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The consumption of patriarchy: commodification to facilitation and reification

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ABSTRACT

There is an abundance of research from cultural, critical and feminist criminology that has recognized media as a vehicle to propagate various forms of gender inequality and violence against women. Likewise, there has been extensive research on how childhood products and toys replicate the patriarchal construction of gender. However, these bodies of research have been relatively silent on how the commodification of culture is consumed and reified by the very population it oppresses (i.e. women). Here, we argue that violence against women is commodified and eagerly consumed in an age of neo-liberalism, legitimizing the patriarchal power structures that subordinate women. Our goal is to begin a discussion of female consumption of the commodification that gives consent and facilitates the patriarchal perpetual power system. Using examples from media and the consumer market, we hope to begin a broader discussion of how patriarchy, gender roles and inequality are reinforced through everyday banal consumption by both sexes. However, this banal consumption by females not only lends to the legitimization of the heteronormative patriarchal status quo but also makes them active participants in the continuation of inequality and power structures inherent within this patriarchal society.

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Introduction

Little attention is paid to the role that consumption has in the facilitation and reproduction of inequalities and violence. As noted by Renner (2002, p. 53) ‘most consumers don’t know that a number of common purchases bear the invisible imprint of violence.’ But consumption takes many forms spanning from the use of everyday products to purchasing entertainment that blatantly objectifies and reifies inequalities. In Global North countries these behaviors are less noticeable as they occur within a democratic state where narratives of agency and freedom of decision-making (i.e. to purchase or not purchase a product) are used to counter broader systemic patterns of inequality. Moreover, there is little recognition of the relationship between the harms, violence and institutionalized inequalities and our own consumption, pacification, tacit support and facilitation of these. As Neocleous (2012, p. 189) argues

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it is a 'training in resilience' that hardens the public to the spectacle of violence. We argue that this contributes to an inequality where such heteronormative patriarchal relations are digested and reproduced.

Nowhere is this perhaps more evidenced than through the consumption of patriarchy and gendered inequalities, where gender constructions that privilege men over women are prioritized over equality. Here, we argue that violence against women is commodified and eagerly consumed in an age of neo-liberalism, legitimizing the patriarchal power structures that subordinate women. Using examples from media and the consumer market, we demonstrate how patriarchy, gender roles and inequality are reinforced through everyday banal consumption by both sexes. Moreover, this banal consumption not only lends to the legitimization of the heteronormative patriarchal status quo but also makes females active participants in the continuation of inequality and the existing power structures. We highlight how driven by capital accumulation the 'commodification of violence [becomes] inseparable from the violence of commodification' (Jarvis, 2007, p. 328). Prior to discussing this in more detail, we provide a brief review of the literature on patriarchy as consumption.

Patriarchal consumption

There is little criminological literature that directly addresses patriarchy as consumption as conceptualized here. The small literature that does exist tackles the subject in various ways such as a women's ability to capitalize on the sexualized objectification of their bodies as a commodity to be sold (Wesley, 2002), patriarchy as a tool of labor division where domestic work is viewed as labor to be consumed (Allen, 1983), and women as property in traditional patriarchal cultures, both historically and today, where they are considered a commodity in the case of marriage (Chaudhuri, Morash, & Yingling, 2014; Klein, 1981), or pornography (Bergen & Bogle, 2000; Hald, Malamuth, & Yuen, 2010; Simmons, Lehmann, & Collier-Tenison, 2008).

Cultural, feminist, and media studies provides an extensive literature that indirectly tackles the issue of patriarchy as consumption by examining the propagation of visual depictions of gender inequality and violence against women (Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000). Analyses of films, television shows, video games, music, books and magazines reveal patterns of media portrayals of patriarchal displays of rape (Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000; Kettrey, 2013), the reinforcement and normalization of dating violence (Collins & Carmody, 2011; Nayar, 2010; Silver, 2010; Wilson, 2011), the romanticizing of intimate partner violence (Bonomi, Altenburger, & Walton, 2013; DeKeseredy, Muzzatti, & Donnermeyer, 2014), the dependence of women, specifically white women's purity, on men for protection from harm (Kelly, 2012), and the expendability of women as commodities as portrayed through the violence that is done to their bodies – i.e. pornography (Bergen & Bogle, 2000; Hald et al., 2010; Jarvis, 2007; Jones, 2013; Simmons et al., 2008; Tempest, 1990). For example, in a study that examined the differences between violence enacted against women as compared to men in 'slasher' horror movies, Welsh (2010) found that not only were women more likely to be victims of certain types of violence than men, but the violence was more likely to be sexual in nature. Likewise, in a 2013 study of the popular book series, turned movie, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Bonomu, Altenburger and Walton note that the experience of the female character is consistent with those who have lived through intimate partner violence. The romantic relationship detailed in the series centers around a bondage, discipline, and sadomasochist relationship with the male character being the dominant and the female the submissive. However, the male

character coerces the female character into engaging in different sexual practices and manipulates her in nonsexual exchanges during their relationship by exercising power and control over her in a manner that is reflective of ‘those observed in chronically violent couples’ (Bonomi et al., 2013, p. 735). Albeit fiction, many of these examples can be, and have been, construed as part of a larger ‘rape culture’ (Fraser, 2015; Garland, Branch, & Grimes, 2016; Projansky, 2001), as they have been culturally constructed to promote and normalize the abuse and subordination of women (Makin & Morczek, 2015). Therefore, myths about rape and violence against women become *the* dominant understandings of rape and sexuality, and become institutionalized (Collins, 2015). As a consequence they are embedded in an innumerable amount of media and the cultural industry in general which further legitimizes the existing gender structure that marginalizes women.

Other cultural analyses examine the propagation of misogynistic and patriarchal values in different genres of music lyrics and videos (Baker-Kimmons & McFarland, 2011; Bretthauer, Zimmerman, & Banning, 2007; Haynes, 2009; Herd, 2015; Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2012; Strasburger, 1995; van Oosten, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2015). From rap, to hip-hop, to country music much of this research concentrates on the sexual objectification of women and the depiction of stereo-types as it relates to sex and gender (Arnett, 2002; Jhally, 2007). Men, specifically white men, are often displayed as powerful, aggressive and violent (Brown & Campbell, 1986; Sherman & Dominick, 1986), whereas genres of music such as rap and hip hop, have been linked to cultural-specific ideals of masculinity (Baker-Kimmons & McFarland, 2011). For example, Baker-Kimmons and McFarland (2011) conduct a historical analysis of rap music to better understand working-class masculinity in black and chicano cultures. They find that rap reaffirms hegemonic masculinity but also challenges the dominant constructions of male power and privilege. They find that rap music accepts that power is a celebrated component of hegemonic masculinity, yet poor and working class men do not have means to acquire this power (i.e. political power). As a substitute, physical power in the form of interpersonal violence and gun culture is celebrated both as it relates to protecting their families and in resisting white domination. Conversely, content analyses of music lyrics find that women, and their value, are inextricably linked to their appearance and sexual attraction and are often portrayed as being weak, vulnerable and dependent on men (Bretthauer et al., 2007). This literature argues that the prevalence of these lyrics and images create a popular culture that devalues women and their bodies, normalizing oppression and violence committed against them.

Similarly, there is an established literature that provides a critique of gender constructions as it relates to children’s toys (Campenni, 1999; Clark & Higonnet, 1999; Messner, 2000). From analyses of G.I. Joe and Barbie (Änggård, 2005; Damico & Quay, 2006; Messner, 2000), to gender constructions in video games (Dietz, 1998; Gray, 2014), these studies examine how these toys and games influence early childhood development, as well as healthy interactions between adolescents noting that gender-stereotyping largely influences what is considered appropriate behavior for girls and boys. Much of this literature illustrates broader cultural reinforcements of ‘traditional’ ideals of masculinity and femininity. Women are constructed as being passive and domestic (Campenni, 1999), with qualities of physical and/or sexual attractiveness being prioritized (Dietz, 1998). Conversely, aggressiveness, toughness, physicality and working outside the home were found to be typical characteristics for toys and games directed at boys. Other literature has addressed media backlash when women in the public realm gain increased levels of power and authority, such as coverage of Hillary Clinton’s

presidential campaign (Ritchie, 2013), as well as the gradual de-politicization of feminist discourse in print media (Mendes, 2012) and popular television programming (Myers, 2013). In varying ways, this literature illustrates the dominance of patriarchal constructions of gender in popular culture, as well the resulting backlash when these dominant ideals are then challenged.

While much of this literature identifies the patterns of gender construction that privilege men over women through objectification, overt sexualization, and the promotion and normalization of violence against women, there is a relative silence on the broader issue of neo-liberal commodification and the willing consummation that we argue needs further extrapolation and discussion among critical scholars.

Theoretical framework

From a Gramscian frame, cultural hegemony¹ and hegemonic discourse, which are patriarchal, permeates all social institutions and everyday life (Gramsci, 1995). Hegemony presents the dominant definition of reality in such a way that it is accepted as common sense. As such, hegemonic discourse represents the dominant ideology (patriarchy), justifying the social, political, and economic status quo. This hegemonic dominance relies on a form of “consented” coercion or as Bourdieu and Wacquant suggest, a form of symbolic violence: ‘the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity’ (1992, p. 167). They refer to this complicity as ‘misrecognition’: ‘recognising a violence which is wielded precisely inasmuch as one does not perceive it as such’ (1992, pp. 167–168). This violence then becomes banal, disavowed, depoliticized and normalized through cultural hegemony and hegemonic discourse (Neocleous, 2008). It is here we suggest that attention should be given to the role of consumption. After all, the commodification of patriarchy is present every day and has come to be seen as a ‘fact of life’ that ‘nicely captures the dominant social meaning of banal goods’ (Goold, Loader, & Thumala, 2013, p. 978).

Baudrillard (1998) argues that consumption ‘is governed by magical thinking’ (p. 31) as it is both an objective process and lived as a myth creating a ‘fantasy of goods and services’ (Ritzer, 1998). This is disconnected from how and by whom the product is made, as well as any broader social meaning. From a structural perspective, that consumption is language, a mode of discourse that conveys messages and symbols as a means of communication. The commodity itself then becomes greater than its intended use, as its value is associated with what it signifies. While Baudrillard argues this allows the consumer to read the system of consumption (i.e. knowing what to consume and when) ultimately resulting in an inability to satisfy their want for commodities, we argue that the language of consumption has greater applicability. Through consumption, broader ideologies and structures can be propagated and reified, supporting unequal power structures that value some groups over others (i.e. men over women). In this sense, we use the term reification as conceptualized by Lukács (1967): ‘the structural process whereby the commodity form permeates life in capitalist society’ (Zuidervaat, 1991, p. 76). The consumer acts willingly as they continue to live the myth, governed by the ‘magical thinking’ that disconnects them from the reality of their consumption as well as the disconnection from the permeation of commodity into all of their everyday life. In this way the magical thinking, as Bauman states, becomes a form of seduction: ‘the paramount tool of integration (of the reproduction of domination) in a consumer society’ (1988, pp. 221–222). This is especially the case when the consumption of goods (both

tangible and nontangible – as is the case of media and other cultural products including music) pose a direct harm to the very group the consumer occupies. Consumption therefore, becomes pathological, driven by fantasies that are disconnected from reality, where ‘consumerism may go so far as consum[m]ation, pure and simple destruction’ (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 43). For the subordinated group, in this case females, this takes the form of violence against the consumer’s body (females as a group)-directly and as well as more banal forms of everyday oppression that are masked within the broader neo-liberal cultural (re)production.

Analysis

... freedom to choose what is always the same ...

(Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944)

The consumption and commodification of patriarchy, gender inequality and violence perpetrated against women takes many forms. From Hollywood Blockbuster movies such as recently released *The Perfect Guy*, *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *The Boy Next Door*, to the uniforms of the wait staff at Hooters, to the sale of pink kitchen appliances, hetero-normative patriarchal values have taken on an uniformity ‘as a whole and in every part’ (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944). Through the propagation of free will, choice and agency, the consumer, especially in democratic societies, is blinded to the commodification of oppression. As such, cultural hegemony and hegemonic discourse present the dominant definition of reality in such a way that it is accepted as common sense. The popularity of a product is disconnected from the ideologies it conveys, it becomes *just* a song, or a movie, or a toy that is not ‘real’. Nowhere is this more evident than in popular songs.

Take for example, the single *Blurred Lines* that shot to number one on the music billboards and remained there for twelve weeks earning it the title of the biggest-selling single of 2013 (NME, 2013). The song is about sexual intercourse and the issue of consent. In describing a woman who ‘wants really wild sex’ (Romano, 2013), the lyrics are ‘I hate these blurred lines, you know you want it’ (Thicke, Williams, Harris, & Gaye, 2013) suggesting she will not admit to her desires. The song reinforces the deep rooted patriarchal assumption that a woman really mean ‘yes’ when she says ‘no’ to sex with a man. The video reinforces this message as it shows a scantily clad woman dancing while Thicke whispers the lyrics ‘I know you want it’ (Thicke et al., 2013) in her ear. Even if this lyric was interpreted as mere indecision, it still promotes the benevolent sexist belief that women do not know what they want and are in need of paternalistic guidance from men to make their decision – i.e. men know what women want better than women. Despite the candor of the songs’ content and accompanying video that promotes nonconsensual sex, approximately 1.44 million copies of the single were sold (NME, 2013). It also represents Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992) misrecognition, as despite its blatant sexist and violent content promoting rape it is not perceived as such by the broader audience who willingly purchase, listen, and sing to the song.

There are a plethora of examples that highlight the consumption of the ideology of patriarchy. Maroon 5’s song *Animal* is another example of top hit songs with lyrics promoting violence:

Baby, I’m preying on you tonight; Hunt you down eat you alive; Just like animals, animals, like animals-mals; Maybe you think that you can hide; I can smell your scent from miles ... So what you trying to do to me; It’s like we can’t stop we’re enemies; But we get along when I’m inside you; You’re like a drug that’s killing me; I cut you out entirely; But I get so high when I’m inside

you; Yeah, you can start over, you can run free; You can find other fish in the sea; You can pretend it's meant to be; But you can't stay away from me (Levine, Shellback, & Levin, 2014).

Songs that refer to females as bitches, less than and subordinate to males dominate airwaves and are readily consumed. These are only a small sample of the examples that exemplifies the general social and cultural reproduction and consumption of understandings of violence against women as being normalized.

Women as well as men are complicit in this reinforcement as they too purchase, hum along, or sing in karaoke to popular songs that serve as cultural productions of hegemonic patriarchy. Women, through their willing consumption, are directly participating in the reinforcement of the existing gender structure. Many of these cultural productions of hegemonic patriarchy are divorced from the reality of what they represent and in some cases are even heralded as being liberating for women in some way. Take for example the aforementioned blockbuster movie *50 Shades of Grey* that was promoted as being progressive for liberating women's sexual expression. This is despite the behaviors exhibited by the male protagonist towards his love interests being reflective of 'those observed in chronically violent couples' (Bonomi et al., 2013, p. 735). Beyond mirroring a violent relationship, the sexual liberation that the series is heralded for, ignores the underlying premise that the female protagonist's self-discovery (both emotionally and sexually) is dependent on a man. The plot then, is less about female empowerment and more about the reaffirmation of the dominance of heterosexual masculinity, as the dominant message is that a woman can only be empowered by fulfilling male, heterosexual desires. Over 100 million books, the inspiration for the movie, were sold worldwide to predominantly female consumers (Bosman, 2014) clearly demonstrating Baudrillard's (1998) pathological consumerism that is driven by fantasies that are disconnected from reality. The *50 Shades of Grey* series is one of many examples that reproduce the dominance of patriarchy through consumerism, from romance novels to the cable television channel *Lifetime*, to television shows like *Law and Order Special Victims Unit*, male-perpetrated violence against women, specifically sexualized violence, has been packaged and promoted as entertainment and then readily consumed. This form of violence has become omnipresent, a 'fact of life' (Goold et al., 2013) as it is banalized, disavowed, depoliticized and normalized through cultural hegemony and hegemonic discourse (Neocleous, 2008).

Specific marketing towards the female consumer is not limited to the entertainment industry. In fashion and beauty advertising women have been the primary target. Through billboards, television, radio, internet, cinema and magazines the female consumer is bombarded with messages that critique the female body. This purposely manufactured anxiety, dissatisfaction and feeling of inadequacy push the female consumer to purchase the product necessary to fix, stave off, or minimize the flaw (Jarvis, 2007). The female body is policed (i.e. how it looks, what goes in it, on it, and over it) and becomes a site for capitalist accumulation where its various parts, such as hair, skin and eyes, are culturally repackaged through advertising, commoditization (i.e. the selling of *perfect* hair, *softer* skin, *longer* eyelashes) and then consumed to meet the patriarchal standard for female beauty. Despite this unrelenting policing of the female form, it is women that continue to make up the primary market for fashion and beauty spending as much as \$38.1 billion in 2014 alone on beauty enhancing products (Krom, 2015). Here we see Baudrillard's (1998) 'magical thinking' at play as beauty ideals propagated by the advertising industry and the products being sold are divorced from their meaning; that of limiting and controlling the female form so it fits within standards dictated by the patriarchal status quo.

It is not just these types of beauty products where patriarchal notions of gender are commodified and consumed. Consider the latest fashions, where the successful female must wear this outfit or 'the night out' attire that are eagerly consumed without thought to the banality to which patriarchal assumptions of what it means to be, look, like, act, or dress as a female permeates every aspect of our daily lives within this neo-liberal system. These products also 'nicely captures the dominant social meaning of banal goods' (Goold et al., 2013, p. 978) as they are ubiquitous, their broader meaning rarely noticed as they are so commonplace. As argued by Miller (2010) goods 'have the unexpected capacity to fade out of view and become peripheral in our vision' (p. 51). Yet, in this case they reinforce notions of acceptable heteronormative gender behaviors, norms and stereotypes in a manner that is unobtrusive and innoxious. It is the banality or triviality of these products that lends them power, as through their pervasiveness they are rarely noticed or questioned, becoming part of the broader patriarchal status quo. Furthermore, the advertising industry sells their products through the marketing of hegemonic patriarchy providing a 'discourse through and about objects' (Jhally, 1990, p. 247). In the case of fashion, this object is the female form which is sold through objectification, subordination and sexualization. Women's capital is inextricably linked to their bodies, or parts of their bodies, which are subject to surveillance and scrutiny from both men and women (Gill, 2009). Very often this objectification is overtly linked to subordination and sexualized violence which is most apparent when adverts portray only one part of the female form (i.e. legs, breasts, etc.). In its extreme, Australian shoe company Loula depicted the shoe clad foot and leg of a dead women hanging from the trunk of a car in an advert for their shoes. Similar advertisements have been produced by Jimmy Choo, Lamode Fashion Footwear and Marc Jacobs where violence against women was central to the advertising message. This is a common motif in advertising where women are displayed as dead, as heads without bodies, bodies without heads, broken and sprawled across various objects, or suffocated by plastic. By reducing women to faceless, broken, body parts, they are stripped of their humanity and more easily objectified. Therefore, violence is used to reduce the value of women to just body parts (both living and dead) as they are visually dismembered – their value reduced to just a leg – for the purpose of selling goods. This process of objectification while reducing the female form to mere object, is readily consumed in the capitalist-consumer society as it not only sets a desire to purchase or own, but it simultaneously sexualizes possession as the most luxurious goods are those that carry the most sexual significance (Caputi, 2015). Women willingly consume these products as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), as it is a violence symbolically exercised against *all* women within a larger cultural hegemony that normalizes the oppression of women and girls. These images of objectification, whether proliferated by print or online media, are not only normalized within the broader consumer culture as they are so commonplace, but so too is the message of objectification and resulting oppression that they represent. The dismembered image of the female form, and the violence it represents, is minimized by the women who then purchase the product using their consumer power to reinforce the acceptability of such advertising messages. As argued by Caputi (2015, p. 380) the female form in its natural state 'is a turn-off to a pornographic culture steeped in misogyny, body loathing, and the technological "fix" for the supposed imperfections of matter. She must be made new, remade into the perfect consumer object.'

As Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) note,

The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises. The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, it draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged; the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached.

The prevalence of banal consumption can also be seen in the marketing and consumption of goods that reify existing gender roles and norms. Products are designed to reflect ideals of masculinity and femininity. There is still a separation of sex and gender along the lines of the public and private spheres where women are still associated with domestic work and men with working outside the home. This is reflected in the abundance of cleaning products, kitchen appliances such as kitchen mixers that often come in a range of colors associated with femininity, and home décor that reinforce ideals of femininity that situate women as being responsible for the home. Similar products that are directed towards a male consumer often include a label indicating it is 'for men.' For example, Kleenex tissues for men come in a black and grey box and are clearly marked 'mansize,' or Bounce sheets for the tumble dryer come in a package labeled 'for men.' This is true of a plethora of products from his and her razors, *Bic* pens, earplugs, and even teas; Yogi tea offers a 'Men's Tea' and a 'Women's Tea.' Distinguishing between the sexes and the reinforcement of patriarchal values is so pervasive it is embedded in the most basic of consumer behaviors – buying tea – where the commodity itself has become greater than its intended use, as its value is associated with what it signifies – acceptable tea for a woman or for a man. This illustrates Baudrillard's argument that the consumer comes to read the system of consumption, knowing what to consume, when and by whom. This has been so pervasive that when Target, a large supermarket in the US, decided to remove gender-based labeling from the toy department there was a tremendous backlash from consumers who expressed outrage such as the following message posted to Target's website by a female consumer,

Are you Target people out of your minds?? If I'm shopping for my grand daughter, I want to know where the girls things are. And the opposite when I'm shopping for a grandson, of course. Guess what? If my grand children develop identity crisis, I can still find what I want! No one is saying girls cannot have boys things or that boys can not have girls things as I have seen so many people point out here. I want the convenience of being pointed in the right direction for what I am looking for. Is that too much to ask?? [*sic*](Miloviz, as cited in Rietmulder, 2015).

This is one example of thousands of consumers that expressed distress at Targets gender-neutral labeling, where its disruption to the established consumer system has posed a challenge to the existing patriarchal order. This consumer has clearly accepted that some toys should be for boys and others for girls, irrespective of the constructed nature of these categories. Her objection to a gender-neutral toy department reinforces the socially embedded nature of these gender dichotomies. However, as an example, Target's removal of gender-based labelling is quite complex. By removing the gender-based language in their stores Target may well be playing a role in legitimating patriarchy by selling the message of gender-neutrality and equality. Albeit, a seemingly positive move towards gender-equality as they are no longer reinforcing the traditional gender roles that are so often linked to children's toys (see the aforementioned studies Campenni, 1999; Clark & Higonet, 1999; Messner, 2000), this does little to impact the dominance of patriarchy in the broader society. In effect, they have acted to depoliticize and give the appearance of rendering neutral the power of hegemonic patriarchy without effecting any substantial improvement in the existing gender order.

Capitalism and consumerism have led to the appropriation of oppressed groups, their experiences and narratives, which are commodified giving the impression of ending said oppression (Colton & Whitney-Squire, 2010). Nowhere is this more apparent than in Hollywood where the narratives of marginalized groups are presented in a way that then appeals to the larger dominant audience. For example, consider that Disney repeatedly represents and reinforces heteronormative patriarchal relationships. This is accomplished in various ways reflective of both pre-feminist and post-feminist gender ideals (Stover, 2013). Early films present a beautiful voiceless princess such as the passive and childlike character of *Snow White*. Portrayed as pure, submissive and innocent, a representation of pre-feminist movement gender ideals, *Snow White* and later *Cinderella*, strive for a happy-ever-after that is equated with finding a prince (Rosen, 1973; Stover, 2013). These films reflect the era in which they were released where the dominant definition of reality for women was that of homemaker, dependent on men for financial work that occurred outside the home. Therefore, the gender relations in these films were accepted as common sense as they represent the dominant understanding of patriarchy during that time period, justifying the social, political, and economic status quo for women at that time.

Post-feminism Disney princesses at first glance seem to be more autonomous and portrayed in ways where they are 'no longer constrained by any inequalities or tyrannies' (Gill, 2007, p. 93). With greater voice, these heroines start from a position of being trapped and break free to find their happiness. They possess character traits such as ambition and focus as they embark on adventures. This is evidenced in the story of *The Little Mermaid* that grossed \$218,601,006 from the film release alone (excluding the host of products that resulted from the film) where at first glance Ariel's goal is to leave the ocean because of her fascination with land. A more in-depth analysis however, reveals that her goals are then reordered so that her struggle to achieve her dream of walking on land is narrowed into the traditional Disney trope of finding a husband. Similarly, Disney has recognized that to widen their audience they need to embrace multiculturalism as more recently represented by Tiana, a black princess introduced in the film *The Princess and the Frog* that brought in gross sales of \$115,488,582. Yet the applauded progress of such efforts disguises the reinforcement of the same patriarchal relationships of the existing social order. While sold as 'new' and groundbreaking, it is the same message keeping gender roles within the inept status quo of patriarchy. Consider that Tiana represents female empowerment as her aspiration in life is to own a successful business. Despite this goal, Disney repeatedly reminds the audience that the originator of this ambition is Tiana's father. This acts to feminize Tiana and recasts her as a young girl seeking approval from her Father. This in turn minimizes the aggressive ambition of a woman and situates Tiana as a little girl abiding by the wishes of her Father, a narrative that is less threatening than an independent woman entering the public sphere for her own benefit (Stover, 2013) reasserting male dominance. While appearing as differentiated products, they prove to be all alike in the end: same message of the dominant hegemony which is patriarchal – i.e. success is defined through the acquisition of a romantic heterosexual relationship, or fulfilling the goals and aspirations of a male character. This trend, as illustrated by Disney, can be described as a 'spiral of illusionary progress forever working towards an unreachable goal of gender equality' (Stover, 2013, p. 2). Due to the popularity and pervasiveness of Disney the princesses are highly visible 'where less overt but ever present backlash redirects the goals of feminism in a counterproductive fashion, disguised as female consumer empowerment' (McRobbie, 2004, p. 255).

Messages of equality are also readily consumed and often heralded as forms of resisting hegemonic patriarchy. Consider the abundance of gimmicky mugs, badges and t-shirts that proudly display messages such as 'men of quality respect equality' or 'women who seek to be equal to men lack ambition.' While the messages being consumed here convey greater autonomy for women and have been equated with greater agency for women, they are coopted versions of popular feminist critique often encouraging the consumer to think of themselves as fighters for a cause, advocates for equality and social justice without having to actually engage in nonconformity, dissent and resistance that achieves such equality, what Goldman (1992) terms commodity feminism. Women therefore become neo-liberal subjects by purchasing corporate approved ideals of gender-equality. These ideals still require judgment and self-monitoring of one's own emotional state, as women exercise their purchasing power in support of a greater cause (i.e. the gimmicky mugs displaying messages of equality). However, such purchasing decisions also necessitate women's consent to engage in the ideological and material consumption of post-feminist neo-liberal consumerism. They buy into the advertisers efforts to 'reincorporate the cultural power of feminism' (Goldman, 1992, p. 130) and in doing so nullify or depoliticize the goals of feminism (Murray, 2012).

The post-feminist premise of increased autonomy, self-surveillance, individualism, choice and empowerment (Gill, 2007), aligns particularly well with corporate capitalist interests where women can be seen as an autonomous 'empowered consumer' (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 2). The post-feminist consumer therefore, associates her empowerment and choices with the market place and material consumption (Gill, 2007) – she is free to purchase what she wants when she wants. She is able to engage her power as a consumer but does so as she aligns herself with broader institutional goals – those of heteronormative hegemonic patriarchy – through the absorption and consumption of products that promote the mythos of equality. This creates a façade of feminist empowerment as individual choice is only exercised within the confines of the neo-liberal market that dictates the parameters of consumerism – exercising their purchasing power to consume products that reinforce more broadly accepted views of gender-equality. Such efforts are carefully crafted ploys introduced to correct the behaviors the marketing industry themselves created (Stole, 2008). The resistance message attached to the product shields the true meaning of the product within the larger neo-liberal capitalist market, creating a disjuncture between the consumer and the ideology it truly represents. We see most forms of commodity/consumption that appear as products of resistance as another avenue that legitimates the patriarchal system. More specifically, what often appears as a form of resistance or 'detournment' can be viewed as how this patriarchal system responds to women's concerns. This response is superficial with little impact on the broader patriarchal social order. Furthermore, when the 'market' reacts and 'resistance' to inequality and patriarchy emerge, it only does so within the cultural hegemonic system and consumption. Accepting these small acts as 'resistance' we suggest, serve to absorb and reproduce the depoliticized side of patriarchal hegemonic control in the current state of neoliberalism. More plainly, by viewing these acts as resistance we have been pacified by the system itself. We have bought products that only reinforce the broader capitalist control of the neo-liberal market which does nothing to challenge the existing patriarchal social order. As such, we suggest it is only when the full visualization of our complicit role in the production and reification of this symbolic violence becomes a staple of critique that meaningful resistance can occur.

Conclusion

We have attempted here to begin what we believe is a much needed discussion of our complicity in legitimating and reproducing patriarchy through consumption of commoditized cultural hegemony. Furthermore, our goal here, while presenting a few small examples, moves beyond discussions related to specific commodities of patriarchal oppression to one that looks at the everyday banal consumption of inequality that is present in all parts of our cultural neo-liberal hegemonic society. We suggest that we need to recognize that hegemonic discourse, which is patriarchal, is commoditized and consumed, reproducing the cycle of patriarchy, inequality and oppression. This process is so embedded in the neo-liberal capitalist market that it includes the consumption of more obvious forms of patriarchal discourse as we have highlighted through examples of music and advertising, as well as more nuanced and subtle forms that are consumed through the guises of anti-oppression and equality.

The maintenance of the patriarchal order is dependent on the separation of the assigned meaning of these tangible and nontangible goods (i.e. media) from the reality of what they represent; a misrecognition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This allows for the corporatization of anti-oppression that suggests greater autonomy, choice and freedom in the market, hiding the corporate repackaging and re-selling of popular feminist tropes as material goods that are aligned with larger institutional ideologies that maintain the current state of being – i.e. patriarchy. Women, empowered by the very markets that oppress – as we illustrated through our examples of beauty and fashion – willingly consume the very products that contribute to the broader oppressive regime participating in the behaviors that are counter to their own self-interest, a form of ‘consum[m]ation, pure and simple destruction’ (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 43). We agree with Baudrillard (1998) that consumption is a pathological behavior, disconnected from reality, a form of ‘magical thinking,’ but we also contend that it masks the broader neo-liberal cultural (re)production of hegemonic patriarchal social control.

In an era often defined as post-feminist, the complicity of women and men in the reproduction and reification of the status quo needs to be recognized. It is only then, that we suggest, that there would be significant resistance to the hegemonic patriarchy that dominates all aspects of our everyday life including the consumer market. This would be a form of resistance that conveys an awareness of the capitalist markets tendency to appropriate popular rhetoric and discourse from the feminist cause and re-package them while doing nothing to address the continued oppression and inequality of women and girls.

Note

1. Cultural hegemony is a term associated with the writings of Antonio Gramsci that refer to ‘the “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production’ (Gramsci, 1995, p. 12).

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