16 Days of Activism
Day 13

Despite worldwide mobilizations led by survivors and activists in recent years through movements such as #MeToo, #TimesUp, #Niunamenos, #NotOneMore, #BalanceTonPorc, and others, sexual violence continues to be normalized and embedded in our social environments. From the trivializing of rape, victim-blaming, the objectification of women's bodies in movies or TV, the glamorization of violence in ads, or the constant use of misogynistic language, we are all daily witnesses to this rape culture, sometimes even silent bystanders, and have a responsibility to stop it. According to a study funded by UNICEF, **Every 10 minutes, somewhere in the world, an adolescent girl dies as a result of violence.** Nearly one in five girls is **sexually abused** at least once in her life. In the United States, more than **18 percent of girls** report that by age 17 they have been victims of a sexual assault or abuse at the hands of another adolescent.

When women and girls are repeatedly objectified and their bodies hypersexualized, the media contributes to harmful gender stereotypes that often trivialize violence against girls. A report by the American Psychological Association on the sexualization of girls in the media found that girls are depicted in a sexual manner more often than boys; dressed in revealing clothing, and with bodily postures or facial expressions that imply sexual readiness. In a study of print media, researchers at Wesleyan University found that on average, across 58 different magazines, 51.8 percent of advertisements that featured women portrayed them as sex objects. However, when women appeared in advertisements in men's magazines, they were objectified 76 percent of the time.

Social media has "amplified age-old pressures for teenage girls to conform to certain sexualized narratives," according to a study published by The American Journal of Psychiatry. The study examined the sexting habits of teens and found that between 10 percent and 25 percent of adolescents surveyed had sent sexts — photos or texts of a sexual nature — and 15 percent to 35 percent had received sexts. Consequences of hyper-sexualization for girls and women include anxiety about appearance, feelings of shame, eating disorders, lower self-esteem and depression. Research conducted for the Dove Self Esteem Project found that only 11 percent of girls worldwide would call themselves beautiful and six in ten girls avoid participating in life activities because of concerns about the way they look. One-third of all 6-year-olds in Japan experience low body confidence. Australian girls list body image as one of their top three worries in life, while 81 percent of 10-year old girls in the U.S. say are afraid of being fat.

IN ADDITION, SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION CONTRIBUTES TO HARMFUL GENDER STEREOTYPES THAT NORMALIZE VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS. Of course, these stereotypes are not only harmful for girls, but for boys as well. Boys see how their bodies are portrayed in relation to girls and learn to believe success or attractiveness is tied to dominance, power, and aggression.

What can you do? Preventing sexual objectification starts with education – about respect, about bodily autonomy, and about consent.

*   Use social media to bring awareness about sexual objectification of women and girls in the media. Whether it is tweeting, sharing a post on Facebook, or creating your own hashtag, do not miss out on an opportunity to shed light on sexist images that affect women and girls every day.

*   Watch and support documentaries that address the issue of objectification and are creating solutions to the problem. Jean Kilbourne's award-winning documentaries "Killing Us Softly: Advertising's Images of Women" and "Still Killing Us Softly" focus on gender stereotypes in the media and its effects on women and girls. Truth in Reality, a social advocacy organization, is also leading a documentary project called Redefining HERstory™, discussing the dire need to change the imbalanced media depictions of Black and Afro-Latina women and girls of color.

*   Petition or report media outlets that perpetuate hypersexualized imagery of women and girls or go directly to the source of the advertisement and write a complaint letter to the company or organization behind it.

        There are many other opportunities to promote positive imagery and messages about women and girls. Whether it is educating others, volunteering with girl-centered groups, or just monitoring what you watch, you too, can take part in ending the sexual objectification of women and girls. Gender inequality, sexual objectification and sexist attitudes should be a remnant of the past. A person's worth, to any extent or dimension, should not be determined by their physical being.