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Contemporary Representations of Female Sexuality: Liberation or Culturally Acceptable Pornography?

In this paper I will consider to what extent conceptions of femininity (both within and outside discourses informed by feminism), have been submerged under the dubious delights of 'raunch culture' celebrity culture, cosmetic surgery and the like. I will consider whether this seemingly 'free' and 'open' attitude to women's sexuality and their sex lives forms part of a liberatory discourse or whether it constitutes a backlash - a way to neutralise and displace the threatening possibilities contained within diverse discourses of the feminine. According to Ariel Levy, in *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, raunch culture is leading towards a point where most representations of femininity (increasingly those aimed at young women) have adopted the previously peripheral attributes of pornography. The paper will address whether or not young (and older) women are adopting values, behaviours and aspirations that, rather than being liberatory, lead them to merely present themselves as objects. Has women's objectification been internalised to the extent that 'male chauvinist pigs' are no longer necessary (although they still exist) because women themselves have stepped into the role of 'making sex objects out of other women and ourselves'? Additionally, I will examine arguments first encountered within second wave feminism insofar as it could be argued that what we experience today is the very opposite of the liberation discourses that the pro-sex thinkers foresaw, insofar as it (pornographised sexuality) is intrinsically very conservative and also saps women's sense of power and agency. A seemingly paradoxical aspect of this activity is that it becomes so mechanistic that it reintroduces a disturbingly passive and almost innocent element that denies the subversive possibilities of sexuality.