

Oversexualisation and Stereotypes in Visual Media: Capitalism, The Male Gaze, and
The Politics of Representation.

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Abstract:

This essay aims to explore how women are represented across media in the 21st century, analysing different media to understand their consequences on societal perceptions of femininity, identity, and power. The motivation behind this research comes from ongoing discussions surrounding visibility, stereotypes, and the influence of the male gaze, particularly in response to the harmful effects of both negative and “positive” stereotypes. Understanding these portrayals is important due to media not only reflecting cultural attitudes but actively shaping them — reinforcing expectations that affect how women are viewed and treated in everyday life.

To explore these dynamics, this essay examines a wide range of visual and narrative media, including advertisements, magazines, music videos, and video games, with a specific focus on the hyper sexualisation of women and the capitalist structures that aid and allow the continuation of these patterns. Case studies such as fashion photography by Terry Richardson, representation in pop music, and gendered character design within the game *Genshin Impact* demonstrate how media constructs and maintains limiting portrayals of women.

By analysing both male and female depictions across these contexts using the visual media invisibility theory, this essay emphasises the persistent double standards within media, as well as highlighting the important role that female hyper sexualisation plays in the patriarchy and capitalism.

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Author's Declaration:

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work

AI acknowledgment declaration:

I acknowledge the use of Grammarly (<https://www.grammarly.com/>) from 18 November – 9 December 2025 to check my work using the prompt(s):

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I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Introduction:

The discussion surrounding themes of representation has notably evolved throughout the 20th and 21st century, with a focus on correctly representing communities and minorities as well as discussing the harm negative representations can create. In my previous essay, I discussed the negative impacts of both negative and “positive” stereotypes — finding that regardless of whether a stereotype is accurate or not, it is harmful to the community. This ongoing discussion has highlighted how representation is not solely about visibility, but the accuracy and context of that visibility — revealing how certain portrayals can reinforce stereotypes and influence how individuals and communities are seen.

This essay will centre on the representation of women in visual media and its impacts on the patriarchy and capitalism, including its real-life effects on women to further explore the importance of representation within media. I will begin by examining how women are represented in advertisements and magazines to understand how visual media shapes societal perceptions of femininity, power, and identity, as well as how these portrayals not only reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes but how they benefit capitalism. Following this, I will delve into female representations in video games to explore how women are portrayed in comparison to their male counterparts — in terms of both their stories and personalities as well as their character designs, with a particular focus on clothing. Using *Genshin Impact* as a case study, I will examine how these portrayals reflect broader trends in gaming, highlighting the ongoing need for more balanced and respectful depictions of women. To continue my research, I will delve into the music industry and explore how women are portrayed and promoted compared to men in the same industry. This will include examining how female artists are often

marketed through physical appearances and sexuality — while male artists are more frequently promoted for their talent, creativity, or individuality. To further my understanding of this topic, I will also look at music videos that either continue to reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes within the industry. By comparing both male and female artists, I aim to highlight the imbalance in representation and the influence of the male gaze.

To conclude this essay, I will refine my understanding of the importance of representation in media to emphasize its effects on real individuals and communities, recognizing that these portrayals can have significant consequences.

Misrepresentation or the reinforcement of gender roles and stereotypes can negatively shape perceptions and impact the lives and lived experiences of those being represented.

Chapter 1:

The Invisibility Theory

Our collective knowledge as a society is heavily dependent on what is visible in the world around us — often distrusting what cannot be seen or proven visually, the invisible. Society's reliance on the phrase "seeing is believing" raises an important question: why has visibility become the primary measure of truth? Our trust doesn't stop at photographs and videos; textual-based rumours still hold significant power, yet photographs carry more power, somehow, feelings are more authoritative. And with the rise of AI and deepfakes, the line between real and fake blurs, a line that had already been blurred by Photoshop/ editing, and cropping/ framing, but the older generations' trust of the visible remains.

Photographs have the ability to construct reality — the framing of a photograph, as well as the stop and start of a video, represent the conscious decisions that can and will dramatically influence the narrative. While many artists and photographers are aware of the power their edits hold, the public continues to interpret the resulting images as truthful representations of reality. We are often exposed to the same images and narratives a multitude of times, which causes us to subconsciously believe and trust what is visible. "The illusory truth effect, also known as the illusion of truth, describes how when we hear the same false information repeated again and again, we often come to believe it is true... The main reason for the illusory truth effect is processing fluency: when something is easy to process (as familiar information is), we tend to assume that means it is accurate." (Pilat and Krastev, no date)

In truth, it is entirely a mystery as to why society as a whole so blindly trusts the visible within photographs. One explanation is that imagery has the capacity to recreate the experience of physically witnessing an event, making viewers more inclined to believe and trust it.

But what is the relevance of the invisible and visible in regard to female representation in media? When stereotypes are created/ reinforced, it is within our human nature to blindly believe and buy into the stereotypes, whether it is something we do consciously or not. The power structures of social and racial prejudices frame what we see and/ or know, creating blind spots and oversights. In summary, it is a cycle. We learn from already existing stereotypes, which creates oversights in knowledge, resulting in the reinforcement of these existing stereotypes in media.

The theory of invisibility proposes that if we do not see it, it does not exist, and if we do see it, it does exist — this is how media creates and reinforces stereotypes. In my previous essay, it is understood why stereotypes are bad and with the knowledge of the role media has in creating/ reinforcing stereotypes, we can understand the importance of truthful and fair representation in media, photography, advertisement, and magazines.

Oversexualisation in Media & Catering to Capitalism

The (over)sexualisation of people in media and advertising is a continuous problem regardless of gender, with both men and women being sexualised to promote or advertise a product. "But nowadays several women's magazines objectify men using the same kind of language and imagery as the men's magazines..." (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 196). However, the (over)sexualisation of men in these instances appears to be a relatively new theme within media, developing at the start of the 20th century and developing steadily. This leads us to question whether such changes might be interpreted as a form of retaliation towards men as women assume more positions of power, or as a problematic strategy that merely excuses the ongoing sexualisation of women. Regardless of the reason, the (over)sexualisation of people is an issue, but women face significantly more sexualisation than men, and it is more controversial to sexualise women for a plethora of reasons.

John Berger argues that women cannot simply exist, every action contributing to her presence, meaning that women have to analyse their every action — her sense of self being replaced by the sense of being appreciated by others. Berger also states

that men will survey a woman before deciding how to treat her, their presence and actions affecting how they will be treated.

She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. Men survey women before treating them. Consequently how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated. (John Berger, 1972, p. 46)

This, among many others, is the reason why the (over)sexualisation of women is significantly worse than the (over)sexualisation of men — it reflects real-life problems. Seeing unrealistic bodies, repeatedly, sexualised in media, teaches men what they should want and look for in a woman, as well as determining how they go on to treat women. This places even more importance on a woman's every action and her presence, which, in turn, reinforces stereotypes.

Every one of her actions — whatever its direct purpose or motivation — is also read as an indicator of how she would like to be treated. If a woman throws a glass on the floor, this is an example of how she treats her own emotion of anger and so of how she would wish it to be treated by others. If a man does the same, his action is only read as an expression of his anger. If a woman makes a good joke this is an example of how she treats the joker in herself and accordingly of how she as a joker-woman would like to be treated by others. Only a man can make a good joke for its own sake. (John Berger, 1972, p. 47)

Historically, and continuing into the present day, men have held the majority of positions of power, or, at the very least, they largely dominate these professions, with men making up 93-96% of CEO positions in the UK and 65% of members of the Commons and Lords in the House of Parliament. This suggests that men are the audience with the greatest profit potential and the most influence over media and advertising choices, making it most logical to cater to the male gaze. But media also caters to capitalism — putting money into the pockets of the men in power.

It proposes to each of us that we transform ourselves, or our lives, by buying something more... Publicity persuades us of such a transformation by showing us people who have apparently been transformed and are, as a result, enviable. (John Berger, 1972, p. 131)

By catering to these groups and reinforcing stereotypes, media capitalises on profits from men while also encouraging women to spend money by buying the products being advertised. But how exactly does the (over)sexualisation of women cater to capitalism? Envy. Through the sexualisation and display of "perfect" and "desirable" bodies, average women are prompted to experience feelings of envy and internalise the belief that acquiring the advertised products will enable them to achieve that same idealised perfection. "If you are able to buy this product you will be lovable. If you cannot buy it, you will be less lovable... With this you *will* become desirable. In these surroundings all your relationships *will* become happy and radiant." (John Berger, 1972, p. 144)

With the use of models with unrealistic and (virtually) unattainable bodies, repeat customers are created. This occurs because the bodies depicted are unattainable. The average woman cannot, realistically, achieve these ideals and goals, so she

continues to purchase the advertised products, persuaded by the false promise that they will allow her to attain a similar look/ body.

Terry Richardson

"Women are objectified, women are treated as bodies — and in particular, bodies that exist for the use and pleasure of others." (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, *cited in* Muntyan, 2016).



Fig 1.



Fig 2.

The images of Kylie Jenner and Kim Kardashian combine playful and provocative elements, displaying how quickly the media can turn innocence into something sexual. The playful aspects make them appear younger or more innocent, reflecting

society's interest in women's innocence and purity. Simultaneously, the poses and props are designed to be sexual, drawing attention to their bodies and creating a clear sense of objectification. Due to the suggestive nature of the images, even the playful aspects become sexualised.



Fig 3.



Fig 4.

This combination reinforces the idea that women are expected to embody both innocence and sexual attractiveness at the same time. Ultimately, such imagery shapes public perceptions of what is considered "ideal" or "beautiful", which relates to the invisibility theory discussed previously — this is because, when this is what we see, it shapes what we believe. When women are shown as both innocent and sexual, that portrayal defines them because any other portrayal is invisible, and we blindly trust the visible.

Through work such as Terry Richardson's, powerful fashion photography in established, powerful magazines, campaigns, and advertisements can impact our perception of ourselves and others, while simultaneously internalising these visuals and perceiving them as "the norm".

[The] male gaze transforms women into objects of the heterosexual man's eye... advertisements and other images of women are shot in such ways that encourage female audiences to adopt a certain perspective when looking at other women and themselves. (Muntyan, D. 2016)

Chapter 2:

Women's History

Historically, women have been positioned under male authority and treated as lower ranking than men, facing numerous restrictions legally, economically, socially, and politically. In the US, married women were viewed as an extension of their husbands, thus not allowing them to do a plethora of things, including, but not limited to: not owning property under their own name, not having control of their wages/ inheritance, and not being allowed to sign contracts, sue/ be sued, make wills, or control custody of their children.

But the limitations placed on women extend far beyond this. There were, and in many ways still are, significant restrictions on women globally, making everyday life considerably more challenging. Women faced structural barriers in most, if not every part of society — for example, they could legally be fired for becoming pregnant, and abortion was, and still is in certain countries, completely illegal, leaving them with little control over their own bodies. They could not have their own names printed in their passports, could not open a bank account without a man's permission, and often struggled to obtain credit even decades later. Women were barred from sitting in the House of Lords and were routinely paid less than men for the same work, reinforcing economic inequality. Access to higher education was restricted, limiting

career opportunities, and on top of this, marital rape was not legally recognised for most of history, reflecting how little autonomy married women were granted. All of these examples highlight how deeply women's rights and freedoms have been limited, both socially and legally, across time.

Tropes

Within video games, there are a multitude of different tropes — some of these are genderless, e.g, the chosen one, the mentor, and the betrayer; while others are more gendered, e.g, the stoic hero (men), femme fatale (women), the protector (men), and the damsel in distress (women). Often, these tropes reinforce stereotypes, with male tropes being more focused on power, dominance, and/ or agency, while female tropes tend to emphasise appearance, desirability, and/ or vulnerability. The stoic hero and the protector both represent men in a way that focuses on their power and dominance, as well as their responsibility over women, while the femme fatale focuses on the character's appearance and desirability, and the damsel in distress focuses on the character's desirability and vulnerability.

The damsel in distress is a female (damsel) character in trouble (distress), whose entire purpose is to be saved by the male main character — these characters are related to each other through family or, most often, romance. This trope is outdated and isn't used as often today in video games, and if it is, it's used more discreetly — often, this trope is used in superhero stories to motivate the male lead.

The damsel in distress trope turns women into props, recreating history — in a fictional sense — by leaving the female characters at the disposal of the male characters. Since women were historically, and to an extent still are, at the disposal

of men, reliant on their fathers and husbands for support and aid to not only live but exist. This trope isn't used to retell or criticise this history, it is used to make male characters look powerful and dominant, as well as to sell/ promote the game to male audiences.

...It turns women into props by completely denying them agency and victimising them. When a woman is turned into a damsel in distress, all agency is stripped away from her. She can no longer do anything. She's at the mercy of her kidnappers. This effectively turns her into an object. She no longer has the ability to make choices or impact the plot. Rather, she is an item that the male hero must go and retrieve. (fandomsandfeminism, n.d)

Character Design — Clothing:

In video games, clothing, beauty and sexual appeal/ desirability are heavily focused on in relation to female characters, whereas male characters are defined by their story, lore, and role within the narrative. This demonstrates how games typically prioritise female appearance over character depth, while male character depth is largely valued.

This all contributes to the hypersexualisation of female characters.

Hypersexualisation in media occurs when a character is designed to be valued primarily for their sexual characteristics or behaviours. In

hypersexualised characters, these attributes are highlighted above all else and made the centre of attention, while everything else about the character is made secondary. (Feminist Frequency, 2016)

Female characters are frequently put into physically demanding situations; however, their clothing is often lacking due to them being sexualised and underdressed, making their outfits impractical, offering no protection. While this in itself is a problem, it worsens when compared to their male counterparts — the male characters within the same games and situations are continuously dressed appropriately with correct protection.

...The sexuality these characters exude is manufactured for, and presented as existing for, the presumed straight male player... Main characters in video games are often created as visual spectacles primarily from a heterosexual male perspective. Female characters in these games are typically portrayed as objects of male desire and are depicted in passive roles. (Feminist Frequency, 2016)

Girls often have less exposure to video games due to stereotypes suggesting they prefer dolls or other “feminine” toys. This results in men dominating the gaming audience, with 62% of gamers being men — 51% of all men consider themselves as gamers, while only 38% of women consider themselves as gamers. This means that there is a larger male audience in relation to most games, meaning that catering to the male gaze has a larger profit potential.

With public figures such as Charlie Kirk, Andrew Tate, and Donald Trump gaining an audience, many young straight men are adopting questionable attitudes and values. As a result, some develop expectations for video games to include half-naked or highly sexualised female characters, reinforcing harmful ideas about women and desirability. Due to men making up the dominant gaming audience, companies often choose to cater to their preferences in order to maximise profit. Designing games

around the male gaze becomes a strategic choice, as it is seen as more financially rewarding for these companies.

Character Design — Genshin Impact

To understand the differences in female and male character design in video games, I will analyse characters from *Genshin Impact* — selecting characters from similar regions and narrative contexts to compare their clothing. To achieve a full understanding of the characters' clothing designs, I will take into consideration the characters' cultural and regional influences, as some characters in *Genshin Impact* are dressed accordingly within their cultural influence and story background.

I will focus on two important characters in *Genshin Impact* for my analysis, both characters being gods (Archons) of their respective nations — Zhongli, the Geo Archon of Liyue, and Raiden Shogun (Also known as Ei), the Electro Archon of Inazuma. These two characters hold similar positions within their region's narrative, making them suitable characters to examine gendered differences in character designs.

Liyue the nation of contracts and is heavily inspired by China and its traditions. Each detail surrounding the nation takes direct influence from the country, from architecture to clothing and patterns. The fashion in Liyue draws inspiration from a multitude of different Chinese fashion themes, including the cheongsam, hanfu, tangzhuang, and Chinese qipao. Although the clothing isn't based on any particular Chinese dynasties, it does take inspiration from the culture. Naturally, the nation's Archon (God), Zhongli, wears clothing strongly inspired by Chinese clothing, reflecting Liyue's cultural foundation.



Fig 5.

Zhongli wears a long, elegant coat, coloured in dark browns and blacks with gold accents, creating a formal and refined look — the outfit is covering and layered, reflecting traditional robe-like garments. Sharp, geometric patterns resemble motifs found in Chinese architecture and textiles, while tassels and ornate decorations further reinforce this cultural influence. His brown, black, and gold colour palette, commonly associated with stability and authority, enhances his dignified presence and reflects the contracts that the nation is built upon.

Inazuma, the nation of eternity, is heavily inspired by Japan and its traditional culture. Every aspect of the region draws clear influence from Japanese aesthetics. Fashion in Inazuma incorporates elements from a plethora of various historical and cultural styles, including kimono, kasa, ashigaru, yukata, hakama, and samurai armour design. Inazuma's Archon (God), Raiden Shogun (or Ei), wears clothing that reflects these influences while also being noticeably sexualised.

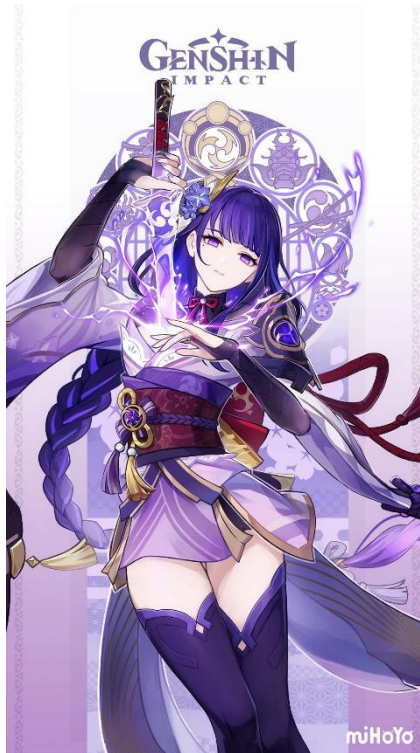


Fig 6.

Raiden Shogun's outfit blends elements of kimono, yukata, and samurai-inspired garments, creating a layered yet revealing design. Wide sleeves, patterned fabrics and decorative knots mirror traditional Japanese motifs, while her purple, red, and black colour palette aligns with colours associated with power and divinity. However, unlike historical Japanese attire, her clothing is sexualised, featuring a short skirt, exposed chest area, and form-fitting details. Traditionally, a kimono is a covering garment, being 30-40 cm shorter than the person wearing it, and covering the chest, but Shogun's kimono clearly does not follow these rules.

Overall, Zhongli's design emphasises tradition, regality, and narrative rather than physical appeal, presenting him as a dignified authority figure whose clothing reflects cultural heritage as well as the nation's beliefs without drawing attention to his body. In contrast, Raiden Shogun's design, while also rooted in strong cultural inspiration, takes a noticeably more sexual presentation. Her outfit blends traditional Japanese

elements with revealing features that highlight her physical form. This creates a clear visual contrast between the two Archons: Zhongli embodies modesty and restrained elegance, whereas Raiden's design merges cultural homage with overt femininity. Together, these differences reveal how gendered expectations shape the visual representation of power and leadership in character design.

Chapter 3:

Influence:

There have been many occasions where pop singers have acted as trendsetters, using their style to make a statement or focusing on their outfits as a form of self-expression. An example of this is Madonna, known for empowerment by making bold fashion choices that challenge traditional ideas of femininity. When pop artists show confidence in their own appearance and style, it encourages fans to feel confident in dressing how they want as well. Music videos, red carpets, and concerts all serve as a way for artists to display their fashion, becoming major sources of inspiration for their audiences. (Camryn, R. 2024)

...It is important that the music industry is constantly aware of how they present sexuality, especially since music videos are so accessible to those who are young and easily influenced. (Mewawalla, T. 2019)

Pop music is omnipresent, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and those around them. Through its lyrics, visuals, and carefully crafted celebrity images, it reinforces cultural norms and shapes expectations regarding beauty, behaviour, and identity. Many pop songs reinforce gender stereotypes, portraying women as emotional, focused on beauty, and defined by relationships, while men are

associated with strength and independence. The repetition of these themes in pop music aids in the establishment of societal expectations for gender roles. Frequently, female artists are evaluated through their appearance and sexuality, influencing cultural ideas of femininity, whereas male artists are commonly recognised for their musical skills and perceived leadership qualities. (Pop Music Gurus, 2025)

Double Standards:

When female artists return with new music, they are expected to have new, unique looks and fresh sounds each time, while it is more appreciated for men to have a more authentic and relaxed persona, following the same theme and sounds with each song release. Using a similar sound and style for men is merely maintaining their brand, but for women, this is seen as not "trying hard enough".

Male artists are frequently met with minimal backlash for lyrics containing explicit and graphic descriptions or sexual themes, while female artists, such as Taylor Swift, are often mocked, ridiculed, and portrayed as over-emotional and unable to move on from a bad break-up.

When female artists attempt to embrace their sexuality or express confidence in their own bodies, they are often met with backlash, specifically from parents of young fans, who argue that these artists should "know better" and that younger audiences should not be exposed to such content. However, when male artists engage in similar displays, it is far more normalised and framed as the responsibility of parents to monitor what their children see, rather than a moral failing of the artist. This double standard reinforces the notion that women's sexuality is inherently more controversial, policed, or inappropriate, while men's sexual expression is accepted within the industry.

There is also a noticeable double standard in the way that artists are treated in regard to drama and being "cancelled". An example of this is the backlash Taylor Swift received following her drama with Kanye West at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards. During Swift's speech for winning "Best Female Video", West took to the stage to interrupt Swift and stated that Beyoncé should have won. "Yo, Taylor. I'm really happy for you, Ima let you finish, but Beyoncé had one of the best videos of all time, one of the best videos of all time" (OCCULT, 2017)

The backlash Swift received from this incident almost caused her to walk away from her career, while male artists such as Chris Brown, who are accused of violence and abuse, are praised and forgiven. To this day, the drama between Swift and West continues, with many internet users claiming they like West simply because they do not like Taylor Swift's music, and vice versa.

Female artists in the 2000s, such as Britney Spears and Miley Cyrus, were frequently sexualised regardless of what they wore. Whether they wore minimal clothing or something as simple as a school uniform, their outfits were seen as sexual. School uniforms, specifically girls', have long been sexualised because of their links to harmful ideas regarding purity and innocence.

Today, artists like Little Mix and Olivia Rodrigo continue to face criticism when wearing more revealing clothing, yet their outfits are sexualised anyway, regardless of whether they are modest or bold. This demonstrates that the issue is not the clothing itself, but the way audiences are conditioned to view women's bodies.



Fig 7.



Fig 8.

Audiences repeatedly attempt to sexualise female artists, but when artists such as Sabrina Carpenter, Little Mix, or Olivia Rodrigo try to reclaim this narrative by choosing how to present their own bodies, they are often mocked, judged, or ridiculed. Their autonomy is questioned, and their choices are treated as inappropriate or attention-seeking. Male artists, however, experience this kind of scrutiny far less often. When men embrace their sexuality or appear shirtless in performances and videos, it is typically accepted as normal. This double standard highlights how deeply gendered expectations and objectification remain within pop culture and music.

Sex Sells:

Women tend to be objectified and sexualised more frequently than men in media, largely due to the belief that "sex sells", and unsurprisingly, it is true. The term "sex sells" suggests that the use of sexual imagery or appeal in advertising is an effective form of marketing products and services by capturing attention to increase sales due to the belief that sexual content garners attention.

To sell a large amount of a product quickly, many companies rely on the idea that "sex sells". This approach is seen as a more effective strategy in marketing rather

than describing the product, comparing it to competitors, or simply displaying it. Marketing teams understand that there is a link between what an audience finds appealing and what they purchase — with sex being widely viewed as appealing, marketing teams connect their products to sexual imagery. As a result, advertisers frequently use sexualised and objectified individuals in their campaigns with the knowledge/ belief that this will boost sales. But often, the product has very little relation to the imagery, it is simply used as an attention grabber — something that causes a Pavlovian response that associates sex with the product.

Classical conditioning, aka Pavlovian conditioning, is a form of learning where an association is made between a neutral stimulus and a naturally occurring stimulus that automatically elicits a response. (Cherry, K. 2025)

The use of "sex sells" can be commonly found in pop music videos — research finds that on average, the music videos with the most views usually include more provocative themes, with a focus on women.

Music Videos:

It is often that music videos serve as a visual extension of an artist's or song's message, but frequently, they reveal the common objectification and gender stereotypes in mainstream media. Female artists are routinely depicted in ways that highlight their bodies even when themes of empowerment are present, while male artists and men are often shown as active, fully clothed, and in positions of control or focus. By examining the most viewed music videos by male and female artists, my research demonstrates how common and normalised these portrayals are.

In *Roar* by Katy Perry, it is clear that the main theme centres on female independence and self-confidence, however, despite the empowering narrative, the

costumes contradict the messaging of the video. Early in the video, Perry's clothing is ripped and torn before eventually turning into an outfit that accentuates her chest and curves. This could be intended to represent transformation and survival, but the choice to make her clothing increasingly revealing plays into long-standing tendencies within the music industry to sexualise women, even when the theme does not require it. Not only does this reinforce objectifying visual tropes, but it also undercuts the empowering message.

The surface themes of Shakira's *Waka Waka* relate to unity, celebration, and global solidarity during the World Cup, yet the video centres heavily on male athletes playing football while the women, specifically Shakira and the backup dancers, are framed through movements and outfits that draw deliberate attention to their hips and legs. The choreography becomes a focal point of the visuals as it emphasizes fluid, rhythmic hip motions and as a result, female bodies become part of a spectacle in a way that male bodies are not. This highlights the uneven representation between the two genders.

Fifth Harmony's *Work* takes sexual expression even further, with the song itself centering on intimacy and desire. The video applies this theme through highly suggestive partnered and solo dancing with the artists wearing revealing outfits that highlight curves and the style of movement. While sexual agency can be a form of empowerment, this video still aligns with the pattern in which women's bodies are used as primary visuals. This raises questions about whether the portrayal aims to support independence or cater to the male gaze.

The music video for *Worth It*, by the same group, intentionally frames the artists as "office sirens", business-themed clothing being used to exaggerate their curves and

cleavage. These visuals play with the idea of power while also relying heavily on sexual appeal, which blends ideas such as empowerment and objectification.

In *Despacito*, there is a clear contrast between the portrayal of the men and women within the music video. While the men appear in casual and non-sexualised clothing, performing normally within their environment, the women dance in highly suggestive manners and wear short outfits that emphasize their curves.

Other top-viewed music videos by male artists differ dramatically. *Shape of You* contains male and female leads dressed minimally, primarily due to their athletic setting. *See You Again* offers a respectful and emotional tribute, and *Crazy Frog*, an animated novelty, avoids gendered objectification altogether.

A clear pattern emerges across these examples — female performers are more often sexualised regardless of the song's theme or the gender of the artist, while men take a wider range of representation. This demonstrates the ongoing influence of the male gaze within the music industry.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the representation of women in visual media, from advertisements and magazines to music videos and video games, reveals a long-standing pattern of imbalance in which female bodies are sexualised, objectified, and shaped through the lens of the male gaze. These portrayals, while often seen as harmless entertainment or aesthetic choices, carry significant influence. Through repeated exposure, visibility, and cultural authority, media constructs norms about femininity, desirability, and women's roles, defining what is perceived as "normal" or "ideal." As discussed through the invisibility theory, what is most visible becomes easily

believed, meaning that the narrow depictions of women we view continuously not only reflect existing stereotypes but also continuously reinforce them.

This cycle is further strengthened by capitalism, which profits from insecurity and sexual appeal. The oversexualisation of women is used as a marketing strategy that benefits male-dominated industries while encouraging women to invest in products that promise unobtainable ideals. Case studies such as Terry Richardson's fashion photography and the double standards in the music industry expose how women are exploited, expected to embody innocence and sensuality simultaneously, criticised more heavily than men, and judged for reclaiming sexuality even when men are celebrated for similar behaviour.

Additionally, representations in video games display how gendered character design recreates these biases on a structural level. While male characters are often based in narrative, power, and cultural significance, female characters are frequently hypersexualised, dressed impractically, or positioned within limiting tropes. The contrast between Zhongli and Raiden Shogun in *Genshin Impact* symbolises how even when cultural inspiration is symmetrical, gendered expectations distort female designs in aspects that prioritise visual appeal over character depth or functionality.

In summary, while representation does show signs of progression throughout the 21st century, shaped by activism and public discussion, underlying patterns remain deeply rooted.

Misrepresentation and sexualisation do more than influence aesthetics — they impact how real women are perceived and treated. The continuation of prioritising desirability over humanity reinforces inequalities, shapes societal attitudes, and narrows the possibilities for how women can exist both on-screen and in everyday

life. Recognising the power of media representation is therefore essential, not only to critique harmful portrayals but to advocate for more accurate and respectful representations that reflect women's full identities rather than reducing them to visual objects.

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