

Commercial culture focuses attention on men

For years, women have bemoaned the female image that is presented to them in our commercial culture.

Women in advertisements are tall and slender, yet full-bosomed, and their skin is smooth and free from blemishes. They never sweat, not even when they exercise, and they seem to be able to climb mountains in high-heeled shoes with the grace of an African gazelle. You never see them walk down the aisle in the grocery store, putting TV dinners and nachos into their carts, or emptying the dust bin or scrubbing the bathroom floor. The women in *Cosmopolitan* don't have time for things like that, because they're too busy with much more important pursuits, such as being beautiful and wearing the latest collections from Christian Dior.

Real women, the kind of women you'd see if you peeked up from the glossy magazines and the television soap operas, aren't like that, of course: they're sometimes skinny, sometimes a little



MARIUS MELAND

bit on the heavy side, and they frequently experience waking up with an unsightly pimple right between their eyes. And, would you believe it, they sometimes become pregnant, so that they won't fit into those French designer clothes, which they couldn't afford in the first place.

We all know the result of the enormous discrepancy between the ideal expectations perpetuated by our commercial culture and the less-than-glamorous reality. Anorexia has become a common disorder among young women, even among girls in their pre-teens. The rate of suicides among young women has

increased rapidly over the past twenty years, no doubt partly because of the intense pressure to conform to society's unattainable ideals.

But revenge is sweet. Nowadays, chances are that if you open the pages of one of the high-fashion magazines, the two-page advertisement from Calvin Klein won't feature an outlandishly beautiful Venus de Milo dressed in the latest variety of the maple leaf. Rather, it will be Marky Mark, a rapper-model with well-documented mental deficiencies, but one redeeming quality: a well-sculpted body.

Guys like Marky Mark, however slow-witted and politically incorrect they may be, are giving normal guys an inferiority complex. And he's not alone: today's magazines are full of tanned, scantily dressed, muscular men advertising everything from Levi's jeans to Obsession cologne. Last week, as I skimmed through a recent issue of *Vanity Fair*, I saw a naked male derriere that was supposed to promote - of all things - a new line of low-fat yogurts.

And if you go to the movies these days, you'll probably see more naked men than naked women up there on the silver screen. Last year belonged to Sylvester Stallone, whose naked body bedecked the cover of *Vanity Fair* after his performance in two of 1993's most popular action films. And this year's *The*

Piano devotes a great deal of its time to a homage of the the male body, as represented in the brawny shape of Harvey Keitel.

Turn on MTV, and you'll see a music video with an artist called Jeremy Jordan. He's not wearing his T-shirt because he's got a well-sculpted upper body to show off to his audience, primarily consisting of teen-age girls. In fact, even Sting, whom people once regarded as a serious artist a cut above singers of Mr. Jordan's caliber, has pulled off his T-shirt in the video where he sings - ironically - the title music from the film *Demolition Man*.

It's enough to make you wonder, as you stand in front of the mirror in your underwear in the morning, whether you're abnormal just because your chest doesn't bulge out like Marky Mark's.

These days, many men are experiencing just the same anguish and anxiety that women have suffered for decades because of the contorted ideal of beauty found in commercial culture. Just like the women of the 1970s sought to achieve the sick, skeletal figure of Twiggy, men of the 1990s may strive toward the abnormal, steroid-fueled body of a Marky Mark or a Sylvester Stallone.

As our culture shifts its focus from female to male sexuality, many women will indubitably derive some pleasure from the

fact that men now are being forced to suffer the same anxieties and inferiority complexes that have agonized them over the years. Perhaps women should be allowed to relish in their vengeance for a while. It is, after all, considerably more excruciating to be coerced into a corset than a Calvin Klein undergarment.

But ultimately, the way advertisements portray beauty - male and female - isn't good for anyone. It gives rise to insecurity, lack of self-confidence, and unhealthy eating habits among young people. And worse than that: it makes people with perfectly normal bodies think that they're somehow abnormal.

Perhaps it would be too much to expect to find a Calvin Klein advertisement featuring Lyle Lovett in the next issue of *GQ*. Commercial culture is, after all, a hazy dream world, separate from the world of real, ordinary people.

But the latest cover of *Vanity Fair* may give us some hope. It features Roseanne Arnold, dressed in sexy lingerie and sitting in a provocative position. She's shed some pounds, that's for sure, but she's still considerably larger than, say, a waif model such as Kate Moss.

And you know what? She's not altogether unattractive.

Marius Meland is a columnist for the Emerald.

LETTERS

Guns 'N Roses

Are you a newspaper? Dave Charbonneau devotes one little paragraph out of 12 that the new Guns 'N Roses album includes music by an unrepentant mass murderer who will profit by the purchase of the album. Charbonneau is so out of touch with real issues. Get a clue.

Henry Keller
Eugene

Good music

As I read the latest on the KWVA debate in the Jan. 10, *Emerald*, I noticed that a few things were worth commenting on.

Bret Landess' suggestion for cutting down on airplay for bands not already aired by MTV, Z-Rock, KDUK and KRVM is to require DJs to play two songs an hour by some of those recognizable alternative sensations. KWVA plays at least two songs an hour by the bands Landess specifically mentions, or those with a similar level of popularity. Furthermore, if you really want to hear "No Rain," for example, call in and request it. Not only will you get to hear it, but so will everyone else who loves that particular song. There's no need for alternative crud above and beyond what the DJs want to play and the callers want to hear.

KWVA is the only station I can listen to Blind Melon on without getting nauseous. Lovers of Stone Temple Pilots and Depeche Mode can get it anywhere but KWVA is the only station you can turn on any time of the day and hear something new and, more often than not, worth listening to.

Nick Johnson
Eugene

Voltaire

Salman Rushdie was not the first, and probably not the last to ridicule Islam. He did it in his best seller, *Satanic Verses*.

Two hundred fifty years ago French historian and dramatist Francois Marie Arouet, a.k.a. Voltaire (1694-1778), satirized Islam in his play, *Mahomet (Mohammad)*. When Voltaire wrote the play his target was not

Islam but the Vatican, which he could not ridicule directly. Instead, he chose a safe scapegoat for Christian Europe, Oriental "other" as a surrogate target.

Much to the ire of Muslims, France and Switzerland, among other countries, are greeting Voltaire's 300th birthday later this year with a new production of *Mahomet*. Should one billion Muslims feel threatened by this production?

In a world where Islamic holy places are occupied by Israelis and corrupted by regimes like the House of Saud and Saddam Hussein's, the choice of this play to celebrate Voltaire will, perhaps, inadvertently further demean Islam. Shouldn't there be some discussion, at least in the academic world, of the choice of this particular play instead of others in Voltaire's repertoire? How can we end the continuing derision of the Islamic world in literary circles as in popular culture in the U.S. and Europe?

M. Reza Behnam, Ph.D.
Eugene

Responsibility

In a recent opinion piece titled "Not all forms of life are equal" (*ODE*, Jan. 12), Dave Thorn asserts that the concept of universal equality of all life "doesn't hold up to any serious scrutiny." Regardless of whether or not this is true, the arguments which Thorn uses to support his claim are less than compelling.

Thorn cites the unique intelligence of the human animal, which allows us to manipulate our environment, as proof of our "superiority" over other forms of life. In reply to this I would ask: is it intelligent to pollute and degrade one's environment to a point at which it becomes barely habitable? If so, then Thorn is employing a very narrow definition of intelligence.

I propose that our unique intelligence engenders not superiority but rather a very solemn responsibility. Until we stop thinking of our world, and the life which it supports, as playthings upon which to practice our manipulative ability, we will never mature as a species.

Brad Wright
English

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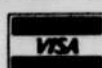


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