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ENG 1710

Social Justice Exploratory Paper

 Social Justice Topics are conflicts and issues that refer to the rights of all human beings and a society’s concept of equality. These conflicts include the distribution of wealth, opportunities and the privileges or disadvantages afforded to members of a society. This paper explores three social justice issues affecting our society under the general topics of feminism, body image and rape. Feminism in the context of the sexual revolution’s effects on women, body image focusing on the media’s impact on male self-esteem and rape concentrating on the sexualization of girls and male sexual violence.

The Sexual Revolution was a movement that was supported by feminists occurring in the 1960’s. Before the revolution it was expected that women would refuse the sexual advances of men until the promise of marriage was confirmed or until after marriage. During the revolution feminists encouraged women to explore sexual liberation and step out of this social norm. Basically, women were taking part in more premarital and casual sexual relationships than in previous years. According to “The Sexual Revolution Has Harmed Women” an article by Carol F. Graglia, the text argues that when the sexual revolution “made casual sex the norm, it deprived women of the societal support they needed to refuse sex” also it “exacerbated tensions between the sexes by making men feel as though they were being judged on their sexual performance”. The fact that feminists endorsed this movement proved that women had no choice but to participate in the movement because most of the society had come to accept this behavior as normal. Feminists believed that they were rejecting the double standard that allowed men to be sexually promiscuous while women remained sexually reserved. The quote and text also explain that the revolution put more strain on the tension between the sexes. Women no longer focused on commitment and romance in a relationship, they were judging the relationship based on men’s performance and their own sexual satisfaction.

Another argument about the sexual revolution is made in an article from Psychology Today called “Sexual liberation: Who’s sexuality is really liberated, men’s or woman’s” by Professor Nigel Barber Ph.D. Barber argues that one of the revolution’s many causes was women outnumbered men 80 to 100 in the 1960’s resulting in women being more sexually active outside of marriage. This ensures that “men get more sex and more sexual variety without making an emotional commitment”. Again the issue of commitment comes up, women were sacrificing something they strived for in the past because they believed that there were not enough men of marriageable age to go around. Women were not freeing themselves from the constraints of chastity and virginity before marriage or seizing sexual power as they were taught by feminists. Women had become slaves to the new social norm, they were placing the craving for sexual satisfaction over their ideals for marriage.

Body image is a topic that is discussed as a widely female issue when it affects men as well. The media of today promotes an unrealistic image of beauty and health and when men cannot achieve this standard of perfection they develop low self-esteem and mental health issues. An article from The Atlantic called “Body Image Pressure Increasingly Affects Boys” by Jamie Santa Cruz states that “nearly 18 percent of boys are highly concerned with their weight and physique”. This means that young boys are now more concerned with their physical appearance than enjoying their childhood. The article also states that “boys in the study who are extremely concerned about weight are more likely to be depressed and engage in high risk behaviors such as binge drinking and drug use”. The quote explains how the concerns that these young boys have when their young develops into serious and in some cases life threatening issues when they grow up.

Another article by Chris Godsey called “Male Body Stereotypes” reflects on Godsey’s personal experience with media and images and how it affected his view of his own body image. The article states “My sense of self-esteem too often depends on how I see my body, and my body image is increasingly affected (infected?) by a continuous, arbitrary onslaught of images and messages that dictate the rights and wrongs of physical appearance”. This explains that Godsey himself felt like the quality of his self-esteem was affected or infected by the images and messages he was exposed to. The media constantly told him what was right and wrong about physical appearance making him feel like he was going to be judged constantly on that fact. He believed that he wouldn’t be happy or accepted by society if his physical appearance did not match that of the media’s idea of the “perfect male body”.

Rape in America has become a crisis that continues to grow worse as time goes on. This behavior towards sex is learned from exposure to media; which teaches girls that they are sex objects and teaches boys that they need to prove their masculinity by showing dominance over girls. An article by Rachel Bell called “Sexualization of Girls Teaches Boys to Be Sexually Violent” argues the sexualization of girls by media “prevents boys and young men from relating to girls and women as complex human beings with so much to offer them. It is preventing boys from forming healthy friendships and working relationships with girls and women. Instead, it is nurturing potentially violent abusers, rapists and johns [clients of prostitutes]. Ultimately, it means boys are not free to be themselves, to know their own humanity.” The quote is saying that when girls are sexualized by the media boys lose the ability to see the true value of a female. They lose the chance to explore what interactions with women can offer. They can’t form healthy or functional relationships and finally, men and boys are not free to be themselves among their peers and stand up for what they believe on their own terms. They lose a sense of their own humanity.

This discussion continues in an article called “The Sexualization of Women and Girls” which clearly defines what it means when a person is sexualized and points out examples of it in the media today. The article states “when a person’s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics; or when a person is sexually objectified — that is, made into a thing for others’ sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making.” Sexualizing a person it dehumanizes them, basically saying they are a thing, not capable of acting on their own or making their own choices. The article also cites fashion campaigns and other media that targets young girls so they learn to self-sexualize which leads to low self-esteem, negative body-image, depression and eating disorders.

Each of these topics are equally interesting and thought provoking but the one that I have to say that the topic that drew most of my attention was the sexualization of girls in relation to male sexual violence. I believe that this topic will be more productive to research because it relates to me in particular. I am a young woman witnessing the character of females be torn down in fashion campaigns, music videos and other media outlets. I understand that in choosing to research this topic further I might stumble upon viewpoints and ideas in which I do not agree, but I must present the facts as they appear. The positive outcome of researching this topic will be that I will be writing about something that is real to me and other women in today’s world. Hopefully, I will gain understanding into the topic and find a way to reverse the effects for future generations.

The topic that I have chosen to pursue in my issue paper is rape focusing on the sexualization of girls and male sexual violence. I have to say that this topic was not easy to choose because it wasn’t the first to catch my attention. I was debating between it and the sexual revolution’s effects on women because I have always wanted to discuss topic under feminism and relationships. But, upon researching each topic I found that the sexualization of girls and male sexual violence angered me because of the experiences I have had and witnessed myself as a young woman. I was angry because women are being taught that they shouldn’t dress and live their lives in the way they want and to always fear the men they walk the street with. I also felt passionate and challenged because rape and sexual violence against women is not an easy topic to talk about and I feel as if some light needs to be shed on the topic and people need to be informed.

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