

Sleaze Run Amok

By Cynthia Crane

A beautiful model walks in front of Howard Stern and sits down on a high stool. She removes her shirt. "You are definitely in need of breast implants," Stern authoritatively claims. In the next scene, we see a surgeon, presumably before surgery, describing this woman's asymmetrical breasts and where the implants will go. Post-surgery, the model returns to Stern, but she is shuffling, not walking, with a cane, and she can barely speak. Stern says in his deadpan, sarcastic voice: "She was shot in the head by her boyfriend. If he couldn't have her, he didn't want anyone else to have her." The model, now crippled, sits down and exposes her new breasts—to whoops and applause from Stern—and she actually says she wants an even bigger pair. (About now, you would expect characters from *South Park* to appear for commentary.) I have been asking for decades: *Why do women subject themselves to this inanity?*

Maureen Dowd, in one of her columns ("The Baby Bust," April 10, 2002), wrote that men preferred "malleable and overawed" women, and feared successful women—smart and analytical—and it is no wonder. Look at Stern's willing victim. What primary image of women do men—or any of us—see in this media-sopped culture? On TV shows, in movies, on magazine covers, and in every form of advertising, it is the prototypical *ad nauseam* image of women. Defining this Icon of Beauty would be an insult to my reader's intelligence because she is everywhere. (See the cover of *Maxim*; any month will do.) The presumption is that we all agree that *this* is female beauty, which is nonsense. Dowd highlights the underlying problem: Women are still, as always, displayed and viewed in the media, and subsequently, in "real life," as objects—as things. And for whom? *In general*, not for other women. Is this a dated observation? Maybe so. But it seems to always be in need of repeating.

When viewed through many men's eyes (and this includes the eyes of many TV producers), women are still labels that bear sexual stamps no matter who they are and what they do—"Eternal Bitch," "Nubile Maid," "Ball Breaker," "Mommie Dearest," "Sexy Sleaze." (Just watch any of the "Gotta Have a Man" reality shows, and all of the above will be represented.) It is not that men view one demented ad or one show featuring a Sex-Bomb and are brainwashed; rather, it is an accumulation of repetitive images that is so insidious and ultimately hurts women *and* men. Women=Sex is so prevalent in our Hollywood culture, but often so subliminal, that men and women can say, "These shows and ads do not affect *me*." Wrong. These demeaning images of women in myriad forms of media spill over into real life and relationships, and therein lies the infection.

Take the first *Bachelor*—the first in a long line of similar shows to follow. It ran in primetime on Fox starring a real-life Harvard bachelor who was to choose a wife from 25 female candidates. (As Dowd stated in her column, if a woman attends Harvard, she keeps it a secret so men will like her. If a man attends Harvard, he brags about it, and women salivate and fall all over him.) This Harvard "catch" had the couth and social skills of an aardvark, and the girls who were panting after him needed antennae strapped to their

heads to pick up tips on how to converse. One segment of show had the bachelor meeting with the women's families and whittling the women down to just three. And whom did he pick? The airhead with the breasts that could be used as floatation devices, of course. A male colleague of mine wondered if a show could be created in which intelligent women face off: Smarts are the lure to win the guy. It will be a battle of wits. Are you kidding? I asked. Most Americans (male and female) would not watch a show of witty romance. What an oxymoron! Robert Bianco, in *USA Today*, (April 25, 2002) wrote, I presume sarcastically, how the bachelor and his final female contenders went off to the boudoir to discuss Nietzsche and Marx. Can you imagine if that discussion ever ensued on network TV? The station would be changed faster than you could say, "sex." He follows with a description of Amanda, one of the hopefuls, smearing herself in chocolate. Why do women so willingly and pathetically put themselves into these situations? Is the money and potential of being discovered worth it? Have we all lost track of what humiliation is?

Dowd also mentions the Bonobos, chimpanzees that are free of male-female inequality. This was not a good example because male chimps are not monogamous and will have sex with any female that moves. Funny that she should mention chimps because a few years ago, around the time of this particular column, the movie, *Human Nature*, that looks at ape and human behavior, said nothing about equality in the wild, let alone in human civilization. This film gives us yet another example of how women are presented to men on a silver platter. The movie merely accorded Patricia Arquette the chance to be naked and expose her breasts—standing up here, swinging there. The male actors (Tim Robbins and Rhys Ifans) are rarely shown bare, and certainly, we don't see their genitals. (And why not? This is a film *about* nakedness!) Also, Rhys, who is uncovered the most in the film, does not have the proverbial ideal male body. (If he had been a woman with such measly body credentials, it would have been unthinkable for him to appear in the movie.) It is also obvious that a man wrote the script because there is reference made to Robbins' character's small penis. Of course, Arquette says that's okay—although not immediately—and Robbins still juggles two gorgeous women throughout the film. The truth is, if a woman had written the script, Arquette would have said, "No thanks. I'll pass." (It is rare in any form of media that men's penis size will be targeted. Budweiser had the nerve recently to pitch an ad to women with a "big hands" reference. Alas, the ad quickly disappeared.) American society runs on stereotypes. It is a misnomer that women are not visual or that, if heterosexual, they don't care about male body parts. Of course, only men care about these things, or so you would think, and that is why we have women baring breasts—and more—in nearly every movie that comes to the screen, but we see little of men.

I am not advocating censorship, but we have hit a new low. Since exposing women (and women exposing) will probably not disappear, then let us equalize—men of beauty can start dropping their drawers. Part of what has happened (at least on TV) is that "T&A" is not regulated well, if at all, by the FCC. Television networks once had standards and practices, which apparently are no longer. Band-Aids were used if nipples protruded. Words were carefully chosen, and bedroom scenes were regulated, but now the camera shows everything; that is, on women.

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