

Polka Dots and Big Guns

A REVEALING LOOK AT HOW OUR SEX-SATURATED MEDIA IMPACTS US

By Melissa Cechota, *for Insight Magazine 2008*

My silky black high heels clicked on the sidewalk as I walked to class. I heard a whistle from behind. The black and white polka-dot dress I wore aroused attention from passing students, including my curious friends who wondered why I was so dressed up and wearing bright-red lipstick.

"I am my own prop," I told my friend Ashley. "My presentation topic today is about the impact of the media on female sexuality."

"Oh," she said. "Well, you look nice."

"Thanks," I said, smiling, realizing that not only was my intended prop already working, but the compliment felt nice too. And when several male classmates checked me out just minutes later and then turned away quickly from embarrassment that also felt good.

Humbled in heels

I made the last presentation of the day. My topic captured the students and professor in my college class. I started by explaining that I am a girly-girl, and that I'd bought the polka dot dress because it made me feel "sexy." This comment, along with several others, resulted in giggles from my attentive listening audience.

Then I shared the startling statistics of how many young girls are negatively impacted by viewing large amounts of media. When I said that the media is partly responsible for girls developing into promiscuous women, the room grew silent. The relevance of my dress and red lipstick became clear. In fact, my presentation sparked numerous questions and related topics for discussion afterward.

My professor commended me for tackling a subject that a lot of us deal with; he has two young daughters and he said one insists on changing her clothes several times a day just for fun. He wonders how he, as a dad, should respond to this. I certainly appreciated his interest in my topic (and I could relate to his adolescent girls' desire for a daily fashion show). Honestly, though, I set out to research this particular topic because I wanted to know what impact the media has on me—and my friends, and my sister, and maybe someday a baby girl who will call me mommy.

When I look in the mirror or decide to buy a dress because of the way it makes me feel, I wonder how much I have been conditioned by our overtly sexual culture. As a young woman who has had a marriage already end in divorce due to a husband addicted to pornography, I am admittedly curious about female sexuality. Let's be honest, who isn't?

Reflected in media

Have you ever noticed how many commercials, music videos, and advertisements market women as sexual objects? As part of my research for my class presentation, I flipped through a *Teen Vogue*. I found 25 out of 57 ads portraying young women included suggestive clothing. While only half of the ads exposed skin (showed more skin than arms or legs below the knee), *more than half* of the ads implied a sexual connotation simply by the model's pose!

What kind of impact do these particular forms of media have on us? From my class discussion I learned that females *and* males feel the effects. Even though my study directly focused on female sexuality, the question arose as to whether or not males ever feel sexualized in the media. And if so, how do they react?

One male student braved up and said, "Yeah, actually I do." He explained that when he watches a movie with Will Smith in it and his character works out bare-chested, he feels inadequate, especially if he's watching the movie with his girlfriend. He also admitted that it motivates him to go home and work out in order to be buff like Will.

We all laughed at this in class, but he's right. As humans, we readily compare ourselves to others—the girl in the advertisement or the guy in the gym. We end up starving ourselves, over-exercising, and honestly, just over-emphasizing our focus on our body image. We may not like to admit it (just as I had a hard time coming to terms with in my research), but what we see in the mirror largely reflects the media we expose ourselves to—it shows how we internalize what we see and hear.

As we are constantly bombarded with sexuality, there's no doubt we will grow more tempted to be sexual. For instance, even if you are not sexually active, the way you dress, speak (using sexual innuendos), walk, and even think, can be sexual. It becomes a personal responsibility for us to keep *every* aspect of our lives in check.

Beautiful in God

Before I concluded my class presentation, I confessed that I have decided to become more aware of the types of media I expose myself to. More important, I have since decided to reflect on God. If I should ever try and model anyone, who better than God? Besides, He provides the only source I should be drawing acceptance from—He loves me after all, plain-faced and in my sweats. The beauty in that surpasses any type of worldly sexiness.

So, girls, have fun being girls, but keep it all in perspective. Don't dress up to get a guy's attention or to compete with other girls for a guy's attention. You are too beautiful for that.

Guys, appreciate a pretty girl without objectifying her. Try complimenting her personality *as well as* her style. And when you see *yourself* in the mirror, let the reflection be a man of God staring back, regardless of how big your guns are.

###

Bio:

Melissa Cechota is a freelance writer and full-time student who enjoys scrapbooking, decoupage, reading, music, photography, and spending time with family and friends.

Pull Quotes:

- The room grew silent and the relevance of my dress and red lipstick became clear.
- Have you ever noticed how many commercials, music videos, and advertisements market women as sexual objects?
- The question arose as to whether or not males ever feel sexualized in the media.