

America the Beautiful: The Normality of the Hypersexualization of Our Youth

In “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re) Viewing Non-normative Body Images”, T. Benjamin Singer discusses the issues with viewing those with “non-normative” bodies. Though subjective, body image is influenced by what society deems attractive by their standards, and it has become the “norm” to shame those who society feels threatened by or uncomfortable with. However, society will turn a blind eye towards subjects that should receive criticism, such as the child beauty pageant industry where children are hypersexualized. Hypersexualization refers to “the attribution by the media of a sexual character to a product or behaviour that has nothing intrinsically sexual about it” (“Effects”). It is seen as normal for young children to dress and modify themselves to look like an adult, but it is frowned upon for an individual to dress or alter their body to what the opposite gender would typically look like. Singer’s criticism of the inhumane views towards transsexual and transgender individuals by the heteronormative society can be seen through the hypocrisy in the documentary *America the Beautiful 3: The Sexualization of Our Youth*, where the hypersexualization of children’s bodies is viewed as normal.

Singer points out that “...body-image is always subject to the shifting representational politics of sex and gender, and that there are fashions in bodies as much as in clothing and hairstyles.” (Singer 604). The “ideal” body type is ever-changing, especially for cisgender (cis) women. Although there is more acceptance for different types of bodies, trans bodies are still not a recognized ideal body type. Even the body of a child has been deemed attractive and is more accepted than the body of someone who is not the conventional standard of beauty. In the documentary *America the Beautiful 3: The Sexualization of Our Youth*, the ideal body type for women is placed on children.

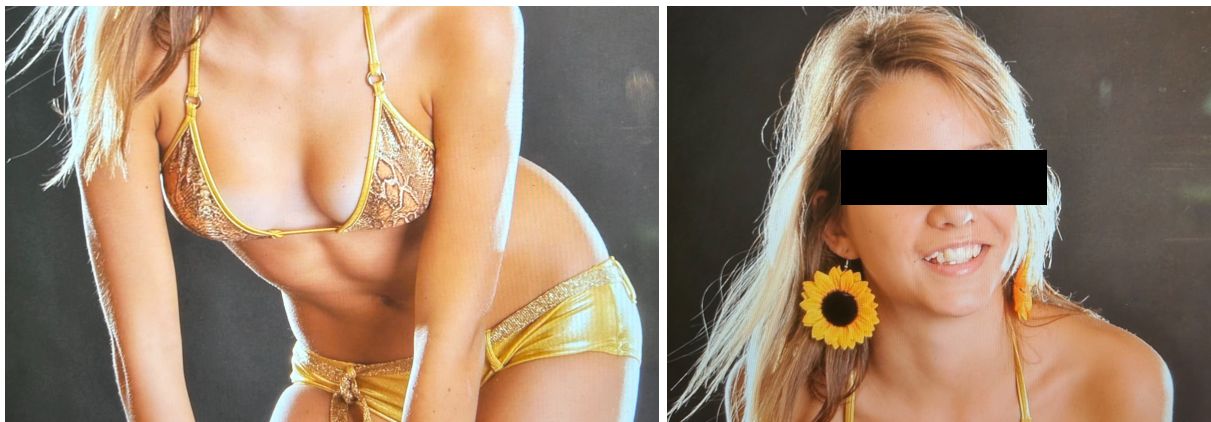


Figure 1. The “ideal body,” and the face revealed to be that of a very young girl (black bar added for security)

Figure 1 displays a young girl doing a swimsuit photoshoot, which Singer would describe as “inviting intimacy.” A bar was added over the eyes of this young girl so that it is clear that these images are not intended to be pornographic, similar to those in the medical texts of Singer. Although the body in the image does “meet the culturally normative standards of ideal physical beauty that are most typically eroticized” (Singer 604), it does not take away from the fact that this is a child, and should thus be protected as such. Images of these children circulate the

internet, never being regarded as child pornography. The faces and bodies of children are seen as sexy rather than cute, while their faces remain uncovered for the rest of their lives. It has also been said that “Sex sells. And for some disgusting reason, young sex sells more” (Roberts, 2014). The sexualization of our youth is solely for profit, as some typically heteronormative parents will sexualize their daughters for the sake of popularity and money by entering their children into such pageants.

It has been said that “Visual perceptions of non-normative bodies, in particular, have been shaped through countless structured acts of viewing, in contexts [such as] talk show spectacles” (Singer 607). The word “spectacle” means “a visually striking performance or display.” This is not a word commonly associated with describing a person in a positive aspect. However, these statements from Singer give us a way to view how these children are viewed in beauty pageants. They are seen as objects or products of the child beauty pageant industry. *America the Beautiful 3* presented that: “...the message is, you’re not good enough as you are” (Roberts, 2014). For children who take part in such pageants, they go through numerous modifications and alter their features to “look better.” Furthermore, according to former Miss America Kirsten Haglund, “your worth is what you look like.” In beauty pageants, young children are taught that their looks are more important than everything else. To them, when you’re pretty, you win. It’s that simple, and if you don’t win, your self-esteem drops. There is a never-ending cycle of pageant moms and their daughters becoming obsessed with this false view of winning and beauty. Recognition is a key factor in why these beauty pageants have become increasingly popular, as seen on the TV show *Toddlers and Tiaras*.

T. Benjamin Singer presents a lens where it can be seen that in *America the Beautiful 3: The Sexualization of Our Youth*, body image is subjective. According to both sources, there is no

one definition of beauty, and traditional standards of beauty continue to change over time. Traditional standards of beauty also have clear evidence of hypocrisy and double standards throughout. Non-normative body types are only called “non-normative” because society expressed what they thought perfection was, and anything that did not fit their mold is not normal. Normality itself is subjective. No one person can be truly normal because everyone has a different view of what normal is. These differing views are what give us life, and what give us beauty. Singer says that “It may be naïve, or even utopian, to think that a paradigm in medical practices can have a profound impact on gendered social relations...” (Singer 618). If the general population as a whole would stop obsessing over fitting the social construct of a social norm, then this view wouldn’t be naïve. It would be truly, blissfully, *life*.

Works Cited

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