

The Conflict between Empowerment and Exploitation: The Hypersexualization of Women in the Media

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Abstract : Pornographic images are becoming increasingly normalized as innovations in media technology arise, the porn industry explosively grows, and transnational capitalism spreads due to government deregulation and privatization of media. As the media evolves, pornography has become more and more violent and non-consensual; this growth of 'raunch culture' reifies the traditional power balance between men and women in which men are dominant, and women are submissive. This male domination objectifies and commodifies women, reducing them to merely sexual objects for the gratification of men. Women are exposed to pornographic images at younger and younger ages, providing unhealthy sexual role models and teaching them lessons on sexual behavior before the onset of puberty. The increasingly sexualized depiction of women in particular positions them as appropriately desirable and available to men. As a result, women are not only viewed as sexual prey but also end up treating themselves primarily as sexual objects, basing their worth off of their sexuality alone. Although many scholars are aware of and have written on the great lack of agency exercised by women in these representations, the general public tends to view some of these women as being empowered, rather than exploited. Scholarly discourse is constrained by the popular misconception that the construction of women's sexuality in the media is controlled by women themselves.

Keywords : construction of gender, hypersexualization, media, objectification

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