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The Sanctified Life: Modesty is Not the Best Policy

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THE SANCTIFIED LIFE:
MODESTY IS NOT THE BEST POLICY

by

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In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

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CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILY CONCENTRATION

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Trigger Warning: rape, assault, sexual harassment

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This work is dedicated to all girls and women, who have been manipulated by the church
to hide, cover, conceal, diminish and shame their bodies.

This work is especially dedicated to those young women who years ago, gathered around
that trip-packing list, whose groans and protests I ignored.

Thankfully, my failure does not have the final word.

The final word rests in Christ's death and bodily resurrection, whose Spirit justifies us,
and makes holy the bodies in which we dwell.

“No Collarbones”

Cheeto®-stained packing lists and cans of soda covered the table as 14 Roman Catholic youth giggled and chattered with excitement. School was out, summer had begun, and they were leaving for Spain in just a few short weeks to see Pope Benedict XVI, at World Youth Day¹. “*Just a few more things kids, and we will be outta here,*” the priest promised, as he tried to regain the attention of the youth. I looked around at the other chaperones, wondering if they were as ready to go home as I was.

The priest continued, “*Girls, I want you to look again at the packing list. Skirts and shorts must be no higher than the knee. No tank tops, no undergarments showing, no necklines below the collarbone...and that includes your swimsuit...one-piece swimsuit of course. This trip is not a fashion show; you are not there to show off. Oh, and I know what men are like. I don’t need you to be grabbed on the metro or yelled at on the street!*” I found myself nodding in agreement as the young women sounded sighs of protest. As I sat in compliancy to the priest’s dress code, my inner-dialogue began. “*No shorts above the knees, and no tank tops... Isn’t it supposed to be 100 degrees in Spain? Note to self: buy a one-piece swimsuit, and apparently shirts that don’t show my collarbone. Is that what he just said? No collarbones? Men will grab the girls because they can see their collarbones? Something isn’t right.*”

Something wasn’t right. In that very moment I realized that I had been participating in a system which was instilling body shame and fear into girls and young women. That very moment, my heart broke open, and scenes of my adolescence flashed

¹ World Youth Day is an international pilgrimage for Roman Catholic youth. It began in 1986 with His Holiness John Paul II. For more information on the history and mission of World Youth Day, please visit <http://worldyouthday.com/about-wyd>

before me: moments of pulling at my t-shirt, trying to prevent the fabric from clinging to my forming figure. Moments of stretching my arms as far down my legs as they would go, proving that my shorts were longer than my fingertips. That moment of being called down into the principal's office for wearing tight sweatpants to class, and that day spent perusing the swimsuit aisle in tears with my mother, trying to find something that would cover my young growing body. Moments of college flashed before me, of my male peers grabbing my body through my dress while at the parties, of trying to look pretty without being considered a tease or even worse, a prude. My mind was plagued with memories of hiding my body, trying to cover its curves and diminish my own presence. Memories of staring at my own reflection in the mirror, wondering if I looked thin enough, beautiful enough, strong enough, acceptable enough— to be a considered a woman with self-worth.

I felt overwhelmed in that church basement as I looked around the table of growing girls, knowing that for their whole lives, they will be told what to do with their bodies. I shuttered at the fact that as a leader, I consented to a policy that was dehumanizing and had severe emotional, physical, and theological implications. I nodded in approval as I allowed those young women to be objectified, to be told that they must cover up their female bodies to prevent their own harassment. I permitted those young girls to hear the message that their female bodies get in the way of ministry-- that their female bodies are distracting-- that their female bodies are best when hidden--that their female bodies are a source of sin--that their female bodies somehow weaken in their personhood.

In that moment, I consented to a culture of objectification, patriarchy, rape, shame, and fear. I wish I had screamed out: *“You don't need to hide your bodies! Your*

bodies are awesome and beautiful. God will work through you on this trip—every part of you—including your body! And if a man grabs you on the metro, it won't be because of your collarbone, it will be because he refuses to see the how holy and sacred your body—your entire self—truly is!”

Instead, I did nothing; and in my silence, I gave my consent. Let this essay be my recant that I no longer consent to a culture that objectifies the female body, that I refuse to participate in a system that publically shames girls and women, that accuses victims, that dehumanizes and devalues all people. I will not contribute to the sin of objectification anymore.

The Objectification of Girls and Women:

What is it?

From early adolescence, girls² in the United States³ are sexually objectified as a part of their lived, daily experience. The objectification of girls and women can be defined in a variety of ways, but it is commonly accepted to be the process in which girls and women are recognized as,

Objects to be looked at, ogled, even touched or used, anonymous things as commodities perhaps to be purchased, perhaps taken-- and once tired of, discarded and often replaced.⁴

² This essay is written from a hetero-normative perspective, and functions under the assumption that there is a distinct gender binary, though I do not promote either of those positions. However, most information on objectification and gender-based crimes enters the discussion by assuming there are only two genders: male and female. I understand that individuals who do not conform to traditional gender roles, are inter-sex, androgynous, or transgender; **do** experience objectification, violence, and discrimination.

³ Objectification of girls and women exists in various cultures and has happened throughout history. It is by no means a problem that only the United States experiences. However, for the purposes of this essay, only the current context of the United States will be considered.

⁴ Frank, Phyllis B. "Objectification Of Women." *National Organization of Men Against Sexism* | *NOMAS*. National Organization of Men Against Sexism, Web. 08 Apr. 2014.

Objectification is “when a woman’s [or girl’s] body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person.”⁵ That is to say, that objectification happens whenever bodies are separated from personhood. Girls especially witness and experience objectification through “television, music videos, music lyrics, magazines, sports media, video games, the Internet and advertising⁶.” Miss Representation, a documentary on the media’s portrayal of girls and women, shares that

Girls get the message from very early on that what’s most important is how they look. That their value, their worth, depends on that. And boys get the message that this is what’s important about girls...no matter what else a woman does, no matter her achievements; her value still depends on how she looks.⁷

In a culture that objectifies the female body, girls and women are only valued for their bodies, which are seen as objects to be desired or objects that are distracting.

Objectification dehumanizes girls because it either places value on females solely for their bodies, or it divides their bodies from their personhood.

The Objectification of Girls and Women:

What does it do?

When girls are objectified, they are forced to function in a world where their bodies are susceptible to constant judgment. Because society views the female body as an object, it seeks to manage women’s appearance by creating a cycle of body monitoring,

⁵ Szymanski, Dawn M. and Moffitt, Lauren B. and Carr, Erika R. “Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research.” *The Counseling Psychologist* 39.1 (2011): 6-38. American Psychological Association, Jan. 2011. Web

⁶ American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. (2010). Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf>

⁷ *Miss Representation*. Dir. Jennifer Siebel Newsom. Girls Club Entertainment, 2011. DVD.

where a female must present her body in a manner that society deems acceptable. In many instances, females must cover their bodies to be considered ‘self-respecting’, yet still somehow exist in a culture that considers their body their sole sense of worth. Girls and women are forced to define their femininity by fitting narrow standards of beauty and by being seen as desirable to others. Society uses two common rhetorical methods of monitoring women’s appearances: ‘Slut-Shaming’ and ‘Prude-Shaming’. Both tools are used by a patriarchal⁸ culture to disrespect and shame women who show bodily autonomy.

‘Slut-Shaming’ happens when individuals are demonized and assigned a role of inferiority by dressing more promiscuously than culture allows. A common target of ‘Slut-Shaming’ is Miley Cyrus, a pop singer who recently performed while wearing a nude-colored bikini⁹. ‘Prude-Shaming’ is defined as the opposite of ‘Slut-Shaming’, and is often seen when the media discusses female public figures, such as Hilary Clinton. Hilary Clinton is often condemned for her un-feminine appearance and for looking “haggard”, which the media then links to her leadership skills as a politician.¹⁰

Both ‘Slut-Shaming’ and ‘Prude-Shaming’ are methods of policing the female body, therefore pushing females into a cycle of objectification that steals their bodily autonomy and diminishes their self-worth. When girls and women become nothing more than their bodies, their bodies become objects that must be controlled, contained, judged, manipulated, starved, injected, toned, painted, bleached, pushed up, covered up, and

⁸ I define patriarchy as a system that implies and perpetuates traditional masculine identity as the norm, which therefore holds power, privilege and authority in society.

⁹ 2013 MTV Music Awards

¹⁰ *Miss Representation*.

eventually, shut up. The objectification of girls and women produces a massive danger to the vitality of all people of every gender, and to society as a whole.

The Danger for Girls and Women

“Sexual objectification changes the way people view women by reducing them to sexual objects—denied humanity and an internal mental life, as well as deemed unworthy of moral concern.”¹¹

Objectification is just one form of gender oppression that girls and women experience in their lives, but “it is one that factors into, and perhaps enables, a host of other oppressions [that] women face.”¹² Objectification Theory is an emerging framework that psychologists are beginning to utilize in their work to better understand the consequences of objectification, particularly seen in their female clients. The framework maintains that when girls and women are objectified, they are treated as ‘things’ rather than honored as persons, which severely damages the wellbeing of the individual. Jean Kilbourne, an internationally recognized expert on gender issues, states that, “turning a human being into a thing, an object, is almost always the first step toward justifying violence against that person.”¹³ Rape, assault, sexual harassment, and domestic abuse are all products of the objectification of girls and women.

When crimes against girls and women are committed, the process of victim blaming is often used to transfer the responsibility from the attacker to the victim. For instance, we teach girls and women to minimize their own risk of sexual assault by

¹¹ Loughman, Steve; Pina, Afroditi; Vasquez, Eduardo; Puvia, Elisa. “Sexual Objectification Increases Rape Victim Blame and Decreases Perceived Suffering” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* April 16, 2013. Web Abstract.

¹² Fredrickson, Barbara L., and Tomi-Ann Roberts. "Objectification of Women: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21 (1997): 173-206.

¹³ Kilbourne, Jean. *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000. Pg. 278

limiting alcohol use, not walking alone, carrying pepper spray or knowing self-defense, avoiding certain bars or clubs, and wearing modest clothing. If these precautions are not taken when an assault occurs, the victim is often questioned for why she did not prevent her own attack. Or, it is somehow insinuated that her lack of prevention tactics led to an attack. We hear this form of victim blaming within destructive phrases such as:

- “She shouldn’t have had that extra drink”
- “She shouldn’t have walked home alone”
- “Did you see what she wore? She was asking for it”

This was seen recently in a rape case in Steubenville, Ohio, where a 16 year-old girl was videotaped and photographed being raped and urinated on by various members of the high school football team while she was unconscious at a party. The football players, coach, and lawyers all claimed that though she was unconscious, she was somehow able to give consent. They also claimed that their behavior was warranted because she was sexually promiscuous, citing photographs that she previously posted of herself on the Internet. Parents in the community believed that the football players who raped the girl were simply “in the wrong place at the wrong time.”¹⁴ Individuals chastised the victim by saying “she shouldn’t have put herself in that position.”¹⁵ This case of victim blaming is not unique, yet it illustrates how girls are viewed and treated as objects and therefore blamed for the crimes committed against them.

¹⁴ Macur, Juliet, and Nate Schweber. "Rape Case Unfolds on Web and Splits City." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 16 Dec. 2012. Web. 09 Apr. 2014.

¹⁵ Rodrick, Stephen. "Serena Williams: The Great One." Editorial. *Rolling Stone* 18 June 2013: 4. *Rolling Stone: Culture*. 18 June 2013. Web. 14 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/serena-williams-the-great-one-20130618?page=4>>.

The statistics for gender-based violence in the United States are overwhelming. Nine out of every ten rape victims are female. One out of every six women has been the victim of attempted or completed rape. Every two minutes, an American is sexually assaulted. Forty-four percent of sexual assault victims are under the age of 18. Ninety-seven percent of rapists will never spend a day in jail.¹⁶ These statistics are not merely numbers; they are people: girls and women, who have been battered, raped, assaulted, molested, harassed, objectified. The startling statistics above point to how the objectification of girls and women contributes to our country's prevalent rape culture¹⁷.

Though the dangers of objectification for girls and women are clear, they are not merely physical. The Association for Psychological Science recognizes that "women [and girls] who live in a culture in which they are objectified by others may in turn begin to objectify themselves." Therefore, objectification by the prevailing culture leads to self-objectification. Self-objectification happens when girls and women are:

Acculturated to internalize an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves. This perspective on self can lead to habitual body monitoring...shame and anxiety...depression, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorders.¹⁸

¹⁶ These statistics are generated by the U.S Department of Justice, National Crime Victimization Survey, made available by the Rape, Abuse, & Incent National Networks: <https://www.rainn.org/statistics>

¹⁷ Rape culture is an important topic and should be defined for the purpose of this essay. Rape culture is deeply embedded in our patriarchal society, and cultivates a constant threat of sexual assault that affects a female's daily movements. It tells girls and women to be careful about where they walk, how they walk, whom they walk with, and what they wear while they walk. It teaches girls and women to be constantly aware of a potential attack, and teaches them to prevent their own assault. Rape culture tells girls and women that they are responsible for an attack if they are not prepared. Often times, images in the media, jokes, and daily language perpetuate rape culture. This definition of rape culture was compiled by the ongoing dialogue happening at <http://www.shakesville.com/2009/10/rape-culture-101.html>

¹⁸ Fredrickson, Barbara L., and Tomi-Ann Roberts. Pg. 173.

As a result, girls are twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression. By the age of twelve, girls begin to place a “greater emphasis on their body’s appearance than on its competence.”¹⁹ The objectification of girls and women cultivates a culture of constant shame, anxiety, and danger, which is inflicted by individuals, groups, media, and the self. Culture enforces the idea that girls and women are objects to be perfected. Eventually, this idea is internalized, even idealized. Attaining society’s expectations of the ‘perfect body’ becomes a source of power for women, and the attempt to achieve that power through the ‘perfect body’ comes at the cost of the individual’s emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing.

The Danger for Boys and Men

“Patriarchy hurts men too...it prevents men from developing and enjoying healthy relationships.”²⁰

Our country’s culture of objectification produces obvious external and internal harm to girls and women. However, girls and women are not the only ones who experience the effects of objectification. When boys and men live in a patriarchal society where girls and women are considered objects, they are belittled to nothing more than animals that lack the ability to control themselves. This is illustrated in a Christian dating book written by Justin Lookadoo and Hayley DiMarco, co-authors and public speakers. Lookadoo and DiMarco state,

Don’t tease the animals. Have I mentioned that guys are visual? They get turned on by what they see. So listen: please, PLEASE don’t tease us. To show us

¹⁹ "Let's Talk Teens, Sexuality and Media." *Let's Talk Teens, Sexuality and Media*. Web. 14 Apr. 2014. <<http://depts.washington.edu/sexmedia/educators/bodyimage/lesson-objectification.php>>

²⁰ Finley, Laura L. *Encyclopedia of Domestic Violence and Abuse*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013. Print. Pg 389

your hot little body and then tell us we can't touch is being a tease. You can't look that sexy and then tell us to be on our best behavior. Check yourself – if you're advertising sex, you're going to get propositions...A guy will have a tendency to treat you like you are dressed. If you are dressed like a flesh buffet, don't be surprised when he treats you like a piece of meat.²¹

This dating book that perpetuates the 'male as animal' stereotype and dangerously furthers rape culture, still received an average 4 out of 5 stars on BarnesandNoble.com.²²

It rigidly defines masculinity and enables a "boys will be boys" culture, where boys and men cannot control themselves if women's bodies are publicly presented. As long as actions and ideologies that objectify women correspond to traditional masculinity and hetero-dating culture, the objectification of girls and women will continue to flourish, diminishing the respect and worth of all peoples. The dangers of objectification are too serious to ignore and neglect, especially when objectification is present within our own backyard: the Western church in the United States.²³

The Response

*"We teach girls shame: Close your legs; cover yourself. We make them feel as though by being born female, they're already guilty of something."*²⁴

The priest that was mentioned earlier in this essay was trying to be proactive in his response to our culture's rampant and dangerous practice of objectifying women. He wanted the girls who were attending his trip to sufficiently cover their bodies in order to prevent harassment and assault: a good intention that subsequently contributes to rape

²¹ Lookadoo, Justin, and Hayley DiMarco. *Dateable: Are You? Are They?* Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2003. Print. Pgs. 117-118

²² <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/reviews/Dateable%2FJustin-Lookadoo/1111651101?ean=9780800759117>

²³ The objectification of girls and women is present within the universal church, but for the purposes of this essay, is only discussed within the Western church in the United States.

²⁴ Ngozi Adichie, Chimamanda. "We Should All Be Feminists." TEDxEuston. United Kingdom, London. 12 Apr. 2011. Speech. Web. 13 April 2014

culture and our societal practice of victim blaming. But he also expressed concern for the ‘male-gaze’. When the priest noted that the trip was “*not a fashion show,*” and “*you are not there to show off,*” he was indirectly communicating to the entire youth group that the female body is a source of distraction, and the responsibility to avoid that distraction was on the female.

By controlling how the girls’ bodies were presented, he believed he was responding to the objectification of girls and women in a responsible and sensible manner. He also believed he was eliminating a source of distraction from ministry: the female body. This priest is not alone in creating dress codes and modesty policies in an attempt to prevent distraction.

We indirectly teach girls that their bodies are a source of distraction through the language we use to enforce dress codes and modesty policies. Recently, school dress codes have banned leggings and yoga pants, because they are “too distracting for the boys.”²⁵ Below, an adult woman shares her own story of breaking her school’s dress code when she was a youth:

In my junior year of high school I wore leggings to my AP Latin class. Leggings were against dress code at my school, as were sweatpants and skirts that were shorter than the ends of your fingertips. I had my leggings on under a dress, which admittedly probably didn’t pass the fingertip rule. My female teacher admonished me in front of the class before sending me home to change. She said something about how I wasn’t respecting myself. I ran home crying and changed into jeans. When I returned, one of the older boys in my class made a rude comment as I sunk into my seat.²⁶

²⁵ Dockterman, Eliana. "When Enforcing School Dress Codes Turns Into Slut Shaming | TIME." *Time*. Time Magazine, 25 Mar. 2014. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

<<http://time.com/36997/when-enforcing-school-dress-codes-turns-into-slut-shaming/>>.

²⁶ Ibid.

In the above reflection, we see the detrimental effect of what happens when we reduce a girl's source of self-respect to the length of clothing she wears. It was communicated to this individual that her body was not only distracting, but she lacked self-respect because of how her body was presented.

This past March, a group of middle school girls in Illinois began a protest of their school's dress code, which bans them from wearing leggings and yoga pants. The girls protesting the dress code believe that the policy feeds into victim blaming. One girl states, "[it gives] us the impression we should be guilty for what guys do." They started a petition against the administration, gaining five hundred signatures to drop the dress code. They also protested outside of their school with signs saying, "Are my pants lowering your test scores?"²⁷ A parent of one of the protesting students stated,

For me, it's about shaming girls about their bodies...it's this message across genders that girls have to cover up, and teachers saying to girls, the reason for this rule is so that boys aren't distracted.²⁸

Schools around the country have similar dress codes in place to keep girls from wearing strapless dresses, exposed bra straps, shirts that are tight, and skirts that are short. Many of these dress codes and modesty policies are in place to prevent distraction from their male peers and to instill a manipulated sense of 'self-respect' in young women.

Though the specific policies may be different, the message for girls is clear: *Your body is a distracting object. Your body gets in the way. Your body creates a problem. Your body prevents you from gaining respect. Hide your body.* The dangerous rhetoric that modesty policies utilize in an effort to cover up the female body, furthers the objectification of girls, promotes rape culture, and cultivates a system of shame and fear.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Girls are taught by various social institutions, “that covering up...is crucial to respecting bodies.”²⁹ This is a belief that is not only enforced by school administrations, but also by the church. Seen stereotypically in Evangelical circles, (though still present in many Christian contexts) the church uses scripture and manipulative theology to control girls’ bodies and self-esteem.

Justin Lookadoo’s dating book, which was previously mentioned in this essay, represents a popular Christian viewpoint on female modesty and self-respect. The foundation of this viewpoint lays on the assumptions that sin resides within the female body, and that it is the responsibility of the female to manage her sinful self, and if she successfully does so, she gains self-respect and worth. Lookadoo’s book strongly emphasizes the responsibility that girls have to manage their own bodies and emotions in order to provide a secure environment for their male peers. Many churches admonish young girls to dress modestly using a phrase lifted out of scripture. “*Do not cause your brother in Christ to stumble.*”³⁰ One woman reflects on her own experience of being admonished as a child with this rhetoric:

It was Easter morning, and it was the first time I had owned a new dress— a pretty dress— in years. I felt elegant, delicate, a crocus pushing up through the snow. The chiffon skirt fluttered below my knees, and the light, cool fabric felt wonderful against my skin in hot, humid Florida. I walked into church that morning feeling like I was finally taking my first steps out of girlhood, and I felt pretty. After church was over, the pastor’s son confronted me in the dirt parking lot.

“Sam... Sam, I need to talk to you.”

I turned to face him, the pit of my stomach clenching. Somehow... I could feel what was coming. It was stamped all over his face, in the way he hung his head, in how he fiddled with the comb he always carried in his pocket.

²⁹ "Beauty Redefined Blog." *BEAUTY REDEFINED*. 27 Feb. 2014. Web. 01 Apr. 2014.

³⁰ Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 8:9-12

“Sam... I, I really just don’t understand. The skirt you’re wearing– it,” he couldn’t look me in the eye as his voice broke. “It caused me to stumble.”

I didn’t really hear anything after that– it was like he was far, far away, his voice coming to me from a distance and his face was frozen and warped. I caught snatches of “why would you do this to me? To yourself?” and the glow that had been inside of me all morning... it broke. The second we arrived home from church, I dashed into my bedroom. In a frenzy driven by shame, by humiliation, by fear, I tore off that dress– the dress I had put on that morning, the dress that had made me feel that for once I could be pretty– and threw it into the dark corner of my closet and slammed the door shut. I crumpled to my bedroom floor, staring at those shut doors, and cried.³¹

We have given girls the message that to in order to respect themselves, they must strictly monitor their bodies and clothing. We have taught girls that respect is earned by the length of their hemlines and necklines, rather than the innate gift found within their basic humanity. This message must be transformed to cease the objectification of girls and women, and to honor the entire personhood of each girl and woman in our communities. This transformative work must be the work of the church, for God calls us to recognize, honor, and nurture the sanctified reality of each person.

An Alternative

“Telling women to cover it up is just as surely a form of sexual objectification as telling women to take it off. Either way, you’re reducing a woman to her sexuality instead of considering her as a whole person.”³²

When we respond to the objectification of girls and women by body monitoring and enforcing modesty policies, we are in fact denying them dignity as whole persons. In

³¹ Field, Samantha. "Objectification, Lust, Modesty, And... Designer Brands?" *Defeating the Dragons Blog*. 1 Aug. 2013. Web. 15 Apr. 2014. <<http://defeatingthedragons.wordpress.com/2013/08/01/objectification-lust-modesty-and-designer-brands/>>.

³² Marcotte, Amanda. "If You Don't Want Girls Judged by Their Hemlines, Stop Judging Them by Their Hemlines." *Slate*. The Slate Group, 15 Feb. 2013. Web. 15 Apr. 2014. <http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2013/02/15/dress_codes_for_girls_they_don_t_teach_self_respect_only_respecting_girls.html>.

doing so, we find ourselves in opposition to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, choosing to trust the life of the flesh, rather than the life of the Spirit. Recognizing the sanctified nature of the whole self, the body included, will help us step out of the systems that oppress girls and women, and allow us to step into the vitality of life offered through the Holy Spirit. For we are called into the life of the Spirit: to participate with God's sanctifying work in the world around us.

But first, what is sanctification? Is it a state of being, a goal to be attained? Are we sanctified by our piety, good works, moral living, and constant prayer? Jürgen Moltmann is a helpful dialogue partner in wondering what sanctification is and does, especially if we are to be Christian disciples. Moltmann defines what sanctification is by describing how one becomes sanctified:

The people whom God justifies [God] also sanctifies. We unsanctified, sinful men and women are pronounced holy, and made holy, by God out of grace for Christ's sake...the person who finds grace in God's sight is also in God's sight good, just and holy. Sanctification as an act of God in a human being signified a relationship and an affiliation, not a state itself. What God loves is holy, whatever it may be in itself.³³

As broken yet beautiful creatures, we are named beloved and holy through God's pure gift. God's gift does not require us to deny or belittle our bodies. In fact, it requires us to do just the opposite: to love more deeply our bodies, to respect and care for them, to embrace them as divine instruments, to honor them as essential to who we are.

We are not passive receivers of this gift of sanctification, which illuminates our bodies with dignity and worth. For "sanctification as gift, leads to sanctification as

³³ Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992. Print. Pg 174

charge.”³⁴ We are charged to observe and recognize the holiness embedded in all of God’s creation: the earth and all that fills it. Humanity is claimed by God’s sanctifying gift, and when we recognize this holiness, we are called to love the things that God loves, and to honor the things God has claimed as holy.

For Moltmann, this means, “clearing the hindrances” that get in the way of us seeing life and loving it “as God sees and loves it: good, just, and lovely.”³⁵ We are to clear any barriers that get in the way of respecting and loving life: barriers such as violence, destruction, oppression, and objectification. How can we deny and shame what bears God’s sanctifying gift? How can we allow one of God’s beloved subjects to be treated as an exploited object? How is it that we can choose to shame a young girl for displaying her body, rather than empowering her to see it as holy? How can we hide, cover, and conceal the very thing God loves? We are gifted with sanctification and charged with sanctification: to see, name and proclaim the female body as holy, and to demand that no force shall treat it otherwise.

As Christians, we are to show deep reverence for our bodies. Many churches believe that showing reverence for the body requires hiding, covering, concealing, depriving, and diminishing the body. And yet that same practice of reverence: hiding, covering, concealing, depriving, diminishing, births the opposite of holy: shame, fear, disgrace, objectification. This is not life in the Spirit: this is life in the flesh.

When Paul describes the conflict between ‘life in the Spirit’ and ‘life in the flesh’ in Romans 8³⁶, we often understand this as a conflict between the spirit and body as a

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Romans 8:1-17

form of existential dualism. But when Paul uses the word flesh³⁷, he is not simply implying the human body. Certainly, flesh is all that is finite and subject to dying. But life in the flesh is more complex. When contrasted with life in the Spirit, “life in the flesh is a false life, life that has missed its way, life that cannot live and leads to death.”³⁸ A life in the flesh is not our promise or our call. A life in the flesh is our bondage to sin. It causes us to respond out of fear, and grasp for false power. A life in the flesh seeks to control, manipulate, and oppress. Life in the flesh objectifies, belittles, assaults, dehumanizes and rapes.

However, life in the Spirit is what God offers, freeing us from bondage and transforming our false reality of the flesh. Life in the Spirit is “true life, life springing from its divine source.”³⁹ Life in the Spirit has already begun: with the Easter promise of life conquering death, we know that God enters into our life of flesh—violence and death—sanctifying us still, calling us to recognize the holiness of this fleshly realm, beckoning us out of the patterns that oppress God’s beloved creation.

As pastors, youth directors, church leaders, parents, teachers, and coaches, we are called to love bodies the way God loves bodies: with the cry of justice and the demand for nothing less than sanctification, we are called to proclaim the truth of sanctification on our lips, singing:

“Holy, Holy, Holy,
Holy is the God almighty,
Who was and is and is to come”⁴⁰

³⁷ σάρξ

³⁸ Moltmann, Pg 87

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Revelation 4:8 NRSV

APPENDIX I: Leader Assessment

Be prepared to recognize the importance of bodies, and to deconstruct objectification in your context!

Ask Yourself:

- Does our church have a clothing policy for events and trips?
 - If so, when was it written and who wrote it?
 - What is the intended purpose of this policy?
 - Does it hide girls' bodies or shame them?
 - Does it perpetuate rape culture by claiming that their clothing is distracting?
 - Does it empower all genders?
 - Does it honor bodily autonomy?

- Does your church use media resources in curriculum or worship?
 - Is any of the content objectifying?
 - Does it contain sexist content, images, or language?
 - If so, do you feel comfortable deconstructing the content with the youth?

- Do you lead worship, teach, preach, or lead large or small groups?
 - Do you engage in negative self-talk?
 - Are you intentional about using positive self-talk?
 - Does your language judge others by slut-shaming or prude-shaming?
 - Do you use predominately masculine language or pronouns for God?
 - Do you use any feminine language or pronouns for God?
 - Do you preach/teach/speak on stories of scripture that depict rape? Why or why not?
 - Do you preach/teach/speak on stories of women in scripture? Why or why not?
 - Do you use jokes that objectify marginalized groups?

- Do you partner with other ministries or organizations in the community?
 - Do they have women in leadership roles?
 - Do they politically engage in human and women's rights issues?
 - Do they seek to empower all genders?
 - Do they have a clothing policy that you agree with or can be in conversation about?

- Does your church have a sexual education curriculum?
 - If so, when was it written and who wrote it?
 - If not, what are the theological implications for not speaking about sex, bodies, or relationships at church?

APPENDIX II: Resources for Congregations

Below is a list of resources to begin the conversation about objectification and sexism in your current context:

- **Beauty Redefined:** A website that contains stories and strategies to confront sexism and objectification. Resources, merchandise, leader kit is available at this site: <http://www.beautyredefined.net/resources/become-a-group-leader/>
- **Our Whole Lives:** A comprehensive sexual education curriculum for church communities that teaches self worth, sexual health, responsibility, justice, and inclusivity. <http://www.uua.org/re/owl/>
- **The Representation Project:** Creators of the documentary, *Miss Representation*, who provide resources and curriculum to help you successfully discuss the film. They also provide conversation starters for teen groups and families to discuss gender, media, and sexism. <http://therepresentationproject.org/>
- **Everyday Feminism:** Resources, statistics, and stories on sexism and feminism. Please save or print this important article on how to talk to children about sexual abuse: <http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/02/10-ways-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-sexual-abuse/>

APPENDIX III: A Confession of Objectification

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Praise to you, God Almighty
Who meets us where our deep cries sound.

Forgive our corrupted actions, forgive our hurtful words
May we see the holiness that you proclaim in each sister and brother, in each father and
mother, in each piece of creation that you have formed.

Heal our broken relationships, mend our painful wounds, help us love our bodies and see
how you have named us each, holy, holy, holy.

All sizes and all colors, all ages and from all places, how beautiful you have created us.
Let our bodies sing your praise; let our bodies reflect your name of Holy, Holy, Holy.

Forgive how we use one another
Forgive how we hurt one another
Let your holy, holy, holy, be our name

Amen

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