, and most innocently at that, and brings her self to complete, total and abandoned climax to the point where she doesn’t even notice the camera focused on her. What if the woman viewing the ad isn’t comfortable with her body and couldn’t imagine being so exposed as that? What if the woman viewing the ad can’t bring herself to orgasm when she tries to masturbate? What if the woman viewing the ad feels that masturbation is wrong? The result is shame and guilt. Shame for those who dislike their bodies and wish they had a better, more beautiful one because they are uncomfortable being seen nude and exposed. Shame for those who do not get sexual pleasure from masturbation yet feel it is an important component to one’s sexual life. Guilt for those who maintain masturbation is wrong, but can’t help and be a little curious about the act anyhow. Anyone who looks at an ad long enough of someone more beautiful and more

sexual then themselves will feel twinges of shame and guilt no matter how confident the individual is.

This shame and guilt is certainly not restricted to women either. Men experience the same sexual shame and guilt as women, just for different reasons. Are men really comfortable being the loser who can't get a woman? Is he really so open minded about it that when he sees such an ad he laughs at the humor of it all? Men don't want to be viewed as inadequate on any level, especially when it comes to their ability of attracting someone to them, which is an indication of their sexual ability. When men can relate to the "loser" ads shame is present because they don't want to be "that guy," yet they are not the beautiful male models either. They are not the "ideal" of male sexuality. What does it really feel like to see an ad that is making fun of you, not relating to you? Surely embarrassment at the minimum is felt, but most likely due to the truth of it shame is also present. One must also question what men think and feel when they constantly see males dominating females in advertising. Are they comfortable with that portrayal of men? One would have to think that there are men in society that not only are uncomfortable with it, but also feel shameful or guilty that they are represented in that way. It is an unfavorable depiction as to what male sexuality means and when a man can relate to that depiction it certainly raises concern, yet we keep seeing it in advertising.

The portrayals of women and men in advertising create and support a conception of sex in America that leads almost inevitably to shame and guilt. These emotions are influenced by the representations of sex and sexuality in advertisements and the disconnection we feel as a result of these portrayals. What we see visually is not what we experience in reality and yet we try to incorporate the representations and the ideal

conception into our sexual lives. The result is disconnection and alienation from our own sexuality and sexual experiences. Eventually we feel the painful emotions of shame and guilt which further the gap between the sexual ideal and our sexual realities.

CHAPTER TWO: SHAME AND GUILT

The purpose of this chapter is to give an analysis of shame and guilt and how they relate to our conception of sex. This will be accomplished through a philosophical account of shame and guilt that is reinforced by psychological concepts. As of yet, there is no one, clear definition or description of shame and guilt amongst scholars of the emotions. However, there are areas of agreement. This chapter will bring together these areas of agreement as well as the deviations in the various theories into a single description of both emotions. The goal is to provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of shame and guilt and how the emotions play out in our lives. In addition, this chapter will illustrate how, through the conception of sex in America, shame and guilt affect our sexual lives and how we view and understand ourselves as sexual beings.

Shame and guilt are unique emotions in our lives. We are able to recognize when we feel them and why, but often we have difficulty putting the experience into words. It is common for these emotions to be equated or defined as being the same, but in fact they are two very different expressions of emotion. Shame and guilt are both emotions of the self. When we feel either of these emotions we evaluate an aspect of our self. Evaluation in the midst of shame involves questioning and determining who we are. Shame is an emotion of the whole, complete self. Guilt, on the other hand, is an emotion of a particular aspect of the self that is associated with an action or a behavior. Self-evaluation involves only questioning the specific aspect of the self involved in the act or behavior that led to guilt. Guilt does not involve the whole Self and therefore does not challenge who we are to the same extent as shame.

Shame and guilt are complex emotions that often interlace in an individual's life. Shame will be analyzed first, although it is the more complex of the two emotions, in order to set the ground work for guilt and the relationship between the two emotions. The work of Bernard Williams in *Shame and necessity* (1993) will be used to provide a comprehensive account of shame. Of particular interest will be Williams' discussion on the relationship found in shame between the subject and the other. A deeper layer of shame and the complexities of the emotion will be drawn from the work of Martha Nussbaum in *Hiding from humanity* (2004). Although Williams sets up the ground work on shame Nussbaum provides an important discussion on shame and the self that takes us deeper into the emotion and how it affects our lives. Of Nussbaum's work her position on self-regard, self-assessment and the role of the self in shame will be of primary focus.

There are many different definitions of shame in philosophy. Williams defines shame as a "loss of power" resulting in a disadvantage (Williams, 1993, p. 220). Nussbaum describes it as the uncovering of our "abnormal" weaknesses (Nussbaum, 173), or as a failure to be whole (Nussbaum, 2004, p. 183). Phenomenologist Max Scheler states shame is "...always conjoined with an element of 'astonishment,' 'confusion,' and an experience between what ideally 'ought to be' and what, in fact, is" (Scheler, 1983, p. 5). Jean-Paul Sartre states, "...shame is shame of *oneself before the Other*" (Sartre, 1956, p. 303). In each case, shame is experienced because we lack something, whether that be power, completeness or wholeness or the ideal of whom we should be.

Even if there is not one accepted philosophical account of shame there are some common philosophical elements that run through the various theories of shame. One of

these is the presence of a subject-object relationship. This means there is the importance of observation and the gaze within this relationship. Williams presents a thorough account of this in *Shame and necessity*. Williams argues that shame is a loss of power and thus a disadvantage. In Williams' theory this means that when one feels shame it is because one is consciously aware of this loss of power. Shame is the reaction to this awareness (Williams, 1993, p. 220). Williams goes on to say that it is the observation of the other while in this state of weakness that is the key element to shame. The other reminds the subject of his failure (loss of power) and of his disadvantaged situation (Williams, 1993, p. 221). The other's gaze maintains the conscious awareness of the subject's weakened state due to this loss of power. The concept of the loss of power is poignant when it comes to pornographic advertising. The pornographic elements of hierarchy and submission both require that a loss of power occurs between the parties involved. To make this relation it is first necessary to acquire a more precise account of what this loss of power is.

In order to understand what Williams might mean by this loss of power, consider some examples of Max Scheler's phenomenology of shame in *Shame and the feelings of modesty* (1987). Scheler's most famous example is of a bashful woman posing nude for a painter. As a model she feels very little shame at her nakedness because she is viewed by the painter as a "given" for the arts and is viewed as an aesthetic being. While viewing her for his painting he does not see her as an individual, therefore she does not experience herself as a naked individual. However, if, for even a moment, his gaze shifts from his original intention of viewing her as a model to viewing her as a nude woman before him, she will not only notice this shift in his gaze, Scheler suggests, but she will feel intense

stirrings of shame (Scheler, 1987, p. 15). The original purpose of her being unclothed has changed. She is no longer viewed as a model, but rather as a sexual being. As Williams explains in regards to Scheler's example, "it is...the change in the situation [that] introduces the relevant kind of unprotectedness or loss of power: this is itself constituted by an actual gaze, which is of a special, sexually interested, kind" (Williams, 1993, p. 121). The situation changed when the painter's view shifted from an artist to a sexually stimulated male. His shift in view of the model changed the way she viewed her nudity from an aesthetic being to a sexual object. The shift in the painter's gaze resulted in the situation being viewed as an artistic endeavor to a sexual moment for both the painter and the model. However, it was only the model who experienced shame due to this shift because it was her experience of nudity that changed in definition from the aesthetic to the sexual.

Another example presented by Scheler introduces the concept of intention behind the gaze of the other. This example involves a prostitute and the gaze of her client versus the gaze of her lover. When the prostitute is with her client she does not feel shame because the client seeks the prostitute not the individual. He views her in a general sense rather than in a specific, individualistic sense. By contrast, when the woman is with her lover he seeks the individual not the prostitute. If in either case the intention changes, and thus the gaze changes, the prostitute would feel shame (Scheler, 1987, p. 16). For example, if her lover did not seek her or view her as an individual, but rather as a prostitute she would feel deep, painful shame. This occurs not only because his intent behind the gaze has changed but also because he changes his view of her from the specific individual (*his* lover) to the general individual (*a* prostitute). These two examples

adequately illustrate how the shift in gaze and the intent behind the gaze can cause an individual to feel shame, or in terms used by Williams can cause them “loss of power.” Such as in the case of the prostitute, if her lover gazed upon her as a prostitute she would lose the power of feeling like an individual, she would be disadvantaged and ultimately shamed. The key point for Williams in any account of shame is that there is a loss of power. This, of course, can take a plethora of forms such as being viewed as a hypocrite, a liar, an insignificant nothing, a fraud, etc. There are simply too many to list. In each case a loss of power and a disadvantaged state occur.

An important component of Williams’ view of shame is the observation of the other. This observation has many layers which perpetuates the complexity of shame. One such layer is that through their observation the other does not have to perceive the situation, acts or position of the subject as a loss of power (Williams, 1993, 221). This is entirely defined by the subject. For example, the subject could be in a yard picking flowers just as someone walks past and smiles. For all intents and purposes the other most likely assumes that the subject is in their own yard picking their own flowers. No thought goes beyond this for the other. However, for the subject that is in their neighbor’s yard picking flowers there is the feelings of shame as they are seen stealing their neighbor’s flowers. What the other thinks or even perceives is irrelevant. It is what the subject knows or thinks about themselves that is important. Jean-Paul Sartre demonstrates this point when he says “shame reveals to me that I *am* this being, not in the mode of ‘was’ or of ‘having to be’ but *in-itself*...But in order for me to be what I am, it suffices merely that the Other look at me” (Sartre, 1956, 351). It is in the moment the other views me that I define myself as I am in that moment. The past and future are irrelevant to this

definition. For example, the moment the other views me picking flowers in my neighbor's yard I am a thief in that moment. This is who I am regardless of the past and future. I may have had permission in the past to pick the flowers and I may assume in the future that I will again receive it. However, in the moment at hand without permission given for this particular moment I am stealing, I have been viewed by an other in this act and I have defined myself as a thief due to their gaze because at this moment I am stealing.

It is certainly possible for there to be more than one type of shame in any given situation. What is important to remember is that there is always a subject and an other in a shame situation. However, the role the subject and the other take varies depending on the type of shame. This is most evident in a second type of shame; that of the imagined other. According to Williams there does not have to be an actual, real other facing the subject and viewing them. All that is necessary for a subject to feel shame is merely *to think* that they are being viewed by an other. This is what Williams' calls the imagined gaze of an imagined other (Williams, 1993, 82). For instance, in a case of an individual renting pornography, he does not have to be viewed by a friend or anyone else while renting the pornography to feel shame. In fact, he could feel shame renting it at home off the internet with an alias. If he does feel shame even under these circumstances of ambiguous identity it is because his imagined other is gazing upon him. The individual *thinks* he is being watched and this is enough for shame to develop if the individual feels what he is doing is shameful. He determines this; no one else. Williams' imagined other is abstracted, generalized and idealized, but the important aspect of this other is that it is somebody and it is someone other than ourselves (Williams, 1993, 84). The imagined

other represents the expectations established by society, and places focus on how we should live our lives and of how our actions and reactions affect the world around us (Williams, 1993, 84). This concept of the imagined other will become very important in the discussion on shame and society's construction of sex. Society's conception of sex often acts as our imagined other in sexual experiences and our understanding of our sexuality. Quite often when we experience sexual shame it is because our imagined other is gazing upon us not being the sexual ideal. The imagined other that brings us shame in our sexual experiences and exploring our sexuality is influenced by society's construction of sex. In order to better understand the relationship between the subject and the imagined other I will use the work of Jean-Paul Sartre from *Being and nothingness* (1956).

One famous example used by Sartre to describe the relationship between the subject, the object and the gaze is that of one peering through a keyhole. Imagine yourself walking down a hallway when you hear sounds behind a door. Out of curiosity you lean closer to listen. As you do so you notice light shining out of the door's keyhole. Realizing that you cannot hear anything but muffled noises you decide to kneel down and peer through the keyhole in order to see what is going on in the room. Up to this point you feel very little, if anything, about what you are doing. However, after a few moments of peering through the keyhole you hear footsteps down the hall. Someone is looking at you. Someone is seeing you kneeling by the door looking through the keyhole (Sartre, 1956, 347-349). You instantly experience shame. Yet as you look for this other you realize you are mistaken. There is no one there. It was merely your imagination. Should not then your shame dissipate? No. It does not and it will not (Sartre, 1956, 370). Even though there

was not an actual, living other that witnessed your rude curiosity there was still an other present that made you take note of your actions which led you to feel shame of yourself.

“...[T]he Other is present everywhere, below me, above me, in the neighboring rooms...”

(Sartre, 1956, 370). This is the imagined other of Williams. Sartre states,

Better yet, if I tremble at the slightest noise, if each creak announces to me a look, this is because I am already in the state of being-looked-at. What then is it which falsely appeared and which was self-destructive when I discovered the false alarm? It is not the Other-as-subject, nor is it his presence to me. It is the Other's *facticity*; that is, the contingent connection between the Other and an object-being in *my* world. Thus what is doubtful is not the Other himself. It is the Other's *being-there*; i.e., that concrete, historical event which we can express by the words, 'There is someone in this room.' (Sartre, 1956, 370)

Thus for the feelings of shame to arise all it takes is for the subject to think they are being seen by an other and to conclude that what they the subject is doing is deemed shameful according to their own standards. “I am ashamed *of* myself *before* the Other...But the Other is not the *object* of the shame; the object is my act or my situation in the world” (Sartre, 1956, 364). We do not need the judgment of others in order to feel shame for we are fully capable of judging ourselves, and most likely we judge ourselves more harshly than any other being does.

The third major kind of shame is the sense of being ashamed of others.¹⁷ This too is defined by a single individual. Just as a subject defines the shame they feel for what they themselves do, feel, think, etc. so too does the subject define the shame they feel for what they see others do. For situations in which one is ashamed of others it is the individual feeling shame who makes the determination of what is shameful. For example, if an individual sees their friend renting pornography and finds themselves feeling

¹⁷ This section on shame—for an other is derived from the work of Bernard Williams in *Shame and Necessity* (1993). The concept was primarily derived from Chapter Four titled “Shame and Autonomy” and from Endnote One titled “Mechanisms of Shame and Guilt.”

ashamed of their friend this is their own determination of what is shameful. If the friend does not notice being watched while renting the video they may feel no shame whatsoever. Or if they do recognize being watched they may feel embarrassment at best. If the individual renting the pornography does feel shame it is their own construction of shame. It is not because their friend is ashamed of them. It is for each individual to determine what is shameful whether it is shame one feels toward oneself or toward an other.

The shame-for others is a powerful type of shame. It is what we feel when we gaze upon another individual acting in a way that we ourselves would feel great shame if viewed upon doing that same act. In shame-for others we take the other and internalize their position. An interesting aspect of this type of shame is that the other not only gazes upon a subject but also feels shame because of what their gaze witnesses. Through this process the subject becomes a subject-other because they are gazing upon an other and reflecting that gaze back upon themselves resulting in the shame they feel the other should be experiencing. In cases such as these the subject blends the subject and the other into one being: themselves. In a sense, the shame-for others becomes a type of shame-for self. Only we are not acting in the shameful manner we are only witnessing what we define as a shameful act. It is through our deflection of our gaze from the other to ourselves that we feel the shame-for the other because as the other we would feel shame for the act in question and thus we become the other as well as the gazing subject.

An interesting aspect of shame-for an other is that the other could be doing something completely harmless, but because of how the subject interprets what they see they define the situation as shameful. An example of this is when a subject pulls up to a

red light and is approached by an other begging them and other drivers for money. As the subject looks upon the other approaching their own car, as well as additional cars, the subject begins to feel shame because of the other's homelessness and impoverished state. The subject looks upon this other and feels the shame they would feel if they were to ever be in a similar situation. They may also feel shame—for the other because they would never resort to such measures or permit themselves to enter into such a situation.

Ultimately, the shame the viewer feels is the shame they think the beggar should feel. It is possible for this shame—for an other to transform into shame—for oneself. As the wait at the light continues the subject (the driver) is also being viewed by the other (the beggar) and this too can stir shame within the subject because they are being viewed ignoring the other and denying them money; most likely because of the shame first felt for the beggar. The gaze of the beggar may perpetuate the driver's shame. Of course, the gaze of other drivers will do the same thing, especially if those drivers did give money to the beggar.

Martha Nussbaum effectively unpacks for us why the emotion felt in each of the above situations is shame through her analysis of the conception of self and self-regard in *Hiding from humanity*. Shame is an emotion of reflection, which occurs through self-regard and self-assessment. Nussbaum explains the concept of self-regard as follows: "In a sense, [shame] requires self-regard as its essential backdrop. It is only because one expects oneself to have worth or even perfection in some respect that one will shrink from or cover the evidence of one's non-worth or imperfection" (Nussbaum, 2004, 184). As individuals we have expectations for ourselves. We have a clear sense of who we are. When we do something that threatens or violates these notions of ourselves we feel shame. In Nussbaum's account, shame occurs when we realize we are not whole, when

we experience failure because we have not reached an ideal state, or when we feel we lack a desired completeness or perfection (Nussbaum, 2004, 184). Max Scheler terms this the process of “*turning to ourselves*” (Scheler, 1983, 15). It is in this moment that we not only assess our situation, but also our Self¹⁸ and our “*feelings of ourselves*” in the situation and make a determination about our Self (Scheler, 1983, 15-16). Of course, this ideal state, completeness or perfection is predetermined by each individual for themselves. It is something we decide we ought to have or how we ought to be. Therefore, when shame occurs we are in the process of looking at ourselves, or turning to ourselves, and evaluating the situation in terms of our predetermined ideal state. The terminology used by Nussbaum, such as completeness, wholeness and perfection, indicates that shame is primarily an emotion of the whole Self. When we feel shame we feel ashamed as to who we are and what we are. We are ashamed of our complete and total Self, or in other words our very Being, and thus we begin to question this whole Self.

Nussbaum maintains that due to the presence of self-regard in shame the emotion offers us an opportunity to self-assess without an audience (Nussbaum, 2004, 204). This self-assessment occurs in all three types of shame (actual other, imagined other and shame–for an other), however it is through our own Self that we conduct our self-assessment not through an other. The opinions and judgments of another being are irrelevant in our determination of our Self and the shame associated with it. Therefore the entire process of shame can occur with only one person in the room; the subject. For example, the subject can be standing alone in the room. They can act, think or desire

¹⁸ The words “Self” and “Selves” are capitalized here to indicate that it is the sense of self, our whole being and our identity that is experiencing shame. This is a very significant aspect to shame and is often what makes it so painful.

something.¹⁹ Their internal other casts a glance toward them. The subject feels the gaze and thinks they are being watched. Shame ensues if the subject determines that what they did, thought, desired or felt was shameful within the context of who they are, what their expectations are or what ideal state they are trying to pursue. As the subject experiences the shame they can, if they so choose, take a moment and self-assess who they are, what their expectations are and what ideal state it is they want. As this self-assessment occurs they may begin to realize that they are not the person they thought they were, that their expectations are not attainable or that their ideal state is not realistic. Through this self-assessment the individual can change, or the individual can determine they are exactly who they thought they were (Williams, 1993, 90). Shame allows us to understand ourselves better. If we do or feel something that brings us shame we can use that situation to determine that feeling the shame is a positive thing because we are not the sort of person who does such an act and feels good about it (such as the desire to sleep with someone besides our spouse), or we can determine that feeling shame over such an act is foolish and our expectations are too high (such as ignoring an individual we don't like so to avoid speaking with them). Whatever the case may be, we can do all of this within our own sense of Self. We do not need an other to be present, to cast judgment, to explain their perspective or to encourage our change. We do all of this ourselves through our shame.

It should be noted that this self-assessment can also occur within the presence of an other, but their opinions and judgments are irrelevant in our determination of our Self.

¹⁹ It should be noted that shame is not restricted to an act by a subject, even though most of this chapter has explained the emotion through acts. Shame can be felt due to a thought, a desire, an omission, a defect, an intent or an outcome (Williams, 1993, 90). This is particularly relevant to the discussion on shame and sex, because it is not just the act of sex that makes one feel shame, it is also the desire to have sex or the thought of something sexual that can bring one to feel shame.

In addition, even after shame develops from an encounter with an actual other the self-assessment can occur later when the subject is alone or in another similar situation at a later date. What is important to note is that the self-assessment of the subject occurs through their Self and only by choice. For to question and doubt your complete and total Self is something one can only do through a conscious and deliberate decision.

Even in shame—for an other there is a concept of the Self and therefore a self-assessment. When we feel shame—for an other it is our Self that feels this shame. Even though we are not the one acting we feel shame and therefore are presented with the opportunity to self-assess. Through shame—for others we can still question ourselves and determine who we are in the context of an other acting and the shame we experience through them. For example, in the case of the driver and the beggar, the shame the driver feels for the beggar allows the driver the opportunity to question their reaction and who they think they are. Through their shame they can determine what about the situation caused them shame. Was it the beggar asking for money, or was it their denial of giving money to the beggar? Was it their greed and lack of care for an other or was it the humility of the beggar? Regardless, the driver is presented with a moment to self-assess and to learn who they are.²⁰

A final characteristic of shame is the phenomenological aspects and physical responses of shame. The individual's reaction to shame is always the desire to hide or disappear from the observer who witnessed the individual's deficiency (Nussbaum, 2004, 183). This is most often expressed through the down cast of eyes of the subject, which

²⁰ Please note that although shame provides us with the opportunity to self-assess it does not mean we always embrace this moment. Questioning the Self is a taxing endeavor and the final result may be undesirable. What is important to recognize is that shame involves reflection which is dependent on self-regard and from here we can move on to self-assessment if we so choose.

gives them the perception that the other's gaze has been broken. Michel Lewis explains in *Shame: The exposed self* (1992) that in extreme cases of shame one may even have the desire to die in order to no longer be present in the situation (Lewis, 1992, 2 and 75). Often shame results in the halting of the behavior, act, thought, desire, etc, as well as in the confusion of thought and an inability to speak (Lewis, 1992, 75). This is the case even when the observer is the imagined other. Williams states, “[shame] will lower the agent's self-respect and diminish him in his own eyes. His reaction...is a wish to hide or disappear...” (Williams, 1993, 90). This notion of wanting to hide or disappear is a common thread between the various accounts of shame. Whenever shame is experienced we want to avoid the gaze of the other. Even if it is only an imagined other that produces shame within us, we still desire to deflect the gaze in order to escape the observation²¹ (Williams, 1993, 90). Ultimately, we even desire to hide from ourselves.

Before moving on I would like to briefly recap what has been discovered so far about shame:

- 1) Shame is associated with the sense of failure, whether that be the loss of power, the failure to be whole or the failure to achieve an ideal state. It is not a result of a specific situation, but rather it is the result of the subject's interpretation of that situation (Lewis, 1992, 75);
- 2) Two types of shame are experienced when a subject is observed by an other. This can be an other that is in the room watching the subject (actual other), or it can also be an internalized other (imagined other).

²¹ Interestingly, Williams does argue there is an exception to this aspect of shame when it comes to the exposure of one's nudity. "...Someone who was afraid in that case of being exposed to a merely imaginary observer would be afraid of his own nakedness, and his fear would be pathological" (Williams, 1993, 82).

Regardless, the important thing is that the subject thinks they are being watched;

- 3) A third type of shame is when a subject feels shame—for an other. As they gaze upon the other the subject feels shame because of how the subject interprets the situation and actions of the other;
- 4) Shame is an emotion of the complete and total Self. It brings into doubt who and what we are; essentially the very essence of our Being;
- 5) In all three cases shame requires a conception of self and self-regard which ultimately allows the subject to self-assess. This self-assessment can, and usually does, occur without an audience;
- 6) The subject reacts to their sense of shame with the desire to hide or disappear from the observer, whether the observer is external or internal.

The three types of shame that we experience in our lives (actual other, imagined other and shame—for an other) lie at the core of our sexual lives and sexual experiences, creating real challenges for our conception of ourselves as sexual beings. Of particular concern are the sexual events that occur where shame perhaps should not be present, yet finds its way into our sexual lives causing real problems and emotional pain. Our shame, I would like to claim, is largely a harmful result of America's conception of sex. This conception and the representation of it in magazine advertisements diminish our real sexual experiences because our experiences always fall short of the representations. The result is doubt about our sexuality and ultimately shame. I will address each type of shame in a sexual experience that our conception of sex establishes as shameful. With

each example questions will be raised addressing if shame *should* be felt in these situations and, if not, how our conception of sex perpetuates shame in our sexual lives where it *should not* have a place.

A classic example of when a subject feels shame in the presence of an actual other in a sexual experience is being nude before the other. Nudity involves a certain vulnerability that is enshrouded in doubt of one's body and attractiveness. When we stand before an other naked and completely exposed we are presenting ourselves to this other to gaze upon us and to see the entire physical being of us. If we are embarrassed of our bodies or dislike certain physical attributes of our bodies the other's gaze upon us will bring us to shame. The actual other is seeing all of the things we abhor about our bodies and their gaze is only making these aspects of ourselves more apparent to us. At this moment when we experience shame standing nude before an other we attempt to divert the gaze. We look away from the other and focus our own gaze on something else, or we lower our head in order to remove our eyes from the situation entirely. At times we even cover our bodies, more specifically our genitalia, with our hands or arms pulling our shoulders inward, shrinking physically before the other so to reduce our bodies, minimize our nudity and escape the shame.

But why should anyone hate their bodies to the point of being ashamed of it? The answer lies in America's conception of sex which defines the ideal sexual body as one that looks similar to the models in the magazine advertisements. For women this ideal body is size two, at most, thin arms and legs with little muscle definition, a flat stomach and firm buttocks. Within our society's conception of sex a woman's body certainly should not be curvy, hippy, soft or a size six let alone size ten. For men it is either a well

defined, muscular body that resonates strength, confidence and power or it is a lean, hard, yet still muscular body, that represents prowess, athleticism and assuredness. By no means is a man to be overweight, weak, small or feminine. If a woman or man should possess these undesirable physical attributes they are an outsider to the ideal and thus they experience shame. Furthermore, they are an outsider that is in a sexual moment and is standing before an other as a socially constructed “undesirable” sexual being. The subject feels the other’s gaze, which at that moment is not merely the actual other before them, but the actual other of society that defines the subject’s body as sexually unattractive, because it is flawed in the sense that it does not mirror the visual representations of the ideal sexual body found in magazine advertisements that is supported and endorsed through society’s conception of sex. Our conception of sex plays a significant role in our experiencing shame in our sexual lives and advertising acts as a reflection of our society’s conception and therefore has its own substantial role in our sexual experiences. When we are before an other and feel shame it is because we have realized this failure through the other before us who represents society’s conception of sex. Thus when we look at advertising and see a model’s exceptionally perfect body we already know we have failed the ideal and one way this knowledge becomes emotional is when we experience that failure in front of an other.

The imagined other is probably the most prevalent type of shame in our sexual lives. This is because the imagined other knows all of our thoughts, desires and secrets. The imagined other knows what we like sexually and how we define ourselves sexually. The imagined other knows our sexual fantasies and desires. It is irrelevant if we act on these or not. Just thinking them can bring on shame because of the imagined other. This

is of particular importance when our society's conception of sex does not accept these thoughts, desires, fantasies or sexualities within its definition of what sex is. The Yves St. Laurent Opium perfume advertisement provides an example of imagined other shame. In this ad the female model is in the throws of ecstasy while she masturbates. She is touching her breast, arching her back and throwing her head back with her legs wide open oblivious of anyone or anything except her own body and sexuality. Shame may result because the image is a depiction of masturbation, but the image also requires a particular type of gaze to be used and this too may cause shame for the viewer. This ad was designed for the male gaze. This depiction of masturbation is how a man would define how a woman masturbates. The ad forces the viewer to take a male gaze. Thus when a woman looks at this ad she is viewing the depiction of masturbation as a man does. She is viewing a woman how a man would. This male gaze is most likely not in line with how a female gaze would depict masturbation or with how a female gaze would view a woman masturbating. As a woman gazes upon this ad she views it and defines it through a male gaze. This male gaze is her imagined other. As she continues to gaze at the ad the shame arises, the doubt begins and the questions start. "Is this how I want society to view me as a female?" "Is this how I want to be defined as a sexual being?" "I certainly do not look like this while masturbating, so am I doing something wrong?" "Am I sexy enough?" "Am I sexual enough?" Because this ad is through the male gaze, which is defining this model and her experience of masturbation as the ideal, the female gazer viewing the ad will make a connection that she herself is not the ideal; in act or in looks. The definition of what she is supposed to be as a sexual being according to the conception of sex and the visual depiction of that according to the ad reinforces her lack of sexuality, her worth as a

sexual being and devalues her actual lived sexual experiences. If she does not look like this through the male gaze or her sexual acts do not look like this through the male gaze then she and her sexual experiences are devalued.

Not only is the model's sexuality and sexual worth dependent on an other in this ad, but her self worth and self understanding is as well. When a female viewer's imagined other is the male gaze her own sexuality, sexual worth, self worth and self understanding become dependent on this other. In this case that other is a man because only the male gaze is present. By requiring a male gaze to be used any context the female gaze may bring to the ad is disregarded. Thus the female viewers have no say in the context of the ad. Their gaze is irrelevant as are their words. Being required to adjust your gaze in order to fit in with the conception of sex brings shame because you are told how you see the world is invalid. How you see yourself is wrong. How you experience your life is meaningless. How you define yourself sexually is not up to you, but rather an other, and in this case an imagined other. The result is alienation from your own sexuality.

Shame—for an other in a sexual experience is a bit more difficult to surmise. It involves a subject viewing an other and feeling shame—for them because of what they are doing regardless of the emotions or intentions of the other. It requires a subject to deflect their gaze back upon themselves within the context and perception of how they gaze upon the other. When we consider shame—for an other we must remember that it is the subject viewing the situation that determines what is shameful. The subject is the one feeling shame—for the other because they would feel shame in such situations. When we view ads that utilize power and control shame—for an other can arise. This most typically would be

shame—for the one who is being controlled. For the one who has no power. For example, the Marc Jacob's ad that depicts hierarchy or the Yves St. Laurent Opium perfume ad that depicts submission illustrate the power and control relationship. In both ads the model is deprived of any control. An other has power and control over them. In one case that power is used to tell them what to do in the other case it is to validate who the model is as a woman and as a sexual being. When a subject views ads such as these they may feel shame—for the model because of the situation they are in. This is particularly true if the subject views the ad as the model willingly submitting to the one in control. As the viewer gazes upon this ad they deflect their gaze back upon themselves and then feel the shame they would feel if they were actually in this situation.

This example can be extended to real life when we can actually see the dynamics of power and control in action. For example, when we overhear a husband berating his wife in public at this moment hierarchy is in play. It does not take much of an imagination to extend this single interaction between the husband and wife into other aspects of their marriage including their sexual relationship and interactions. Our shame—for an other will apply to the wife if she submits to her husband's harsh words or to the husband if his wife stands up to him and regains control of herself and the situation. We feel shame—for an other when we see them submit to someone and we feel shame when we witness someone trying to control an other: shame for being controlled and shame for trying to control. Our conception of sex incorporates power and control to such a degree that it is difficult for us to separate sex from power and control. Shame is closely tied to the loss of power and if sex is commonly depicted with a power/control element then shame is commonly incorporated into our sexual lives. When we see it play out in others'

sexual lives we still encounter shame because we deflect our gaze back upon ourselves and see the power/control factor in our own sexual lives. We sexually control others and submit to others and through it all shame resides.

Another example of shame-for an other is when we see individuals or couples who fail to meet the sexual ideal of society's conception of sex. In them we see their failure, and possibly our own. We reflect our gaze back upon ourselves and begin to doubt if we too have failed to attain society's sexual ideal. If so, their failure reflects our own, and we feel shame-for the other's failure as well as our own.

Shame is a prevalent emotion in our sexual lives and how we define ourselves as sexual beings. However, it is not the only emotion that is present in our sexual experiences or in our society's conception of sex. Guilt is also at hand and plays a significant role in our sexual lives. We feel guilt because we have done something wrong and have cause a harm to someone else, or possibly even to ourselves. This is easy to see when we consider an act such a stealing or lying. However, it is more difficult to determine the role of guilt in our conception of sex, yet it has a presence in and an affect on our sexual lives that is worth discussing.

Shame and guilt are commonly equated; however they are emphatically different emotions both with their own unique and distinct characteristics. Like shame there is no one universal definition of guilt. Nussbaum defines guilt as a self-punishing anger, which is a reaction to the perception that one has done wrong or has caused harm through an act or a wish to act (Nussbaum, 2004, 207). Williams' places importance on the victims and their feelings when they have been harmed because the subject (who feels the guilt) places their attention on those they have harmed rather than on themselves (Williams,

1993, 222). Lewis defines guilt as “[t]he emotional state...produced when individuals evaluate their behavior as failure but focus on the specific features or actions of the self that led to the failure” (Lewis, 2000, 629). The commonality between these definitions is the concept of action. Guilt is an emotion of action. We do not feel guilt for thoughts, ideas, motivations or desires (Williams, 1993, 90). We feel guilt because of something we did to an other or to ourselves. Guilt is limited to an action or a behavior because that is where the subject’s focus lies (Lewis, 2000, 628). Examples of actions that can lead to guilt can be in situations in which we tell a lie, accept more change from a purchase than is due us or manipulate a friend into doing something they do not want to do. It is through the actions of telling, accepting and manipulating that guilt is derived. Guilt is also associated with our behaviors (Lewis, 2000, 629). When we lie on a regular basis we develop a behavior of lying and we can feel guilt not only for the individual lies that we tell, but also for the behavior of constantly lying. When we feel guilty about an act or a behavior we do so because society has determined that act or behavior to be a violation of a social rule, expectation, norm or code²² and this violation brings harm to an individual or to society in general. In any guilty act, harm is the result (Nussbaum, 2004, 207; Williams, 1993, 222; Lewis, 2000, 629).

Of particular interest to the discussion of guilt is its relation to the self. In the definition of guilt provided by Lewis he states that one experiences guilt when one focuses “...on the specific features or actions of the self that led to...” a sense of failure. The key element of this statement is the specificity of the focus of the self. Guilt does not encompass the whole Self, rather it addresses only very specific aspects of the self.

²² This discussion of societal rules, codes, norms, expectations etc. is derived from the work of Micheal Lewis in his chapter on shame and guilt in *Handbook of Emotions* (2000) (see citation in works cited).

“Unlike the focus in shame on the global (whole) self, the focus in guilt is on the self’s actions and behaviors that are likely to repair the failure” (Lewis, 2000, 629). Therefore, there is no self-assessment or determination of who we are, in the big sense of Self (capital S), with guilt. There is only the assessment of the action that led to a sense of failure and the assessment of the self that gave permission to take such an action. For example, with guilt we focus on the aspect of the self that permitted us to tell a lie, the aspect of the self that accepted more change than was due, or the aspect of the self that allowed us to manipulate our friend.

When we experience guilt we typically want to eradicate it from our lives. Our desire is to correct the harm done and repair the aspect of the self associated with the action that induces guilt. Although this is something we want to accomplish it does not mean we will be successful, however our attempts are important in understanding this complex emotion. Lewis claims that we attempt to correct the harm and repair the aspect of the self associated with our guilt in all instances the emotion is experienced through an immediate act he terms “corrective action” (Lewis, 1992, 76; Lewis, 2000, 629). There are two options in corrective action. One is to rectify the failure we experience and the other is to try to prevent it from occurring again (Lewis, 2000, 629). Thus when we tell a lie and immediately follow it with the truth or when we take the change back into the store and explain the wrong amount was given to us we are trying to rectify our failure. When we try to make right the manipulation of our friend and tell ourselves never to do it again we are in the act of preventing such behavior in the future. In all these cases we are also trying to eliminate our feelings of guilt. The purpose of the corrective action is primarily for the individual(s) harmed and amending the harm done to them. In this sense

Williams' position on guilt becomes relevant because he claims feelings of guilt focus on the victim(s) of our act and our desire to correct the harm done to them and their hurt feelings (Williams, 1993, 222). Thus through our corrective action we are trying to take a course of action that will quell the hurt feelings of those we have harmed. "From a phenomenological point of view, individuals are pained by their failure, but this pained feeling is directed to the cause of the failure or the object of harm" (Lewis, 2000, 629). The repair of the self involved and the eradication of our guilty feelings is also a factor for taking corrective action. In guilt "[t]he corrective action can be directed toward the self as well as toward the other; thus...in guilt the self is differentiated from the object" (Lewis, 2000, 629). However, it is the victims and their feelings that tend to motivate us to take corrective action.

An interesting aspect of the corrective action is that it is not necessarily something that we can or do follow through with (Lewis, 1992, 76). The critical factor with guilt is the acknowledgement of a corrective action being necessary is always present. If the corrective action is not at hand in thought, feeling or deed it is possible for guilt to turn into shame (Lewis, 2000, 629). This is an important connection between guilt and shame and yet a significant distinction as well. "We can be ashamed of our guilty action, but we cannot feel guilty about being ashamed" (Lewis, 1992, 77). Once guilt progresses to shame, the guilt is no longer present. Essentially, shame takes over. This occurs when there is a complete lack of corrective action in thought, deed or feeling.

A summary of guilt is provided to highlight the major components of the emotion:

- 1) Guilt is “[t]he emotional state...produced when individuals evaluate their behavior as failure but focus on the specific features or actions of the self that led to the failure” (Lewis, 2000, 629);
- 2) Guilt is a result of acting in away that violates social rules, expectations, norms, goals, etc;
- 3) Guilt is associated with a specific aspect of the self that allowed us to do the action that induced harm to an other or a failure of ourselves;
- 4) All instances of guilt are followed by a corrective action either in thought, feeling or deed;
- 5) Our motivation to take corrective actions lies in the effort to correct the harm and make right by the victims, however we can also direct our corrective actions to repair the self and to eliminate our guilty feelings;
- 6) If a corrective action is not present guilt transforms into shame.

The aspects of guilt most prevalent to society’s conception of sex are the failure we feel when we do not achieve the sexual ideal, the acts we do in attempt of being the ideal sexual being and the aspect of the self associated with those acts that led to our failure of achieving the ideal. As we consider the magazine advertisements that present a visual depiction of society’s conception of sex we begin to doubt ourselves because we are comparing ourselves to the ideal, thus we do things to try to be the ideal. What we do is different for everyone. Some of us get plastic surgery to be more beautiful, others diet non-stop to achieve the ideal body; still others are promiscuous to be more sexual.

Whatever our response is to the ideal conception of sex it is a response through an action. Therefore, when we act to achieve the ideal we may feel guilty because of the choices we have made. Or when we have acted to achieve the ideal and failed we may feel guilt for our failure. The guilt we feel is a reaction to the harm we have caused. In some cases our actions to achieve the ideal will harm others.

The guilt we experience due to society's conception of sex is often more surreptitious than the shame. When we consider society's conception of sex and the guilt we feel in connection to it we can begin to see how the actions we take to achieve the sexual ideal often result in guilty feelings. This occurs not only because harm is committed, but also because of our failure in achieving the sexual ideal. For example, when we diet obsessively, workout excessively, have breast enhancements or get Botox there is an aspect of our self that is associated with these actions. This aspect of the self doubts our ability to be sexy or sexual outside of the conception of sex to such a degree that it allows us to take drastic steps to fit within that conception. This aspect of the self is reinforcing the failure of our achieving the sexual ideal and it is our motivation for taking action to continuously strive for that ideal. However, what happens after the diet ends, the working out ceases, the breasts have healed and the Botox is finished? Has anything really changed? No, society's conception of sex remains intact and we are *still* not the ideal sexual being we are "supposed to be." This is when guilt sets in because all of our actions have led to nothing. We have still failed and now this is not just a failure of the conception, but it is also a failure of ourselves. An aspect of our self allowed us to act within accordance of an unattainable ideal and the harm caused was the doubt and

voluntary invalidation of our sexual worth and sexual being, as well as the misrepresentation of our sexuality.

This harm is not limited to the individual who acts. It is also possible to harm others through our actions to achieve the ideal. This is not a direct harm necessarily, as what we do to achieve the sexual ideal we do to ourselves. However, part of the process of attaining the ideal is misrepresenting ourselves sexually. This misrepresentation occurs because the ideal is unattainable, yet we want to give the impression to others that we have attained it. Therefore, we present ourselves as the ideal sexual being of society's conception of sex rather than our actual sexual selves. For example, we cover our flaws (men their receding hairlines, women their cellulite), we hide our insecurities (women wear push up bras, men exaggerate the size of their penis), we lie about our sexual experience (virginity and innocence vs. experience and promiscuity), and so on. We do this with full knowledge that when the clothes come off, the lights go dim²³ and the fun begins we may be found out. Rather than presenting our actual, real sexuality we present the false ideal. Certainly the other experiences disappointment even if the other themselves is trying to maintain a representation of the ideal. When we misrepresent ourselves in this way we feel guilt. We feel guilty for making someone else believe we are someone we are not. We feel guilty because we have failed to be true to ourselves and to present who we really are sexually. The absurdity is we do this over and over again. We would rather maintain the misrepresentation of the ideal rather than present the reality.

²³ Of course the dimming of the lights is a personal preference, but perhaps it is our sexual misrepresentations that encourage the commonality of sex in the dark in order to prolong the ideal rather than shed light on the reality.

It is difficult to make a definite claim as to why this is, but I would like to argue that at least one aspect of this is that as sexual individuals, and at some point as a sexual society, we have not found the corrective action to eliminate this guilt. Thus, we keep attempting to correct the harm through further sexual misrepresentation. However, in the next chapter I provide an argument for a possible corrective action for our guilt, as well as a way to reduce the shame we feel, due to our society's conception of sex. The corrective action involves the recovery of what I call "sexual self-respect," a variant of the philosophical conception of self-respect. When we respect ourselves sexually we no longer need to misrepresent our sexual selves. Furthermore, we no longer need to feel "invalid" shame in sexual situations. I argue that through our individual sexual self-respect we develop sexual self-respect for others and through this our society's conception of sex will change to one that promotes reality, accepts our actual sexual selves and celebrates our lived sexual experiences.

CHAPTER THREE: SEXUAL SELF-RESPECT

As often as not the experiences we have in our sexual lives are at odds with society's conception of sex and notion of the sexual ideal. This isolation causes us to question and doubt who we are as sexual beings and has the potential to cause us to feel a disconnection between ourselves as sexual beings and the sexual experiences we live. This disconnection can, and often does, result in us experiencing the emotions of shame and guilt in association with our sexual selves and lives. This shame and guilt is a result of the sexual ideal endorsed by society's conception of sex. For example, when we notice we do not match up with this ideal we can experience shame, or when we attempt to achieve the ideal through various acts or behaviors we can cause harm to ourselves resulting in guilt. In addition, our failure to meet society's sexual ideal can result in shame or guilt. The difficulty is overcoming this shame and guilt that is a result of our society's distorted conception of sex. Yet, within both of these emotions we are provided with the opportunity to do just that, and to come to a point of empowerment in ourselves as sexual beings and in our sexual experiences.

What is of concern is when the feelings of shame or guilt result due to society's conception of sex, yet the emotions are unfounded for the sexual situation at hand. In such circumstances we are experiencing what I will be calling "invalid shame" and "baseless guilt."²⁴ When the emotions of shame or guilt are unwarranted in a sexual situation we have the opportunity to come to a point of self-respect; more specifically sexual self-respect. We can accomplish this through the self-assessment of shame and the

²⁴ At any point when the terms "invalid shame" or "baseless guilt" are used it should be assumed that the emotions are a result of society's distorted conception of sex. Therefore, I will not always indicated the source of the emotions when they are mentioned.

corrective action of guilt. Through our sexual self-respect we can come to a place of better understanding who we are as a sexual being. Equally important, through the sexual respect for others we can come to a place of tolerance for who others are as sexual beings. Ideally, this would eventually become acceptance both for who we are as sexual individuals and for who others are as sexual beings. It is through sexual self-respect that we as individuals will overcome invalid shame and baseless guilt established through society's conception of sex. It is through the sexual respect of others that as a society we will overcome the current conception of sex, and change it to one that is more conducive to and accepting of our actual lived sexual experiences. Through this change in society's conception of sex we might eventually come to see a visual change in magazine advertisements. As will be explained, the goal should be to establish a conception of sex that embraces sexual acceptance and sexual equality. Two of the ways we might see this change in magazine advertisements would be through the use of erotic elements rather than pornographic elements, or by seeing models that more accurately represent us.

I will present this position by first explaining self-respect and how sexual self-respect is related to and derived from our self-respect. Throughout this discussion I will illustrate how the current conception of sex undermines our sexual self-respect. I will then consider in what ways we can rebuild it. I will address how self-respect in general, and sexual self-respect in particular, will help us overcome our invalid shame and baseless guilt, and how it will help redefine our society's conception of sex working from the individual, extending to others and embracing society.

Within the general framework of self-respect there are three types of self-respect. What these types consist of is not always agreed upon by theorists. However, looking at

the theories presented by David Middleton in his article “Three types of self-respect” (2006) and by Robin Dillon in her article “Self-forgiveness and self-respect” (2001) we can flush out the most important aspects of self-respect. Middleton’s term “human self-respect” captures the first type of self-respect addressed. The second type is Dillon’s evaluative self-respect and the third will be Middleton’s status self-respect. Drawing on the work of these theorists we will come to a coherent definition and explanation of self-respect and its relation to sexual self-respect.

Human self-respect is at the basis of self-respect. As humans we regard ourselves as possessing moral worth and an inherent dignity because we are human (Middleton, 2006, 64-65). We live in a society that endorses the essentially Kantian claim that all persons should be treated of equal moral worth and that all persons are entitled to human respect (Middleton, 2006, 65). Dillon’s recognition self-respect provides in more detail the aspects of personhood we hold of particular importance. “[Human] respect for oneself as a person involves living in light of an understanding of oneself as having intrinsic worth and moral status just in virtue of being a person, and of the moral constraints that personhood entails” (Dillon, 2001, 66). Dillon claims that the Western conception of persons consists of three things we consider to have intrinsic worth: agency, individuality, and equality with others. Agency includes “taking seriously one’s responsibilities as persons, especially the responsibility to manifest one’s dignity as a person” (Dillon, 2001, 66). Individuality involves “appreciating the importance of being one’s own person by striving to live according to a conception of a life that defines and benefits one as the particular person one is” (Dillon, 2001, 66). Finally, equality with others recognizes that “all persons have equal basic moral worth, which entitles each to respect

from all, respect for oneself as a person among persons ... [and] involves living from a view of oneself as a being of equal dignity” (Dillon, 2001, 66). Thus within this most basic self-respect we have our moral worth and inherent dignity, as well as our equality, agency and individuality. All of these are important aspects of our personhood and our human self-respect.

Unfortunately, it is common in our society to see these components of human self-respect violated on a regular basis.

The most obvious way in which people’s moral worth is undermined is by allowing their dignity as humans to be undermined. This is done when we treat people as a means only, slaves for example. But it is also done when we allow people to live degraded lives: the homeless or those in violent domestic relationships. People’s dignity is also undermined by racism and chauvinistic attitudes toward women. (Middleton, 2006, 65)

When an individual experiences this sort of minimization of their moral worth they begin to lose their self-respect. This occurs because we experience our moral worth through the respect we receive from others.

To be treated as worthless, as a means and not an end, as an object not a subject conveys powerful symbolic and material messages. In undermining our autonomy it makes us the instrument of others [*sic*] actions ... To be in an inherently unequal relationship must affect an individuals [*sic*] self-respect. To be constantly under another’s dominion is to be reminded of one’s own powerlessness and this must undermine the sense of our own moral worth. (Middleton, 2006, 65-66)

How others treat us affects the way we feel about ourselves (Middleton, 2006, 65). When at any point the essential components of human self-respect are intruded upon by an other we run the risk of losing a portion of our self-respect. Middleton’s human self-respect carries with it Kantian concepts of how we should treat ourselves and others.

Now I say that man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will. He must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end ... rational beings are called

persons inasmuch as their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves ... [and] are thus objects of respect. (Kant, 1993, 35-36)

When we treat an other as a means rather than an end we have violated their inherent dignity and worth. The same can be said when we treat ourselves as a means. Our human self-respect upholds the Kantian claim that we are an end rather than a means. Thus through our human self-respect we can sustain our position as an end, but it can be threatened or diminished if we are treated as a means.

There are direct parallels between human self-respect and sexual self-respect. At the basis of our sexual self-respect we have something very similar to human self-respect. As humans we are sexual beings and therefore possess sexual worth, sexual dignity, sexual equality, sexual agency and sexual individuality. Others, as well as society, can affirm our sexual dignity, protect our sexual equality and acknowledge our sexual agency. In our sexual self-respect there is a circular relationship between our sexual selves, our sexual self-respect and others in society. Society reinforces our sexual self-respect through how we are treated and viewed as sexual beings. When we are treated as sexually worthless, as a sexual means or as a sexual object, or when society's conception of sex views us in this way our sexual self-respect is violated. For example, when women constantly see themselves portrayed as sexual objects in magazine advertisements they are seeing a representation of society treating them as objects. Their subjectivity is irrelevant, and their equality and agency is infringed upon. Likewise, through the pornographic elements of submission and hierarchy women are reminded that others, usually men, have control over them. They see that women are, in fact, sexually powerless. The inequality presented in the portrayal of sexual relationships continues to undermine the sexual self-respect of women. Through the magazine advertisements

women see that sexually they are worthless, that they are a means and an object, and that they do not possess sexual autonomy. These portrayals lay the groundwork for women to lose their sexual self-respect because society treats them and views them in this manner. Even though we have an inherent right to our sexual self-respect it is not guaranteed. When an other undermines our sexual dignity our sexual self-respect begins to falter.

The second type of self-respect is best understood through Dillon's evaluative self-respect. Dillon places emphasis on one's "confidence in one's merit, which rests on an evaluation of oneself in terms of the normative self-conception" (Dillon, 2001, 66). Our normative self-conception composes of ideas about being the best possible version of ourselves by focusing on qualities such as excellence, acceptability and decency. Through this we develop standards for ourselves to adhere to and expectations to live up to (Dillon, 2001, 66-67). Dillon's evaluative self-respect requires one to reflect upon oneself and ask the questions "Do I have merit?" or "Am I living up to my standards and expectations of myself" (Dillon, 2001, 67)? "Evaluative self-respect contains the judgment that one is or is becoming the kind of person one thinks one should be or wants to be, or more significantly, that one is not or is not in danger of becoming the sort of person one thinks one should not be or wants not to be" (Dillon, 2001, 67). In this account we are appraising ourselves not just on what we do, but more importantly on who we are or who we are not. Our evaluative self-respect lies within our normative self-conception and the representation to ourselves of how we live up to it. We do not derive this self-respect through what the moral and non-moral ideals we aspire to or the standards we hold ourselves up to are, but rather we derive this self-respect through how well we adhere to our ideals and standards, whatever they may be. What the standards or

expectations consist of is irrelevant, what is of importance is that we live up to them. If we fail to do this our evaluative self-respect is diminished.

Our ideas about excellence and expectations about acceptability and decency in relation to who we are clearly has application to our sexual selves and our sexual self-respect. Within this self-conception we have notions of our sexual selves and our sexual standards. Our sexuality is a part of who we are. When we reflect upon ourselves we ask the questions “Do I have sexual merit” or “Am I living up to my sexual standards and sexual expectations of myself?” We judge whether we are or are becoming the sexual being we want to be, as well as if we are not or are in danger of becoming a sexual being we do not want to be. We have an evaluative sexual self-respect which incorporates our sexual self-conception and the representation to ourselves of how we live up to it. Whatever our sexual standards may be we derive our evaluative sexual self-respect through how well we adhere to these standards and expectations. What the sexual standards entail is irrelevant to our attaining evaluative sexual self-respect.

Our society’s conception of sex places this evaluative sexual self-respect at risk. As we live our sexual lives and understand them through our society’s conception of sex we are at risk of trying to live up to the ideal the conception of sex establishes rather than to the sexual standards we ourselves establish. When we do this and then reflect upon ourselves we see that we are not adhering to our sexual standards, but rather we are trying to adhere to the standards established by society. These are societal standards pertaining to how we look and how we act as a sexual being, but they do not consider our actual lived sexual experiences. What we discover about ourselves is that we are not the sexual

being we want to be or at the very least we are in danger of becoming a sexual being we do not want to be. In this discovery we begin to lose our evaluative sexual self-respect.

The third type of self-respect as addressed by Middleton is based on our status or place in society. We are all members of subgroups in society. Some of our memberships are by choice, others by birth and still others by accident (Middleton, 2006, 73). Some of the groups we are a part of can be a source of self-respect, but others can diminish our self-respect (Middleton, 2006, 73-74). Middleton states,

Our status self-respect is a recognition of our individual status ... [as well as] an acknowledgment that we are all members of various collectivities, and these in some ways are constitutive of the person that we are. Although we are unique individuals, we are unique individuals within particular social environments in which our membership is crucial to our ability to be respected by others. (Middleton, 2006, 70-71)

To have status is to have recognition and it is through this recognition and the desirability of certain statuses that creates status self-respect (Middleton, 2006, 73-74).²⁵ Within our status self-respect there is also the influence of others and of society because we know we are treated differently because of our status (this reaction can be positive or negative) (Middleton, 2006, 74). Depending on what groups we are a part of, how we view that membership and how others view it our status self-respect is formed.

An aspect of our status in society is certainly our sexual status. Some of us are born into the group of heterosexuals, others in the group of homosexuals. Some of us are told by society that we fall into the group of females as sexual objects while others are placed in the sexually aggressive male group. Whichever group we are members of our

²⁵ It should be noted that it is at this point Dillon's recognition self-respect relates to Middleton's status self-respect, because we are not only aiming to uphold our equality, agency and individuality at the human self-respect level, but also at the status self-respect level. Within the groups we are members of we want the recognition of our equality, agency and individuality to remain in tact. If at any point one or all of these aspects are violated due to our membership of a group our status self-respect is weakened.

sexual status self-respect is affected. In addition, we can be members in several sexual groups or we can find ourselves falling between established sexual groups into an unnamed sector. Those who fall into the desired sexual group, according to our society's conception of sex, of white, sexually dominant, males will most likely have more sexual self-respect than those who fall into an alternative male sexual group. Men have more sexual self-respect than women; heterosexuals more so than homosexuals. Those who fall into un-established group may find no effect on their sexual self-respect, at least until the group becomes recognized by society. How our society's conception of sex considers each group and the portrayals we see in magazine advertisements of those groups affects our status sexual self-respect.

It is possible through the treatment of others for us to lose a great amount of our sexual self-respect because the sexual group(s) we fall into determines our status sexual self-respect, and because the groups' value and status is determine by society at large and society's conception of sex, not necessarily by the individuals that make up the group(s). As an individual of that group it is difficult to re-establish status sexual self-respect because the status of the group is defined by society. For example, until society's conception of sex considers homosexuality as a desirable sexual group, homosexuals will experience a diminished status sexual self-respect; even if the individuals in that group views the sexual group of homosexuality as desirable. Although the individual of the group may have a positive conception of their membership in it outside influences from society can still affect the individual's status sexual self-respect if society's conception as a whole is negative toward the group. A further threat to our status sexual self-respect is how we as individuals view our sexual group(s). We do not always get to choose the

sexual group(s) we fall into. If our society's conception of sex indicates that a sexual group we are a member of is objectionable, we may further see a decline in our status sexual self-respect because we adhere to this notion of society's conception rather than either challenge society's conception of the group or embrace and identify with the sexual groups we are a part of.

The following is a recap of the three types of self-respect and how sexual self-respect relates to and is affected by those types of self-respect:

1) The three types of self-respect are as follows:

A) Human self-respect – this is at the basis of the other two types of self-respect. It consists of the moral worth and inherent dignity we possess because we are humans. It is based on our society's conception of equality, agency and individuality.

B) Evaluative self-respect - this is centered on our merit and how we live up to our normative self-conception. It is concerned with how well we adhere to our ideals, standards and expectations whatever they may be. It is an appraisal of who we are or who we are not.

C) Status self-respect – this places emphasis on our status in society and the groups we are members in. Through our groups we can gain or lose self-respect.

2) Our sexual self-respect relates to and is affected by the three types of self-respect:

A) Human sexual self-respect - at the basis of our sexual self-respect we have something very similar to human self-respect. As humans

we are sexual beings and therefore possess sexual worth and sexual dignity, as well as sexual equality, sexual agency and sexual individuality.

- B) Evaluative sexual self-respect - within our normative self-conception our sexual selves and sexual standards exist. How well we uphold our sexual standards determines our sexual self-respect. It is an appraisal of who we are or who we are not as a sexual being.
- C) Status sexual self-respect - which sexual group(s) we fall into determines our sexual status and affects our sexual self-respect. It is influenced by society's conception of sex.

- 3) Self-respect and respect, and their counterparts sexual self-respect and sexual respect, have an important give and take relationship. We have an expectation of how we want to be treated by others and others have similar expectations of us. When we possess self-respect we expect the respect of others (Middleton, 2006, 61). It is also possible that the absence of respect from others will reduce the self-respect of an individual (Middleton, 2006, 61).

Sexual self-respect plays an important role in our sexual lives and how we view ourselves as sexual beings. It is also an important component to our overcoming the invalid shame and baseless guilt we experience due to society's distorted conception of sex and sexuality. Although society has a responsibility in devising a conception of sex that is more conducive to our actual lived sexual experiences (which will be discussed

shortly) we as individuals have some influence in developing a resistance to invalid shame and baseless guilt by rebuilding, maintaining or establishing our sexual self-respect. We do this through the self-assessment prompted by shame and the corrective action prompted by guilt. Although society's conception of sex is the source of these painful emotions we can as individuals dissipate the influence they have in our sexual lives by acknowledging that the emotions are unwarranted and that they are a result of society's distorted view on sex and sexuality.

It should be noted that as individuals we all have a preconceived notion of who we want to be as a sexual being, how we want to act as a sexual being and how we want others to see us as a sexual being. This is our authentic internal sexual selves. Our understanding of this internal self is partly influenced by biology, such as our sex organs and sex hormones. However, it is also constructed and grounded in the ideologies that form our world view, such as religious doctrines, ethnic identities, parental viewpoints, childhood experiences, our sexuality, etc. Our world view, whatever it may be built upon, plays an essential role in developing our internal sexual self. The result is an established authentic internal sexual self that is evident in our evaluative sexual self-respect. Within this type of sexual self-respect we have our normative sexual self-conception and our sexual standards. Although our self-conception develops throughout our lives it is also an inherent part of our selves. It is something that we can recognize and evaluate, but this is not necessary for our self-conception to remain in tact. What is important to keep in mind is that our authentic internal sexual self is an aspect of our self-conception and therefore it too is inherent. Whether we recognize it or not we have a sexual world view built upon various ideologies that establishes and grounds our internal sexual self.

Most commonly when we do recognize our authentic internal sexual self it is when that self is challenged by or clashes with society's external sexual constructions. When society's conception of sex tells us who we should be sexually, how we should behave sexually and how society views us as sexual beings we tend to notice our internal sexual self is not inline with this external view. This is because our sexual self-conception is developed within our selves through our experiences and through the observance to ideologies we find important. In contrast, society's conception of sex is developed through, often times, superficial expectations and an unattainable ideal. Thus we sense a clash between our internal sexual self and society's external conception of sex. It is difficult to say if this conflict can ever be resolved, but it is important to acknowledge it and the significance it has in our sexual lives. Due to this clash of the internal and external sexual constructions of sex we experience the emotions of shame and guilt in our sexual lives. As individuals and as a society we can begin a process of addressing the conflict and searching for a solution. As individuals we will accomplish this by distinguishing between the validity of our shame and guilt, recognizing when the shame is invalid and the guilt is baseless and minimizing the impacts of the emotions in our sexual lives and experiences. As a society we will reduce this clash by constructing a conception of sex that is more conducive to our sexual lives and who we are as sexual beings.

In regards to our invalid shame we have the potential to overcome this through our self-assessment. For example, when we stand nude before an other we often experience shame. This shame is a result of society's conception of sex. We feel this shame nude before an other because we feel our body is inadequate and imperfect

because it is not the ideal, sexual body. Our shame is a result of being gazed at by an other. The gaze of the other represents society's conception of sex. We are not being viewed by just the other, but also by society at large. In any moment of shame we have the option to self-assess. It is through a self-assessment that we determine the type of shame we are experiencing; whether it is valid or invalid. We can recall from the previous chapter that in cases of valid shame the self-assessment can result in the realization that we are not the person we thought we were, that our expectations are not attainable or that our ideal state is not realistic. This can be a very difficult and emotionally painful process because we may learn things about ourselves we do not like or want to admit to. However, working through a self-assessment is the only way we can eradicate the shame we feel and therefore we find ourselves undergoing this difficult task.

A self-assessment is particularly valuable when we are experiencing invalid shame because it is not until we self-assess that we determine the validity of the emotion. Therefore, when we experience shame while nude before an other and we opt²⁶ to self-assess we will realize this shame is invalid because it is based on the ideal of society's conception of sex. It is at the moment of self-assessment that we begin to understand the shame we feel and why we feel it. In situations that shame is felt because we aim for the sexual ideal established by society's distorted conception of sex we will notice that the shame is invalid. When we recognize this invalid shame we are presented with an opportunity to replace it with sexual self-respect. Invalid shame in a self-assessment is not an issue of the whole Self (i.e. who we are or who we are not) as it would be if the shame felt was valid. Rather the issue is eradicating the invalid shame and helping

²⁶ Our self-assessment can occur at the first moment when we feel this shame (when we divert our eyes from the other and try to hide our nakedness) or we can self-assess a few hours, days or weeks later. We can even self-assess after experiencing this shame several times in similar situations.

ourselves build up a guard against it. As individuals we have some influence in eradicating our invalid shame and maintaining, rebuilding or establishing our sexual self-respect.

Guilt provides a similar opportunity to build up our sexual self-respect. We would do this through our corrective action. When we feel guilty for misrepresenting our sexual selves or for doing acts to achieve the unattainable ideal we are presented with the opportunity to do a corrective action and eradicate the guilt. Recall that an action or behavior that results in guilty feelings is usually followed by a corrective action in thought, feeling or deed; if it is not shame will result. I mentioned briefly in the last chapter that perhaps the problem we face as sexual beings, and as a sexual society, is that we have not found a corrective action that dissipates the guilt we feel when we act in accordance with society's conception of sex. Most corrective actions we choose seem to only further the problem and deepen the guilt. For example, when we recognize that we have sexually misrepresented ourselves we tell ourselves to "never do that again." Or when we diet excessively to achieve that perfect, ideal body we binge eat once in awhile (maybe to make ourselves feel better emotionally or to justify the dieting). When we get Botox we swear it will be the last time and we always respond honestly about our age when asked. All of these (the "never do that again," the binge eating, the "swear it's the last time" and the honest statement of age) are all corrective actions. Yet, it seems the corrective actions we do are insufficient and tend to lead us to do additional acts that make us feel guilty. The binge eating leads to more dieting, the honesty in age justifies the Botox and the sweeping statements are shallow and meaningless, etc., etc., etc. By focusing our corrective action on maintaining, rebuilding or establishing our sexual self-

respect we may find that we have discovered the avenue necessary for challenging the ideal and breaking away from the actions that result in baseless guilt.

As individuals we have some influence in reducing our invalid shame and baseless guilt and maintaining, rebuilding or establishing our sexual self-respect. Mainly we will accomplish this by recognizing the emotions, acknowledging their source and replacing them with sexual self-respect. However, we face limitations when we try to completely eliminate our invalid shame and baseless guilt because the source of this is society. We are able to recognize the emotions and their source and we are able to minimize their influence, but they will not be eliminated until changes take place in society's conception of sex. Not until the source of the emotions is addressed and resolved will these emotions ever be completely eradicated from our sexual lives. Society has a responsibility in this because it is society's construction of sex that instigates our invalid shame and baseless guilt to begin with. Additionally, society has a role in our self-respect. Society can and does diminish our human and status self-respect (or, in other words, our human sexual self-respect and status sexual self-respect), and with that comes the responsibility of replenishing that depletion. Robin Dillon states in her article "Self-respect: Moral, emotional, political" (1997):

The source of some damage to self-respect is an implicit interpretive framework of self-perception whose organizing motif is worthlessness. And this framework ... is not a private phenomenon but is a feature of the historical and sociopolitical situatedness of individuals. Self-respect may be damaged not because individuals fail to have appropriate thoughts and emotions but because they fail to have an appropriate situation...

To say that self-respect is a sociopolitical construction is to say not only that it develops and plays out against the backdrop of social and political contexts, but more important, that it is constituted by and reflects prevailing forms of social and political life. The nature and meaning of self-respect and how it is constituted and expressed, both at the level of individual experience and at the level of concept, is

a function of social relationships and the structure and functioning of the social institutions which we live. (Dillon, 1997, 243-244)

Our historical and sociopolitical experience in our society affects our sexual lives, how we view ourselves as sexual beings and our sexual self-respect. Society's conception of sex is an historical and sociopolitical aspect of our society. What the conception determines is sexual, defines as sexy and designates as acceptable sexual groups has been established through historical and sociopolitical influences. What is difficult to determine is how to resolve the damages done to our sexual self-respect by this aspect of our society.

I argue this solution will reside in the give and take relationships that have been described thus far: between the individual and society, between sexual self-respect and sexual respect and between society and the media. At the individual level we can establish, maintain or rebuild our sexual self-respect through the process of overcoming our invalid shame and baseless guilt. Although there are limitations to this it is possible for the work at the individual level to spur subtle changes in society. This is based on the give and take relationship between sexual self-respect and sexual respect. As we improve our sexual self-respect others will notice and they will increase their sexual respect for us (Middleton, 2006, 61). This is neither simple nor immediate, but it is relevant to societal changes. For example, when a woman finds herself in a sexual situation that results in shame, and she chooses at some point to self-assess, which results in the recognition that the shame is invalid, she can then work towards sexual self-respect. In time this sexual self-respect may be perceived by others and she will then, eventually, receive sexual respect from others. Her having sexual self-respect is worth the sexual respect of others. Through our sexual self-respect not only will we see ourselves as a sexual being who has

the inherent right to sexual worth, dignity, equality, agency and individuality, but others will also see this. This process increases our human sexual self-respect.

From the individual level it is possible for the sexual groups we are members of to gain respect from others and society resulting in an increase in our status sexual self-respect. When women as individuals are able to minimize the invalid shame and baseless guilt in their sexual lives by recognizing the emotions and overcoming them by establishing, maintaining or rebuilding their sexual self-respect, which results in the extension of sexual respect from others (resulting in increased human sexual self-respect), they will then eventually experience society extending sexual respect to the group of women in general (resulting in increased status sexual self-respect). It is at this point real changes in society's conception of sex will be noticed. In this process we can see that the give and take relationships between individuals and society and between self-respect and respect are working together. In this approach the individual is the catalyst to societal change. It is the individual that recognizes the invalid shame or baseless guilt in their sexual lives and replaces it with sexual self-respect, which then influences the sexual respect they receive from others and society.

There is another force that works in tangent with this, however. Society has a responsibility to rectify the damage it has caused through its distorted conception of sex. This will occur by society changing its conception of sex into one that is more conducive to our actual lived sexual experiences. It will be a conception that accepts and celebrates our sexual lives. As previously indicated, this change will be partly influenced by the give and take relationship between individuals and society. As individuals possess a strong sense of sexual self-respect they will no longer identify with the current

conception thus forcing society to redefine its views on sex and sexuality. Another influence will be the give and take relationship between society and the media. As society's conception of sex changes the portrayals of the conception will also change, which of course will further change in society. This change in society's conception of sex will most likely become apparent through its representation in advertising in two ways. One change will hopefully involve a representation that incorporates erotic elements rather than pornographic elements. The other will be the possibility of using models that more accurately physically represent who we are as sexual beings.

The first chapter introduced the pornographic elements of objectification, submission, hierarchy and violence used in fashion advertising. Pornographic advertising utilizes several different methods and elements to create a representation of sex and sexuality. In almost all magazine advertisements that use a pornographic approach a moment of tension is created through the use of voyeurism, fantasy and the implied participation of the female model (Merskin, 2006, 203). From this moment of tension further elements are added. Each pornographic element incorporates certain pornographic characteristics to express a certain aspect of sex and sexuality.

In her essay "Where are the Clothes?" (2006) Debra Merskin defines pornography "as material that depicts men and women as sexual beings with the purpose of arousing mostly male desire in a way that reflects and helps maintain the subordination of women" (Merskin, 2006, 202). She goes on to claim that "pornography pivots on sex and works in specific ways that target particular audiences by cultivating control and desire and the promise of sexual power through the viewing of available bodies" (Merskin, 2006, 202). This is accomplished through the four pornographic elements.



Figure 12: This image is an example of pornographic advertising. Here we can see how voyeurism, fantasy and the implied participation of the model working together to establish a moment of tension that encourages the viewer to keep looking.²⁷

Merskin distinguishes erotica from pornography by claiming erotica is an artistic expression of sexuality and equality (Merskin, 2006, 202). Although it is common for the two to be equated the difference lies in terms of power and control (Merskin, 2006, 202). In erotica we see an expression of sexuality and equality. In pornography we see an expression of power and control in a sexual context. This is an important distinction. Another difference between erotica and pornography is the use of artistic concepts in erotic advertising. In erotica, we will see an artistic portrayal of sex and sexuality. The erotic elements will still be present, but they will be presented in a way that also considers artistic elements and aesthetics. Jerrold Levinson provides a definition of erotic art in his article “Erotic art and pornographic pictures” (2008). He states,

²⁷ This image was found in the March 2008 issue of *W* magazine. It is a part of the issues “Pin Up” series. It was accessed from www.wmagazine.com on March 6, 2008.

Erotic art, though aimed in part at sexually affecting the viewer, at stimulating sexual thoughts and feelings—that's what makes it *erotic* art, after all—also aims in some measure to draw the viewer's attention to the vehicle, inviting the viewer to contemplate the relationship between the stimulation achieved and the means employed to achieve it, and more broadly, the relationship between the erotic content of the image and its other contents, such as expressive, dramatic... (Levinson, 2008, 232)

Levinson places emphasis on the content of the image being considered. Certainly in regards to the topic at hand the content of interest is sex, sexuality and society's conception of sex. Through erotica we will begin to see these aspects be presented in a more artistic form. Levinson describes the artistic intent or dimension of an erotic image as follows:

...its form and the relation of that form to its content; the way the content has been embodied in the form, the way the medium has been employed to convey the content.

...an image that has an artistic interest, dimension, or intent is one that is not simply *seen through*, or *seen past*, leaving one, at least in imagination, face to face with its subject. Images with an artistic dimension are thus to some extent *opaque*, rather than *transparent*. In other words, with artistic images we are invited to dwell on features of the image itself, and not merely on what the image represents. (Levinson, 2008, 232)

The artistic elements of erotic advertising would allow the viewer to consider the image and think about what is occurring and what is being presented. This could play a significant role in the transformation of society's conception of sex because it would involve viewers and encourage them to explore society's conception of sex as well as their own sexual experiences and sexuality. When we consider the advertising that uses pornographic elements we see a transparent presentation of society's conception of sex. We see a snapshot of sexual events that are in the process of occurring. The gang rape is just about to occur. The submission of the female is almost complete. The women in the Versace ad are about to engage in group sex while a man sits to the side and watches, and

possibly directs, what happens. In such ads we see a pause or a moment of the disturbing events that are unfolding. In contrast, erotica would present a complete representation of sex or sexuality. It would not be a moment of violence, but rather concept of sexuality, equality, acceptance and celebration.



Image 13: This is an ad for Strenesse clothing line. Notice how the model is laughing. She looks natural and at ease. Rather than a cold, lifeless stare we are gazing upon a real person caught in a moment we can all relate to.²⁸

The distinction between erotica and pornography is important in advertising. To represent sex, sexuality and the American conception of sex within the guidelines of erotica may give a more accurate portrayal of the lived experience of sex and sexuality, because erotica expresses sexuality with emphasis on equality. In erotica the image will still be of a sexual nature, but it will be an expression of sex and sexuality that incorporates the erotic elements of equality, acceptance and celebration. Thus we will see

²⁸ This image was found in the March 2008 issue of *ELLE*.

an ad that portrays a sexual situation between a man and a woman that is sexy and maybe even sexually stimulating without the use of violence, objectification, submission, hierarchy or dominance. The representation will consist of two sexual beings enjoying each other equally. Rather than a man standing over a woman they will stand eye to eye.

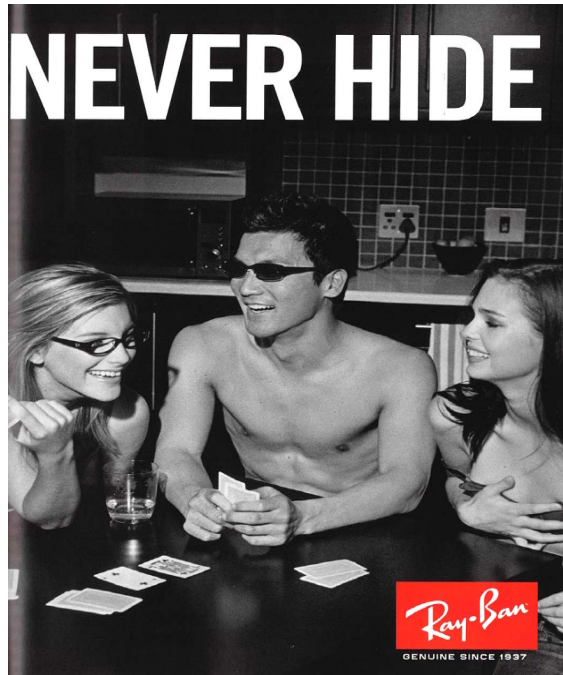


Image 14: This advertisement is clearly portraying a game of strip poker. Although this is sexual in nature notice how the models are all on an equal level. They all may or may not be undressed. Also, the male is looking at something, or someone, else. He is not leaning over the two women in the photo.²⁹

Advertising that utilizes erotic elements will celebrate our sexuality and lived sexual experiences, rather than diminish, degrade or simply ignore them. Instead of being told how to be sexually we will see images that express how we live sexually. Since sexuality and equality are an essential aspect of erotica we may also see more frequently the portrayal of homosexuality in advertising indicating the acceptance of that sexuality. Throughout all of these erotic advertisements sexual respect for the sexual being will be present. The portrayals in advertising will change because society's conception of sex has

²⁹ This image was found in the March 2008 issue of *ELLE*.

changed. Recall, that the advertising is a representation of the conception of sex in society. However, as the instances of erotic elements increases in advertising so too will society's conception of sex. This is the give and take relationship between society and the media at work. It will occur in tandem with the similar relationship between individuals and society and sexual self-respect and sexual respect.

An additional influence in society's conception of sex and an individual's association with it is using models in advertising that represent us as sexual beings. This would mean models that look like us. We would be able to relate to them on a physical level and rather than feel alienation from our bodies we would feel a connection and appreciation. The models representing us as sexual beings would have body types more like ours and their facial features would be unique. Rather than looking at clones in advertising we would be looking at individuals. This approach would put a sense of life into the image. Our gaze would fall upon a real person expressing their sexuality. This in itself would encourage a change in the representations of sex and sexuality because we would not want to see the pornographic elements used on someone that we could relate to. Therefore, there would be further encouragement for the advertisers to use erotic elements in order to properly represent a model who exhibits life and individuality and who reflects our sexual lives.

This approach has started in advertising and may eventually have an effect on society's conception of sex, especially when individuals themselves challenge the conception and necessitate a change that embraces them as sexual beings. The better known example in advertising that celebrates our sexual diversity is Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty." Although the campaign is focused on beauty and not sexuality per se

they are closely linked conceptions in our society. In fact, it seems that when one says someone is beautiful they are also saying the person is sexy or vice versa. The goal of the campaign is “to change the status quo and offer in its place a broader, healthier, more democratic view of beauty. A view of beauty that all women can own and enjoy everyday” (Dove website, 2008).



Image 15: This is an example of Dove’s “Campaign for Real Beauty.” The women represent the average woman. They have breasts, thighs, stomach, etc. of varying size. Each one is unique and sexy in her own way.³⁰

The Dove advertisements challenge society’s conception of beauty and questions what real beauty is. This approach can be extended to challenging society’s conception of sex and question what it means to be sexy. Does it mean we should be a size one, with lifeless eyes, sitting listlessly and being dominated by a male model or the viewer? Not at all. To be sexy means to have a confidence about oneself and one’s body. It means to appreciate ourselves as sexual beings. It is a celebration of our sexual experiences and an

³⁰ Access on Dove’s website www.campaignforrealbeauty.com on March 11, 2008.

appreciation for our sexual histories and futures. It is a sexual self-respect we have for ourselves and a sexual respect we extend to others. When we look at these women we realize they are just like us. They are not perfect, but they are real. By using female models that accentuate the more tangible aspects of beauty and sexiness female viewers can begin to connect to those concepts. The disconnection that has become so pervasive in our sexual lives can lessen and the alienation we are all so familiar with can dissipate. As this approach becomes more accepted in advertising and the acceptance of our differences becomes more prominent in our society's conception of sex we will see a shift in society's view on sex and sexuality, and we will see a change in the way we view ourselves and each other as sexual beings.

We are beginning to see changes in advertising and these changes may have an effect on society with time, however the complete transformation of society's conception of sex may not be complete without the interaction of all three of the give and take relationships.³¹ All three relationships play an important role in stimulating change in society and in ourselves. As individuals when we recognize our invalid shame or baseless guilt and replace it with sexual self-respect we are protecting ourselves from further experiences of invalid shame or baseless guilt, and we are recognizing the aspects of society's conception of sex that perpetuated that shame and guilt. As we rebuild or establish our sexual self-respect we will receive sexual respect from others, and we too will be able to give sexual respect to others. As we become more accepting of our sexual selves and each other we will notice the incongruity between our sexual experiences and

³¹ It should be noted that Dove is not the only advertiser that takes this approach. An other example is CoverGirl cosmetics signing Queen Latifa as their 2007 CoverGirl. Also, Jamie Lee Curtis challenged society's conception of sex in 2002 by posing for a magazine, but refused to allow any alterations to be made to the photograph or to her body, hair, etc.



Image 16: Examples of the ad campaign for Dove for real beauty that challenges society's conception of beauty. A similar challenge can be applied to society's conception of sex.³²

³² All four images were accessed from Advertising Educational Foundation www.aef.com on March 11, 2008.

society's conception of sex. We will then encourage meaningful changes in society's conception to be made. One of the ways we will see this change is in the representations in advertising. We will see portrayals of sex and sexuality that represent our lived sexual experiences and that illustrate equality, sexuality, acceptance and celebration through the use of erotic elements rather than pornographic. We will begin to relate to these portrayals as a representation of our sexual lives. This will be furthered by the use of models that look like us as sexual beings. When we gaze upon these ads we will feel a connection, rather than a disconnection, and a celebration for who we are sexually. Society's conception of sex will change as we change and the representations in advertising will portray this change. The more give and take relationships we utilize to entice this change in society and in our conception of sex the more quickly the process will occur so that we can begin living sexual lives without invalid shame or baseless guilt.

Advertising is just one component of this change and it certainly can not work alone to change society's conception of sex. There are other influences that perpetuate society's distorted view on sex and sexuality and these too must go through a transition similar to advertising. Television commercials should start incorporating a more conducive conception of sex we can relate to, rather than endorse the distorted views currently in place. Television sitcoms should better represent our sexual lives and experiences rather than making fun of who we are as sexual beings, especially if we fail to meet society's ideal. The easy access to pornography and sex on the internet should be restricted and certainly not so accessible to our children who are in the process of forming their conception of sex and sexual identity. The availability of pornography in

hotel rooms should be questioned and determined if such access is necessary. Reality television should be more realistic rather than the phony depictions it currently consists of that often that endorses society's skewed views on sex. Sex education in schools should place emphasis on the realities and responsibilities of sex and provide an honest depiction of what being sexually active actually entails. The list goes on.

Sex and sexuality is something that we experience continuously throughout our lives. The ever presence of shame and guilt in our sexual lives has become a phenomenon we are forced to contend with throughout our sexual experiences and sexual histories. Due to our society's distorted conception of sex this has become a daunting task because of the frequent appearance of invalid shame and baseless guilt in our sexual lives. Society's sexual ideal has presented us with the challenge of distinguishing between the validity of these emotions in our sexual lives. Certainly at times these emotions are legitimate. For example, if we cheat on our partner, if we use someone for sex knowing they want more out of the relationship, if we look at child pornography, etc. However, there are many situations in our sexual lives that we experience shame or guilt in which the emotions are unwarranted, such as standing nude before our lover, considering who we are as a sexual being through the perspective of the opposite sex, enjoying a sexuality that is not accepted by society, etc. Shame or guilt in these instances is a result of society's distorted conception of sex. Thus the shame is invalid and the guilt is baseless.

Our society is in need of a more accurate conception of sex that incorporates our actual, lived sexual experiences. If this should take place we will find that the occurrence of invalid shame or baseless guilt in our sexual lives is eliminated. If we were to live in a society with a conception of sex that accepts us as sexual beings, celebrates our sexuality

and promotes a healthy view on sex and sexuality, we will no longer be required to feel shame or guilt in situations in which it is unfounded. Rather, when we do feel these emotions it will be, more than likely, because we have done or thought something that is in violation of who we thought we were (i.e. shame), or because we have caused a harm to another or failed ourselves (i.e. guilt). We will then be in a position to act accordingly to the emotions, if we choose. Currently we are living in a society that consists of so much shame and guilt in our sexual lives, whether founded or not, that we are confused as to when the emotions are appropriate and when they are not in our sexual experiences. We have come to a point in which we misappropriate the emotions and therefore run the risk of either not addressing them at all or addressing the wrong emotions, such as working through invalid shame rather than legitimate shame.

By having a more accurate and appropriate conception of sex in our society we will recognize more easily when the emotions are applicable. We will also notice a reduction in the presence of the emotions in our sexual lives and the disconnection we are currently experiencing will be demolished. We will instead find a connection between our sexual selves and our sexual experiences. We will better understand who we are as sexual beings and our sexual lives. We will also better understand the emotions of shame and guilt. When we experience them we will know that they are legitimate and that a self-assessment or a corrective action is in order.

It is worth noting that although I critique the presence of sex in society and advertising I am by no means advocating for sex and sexuality to be eliminated from society or advertising. We are a sexual society and that should not be disregarded. Rather I am advocating for us and our society to acknowledge the actual sexual experiences of

our lives and to place importance on this, not on the idealist and dramatized aspects of the media and our current conception. I am not trying to hold sex and sexuality to a higher standard than it deserves nor to diminish it, but rather to state that the actual lived sexual experiences of our lives is what influences us sexually, changes our sexual understanding of ourselves and determines our sexual futures. This is not a minor aspect of our lives. It is for this reason these experiences should be recognized, valued, respected and celebrated by the individual who lives them and by society in general.

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