

The Hyper-sexualization of Lesbianism:

Media Representations and the Male Gaze

DRAFT INTRO AND OUTLINE

Film and television often portray lesbian relationships and identities through a lens that caters towards heterosexual male fantasy, commonly referred to as the male gaze. This not only over-shadows more authentic representations of lesbian experiences and contributes to the continuous use of stereotypical portrayals but leads to the hyper-sexualization and fetishization of lesbian women. Annati and Ramsey (2022) discuss how lesbians perceive media portrayals as stereotypical and excessively sexualized, stating that it is widely accepted and encouraged as the normative representation of lesbianism in film and television. For example, in shows like *Orange Is the New Black* and *The L Word*, where lesbians are central characters, their relationships often emphasize sexualized elements rather than exploring the emotional depth of their identities. Similarly, Randozzo et al. (2015) points out that media portrayals of lesbianism are often pessimistic, depicted as a temporary performance rather than a genuine, lasting identity. These representations support the misconception that same-sex attraction in women is temporary, reinforcing stereotypes about the fluidity and impermanence of women's same-sex attraction. This paper argues that the hyper-sexualization and fetishization of lesbian relationships in mainstream media, designed to appeal to heterosexual male audiences, distorts public perceptions and undermines the authenticity of lesbian identities, further continuing harmful stereotypes and contributing to societal biases.

REFERENCES

Annati, A., & Ramsey, L. R. (2022). Lesbian Perceptions of Stereotypical and Sexualized Media Portrayals. *Sexuality & Culture*, 26, 312-338.

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OUTLINE

1. Introduction

Overview of media portrayals of lesbian relationships and their hyper-sexualization, specifically catering to heterosexual male fantasies.

Thesis statement: the hyper-sexualization and fetishization of lesbian relationships in mainstream media, designed to appeal to heterosexual male audiences, distorts public perceptions and undermines the authenticity of lesbian identities, further continuing harmful stereotypes and contributing to societal biases.

2. Argument 1: The Male Gaze and Hyper-sexualization of Lesbian Relationships

Evidence: Annati and Ramsey (2022) on stereotypical and overly sexualized portrayals of lesbianism.

Examples: The L Word and Orange is the New Black as TV shows that depict lesbian relationships in a way that caters to male fantasies. As well as movies, but, I have not yet found specific examples for movies.

Impact: The portrayal of lesbian relationships as “experimental” or “performative” rather than authentic, which distorts public perceptions.

3. Argument 2: The Consequences of Sexualized Representation on Public Perception

Evidence: Studies and scholarly articles show how sexualized portrayals of lesbians contribute to misconceptions that lesbianism is a phase or temporary.

Analysis: The impact of these portrayals for both lesbian viewers, who feel invalidated, and heterosexual male viewers, who reinforce stereotypes for their own desire.

4. Conclusion

-Reiterate the negative impact of sexualization on the perception of lesbian identities in media.

-Restate thesis, emphasizing the need for more authentic, non-sexualized representations in media.