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### An Unfaithful Media

Fox news is blaring from my television with some of the latest news: “Britney Spears and Kevin Federline are getting a divorce, and the battle for custody of their children is just beginning.” “Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes got married over the weekend, now that Tom and Nicole Kidman’s divorce is final...” It seems that just months ago these famous stars were happily married to others, appearing to show America a righteous path that was focused on fidelity and work to make their now-past marriages succeed. In our society today, the meaning of marriage has changed. This relationship concept is not only focused in the unrealistic lifestyle of the stars, it has spread to the common American life. What has changed in America’s view of marriage and the life of commitment and fidelity? My grandparents were only married once, and their marriage lasted for over fifty years. These days, a marriage that has lasted only five years is considered to be a success.

I have been surrounded by infidelity for most of my life. Whether it is choices I have made, or choices of those that are around me, fidelity seems such an un-important virtue. I have struggled to find answers to this pandemic of cheating, and it seems that many answers (though not all) lie in the media.

The most popular songs off of the Billboard Top 100 have changed their lyrics from “when I fall in love, it will be forever” (Heyman & Young’s, “When I fall in Love”), to verses like, “you make it hard to be faithful,” from Hinder’s “Lips of an Angel” and “every gal is game” from Akon’s “Smack That”. I know that these songs have underlying messages, and I also know

that these messages are received very well. A good friend of mine cheated on her fiancé shortly after she heard the “Lips of an Angel” song, and the song is still one of her favorites.

The media reaches people in many ways, and one of the most accessible forms is the television. According to Nielsen Research, ninety-eight percent of Americans have a television in their home, with the average home having 2.7 televisions. In every checkout lane at every grocery store, one can read the latest headlines from magazines discussing the most recent updates in the entertainment industry personalities while waiting to purchase items. This, above all else, cannot be disputed: the media is reaching everyone. So what is the media focused on? What is it that they market to the everyday American? These are some of the latest headlines from People Magazine: “Peek at Other Women’s Boyfriends and Husbands,” “Just Two Months After her Divorce is Final, Jessica is In Love,” and “Love, Lies and Betrayal.”

Why is it that these are the ideas that people want to buy and read more about? People magazine is one of the top selling magazines in America, with 3.7 million subscribers. It is obvious that their headlines are attracting the reader, but what kind of readers are in America that these are the magazines that they choose to read? Even when I am standing in line, I find myself picking up this magazine deeply intrigued by the lifestyle of the stars. In fact, I have a few copies of People Magazine sitting on my nightstand hidden under other more reputable magazines like The Scientific American and The New Yorker (I wouldn’t want anyone to know that I actually care about the latest breakup in Hollywood.)

As I have pondered this thought, an old philosophical idea, Epicureanism, comes to mind. Epicureanism is the concept of the pursuit of pleasure. It is the idea that over everything else, one wants to only have pleasure. If certain things don’t bring pleasure into someone’s life, then they

may drop those things and replace them with something else (usually something that gives instant gratification). If we take a look around our society, some of the most prevalent problems are those that lead to instant gratification; Drug addictions, porn, overeating, and compulsive shopping are all great examples of this. Strangely enough, Epicureanism actually promotes freedom from pain (*ataraxia*), yet cheating (along with all of these other problems) appears to only create pain. It seems most of these problems are a result of a lack of morality and self-discipline, two things that are needed to succeed in most pursuits.

In relationships, there are many stages. There is the beginning of the relationship that is filled with affection and conversation (the honey-moon stage). After awhile, things taper off, and the relationship becomes more of a friendship, and the butterflies in the stomach tend to slow down, and the excitement decreases. Finally, there comes a point in most relationships where both partners are either extremely fulfilled and comfortable and happy, or extremely uncomfortable and bored. This stage is usually when cheating happens. Instead of working on things, most people decide to just temporarily fix the problem by bringing someone new into the picture that can bring back that excitement. This isn't an uncommon measure to take, and it often permanently ends very strong and beautiful relationships. I only state this because I have done it.

Today an estimated thirty-six percent of marriages end due to infidelity. According to a poll by womensavers.com, fifty-nine percent of men and women have cheated on a significant other. These statistics are astounding, and yet are not quite as bad as the statistics in my life. Sixty-six percent of the marriages in my own family have resulted in divorce, with thirty-three percent re-marrying. Fifty-five percent of these marriages have dealt with unfaithful spouses. When did the idea of falling in love forever and working everything out disappear?

The media is not fooling anyone, though. This focus on a lack of morality is an accurate portrayal of the American people. These newsstands don't only discuss entertainment icons. Just a few years ago philanderer President Bill Clinton was almost impeached because of his infidelity! This was a topic that was all over the media. I can hardly remember a day where it wasn't either on television or discussed amongst my peers. Unfortunately, fifty percent of Americans say that Clinton's adultery makes his moral standard "about the same as the average married man." It is everywhere, and still seems to be following me.

Someone quite close to me once said, "I wasn't made for monogamy. It's all a big joke." What is monogamy anyway, is it really a feasible concept? Can someone really love another person perpetually? Is it all just a big scam? And if it is not truly possible, then is marriage just a big joke? Are people just pretending to take vows in front of their family and friends for the fun of it? It seems that if people truly felt that marriage was a ridiculous idea, then they wouldn't bother doing it! The person who said that monogamy was a joke certainly believed it, as he just recently finalized his third divorce. It may seem that this is the way our society is headed, but a lot of things just don't add up.

While people across America are getting married and divorced every few years and taking their vows like a joke, our government is turning down the opportunity of marriage for same-sex couples. Many of the arguments people give that are against same-sex marriage have a tendency to discuss the "sanctity" of marriage. What sanctity is there when the divorce rate is at such absurd numbers?

Of course, Americans have no one but themselves to blame for this lack of morale. Everyone is influenced by their surroundings, but that is no excuse. Americans need to realize

that though our society appears to promote the pursuit of pleasure and freedom from pain, there are still concrete morals. It is wrong to cheat on someone, because it brings pain. The problem is that it doesn't seem wrong anymore, because everyone is doing it. Or at least, that's the message that the media conveys.

The radio company Sirius recently bought Howard Stern's radio show for 500 million dollars. This show used to feature seductive women like porn stars undressing on the show for Stern, and was taken off the television due to its content. Considering that the radio bought the show for so much money clearly shows that there is a market for this (four million people, to be exact). Whether it is on the television or the radio, people still want to hear about these ladies getting naked in front of a vile old man, and Sirius knew that when they bought it.

The internet has great content and can connect the entire world through a computer. And though the internet is a great invention, it is most commonly used for porn. The porn industry is a multi-billion dollar industry (fifty-seven billion dollars in revenue world-wide), and everyone looks at it. I can't say how many times my friends have had viruses on their computer because of porn that they were looking at. I've even gotten a virus that way! Porn isn't just on computers though, many of my guy friends have subscriptions to Playboy, and most of these guys are not single. Playboy has become an American icon, and many of my friends (boys and girls alike) have the Playboy Bunny as their background on Myspace, or posters or clothing apparel that feature the bunny. I realized one day as I was yelling at one of my friend's for buying himself another Playboy shortly after he got engaged, that I had no place. Playboy bought me out a few years ago when I got a poster for my dorm room that had the bunny on it.

Today rock stars, actors, and many other influential people lead lives that are conveying

the wrong message. The media is perpetuating this problem, and it appears to have no end in sight. It is possible that the media is the catalyst to the familiarity that everyone has with this betrayal between lovers, but is it possible to stop this misleading message? And if it can be stopped, how can it be done? From my own experiences, I realize that the media knows exactly how to convince people that infidelity is okay. I don't know how we can stop it, and I don't know if it will change, but I know that we live in a democracy, and we have the power to make the changes.

America, wake up! Realize that this excessive amount of betrayal is wrong, and will not fix anything. At the end of the day, everyone has to go home and deal with the person that they are in a relationship with. It is a deception that the media controls us. We can change what the media thinks we want. We pay for our cable, subscriptions to magazines, and songs on I-tunes. Why don't we make sure we're getting what we want, because in all actuality, don't we own the media anyway? We may even find that we want to hear about something positive! Wouldn't it be wonderful if the next headline stated, "Longest Marriage Ever: Couple marks their 100<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary."