



Beyond Explicit: Pornography and the Displacement of Sex

Helen Hester

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Develops a novel characterization of the pornographic as a cultural concept.

This original contribution to porn studies aims to interrogate previously untheorized changes in contemporary understandings of the pornographic. Helen Hester argues that the words “porn” and “pornographic” are currently being applied to an ever-expanding range of material and that this change in language usage reflects a wider shift in perception. She suggests that we are witnessing a seemingly paradoxical move away from sex within contemporary understandings of porn, as a range of other factors come to influence the concept. Using examples from media, literature, and culture, and discussing the rise of notions such as “torture porn” and “misery porn,” Hester’s argument ranges from sexually explicit German novels and British policy documents to a discussion of the differences between European and American editions of pornographic films. She concludes that four factors in particular—transgression, intensity, prurience, and authenticity—can be seen to influence the way that we think about porn.

Helen Hester is Lecturer in Promotional Cultures at Middlesex University, London.

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