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Sexualized Violence in the Media Contributes to Violence Against Women

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"Our kids are surrounded by these brutal representations of girls and women, and it is no wonder that women and young girls are the victims of male violence."

In the following viewpoint, teacher Marina DelVecchio argues that sexualized images of beaten or dead women encourage real violence against women. She points to music videos, television, fashion, and comic books to show evidence of the pervasiveness of images of sexualized violence. DelVecchio is a teacher and a contributing writer to the *New Agenda*.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. What does DelVecchio say that the Greek word *miso* means, and how does she apply this to the meaning of *misogyny*?
2. What images of violence against women does Anita Sarkeesian say are used in Kanye West's music video for "Monster" on the *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* album?
3. According to DelVecchio, what is the focus of Gail Simone's blog *Women in Refrigerators*?

Misogyny is defined as "hatred of women." Interestingly, *miso* in Greek not only means "hatred", it also means "half." If we apply this definition to the way women are presently being depicted in the media—in movies, television shows, cartoons, music videos, and even comic books—it is clear that women are presented as half-human and objectified. If a woman is looked upon as an object, without feelings, life, soul, or thoughts, then it is easy to ingest images of her that defy her humanity. She is not a woman—a living creature with human attributes. She is merely a body, a vacant, empty, vessel intended to contain the needs of others—preferably men—and her body, which is the most desired aspect of her existence, perfect, lithe, smooth and hair-free, is open for interpretation and domination.

Objectification Justifies Violence

Because she is half a woman, the acceptable and sexy parts of her—her eyes, her mouth, her breasts, her long legs, and her thighs and genitals—are coveted, defined, exploited, manipulated, and used to satiate men's needs, while the rest of her—her mind, intelligence, thoughts, and voice—are avoided, silenced, and virtually non-existent. This type of misogyny exists in our culture—our refined, free, and progressive American culture. It is a prevailing theme perpetuated by corporations that dabble in pop culture's music, movies, reality television shows, and commercials, using female sex to make tons of cash. And while their pockets are filling with dough, women suffer the consequences of being dehumanized and objectified.

In [the article] "Two Ways a Woman Can Get Hurt," Jean Kilbourne claims that by "turning a human being into a thing, an object, is almost always the first step toward justifying violence against that person." She contends that by using female sex to sell their products, advertising companies send the message that "all women, regardless of age, are really temptresses in disguise, nymphets, sexually instable and seductive."

Advertising isn't the only culprit, however, which inarguably demonstrates that this attitude towards women and their dislocated,

dislodged, dismembered bodies is a rampant theme.

It is in reality television shows. In an article published at *Women in Media and News*, Jennifer L. Pozner criticizes misogynist representations in popular reality TV shows such as *America's Next Top Model*, which just aired a challenge for their models to pretend they were dead and sexily clad:

This misogyny has been manifesting itself in print for years as advertising's fetishization of images of beautifully beaten, raped, drugged, tortured and murdered girls ... today, advertisers are advancing these same backwards notions in 3-D, in the name of "reality," their product placement bucks allowing them to influence and sometimes even control the dialog, sets, themes and plotlines of primetime's most popular "unscripted" programs.

Images of scantily clad and sexy women who are dead has become an artistic motif in music videos. Recently, Kanye West released a music video for [the song "Monster" on] his new album titled *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* [2011], wherein images of beautiful but dead women are presented. Anita Sarkeesian, a pop culture media critic who creates video blogs for Feminist Frequency describes it quite well:

Throughout the video we are presented with a series of lifeless, nearly naked, mutilated women's bodies. We see women, or parts of women, all white, draped across sofas, propped up in beds, hanging from nooses, and all with perfectly applied make up and high heels. In addition to the sexualized, dismembered body parts, we're also treated to Kanye holding up a freshly severed head.

And as the title of Kanye's album points out, this is his "fantasy" to be surrounded by the vacant bodies of sexy, fragmented women who look good, but have nothing to say their bodies/corpses to be used in any way the man deems necessary in having his pleasures and fantasies satiated. Her body exists for him without her actually being present. Very disturbing.

Not Creative Expression

This image of sexy corpses saturates also the artistic realms of fashion photography. *The Society Pages* posted an article by Gwen Sharp titled "More Sexualized Violence in Fashion," which shows very graphic and violent photos of models portrayed as dead, a few of them depicting the images of [actress] Lindsay Lohan holding a gun, having a gun aimed at her face, and lying on the floor, wearing barely anything, and surrounded by blood....

Lohan and the photographer argue that this is creative expression, but it surely isn't. And if it is, then what are they creatively expressing that violence and brutality become women? That it is OK and commonplace to fantasize over dead or brutalized women? That they're sexier and more erotic when they're dead, lying in a pool of their own blood?

And who sees these images? If you think your kids aren't, you are sadly mistaken. These images are everywhere. They're in places parents don't think to check, like on their cell phones, ipods, mp3s, and the computers they do their homework on. They're in the songs they listen to, the movies they see with their friends, the news that report gang rapes, rapes, murders of little girls, and pregnant women; they're even in comic books, as illustrated by Gail Simone's *Women In Refrigerators*, a blog that she created, which provides a lengthy list of female characters brutalized, raped, and/or murdered in order to drive the main male character in comic books to seek revenge for his beloved's death.

Our kids are surrounded by these brutal representations of girls and women, and it is no wonder that women and young girls are the victims of male violence. No wonder that 20% of college girls will be sexually assaulted by guys they know in school. And it is no wonder that boys as young as 14 are capable of raping little girls as young as 11. How else are they to perceive girls if they are inundated daily with images of half-humans, half-living women, looking "sick and sexified," as Kesha's new song ["We R Who We R," 2010] goes.

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