

KNOCKOUT

Featuring

Sochi Sex Appeal

// Sports

**Picture Perfect? Why Stock
Photos Matter**

// Mass Media

Girls on Screen

// TV

and

Fully Frontal

// Interview with Rachel Scott of

Naked Women's Racing



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KNOCKOUT

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What is a **K N O C K O U T**?

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B. *v.* To defeat thoroughly

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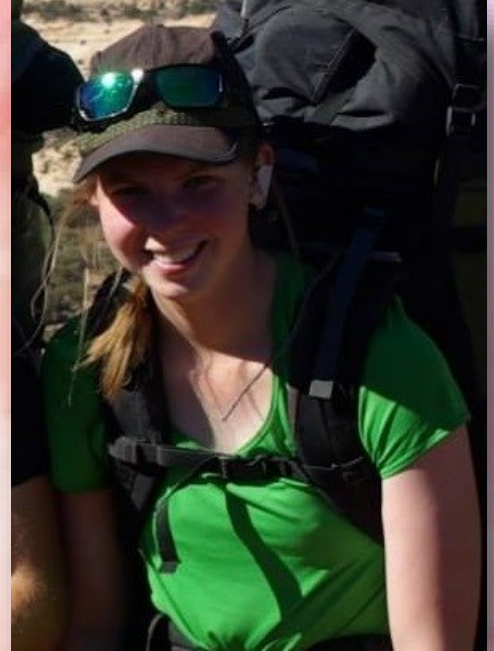
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Letter From the Editor

Dear Knockout Reader,

If you've seen anything in the media recently, you may be wondering what it means to be a woman anymore. According to today's television, movies, sports, and news, women are supposed to be many things; independent but nurturing, sexy but modest, assertive but submissive. These contradictory identities can be discouraging, especially for strong, successful women who may even be on their way to raising new female leaders, whether it be as mothers, teachers, businesswomen, or athletes. The way the media depicts us does not tell all of our stories as women.



We welcome you to Knockout magazine. We believe the mainstream media's traditionally negative narrative of women is not the only story to be told. We present critiques, focused primarily on television and sports, of the media's current depiction of women and offer you alternate portrayals of women that serve to empower.

Depicting women in a constructive light, as we at Knockout emphasize, can have positive results. According to a study by Christopher J. Ferguson of Texas A&M University, "Strong, independent female characters in television shows appear to negate the influence of sexual and violent content"(896). Highlighting dynamic representations of women can help us reimagine the female image.

We also focus specifically on how women are depicted in sports, as women's athletics are a new battleground for changing the identity of women in the media. We focus particularly on a new female form, one that is empowered by the sports experience. Athletics are an important arena in which we can affect change for girls and women. Scholars Elaine M. Blinde and Sarah G. McAllister write of the benefits of

this for disabled women, “Many women viewed participation in sport and physical fitness activity as enhancing the perceived degree of control in their lives . . . feeling empowered, believing that no obstacles can stop them, and experiencing a sense of mastery”(135). Participating in sports and depicting female athletes as capable competitors can have profound effects on women and girls.

We at Knockout focus on empowerment and celebrating our accomplishments while striving for more. We are Knockout because we want to encourage our readers to be “knockouts” in their own lives, and to define what it means to be a “knockout” on their own terms. We want to inspire thought and action, creating new depictions of women, ones based on our experiences. bell hooks writes about the origin of this need, “Our search leads us back to where it all began, to that moment when an individual woman or child . . . began to name her practice, indeed began to formulate theory from lived experience” (42). We know each of our readers comes to Knockout with different experiences. These experiences, inform our realities in important ways.

We want to encourage new thought and dialogue that changes the way we as women are told to be, and challenge this in and through our everyday lives. We want to inspire our readers to embrace who they are, not who they’re told to be.



Kylan Nelson

Editor-in-Chief

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Sochi Sex Appeal

By: Chris Banks

As our editor's interview with cyclist Rachel Scott illustrates, women in any sport face obstacles and challenges that simply are not an issue for men in similar situations. With a culture that praises traditional ideas of "femininity" such as daintiness and a doting nature, sport is an area of life that does not immediately lend itself to those traditional ideas. While women's sports have come a long way, they still face some ingrained conceptions of what they should be and how they aren't living up to those standards. Media representations can help, but more often perpetuate existing ideas and can slow down or even work to undo what progress has been made.

Recently, both men and women competed in the highest level of international sporting in the Winter Olympic Games, hosted by Russia. The Olympic Games are always a time of heightened excitement and national pride for many countries, when they can prove their prowess on the world stage. However, this excitement can be expressed both positively and negatively for the athletes involved.

A Russian website, AdMe.ru, published a photo shoot with some of the Russian women's Olympic competitors (see fig. 1). Figure skating, curling and skiing were some of the events in which these women compete, and the website explains their reasoning behind publishing the photos; "We sincerely support our team and believe that its strength is not only in sports achievements [...] Our Russian Olympic team defies stereotype that women in sport are just a heap of muscles and masculine

shapes" (Stewart). And so, under the guise of celebrating femininity in women's sports, the website ran a series of photographs of Russian athletes in their underwear, standing in provocative positions and often with some piece of equipment representing their sport. That piece of equipment, however, is just about the entirety of any reference whatsoever to the fact that these women are among the most skilled, athletic, and powerful in the sporting world. High heels and G-strings don't contribute much to a successful skier or skater, other than by making their bodies more attractive to the photographers, and, by extension, the viewers. By presenting the women in these photos next to pictures of them performing their various sporting duties, the publishers, either intentionally or not create a dualistic frame through which to view these subjects.

On the one hand, they are serious competitors; physical beings with physical and mental attributes of cunning, strength, speed and strategy; these are women who must battle for supremacy every day of competition. On the other hand, however, they are still the objects of beauty and attraction that men want them to be and their "femininity" is still intact.

To make clearer the distinction between celebration and objectification, another example of scantily clad athletes can be looked to. ESPN magazine published an issue under the name "The Body Issue," a title that both predicts what is to come, and names the problem that women athletes may



Fig. 1. Ekaterina Galkina, Curler.

face. In the pictures published in this magazine, the athletes are wearing even less than those in AdMe.ru's published images.

However, they are not solely female, nor are they posed in ways wholly unrelated to their sport (see fig 2-3). Many of the athletes are photographed in the midst of a swing, jump, punch etc...and clearly show off the body that they have worked for years to create doing exactly what it was meant to do. It is in this way that the women specifically are shown not as stunning models of beauty, but as powerful boxers, snowboarders, climbers, and motocross riders. What is showcased is their strength as athletes, not their body as an object.

- Women have long held a position in sport that is markedly different from that held by men.
- Sports have seemed to be a distinctly male endeavor, and would indeed seem that way after an afternoon of watching ESPN, however progressive their magazine may seem. Michael Burke quotes John Carroll in Burke's essay *Women's Standpoints and Internalism in Sport*, where Carroll says,

Women should once again be prohibited from sport: they are the true defenders of the humanist values that emanate from the household, the values of tenderness, nurture and compassion, and this most important role must not be confused by the military and political values inherent in sport. Likewise sport should not be muzzled by humanist values: it is the living arena for the great virtue of manliness. (Burke 45)

While it is probably safe to say that the majority of people would not seek to bar women

completely from all sports and competition, Carroll does present a pretty clear argument that pretty clearly is based in the thinking that men and women are inherently different, that they both are naturally born into respective roles that are opposite and complementary. Women would only be confused by the competition, and would dilute "the great virtue of manliness" (Burke 45).

This hierarchical understanding of men's and women's methods is not unique to sporting. Social psychologist Carol Gilligan evaluated two interviews with two children, a girl and a boy,

concerning the so-called Heinz dilemma, where a man is faced with a decision to steal a drug to save his wife's life. The children give different answers that connote two very different ways of seeing the world, Jake (the boy) seeing the answer as based on logic and power relationships and Amy seeing it as a problem of communication and relationships between people. "When considered in the light of Kohlberg's definition of [...] moral development, her moral judgments appear to

be a full stage lower in maturity than those of the boy," showing the scale of moral development, in this case, to have constructed a moral hierarchy in which differing views of morality cannot be incorporated to be different, but only lesser (Gilligan 325). With this in mind, we can see what AdMe.ru tried to express, that sportswomen are not 'manly' for their voluntary involvement in sport, but that they are women and have a feminine way of performing the same tasks as men which is not less valuable or less worthy of praise.

For some athletes with bodies that don't fit neatly into one of the two categories, the distinction between male and female has a different result than just a hierarchy of power-it means they aren't allowed to compete at all.



Fig. 2. Kenneth Faried.



Fig. 3. Marlen Esparza.

For instance, Mokgadi Caster Semenya, who won gold in the women's 800 meter competition at the 2009 World Championships, was thereafter subjected to gender testing. Her body did not fit into what was then accepted as 'woman,' and so she was prohibited from international competition for over a year until her gender could be confirmed scientifically. However, this brings up a problem for those athletes who are questioning their own place on the sex/gender spectrum, and places the essential characteristic of 'woman' under the purview of medical science. "What makes a woman a woman? Is it chromosomes, genitalia, a way of life or set of roles, or a medical record?" questions one researcher of the subject (Teetzel). One suggested solution to the problem is the idea that "The only way to avoid defining essential characteristics of women for the purpose of eligibility is to eradicate sex categories entirely, or to trust participants to self-select the category in which they will compete" (Teetzel). The eliminating of sex categories is probably something that will not happen very soon if it all in sport competition, considering that the male/female binary is still so charged and ingrained, but maybe instead of eliminating the categories, we

should complicate them. "Today, however, many argue that they need to come out as transsexuals, permanently assuming a transsexual identity that is neither male nor female in the traditional sense," (Fausto-Sterling 509) and this could extend to the world of sports. By allowing for a third category, or perhaps a third and fourth, we would allow a space for competition free from questions of "isn't she too manly to run against them?"

By supporting the kind of glorification of women's bodies over their actual eligibility or abilities in sports that AdMe.ru espouses in the publishing of these pictures, we are giving an implicit 'pass' to conceptions of women as less able to perform the same tasks as men, and thus to a gendered hierarchy of power. Only when this kind of understanding is subsumed into one without this gender-based conception of ability can we then move to include categories other than male and female, either through an elimination of those categories or through a complication of that binary. The place to start for this changing conception must be through the media and their representations of women in sport. Women's sports, as a matter of course, need to be broadcast more widely and shown more support generally, and the athletes themselves should be revered or at least recognized in the same way as many of the male superstars in their sports are.

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Picture Perfect? Why Stock Photography Matters

By: Samantha Crook

In 2011, The Hairpin published “Women Laughing Alone With Salad.” In the post, Edith Zimmerman curated stock photographs that shared a curious trope: a plethora of young women, all eating salad, and all laughing to themselves (see fig. 1). As media scholar Paul Frosh suggests, one image of a conventionally attractive young women eating salad, alone, laughing might eloquently represent healthy diet and youthfulness (“Beyond the Image Bank,” 144).

● But when these images are curated, the uniformity of women’s representation in mass media becomes apparent and the veil between consumer and image source is lifted (Frosh, “Inside the Image Factory” 643).



Fig. 1. Woman blissfully preparing salad.

The proliferation of digital images iterates current gender norms and expectations of gender

norms in the future. Frosh outlines the influential yet illusive industry of commercial stock photography and invites consumers into a discourse which challenges cultural hierarchy. Building on Frosh’s examination of stock photography, I urge critical consumers to reach for feminist theory in critiques and discussions of commercial stock photography, an industry that has both depicted and fueled gender stereotypes.

It is this industry’s simultaneous mundaneness and pervasiveness that calls for feminist thought which addresses the everydayness of oppression. As Charlotte Bunch writes, “A solid feminist theory would help us understand present events in a way that would enable us to develop the visions and plans for change that sustain people engaged in day-to-day political activity” (12). Photographic theory, augmented by media and culture studies, can contribute to feminist theory that helps us understand the present reality of women’s visual representation.

A Brief History of Contemporary Stock Photography

Stock photography is dominated by a handful of multinational companies based in the US and Europe, namely Getty Images, Visual Communications Group, and Corbis, which rapidly acquired smaller stock photography companies in the late 20th century (Frosh, “Inside the Image Factory” 627). Key factors in the “systematic industrialization” (Ramamurthy qtd. in “Inside the Image Factory” 626) of photography in the

late 20th century are 1) commercial consolidation and 2) the prioritization of authoritative advertising clients. However, this process isn't completely synonymous with uniformity. Which is to say that stock photography can be considered a diverse industry in at least one respect: it depends on cross-industry interaction and grows a range of professions in entertainment, media, and photographic fields. Recognizing the multiplicity of professions involved in creating and circulating stock photography is useful in identifying multiple points of entry for intervention in the representations of women.

The creation and affirmation of advertising hegemony that pervades stock photography can be better understood by looking at Frosh's definition of "success" in the industry. Frosh explains,

"The extent of resale to cultural mediators such as art directors, picture editors and designers, rather than the response of the consumers to the advert in which the image appears [...] mediates the criteria of success, feeding back into the production process." ("Inside the Image Factory" 634).

More specifically, success in the minds of many stock photographers is linked to short-term revenue generation. Though, photographers must remain conservatively responsive to cultural shifts in order to distinguish their images from existing images, just enough to assure clients that the image can compete. In this way, photographers are both enforcers of existing norms and cultural producers (Frosh, "Inside the Image Factory" 635).

Class, Gender, and Lone Business Women on Cliffs

Major stock photography companies cater to advertising agencies which depend on depictions of a white middle-class lifestyle. This representation not only appeals to the minority

demographic it depicts, but conjures broadly shared values of American success based on spending and leisure time. It is only within the past 30 years that advertisers have demanded more "ethnic subject" (Frosh, "Inside the Image Factory" 640) from stock photography companies in response to increasing specialized market research. "Women Laughing Alone With Salad" speaks to the highly explicit nature of metaphor in stock photography. An image of a woman blissfully preparing salad quickly associates the company using the image with American ideals of success. More recently, The Cut published curated stock photos of women in "Feminism, according to Stock Photography." In the piece, multiple genres of stock photography are identified, including "Women Wearing Boxing Gloves With Sexy Outfits – Or Nothing At All," and "Lone Business Women On A Cliff" (see fig. 2-3) These tropes in stock photography expose social anxieties about women's strength as



Fig. 2. Women boxing in sexy outfits.

potentially antithetical to their femininity and concern about women's competence in the workplace.

Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In Collection with Getty Images represents a recent feminist intervention in stock photography (see fig. 5). Women and girls in the Lean In Collection are depicted in a wide variety of settings, engaged inside and outside of the home, racially diverse, and their masculine



Fig. 3. Business woman on cliff.

counterparts are depicted with similar variance. As the founder of LeanIn.org and Facebook COO, Sandberg’s role in propagating these images is tied to her standpoint feminism position that “The world would be a better place if half our companies and half

Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake write, “Distinguishing myself is all I know” (47). Feminist leanings that elevate the individual can segregate individual women from solidarity based on shared feminist values.



Fig. 5. Woman with baby.



Fig. 4. More businesswomen on cliffs.

our countries were run by women and half our homes were run by men” (LeanIn.org). At times, standpoint and cultural feminist approaches to depicting women’s experiences risk essentializing women across cultures – similar to the way stock photography’s dependence on widely recognizable metaphors produces uniformity. In contrast, Gen Xers’ approach to identity is deeply rooted in ideas of individuality.

However, this generational shift isn’t necessarily irreconcilable. Effective feminist approaches to mass media intervention depend on prioritizing difference while acknowledging how the misrepresentation or omission of some women’s experiences contribute to the marginalization of all women. A strategic call for more accurate, and therefore more diverse, images of women necessitates collaboration between women with commercial media platforms and women without commercial media platforms. Promoting images of diverse subjects with diverse lifestyles has the potential to go beyond creating an aesthetically pleasing rainbow effect of inclusivity. Plural representation of women would more accurately represent lived experiences and therefore invite consumers to respond to a more comprehensive reality.

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Girls on Film

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Fully Frontal: An Interview with Rachel Scott of Naked Women's Racing

Interview by Kylan Nelson



U.S.A. Pro Challenge start at Breckenridge 2013; should women be here?

Colorado is the home of many recreational and professional cyclists, both men and women alike. Despite the disparity in race opportunities between men and women, Colorado has made great strides in involving women in cycling and getting more support for women to participate. In this issue, I spoke to Rachel Scott, cofounder of Naked Women's Racing, a Boulder, Colorado based competitive women's cycling team. Naked Women's Racing has both a competitive racing team and a club team. They also host clinics and group rides aimed at getting more women involved in the sport. The team is also heavily involved in charity in the community. In 2012, Naked Women's Racing was named Club of the Year by USA Cycling (USA Cycling).

Like many other realms of society, sports and athletics are very male-dominated. This is especially true for cycling. Sports and cycling seem to favor men, but also provide a place in which women can challenge this. Michael Messner, in his book *Taking the Field: Women, Men and Sports*, problematizes this male domination in sports. He writes, "The center of sport [. . .] is a position occupied by the biggest, wealthiest, and most visible sports programs and athletes. It is a site of domination and privilege [. . .] And sport's center is still, by and large, a space that is actively constructed by and for men" (Messner xviii). Messner highlights an important problem that plagues athletics. In cycling, this is a prevalent problem that systematically challenges women's presence and participation in the sport.

Naked Women's Racing is making great strides for women in cycling and in athletics in general. This interview I had with Rachel Scott of Naked Women's Racing team highlights some important challenges women in sports face, but also emphasizes the importance of empowerment and solidarity in affecting change.

Kylan Nelson: What is your background in cycling? What are some of your early racing and training experiences?

Rachel Scott: I've been in cycling for ten years. My boyfriend actually got me into the sport in a recreational sense, which is common among a lot of women in the sport. And women are just looking for other women to ride with, because it is hard to keep up with their significant others. So I luckily kept the bike, dropped the boyfriend, and have continued since. I was on a men's Masters team as a twenty-four-year-old female and built up the team there by recruiting other women.

KN: What made you want to start a women's team?

RS: I moved to Colorado and was going to join a women's specific team out here, but it folded because of sponsorships. I met with two other women and we decided we should start our own thing. I wanted to have more of a focus of giving back to the community and helping women specifically get into bike racing, so that's how the Naked team came about. We started recruiting women after that. We started with six people, my two other cofounders, and now we have over one hundred in 2014. At a grassroots level, in Colorado specifically, I know we've grown the sport nationally in comparison to the rest of the U.S. We're at 17% women's participation, and in our Cat 4 fields we're actually at 24%. I was on the Board of Directors for the Bicycle Racing Association of Colorado, specifically the women's program.

KN: Why do you think that cycling is so male-dominated and what does that mean for young women trying to get into the sport?

RS: Personally, I think it's a trickle-down effect from the leadership at the top, but it goes both ways. There's just no support, not only from the leadership from UCI but from the bottom as well. The media is also to blame, because if the cycling fans are not clicking on women's links and wanting to read about women's news, then the media is also not going to publish that [women's cycling news] because that's how their

advertisers are paying the money. So I know that someone is quoted in their article as saying that they don't show as much women's news because that's not what the readers want. But also, I think from the bottom women also kind of do it to themselves, too. Cycling is a very catty sport, or it can be perceived that way, so a woman straddles a very difficult line of being a



The Interviewee; Rachel Scott (Courtesy of Rachel Scott).

competitor and also having to be nurturing as well, which is deeply rooted in psychology. So women, instead of focusing on helping each other out, sometimes can attack each other, which doesn't help the sport. We're an all-inclusive women's team, so we do not turn anyone away and we give everyone the benefit of the doubt.

KN: I was the only girl on a youth team for a while. When you're doing group rides with a bunch of guys it can be hard to keep up, which can be very discouraging and keep women out of the

sport as a result.

RS: It's just very disheartening. I think the lack of education is also to blame. If you look at Title IX, with Billie Jean King and tennis, it took forty years to get women's tennis to be taken seriously. It's a long process and it takes years to recognize that and to make sure that the vision doesn't stray.

KN: Marianne Vos is considered one of the best cyclists of all time. With her and other great professional female cyclists in mind, what do you think are some particular advantages of being a woman in cycling? What are some challenges that a lot of us face in trying to make it to the top?

RS: The media's representation is a challenge, as well as lack of support. So if there's any money left over from men's teams they may support a women's team. Women who race at the pro level have to have other jobs. I know that I work full time, I know that if I were to go race in the Gila [Tour of the Gila, a stage race in New Mexico] or the Giro Donne [an elite stage race for women in Italy] I would get destroyed

because I work 40 hours a week and would have to train at a pro level on top of that. The lack of media representation, sponsorship, and support can definitely be seen as challenges. Also the lack of races, because there's just not as many races with the men's races. Marianne Vos is an amazing cyclist and she should be credited more than she is, and the same with Katie Compton and a lot of these other women too. They're doing feats that men have never done, which are elevating them as role models, not just for women, but for all of cycling. I think a lot of women have male role models in cycling and not as many female role models.

KN: What do you make of the lack of women's Grand Tours? Even in Colorado, the USA Pro Challenge is pretty big, but there isn't a race for women or publicity for women's cycling that goes along with that. What do you make of that and how does that affect the atmosphere of cycling for women in Colorado?

RS: The unfortunate thing is that three years ago it was a three day omnium, and then they reduced it to one day, and then they reduced it to not knowing if we were going to have support, and then it was put on the grassroots organizations to do it and organize it. But hosting that race is a lot of work, especially when you don't have a lot of support from the Grand Tours but you're trying your best to make people aware that it's there. I almost feel like it's very backwards and back to pre-voting days in early eras that we're still having to deal with this. In Colorado I think you're a little more sheltered than this because we have pretty good support for a women's programs. There are strong women who live here and we have Olympians, so it's nice to have that in our backyard. But around the rest of the U.S. they don't have that kind of support to help from a grassroots level. It's definitely disheartening and you feel like you're in a time warp.

KN: We don't have that pinnacle to get to and it's kind of disheartening. You've mentioned the media quite a bit. What particular challenges, even outside of cycling, does the media pose for female athletes?

RS: It's a money-making business, they're in it to make money, they're not in it for unbiased journalism like at one time it probably used to be. To me, the way the media perceives it is what has the most click-throughs (sic). They want what has the biggest and best headlines,

what's going to get the most retweets and advertisers. In women's cycling, unfortunately, according to their numbers, they'll never reserve a space for it.

KN: What has been the biggest challenge you've faced in trying to create a women's specific team?

RS: Probably having to do with the internal cattiness. We have a no-drama policy; we actually have it written on the inside of our jerseys. We are an all-inclusive team and creativity and diversity makes for an amazing team. But that being said, some people rock the boat. Also, this isn't a challenge necessarily, but women do learn differently than men. They ask a lot more questions. They almost want to have one-hundred percent knowledge before doing anything, whereas men sometimes just show up and even if they don't know what they're doing, they just go for it. We host probably twelve clinics a year and we actually dedicate part of our sponsorship budget to that for women. Everything from crit cornering to how to eat and train. We want women to be self-sufficient and to become mentors and leaders themselves, because that's the only way it's going to grow. So if we impart a good experience to them, then they can possibly go out and start another team and grow the sport some more. Then we've done our job.

KN: So where do you think some of the cattiness, as you mentioned, comes from?

RS: I think some women are too concerned that they're going to lose friendships over competitiveness, and that should not be the case. Celebrate your competitiveness. You should be happy for that person because that's just what it is; it's a game, it's a sport. It should not dictate the rest of your life. We work and think differently. I think trying to fulfill all the roles women have to fulfill causes it too. You're trying to be the caretaker and the nurturer and the companion and the friend, and you can't be both of those things in a competitive environment. It's okay to be competitive and celebrate the strength of your peers. We should celebrate women more.

KN: What advice do you have for young female athletes or even young females trying to get into cycling?

RS: Mentorship is really a good thing. There are a lot of really good junior teams and Colorado puts a special emphasis on juniors. Finding a good mentor and finding a good group ride are

good things, and most people are willing to help. And as a female, I think making sure that there's presence of other females and trying to recruit your friends. Don't be afraid to try it on your own.

Rachel Scott points out some very important challenges that women in cycling face. From internal struggles to lack of media coverage, women in athletics face some unparalleled road bumps that our male counterparts often do not have to worry about. These challenges, as Scott mentions, are sometimes reminiscent of struggles that women faced in the past. We have certainly come a long way, but there is still a lot of work to be done. Teams like Naked Women's Racing certainly set a positive precedent for how to change the status quo by embracing strengths, differences, and being involved in the community. It is teams like this that will certainly change the face of male dominance in cycling, though it is a slow, steady effort.

The struggles that have plagued women in cycling and the strategies for changing the status quo are certainly not unique to cycling. The lessons that Naked Women's Racing, as well as other women's cycling teams, have learned can be applied to many situations. The work of changing the status quo, as Scott emphasizes, necessitates uniting women and embracing our strengths in order to find empowerment. This agrees with Rebecca Walker's conception of Third Wave Feminism in "Becoming the Third Wave." Walker writes, "To be a feminist is to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fiber of my life. It is [. . .] to join in sisterhood with women when we are often divided" (459). This is certainly a new and positive conception of women's identity, one that embraces differences and strengths. Whether you are young or old, athletic or not, these are significant lessons that can be applied to our everyday lives as women. Women's empowerment can take us a long way, from cycling to beyond.

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Girls on Screen

By: Chris Banks

We seem to be living in a time in which a major shift is beginning to take place. From Kevin Spacey in *House of Cards* to Matthew McConaughey's *True Detective*, television shows are starting to take the place of big-screen cinema for many viewers. Online services such as Netflix and Hulu are making it easier every day to 'binge'

on your favorite shows, with entire seasons played continuously from start to finish. Though these

services also offer movies, data published by MediaPost.com states

“Netflix users preferred TV content to movies by a 77% to 23% margin” (Goetzl). With more actors, actresses, producers, and audiences shifting their focus to television, the medium's importance and effect on our culture becomes ever more apparent.

Women have always played important roles in television, though those roles may not have always been very diverse or unpredictable. Often, they are roles that take on importance in their relation to the roles of others; the wife as a foil or oppositional influence to her husband, the mother to her children. Many television shows present women and femininity in a certain, unfavorable light. Kristen Myers details this in an article concerning four shows aimed at young girls/children. “Femininity,” she found, “was frequently associated with weakness,” with

boys being seen as feminine when they lost strength competitions, female characters were presented as incomplete and dysfunctional without a boyfriend/male companion (Myers 199). Current shows for older viewers aren't exempt from this either, such as *The Big Bang Theory*'s main female character, Penny, who acts as a

humorously ill-informed yet popular neighbor to four bright but socially inept scientists, constructing her main use to be that of an attractive object of yearning for the men as well as someone who can help them build and maintain relationships with other people. *Modern Family* has Claire and Gloria, the first a middle-aged mother of three who wants to find her way back into the workforce (though finds it difficult after spending most of her life raising a family), and the latter a former single mother of one who remarries an older, wealthy man.

These representations of women on screen can help us to create a larger picture of how women are seen in contemporary society, but only if we understand the effect of television shows and cinema on a viewer. Laura Mulvey can be of assistance here, in her 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. “film”, she says, “portray[s] a hermetically sealed world [...] indifferent to the



Fig. 1. Lena Dunham Rolling Stone Cover.

presence of the audience, producing [...] a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic fantasy” (255). Her application of the mirror phase to the spectacle of film is also important in understanding why this all matters, for when she says “Recognition is [...] overlaid with misrecognition: the image recognized is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego”, which, being superior, then becomes the ideal ego, or a more perfect conception of oneself (255). What this means for film and television is that the main, leading characters (including the women) are presented in such a way as to be conceived as an ideal; the amount of make-up, lighting and visual effects that go into making an actor or actress ready for a shoot are enough to separate them from the reality of life and to open up a space for them as superior or ideal. While these ideas were initially applied to cinema, Mulvey states later in her essay that “it is the place of the look that defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it,” thus allowing some room for television to fit into her definition of cinema, as these things are most certainly possible within both media (258). So, by creating a separate world that has some serious commonalities with the world that most of us inhabit (specifically, the



Fig. 3. Main Cast from The Big Bang Theory.

ideal man and of ideal woman.

The fact that these ideals are all acted does not mean that they don't matter or don't have any sort of effect on real life. Joan Riviere presents an argument in “Womanliness as a Masquerade” that will help to see this more clearly. She sees femininity as a mask, “womanliness[...]could be assumed and worn [...]to hide the possession of masculinity,” but she does not see this as something that can be turned on and off at will (Riviere 147). Pushing on her own argument to “draw the line between genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade’,” Riviere answers that “they are the same thing” (147). The mask of femininity is the essence of femininity, thus blurring the line between the acted womanliness of television actresses and the day-to-day womanliness performed by actual women. So, the influence of cultural norms of womanhood can be seen reflected on television, while the women of television influence and create the mask of womanhood that will be worn by their viewership.

The HBO show *Girls*, however, seems to want to do just the opposite. The four main characters are women (they call themselves girls even though they are all over the age of twenty) who have graduated college and now



Fig. 2. Adam Driver and Lena Dunham.

cultural world) and by injecting into that separate world various bodies that represent the “ego ideal”, television is essentially a reflection of cultural norms and desires for both the spaces of

are trying to make something of themselves in New York City. They are, generally, white and well-off, but none of them is a stunning ideal to look up to. Lena Dunham, who produces and stars in the show, plays Hannah Horvath, a neurotic twenty-something whose parents have just cut her off from financial support. She struggles with the realities of growing up and is presented as being far, far, far from perfect. Hannah is often seen nude in the show, which presents problems for some viewers. She does not have the stereotypical body type or shape that is so often seen on television, prompting a general sense of confusion by critics. Tim Molloy, part of a panel discussing the show with Dunham before the premiere of *Girls*' third season, raises a particularly telling concern:

“I don't get the purpose of all of the nudity on the show, by you particularly, and I feel like I'm walking into a trap where you go, “Nobody complains about the nudity on ‘Game of Thrones’ but I get why they are doing it. They are doing it to be salacious and, you know, titillate people. And your character is often naked just at random times for no reason.” (Ford)

Obviously confused, flabbergasted, and minimally aware of the fact that he enjoys seeing the thin, busty, sexualized women of another HBO product, Molloy confronts the difficult question of why Dunham would subject him and viewers to her horrifyingly nude figure. By not

disguising her particular womanliness, by not forcibly wringing out all aspects of masculinity in her figure, Dunham presents a body not impressed upon by ideals of men or of women. HBO itself, in promoting the show, frequently compared Dunham to (either implicitly or explicitly) popular and respected male comics “like Larry David, Woody Allen, and Louis C.K. [...] this branding strategy emphasizes her humor, wit, self-reflexivity and comic timing [...] more in-line with [the] traditionally masculine” (Nygaard). While the network itself wants to see Dunham as being more traditionally male, the viewership nevertheless recognizes her femininity and seeks to fit her into ideas of what feminine is or should be. Dunham confounds these efforts by not subscribing to either completely male or completely female ideals, but rather presents herself as she is.

Her acts of comfortable nakedness (being “naked [...] at random times for no reason”), her ‘masculine’ comedic qualities and her show’s woman-centric stories all place Dunham in a position of resistance to traditional ideas of a gender binary or hierarchy, as she embraces all aspects of her personality and imagination without necessarily placing them in gendered categories (Ford). By resisting that binary, she presents a picture of woman as a full person, as not defined solely by a cultural gender.

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By our honor, we have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.

- KNOCKOUT

S. Creed

Chris Zerbe

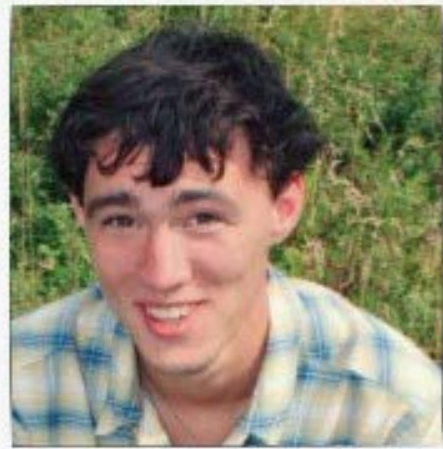
Kyle A. New

Jessica Ast



Kylan Nelson

“I told you in the course of this paper that Shakespeare had a sister . . . She lives in you and me, and in many other women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh.” — Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (153)



Chris Banks

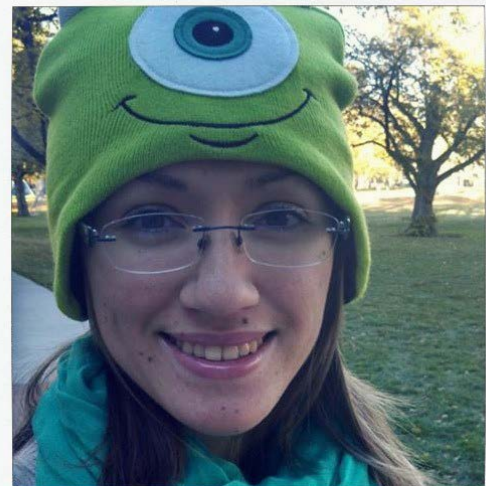
“They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss. That would be enough to set half the world laughing, except that it’s still going on.”

— Helene Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” (228)



Samantha Crook

“Lets face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something.”
— Judith Butler, “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy” (527)



Jessica Ast

“The economic independence of woman will change all these conditions as naturally and inevitably as her dependence has introduced them. In her specialization in industry, she will develop more personality and less sexuality” — Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (119)