

GIRLTALK MAGAZINE

June 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS



3 Letter from the Editors

3 Word Cloud *Made by Eve Kaplan*

4 Promising Young Woman:
A Feminist Movie Far from
Empowering *Eve Kaplan*

5 Shackles: The Latest Feature of our
Beauty Standards *by Alex Wexler*

6 Genderbending Fashion
by Olivia Weiner

7 A Positive Perspective on
Promising Young Woman
by Lily Kramon

8 Fetishization of Asian Women
by Monie Choi

10 Not Your Fetish, Token,
or Best Friend *by Sophie Saxl*

Letter from the Editors

Hello!...and sadly, goodbye.

With this last issue of the school year, we are so filled with gratitude, grief, and excitement to end our reign as Co-Editors-in-Chief of such a wonderful magazine run by the most hardworking and resilient girls we've ever known.

With every issue, we are inspired by our writers' (and readers') dedication to not only this magazine, but the movement of feminism as a whole. We have seen, through working side-by-side with our staff, that this magazine is run by people who truly want to effect change in the world, and we do not have a doubt in our minds that they can.

Even as we pass the torch on to our successors, we hope that they will know we will always be cheering them on by the sidelines, religiously checking the website to be the first to read the next issue.

Cheers to the next one,
Monie and Olivia

Word Cloud

by Eve Kaplan

Below is the word cloud created from the prompt "How have men made you feel through their inappropriate actions?"



Promising Young Woman: A Feminist Movie Far From Empowering

by **Eve Kaplan**

Promising Young Women, a movie made to empower women and further the feminist movement. But, when watching it, I had the opposite reaction. As someone who has spent their entire life fighting sexist comments and rolling their eyes at boys who thought they ruled the world, I went into this movie expecting to love every part of it. The trailer caught my entire family's interest, although some of the reviews weren't raves to say the least, we all wanted to experience the movie for ourselves.

However, by the time I came out of the movie, I was unsure how to feel, parts of the movie felt empowering and yet the more overwhelming feeling was misrepresentation. In this movie our main character Cassie seeks revenge on all men because of the death of her best friend who was a victim of rape. She goes about seeking this revenge by going to bars and acting drunk and weak to get unassuming men to take her back to their house and see if they try to have sex with her unconsensually. If they attempt assault, she becomes violent and confrontational in an attempt to scare these toxic habits out of the males.

She lived her life fighting to show the world how important consent is sexually, but she was never able to touch on other types of consent for scenarios such as kissing, hand holding/touching and smaller parts of rape culture. Although Cassie was a powerful character it seems prevalent she spent years of her life acting as if what she was doing was all for Nina when it was clearly also about her. The film blatantly ignores how

much danger Cassie is putting herself in as a statement which comes off as lemon juice in a cut.

As the movie continues Cassie reunites with a male who went to the same college as her, Ryan, and begins to fall in love with him. As she slowly becomes more and more involved in their relationship she begins to slowly move on with her life and grow from her grief. But when a video resurfaces of Nina being raped and Ryan being a bystander she is thrown back into her old habits once more. She learns of a bachelor party being thrown for Nina's rapist, Al, and Cassie decides to show up as a sexy nurse and once and for all, serve what she feels is justice for Nina. This act leads to her death at the hands of Al. And although in the end Al is eventually held accountable and put in jail for what happened, both Cassie and Nina are now dead.

This ending is not justice, all it says is that two women had to die for one man to be held accountable in the justice system for his actions. Despite justice having been served in the end, the only message I was able to take out of it was that for the other millions of rape victims justice is nearly impossible. This wasn't empowering but more insulting because it acted as if the movie was bringing a new message to the conversation when it simply reiterates the fact that women don't get justice for the sexual assaults committed against them which almost all females already are well aware of.

Shackles: The Latest Feature of our Beauty Standards

by Alex Wexler

Disclaimer: A hugely generalized gender binary is used in this article and while it's not a binary that I personally believe in, it's a binary that many studies have used and so I felt that this binary was necessary in order to represent these studies. Please don't be disillusioned, this issue affects non-binary people!! I just did not have the space nor the resources to study and discuss it in this article, unfortunately.

Good morning! It's seven thirty in the morning and you are getting ready for work. You work as an accountant executive in an office building where you'll interact with co-workers, but you'll spend most of your time in your corner office completing paperwork. To begin your morning routine, you hop in the shower. If you've purchased a shampoo advertised towards women, you'll reach for a \$8.39 bottle of shampoo and if you've purchased one advertised towards men, you'll reach for a bottle that costs 48% less (Vox). Alright, men, well now that you've showered, it's time you shave the beard you've let grow the past few days. While that's happening, women, you begin your multi-step skin care regimen. Luckily guys, once you've done that, you apply some beard balm, wash your face, and well... your regimen is complete! You later walk into the office, nobody bats an eye at your appearance, you look great! Ladies, at this point in your skin care routine, you've probably already applied moisturizer, SPF, toner, and while you let that all sit, it's probably time you start working on your hair. I sure hope you have an hour to spare, since that's the average amount of time you'll

likely spend combing, brushing, braiding, curling, straightening, etc. It'll cost you lots of money too! And if you're a black woman, I got bad news, the cost to maintain your hair is going to be nine times higher for you! Fast forward an hour or so, when you begin to account for the cost of all the makeup products, hair products, and hygienic items you'll be expected to use and wear, women, you will spend an average of over \$1,800 while men, you will spend about \$600 (annually).

So, it seems like women are just more into pampering right? Perhaps some are, but many of these meticulous self-care habits are formed by a need to comply with social standards in order to get by. The Huffington Post wrote that when we envision "the average man", we don't envision one who's perfectly groomed or who looks as though they've spent hours on their hair and makeup. However, when we think of the average woman, the image of a perfectly up-kept, groomed woman in make-up pops into our minds. Oppressive beauty standards have made people believe that make-up and perfectly done hair are essential to the paragon of a "successful woman" or even just a "normal" one. The beauty industry brings in annual revenues of almost \$90 billion (Statista) and it continues to thrive off of exploiting the insecurities of women and making them feel as though they must cover



and hide these insecurities to 1. fit in, and 2. be successful. These standards also almost always favor white people and they intentionally target black women in many ways. They enforce the idea that “perfectly done hair” looks like traditionally white hair, and they’ve fed into the incredibly discriminatory idea that black hair is somehow unprofessional. Because this message is constantly being fed to us, it’s hard not to internalize it and when we’re surrounded by people who are victims of this standard, it becomes harder and harder not to become part of the cycle ourselves. This of course is NOT to say that make-up or hair products are inherently oppressive, they can be a beautiful means of self-expression. They only become oppressive when they feel like a necessity rather than an accessory or even a choice.

Beauty standards or any type of standard, gen-

dered or not, can be harmful if we make people feel as if they don’t have a choice. What we have to realize is these standards live in cycles, when we allow ourselves to be restricted by these standards, we help these standards exist and thrive. By doing whatever we feel comfortable with or by not allowing these standards to affect us, we create safe spaces for other people to break out of the shackles of these standards as well. Disobeying social rules doesn’t have to mean doing the opposite of what they tell us to do, rather, it can mean embracing choice. As author and activist Bryant McGill once said, “The great thing about life-the most magnificent thing about being these sentient human beings-is that we have been given the power of choice.” We all make thousands of choices everyday, make the ones that make you feel powerful and comfortable, not the ones you feel like you have to make.

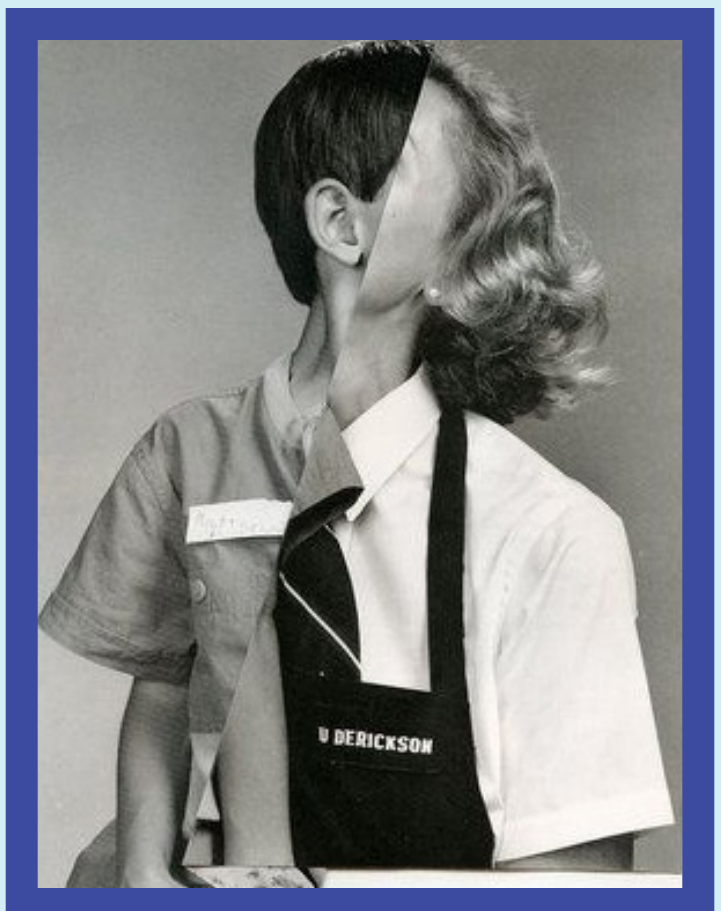
Genderbending Fashion

by **Olivia Weiner**

The message is ingrained in us from birth: girls wear pink, boys wear blue. Girls wear dresses, boys wear pants. Girls wear jewelry, boys shouldn’t accessorize. These ideas and expectations have existed for years, seeming insignificant but constricting how we dress ourselves - a key component of how we express ourselves on a daily basis - to a few colors and styles.

Yet, in face of these deeply-rooted social boundaries in fashion, designers and wearers today are challenging the idea of certain garments, colors, and silhouettes being inextricably linked to gender. In fact, I’d argue that the growing challenging of gender’s role represents a new era of exploration for the fashion world, where high-fashion designers to the average wearer aren’t tied to arbitrary boundaries of what is acceptable to society.

But why now? Challenging gender through fashion isn’t new at all, in fact, the LGBTQ+ community has been experimenting with gender since before



ball culture was popularized in the community in the 80's. Challenging gender roles is now deeply tied to LGBTQ+ people to the public, wearing something deemed feminine as a man is frequently labeled as being gay and wearing something masculine as a woman is associated with being lesbian. Now though, as the progressive, elite circles of the fashion world finally begin to become accepting of LGBTQ+ people, their culture which was once frowned-upon is edgy and new. This diffusing effect of culture is natural - although a little predatorial and awkward - and has brought genderbending fashion to the public eye in a way which is finally presented as cool.

For example, This past year, infamous fashion publication Vogue made history by featuring British pop-star Harry Styles as its first-ever male cover star. The cover immediately sparked passionate debates around masculinity and gendered dressing: The cover features Styles, donning a blue Gucci gown paired with a black tuxedo jacket. To some, the image felt representative of the growing exploration of gender-fluidity and non-

binary dressing taking place, however, prominent conservative voices such as Candace Owens and Ben Shapiro voiced strong disapproval of the cover. Owens writing on her Twitter page to: "Bring back manly men." Comments such as Owens' reflect just how divisive debates around gender expression have become in the US, even when a massively popular musician such as Styles, who identifies as cisgender, engages in exploring it.

While the growing acceptance of LGBTQ+ culture in the fashion community has amounted to the 'coolness' of genderbending, it's important that this kind of fashion is more than just a look, it's a way of expressing yourself and exploring who you are. This is not a fad or trend to be dropped by the time next fashion week rolls around, but an expansion of the boundaries gender has played in fashion. Although conservative voices fighting against the inevitable tides of change speak louder than most, this gradual popularization will legitimize more people than you can quantify with a number.

A Positive Perspective on Promising Young Woman

by Lily Kramon

Promising Young Woman, released in late 2020, shook the entertainment industry as a dark and biting comedy with an impactful message for its viewers. The film stars Cassandra Thomas, played by Carey Mulligan, a woman who seeks revenge for her best friend that was raped in college. Every weekend, her character goes to a bar and acts as if she is too drunk to stand, and when a man takes advantage of that, she teaches them a lesson. She intimidates them and triggers an emotional reaction, ensuring that those men will not take advantage of another woman again. After this, she goes after the man who raped her best friend and got away with it. When the man who raped her best friend is holding his bachelor

party with his friends, she pretends to be the special guest at their party, and then specifically addresses the guilty man alone upstairs. It has been said that Promising Young Woman is too dark of a story to address the issues at hand such as rape and sexual assault. While it is a different approach on using film to address such issues, the film hooks the audience in and causes the viewer to feel the pain that Cassy (Mulligan) feels for her friend who was raped. The overall darkness of the film causes the viewer to feel uncomfortable at times and even nervous. These feelings are why the message and themes in the film are conveyed in such a powerful way, and why the takeaway from this film has shaken

the film industry and activism such as feminism and the #metoo movement. The major messages in Promising Young Woman are to speak up for victims of rape who were denied justice because of society's standards. People are too scared to hold young boys accountable for their actions, especially college students, as they see them as just being young boys who don't know better. Our judicial institutions don't provide accountability to men in positions of power. Carrey Mulligan's character and the revenge she seeks shows how administrators and the justice system have time and time again, been too slow to take action for victims of rape, as she feels the need to take matters into her own hands. Others say it is a creative and unique take on the feelings young women experience when recovering from trauma and watching others get away with horrible actions such as rape and sexual assault. The statistics in sexual assault on college campuses show why this film is so important for a big audience to see. According to RAINN.org, 26.4% of female undergraduate college students experience rape or sexual assault through physical force or violence, and 6.8% of male college undergraduate students experience the same. This film focuses on a specific rape incident that occurred with

college students, but also addresses sexual assault and consent issues in adults. Promising Young Woman shows how film can express an important message by making its audience jump between different emotions throughout the film. The messages expressed in this film stick with the audience for a long time, and are continuing to be discussed in the media and the news.



Fetishization of Asian Women

by Monie Choi

Six Asian women were murdered in a targeted attack of three Atlanta spas. This brutality shocked the country, but for many women in my Asian-American community, the killings only served as reminders of the deep rooted misogyny and hypersexualization of our bodies that we've learned to accept as a fact of life.

I've specifically noticed that the intersection of Asian-American women's race with their gender makes them uniquely susceptible to a type of

violence that feeds power-hungry people's urge to dominate the "docile and submissive." The perception of Asian-American women carrying these characteristics can be traced back centuries to the Page Act of 1875, which blocked Chinese women from immigrating to the U.S. in a way that seemingly was for the purpose of regulating prostitution, but really, the law was a tool to exclude Chinese women from the country under the pretense that they were all prostitutes. This pretense is further rooted in U.S. imperialism during

the Philippine-American War, World War II, and the Vietnam War where American service members solicited sex workers while abroad, creating the perception of Asian women as sexual objects.

This dangerous perception and expectation of Asian-American being the exotic sex objects that they've been stereotyped as has not gone away, but instead, it has taken a more covert form as a result of the model minority myth, where people now have an unfounded assumption that Asian-Americans are all doctors or lawyers, which seems to minimize the oppression and silencing that Asian-American women have endured.

In reality, however, many Asian-American women who immigrated to the U.S. work in the service industry in beauty salons, massage parlors, and hospitality. These low-wage service jobs continue to perpetuate the stereotype of Asian-Americans as cheap and disposable laborers, as workers face stigma, fetishization, and misogyny. These women are uniquely vulnerable, too, however, as many of their statuses as migrants box them into silence, as they fear the risk of deportation if they turn to the authorities to report acts of violence or crimes against them. This fear, coupled with



the model minority myth, effectively papers over the ongoing structural violence that Asian-American women face, creating the perfect condition for horrific crimes like the Atlanta shootings to occur again.

Not Your Fetishm Token, Or Best Friend

by Sophie Saxl

Damien in *Mean Girls*, Christian in *Clueless*, Nigel in *The Devil Wears Prada*, and so many more. You've seen the "gay best friend." Not only in cult-classic movies, but everywhere. While some fit the fundamentally flawed concept and some break the mold, they all affect the tokenizing condescension that the majority of heteronormative people use to treat gay men.

Straight girls act like gay men are these cute little pets they can carry around, almost like they're an accessory. This works as almost an add-on to

her social status: a token member of the LGBTQ+ community. However, this seemingly innocent and extremely common stereotype can often turn into something intensely creepy. Because of our societal boundaries (or lack thereof) around this topic, many straight women become obsessed with gay men, including fictional characters. A gay man's sexuality should not be fetishized, just as we don't fetishize a straight man on that basis.

This brings us to the crown jewel of the stereotypes, tokenism, and fetishization. The main source of it

all: the gay best friend in media. A flamboyant, huge personality with a cliché sense of humor, the frequent TV/movie gay best friend has started to shape gay men in the real world, and not for the better. Embodying your sexuality in a way that makes you feel secure and authentic is a hard thing to do. With so many straight girls obsessed with the effeminate “yas queen” gay man, going along with it is an easy way to find people who support you while you live with your authentic sexuality. Societal standards make fitting into a stereotype something many gay men need to do so that they can feel safe. Any gay man (or any member of the LGBTQ+ community for that matter) who don’t fit the stereotypes are subject to more hate and homophobia. The gay best friend trope never goes along for women, or even a gay man who “breaks the mold”. Not only are these stereotypes specific to just gay men, but the man is almost always white. The internalized racism as well as homophobia, transphobia, etc. in the LGBTQ+ community itself is shocking. The gay best friend trope needs to be changed before it can prevent more and more LGBTQ+ youth from living as themselves.

A key part of the gay best friend is right in the name: best friend. Not the main character, lacking in depth for independent storylines. The gay best friend is often struggling with love, but ends up with a happily ever after to the only other LGBTQ+ character in the show. Not only does this show the bare minimum of effort that shows put into representation, but it sets yet another precedent for the new generation growing up as LGBTQ+. This love timeline gives the impression that when you happen to meet someone who is attracted to your gender, you should just go with it, as if no one could ever do better than the first person they ever meet. Imagine the roles are switched. Two predominantly straight people meet, and their friends force them into thinking that this is the best they will ever do, to just go along with it because it happens to work in the most bare-minimum of ways. This creates more issues when it transfers to reality, as gay people are often immediately “shipped” with any other gay person, even if they are nothing alike and totally non-compatible.

This problem presents another issue of tokenism

vs representation. There is a fine line between putting a gay character in a TV show, movie, or book so you can say that you did (tokenism) and actually giving the LGBTQ+ community the support they need via representation. It’s the same “I’m not racist I have black friends” idea that goes into the concept of tokenism. One can’t be accused of homophobia if you have a gay character, so many authors and screenwriters take the easy way out. The gay best friend can be a “throwaway character” and is an easy way for shows or books to seem politically aware. This is where the problem starts. Tokenism in media becomes tokenism in real life, invalidating the lives and experiences of queer people everywhere.

We can get proper representation by abolishing the gay best friend trope and letting gay men and other members of the LGBTQ+ community live in a free and safe way authentic to who they really are. Moving forward in media we should be able to show true struggles of LGBTQ+ people while still giving them more personality than “gay”. Instead of having a gay best friend who’s “different” this time we should have a gay main character, who is anything and everything more than the trope. More than gay, more than flamboyant, more than funny or mean. Just like every other character- their own.

