

The Retooling of Betty Friedan: The New Feminist Message?

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Abstract

Years ago, before smoking was passé, Virginia Slims cigarettes had the marketing slogan: “We’ve come a long way baby.” Now women must ask themselves if, in fact, they really have advanced. The question is what have we learned throughout the last several decades, maybe even last two or three centuries. Unfortunately, some of that learning has gotten misconstrued, and we are sending the wrong message of empowerment to our young women. Of course, there are influencers who molded us to be the people we are today—2018. The impact of this inspiration, influence, and learning is currently in question because our technological society is eroding the past strides. Unfortunately, young women are getting an erroneous message: one that has women being objectified more often than not because of the very thin line between budding sexuality and pornography. One of the fallouts of this incorrect communiqué is women are not being respected. There must be an analysis of the problem of mixed messages that women are given today. To highlight and discuss the education, be it either academic or “on-the-streets” that women are getting that creates a false vision of themselves, seminal and current works were researched. Empowerment and entitlement are not synonymous; they cannot be used interchangeably. Unfortunately, that is how those two words are being perceived. No discussion of empowerment is complete without analyzing the information a young girl is given. Education is a key component in making anyone, male or female, feel empowered. It is through these instruments that we set our standards. If given improper training formal or informal, a person can be placed on the wrong path.

Forum on Public Policy

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Years ago, before smoking was passé, Virginia Slims cigarettes had the marketing slogan: “You’ve come a long way baby.” Have we? What have we learned throughout the last several decades, maybe even last two or three centuries? Who were/are the influencers who molded us to be the people we are today—2018? The educators of yesterday tried to make a difference when it was difficult to be heard; the story writers of yesterday tried to make a difference when perhaps no one listened. What did both groups tell us that we have taken into our bosoms and where and when did it go wrong?

In 1963 Betty Friedan completed her research and wrote the book *The Feminine Mystique*. It became the bible for women’s rights. She highlights how the experts told women their “role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers” (Friedan, 1963, p. 1). One of the issues with the word feminist is the connotation; some people at least in the late sixties and seventies assumed that a feminist hated men. Betty Friedan’s ex-husband said several years after their divorce that “Betty—she hates men. . . Let’s face it, they all do—all those activists in the women’s lib movement” (Horowitz, 1998, p. 225). Many say, because of Friedan’s book, women began to strive for more. However, in 1991, Susan Faludi wrote *Backlash* in which she states that marketers began a campaign to entice women back to the kitchen sink. As Friedan (1963) notes, “by the end of the nineteen-fifties, the average marriage age of women in America dropped to 20 and was still dropping into the teens” (2), (sounds like a winter forecast). Coincidentally, there could be a metaphor there because of the way the country looked at women and their roles was a bit frosty. Today the average marriage age is higher at 26 years old.

Happily, it should go without saying that women are very strong: we can basically do anything that we put our minds too: we give birth, we have careers, we do all sorts of things; the list is endless. Yet, we seem to be fostering “prostitots.” This portmanteau is a combination of prostitutes and toddlers. It is post modernistic that the younger generation of women have seemed to cut the cord of all moralistic values and standards and have rendered themselves less than empowered. We must stop that destructive tide and tell the world once again that women are more than just “mattress dressing.”

Women have realized there are many different avenues they can take for fulfilling lives. But the problem is the direction and paths they take to get there; something in the delivery of messages received unfortunately has been malfunctioning. The journey begins with determining who we are. Search for self is arduous. What really needs to be considered initially is how did we as individuals become who we are today? In 1983 author Alice Walker wrote a book of essays *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*. In the title essay, she references the author Jean Toomer who came to prominence during the Harlem Renaissance era of the 1920s. Walker notes one of his observations that black women with their intense spirituality were unaware of the richness they held because they were so used to being used and abused that they did not dare be mindful of their inner being. Walker writes that women thought of themselves as the “mule of the world” (1983, p. 237) Yes, her essay specifically mentions black women, but her words and cautions apply to all women—her message is universal. To get to an understanding of self, women must search their past and

Forum on Public Policy

look at who came before. As we traverse through life, mothers and grandmothers are not the only people we encounter; the number of people who impact our lives is tremendous. We are products of those people. As we look at all those influencers, take note of their struggles and hardships and how they handled them. Were any of their dreams and aspirations thwarted? Can you imagine the utter frustration of being told you are not good enough? The creative spirit is not just the talent to draw/paint a picture, but to have the drive and ability to move forward and feel good about yourself.

The search for self has been ongoing for centuries, highlighted by the turbulent 1960s: people doing sit-ins, marching for civil and equal rights, marching for the end of Vietnam War, disrespecting police; people wanted and demanded change. Change they did get. The year 1968, as the media has been declaring, was the year that changed the world. Women no longer were satisfied to being window dressing in the home baking bread, cleaning toilets, and doing a myriad of other household duties. They wanted to earn a real paycheck and get promotions. Many things have changed since those days: women do have careers and get promotions. The fabulous message of the late sixties and seventies of empowerment and equality has somehow become distorted to our young women of today. Regrettably, the current woman's message seems to have swung the pendulum to the very far opposite corner. Somewhere along the way the communication to women got misconstrued and currently plays havoc with young women.

To understand how far we have come, a discussion of Friedan's research is essential. Friedan (1963) defines the feminine mystique as "the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity" (1963, p. 39). The feminine mystique is also defined as being dependent on a man: "she exists only for and through her husband and children" (1963, p. 44). One of Friedan's chapters is devoted to Freud's psychoanalytical thinking. Since Freud based much of his position on sex and gender roles, Friedan tries to have the reader comprehend Freud's theory of femininity. He claims that "it was woman's nature to be ruled by man, and her sickness to envy him" (as cited in Friedan, 1963, p. 101). He also thought "women were a strange, inferior, less-than-human species . . . who existed to serve man" (1963, p. 101), giving her no voice of her own. Voice equals power. One cannot blame Freud, the man, one hundred percent because, according to Friedan, Freud (1856-1939) was a product of his culture, both the Victorian era and his Jewish religion, in which a man thanks the Lord that He has not created him a woman (1963, p. 102). Therefore, women had a tremendous amount of pre-existing prejudice to overcome and, unfortunately, there was no mention of any aspect of empowerment.

Friedan also noted that, in 1942, Farnham and Lundberg wrote *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, which warned readers that "careers and higher education were leading to the 'masculinization of women with enormously dangerous consequences to the home, the children dependent on it and to the ability of the woman, as well as her husband, to obtain sexual gratification'" (as cited in Friedan, 1963, p. 39). Not much has changed with regard to the male ego and sexuality; "some men still see masculinity as a zero-sum game where gains in female achievements or power take something away from their [men] identity (Coontz, 2011, p. 175).

In the middle sixties, the tide shifted--enter Helen Gurley Brown, who became the voice of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and changed how the contemporary woman looked at herself. Brown's magazine gave a message that allowed women to have careers and be sexual beings. Every cover

Forum on Public Policy

enticed women to make themselves happy in every aspect of life, love, and sex. Although, besides making themselves better people, Brown also encouraged women to make their husbands/boyfriends/lovers happy in bed. Each issue had, and continues to have, a scantily dressed female on the front proclaiming sexual satisfaction for all players. Under Brown's tutelage, *Cosmopolitan* changed how women viewed themselves; rather than the contented little "Sally Homemaker," women were introduced to not only career ideas but sexual positions, in other words, sexual empowerment. However, and this is a big however, Brown may have started the turn in the message. Yes, she did preach sexual empowerment, but many of the covers of *Cosmopolitan* advertised the articles inside of how to please your man.

On the other hand, just a few years earlier, in 1963, Friedan suggested that "compulsive sexual activity usually veils a lack of potency in the other spheres of life . . . sexual satisfaction is not necessarily a mark of fulfillment in woman or man" (1963, p. 258). Yes, women can do anything they want if they put their minds to it; they can have the career they want; they can have sex with whomever they want, but, as with anything, there may be a price to pay. Again, to reiterate, the message of the women of the sixties and how today's young women see themselves has gotten miscommunicated because the media got a hold of it and spun it out of control, sending mixed messages without regard to what affects it was having on the receiver.

Years ago, when Freud was studying people and developing his psychological thinking, he saw women as "childlike dolls' who existed to serve men" (as cited in Friedan, 1963, p. 101). Fortunately, while Freud was forming his deluded philosophy on women, there were pioneers, women who forged ahead regardless of public opinion. Early educators, such as Emma Hart Willard who started a school for women, focused on a curriculum normally reserved for men—the classics, arts, and sciences, instead of the home economics classes. Willard did not "advocate a radical alteration of women's role in society, but she did insist that girls were just as capable as boys" (Biography.com Editors, 2014, p. 2).

As Ms. Willard began to change the tide of female education in the early 19th century, we know that education is the key to a person's success and eventual empowerment. In addition, literature is full of stories about the trials and tribulations of women. The purpose here is not to do a review of all the stories about strong women, but if one were done it would demonstrate how the message to women today is fraught with errors. The message in the prior years was that in order to get what one wants, one must go against the norm and fight. Why then are many young women today acquiescing to what women fought so hard to escape—the idea that women are just "mattress dressing"?

As Naomi Wolf (2002) writes in her introduction to her reprinted book *The Beauty Myth*, "the influence on women's sexual sense of self—which was just beginning to take hold at the time this book was first written [1991]—has now become so complete that it is almost impossible for younger women to distinguish the role pornography plays in creating their idea of how to be, look, and move in sex from their own innate sense of sexual identity" (2002, p. 5). In a telling statement, recent literature for young girls reflects the changing norms of today's culture. Today's young women are reading books that advocate sex, glamour, and materialism. This influence is best seen in the books by Cecily von Ziegesar (2006) who created the *Gossip Girl* series and the *It Girl* series, which are aimed at teenage girls, and demonstrate the shifts in cultural and behavioral

Forum on Public Policy

norms. *Notorious* is one of the *It Girl* books; in it the “f” word is used indiscriminately, just a regular part of everyone’s conversation. In addition, there is an undue focus on breasts: “Jenny stared enviously at her browned shoulders and the outline of her round, perky breasts. What she wouldn’t give to be able to wear a shirt like that” (2006, p. 4). In the first four pages; there are six references to breasts in just a page and a half; the rest of the book goes downhill after that. The main characters are four females in a boarding school and there is a large focus on fashion, with many very expensive designer names being touted. Not only are there excessive references to materialism, but shockingly, many parts of the book contain drinking scenes and raw sexual content: “Her half-dressed body was splayed against the velvety hotel couch. The coffee table in front of her was cluttered with empty wine-glasses.... ‘Come on,’ Tinsely climbed onto Heath’s lap” (von Ziegesar, 2006, pp. 258-259). A few pages later two girls are under a blanket with one boy: “Tinsley...slapped at one of Heath’s hands that had strayed too far. ‘No,’ she admonished him sternly. ‘You can only go where I tell you.’ She reached for his hand beneath the blanket. ‘Like, here.’ ‘Oh my God,’ Heath’s eyes almost rolled back into his head. ‘I love this rule.’ Jealously, Callie grabbed Heath’s other hand. ‘Or here’” (2006, p. 266).

Von Ziegesar’s (2006) writing is a far cry from the various writers who took the pseudonym of Carolyn Keene and wrote the Nancy Drew mysteries. Where are the role models? Granted the Nancy Drew series had many references to clothes but not nearly as many and not designer focused. Keene wrote about party frocks, matching shoes and purses, cashmere sweaters, and camel hair coats, but the stories focused on solving the mystery not the materialism. What message are the authors of today giving to their audience? This contemporary series is more soft-porn than literature or pop fiction, which is a stronger reinforcement of Naomi Wolf’s (2002) position of the almost non-existent line between pornography and self-identity.

Similar to the sixties, revolutionary times are happening again now in the mid-2000s; it is not just political; it is so much more: it is the future of our young women. With all the strides that women made in the sixties and seventies, young women today seem to have gotten the wires crossed. But, any problem the child has as she grows up cannot all be blamed on the mother. However, it was that generation who read *The Gossip Girl Series*, the *It Girl Series*, and the like who are raising and influencing the new generation. Unfortunately, today that group seems to be devolving and spiraling out of control.

As mentioned earlier, everyone, male and female, is subjected to external influence. But if mixed signals are being received, confusion will reign among the receivers. Research conducted a few years ago stated that when women were in the company of men, women deferred to men. Once a woman has reached a position of power, there can be several conflicting signals going on within her as she advances; one of which could be a bit of “daddy’s little girl” syndrome as suggested in Dowling’s (1982) *The Cinderella Complex*. This means that a woman may be in a strong conversation with someone, but with “winking and dimpling and in general behaving helpless and seductive” (1982, p. 35). Also, in the book is an excerpt of an interview between a financial reporter, a Wall Street broker, and an advertising executive. One of the topics they discussed was the way women conduct business. The male interviewees gave the following example: the woman was dressed in “lots of make-up, long painted fingernails, and gold earrings that dangled and jangled. I could hardly look at her; she had so much on, such a presentation. As she talked she would shift into and out of different personality styles . . . serious . . . then giggle and give a little

Forum on Public Policy

shoulder (Dowling, 1982, p. 55). Even though the men's responses are clearly their problem in dealing with women, it does make a point of the mixed message that women give to others and the confusion within themselves. In 2007 "Catalyst, which is an organization to help women enter the workforce, surveyed more than 1200 senior executives and found that women who focused on work tasks, displayed ambition, or other behaviors for which men would receive high praise, women are perceived as too tough and unfeminine" (Coontz, 2011, p. 174).

That sort of remark did not just start in the 2000s; there has been a slow erosion of women's advances. Back in 1991, Susan Faludi discussed the media's influence on women in her book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. Disappointingly, the strides that women have made over many years were slowly being torn down, and the many struggles that were endured seem to be for naught (Faludi, 1991). Where once women were only known as sex objects, now in the mid-2000s it is happening again, but at a faster pace, and sadly women are allowing it. Even though there are numerous women with a grand list of accomplishments, the younger generation is being inundated with media hype; unfortunately, it is frequently negative to women and doing damage to the younger generation. How young women seem to use their voices gives the adverse impression that they have gone to the seamy side of the spectrum.

Voice is extremely important, but women are getting mixed messages about that too, and unfortunately, that message was delivered in very early childhood. Perhaps one reason girls do not seem to be using their voice appropriately is a seemingly innocent and adorable toy and various child products that many little girls got—Hello Kitty. She is a fictional cartoon character that was created and produced by a Japanese firm, and little girls love her. But, she is missing a very important part: she has no mouth. The absence of that major feature leaves her with no voice; therefore, no power.

Today the media has taken on an even more powerful voice. Through the years the media has controlled how people view the roles that each gender takes. The negative media influence is best seen in the past and current reality television shows, for example, *Toddlers and Tiaras*, which ran from 2009-2016. The several episodes that I watched had five-year old girls in full make-up, complete with false eyelashes and highlighted hair; they looked twenty years old. The commentator said about one little girl as she was announced and strutted on stage, that when she grows up she wants to be the next top model. As the "future model" sashayed across the stage, she wiggled and gyrated as though she were doing a striptease. Moving on to children a few years older, there are other popular shows for the teenager—*16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom*. Frequently the message that is being sent is that even if raising a child at such a youthful age may be difficult at times, it can be worked out. If one walks into a middle school or junior high school today (8th and 9th grades), the number of pregnant girls or girls who already have a child is staggering. "Approximately one in five middle-school kids is sexually active (Hymowitz, 1998, par. 12). Sadly, according to a recent discussion I had with some of my college students, pregnant sixth graders are more and more common.

In Freud's study of human sexuality, he found "between the first phase of childhood sexuality and the onset of the second phase with adolescence, sexual development enters a period of relative stability, which he calls the latency period" (as cited in Birkhold, 2013, p.5). But, this is the time that damage can be done to healthy sexual development. It is during latency that a child transitions

Forum on Public Policy

from reliance on the parents for love and attention to outside influencers, and according to Freud, “it is essential that the latency period lasts long enough for all the necessary dams to be constructed and for psychosexual tasks to be accomplished before the sex drive can safely function” (as cited in Birkhold, 2013, p. 5). One of the major culprits in the inhibition of establishing proper healthy sexual development is social media.

During the middle school years, children are filled with insecurities, trying desperately to fit-in and to feel comfortable in their own skin. “Pressure to look sexy starts even before middle school...interviewed girls at Risman and Searle Middle School said that looking ‘hot’ was mandatory” (Coontz, 2011, p. 176). In the book *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*, Orenstein (2000) reports on boys’ words and actions, and girls’ responses in various middle schools. Boys are also influenced by what they see on television, internet, and social media, which can make them insensitive to other’s feelings. They make lewd comments to girls, but “the girls think that guys ‘just say these things,’ and that after a while you think that this is the way that guys are supposed to talk to girls” (2000, p. 121). The counselor Mrs. Deloria advises the young women that they need to be in control and tell the boys they are not going to accept that kind of talk and then follow through. She also advises them that it’s not easy and they must be role models (2000, p. 121).

Role models are the key—good, solid role models are needed. Pathetically, positive role models are getting harder to find. In another example in Orenstein’s book, a principal and a police officer were talking to a boy who calls girls names, such as hooker, slut. When the principal called his father, the father was not surprised and refused to talk to his son because he said the problem was his ex-wife’s fault. The principal said, “now I know where he gets it [the vulgarity]” (Orenstein, 2000, p. 126). If young boys are not being taught to respect women and women are acting cheap then it is a no-win situation—women will lose their voices.

But it is the young girls who are going to suffer for this lack of respect. In much of the research, there is example after example of girls doing illicit acts. An eighth-grade girl “made a digital recording of herself masturbating and simulating fellatio on a Swiffer mop, which then someone posted on a social media site. As a result, her popularity rose almost to celebrity status” (Levy, 2005, p. 140). In another instance, a white girl pleased a black boy and then he dumped her, and she called him the “n” word. She got expelled from school for the name-calling and nothing happened to him.

Levy (2005) quotes a study by Deborah L. Tolman associate director and senior research scientist at the Center for Research on Women at Wellesley College; Tolman discovered “in many hundreds of studies . . . girls’ sexual behavior is not prompted by their sexual desire” (as cited in Levy, 2005, p. 156). Levy notes that there are “two widely divergent messages. [Teens] live in a candyland of sex . . . every magazine stand is a gumdrop castle of breasts, every reality show is a bootylicious Tootsie Roll tree” (2005, p. 157).

Young girls’ clothes are shocking example of how the message to them is skewed. Retailers are pushing grown-up clothes and underwear for children, especially thongs with phrases on them, such as “eye candy, feeling lucky, and the Playboy Bunny” (Levy, 2005, p. 143). A posting on a social media site: “I don’t need to cry acid tears to get attention, only wear a low-cut shirt” (2005,

Forum on Public Policy

p. 143). However, with an idea of simple biology, one knows that boys are a mass of raging hormones, and it doesn't matter to them what the girls wear. As Levy writes, "the people who are really distracted by the competition to look and seem sexy are the girls themselves" (2005, p. 157).

As noted above, girls want attention and will do almost anything to get it. To them "sex is an ego thing rather than lust" (2005, p. 162). It is a sad point that girls "are conceiving of sex as a performance you give for attention, rather than as something thrilling and interesting you engage in because you want to" (2005, p. 163). This is the difference in today's message from Friedan's and even Helen Gurley Brown's. They pushed liberation from always doing for the man to enjoyment for self. Unfortunately, there are many examples of girls aggressively going after guys in a sleazy fashion; only using their bodies to get attention, but some of it may be unwanted attention. The over-the-top teasing of boys can result the girls turning themselves into pieces of meat. Girls think by showing their thongs, flashing their boobs that they are playing a silly game—poking fun at men, but in reality, the girls are looking pathetic, cheap, and simple-minded.

Many of the articles researched use the terminology "growing practice of sexting" (Birkhold 2013; Guerra, 2016; O'Keefe, Clarke-Pearson, and Council on Communications and Media, 2011). "Sexting—a recent study revealed that 20% of teens have sent or posted nude or seminude photographs or videos of themselves" (as cited in O'Keefe, Clarke-Pearson, and Council on Communications and Media, 2011). In addition, another survey "by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy found that 21% of girls and 18% of teen boys have sent or posted online sexually explicit image of themselves" (Rosario, 2010). The authors also found that some teens have been charged with felony child pornography charges (O'Keefe, Clarke-Pearson, and Council on Communications and Media, 2011; Rosario, 2010). A few years ago, "six Pennsylvania high school students were slapped with child pornography charges after three teenage girls allegedly took nude or semi-nude photos of themselves and shared them with male schoolmates" (Rosario, 2010). An example closer to home, a dear friend of mine's fourteen-year old granddaughter was caught sending naked pictures of herself and posting them on social media sites over a period of a year or two. She was criminally charged, and her mother under court order and recommendation sent her to a high school that focuses on therapy as well as education. She recently graduated and is back, hopefully, a wiser young woman.

Sexting is a problem that is not going away, matter-of-fact it is getting worse. In "Pennsylvania six high school students were slapped with child pornography charges after three teenage girls allegedly took nude or semi-nude photos of themselves and shared them with male schoolmate" (Rosario, 2010). In another case in Florida, an eighteen-year old boy was charged with 72 counts of child pornography after he sent a photo his sixteen-year old girlfriend to friends after they had a fight (Rosario, 2010). Horrifyingly, the ages of the girls are getting younger, starting at 12-13-years old. "In Massachusetts, a 13-year old girl sent a nude picture of herself to her boyfriend who then forwarded it to a group of his friends" (Ostrager, 2010, p. 5). These are just a few of the ever-growing list of incidents. In conversations with several high school sophomores, Rosario (2010) found the number of girls who sext is increasing. The comments were very telling as to the how girls view themselves. One girl said a boy asked her to send him a picture and because she liked him, she did it. Basically, all the girls repeated the same type of reason.

Forum on Public Policy

Rosin (2014) examined the reasons why kids sext and acknowledges that the practice of sexting “inspires a maddening, ancient, crude double standard” (12). The boys said that it “is common only for girls with slut reputations, and the girls who don’t are stuck-up or prude. The boys were largely immune from criticism, whether they sexted or not” (12). It should not be a surprise that sexting is gaining in popularity because the young people are surrounded by celebrities, such as quarterback Brett Favre, and actress Vanessa Hudgens, who freely acknowledge that they have done it and find it quite a stimulating from the point of view of both the recipient and sender. Plus, rapper Ludacris sings to a woman who had just sent him a sext (Briggs, 2012).

The most eye-opening issue that has developed the fact that young men are losing respect for women. Rosin (2014) also had specific conversations with her group of teenage boys, and they all said that “you gotta work on the girls but you just have to tell them what they want to hear, and you got a picture on your phone” (2014, p. 12). Do they respect the girls? No, they refer to them as thots: a colloquial expression meaning that-whore-over-there (2014, p. 12). Furthermore, in a discussion of women, power, and voice in approximately 160 English classes over the last fifteen years comprised of 20 students in each with at least a third to half were men (approximate total n=1440), I asked the students in a brief survey how they felt women were acting today. I inquired if women were respected, more specifically, I asked the young men if they have respect for women. Shockingly, in every class over the last fifteen years, the response was for the most part negative—80% of the men said no. Several fellows volunteered that women are not commanding the respect. Many young men offered the comment that men are not sure how to take women, sometimes women act whorish and other times they try to act innocent. This confusion impacts men. It could lead to resentment, psychological impotency. Frequently misogyny grows out of the fear of women and perhaps the loss of male power and dominance.

It is common knowledge that women through the centuries have been viewed as goddesses or whores; it was a woman who lured Adam into sin; it was a woman who demanded the head of John the Baptist and got it; it was a woman who destroyed Samson. Women have a lot of power, and, most importantly, voice equals power. The question now becomes why are women wasting and/or abusing their power.

What is happening today cannot be considered a backlash because many young 21st Century women feel they can do anything they want, and everyone should just accept it. In a few past English classes and a current class (fall 2018 semester), some young women (n=4) said that “men do the same thing, and it is okay,” and “I can do and dress anyway I want; no one should tell me differently; I am my own person.” Unfortunately, women have a lot more at stake. Why do women want to lower their standards? The lowering of a woman’s value in that she thinks just because men do it she can too is the primary proof the original Friedan (1963) message and the hard work women of 1970s has been diluted and misconstrued.

Women need to be smarter and to think about possible repercussions. As a nineteen-year old, I went to several fraternity parties, but one in particular stands out. The frat house was a former mansion, which in its heyday was gorgeous and at the time still held its magnificence. I was on a date at a party, and as the evening progressed, my date, Jim, asked me if I wanted to see the upstairs to which I responded yes. As I walked up the stairs, I got halfway up and rethought my decision. I said “oh, it is really pretty; thanks, I’ll see you downstairs.” The key word is “rethought.” One

Forum on Public Policy

can only image the scene that would have occurred if I did make that total climb up the “wooden hill.” Another example of hundreds of “should have rethought” happened several years ago at a Kennedy compound in Florida. One of the Kennedy cousins met a girl at a bar and as the evening worn on to the early morning hours he asked her to come back to see his home. She did and then cried rape. Did she think she was going to play Parcheesi at four o’clock in the morning? Camille Paglia (1991) wrote an essay “Rape a Bigger Issue than Feminists Know”; in it she describes a similar scene to the fraternity party above. She advises women to be cognizant of their surroundings and be smart. Yes, a woman can do whatever she wants, but there are consequences to actions. The above examples are from several years, but the point is the same regardless of year—women must be smarter.

Even though social media is the most used tool of choice, television does not sit too far behind. There are very popular series of shows the *Real Housewives* of whatever city and the new *Jersey Shore* series. Every woman is heavily made-up, wears very expensive clothes, and lots of jewelry. There is constant fighting and over-reaction within the group of friends. I watched for twenty minutes and then tuned in later and they still repeating the same lines or versions of the same lines. There is no substance to the shows, and with the constant bickering it should be called the “Bickersons.” It is a pathetic statement to our current mores, but, unfortunately, the reality is these shows are very popular.

Sadly, something changed; it seems to have changed somewhere in the eighties—the ME generation. The eighties generation are having the children who are now teenagers, and it is imparting its message of entitlement to them, and they have begot the Selfie generation: The generation that takes many photos of themselves and, in some instances, sits behind a screen and imparts all kinds of hurt and meanness through cyber-bullying. This current generation has an enormous task; they must now try to filter through the mixed messages that are rampant throughout all forms of media.

Children watch and look to adults for guidance and example. In most cases, mothers/parents/guardians are responsible for raising their children. They are the eye to the world for their offspring. They buy the clothes a child wears. Why then are mothers/guardians buying adult clothing for an elementary or middle school girl? Is it because they think the five-year old looks cute and precious as an “almost grown-up”? Education of girls starts at birth. Babies and children are sponges, sopping up all they see and hear around them. Naturally, they do not understand most of it, but it is embedded in their subconscious and will be drawn out later. Alice Walker (1997) wrote a book of contemplative essays *Anything We Love Can be Saved*. In the section titled “What Can I Give My Daughters, Who are Brave?”, she discusses her relationship with her own daughter Rebecca. In a conversation between the two, regarding Rebecca’s childhood and her feelings of abandonment, Walker told Rebecca, “I did my best, and yet I still hurt you” (1997, p. 77).

To develop a solution to the problem is almost impossible because every generation has issues that irritate the older generation. In the early 1900s it was showing ankles, later it was showing knees; now it is midriffs, legs, behinds, and breasts—sometimes all at once. How can we stop the tide? Perhaps we should all walk around naked, but that is an emotional reaction and not feasible. But what could work more parental involvement, more family, and more thought into what the

Forum on Public Policy

repercussions on the young girls will be as they grow into adulthood; in other words—change the message girls are getting. We have seen the damage. The mores will never be like the fifties, and we would not really want that, but our children need their childhood, otherwise it is child abuse—robbing our youth of their innocence. Our young girls and young women need to know that they are more than a pair of legs and breasts, “mattress dressing.” They are intelligent human beings who can make a difference and be empowered.

Forum on Public Policy

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Forum on Public Policy

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