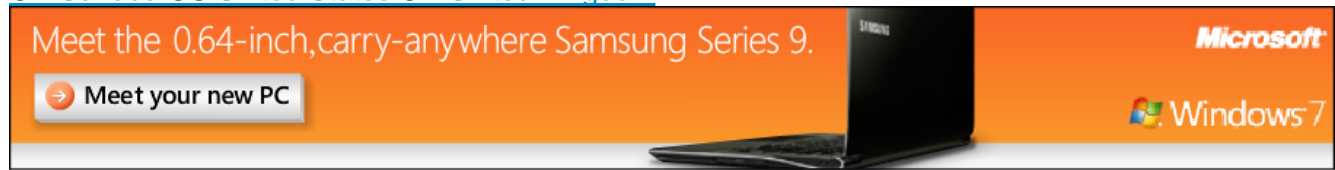


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Are Women "Pornified" by Popular Media?

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A new study by University of Buffalo sociologists suggests the answer is yes, indeed. This may be well-tread territory, but we think we need to go there anyway. One reason is what we call the "[tyranny of the shoulds](#)."

The study, entitled "[Equal Opportunity Objectification? The Sexualization of Men and Women on the Cover of Rolling Stone](#)", will be published in the September issue of the journal *Sexuality & Culture*. The researchers, Erin Hatton, Ph.D., and Mary Nell Trautner, Ph.D., analyzed covers of *Rolling Stone* magazine over the past three decades and found that "sexualized representations of both women and men increased, and hypersexualized images of women (but not men) skyrocketed." They chose *Rolling Stone*, in particular, because of its long lifespan and because its covers have featured a broad mix of pop culture icons -- from celebrities to politicians -- of both genders. According to [the University of Buffalo News Center](#), here's what they had to say about their findings:

"In the 2000s," Hatton says, "there were 10 times more hypersexualized images of women than men, and 11 times more non-sexualized images of men than of women."

"What we conclude from this is that popular media outlets such as Rolling Stone are not depicting women as sexy musicians or actors; they are depicting women musicians and actors as ready and available for sex. This is problematic," Hatton says, "because it indicates a decisive narrowing of media representations of women."

"We don't necessarily think it's problematic for women to be portrayed as 'sexy.' But we do think it is problematic when nearly all images of women depict them not simply as 'sexy women' but as passive objects for someone else's sexual pleasure."

The problem, the authors said, is that this hypersexuality dominates the cultural representation of what it means to be a woman today. And you'd better believe that hurts us all. Because as much as we claim otherwise, the media often becomes another way by which we measure ourselves. Sure, we know all about photo-shopping and air-brushing, and we know it's not real. But still: As much as we try not to, we buy into what is presented as a cultural norm.

In their study, the authors cite a large body of research that has shown a link between sexualized portrayals of women and violence against them, as well as garden-variety sexual harassment and, in some men, neanderthal attitudes toward women. They reference studies showing that media images of impossibly perfect and hypersexy women also increase the rates of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction and that such images are also linked to an increase in teen sex. Finally -- cruel blow -- the authors reference a number of studies that have linked hypersexy images to decreased sexual satisfaction among women as well as men. Scary, right?

Sure, those may be worst-case scenarios. But at the very least, there's this: When we are bombarded by increasingly sexualized images peeking out at us from every newstand and/or iPad, another bullet point goes onto the "should" list. You know what we mean: There are the big bad societal shoulds, of course, and there are also the shoulds you hear in your best friends' voices, your mom's, your significant other's. TV and magazines remind us we should be thinner and happier -- and apparently, smoking hot as well.

We may call every bit of it out as unholy nonsense, but still, is there a part of us, deep inside, that believes that this is what it means to be a woman today? To Have It All?

Back in the day, the archetype for the woman who "had it all" was exemplified by the ad campaign for Enjoli, which billed itself as the "eight-hour perfume for the 24-hour woman." The classic seventies-era television [commercial](#) featured a woman who morphed from housewife to businesswoman to sex kitten wife, all the while singing: "I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, and never, ever let you forget you're a man, cause I'm a *woman*."

An impossibly ridiculous role model, from any number of aspects. But let's look at just one thing. She was pictured in a bathrobe, a business suit, and finally -- as the sexy chick -- in a high-necked evening gown that exposed nothing but her arms. We can't help wondering what, if anything, she'd be wearing if that ad were made today.

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