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Study: Sexualized portrayals of females are norm in pop culture

August 12, 2011 10:50PM

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Katy Perry on the cover of Rolling Stone “double issue.”

Updated: August 13, 2011 7:19PM

Examining how men and women have been presented in popular media, University at Buffalo sociologists looked at more than 1,000 images of males and females on the Rolling Stone magazine covers over the course of 43 years.

Their conclusion: portrayals of females have become increasingly sexualized, even “pornified.” Men, too, but less so.

Assistant professors Erin Hatton and Mary Nell Trautner developed a “scale of sexualization.” An image was given sexuality “points” if, for example, the subject’s lips were parted or his/her tongue was showing, the subject was only partially clad or naked, or the text used explicitly sexual language.

The authors identified three categories of images: not sexualized (0-4 points); sexualized (5-10 points); and “hypersexualized” (11-23 points).

In the 1960s they found that 11 percent of men and 44 percent of women on the covers of Rolling Stone were sexualized. In the 2000s, 17 percent of men were sexualized and 83 percent of women were sexualized. Among those images that were sexualized, 2 percent of men and 61 percent of women were hypersexualized.

“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,” Hatton said.

“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,” she said.

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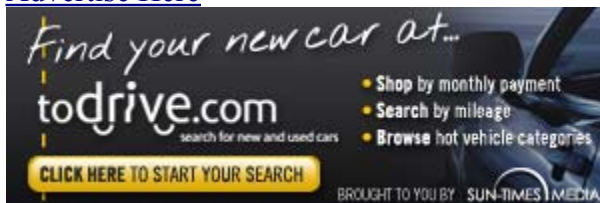
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