

# The Sexual Oppression of Women: Social Perspectives

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# FMPs – Not the Song Baby, It's the Shoes!



## Serious Laying Down Shoes

Everybody Loves FMPs– The Guys Even More Than the Girls!  
Get the Latest Stilettos, Platforms, Stripper Shoes and Sexy Boots

- ▶ *I Love My Shoes, and I Especially Love My Collection of FMPs! I'm 27, single and I love dressing up and going out. My FMPs are so much fun and I just love wearing them.*
- ▶ *I can say a lot with my shoes believe me. When I want it, I mean I really want it, I put on the sexiest hottest heels I've got, a short tight skirt and out I go. I can have my choice of any guy in the place. I like the upscale hotel or restaurant bars for finding the best guys :-)*



- ▶ *For all you guys out there, Listen Up! Buy Her a New Pair of these FMPs, Tell Her How Hot She Looks in Them and the Laying Down Part Will Happen, just you watch!*
- ▶ *Girls All Like New Shoes, you'll never go wrong getting her a pair of really Cute Shoes! You won't believe how many points you can make :- ) IT'S THE AMERICAN WAY!*

These will  
lead to....



...the best sex  
in a man's life.

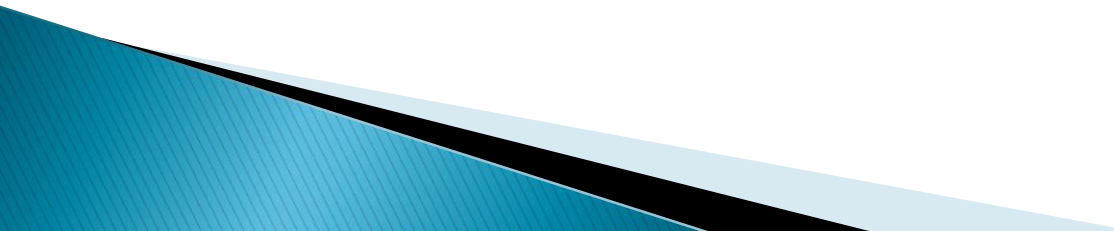
- ▶ *And a girl might just get some bling, an apartment, a car, a boyfriend, or even a husband and kids, especially if...*
- ▶ *She makes sure to visit those upscale hotel or restaurant bars for finding the best guys!*

**“It’s hard to fight an enemy  
who has an outpost in your head.”**

**– Sally Kempton**



# Sexualization of Women

- ▶ As mentioned later in this symposium, there are numerous factors that influence the sexual oppression of women, including disability status and gender nonconformity, among others.
  - ▶ This presentation focuses specifically on contemporary Western hetero-normative social influences that contribute to the sexual oppression of women (e.g., Gavey, 2005).
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# Compulsory Heterosexuality

- ▶ In Western culture, intimate relationships **MUST** be between a male and female (Unger, 2001)
  - Romantic scripts (movies, TV, magazines, internet, etc.)
  - Marriage scripts (regardless of recent same-sex gains)
  - Procreation/Parent scripts (nuclear family = husband/wife/children)
- ▶ Social Reinforcement (Dion & Dion, 2001)
  - Family/friends and “Couple’s Culture” (expectations of parents, siblings, extended family, etc.)
  - Employment (insurance, family leave, etc.)
  - Government (Social Security, IRS, tax breaks, etc.)
- ▶ Ostracization for Non-Hetero Relationships (Kitzinger, 2001 ; Gavey, 2005)

True Blood



Gone With the Wind



Seven Pounds



Harry Potter





# Compulsory Heterosexuality (cont.)

- ▶ HETEROSEX = coital imperative (Gavey, 2005; Unger 2001)
  - COITAL IMPERATIVE = gendered sexual script requires penis/vagina insertion for “real sex” (all other forms of sexual activity not considered the real thing)
- ▶ SEXUAL SCRIPTS (Gavey, 2005; Kitzinger, 2001)
  - MALES = are the sex experts and take initiative
  - FEMALES = are uninformed and naïve about sex and are labeled (slut whore, etc.) when taking initiative

Sex?



That depends on what  
your definition of “is,” is.

# Compulsory Heterosexuality (cont.)

- ▶ HETEROSEX = gendered double standard (Kitzinger, 2001)
  - FEMALE WHORE = whatever a male wants sexually, the female must provide (appearance, dress, public/private actions, etc.)
  - FEMALE VIRGIN = must maintain chastity (“Why buy the cow when the milk is free?”)
  - MALE STUD = a “real man” is always everywhere ready (penile erection is paramount) and multiple sexual conquests are expected

Real Woman

=



+



Real Man

=





# Sexualization Starts Early for Girls

## APA Task Force Report on the Sexualization of Girls (2010)

According to the Executive Summary of the Report, sexualization occurs when:

- ▶ a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics;
- ▶ a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy;
- ▶ a person is sexually objectified—that is, made into a thing for others' sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or
- ▶ sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person.



# Pornography: The New Female Norm

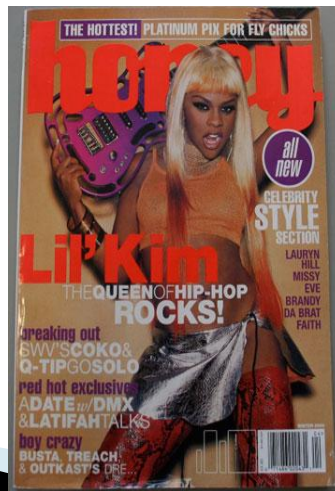
## ► “Pornland” (Dines, 2010)

- 1980’s porn is ubiquitous across all contemporary media and entertainment depictions of women
- Explicit body presentation/image paired with ready sexual availability
  - Found in female genital waxing, cosmetic surgery, hookup culture, fashion trends, music videos, movies, etc.
- Generic, formulaic, and plasticized

Vogue



HipHop



Beer Ads



Sports



# Pornography: The New Female Norm (cont.)

## ▶ The Barbie Imperative

- Facelifts, botox, breast implants, liposuction, and genital “rejuvenation” surgeries have dramatically increased over the last three decades (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), 2007)
- The ACOG warned that widespread unnecessary female genital surgery has led to infections, infertility, altered sensation, pain upon urination and/or intercourse, adhesions, and scarring
- Is this our new Western equivalent of female genital mutilation?



# Rape is Normal in Pornland: Myths About Men's and Women's Responsibility

- ▶ The following is a short list of rape myths (Gavey, 2005; Kitzinger, 2001):

| <u>It's not rape if:</u>  | <u>She was raped because she was:</u>  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They're married</li><li>• They're dating</li><li>• They've had sex before</li><li>• There was no force or violence involved</li><li>• She didn't fight it</li><li>• She went home with him</li><li>• She wasn't aware of what was happening</li><li>• She said no but really meant yes</li><li>• She's a prostitute</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drinking alcohol or doing drugs</li><li>• Wearing tight or sexy clothes</li><li>• Young and attractive ("hot")</li><li>• Leading him on</li><li>• Asking for it</li><li>• A slut and sleeping around</li><li>• A tease or a prostitute</li><li>• Dumb or stupid</li><li>• In the wrong place at the wrong time</li><li>• Not forceful enough saying no</li></ul> |

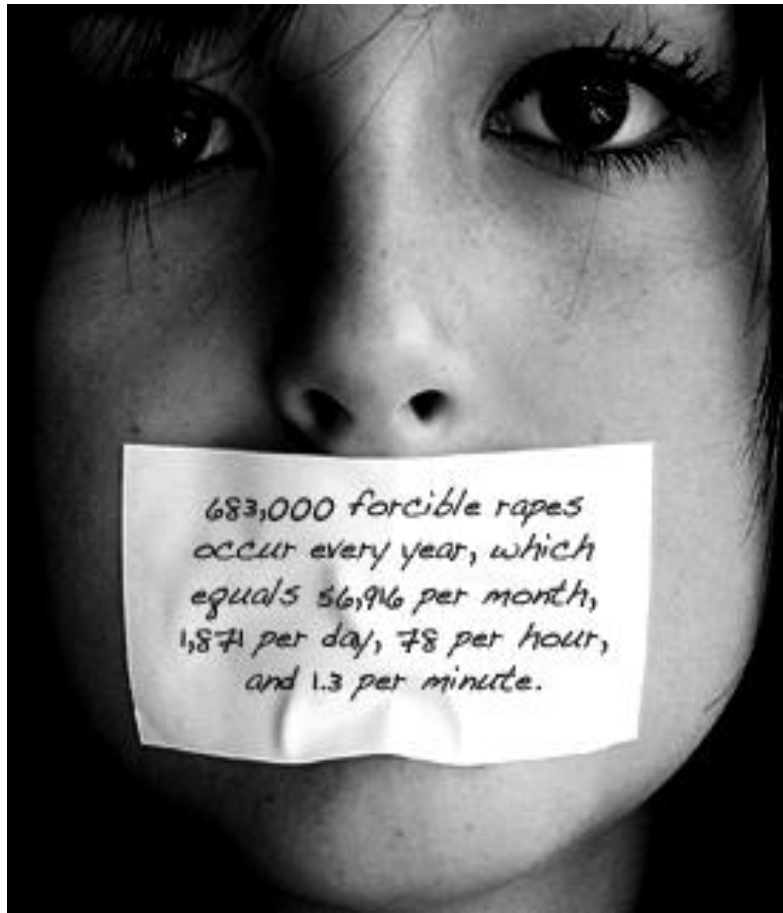


# Rape is Normal in Pornland: Myths About Men's and Women's Responsibility (cont.)

## Male Excuses for Rape Perpetration

- The women/girls were dressed sexily (they asked for it);
- The women/girls didn't resist (they must have liked it);
- The women/girls didn't disclose the rapes fast enough (they must have consented and thought nothing of it);
- The women didn't pay attention where they went and therefore put themselves in danger (women are responsible for the behavior of all males)
  - OR –
- The girls' parents didn't control them and therefore put them in danger (parents are responsible for the behavior of all males);
- The rapists thought the women/girls wanted it (she gave consent and enjoyed it)
  - OR –
- The rapists thought the girl children were old enough (I didn't know she was a child);
- The rapists were mistaken, just watched, or gave into peer pressure (I didn't do it, but if I did, it was those other guys made me do it).

# All Women and Girls Are At Risk for Being Raped



- Worldwide, women and girls are at high risk for incest as well as sexual harassment, assault, and rape
- Most women and girls are not believed once they disclose
- Most women and girls are blamed upon disclosure
- Not surprisingly, most rapes are not reported
- Once reported, most rapes are not prosecuted
- If prosecuted, the rapist usually pleads down, receives little to no jail time, or goes free

– United Nations (2002, 2005); Watts & Zimmerman (2002); World Health Organization (2002, 2006)



# Economics: Are All Women Just Prostitutes?

## ▶ Hetero-Normative Employment Expectations

- The ideal hetero relationship script is one where the male goes to work and the female stays home to take care of the children
- This has been noted by some to be similar to prostitution, wherein males receive housework, childcare, companionship, and sex from females in exchange for money and other material resources (e.g., Goodman, 2008)
- However, from the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present within the U.S., most women work outside the home for pay (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2010)
- Thus, the “ideal” middle-class White women’s role doesn’t match women’s reality (see below)

She works hard  
for the money...



# Economics: Gendered Income Disparities

- ▶ The Pay Gap (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2010; U. S. Census Bureau, 2003)
  - In 2009, 81.9 million men and 73.0 million women worked in the U.S.
  - The mean annual full-time year-around wage for men was \$47K compared to \$36K for women
  - Women made 77 cents for every man's dollar, even though women's actual contributions both at home and at work (e.g., "double-duty") are twice that of men
  - Women heads-of-household were 3x more likely to live in poverty than men (for women over 65, they were 9x more likely than their male counterparts)
  - Children were 5x more likely to live in poverty if their single-parent household was headed by a female than a male
  - Upon divorce, men's income rose 75% while women's income fell by 35% (averaged across families with and without children)

 **Heteronormativity PAYS MEN WELL**  
**and PAYS WOMEN TO BE WITH MEN** 

- Income in male/female households is higher overall
- Overall, divorce costs women (and their children) MUCH more than men

# Sexual Pleasure, Reproductive Rights, & Procreative Responsibility

## ▶ Women's Sexual Pleasure

*“One of the greatest mysteries in life is what constitutes a woman's sexual satisfaction.”*

– Herman & Herman (2005, p. ii)

- One wishes the authors (two sisters, a psychotherapist and a medical doctor) had asked lesbians this question before composing the quote above, but they focused on hetero women in their survey study
- Even so, they listed the following as “keys” to women's sexual satisfaction:
  - Relationship health (emotional and physical connectedness with partner)
  - Communication in and out of the bedroom
  - Strong emotional health and social support
  - Accepting and overcoming physical health obstacles, if any
  - Sexual self-stimulation (getting to know your own genitals)
  - Orgasm (self and with partner – coital imperative?)
  - Arousal and lubrication
  - Sexual empowerment

# Sexual Pleasure, Reproductive Rights, & Procreative Responsibility

## ▶ Women's Sexual Pleasure (cont.)

- What seems to be missing from that list?
  - Cultural definitions of women's sexuality/responsiveness
  - Economic/money worries
  - Time pressure (women's double-duty at home/work)
  - Assistance from male partner (or lack thereof) for the day-to-day
  - Children/childcare
  - Violence (domestic and community violence)
  - Sexual victimization (past, present, future)
  - Sexually transmitted diseases
  - Contraceptive availability/use (man or woman?)
  - Fertility issues

**Today's Superwoman Should  
Always Be Sexually Fulfilled!**



# Sexual Pleasure, Reproductive Rights, & Procreative Responsibility (cont.)

## ▶ Reproductive Rights

- How can hetero women's sexual pleasure be assured without addressing reproductive rights?
- Just recently, with the debate over requiring insurance companies to provide contraceptive coverage without co-pays, it was noted that:
  - women lack access to affordable **contraception**, yet it is non-controversial within the U.S. today (Northrup, 2011)



- What IS controversial is the legal access to abortion (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2010)

*"If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament."*  
– Florynce Kennedy, 1973



# Sexual Pleasure, Reproductive Rights, & Procreative Responsibility (cont.)

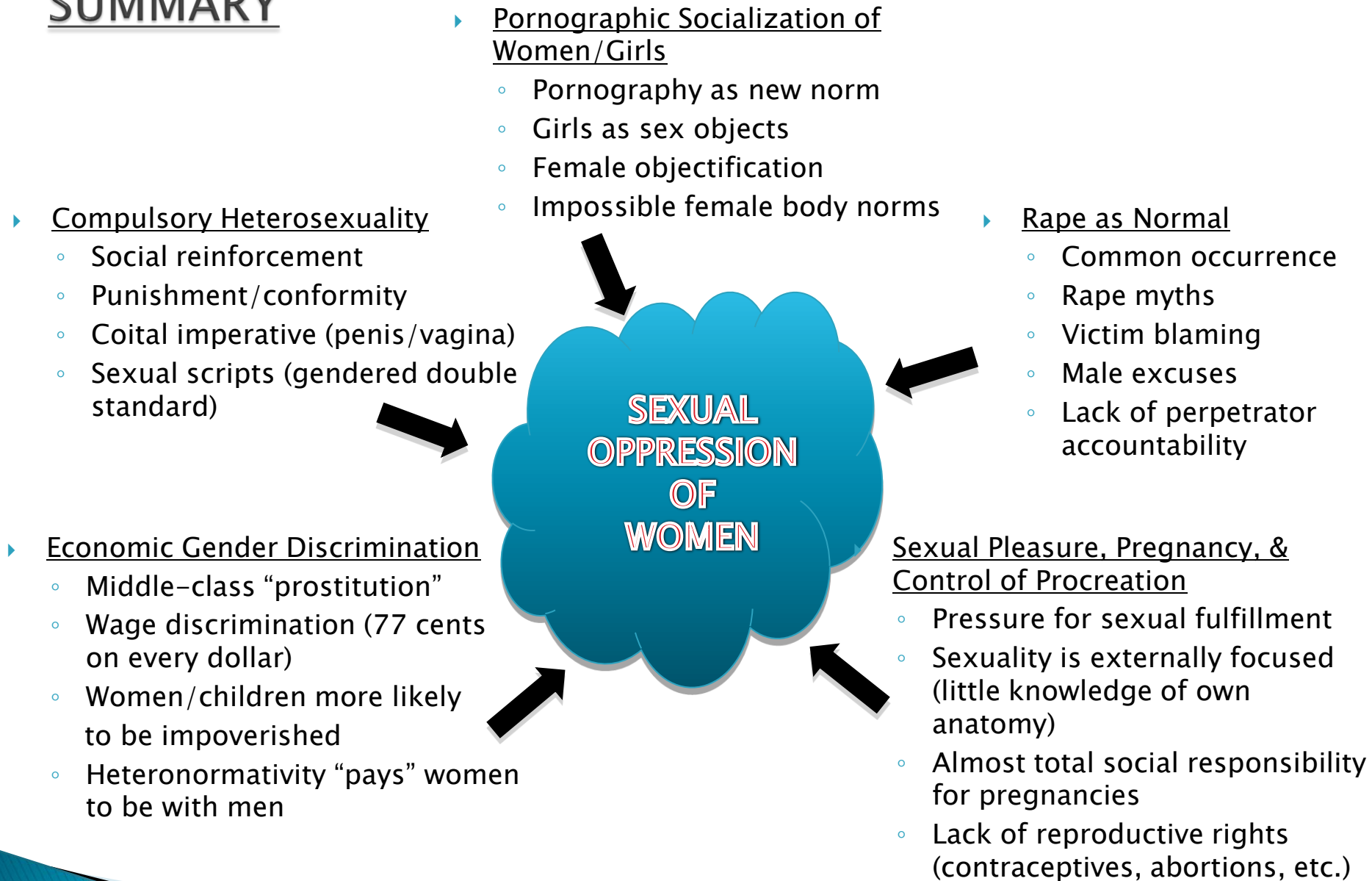
## ▶ Procreative Responsibility

- Heteronormativity demands that women take responsibility for pregnancy and children after birth
- This means that hetero women must police their own, and their male partner's, sexuality
- However, hetero women's procreative responsibility is negatively impacted through cultural, social, economic, and political policies
  - “entitlements,” concrete resources, and other social supports are largely missing for women to attain overall effectiveness (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2010)





# SUMMARY



# Concluding Remarks

- ▶ It seems clear that hetero women deal with every day pressures to conform to sexualized scripts that are oppressive
- ▶ As noted above, multiple social barriers can be found in the environment that keep women from maximizing their ability to overcome sexualized and oppressive forces
- ▶ Use the knowledge we have to document the extremely negative factors that contribute to the sexual oppression of women.
- ▶ Use such documentation to advocate for policy changes:
  - Poverty, welfare policy, and the currently short-term assistance provided to needy families (e.g., TANF), as well as other economic policies that impact all Americans
  - Gender discrimination in employment and insurance coverage, as well as limited access to contraceptives and abortion overall
  - Criminal justice policies that unfairly affect sexually victimized women
  - Lack of media and/or entertainment depictions that counteract the pornographic female norm
  - Education about heteronormative sexual assumptions and practices
  - Non-discrimination policies across all the above domains

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