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Dani Santos COM 2500 Easy A, The Stud Versus The Slut: The Sexual Double Standard as Perceived by Western Adolescents Easy A is the romantic comedy that finally fits the definition. The dry humor of spunky, independent main character, Olive Prendergast creates a film that is unlike most movies in its genre. The comedic overtone throughout the film nearly blinds viewers from the serious sexual issues that today's adolescence face that are intertwined from scene to scene (Perry, 2011). The main social issue identified in this film is that of the sexual double standard. Western youth is consumed by a perception of gender roles and addicted to what is acceptable sexually for each female and male. Historical gender rolls, parental guidance, and the media are all leading examples as to how the sexual double standard (SDS) becomes evident in the lives of youth. Further, the negative perception of permissive females, as well as the negative perception of sexually inactive males, affects the social status and peer acceptance of students across the United States. The way sexual behaviors are perceived by gendered peers can be related and analyzed in the movie, Easy A. The scene includes Olive and a gay acquaintance, Brandon, who exit a room after faking a sexual encounter for an audience behind a closed door. From the experience, each character benefits from the sexual double standard as gender norms are bent and sexual expectations are shattered.

Literature Review Numerous studies have been conducted on the sexual double standard as related to adolescence. Understanding how the SDS manifests and is perceived by both men and women is crucial in investigating the artifact. Through literary analysis, peer acceptance and relationships, as well as reasons for consistency in the SDS, will be examined. Typically, social norms tend shift as society evolves. For example,

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norms such as language, style, and ethics have changed regularly over centuries. While some argue that gender norms in contemporary Western society are currently developing, the SDS is an illustration against such claims. Hundreds of years ago, men were persistent on maximizing their offspring. To do so, they impregnated as many women as possible to amplify probability. Women however, focused on quality as opposed to quantity, searching for a stable mate to assist in raising her child (Ratter & Riccioli, 2009). Evolutionary psychology may allude to the origin of the sexual double standard. This idea is furthered by gender norms that are instilled in children by parents. According to King, children begin recognizing gender roles as early as 14 months old. He says by the age of four, children have generally embraced stereotypical gender, and pressures to fit into traditional gender roles become most prominent around age nine (as cited in Ratter & Riccioli, 2009, p. 2). Therefore, the information and lessons a mother conveys to her child in their ripest age will most likely shape their early views on sexual standards. Research has concluded, that in regards to sexual development, mothers are usually more tolerable of their sons' exploration than that of their daughters' (Ratter & Riccioli, 2009). This intolerance of female sexual maturity is one of the first models of sexual bias seen by youth. When mid adolescence is reached, most will engage in sexual intercourse for the first time during a period of gender role intensification. This phase will continue into high school, where peer acceptance will persist in developing the sexual double standard. An adolescent's number of sexual partners and their acceptance by peers are dramatically related according to a study done by Kaerger and Staff (2009). The study consisted of 5, 944 girls and 5, 530 boys across the nation, all ranging from seventh to 12 grade and 12 to 20 years

old. Results showed that sexually permissive girls who had slept with eight or more partners had not only fewer friendships than those with no sexual partners, but were less accepted by peers. The correlation between a rising number of sexual partners and peer acceptance is nearly linear for both females and males. However, the male relationship is reversed, peer acceptance is enhanced with permissiveness. Males lacking in sexual experience on the other hand are characterized as having significantly less friends. Although other variables for measuring peer acceptance were tested, such as age, GPA, or participation in athletics, number of sexual partners trumped as most influential. High school popularity then consequently depends on one's sexual promiscuity, or lack there of. Kaerger's in depth study epitomizes the SDS and in addition, provides data that may explain why the double standard is not diminishing in spite of gender norms evolving in society. First, Kaerger gives an explanation for the constant SDS using media influences as an example. Female actors in the United States are under relentless scrutiny by society, particularly by young women. To avoid negative stigmas associated with licentious behaviors, actresses must keep their sexual activities secret. This serves as a model for young women. Increasing sexual partners and behaviors frequently poses a higher chance of closet activities being revealed to the public, thus having to endure social reaction. While the actress example deters permissiveness in girls, continuing the SDS, other factors also come into play. Ratter and Riccioli analyzed young women "talking" about the SDS and how they disliked it (2009). Even though they condemned the "stud" reputation men receive from promiscuity, the women suggested nothing of resistance or attempt to change norms. Instead, they lamely accepted the SDS as

inevitable. Heidi Lyons of Oakland University completed a study in which one focus was the cultural reality of the SDS to adolescence (2011). Lyons discovered that regardless of sexual experience level, young women were by and large aware of key elements to the SDS and conscious that they were held to, "different normative standards compared to men" (2011). In addition, these women scorned the social labeling process that rewards men for similar behavior that degrades women. Some of the females bashing the gender bias were promiscuous themselves, but provided explanations and disclaimers to their behavior. They furthermore cursed permissive women, identifying a secondary female double standard. Data collected from Kaerger's study on perceived peer status from strictly male or female perspectives also discovered major discrepancies in the SDS. Research suggested that, "permissive boys are more likely to gain status from female peers than from male peers...female reactions to sexual behavior simultaneously escalate the status of permissive boys and decrease the status of permissive girls" (Kaerger, 2009, p. 156). Therefore, women's desire to model media examples of hiding sexual activity, as well as accepting the SDS instead of refusing it, cause the SDS to continue unwaveringly. The manifestation of the sexual double standard was inevitable due to rooted gender norms and the parental proliferation of gender stereotypes. More recently, the SDS has remained relatively constant because of women's own perception and double standard. The negative views towards both female and male sexual behaviors, or lack thereof, affect the acceptance by peers in Western society. In reference to the artifact, Easy A, the following topics will be used for analysis: \* Negative perception of permissive females \* Negative perception of inexperienced

males \* Sex-status association Analysis Easy A, although comedic, includes serious social themes. The largest theme observed in the scene being analyzed is that of the sexual double standard. The negative perception of promiscuous females and conversely the negative perception of inexperienced males by adolescent peers are very apparent in the clip. In addition, sex-status association, or the relationship between sexual activity and social status, is also evident. In Easy A, Olive is the perfect subject to observe in regards to the SDS. First, as Olive exits the room, the crowd of students awaiting her and Brandon outside offer mixed feedback on the supposed " deed" as distinguished by their gender. Female onlookers immediately sink to a disgusted demeanor when they see the " slut" exit a room used for sex in a public setting. The previous rumor about losing her virginity is now amplified with an open location sex act, which demonstrated a rapid increase of sexual partners. As Kaerger explained, as number of sexual partners increases, acceptance of peers and number of friends decrease (2009). Olive has become ostracized from her female peers (Perry, 2011). Adversely, male students outside the room now see Olive as a possible " hook up". They " check her out", but also make fun of her behind her back by performing lewd gestures. Olive leaves the party early, upset, with her self-esteem low. The fact that Olive has not actually partaken in any sexual acts allows the audience to see the degree to which the double standard can reach. Brandon on the other hand, who also did not perform any sexual act, benefits from the SDS. In this scene, Brandon transforms by gaining peer acceptance and friends due to his fake sexual encounter. His popularity will grow according to Kaerger, and have the opposite affect that that of his counterpart. Unlike Olive, as Brandon exits the room he is greeted

by nothing but positive responses. Before the stunt, he was subject to extensive bullying and abuse; the false reports create a temporary security from the antagonism he would otherwise face due to his rumored homosexuality and virginity (Zwarg, 2011). Now, he is perceived as a "stud" by male and female students alike. In his case, the SDS helped him to escape abuse and gain status. Although the general outcomes vary from positive to negative for the pair of Olive and Brandon, they were both successful in helping each other reach status quo (Perry, 2011). As invisible high school students, the duo strived to make names for themselves. Olive demonstrated in the scene that she would embrace her new popularity, whether positive or negative, by continuing to pretend to be sexually promiscuous (Zwarg, 2011). She behaves as the "popular boy" in Kaerger's ordering of sexual partnerships and peer status (2009). He refers to the inverse double standard hypothesis in which status increases sexual partnerships as opposed to the other way around. He states, "unpopular girls would seek peer acceptance through sexual intercourse and popular boys would take advantage of their high status to have sex with many girls" (Kaerger, 2009, p. 159). As previously stated, Olive reverses roles as the only "popular" student involved in the fake sexual activity. As a result, Brandon, the homosexual, assumes the role of unpopular girl seeking acceptance. By the end of the scene, they both have received the attention and status satisfaction the set forth for. Conclusion In conclusion, Easy A is the romantic comedy that incorporates serious sexual issues that adolescence face in modern, Western society. The sexual double standard is branded on this film, re-defining and shocking viewers with gender role reversals and surprises. Today, youth conforms to perceptions of gender roles and labels others

based on what is considered sexually acceptable. "Sluts" and "studs" are the vocabulary terms that rule the high school hierarchy and define students as popular, or a nobody. Further research could be done on the subject regarding Brandon's homosexuality, and if there's a correlation between same-sex partners and peer status (Kaergar, 2009). Another subject for further study could relate to the location of the high schools studied, and whether their cultural norms affect the way sexual promiscuity is perceived, especially in regards to social status. A final focus of further research could study the long-term affects of adolescent sexual double standard. Whether women that assumed the "slut" role can, as adults, hold relationships and become successful, and whether men that assumed the "stud" role can do the same. In all, deep rooted historical gender rolls, parental direction for children, and the media are all primary examples as to how the sexual double standard manifests in the lives of youth. In addition, the negative perception of permissive females, and the negative perception of sexually inactive males, is demonstrated in the Easy A scene. The characters transformations from "virgins" to accumulating sexual partners reveal both the positive, and negatives sides to obtaining sex-status and popularity. In the end, breaking gender norms and smashing sexual standards produces individuals free from the constraints of society. References Kaerger, D. A., & Staff, J. (2009). The sexual double standard and adolescent peer acceptance. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 72(2), 143-164. doi: 10.1177/019027250907200205

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