



The Vulnerable Empowered Woman: Feminism, Postfeminism, and Women's Health (Critical Issues in Health and Medicine)

Professor Tasha N. Dubriwny

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The feminist women's health movement of the 1960s and 1970s is credited with creating significant changes in the healthcare industry and bringing women's health issues to public attention. Decades later, women's health issues are more visible than ever before, but that visibility is made possible by a process of depoliticization

The Vulnerable Empowered Woman assesses the state of women's healthcare today by analyzing popular media representations—television, print newspapers, websites, advertisements, blogs, and memoirs—in order to understand the ways in which breast cancer, postpartum depression, and cervical cancer are discussed in American public life. From narratives about prophylactic mastectomies to young girls receiving a vaccine for sexually transmitted disease, the representations of women's health today form a single restrictive identity: the vulnerable empowered woman. This identity defuses feminist notions of collective empowerment and social change by drawing from both postfeminist and neoliberal ideologies. The woman is vulnerable because of her very femininity and is empowered not to change the world, but to choose from among a limited set of medical treatments.

The media's depiction of the vulnerable empowered woman's relationship with biomedicine promotes traditional gender roles and affirms women's unquestioning reliance on medical science for empowerment. The book concludes with a call to repoliticize women's health through narratives that can help us imagine women—and their relationship to medicine—differently.

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