

Entertainment: Where did we go wrong?

Entertainment has been a part of our daily activity for decades. Rather it's through attending plays and concerts, watching television, or reading the paper, we have found ourselves consumed by the various dynamics that we call entertainment. In this paper, I will be exploring the history of sex in advertisements and the ramifications placed on society. As well as why sex has played such a huge roll in advertisement and why those that participate in it find it justifiable. I will also be applying the potter box method as an ethical analysis and exploring two perspectives. My theory is that society has lost its moral's and conformed to accept sex in entertainment, with the allowance of nudity in all media to soon follow.

People often hear the term “the first sex symbol” and their minds automatically go to Marilyn Monroe. With her breathy speech, coke bottle shape, and blonde hair, she was considered the sex symbol of her time. But by no means was she the first, when we think sex symbol we also must think about such actresses as Liz Taylor, Jane Mansfield, and Ava Gardner just to name a few (Smithfield, 2016). But when speaking about sex symbols we can't simply speak on just women; men have also been associated with the phrase “sex symbol”. When you think of Bonanza you think of Michael Landon the sex symbol of his time. But before these actresses and actors came along there was vaudeville, a mixture of burlesque, dance, comedy, and song. This showcased the talents of such entertainers as Ester Jones and Helen Kane. Besides sex being displayed in the form of television, live shows and advertisements, there were sex symbols from cartoons. With such characters as Betty Boop and Jessica Rabbit. Although we know Betty now as the character with the high-pitched voice, and curvy shape, she started as a poodle, later taking on the form we see today (Blakemore, 2017). While Betty was to appeal to a

more adult audience, she was only a sixteen-year-old girl, and her virtue was supposed to remain intact. However, there were moments where the line was very thin on an appropriate cartoon and inappropriate. An example of a thin line between inappropriate and appropriate was in “Don’t take my Boop-Oop-A-Doop away.” In the episode, Betty is trying to get away from the Black King as he drags her to the bedroom and attempts to force himself on her. While the act was not performed, the insinuation is beyond inappropriate for that of a cartoon. But it's not surprising that during this time inappropriate cartoons were a part of the norm. Disney often relayed on sexual behaviors and sometimes even racism to appeal to its audiences. It wasn't until the Production Code of 1934, and the National Legion of Decency enforced guidelines on Betty Boop's flapper girl image and sexual innuendos (Wells, pg. 85). Sex in media and entertainment has been a part of the norm for decades. With the rubber band of what acceptable expanded further and further as time progresses.

The 1920s allowed women the right to vote, the usage of birth control, and the flapper women. Flapper women were the party girl of their times, drinking, smoking, dancing, and dressing provocatively. They wore short skirts, heels, showed cleavage and ditched corsets for bras and lingerie. They were the epitome of sex. After being called into the workforce during World War I, women now had their own disposable income. This altered the direction of advertising. With less emphasis placed on corsets and household items, ads now focused more on cosmetics, cigarettes, and fashion. It was during this time that Helen Lansdowne Resor, an advertising executive at J Walter Thompson Agency began pushing sex appeal to get male attention (Pruitt, 2018). Although flappers were considered taboo, they were the beginning of women's sexual liberation, and the thought behind sex sells. Now being featured in such films as “Gentlemen prefer blondes,” giving off the belief that blondes are more fun and attractive than

brunettes. However, Mary Louise Brooks showed that brunettes could still be considered sexy with her short dark bob and flapper girl attire. Clara Bow was another actress that showed shameless sex appeal. Although flappers were becoming more and more of the norm, liberating women sexually it was met with some disapproval. There were many attempts by such states as Ohio, Virginia, and Utah to ban short skirts, form-fitting fashion, and clothing that revealed too much throat. Women were no longer being allowed to wear bathing suits on beaches and were escorted off by officers if they did so (Pruitt, 2018). With the great depression, the flapper lifestyle began to take a turn, women couldn't purchase the luxury clothing, and the Hays code of 1930 limited sexual themes in movies. Sexuality had been explored in public since the 1860s, but it was the women of burlesque and flapper girls that made it a part of American culture. Compared to our current display of sex in advertising and media today they were breaking down barriers, by exploring their sexuality and performing what was called provocative dancing. (Pruitt, 2018).

Sex in advertising and media has been occurring for years, the ability to appeal to the masses by having women show more skin, to build profit. Leaving behind the thought of dignity, morals, or ethics, sex in advertising is focused on the domination of sexual liberties to consume American dollars. While the initial belief was that this was a way for women to explore their sexual liberties the idea to appeal to a larger demographic was placed on the men. Although this allowed women to feel more freedom in their bodies, the moral ramifications were not explored. Women who participated in such activities considered themselves to be risqué, offering married men something their wives couldn't, and unmarried men a good time. Conforming to what society was depicting as the new normal. When looking at the display of nudity in entertainment I also must discuss Hefner and Playboy magazine. Uninhibited, and provocative this

magazine leaves nothing to the imagination and has been a huge part of entertainment since 1953. Utilizing her fame, and beauty the first nude woman featured in the magazine was none other than Marilyn Monroe (Sanburn, 2011). Since the conception of Playboy, many other magazines and publications followed suit and placed nudity as their form of entertainment. These publications include Hustler, Maxim, and Penthouse just to name a few. In the early 2000s, there was Eye Candy, a website focused on women posing provocatively or partially nude for a chance to gain internet fame. Two women, I was close to at the time, both decided to explore this opportunity. One deciding that it was not for her and that she was not interested in furthering her career in internet fame. The other decided to continue in her pursuit, later landing on magazine covers, carrying trophies on award shows, and being featured in music videos. Although it may seem like she's hit the celebrity lifestyle jackpot her day-to-day profession is exotic dancing. Now nearing forty, she still lives a life of an eighteen-year-old, no stability, partying and drinking. Is forsaking your morals acceptable when it comes to gaining fame and fortune? Going back to the time of Marilyn Monroe, she changed her name, style of dress, and hair color to appeal more to the male demographic to achieve stardom. She became known as the ditsy blonde; that any notable man could screw. Often associated with the Kennedy's and having been married three times, achieving star status, at a level that has lasted decades, she still seemed unhappy. Money doesn't equal happiness, in Marilyn's case, she wore a smile for the world while crying inside. Seeking the love, she never received as a child, and the affection she desired as an adult. Wanting to explore motherhood, and be the daunting wife, just never happened for Ms. Monroe. Was giving up her morals and ethics for fame worth the loss of her happiness? Would she have felt better about herself if she had stayed the brunette with the name Norma Jean, married and had children, allowing her to live a longer more fulfilling life? With these

questions in mind, I must continue to explore how sex in the media has wreaked havoc on what society believes is beautiful or acceptable. Do women need to be a size two, show cleavage, and change their names to game fame or show themselves worthy of being titled “beautiful”. In the late 30s law abiders fought to have sex be left behind closed doors, attempting to limit sexual innuendos in cartoons, television, and media. But today sex is so openly flaunted as if it’s a part of normal society. Kim Kardashian and her family have made a living off a scandalous sex tape, and her mom's (Kris) ability to manage her daughters in a distasteful way to live a luxurious lifestyle. What does this say for Kris as a mother? Can some of the faults of the women that lower their moral standards be placed on their parents? In the example of Marilyn, she strived to achieve the love she wanted as a child but was unable to receive from either parent. Her mom suffered from mental illness, and her dad being unknown left Marilyn constantly trying to find love in the wrong places. In Kardashian’s case, they look to their mother for guidance, not just as a mother but also as their manager. And their mother looks to them for dollar signs. There is a lack of morals and ethics within that family dynamic, that further solidifies how sex in the media has changed our perception of what's acceptable.

We can place blame on many different aspects of past situations and consider the mass media and its dependency on profit as the cause for morality leaving advertising and entertainment. But society is as much to blame. We allow the media to tell us what size we should be, the makeup we should wear, clothes we should buy, etc. By allowing their perception to dictate our purchases we are also allowing them to decide what we accept. Essentially what we are saying is that we agree with the sexiest misogynistic behavior and conforming to the system of their level of morality. There are stores such as Victoria Secret that have allowed us to believe that we need to be a size two to feel beautiful. Women flock to these stores as if they are

the epitome of what's beautiful. The ethical problem between now and the 30s is that in the 30s people refused to allow the media to alter their ethics. They took a stand on what's acceptable and fought to have morality keep its place within society. But somewhere along the lines, we lost that capability or that drive to fight for what's right. My conclusion consists of two perspectives; however, the issue is the same in both scenarios, the level of acceptance of sexuality and nudity in entertainment. My first perspective is that society is at fault for allowing media and entertainment to make choices for us, we've lost sight of logic, and morality and conformed to the aesthetics placed in front of us. There are no more principles, we choose to follow along with the masses. Society has placed its loyalty with the entertainment industry, unwilling to challenge its ethics, behavior, or the immorality of nudity in the media, furthering the concept that "sex does in fact, sale." We have lost sight of our morals. My second perspective comes from the entertainment industry. Their values lack professionalism and morals. The principle thought is that making sales is more important than the dignity of those they exploit. They understand the desire for fame and fortune, and don't mind pushing the envelope of those that crave the lifestyle. The entertainment industry's primary loyalty is with the American dollar regardless of the outcome.

Citations:

Smithfield B. (2016, August 30) *The first male Hollywood sex symbol was the Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa.*

<https://www.thevintagenews.com/2016/08/30/the-first-male-hollywood-sex-symbol-was-the-japanese-actor-sessue-hayakawa/>

Blakemore E. (2017, July 20) *The People v. Betty Boop.*

<https://www.history.com/news/the-people-v-betty-boop>

Wells P. (2002) *Animation and America* (pg. 85) Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Pruitt S. (2018, September 17) *How Flappers Redefined Womenhood (Hint: It involved Jazz, Liquor, and Sex).*

<https://www.history.com/news/flappers-roaring-20s-women-empowerment>

Sanburn J. (2011, January 24) *Brief History: Playboy*

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2042352,00.html>