

A Critique of Contemporary Sexual Liberation: A Third Way Analysis

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Abstract : Sexual liberation has been thought of as a movement, an idea, and an antithesis of material oppression. Within feminism it has consistently resisted definition - different feminist schools of thought had entirely different constructions of what liberated feminine sexuality could look like and how we might get there. This paper will critique the current definition of sexual liberation as being limited and carceral in its perspectives of sexual assault and extremely reductive in its imaginings of sexual liberation. The ultimate goal of this assessment is to potentially outline what true sexual liberation might look like in a way that is inclusive but not ignorant of the realities of the patriarchy. The first critique of sexual liberation included in the paper centers around the limits of consent, carceral feminism and sexual subjectivity. The argument will build off the traditionally sex-negative critiques of consent as being limited in scope by explaining how a lack of nuance is even more dangerous to victims of sexual violations. The discussion will also expand an interrogant of consent to an interrogation of wantedness and desire. If we understand that critiquing the conditions of consent is important, we must also critique the way patriarchy and compulsory sexuality have affected desire. Using the aforementioned concept of compulsory sexuality, the paper will argue that while sexual liberation has begun to include queer and transgender individuals, it is still overwhelmingly allonormative. Sex positivity and its opponents both fail to include asexuality. This ultimately leads to a conflation of sexual liberation with genuine material liberation. Just as we cannot divorce our constructions of sexual liberation from the realities of the patriarchy and rape culture, we should consider compulsory sexuality as its own system of social regulation. The conclusion will begin to construct an alternative vision of sexual liberation, leveraging concepts of sexual subjectivity, including a rejection of carceral feminism as a response to sexual violence, and finally, leading to the beginnings of a deconstruction of compulsory sexuality. The paper concludes with a vision of sexual liberation that does not confuse itself with material liberation or mere sexual oppression, but rather a key way stops on the road to constructing our most authentic sexual selves.

Keywords : feminism, sexual assault, sexual liberation, consent

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