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Introduction

Aline Brosh McKenna and Rachel Bloom's "Crazy Ex Girlfriend" follows the life of Rebecca Bunch (Bloom), who abandons a promising career as an attorney in New York to follow her ex boyfriend from a decade ago, to California. An episode in the first season depicts Rebecca volunteering at the same summer camp as Josh in order to get closer to him. When all does not go as planned, however, she finds herself bruised, rejected, and lost in a cabin full of teenage girls, who remind her to pick herself up. They accomplish this through the original song "Put Yourself First," a female empowerment anthem that directly parodies the work of the popular all-female ensemble Fifth Harmony. The girls descend on Rebecca with lipstick and

labeled "Male Gaze"; but while a satirical television show has the ability to explicitly anthropomorphize the concept of the male gaze and objectification, recognizing these practices in reality proves to be much more difficult, especially in the midst of such situations.

Gender becomes even more complex when one looks beyond identifying as male or female and recognizes that some people identify as something entirely different. Many people around the world fall under the nonbinary umbrella, a set of identities that exists beyond the binary, or two-parted, system of gender that mainstream society upholds. For example, those who identify as agender feel neither male nor female, and instead live comfortably without classifying themselves as a particular gender. Those who identify as gender fluid do not feel that they have a fixed gender but rather fluctuate between genders over time. Others identify as simply nonbinary denoting that they do not feel that they live, or that they should have, to live within the gender binary. As of 2014, Facebook offered eight gender options for users to mark on their profiles, showing the wide range of identities that people claim and demonstrating that gender is a much more multifaceted experience than we believe it to be.

“Doing Gender” Theory

On the surface, gender is often reduced to a simplistic dichotomy of male or female, masculine and feminine, and people become categorized accordingly. Sociologist Betsy Lucal (1999) further explains the binary system of gender, stating that people’s polarized views regarding gender lead them to use socialized cues to classify others into one of two classes, and anyone who does not neatly fit into “male” or “female” is automatically viewed as illegitimate or abnormal (p. 784). To avoid confusion and ridicule, therefore, people learn to do a gender, either male or female, and “do” the differing actions and behaviors associated with each. These performances become so socialized in our experience as humans that they are so much ingrained in our lives but rather become their bases

Because our appearances, mannerisms, and so forth constantly are being read as part of our gender display, we do gender whether we intend to or not. For

Gender Hegemony and the Devaluation of the Feminine

If femininity exists as the process of adding “extras” to differentiate

In other words, the perceived physical dominance of men over women translates to a larger societal perception of men's overall dominance. It is important here to emphasize that men do not in actuality have to dominate women in all aspects of society; instead, the mere perception that they do creates a symbolic complex that perpetuates the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity.

It is also paramount to acknowledge that within the gender hegemony, masculinity and femininity are tied to their "appropriate" actors, meaning men acting masculinely and women acting femininely. The devaluation of the feminine is the phenomenon that allows women now to wear pants (moving up the hierarchy through a "masculine" action) but bars men from wearing skirts (moving down the hierarchy by adopting a "feminine" action). When a man acts feminine, other men invoke what Schipper (2007) describes as the "masculine hegemony," the hierarchy within masculinity that places the most masculine men above less masculine men, resulting in "the subordination and marginalization of other masculinities" (p. 87). Therefore, men who adopt feminine actions, such as wearing skirts and makeup are perceived as lesser because, by being feminine, they are placing themselves lower on the hierarchy established by the gender hegemony.

While society now largely allows women to discard their polka-dot bows and skirts, we must still be, at least in some sense, a Minnie. We can wear pants, but they must be women's pants—flatteringly fitted, cut to showcase shoes. We can do away with a cumbersome bow, but our hair must still remain long, or at least styled with a feminine flair. We can play sports and be physically powerful, but we must still look good while doing so, and we are still encouraged to shrink ourselves through exercise and dieting if we don't—if we fail or refuse—we fall lower not only within the gender hegemony but "feminine hegemony," just like its masculine

counterpart, the feminine hegemony involves an ascendancy of certain expressions of femininity over others (Schippers, 2007, p. 94). For example, while it is possible for a woman to be and feel feminine with a buzzed haircut, such an expression would place lower on the ladder than, say, the more typically feminine one of long blonde curls. Therefore, implied within the concept of gender hegemonies is the existence of multiple masculinities and femininities, ones that uphold the established hierarchy and ones that challenge it. The challenge is polkadotted Miceys, the eyelashless Minnies—find themselves stared at, slandered, ridiculed, even harassed because of their embodied opposition to the conventional perception of gender expression. So, yes, women can now wear pants, but I'm waiting to cheer until men can wear lace dresses with no one blinking an eye.

Raunch Culture and Weaponized Femininity

Raunch Culture

The various power structures inherent in gender play a large role in how people behave and choose to present themselves as they conform to masculine and feminine expectations not only to avoid ridicule, but to seek out societal benefits. In the case of coerced femininity, however, the benefits may not outweigh the damage one may do to her body, her internal psyche, and the overall state of gender equality. Author Ariel Levy explores the idea of conforming to socially accepted expressions of femininity and womanhood in the book *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. According to (2005), "raunch culture" encompasses a society in which a specific brand of women's sexuality, slutty stereotypes," has become codified and commodified, leading women to be objectified, objectify others, and objectify themselves (94).

(168). Instead of feeling free to express themselves however they see fit, women often believe

the feminine rears its head, and the “female chauvinist pigs” Levy describes use the phenomenon

describes to appeal to men and in turn gain social benefits. However, raunch culture is not the only phenomenon to arise from the devaluation of the feminine; women have also created a culture of embracing a certain version of ~~ant~~masculine femininity, called here ~~we~~“weaponized femininity,” to combat patriarchal ideals.

Weaponized femininity is a fairly new concept, birthed and popularized through social media sites, but what it lacks in ~~per~~reviewed scholarship, it makes up for in discourse on websites like Tumblr, Twitter, Pinterest, and ~~Redd~~Reddit. It may be viewed as a subset of raunch culture in the sense that it embraces a particular type of feminine expression as an avenue to a particular type of empowerment, ~~but~~ it is distinct in that it involves an acknowledged disdain for the masculine. Women who engage in weaponized femininity use a “girly” feminine expression to subvert the gender hegemony by reclaiming femininity and infusing it with intentional feminist intent, thereby reframing the feminine as a politically charged, even dangerous identity. Instead of simultaneously rejecting and conforming to an accepted form of femininity as in raunch culture, the culture of weaponized femininity attempts to ~~trans~~gender roles by transforming the feminine—usually viewed as soft and nonthreatening—into an act of aggression.

How, then, can femininity become weaponized? A search for “weaponized femininity” on Pinterest reveals images of women, more often than not, ~~white~~ and conventionally attractive, wearing dresses and heels while wielding a knife or gun. There are daggers sheathed in G-strings and pistols adorned with roses, meant to jar the audience with the combination of the nonaggressive (feminine) and the violent (masculine). These images occur alongside photographs of extensive lipstick and eyeliner collections, and even advertisements for certain makeup brands such as one called WarPaint. Taken all together, the Pinterest results reveal a

In both raunch culture and the culture of weaponized femininity, women are not passive victims; to assert as much would be an insult to the intelligence of the innumerable women who have engaged in both sets of practices. Instead, it is often a conscious decision to don revealing clothing or to regard makeup as war paint, and women who choose to do so believe it is to their benefit on some level, whether in the name of subverting gender roles, feeling comfortable in their bodies, or simply having fun. The evident contradictions, however, invite scrutiny as to why this occurs—why women choose behaviors they may or may not recognize as doing to themselves or other women.

Patriarchal Bargaining

One explanation could rest in the phenomenon of patriarchal bargaining defined by Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) as women's strategies and coping mechanisms in dealing with the concrete gendered restrictions placed upon them (275). According to Kandiyoti, "patriarchal

Internalized Oppression and Domination

Psychological factors could also play a role in women embracing roles that perpetuate their “lesser” placement on the hierarchy. University of Chicago researcher Gail Pheterson (1986) examined some of the psychological and social processes that underscored divisions between women as discovered by the Feminist Alliance Project in the Netherlands (p. 146). Two prominent concepts arose: internalized oppression and internalized domination. Internalized oppression is the process by which oppressed individuals, in this case women, accept their lower status within the dominant society and incorporate it into their behavior. It is often characterized by “self-hatred, self-concealment, fear of violence and feelings of inferiority, resignation,

adhere to socially rewarded yet problematic expressions of femininity. R. Claire Snyder (2010) discusses the character of the third wave feminism, developed in the 1990s and continuing today, as a movement that seeks to reconcile traditional femininity with the ideals of feminism by exploring the relationship between gender equality and sexual freedom (p. 255). This new, inclusive wave of feminism driven by the idea of individual choice and self-determination invites its own set of questions: is the concept of free choice inherently problematic because it allows women to perpetuate the gender hegemony? Should women who make choices deserve negative judgment? Is it anti-feminist to engage in raunch culture or weaponized femininity? Is it anti-feminist to say that it is anti-feminist?

“The New Femininity” and Third Wave Choice

Contemporary feminism draws strength and pride in declaring itself new, different from past iterations of feminism that focused on narrower objectives. Women have won the right to vote, to attend coed colleges and universities, and many other triumphs; third wave feminism expands the fight for gender equality to become more pluralistic and inclusive, celebrating a range of feminine expressions and choices to reach full self-determination. However, exactly how these ideas manifest in practice must be examined.

Anthea Taylor (2003) encourages scrutinizing new ideas within feminism to determine whether they are truly progressive and defiant to the gender hegemony. Through Taylor examined feminism in the early 2000s, before Ariel Levy published *Female Chauvinist Pig*, before the concept of weaponized femininity took hold of Internet spaces, she predicts the two phenomena in determining that the “new femininity,” as she names it, hinges upon two ideals: celebrating rather than denigrating femininity, and characterizing women’s

attempts of weaponized femininity to raise up femininity by attaching it to an aggressive agenda; the latter reflects raunch culture's embracing of women who subjectify themselves and other women. These parallels demonstrate that Taylor's "new femininity" meets the same pitfalls—perhaps empowering a small number of women, but ultimately "[shoring] up, rather than [contesting], a particular symbolic order," here meaning the gender hegemony (Taylor, 2003, n.p.). If feminism is about achieving gender equality, it must challenge the unequal dynamic established within the gender hegemony; raunch culture, weaponized femininity, and the idea Taylor discusses of *antefemininity* may purport to work towards gender equality, but all three fall short of truly challenging the patriarchal power dynamic. Therefore, when women choose to engage in the practices attached to such cultures, they are not being "feminist" in the sense of actively challenging exist weaet'n 10((,)anl-4(s)-dw)4(eD(l)eix t)-6eTm1z(t)b,hMC /P <</MCID

ostensibly making the best decisions for themselves, and instead more useful for a woman to find

Sexualization of Girls found that sexualization and objectification destroy confidence and reduce one's comfort in her own body, leading to guilt, shame, anxiety, and disgust (Erstein, Mantilla, Manzano, & Seelhoff, p. 5). The culture that promotes excessive sexualization of young girls also promotes the risk of developing depression and anorexia or bulimia, along with increased instances of sexual intercourse and sexual aggression (p. 5). The set of characteristics acceptable within raunch culture, weaponized femininity, and the new femininity contribute to women of all ages believing they must conform to a certain standard, and if they don't, they may be at risk of damaging their bodies and brains to achieve an impossible standard.

The psychological harm that can arise from self-objectification therefore places women's choices in a new context. If a woman who objectifies herself à la raunch culture presents herself to an audience of other women, as in the case of a porn star, can she be blamed for inflicting such damage on her peers? The answer once again lies in Levy and Sly's misgivings about free sexuality. It is not the fault of the woman engaging in raunch culture, but rather that the image of female sexuality put forth by raunch culture is the predominant one, oftentimes the only one, another woman sees. If only one, stylized form of femininity overpowers all others whether the caricature-like iteration Levy describes or the pseudo-progressive one of weaponized femininity—therein lies the root of the issue. As Levy (2005) states in her conclusion, "If we are really going to be sexually liberated, we need to make room for a range of options as wide as the variety of human desire. We need to allow ourselves the freedom to figure out what we really want from sex instead of mimicking whatever popular culture holds up to us as sexy. That be sexual liberation" (p. 200). More so than sexual liberation, I argue that making Levy's wishes a reality would be life liberation. If humans were to free ourselves from the restraints of gender, especially from the narrow iterations and stereotypes put forth by the mainstream popular

culture, then it would not matter whether some women prefer strapping on heels while some prefer slipping on sneakers. It would not matter whether some men prefer to be dominant while some prefer to be submissive. People would be able to simply live free of the limiting influence of gender assumptions.

Personal Case Study

I was not raised to be overtly feminine. My mother never wore makeup and never shaved any part of her body, and throughout my childhood she never mentioned my appearance or weight in a negative manner. When I started commenting on my own weight faster than my peers as a child and felt out of place until around the age of fourteen—she immediately shut me down, telling me that I was beautiful and had nothing to worry about.

But therein lies the catch: her telling me that I was beautiful. By doing so, my mother,

Fortunately, I grew out of the shame for the most part, but I still have friends now in their twenties who refuse to wear shorts or leave their house without putting on makeup. We are still barraged with images of unattainable bodies and faces, leading me to sometimes stare wistfully at an advertisement and wish I had that body, that hair. It's always only for a second, but it is a second too long.

I admit that I have engaged in raunch culture and weaponized femininity at various points in my life, but mostly after I entered college. I have put on revealing clothing, strapped on heels, painted my face, and felt good about it - sexy, even. There was even a time when my roommate and I started a photoshoot wearing red lipstick and posing with knives. It started out as a joke, but quickly turned into a practice in aggressive empowerment. However, I have found a marked difference between when I dress to feel good for myself when I dress to appeal to the male gaze and potentially attract a man. Even if I wear the same cropped shirt and heeled boots in both situations, more often than not I find myself feeling doleful and uncomfortable at the end of the night when my intention is to be appealing, rather than happily exhausted from dancing and having fun when I am only worried about myself and my own friends.

Especially after I began studying social science, I became acutely aware of the ways my friends and I engage in problematic behaviors. To this day, I watch my friends in social

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2lmojePnA0> (Put Yourself First)

I. Introduction

- A. "If I'm doing this for him, aren't I by definition putting myself...second?"
"Don't think about it too hard."
 - a. Introducing the concept of women's choices becoming influenced by the male gaze

II. What is Femininity?

- A. "Doing Gender" theory
- B. Devaluation of the feminine <http://www.jstor.org/stable/190119>
- C. Defining/examining femininity in the context of multiple femininities
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4501776>
- D. Gender consciousness/agency in developing self-identity--
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/190119>
 - i. "Empirical research reveals that a sub-5(u)(m)-2(a)4(l)-2(e)4()JTJ -0.01 Tc 0.01 n

A. Contradictions of gender

“Even if few women and men actually embody these characteristics in relation to each other, the symbolic relationship established through these hierarchical complementaries provides a rationale for social practice more generally” (Schipper 91).

B. Female Chauvinist Pigs and explanation of what raunch culture is

C. Personal experiences experiencing/perpetuating raunch culture

D. Why does this happen?

a. Internalized oppression: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174362>

i. “Internalized oppression is the mechanism within an oppressive system for perpetuating domination not only by external control but also by building subservience into the minds of the oppressed groups.”

ii. Connection to “Put Yourself First”

b. Internalized domination (same link)

i. “Internalized domination perpetuates oppression of others and alienation from oneself by either denying or degrading all but a narrow range of human possibilities.”

ii. Limitations for the oppressor as well as the oppressed

“Regardless of one’s sex category, the possession of erotic desire for the feminine is constructed as masculine and being the object of masculine desire is feminine” (Schipper 90)

IV. Sexual Empowerment/Women’s Choices

A. The “new femininity”-[http://p2048-](http://p2048-library.ramapo.edu.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/docview/210910610?accountid=13420)

[library.ramapo.edu.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/docview/210910610?accountid=13420](http://p2048-library.ramapo.edu.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/docview/210910610?accountid=13420)

B. Discussion of “choice” <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25698533>

a. “Despite women embracing and expressing sexual agency at different historical times and in different cultural settings, contemporary, Western constructions of heterosexual sex still reduce it to penetrating and being penetrated and that relation is consistently constructed as one of intrusion, ‘taking,’ dominating” (Schipper 90)

C. Connection to raunch culture

D. Personal experience

V. Media Study –The Women in Teen Wolf

A. Discussion of femininity/feminism in the media in general

[http://p2048-](http://p2048-library.ramapo.edu.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/docview/210910610?accountid=13420)

[library.ramapo.edu.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/docview/210910610?accountid=13420](http://p2048-library.ramapo.edu.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/docview/210910610?accountid=13420)

B. Alison, Lydia, Melissa

VI. Impact of These Processes/Where do we go from here?

A. Effects of selfsexualization- <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20838700>

B. Is femininity/feminism an individual or political act?

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23269182>

C. Challenges facing third wave feminism-[http://p2048-](http://p2048-library.ramapo.edu.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/docview/233237030?accountid=13420)

[library.ramapo.edu.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/docview/233237030?accountid=13420](http://p2048-library.ramapo.edu.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.library2.ramapo.edu:2048/docview/233237030?accountid=13420)

D. Personal thoughts on femininity/feminism/tie back to “Put Yourself First”

Other potential links:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3081875>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20676769>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3090101>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25698533>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25792560>

<https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2013/12/28/my-centson-feminism-and-miley-cyrus/>

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/089124388002003004>