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Exhibition Essay

This exhibition focuses on the subject of women and explores the various ways in which they are represented in portrait photography. The pieces chosen for this exhibition illustrate how the depiction of women has evolved. The photographs document the perspectives through which women have been seen over time as well as the roles they have played in society. The earliest portrait featured in this exhibit dates back to 1933, titled *Girl and Child* by Paul Strand, and the most recent piece is from 2012, titled *Folsom Street Fair* by Janet Delaney. The comparison between these two pieces alone displays an immense difference in the definition and roles of women in society. This is a very interesting and important topic to focus on because not only does it look at gender roles and stereotypes, but it also sheds light on subjects such as feminism, gender association, sexual association (LGBTQ+), social acceptance and gender inequality. Art is used in a political and controversial way to create activist pieces that represent the voice of the public and those who were not being heard. Although there has been a lot of progress in resolving some of these social issues, they are still very much prevalent today. This exhibition highlights these issues and displays how these photographs challenge traditional perceptions of women and support female empowerment and rights.

Female empowerment and the strive for equal rights are what make up the foundation of feminism. Feminism is based on liberalism, which claims that all human beings are created equal. It focuses on reshaping the relationship between men and women and allowing the same opportunities for all. Feminism emphasizes that there is no essential difference between women and men, as everyone is human and deserves equal rights. Allowing for sexual and gender equality changes the stereotypes about women for the better, paving a pathway to a just future. This claim is shown throughout this exhibition and essay, with the aid of research, where women are standing up and fighting to take hold of their inalienable rights and their representation in society.

However, female-born women are not the only women that need fighting for. In 2009, when Obama entered the White House, he promised the LGBTQ+ community that he would do everything he could to achieve full equality and equal representation for them. Since then, there has been much progress. However, it is not yet fully accomplished. Completely eliminating discrimination and unequal treatment is the goal and dream for the LGBTQ+ community. Obama supported the LGBTQ+ community to pursue their rights and representation, and gradually changed people's perspectives on them through his efforts. Nearing the end of Obama's eight-year presidency, there was a major win for this community and the activist movement. On June 26th in 2015, gay marriage was legalized across all 50 states in the US. While there is still more work to be done and goals to be achieved for other groups within the LGBTQ+ community, this was a big step in the right direction. Our most recent picture in this exhibition, credited to Janet

Delaney, displays a photograph of a transgender woman that represents and encapsulates the positive, confident, and determined attitudes of the LGBTQ+ community.

In this exhibition, we will show the progression and involvement made by this big intertwined system to alter women's roles in society through our featured artists. Some of these artists are Philippe Halsman, Marion Post Wolcott, and Judy Dater. The pieces we present highlight the main focuses in our exhibition about women's representation. Halsman helped women in the 1950's create an individual image for themselves. His passion was capturing their mystery and essence through a single photograph and revealing who his subject really was inside. Wolcott highlighted the essential role women played during the Great Depression, and how the world would not have survived without their immense help and contributions. Dater's work internalized the attitudes and movements of the 1970's in aspects of female liberation, sexualality, and for the whole self. All of these artists partook in momentous parts of our history, especially women. Social acceptance is an ongoing battle, and the integration of its demands with famous artists pushes for a promising future for us all.

Social acceptance is about shifting stereotypes or getting rid of them completely. One example is the role of men as the breadwinners of the family and women as responsible for domestic work such as house making and raising children. However, in more recent times, women are stepping into "male roles" and obtaining more equal rights. One of the changes made to eradicate these snide stereotypes was in higher education. In the 1930's-1950's, men dominated college campuses and institutions. "A highpoint of gender imbalance in college attendance was reached in 1947 when undergraduate men outnumbered women 2.3 to 1." (Goldin et al. p.133). From this peak in 1947 onward, enrollment slowly but surely was growing among women. By 1980, men and women were equally represented in universities, and fast-forwarding into the 21st century women now hold the majority enrollment. Beyond the life of education, in more modern households nowadays we see both men and women sharing equal responsibilities in parenting, housework and financial support. Jerry Adam Smith calls attention to this new shift in responsibilities in his book, *The Daddy Shift: How Stay-at-home Dads, Breadwinning Moms, and Shared Parenting Are Transforming the American Family*. We are now seeing more stay at home dads, which was rarely ever seen in past generations, as well as h more working mothers. We are taking closer steps each day as a society to change these expectations put upon us, and the result is a more equal world.

The mission of the de Saisset Museum aims to "inspire curiosity, provoke dialogue, and encourage reflection", and this exhibition does all three of those things. It also offers reputable information in hopes to evoke deeper understanding about the history behind these pieces and what they represent. This exhibition aims to inspire everyone to learn more about social inequalities and problems that are still present in our society today, as well as to become part of the solution and the means towards a brighter future for all.

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