

THE FOLKLORIC IMAGE OF THE GOOD GIRL AND ITS EFFECTS ON WOMEN IN THE
AGE OF THE INTERNET

by

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Folklore is the unofficial culture of a society that changes over time and often reflects what a society finds important. One image of folklore is that of the “good girl.” The good girl ideal is the concept that women have to be good, submissive, loving, and motherly in order to be accepted by society. First provided is the history of how this folkloric image came to be shaped by Western culture, beginning with an examination of the Judeo-Christian perception of women as bad through Eve’s eating of the apple. The establishment of the good girl ideal shifts and grows as time passes through the Victorian Era, first and second-wave feminism, and continues on in the present day. I wanted to examine how this centuries old expectation of women has affected women in the modern day. Using a case study approach by examining the online discourse platform Reddit, I found two subReddits aimed at conducting discourse about women’s experiences. Women and men discussed women’s relationships to society and how they have had to cope with the expectations of women in Western culture. What I found was that women today are being deeply affected by cultural norms established centuries ago as well as that women are using the platform of Reddit to find connection and understanding of the issues women face as a result of the folkloric good girl image.

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Chapter 1: The History and Establishment of The “Good Girl”

During the final debate of the 2016 election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, Trump called Clinton “such a nasty woman” after she commented that her “social security contribution will go up, as will Donald’s assuming he can’t figure out how to get out of it.” Her challenge of his behavior resulted in Trump resorting to negative name calling. While Clinton’s remark was contemptuous of Donald Trump, his calling her a “nasty woman” caused me to wonder why is Clinton nasty for her assessment of Trump?

Trump has used the phrase “Nasty Woman” to describe women other than Hillary Clinton. He called Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House, a “nasty, vindictive, horrible person” after she said “I don’t want to see him impeached, I want to see him in prison,” (Collinson). He said “I didn’t know she was nasty,” in reference to Meghan Mountbatten-Windsor, Duchess of Sussex after hearing she had called him “misogynistic” and “divisive” during the 2016 presidential season. And he said Senator Kamala Harris was “probably very nasty” in her questioning of Attorney General William Barr during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing (Stevens). The attitude towards nasty women expanded to Trump’s base and by Fox News anchors like Tucker Carlson who said Elizabeth Warren is “nasty, too, unfortunately. She shouldn’t be. She is, though. She is nasty” after she stated Fox News “balances a mix of bigotry, racism, and outright lies with enough legit journalism to make the claim to advertisers that it’s a reputable news outlet” (Wemple). So, what makes these women nasty in the eyes of a conservative media?

Each of these women are of different backgrounds, educations, and professions, yet all receive the same label of “nasty” due to their acknowledgement of problems within the current United States political system. Historically, “nasty” women have spoken out against injustice.

Suffragettes were called selfish for their acknowledgement of the inequity in society and desire to have a voice in their government. Women of second-wave feminism were called manhaters and bra-burners. Women are demeaned for their recognition and criticism of negative behaviors in Western society, yet men are not confined to the same social consequences as women. Donald Trump has empowered people in the United States to accept “locker room talk,” and insults thrown at women about their appearance like calling Rosie O’Donnell a dog, asking whether or not they are on their periods when they are confrontational as with Megyn Kelley, or if they are outspoken like Hillary Clinton and Meghan Mountbatten-Windsor. Many have denounced Donald Trump, yet the behavior has not vacated the office of the president or his surrounding staff. The good girl image has been born not only from societal expectations of women, but from lack of accountability for men and their behavior. Donald Trump may have brought this behavior back to the forefront of American media and politics, but he is far from the only instance of lack of male accountability regarding women. When women speak out, they are relegated to the status of whiney, bitchy, “feminazis” who should be appreciative of a society that takes care of them. Women have had to maintain a good girl image in order to be accepted by a patriarchal society, yet there is no equivalent behavioral expectation of men in Western culture.

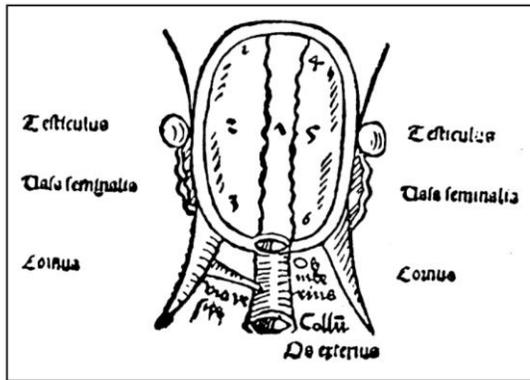
“All your life, you know, people are saying ‘Be a good girl,’ well that implies that you’re not naturally good” (*Feminists: What Were They Thinking?* 1:13:02-1:12:56). The ideal of being ‘good’ has been a constant presence in the lives of women in the western world. It has been used as a method of control to push women towards perfection and submission in a patriarchal society. What does it mean to be a ‘good girl?’ How did this folkloric image come to be so well established and affect generations of women in primarily negative ways? How was the implication of women not being “naturally good” created? In order to answer these questions,

one must examine a tumultuous past of women's station in society that lead to the establishment of the 'good girl' image as a piece of folklore.

Folklore is an unofficial societal tradition or narrative that is passed between people, usually in the oral tradition. The good girl has been an image molded and shaped by each passing generation since Biblical times. The Judeo-Christian creation story in Genesis shows Eve eating from the Tree of Life. Eve, tempted by Satan, eats an apple and forever damns womankind to an existence of subservience and painful childbirth. Since the West has historically based societal norms on what is acceptable through biblical doctrine, women have been deemed "bad" as a result. Women must strive, against their nature, to be a 'good girl.' The Judeo-Christian belief that "the sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age; the guilt must necessarily live too. You are the gate of Hell, you are the temptress of the forbidden tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law" (Thompson 39). Tertullian, a Christian philosopher who lived between 155 and 250 A.D., reflects the sentiment many Christians of the time had towards women. Women bear the burden of this original sin and are therefore not good as a result. Since this judgement had been passed on all women the "result of this early male domination... 'misogynism became ingrained in Christianity'" (Thompson 42). Although Adam ate from the tree too, this misogyny has caused women to be subservient, silent, and compliant in order to be a good woman. The Judeo-Christian belief of women's inferiority crosses into her anatomical design. Plato believed the uterus was "a living thing" and "possessed of the desire to make children...the womb is an animal which longs to generate children. When it remains barren too long...it is distressed and sorely disturbed, and straying about the body and cutting off the passages to breath" (Thompson 33-34). Plato's description of the uterus as an "animal" further illustrates how women are deemed as less human than their male counterparts because of their anatomy. It was also

believed a woman’s uterus could wander around her body, and possibly kill her, if she did not maintain a pregnancy. Long after Plato and Tertullian’s time, the evil associated with women and the uterus persisted.

The concept of a seven-chamber uterus, pictured below in Figure 1., depicts a commonly



From Charles Singer, *A Short History of Anatomy from the Greeks to Harvey*. Reprinted by permission from Dover Publications, Inc.

Figure 1: Sketch of the seven chamber uterus by M. Hundt.
(Thompson 55)

held belief of the middle ages that women had seven chambers in the uterus. “The belief was that males developed in the three right hand chambers, females in the three left-hand chambers, and hermaphrodites in the middle one.” Notably, women are in the left-hand chamber. The left being a persistent symbol of the

other as opposed to the right. “the Latin word for ‘left hand’ is *sinestra*, which also meant ‘unfavorable.’ Its meaning has since come to include *sinester*, ‘evil’” (Thompson 55). Folklore of women being born evil and weaker, like the negative connotation of the left hand, has been pervasive and dominated perceptions of women in western culture.

A woman’s ability to give birth and help her husband “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1.28) has been her primary purpose since her creation, and “in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen. 3.16). In order to be good, a woman must desire her husband and have as many children as possible. Eve deserves this punishment for disobeying God.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, women's identities began to be defined by their ability to be good mothers and moral leaders of their families since "sentimental motherhood contested the ways in which women had been defined as inferior and corrupted by their bodies" (Doyle 5). The concept of "sentimental motherhood, a term that encompasses the traits of a moral mother, republican motherhood, and imperial motherhood, while also recognizing the ways in which sentimental expression and the power of feeling became central to the definition of the good mother" (Doyle 4). Focus was shifted to the emotional aspects of a woman's identity, and new issues for women were created. While women's primary function is to bear offspring, there is now the addition of expected propriety and emotional virtue in order to be a 'good girl.' "To be sensible was to be a good mother - to be insensible was an affront to female virtue" (Doyle 96). This expectation of sensibility infused propriety in the feminine identity.

Historically, women helped women give birth, but as the practice of obstetrics became a professional field, male-midwives became prevalent. This shifted new medical literature towards the male perspective rather than female need. In order to avoid impropriety, medical literature "began to efface the presence and the agency of the mother. In doing so they made the womb the focus of their studies" (Doyle 16). Since the focus was not on the sexuality of the mother but the male midwife examining a woman, the mother became increasingly invisible, and the primary focus was on her body's capabilities and "childbearing came to seem less a result of women's labor and more the outcome of a tense relationship between the uterus and man-midwife" (Doyle 17). The focus of childbirth began to dismiss the humanity of the woman in order to avoid indecency. For example, as seen in Figure 2, vaginal examinations would consist of a "touch rather than sight" (Doyle 48) to avoid anything improper and, ideally, save a woman's modesty. This propriety was not about protecting the mother's virtue; it was about male physicians

maintaining “their medical authority and testify to their moral decency. Thus, physicians did their best to conceal the figure of the mother” (Doyle 50) and “by writing the mother out of their texts, medical writers made it possible to envision her as an idealized figure, rising above the taint of the body.” (Doyle 51). The sentimental mother, created as a result of 18th and 19th century medical erasure of the women, creates the narrative that women’s propriety is connected to male perception and relations. In order to be a proper



Figure 2: Illustration of a “proper” vaginal exam in the 18th and 19th centuries (Stage 150)

woman, she is deemed invisible by those around her less she potentially places a man in an uncomfortable position. Society of the 18th and 19th century allowed men to control the narrative of how a ‘good girl’ is defined.

There was a “a profound shift between roughly 1820 and 1880” (Stage 65). This shift was social and economic, causing women to work outside the home during difficult economic times. Since a man’s “business is to earn money, hers to spend it” (Stage 66), this was a challenge to masculinity. Being a “kept” woman is what makes her husband a man and “the need to restrict and codify woman’s proper sphere intensified as women began to demand greater freedom” but men, in a need to exert dominance “spoke of the need to protect women from the contagion of the marketplace...she became his ward and over her he exerted dominance with the conviction

that he acted in her best interest” (Stage 67). Women were perceived as too weak and simple-minded for the labor force, and it was a man’s duty to keep his feeble-minded wife at home where she could be taken care of. As with the ideal of the sentimental mother, which placed an expectation upon women to be virtuous, doctors in the era of Lydia Pinkham viewed the woman as a “mutilated male” which “ enabled doctors to judge her unfit for the demands of the larger world and thereby justify her limited domestic sphere” (Stage 68). The male ego and a woman’s body are being used to keep women in their “proper sphere” and further perpetuating the ideal that women are “helpless and confirmed invalids” by “glorifying male strength” (Stage 75). Women were not expected to do more than stay at home, keep a tidy house, and raise children in order to sustain the male ego. Language like “mutilated” and “helpless” implies women, at their core, are imperfect mentally and biologically, and a woman’s only job in life is to serve man after Eve’s disobedience of God. As a result, subservience was added to the expectation of the good girl.

Throughout the 20th century, the ‘good girl’ reached its peak in the idyllic 1950s. After World War II, there was a need for women to return to domestic life because “the definition of family was in jeopardy” (Santana). Even though Women had been out in the work force and for the war effort and now needed to take care of their families at the war’s end. “Many couples bought into the ‘American Dream’ purchasing new homes and cars” (Santana). The American Dream is the idealization of the nuclear family and possessions of status like a house and a car. If one had a family and these symbols of accomplishment, then they were living the American Dream. The generation of women who grew up in the 1950s were caught between the American Dream way of living and the battle for women’s rights that was just around the corner. This generation of women was taught to be perfect and desire domesticity through “ads of shiny

washing machines, dishwashers, and refrigerators” (Santana) because the culture needed a sense of normalcy after the events of World War II. This dream did not include imperfect children, especially imperfect young women.

Folklore surrounding teenage sexuality in *Did You Hear About the Girl Who...?* discusses many stories that involve the sexual shaming of young women and couples in order to enforce abstinence. These tales often shamed the girl over her male companion, since sexual activity “ruins” a young woman. In one such story:

A girl and her boyfriend were having oral sex when the guy decided it would be fun to put peanut butter on himself. A fly got stuck in the peanut butter, and, of course, the girl swallowed the fly. Later that week she was taken to the hospital with a terrible stomachache. When her stomach was pumped, they discovered maggots in her stomach. (Whatley and Henken 136)

The girl is punished for committing a sexual act hinting that she should not engage in any type of intercourse because of harmful consequences. Another story, focusing again on the embarrassment of the girl:

It was this (teenage) girl’s birthday and she was going to celebrate it with her parents at their summer cottage. They had already left; she stayed behind to do the laundry and was then going to drive over with her boyfriend. Anyway, her boyfriend came over and they were upstairs having sex, when she remembered she had to switch the laundry from the washer to the drier. So he carried her piggy back down the stairs and they were naked and laughing...And they

went to the basement and turned on the light and all these people jumped out yelling “Surprise!” - her parents and everyone. They had come to give her a surprise party. She was so embarrassed. I think the whole family left town and put her in another school. (Whatley and Henken 129-130)

The girl, once again, is shamed and punished for sex that involved two people. She potentially moved to another town and was embarrassed in front of all her friends and family, illustrating that a good girl, to avoid embarrassment and public ridicule, must not engage in premarital sex or the simple act of walking around her own home without clothes.

This attitude reflects real life expectations of teens in the 50s and 60s and is shown in *The Girls Who Went Away* by Ann Fessler. Young women who had premarital sex resulting in a child out of wedlock tell their stories of being highly encouraged or forced to give up their children for adoption to be a 'good girl.' They had already been labeled as bad through their sexual experience, so they had to do damage control to regain their goodness. Many of the women in this book call attention to their lack of sexual education as adolescents to be a contributing factor to their becoming pregnant. “Adult society effectively turned a blind eye to the situation, and in the main [stream] simply continued to profess that young people should hold out until marriage...women were expected to wait and learn about sex from their husbands” (Fessler 37). Since sexual education was an improper thing for both young men and women to engage with, they had no idea the consequences of intercourse. However, “the young men who had fathered these children largely escaped social condemnation” (Fessler 74) as “a young woman’s pregnancy was thought to result from her ‘badness’” (Fessler 36). Women’s roles in Western society have been created by their relationship to men. Since the woman is the one to carry the

child, the pregnancy is her responsibility and her shame. Sex education and women's sexual health have taken a back seat to male needs since men entered the field of obstetrics as male midwives and then when women were told to be non-sexual unless married and having a child. "Taken together, these experiences offer evidence of the lack of individual choice and the pervasiveness of surrender as a social phenomenon" (Fessler 13). Women were at the mercy of a society that expected more of them than their male counterparts. In order to be accepted, an unwed mother must surrender her child, no matter her own wants. Being a good girl means dismissing individual wants for society's needs, even if those needs are guided by arbitrary gender roles.

Second-wave feminism challenged these roles. Betty Friedan called attention to these social imbalances the good girl created in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). She gave voice to "The problem that has no name" (Friedan 1). This problem being how unhappy women were with their role of the feminine mystique (i.e. good girl) in a patriarchal society. This struggle established patriarchal control that refused women the right to have credit in their names, have access to birth control and safe and legal abortions, abstain from marital sex, maintain employment if she became pregnant, and be able to report sexual harassment in the workplace without repercussion. Each of these restrictions was employed to keep women 'good.' Women began to fight against the established norm of the 'good girl' and demand rights for women. From this challenge of to the 'good girl' came with the word "feminist."

The word feminist defines someone as believing in the equality of the sexes. Unfortunately, equality of women to men is not a part of the good girl ideal created by Western culture. "There is no doubt that the news media of the early 1970s played an absolutely central role in turning feminism into a dirty word" (Douglas 165). One reporter, Ruth Brine, described

feminists as: “‘the angries,’ Brine observed, ‘Many of the new feminists are surprisingly violent in mood’ and ‘women themselves do not, in truth, have a record of soaring achievement.’ The message was clear: women were, by nature, a bunch of incompetents who, if you gave them just a little power, would turn into megalomaniacs and become as lethal as Snow White’s wicked stepmother” (Douglas 168). If a woman, in any capacity, challenges the status quo, she is deemed incompetent and bad. Feminist is not a dirty word, but the connotation given to feminism by the media sets it up in opposition to the ideal good girl. While not all media outlets illustrated the radical feminist, Brine’s message is reflective of attitudes towards feminism which are pervasive today. Feminists are painted as bad women who cannot possibly be a good girl with a husband, children, or sense of purpose since they are focused only on themselves. This is an inaccurate narrative for feminism, yet it still permeates Western culture. The women of the second-wave feminist movement began to take control of their lives but the reaction took its toll.

Judy Chicago, an active feminist during second-wave feminism, created an art installation called “The Dinner Party.” It has 39 places settings depicting elaborately designed female genitalia and symbolizing women’s progress in the feminist movement. In the documentary *Feminists: What Were They Thinking* this artwork is only a small component of the feminist movement, but the backlash against it demonstrates views of women at the time. The documentary presents several white, male, government representatives calling this installation “weird sexual art” and saying “it not art, it’s pornography” (*Feminists* 9:22 - 9:05). Women taking control of their sexual narrative and their identities as women challenges the ideal that women must be subservient to truly be a woman. Chicago describes her feelings towards this backlash in a quiet moment she had at her father’s grave “during the period The Dinner Party was being vilified for the first time I visited my father’s grave in Chicago and I told him he had

told me a lie. That he had told me I could be myself and be loved” (*Feminists* 9:05-8:47). An inability to be oneself has scarred the psyche of Western women. If the Western woman acts in control of her body and mind, she is not a ‘good girl,’ nor can she be loved by society. Women have learned the part of girls that is disobedient, feisty, outspoken, vibrant, and solely herself is squashed down by patriarchal, religious, and societal demands of women. Jane Fonda states that “that part of a lot of girls goes way subterranean. It’s not that it disappears. It doesn’t get lost. It goes underground and the goal of our lives is to bring her back up” (*Feminists* 5:17-5:05). Women should not have to bear the responsibility of holding up a society that devalues them. This social structure takes away their ability to be authentically themselves and create their own identities outside of just being “good” or “bad”

Second-wave feminism did not face opposition only from men in society. It faced opposition from women who were content with a woman’s created societal role. Unlike Betty Friedan who “became a feminist who saw history as having imbued women with a role that kept them entrapped, frustrated, and oppressed by the myth of the traditional family,” women like Phyllis Schlafly became antifeminist who saw history as having fulfilled the promise of womanhood by allowing women to choose to become wives and mothers in traditional families, the cornerstone of civilized society” (Critchlow 13). Women like Phyllis Schlafly characterized women’s liberation as an “anti-family movement” and that women in the liberation movement target “men as the enemy” and is the “teaching of women that they’ve been oppressed” (From the Archive :21-:51). This is a type of internalized misogyny stems from women having it ingrained in them that they have one job in society: to be the perfect wife and mother and make their contribution to the cornerstone of civilization regardless of their personal desires.

Clementine Ford is an Australian author and feminist addresses how this turbulent history of feminine identity and woman's place in society has affected women born after second-wave feminism in the age of technology. Similarly to Fonda, Ford calls attention to the fact

That women are human beings with just as many aspirations as men...Why is it that men who prioritise adventure and independence over family are called 'committed bachelors' or 'wanderers' who just can't be tied down, but women who similarly pursue a life free from burdens are called 'spinsters' and 'cat ladies' and are viewed as pitiful cautionary tales? It's because men are given the complexity to be fully rounded individuals while women are still treated like plants in need of a man's attention to fully bloom. (Ford 113)

Women have been deemed by history to lack direction without male or societal guidance. Even though the feminist movement of the 1970s challenged this and made things better for women, there is still a long road to travel for women to break away from the context of being a 'good girl.' The negative label of being a feminist has not gone away. The folklore that began during the suffrage movement of women hating men continued into the 1970s that of all feminists hate men. This concept has only gotten worse in the age of the internet. Ford's declaration of her feminism has stamped her as a "Misandrist. Man-hater. Feminazi boner killer. Joyless harpy, jealous of the prettier girl. Dumb fat cow. Ugly femmo" etc. (Ford 162). This hostility comes directly from Ford challenging the role of the good girl. This widespread misunderstanding and creation of the feminazi image has challenged masculinity and is in direct opposition to the

perfect, subservient good girl. The insults Ford is subjected to online are meant to degrade her and any woman who chooses for stepping outside of that ideal.

Women of the past have had to stay in their “proper place” in order to uphold a western patriarchal society. Unfortunately, the attitudes of the past still permeate western culture today. While women have far more rights than women of the suffrage era or second-wave feminism, they are still held to archaic beliefs about what a woman should be. Times are changing in that there are more powerful female roles on television and in film, toys for young girls are incorporating STEM components, and women like Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, Hillary Clinton, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg are at the forefront of American politics. Yet, there has been a resurgence of disdain for powerful women. Even if it is a minority of people in the country, it is a loud minority that does real harm to women.

The folkloric image of the good girl, which has been perpetuated by Western culture since its Biblical inception, is harming women in the present day. The way it harms women is not through laws specifically dictating what women can and cannot do, although this is still an issue, but through small acts of harassment, discrimination, and dangerous assumptions made about women’s behavior. In 1963 Betty Friedan wrote about the “problem without a name.” This problem of expected behavior in women is still ongoing and is still lacking acknowledgment in the present day over fifty years later.

Chapter 2: Methods of Research

I chose to use a folkloric perspective for this project because folklore offers a way to examine the ongoing problem “that has no name.” This problem has been created, in part, by the good girl ideal. As detailed in my introductory chapter, the good girl has changed over the centuries and been shaped by a given society’s values at the time. Folklore is the study of unofficially held beliefs of a society that are passed down and changed over time. The good girl is an unofficially held belief of what women should aspire to be. No one sat their daughters down and explicitly explained the good girl ideal to them as a firm set of rules to follow. There are not laws that dictate a woman must be a good girl. It is a social construct created in small actions and assumptions about women’s behavior. These assumptions are passed down from generation to generation, each one changing and adding to the good girl ideal. Due to this evolving concept of the good girl and that it is an unofficially held belief that is passed down, folklore was the appropriate choice to examine this social construct of the good girl.

Throughout this paper, one will also note the use of “girl” and use of “woman” and “women.” Outside of the construct of the good girl image, women will not be referenced as “girl” but as “woman.” I chose to do this because the word “girl” implies that women are childlike. The goal of this study is not to perpetuate the concept of inferiority as a result of the good girl ideal.

For my research method I adopted a case study approach. I chose this method because it allowed me to examine two Reddit threads focused on women’s experiences over a period of time to determine if there were any patterns in the discourse regarding the good girl. I chose the website Reddit as the primary tool for this case study because it is a website predominantly populated by Westerners and is a website specifically designed for discourse and sharing of

information. Although Facebook could fit these criteria, I chose Reddit since its primary function is discourse. Facebook can function as a platform for conversation, it is also dominated by pictures, life updates, and articles which may not be relevant to my research goals of examining the folkloric good girl.

Reddit, a play on the phrase “I read it,” is a social news website designed to facilitate discussion “where content is socially curated and promoted by site members through voting” (Rouse). Reddit is a free website to all users; however there is an option to use Reddit Gold that offers more features to paying users. The content on Reddit is generated by the users and then “upvoted” to make the most interesting, funny, or informative information appear on the front page. This content consists of “subReddits” which focus on a specific topic. These topics vary from women’s issues, to politics, to cute animals. Any topic you want to participate in a discourse with is available on the website Reddit with millions of users to interact with. Each subReddit is filled with threads created by users in which they pose questions, state topics of discussion, or share content such as artwork or videos. Reddit is self-proclaimed as “the front page of the internet” due to its variety in content and ease of access by its users.

While Reddit does not provide readily available data on its users, surveys done by the Pew Research Center, Survey Monkey, and other data collecting sites emphasize that the Reddit user population is primarily Western. “Reddit themselves have stated that 54 percent of their audience comes from the United States as of January 2017” and Alexa.com found “that number is up to 58.4 percent.” After the U.S., the United Kingdom makes up 7.4%, Canada 6.3%, Australia 3.1%, and Germany 2.1% (Sattelberg). Nearly 73% of Reddit’s 330 million users are from Western societies (Reddit Statistics), and this number is congruent with the data that 80% of Reddit users are English speakers (Protalinski). Of the U.S. based users, 59% are male

(Agrawal), and most likely the other 41% are cisgender female. Unfortunately, this does not account demographics of other gender identities who use the site. Of the U.S.-based users, which is over 50% of Reddit's traffic, 70% are white, 7% are African American, 12% are Hispanic, and 11% are non-Hispanic (Sattelberg). Since this research is based in how Western women, primarily those in the United States, have been affected by the folklore of the 'good girl,' using a site of predominantly U.S. based users for analysis was best suited for this case study.

The ages of Reddit users also play a vital role in this analysis: 64% of users are between the ages of 18 and 29, and 29% are between the ages of 30 and 49 (Sattelberg). The age range is important because the primary users of Reddit, as of the 2016 poll were born between 1967 and 1998. This age range indicates the women who use Reddit are the children and grandchildren of people who lived in the conservative society of the 1950s but also in a society that had second-wave feminists. These women are still feeling the generational effects of past attitudes towards women.

Even though Reddit's user base is not primarily women, the website has heavy traffic by women in two particular subReddits, AskWomen and TwoXChromosomes. These threads were two of the most popular subReddits focused on women's issues. TwoXChromosomes has 12.2 million subscribers and AskWomen has 851,000 subscribers compared to other popular women's subReddits like TheGirlSurvivalGuide which has 149,000 subscribers and AskFeminists which has just over 20,000 subscribers. AskWomen and TwoXChromosomes offered more in both variety and data based on the number of subscribers to each thread.

Along with the amount of data offered, these threads also have clear focuses for their existence and strict guidelines for how users can interact with each other in the subReddit. The AskWomen subReddit states that questions posted in the thread "should focus on the personal

thoughts and experiences of the community members replying to the question rather than seeking their thoughts on your own opinions or experiences” (AskWomen). Since this is the primary focus of my research, to examine the thoughts and experiences of women, this thread was ideal for examining the effects of the ‘good girl’ image. The AskWomen subReddit also has rules that moderators strictly enforce to ensure thoughts, experiences, and opinions can be shared constructively. Rules include: “no personal attacks,” “no gendered slurs,” “no misogyny, misandry, transphobia, general assholery, invalidation, or otherwise hateful or disrespectful commentary,” (AskWomen). These rules and the moderators who enforce them help make the AskWomen subReddit an unbiased place for women to speak of their experiences without fear of being judged, stigmatized, or marginalized.

The TwoXChromosomes subReddit has similar guidelines and statement of purpose. The first question in its FAQ is: “what content should I submit to 2xc?” and the response is: “anything relevant to the existence and/or experience of girlhood, from any perspective.” (TwoXChromosomes). This subReddit is focused on the experiences of being a female in society. To ensure this discourse is open and productive, like AskWomen, the TwoXChromosomes rules include “Respect - No hatred, bigotry, assholery, utter idiocy, misogyny misandry, transphobia, homophobia, or otherwise disrespectful commentary” as well as “Grace - No tactless posts generalising gender” (TwoXChromosomes). Each of these threads not only has a clear focus for what its users can discuss and ask but also have guidelines to ensure that the discourse of the threads maintains a respectful and focused environment.

I chose these threads because of the clear expectations of users and because they do not allow misandry. It was important that the threads I examined were not biased towards women, but also not biased towards men. In order to obtain the most valid information, it needed to be

based on personal experiences of women rather than the assumption that the patriarchy and men are the cause of women's problems. Both threads have moderators who do not allow the forums to become an avenue for women to complain about interactions with men in society, but, instead, create a productive and thoughtful community intent on sharing experiences and not criticisms. It is important to have objectivity in this research data because women who demonize men are often written off as being "feminazis" or whining about the patriarchy. This objectivity was important because the forum of Reddit can be a heavily misogynistic place filled with internet trolls attempting to demean and invalidate women's experiences. Without objectivity and rules in place to keep the discourse productive and focus on women's experiences, the forum could be a toxic environment where women feel as if they have to battle to be understood and heard, similarly to community offline.

Once I decided on the subReddits for my research, I began to analyze individual threads in the subReddits. Between the period of December 1st and December 31st of 2018, I collected over forty threads between the AskWomen and TwoXChromosomes subReddits that pertained to my research topic of the 'good girl' and how she has played a role in society today. Each thread was comprised of five to one hundred comments from Reddit users. My methodology for choosing the threads would begin with the title of the thread. I specifically sought out threads that discussed women and their interaction with society. For example, thread titles from TwoXChromosomes include: "is it a bad thing to never, ever want to be a housewife?", "My dad thinks I hate men because I call myself a feminist," and "You are allowed to move if you feel uncomfortable." In the AskWomen subReddit thread titles include "In what ways are you old fashioned?", "What unfair gendered expectations do you feel are placed on women by other women?", and "In what ways have you learned it's okay to take up space?" Each of these thread

titles indicates a narrative of women and their interaction with western society under the umbrella of the good girl. Once I decided on threads that best illustrated women's interactions with society, I examined each thread by printing it out and making annotations to determine if there were any repeating patterns of having to decide between what a woman wants vs. what society expects her to be. I organized this data was by printing out entire threads in each subReddit and annotating them in order to find patterns. In total, I analyzed 188 pages across 32 threads between the TwoXChromosomes and AskWomen subReddits. What I found was gendered expectations of the good girl of women were negatively affecting women.

The platform Reddit offers invaluable data in the discourse between women and their society, but there are some limitations. To begin, one limitation of this methodology includes not having concrete demographic data from Reddit itself. This lack of information makes it difficult to assess the demographics of the users of Reddit and individual forums. Since my research is based on examining how the Western woman has faced the 'good girl' image, not knowing the specific national, racial, or gender identity of the users I have examined in this case study poses an issue for this study's accuracy. However, from the data I was able to examine about Reddit's demographics have illustrated the site is primarily Western based.

Another limitation to this methodology is attributed to the inaccuracy of where the data comes from. The data for location demographics does not come from the Reddit users themselves, since the location is voluntary and not required for a Reddit user to access the site. The data most likely comes from the locations of IP addresses. The locations of IP addresses do not necessarily mean a Reddit user is in the country the IP address says he or she is. The use of VPN (Virtual Private Networks) allows a user to connect to an IP address in another country to

use a website that may be blocked in his/her home country. While this may skew the data, it is unlikely a majority of the percentages shown are through the use of VPNs in other countries.

The last limitation I found is that there is no data for the percentage of female Reddit users. While data for men is readily available, 59% of U.S. users are men, there is no data for female users. One could assume since the male U.S. users are at 59%, then female would be 41%, however this number could also include users who identify with other gender identities and cannot be assumed to be all women. This also speaks to the issue with the title of the TwoXChromosomes. This implies that all women have two X chromosomes and erases the validity of a transwoman's identity and experiences as a woman.

Chapter 3: TwoXChromosomes Case Study

This chapter will focus on one of the Reddit threads I examined during the month of December in the TwoXChromosomes subReddit. This subReddit, as stated in my methodology chapter, focuses on “anything relevant to the existence and/or experience of girlhood, from any perspective” (TwoXChromosomes) and has provided many examples of how conception of the “good girl” is still affecting women’s lives today and the good girl must make herself small in order to make men around her feel comfortable. I will be dividing this chapter in sections of societal situations women face and how the folkloric good girl and societal expectations of her have influenced the women sharing their experiences.

Bodily Autonomy and the ‘Good Girl’

Many of the individual threads in the TwoXChromosomes subReddit I encountered in my research were focused on bodily autonomy. When one hears women’s bodily autonomy, it most usually connected to a woman’s right to choose to carry a pregnancy to term. There is a smaller, yet just as important, situations in which a woman’s bodily autonomy is challenged, however. This poses a problem for the women affected by the good girl image because removing oneself from the situation in which her bodily autonomy is challenged can become difficult while maintaining a polite demeanor. Reddit user bi0ta told “Another ‘please don’t hug me’ story:”

I am mostly writing this to get it off my mind. This memory flashes back to me every so often and makes my blood boil every time. I was 17 at the time working the concession stand at an indoor sports complex. There were often high school rec roller hockey teams practicing and playing there. The owners son was playing that day, who I’ve never talked to or interacted with before, but recognized. He was maybe 14/15. He comes up to the concession stand in full roller hockey gear while

I'm working and asks for a hug. I say "no that's okay, I really don't like hugs." this went back and forth for a while with him saying "c'mon why not it's just a hug. You know I'm the owners son right?" All responses were nervous laughter and "please leave me alone." He then went as far as to attempt to jump over the counter to get to me and that's when I started to get afraid. I run to the back office connected to the concession stand and bump into a larger male coworker, who's obviously heard everything and says "is that guy bothering you?" I nod and he goes out there. I'm not sure what he said to the kid but I was never bothered again. That job sucked for many reasons, but that was one of the encounters that has stuck with me many years later. It's frustrating that we (as women) feel so out of control about what happens to us starting at a very young age.

bi0ta's response of "nervous laughter" and "no that's okay, I really don't like hugs" shows she was saying no but in a way that was non-confrontational. Women being non-confrontational is a hallmark of the good girl image and compromised her feeling of power in this situation. Until the male co-worker stepped in, she was unsure of how to handle her aggressor. What I find especially interesting about her story is her final comment of "It's frustrating that we (as women) feel so out of control about what happens to us starting at a very young age" implying this is something many women can identify with. If a woman is not in control of what happens to her, the implication is the society in which women are subservient and ruled by a patriarchy is in control.

One Reddit user responded: "This brings me back to how we're basically forced to hug and/or kiss relatives and friends when we're kids...And if I made a fuss about it my mom would spank me or yell at me for 'being rude'. And then there's people like this boy in your story that

think it's still expected of us for whatever reason...A lot of people may think I'm a bitch because of it, but whatever, I don't like being touched" (deadbutstillhorny). Young girls are expected to be hospitable toward others' wants, even regarding physical affection. If a girl or woman refuses or is impolite, she is labeled as "rude" or a "bitch" through her intentional disregard of another person's needs. This is not something males in Western culture have to face. From a young age, boys and girls are treated differently through societal expectations, as one father commented in another thread, also about unwanted hugging.

This is actually relevant to a conversation my wife had to have with my daughter this morning. Honestly, having two daughters, I figured there would be a point in time where my wife and I would have to have a conversation about them being able to say no (to anything regarding their body, from sex to a hug), how to stand their ground when they say no, and what they can do when someone tries to not accept their answer. However I did not expect to have to talk to my 6 year old daughter about it because a boy in her class kept trying to kiss her, and I did not expect to have to ask the teacher why nothing was done when my daughter told them about it...It angers me to think she has to worry about this at that age. (Kynsbane)

The absence of female bodily autonomy at a young age surprises the father in this narrative, and he is frustrated his daughter's teacher did nothing about the situation. One user responded with a possible reason: "My guess is 'boys will be boys' lol" (thecuriousblackbird). This phrase is problematic because it allows young boys a pass on unacceptable behavior and simultaneously dismisses a girl's concerns. From a person asking for a hug to a little boy trying to get a kiss, girls are expected to be the responsible party. There is no female equivalent of "boys will be boys" to excuse negative behavior of women just as there is no male equivalent of the "good

girl.” User Hearthspire responded to thecuriousblackbird’s comment with “Everytime I hear that damned phrase I throw up a little in my mouth each time. Ridiculous.” Disregarding male behavior as “boys will be boys” assumes girls will cater to the needs of adults and boys in their lives which is an unfortunate dichotomy of the genders in Western society. Men and women are not held to the same standards of social conduct.

There is no “good boy” equivalent for men in society. Men can behave badly and have their words and actions be dismissed as “boys will boys” and “locker room talk.” Often times, men, primarily white men, who behave badly are rewarded in spite of their bad behavior. Donald Trump was still elected president after he stated he grabbed women by their genitals. Brett Kavanaugh was appointed to the Supreme Court even though he allegedly committed sexual assault and acted combative and unprofessional in his confirmation hearing. Harvey Weinstein had an open track record of abuse towards women he worked with, but since the films he produced earned Oscars, he was allowed to keep his power in the film industry. Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton decides to openly comment on the negative aspects of Trumps personality and she is deemed a “nasty” woman.

Women have to challenge the good girl image in order to maintain their safety around men like Harvey Weinstein and Donald Trump. Reddit user frickenwutcarl describes a situation in which intentional challenge of the good girl allowed her to escape a dangerous situation:

So this happened on the weekend and I feel like sharing to this wonderful sub Went out for drinks with a few friends on the weekend. Got a little more dressed up than usual for once because F it, why not? I hardly ever do and it was fun to get ready with the girls. The night is over and I decide to walk home as where we ended up is very close to my home. I live in a big city,

but the area wasn't bad, it was busy, I wasn't worried. I start walking and maybe 5 minutes in, as I'm crossing the street, some guy intercepts me as soon as I hit the sidewalk and wraps his arms around my waist, yanking me into him. I didn't even see him coming. I yelled out WTF and pushed him back. This asshole was clearly drunk, grabs my arms and yanks me back in. Again, I push back and start backing up, telling him to not touch me again. He said something along the lines of "cmon, you can't be out here lookin this fine and expect me not to say hi!" (Since when is grabbing strangers saying hi btw). He starts walking after me and I see him reaching for me again, so I just faced him and started barking, as loudly and aggressively as I can. Literally like a dog would. I don't even know why I chose to, I just wanted to do something outrageous to make him back off and think I'm crazy or something. It worked. The look on his face was priceless. He just turned around and walked away, it was awesome.

Frickenwutcarl would be a nasty woman for this behavior because she is not adhering to good girl social norms. The surprise at the barking from the man assaulting her defied his expectations of what was supposed to happen when interacting with a woman. Good girls do not bark. Good girls also do not "pretend to have hallucinations and scream at the open air" (oversleepercell), screech "like a parrot and also [talk] to someone wasn't there while gesturing" (whydonttheysayegg), or put your heart and soul into sounding like a giant prehistoric anger chicken of death" (Kairoto) or a pterodactyl. The fact that women need to resort to this behavior to counteract the "boys will be boys" narrative illustrates that women and men are still not deemed equal since they are not held to the same social standards.

Am I Overreacting?

Women have been raised in Western society to cater to the needs of others and question their own motivations and actions in the process. Similarly to bodily autonomy, this is ingrained in girls from a young age. Reddit user TaimaAdventurer recounts an experience when she was thirteen years old:

I had one interaction in a crowded, dollar theater when I was 13 that had me questioning where the line between “overreacting” and being safe was. A man and his son(?) came to sit down beside my friend and I. The theater was pretty full. I shrugged the man off as having found the only two remaining seats together after glancing around. He put his jacket over his thighs and it happened to cover the armrest and sort of invade my seat. He apologized, so again, I shrugged it off as an accident. Then, over the course of almost the entire movie, his hand began to slowly invade my space. He would shift and suddenly be lightly touching my leg. I scooted over. Eventually another shift and he was touching me again. He seemed intent on the movie and I was young and trained not to make a scene. I couldn’t tell if it was accidental or not. I had nowhere else to go without missing out on the movie. My mom and sister were a few rows back and mom had allowed me and my friend to sit separate. It was a big deal, some freedom- but now all I wanted was to be able to lean over and tell my mom. She would have known how to handle it. I was so anxious. I minimized it to myself; he isn’t rubbing me, a pervert would be rubbing/squeezing right? He isn’t touching anything but the side of my thigh, a pervert would try to be more intimate right? I wish 13 year old me had the guts to get up and leave, or tell an usher or go tell my mom. But I just wanted to see the

movie and have a nice time with my friend. I didn't get either because of the creep.

I never thought I would freeze but I was so confused and not sure whether he was crossing the line or not. He definitely was.

This young girl was "trained not to make a scene" even when she felt increasingly uncomfortable by the man's behavior next to her. This training causes young girls to question when they are being violated, which then manifests as question of consent as girls age. A thread entitled: "I slept with a guy that whipped out his phone to record me without asking if I was okay with it" details the story of one young woman whose partner took out a phone to begin filming her while they were having sex. She states, "I felt very uncomfortable on the spot but didn't say anything, because I was very confused, and I didn't want to 'spoil' the mood." After this encounter, the next day she confronted him and he replied, "that is was supposed to be a joke/funny" (neverwithoutconsent). Her worry about spoiling the mood demonstrates the harm that can come to women by through growing up questioning their own judgement. The potential of being seen as combative or bitchy is a worse outcome than allowing videotaping of a private act. User sarah_the_intern posted her story depicting a similar event:

I remember one time I was lying in bed (post-sex) with a guy who worked for a university and ran their social media. He jokingly whipped out his phone and took a picture via the university's Instagram of me naked. He didn't post it, luckily, but I know Instagram saves any photos you take to your camera roll, even if you don't post them. He insisted that wasn't true, but refused to show me his camera roll. Now I have to live with the fact that someone has a photo of me naked, with my face showing, on their phone. I'm currently working towards becoming a teacher overseas and I'm afraid it'll surface.

The fear of this photo surfacing, something that can also damage the good girl image, was still not enough to overcome the good girl expectation of niceties and take her partner's phone. Some users on this thread asked the question "You were still nice and didn't search his phone?" (noahswetface) and others said things like "People! Stop being nice when your rights are violated! She should have stopped having sex with him right then and there. Stop being nice when someone does something like this. You matter. Your feelings matter. You are not alive to please someone who does not respect you!" (indarkwaters) and "OP I am going to be tough and say for your own safety and other people reading it is so important to work on being assertive in bed" (right_ho). While being assertive should be the way society teaches women to be, this is not the case. The good girl narrative perpetuated by Western culture has not taught girls to be assertive. This is becoming more prevalent in society through heroes like Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel, through television series portraying unapologetic and powerful women like Daenerys Targaryan, Olivia Pope, and Jessica Jones, and through female empowerment programs like Girls Who Code and Girls Inc.. Through this prevalence, young girls are gaining power and will hopefully grow up even further away from the good girl image, but these strides do not eradicate hundreds of years of inculcating the ideal of the good girl.

This lack of assertiveness crosses over into less intimate social situations as well. Something as simple as moving away from someone on the bus when they sit down next to you is also cause for internal conflict. In a thread titled "You are allowed to move if you feel uncomfortable" users describe their experiences of being polite to complete strangers and compromising their own sense of safety and wellbeing.

Yesterday, I was sitting in the bus's window seat when a man with a walking stick came and sat down next to me. This was on the top deck. Some months back, I was

sexually assaulted on a bus. Same set up. I was sitting in the window seat and a dude came and sat next to me. I closed my eyes for a few minutes to find the fucking creep stroking my thigh. A few months after that, I encountered another creep . Anyway because of these experiences, I'm now on edge whenever a man sits next to me. Back to yesterday, I felt uncomfortable and as if he was encroaching on my personal space. He was too close for my liking. I couldn't relax and I was going to be on the bus for a while. I remember thinking 'but he will feel rejected or as if he has done something' if I move. The walking stick was further complicating things. 'He's not a predator. He has a stick.' This was incorrect thinking as there are convicted paedophiles who were in wheelchairs when they were committing their crimes. My ex's mum was also downstairs and I didn't want to see her. Anyway long story short, I went downstairs and sat next to the driver. Fuck it . It is a free country. I can sit wherever I want. Fuck his feelings. I was finally able to relax.

(boqolnicks)

Boqolnicks' experience was shared by many women. AfineG commenting on the root of why so many women reach the point of exhaustion putting others first:

I have a theory about this “not giving a fuck” stance... I believe your parents/teachers/society instills a very polite etiquette on you when you are growing up, to think of others, and be seen and not heard, and respect your elders, etc... I think by the time you reach middle age you are PC exhausted, I mean really tired of thinking of others before yourself. Then at some point you have a social epiphany and realize you're a fucking adult and can do and say whatever the fuck you want. So things like this seem like a big deal/hurdle for you. I know I've come up to my

own in this area and yea, when I'm uncomfortable/annoyed or whatever... I make it so I am not any more rather than sit and stew in my politeness.

Similarly to barking like a dog, the women in this study are realizing that the societal norms they were raised with do not have to be the way they interact with the world for the rest of their lives. Something as simple as moving to another bus seat "seems like a big deal/hurdle for you." The good girl does not do anything that would make another person uncomfortable, even a stranger. Counteracting this lifelong training can be difficult to overcome.

Learn to Take a Compliment

Women who walk down the street can often be subjected to catcalling. The act, usually committed by men towards women, of telling a woman anything from "Hey beautiful" to far more graphic harassment is deemed a nuisance by some and a compliment by others. The latter is problematic for women. Catcalling makes women uncomfortable when walking down the street and makes them question their own safety when in public. Fox News anchor Kimberly Guilfoyle once said in regards to catcalling "it's nice to get compliments...I mean let men be men." (Garcia). This argument is used all too often to tell women they are overreacting and to assume men are incapable of controlling themselves. "So many people take up for these guys and say it's harmless or should be taken as a compliment, etc. If more people condemned this abhorrent behavior, it would probably happen less often. They'd be too scared of the consequences" (WingedShadow83). Excusing men for their behavior as "boys will be boys" or "locker room talk" yet telling women they need to accept an unwarranted advance furthers the dichotomy of men and women and their behavior in Western culture. Men have a choice in their actions, and are often excused by conservative media when those choices are negative. Women are held responsible for not only the unwanted attention they receive, but also for how they

handle themselves. A good girl is encouraged to cater to men's needs, even if she is in an uncomfortable situation.

A thread entitled "You aren't obligated to be friendly" illustrates the entitlement some men feel to female attention and the expectation of a good girl reaction.

Dear Sir, Yes, I did hear you shouting at me as I left the grocery store. I didn't react or look at you because I didn't want you to have any positive reinforcement for shouting at a stranger as she walked to her car. Still I heard it all. I heard your comments about my appearance. As I walked, your voice got louder as you threatened to assault me. As I climbed into my car, I heard you shout the outright lie, "BEING FRIENDLY NEVER HURT ANYBODY YA KNOW." I'm willing to be there are times when "being friendly" did indeed cause harm to me. I know for a fact that when women respond to shouting strangers, there's a possibility the situation will escalate from verbal abuse to sexual assault and/or murder. I am not your friend. I am not your family. I do not work in customer service. I am under no obligation to give you my time or attention. (TBH your friends and family and customer service agents don't HAVE to put up with your bad behavior, either.) I am under no obligation to smile. You aren't obligated to be friendly to strangers who shout at you, and neither am I. (ohitsberry)

ohitsberry's story shows that street harassers can assume women should engage with them and accept the compliment, but it also shows why women find this behavior terrifying and frustrating. Yet women are still belittled for their frustration with catcalling and street harassment. I would argue this belittlement attitude stems from the expectation that women are supposed to be sexual when men desire their attention, but not so for their own personal pleasure.

Historically, women have been told sex is a way to procreate and not for her pleasure. She should cater to the male rather than her own needs.

At times, the media reinforces these sentiments through blaming the victims of sexual assault and harassment rather than the harasser. For example, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford came forward with testimony about her alleged sexual assault in 1982 by then Supreme Court Justice candidate, Brett Kavanaugh. The coverage of Dr. Ford by conservative leaning news outlets upheld Kavanaugh's credibility and excused his alleged behavior in the 1980s but also his emotional and combative demeanor during the hearing. Dr. Ford was called a "very sympathetic witness" and also "extremely credible," even by conservative media. The coverage of Kavanaugh by the same conservative media regaled his "Impassioned Rebuttal." Fox News anchor Lauren Ingraham stated "Kavanaugh is fighting like we need all conservatives fighting against this poisoned process" and Sean Hannity said "I don't think I've ever seen more compelling testimony" (Schwartz). Donald Trump used his platform to further question Dr. Ford's credibility implying that her statement of having "one beer" was false and mocking her ability to remember details, details that were in her testimony unlike what Trump proclaims, and going on to say "A man's life is in tatters. A man's life is shattered" (Haberman and Baker). The conservative media was focused on how Kavanaugh was being affected by this testimony rather than what his actions in the 1980s and at his hearing meant about his character.

I use this hearing as an example media can exempt men from the consequences of their actions while simultaneously hold women accountable remembering all the details of a traumatic event before she can be believed. If Dr. Ford had acted in the same manner as Kavanaugh, she would have negatively impacted her testimony by not being a "good girl" and her credibility

would have been thrown out the window, but Kavanaugh's emotions and combative answers earned him a spot on the Supreme Court.

Trump's disbelieving tone during his remarks about Ford's testimony of having "one beer" implies that if she had not had more than one beer, she would have been able to remember more details, thus it is her fault she is not believed. This reflects the mentality that women "ask for it" if they drink, wear a short skirt, or do anything that would put themselves in harm's way. The assumption is that nothing bad would happen to a woman if she was more proactive about her own safety rather than holding men who perpetrate sexual harassment and assault accountable.

The mentality of training a girl to keep herself safe in society fits right into the good girl persona and women are held to a higher standard than men. One Reddit user says: "I don't think women are necessarily more socially intelligent than men, they simply need to rely on social intelligence for their safety to a degree men don't have to, and so it has to be sharpened to the highest degree" (GrumpyWendigo). Women must rely on social intelligence and societal expectations of her behavior in order to avoid attention, both positive and negative. If she does not handle herself appropriately, i.e. society's and male expectations, she is blamed either way. Some women are pushing back against unwanted street harassment as one woman states "Fuck politeness when someone comes at you in a way that's clearly not friendly" (landho54). Women should not be expected to accept a compliment when it makes them feel uncomfortable.

Another redditor comments: "I always wonder if those guys who shout things that begin complimentary, but upon not getting the reaction they desire resort to things like 'well then fuck you, you stuck up bitch', understand the irony that they have now removed all doubt in the woman's mind that she may have been wrong to not respond. Thanks for confirming her

suspicious, Richard.” (MushroomToast). What is interesting about this comment is it implies that women doubt themselves when reacting (or not reacting) to a catcaller. The original poster responds to MushroomToast with “It makes perfect sense, when you see that the premise they’re working with is “women \neq person”” (ohitsberry). This observation by ohitsberry reinforces the idea that women are not fully considered people in Western society. They are objects that can have expectations thrust onto them, and if they attempt to fight back, they lose their goodness. There is an unfortunate absence of choice as a consequence of the good girl image. Women are “damned if they do and damned if they don’t” conform to expectations of their behavior.

‘Feminist’ is not a Dirty Word

The term ‘feminist’ has been stigmatized by some media outlets and shared positively by others. Conservative news outlets which are more likely to perpetuate socially created gender norms “has portrayed feminists as crazy man haters since the era of suffragettes. It wasn’t true then and isn’t true now.” (hegel_g_pataki). The perception of women who believe in equality of genders has been fundamentally misunderstood since the time of suffragettes. This misconception deepened with Second-Wave Feminism in the 1970s. Women who fight for equality and speak out about the inequities they see in society disqualifies them for the title of ‘good girl,’ since they are going against the good girl ideal of being submissive and accepting society and their place in it. Redditor Electronic_Outside describes her experience being a feminist in an area that is highly conservative and unaccepting of ideals:

Around a month ago, I told my republican dad I was a feminist and a libertarian in casual conversation. He then started making these little annoying jokes here and there like “Man, that guy needs to have his turn signal on. Oh sorry, that man or *woman* needs to have their turn signal on” and “I hope you don’t get offended, but

your uncle is coming over on Thanksgiving and I don't know if you can handle another evil male in your life". But it keeps ramping up. He's been even more distant it seems, and it's so petty and obnoxious. I told him that I want men and women to be equal, not to have either one be superior. I told him how much I love my boyfriend, and how I see ourselves as equals in our relationship. I pointed to all the male friends I have, some even republicans. But he refuses to listen. He consistently treats me like I am this hate filled, repugnant woman who only loves women and no one else. I want to have actual discussions with him, but he continues to treat me like this and I just don't know what to do. My mom stands firmly with him, even cracking her own jokes at me at times, but none to the extent of my dad. My life has been filled with so many great men as well as women. My boyfriend is my best friend and someone who I trust more than anyone I know. So him saying these things hurts me so much because it feels like he doesn't understand that I love relationships and people as a whole, and that my feminism comes from a striving to see a public more accepting to this idea. I know this isn't that big of a deal really, and that everyone has bigger issues than this, but if anyone has experienced this in the slightest or has some advice, I'd love the feedback. (Electronic_Outside)

Being a feminist has become a cause for ridicule in conservative communities which can lead to women being treated like children who do not understand what they are talking about. This redditor's father dismisses his daughter as a "hate filled, repugnant woman who only loves women and no one else." Being a feminist is not congruent with being a good girl, because a good girl is supposed to love men and the society they have built for her. A good girl wants to have babies and a family. How could she possibly do this if she

does not love men? Women are the glue in a family that are supposed to hold everyone together. She is the sentimental mother and the perfect housewife. If she does not put everyone, especially her husband or the men in her life before her own needs, how could she possibly be a good girl?

One user responded, “This is a powerful lesson in how labels will taint us by association” (contensiouspanda). This quote especially resonates with me because not only does ‘feminist’ taint women if they are associated with it, but ‘good girl’ has tainted women through society’s association of it with women. One is a label some women have chosen, while the other is a label forced upon women. The result is the same. Unless a woman decides to be a quiet, subservient, mother, and martyr for her family’s success, she will not be accepted by a patriarchal society. She will be judged for any choice she makes that differs from good girl expectations. Another commenter responded “I suspect he is making these jibes to try and knock your self-esteem and keep you in your place. I think he’s threatened by your confidence, authentic beliefs and independent thought” (mdsislkh). A patriarchal society intends to keep women in their place so the patriarchy can continue to run smoothly for those who adhere to its norms. A woman who is confident, independent, and authentically herself threatens this society; therefore, the good girl was created in order to keep her in her place. While each era of Western history has changed or added on to the good girl persona over time, she is a folkloric image that has harmed women and continues to harm women today.

Chapter 4: Ask Women Case Study

The AskWomen subReddit offers three topics which repeatedly arise, no matter the title of the individual threads. These topics included arbitrary gender roles, internalized misogyny, and how women's perceptions of their own bodies have been influenced by the good girl ideal. These are deeply ingrained structures, which uphold previously discussed societal issues, such as the lack of bodily autonomy and judgment towards women for standing up for themselves. Good girls are supposed to adhere to arbitrary gender roles like the role of the sentimental mother and ideals of goodness only expected of women and not men. Expectations of women are confined by the function of their bodies. They must want to have children and also appeal to the ideal aesthetic of societal beauty expectations. Lastly, internalized misogyny, similarly to the mothers in *The Girls Who Went Away* or that of conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly has caused women to be some of the most powerful critics of other women. These social expectations of women have caused them to seek out connection online. This space allows women to offer their experiences and answer questions the internet has for, primarily cisgendered, women about their experiences in a patriarchal society.

Arbitrary Gender Roles and the 'Good Girl'

To begin the examination of this thread I will discuss the many comments about the arbitrary gender roles. User Hunnybunny6 sums up how these arbitrary guidelines have become such a staple in our society:

It's society and the beliefs of the people in that era...Like high heels were first mens fashion, both genders used to wear make up, pink was a boys colour...even when things are based on an actual difference, like men being stronger than women, its

twisted into men not having emotions because they are strong but that's not what physical strength is...So society is the main influence on our idea about gender. Each generation of people creates its own norms and taboos surrounding gender roles. Traditional gender roles of the man being the provider and the woman being a homemaker and mother are designed to place women into boxes: either a 'good girl,' or a bitch, slut, 'nasty woman,' frigid, bossy, frumpy, etc. As another user says this is "sexism, plain and simple. Anything that is labelled masculine or feminine is only labelled so to fit the narrative our society has created around gender" (spider_party). The narrative that has been created is if a woman wants to be accepted, she needs to be a good girl or risk challenging cultural norms and being called any of the above colorful expressions. These expressions are rarely, if ever, associated with men. Reddit user nevertruly sums up this sentiment well by saying

Humans tend to like to categorize things (rightly, wrongly - doesn't matter. They just do it regardless of accuracy). Power structures reinforce themselves this way. In patriarchal culture, generally men will be assigned the roles that lead to power and women assigned the roles that lead to frivolity and subservience. That's why a man and a woman exhibiting the same behavior will be labeled differently. He can be confident, assertive, firm, and strong when stating his opinion. A woman stating the same opinion in the same way would instead be labeled things like bossy, bitchy, shrill, and overwrought. In that type of structure, men are endowed with the positive sides of virtues and women with their distorted mirror image.

While the correlation is not direct, the representation of women in roles of power is quite low in western culture. Consider the United States Congress: only 23.7% of seats in Congress are held by women (Women in the U.S. Congress). In the UK, 32% of Parliament is comprised of women

(Browning), and in Canada, Parliament is comprised of 26% women (Munn-Rivard). The UK has had two female Prime Ministers and Canada has had only one. The United States has never had a female president in its 243 year history. Powerful women are assumed to be “cold and emotionless” (SassyClassy), neglectful of “her feminine side/family/children/potential children/happiness, and that’s something disordered that needs to be fixed” (PurpleWeasel), and if she “displays leadership qualities that men are lauded for? She’s bossy/a ‘bitch’/shrill/etc” (coffeeblossom). The good girl image does not condone a powerful woman, which makes it unsurprising there are not many women in power in western cultures.

Arbitrary gender roles are not strictly assigned to women. They affect men as well; however, even men’s roles somehow still reflect a woman’s role in society. One common norm associated with men is that men are incompetent when caring for children since that is supposed to be a woman’s familial role. Men are the providers; women are the caregivers.

I want to see Diaper commercials where the dad is changing the diaper and it does not show him being a fuck up at it. Baby product ads in general are so generic and mother centric. Like, way to pigeon hole mother’s as the primary care giver and portray father’s as helpless idiots. (AppalachiaVaudeville)

This message is not only conveyed through diaper commercials. Often media portrays women as the competent and beautiful caregiver and men as a surviving in life with only their knowledge of cars, power tools, and classic rock, simpleton. Neither assessment of the genders is fair, but women are held to their media portrayal more rigidly than men. Another user notes: “things often and still are considered masculine or feminine, are because ads are working with the standard gender roles, and making them even more visible, since girls appear far more often in an adds for dolls than boys” (Liljah3). The media in western culture are being used as a tool to keep gender

norms in place. Men are playfully inept at the jobs women were “born” to do, demonstrating lack of accountability for men and child raising. This is demonstrated early to girls who see commercials for dolls and play kitchens while little boys see themselves in commercials for Nerf guns and play tool benches.

These roles are being challenged with commercials for kids’ toys being more diverse by showing both boys and girls playing with a given toy. Lego Boost, a robotic engineering and coding toy, shows both boys and girls using the product to code and have fun without gender assumptions that girls cannot do it. The UK has even banned advertisements that reinforce gender stereotypes. Yet even toys that have some diverse commercials have equally gender stereotyped commercials. For example, Hatchimals are large toy eggs that hatch a cute animal. One of the first commercials for this toy from 2016 shows both boys and girls all over the world playing with it in non-gendered ways. They are simply intrigued with the toy while hiking in the woods, playing soccer, drinking tea, or sitting in their kitchen (Hatchimals). Fast forward to a 2018 commercial for the same product but rebranded as “Hatchimals Hatchibabies” is targeted at girls. This ad shows to girls holding their eggs in the crook of their arms like babies and an enthusiastic young female voice over saying “they need your love” and “will you hatch a boy or a girl?” (I4U News). This commercial is obviously targeted at the assumption that girls want to be caregivers and give their love to children, as a good girl should.

Internalized Misogyny/Sexism and the ‘Good Girl’

Women falling into line, however, is not simply something that is enforced by men in patriarchal western society. Internalized misogyny is defined as “women’s incorporation of sexist practices, and the circulation of those practices among women, even in the absence of men” (Bearman). Women can be equal participants, if not harsher towards other women in

enforcing the good girl ideal due to internalized misogyny/sexism. In the thread titled “What kinds of things do you feel society expects of you simply because you are a woman,” most of the responses were from women who had been judged by other women for breaking societal norms. The first story from a user was:

If my husband invites anyone over for any reason, there’s the unspoken expectation that I’ll play hostess. My husband doesn’t expect this, but the guests often do. For example, he once offered our house as a meeting place for a local civic group, and it was last minute so there wasn’t much in the way of refreshments. One woman commented to me about the bottles of water not being chilled, and I said ‘Talk to Hubby....it’s not my party.’ (MyOwlMerlin)

Another woman at the party decided to make a negative comment about the refreshments to the wife, who “should” be the hostess rather than the husband.

Maybe it’s just where I live, but I feel like I’m expected to ‘take care of’ my husband to the point of babying him. Some of his friends’ wives are shocked that I don’t make his lunches every day, do his laundry (and lay out outfits for him for special events), book all of his appointments, and do things like automatically refresh his drink and make plates for him at group gatherings. To be clear, for all of these couples both spouses work full time. I once asked my spouse if he wanted me to do these things, and he was horrified by the idea and weirded out that his friends all seem to like being treated this way. The time this was the clearest was at a barbecue where a wife handed her husband his plate of food, then when he didn’t acknowledge it or her because he was telling a story, she took it back to cut all of

his meet for him. NOBODY seemed to think this was weird but me and my spouse.

(himynameisbetty)

This user was judged by other wives for not pampering her husband and taking care of his every need. This is reminiscent of the idealized 1950s housewife who served her husband, family, and community with a smile.

For each component of the good girl personality, there was a comment by a Reddit user about a personal experience they had with internalized misogyny from other women. Women who do not exhibit the characteristic of being a virtuous wife and mother who serves those around her can be judged for not being a martyr in the name of idealized femininity. Comments included judgement on anything from “ripping on a woman for being single...A man is not an accomplishment.” (idiosyncrassy), to the assumption “that cussing is un-lady like... my mom always pisses me off when she yells at me ‘talk like a lady!’”(datbeckyy), and that “so many women judge other women about the cleanliness of their house, mostly on the inside, not the outside which is masculine domain.” (Durhamnorthumberland). These arbitrary gender roles and internalized misogyny have unduly burdened women, attempting to force them to act as society deems acceptable. Women have an absence of choice as a result of the good girl ideal. No matter the decision, they are deemed good or bad but a larger social construct. It eradicates a woman’s ability to have choice in her own life without being criticized. This criticism then affect how a woman may live her life.

A Reddit user who has since deleted her account made the poignant comment: “Mostly I’ve found that some women can be incredibly resentful if you don’t submit to the same social expectations they have, like dumbing yourself down for others’ comfort, or framing instructions like they’re requests. They can be some of [the] harshest enforcers if you fail to perform

femininity ‘correctly’” (deleted user). This “correct” way of being feminine is cemented in the good girl ideal. It is easy to deem the problem as solely a male created and enforced issue when, in reality, it is “women and men both perpetuate the patriarchy” (amgov) because “gender roles and stereotypes are just so ingrained in these women. They act out because in a patriarchal system, it’s only other women who they can have authority over” (Not_a_cat_I_promise). This user makes an interesting point about women in the west. The gender roles created by a patriarchal society have become ingrained in many women, to the detriment of themselves or other women. Fitting into this role means one must adhere to the norm (i.e. good girl) and potentially ignore self-interests. Women who challenge the good girl role could be seen as a threat, create envy in other women, or be judged because it is not the norm. User Bluepompf points the frustrations women who contend with internalized misogyny from other women face are “women shittalking about other women because of their insecurities. Women shaming other women for their outfit, make up, hair etc. Mothers shaming working mothers or single mothers or child free women. Basically, women shaming other women for their decisions.” Women not only have to grapple with male dominance, but also oppression from women themselves.

Betty Friedan calls attention to this complicity in perpetuating the good girl narrative in *The Feminine Mystique*: “For the feminine mystique to have ‘brainwashed’ American women...it must have filled real needs in those who seized on it for others and those who accepted it for themselves” (Friedan 212). The good girl image serves a purpose for women who adhere to these gender norms so fiercely. It keeps a sense of order in a chaotic world. Friedan discusses how women post World War II sought a stable husband and family life after the loneliness and uncertainty during the war. This need then translated into the 1950s ideal of the perfect nuclear family and norms that still affect women today. Women still cling to the good girl because it is a

comfortable role that has set behavioral parameters to operate within. The world today is chaotic in its own right, which makes it unsurprising that these needs still persist.

However, women are also searching for an outlet to share their experiences with these parameters. Women who police other women attempt to enforce social norms of the good girl and women who receive this criticism must figure out how to operate in a society that does not accept them. These are acts of resilience in an unaccepting world.

In a study done by Elizabeth Dorrance Hall of Utah State University, she examines the act of resilience by marginalized members in a family. Women who do not conform to the good girl ideal can be considered “black sheep” (Dorrance Hall) in the female community but also western society at large. While Hall’s study focused on familial relationships rather than large social relationships, her findings of how black sheep in families cope with social ostracization were similar to how the platform Reddit is being used by women to voice their concerns with society.

In her study, Hall sites three ways marginalized family members become resilient. They utilize “social support,” practice “active coping,” and engage in “stigma management.” (Dorrance Hall) Each of these resilience strategies is present in the use of Reddit threads for management of societal expectations of the good girl. Women use these threads for social support and discourse to share their issues both personal and large scale. Reddit is also an active coping mechanism since it allows “attempts to reframe the situation” or discuss “the problem with others” and allow for stigma management of assumptions society makes about women who do not meet the good girl standard. Reddit provides an outlet for women to combat the internalized misogyny they face from other women and the patriarchal world they live in.

Female Body Standards and the ‘Good Girl’

In the TwoXChromosomes subReddit, bodily autonomy was discussed in connection to women being in control of those who enter their personal space. In the AskWomen subReddit, bodily autonomy is more discussed in relation to what women can do with their bodies to meet the aesthetic norms for women in society. Even if a woman is a good girl in every other sense of the term, she is still judged for her physical goodness. In a thread titled: “What is something society freaks out about but you don’t think is a big deal?” Women responded with various normal bodily appendages and characteristics good women are not supposed to show.

Female nipples. I find bras extremely uncomfortable and my boobs aren’t big so I have no reason to wear one except hiding my nipples. I try to find other ways to do so, like nipple covers, but in some situations that won’t do it and I’m back to being uncomfortable in a bra. I’ve seen countless men with hard nipples and boobs bigger than mine, but of course, there’s no problem with that, just my female nipples.

(enyelleh)

It is deemed improper and illegal for a woman to show her nipples, primarily because women’s breasts are sexualized, while male nipples are not. A good girl cannot call attention to anything remotely sexual even if female nipples are not inherently sexual. The same society that created the good girl created the stigma around female nipples.

Women in this thread also demonstrated frustration with how normal female bodily functions are portrayed in advertising, covering up the not so pretty parts of a woman’s anatomy instead of embracing them, further stigmatizing anything outside of an ideal female image. User brainstheburger states: “I want to see ads that feature women with acne, acne scars, hyperpigmentation, spider veins, stretch marks...and any more of the skin/body ‘issues’ that real

life people face who aren't airbrushed into oblivion." As in the section focused on arbitrary gender guidelines, advertisements and media perpetuate the exemplary woman and girl as perfect. This extends to physical appearance and masking natural biological functions of female bodies. Period ads often do not show blood, as one user remarks:

I want to see a tampon/pad commercial that seems realistic. No, I'm not going to be dancing around in white pants and cuddling stuffed animals because I shoved a certain brand of cotton in me. And no, a pad will never make me feel like I can freely move as I please. One shift the wrong way and nine times out of ten it's leak city (Handy_Raccoon323)

Women's periods have been a cultural taboo in the west, from biblical times warning a woman on her period and anything she touches is unclean to "female troubles" of Lydia Pinkham's time. There has not been much honest discussion about women's bodies. Ads for stretch mark and acne products rarely show blemishes, but rather the perfect after effect of using them, and ads for women's razors, not showing hair on women's bodies until the first ad to do so aired in 2018.

Since the mid-20th century, having hair is not a feminine trait and forces the illusion that women need to meet this standard of hairlessness to be accepted. Several Reddit users called out this societal expectation that is unnecessary for society to think "women need to shave to be attractive or hygienic" (starlady103). Women often must make a choice between their own physical comfort and being socially accepted, like user roonil____wazlib, who wrote:

I hate shaving I get razor burn like crazy no matter what I do, and it's extremely painful and itchy. I stopped about 6 months ago and don't want to go back, but a lot of people treat it like it's some feminist statement I'm making. Like sure, that'd

be cool if I was making a point by growing out my hair, or making some type of commentary about beauty standards. In reality, I just don't fucking wanna shave.

The good girl must choose between what society expects of her and her own comfort and beliefs about her body. If a woman refuses, she becomes less of a woman, and less of a good girl as a result. While men have their own standards of beauty and masculinity to contend with, they are not as culturally shunned for not meeting traditional aesthetics or for not looking like Jon Hamm or Brad Pitt.

These romanticized versions of women and their bodies have impacted the way women envision themselves and their femininity. If they do not emit a similar perfection and confidence that these ads portray, they themselves can feel invalidated as women.

I suffer from PCOS symptoms like acne and excess body hair, which has been really hard with feeling feminine. I hate the thought of anyone going anywhere near my face and seeing how unsightly it is. I definitely feel non-feminine sometimes although I have lots of typical feminine traits - long hair, wear make up etc.”

(sadlibrarian)

While this user still presents those “typical feminine traits” she still feels inadequate due to the societal expectation of being smooth shaven at all times as a woman. Many women in this thread discussed their experiences specifically with PCOS (Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome), a hormonal disorder that causes sporadic and prolonged periods and excess of the male hormone, androgen, in women's bodies as well as developing cysts on the ovaries.

I have PCOS. So excess hair, infertility, hormonal acne, and thinning hair. To top it off, I am overweight with small boobs, broad shoulders, and a large ribcage. I'll have excess skin when I lose weight. Feels like no matter what, there will always

be an issue. Feel like my nose is too big for my face....Point is, I don't feel feminine or desirable on the best of days. Feel like I have no reason to be. That I will never be desirable to anyone. Remember reading a thread a while back of guys saying things that they physically hated in woman and it felt like I checked off all the marks. So many of them said that it didn't matter if girl has lost weight, that the stretch marks and loose skin were ugly and a turn off. (MoogieVivi)

This shows not only how women are affected by societal standards of beauty, but also how many set their expectations of how beauty standards should present on women, not unlike behavioral traits of the good girl. If she does not present in the "normal" way, then she is not feminine enough or attractive enough to be sexually desirable.

This question of a woman's femininity simply because she does not represent an ideal woman can have extreme consequences as one user wrote: "5'10 without a small frame, and boys in Middle School called me 'mannish.' I also suffered from eating disorders for about a decade" (BayAreaDreamer). Because she was not the ideal woman by society's standards, it took a psychological and physical toll manifesting as an eating disorder. Another user discusses how not fitting the ideal beauty standard both physically and racially took a mental toll on her:

I struggled a lot with having darker skin when I was younger, and as we all know, the media doesn't really idolize dark skinned black women. I didn't really date much during high school as I'd notice most guys flocking towards people lighter than me (but I have to take some responsibility; I was a whole ass mess in high school haha) This, combined with my height (I

was 5'8-5'9 all through high school; I towered over guys) would trigger me to spend so much time loathing myself (kat_goes_rawr)

Kat_goes_rawr presents the issue in western society that the ideal beauty standard is eurocentric. Eventually that message of Eurocentricity of lighter skin is beautiful skin takes a mental toll on those who do not fit into that box. This issue is a significant one, which warrants its own examination. A slew of assumptions about women of color based on race could be its own thesis in and of itself, and I want to use this material to illustrate that the good girl ideal excludes women of color.

The folkloric good girl manifests in many areas of western society. It has the power to control women's bodies, life goals and choices, self-esteem, and relationships to family and community. If the expectation of being good were eradicated for women, the issues discussed in the AskWomen and TwoXChromosomes subReddits would be something women of future generations would be far less likely to face.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Women have long been held to a different standard than men in society. Beginning for Western culture at the Judeo-Christian creation of Eve in the book of Genesis, women have been marked as inherently bad with the eating of the forbidden fruit. From there, misunderstandings and misrepresentations of women's reproductive anatomy and sexuality led society to believe women were only meant to be mothers and homemakers with little to no regard for the desires of individual women. The folkloric good girl has pervaded Western culture for centuries and created an expectation of perfect that does not exist. Suffragettes challenged this image and women of second-wave feminism did as well, slowly chipping away at the good girl, yet this ideal still exists and affects women in present day, western culture.

In order to assess the effects of the good girl image in today's society, I chose to examine a portion of the website Reddit, a discussion platform known as the "front page of the internet." I came to the conclusion to use this website because of its heavy user traffic as well as because of the prominent role technology plays in our society, making the internet an ideal place to begin research. While a majority of Reddit users are male, there are subReddits focused primarily on women's issues. The two subReddits chosen, AskWomen and TwoXChromosomes, are specifically female focused and offered much in way of data for this study.

TwoXChromosomes provided a perspective of women sharing their concerns and problems being a woman in a Western world. It is a forum that allows women to bring up topics for discussion that they may be struggling with, need advice on, or sharing an experience. The posts by women primarily focused on negative interactions with the patriarchal society around them. Thread titles include: "Held a creepy cashier accountable for his comments this weekend," "You are allowed to move if you feel uncomfortable," and "You aren't obligated to be friendly."

This thread illustrated women's need to own their experiences and share how they have survived in Western culture while being a woman.

AskWomen primarily focused on how women feel they are perceived by society as a whole based on the arbitrary gender roles that enforce male and female behavioral norms, the internalized misogyny/sexism that affects how women are treated by other women, and the expectation of socially acceptable bodily and hygienic standards. All these expectations take their toll on women in the Western world which can lead to low self-esteem, contention within an individual's family or culture, and feelings of loathing towards oneself for not meeting the arbitrary standards this patriarchal society has set for them as women.

Combined, these threads provide a look at the internal and external struggles women face in Western society on a daily basis and how a woman is held to a standard of being 'good girl' otherwise she is a girl unworthy of being called female, depending on how she chooses to live her life. However, this study was not comprehensive of all female experience, it offers a data and experiences which are primarily reflective of women in a eurocentric Western society due to the data and limitations of the platform Reddit in this study.

Two notable absences of examination in this project were the experiences of women of color as well as women in the LGBTQ+ community. While I do wish more material would have been available on these topics in the two Reddit threads I analyzed, there was not enough to give an adequate assessment of the effects of the good girl ideal on these communities. Further research needs to be done in order to sufficiently examine these topics.

The other weakness of this study is the sole focus on Westernized cultures. In a eurocentric society, perspectives of women of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds are lost. To have a comprehensive study of the 'good girl' image as it affects many types of women, one

would need to examine the good girl in regard to cultural expectations of women in their countries and cultures, then examine how this ideal has affected them, if at all.

Despite these limitations in my research, this study still offers valid data to the field of women's studies and folklore. From my readings, there have been numerous books and studies conducted on how women have been treated in western culture through the centuries. *The Feminine Mystique*, addressed the "problem that has no name" (Friedan 1) and gave voice to a generation of women who struggled in a patriarchal society and aided in the creation of second-wave feminism. The internet in contemporary society can empower women to spark change as a study titled "The Internet: Empowering Women?" concludes. "As individuals, women's voices have significance, but their voices and actions have power when bound together as a global community" (Onyejekwe). Folklore in women's studies focuses on how women interact with each other and society via the internet. Women are using the online platform of Reddit as an avenue to communicate and build a community surrounding the social issues women face. My assessment of how women use the internet to discuss the cultural acceptance of the good girl image is a contribution to folklore in women's studies in the age of the internet. Hopefully further research into this topic of how the good girl is affecting women, as well as acknowledgement of the societal and cultural issues women have to face daily will aid in providing a better societal understanding of the harmful effects of the good girl on women's psyches and behavior.

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