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Eleanor Byers   April 7, 2025

Collective Illusion: Feminism, the Internet, and the Impossibility of Liberation

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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At the core of this thesis is the stories we are told: stories of feminism and stories of technology. The stories we are told are meant to be a progress narrative. It is my intention to trouble the linearity of these stories. This thesis examines two feminist commitments: the commitment to understanding and defining misogyny and the commitment to rehabilitating sex. These commitments are examined alongside what I perceive to be feminism's biggest obstacle at the moment: the internet, and more specifically, the rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and its use to create pornographic "deepfake" content. Beginning with a survey of feminist thoughts on misogyny, I examine an interaction between two TikTok creators surrounding the problem of deepfakes, and I analyze the gendered dynamics at play, concluding that femaleness, as defined by Andrea Long Chu, is at the center of these interactions. I then turn to Baudrillard's theory of image to think through the ways in which reality changes in the age of generative AI, arguing that the deepfake actually aids in the feminist commitment to returning to an uncorrupted sex. Finally, I turn to a story of my own to revisit the goals of cyberfeminism, which emerged in the 1990s. I think through the limits of hoping for liberation – another story we are told. In the end, I conclude that feminists need to get offline to inhibit a space outside of the illusions of theory.

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Table of Contents

Preface: Feminist Stories

Throughout this thesis, I am going to look into the stories we are told by Western feminism – about what feminism is, what it targets, and how to fix it. Andrea Long Chu (2019b) argues that most women are dissatisfied with feminism. No statistic is needed to back this up. We are constantly surrounded by efforts to rehabilitate anglophone feminism – make it more intersectional, queer it, modernize it. The feminist project is under constant revision. But this dissatisfaction is so rarely a part of the story that feminism tells us; feminism yearns to be linear and progressive. It is my goal to investigate the stories of feminism as a way to de-linearize them. Claire Hemmings' *Why Stories Matter* (2011) tracks the Western narrative of feminism as a narrative of "interlocking narratives of progress," which Hemmings argues simplifies and flattens feminist history (p. 3). It is Hemmings wish that Western feminism creates a space where "memory, desire, and uncertainty" and the unknown are inserted into the narrative (2011, p. 27). Through my own process of investigating stories, I insert these elements through telling my own stories.

Another force we are told is linear: technology. There is a commitment to technology getting better – faster, lighter, brighter. It is the dominant narrative that these improving technologies not only improve the world around us but also improve us. Technology thus becomes an extension of oneself; one gains abilities alongside technology. November 2022 – a site of intensification: ChatGPT launched and gained over a million users within five days (Marr, 2023). Public access to generative artificial intelligence (AI) was presented as the next step in improving humanity. A *New York Times* article reveals popular ways AI is used in daily life; ranging from writing a wedding speech to transcription, the majority of uses detailed in the article are meant to

"make daily life easier," or unburden someone from their menial tasks (Paris & Buchanan, 2023). When life is made easier through the use of technology, it is then presumed that life is now better due to the progress of technology.

Feminism's attempt to reckon with technology emerged in the early 1990s as "cyberfeminism," which has the goal to make technology feminist. Since the emergence of cyberfeminism, so much of our digital lives has changed. As generative AI becomes part of our everyday lives, AI becomes a part of our reality, thus becoming a part of sex. And so the "deepfake" is born. A deepfake is a creation of generative AI that *looks* like reality. This thesis turns specifically to the sexual deepfake, where false images and videos of pornography are created through AI. I explain and reference a specific interaction between two content creators, Brooke Monk and Kay regarding the creation of deepfakes of Monk, which Kay then encounters on X (formerly Twitter). The interaction becomes a site of feminist intensity, as its virality attracted an audience beyond the usual consumers of pornography (being men who specifically seek it out) and broadens it to an audience of young women. These young women have no doubt been told many stories by feminism and by technology that lead them to form their opinions surrounding the issue of deepfakes; this is how the deepfake becomes a feminist issue.

I would like to note that I move between feminist theory and popular feminism throughout this paper while rarely making a distinction. This is intentional, as I strongly believe that popular feminism and feminist theory are frequently circling around the same things, particularly in the last decade with the popularity of #MeToo, resulting in an increased discourse about heterosexuality that ranges from articles on pop culture websites like *Babe* and *Buzzfeed* to the publishing of books of feminist theory that

discuss contemporary sexuality in a post-#MeToo landscape (Obaro, 2018; Gilmore, 2023; Wanzo & Stabile, 2022). While I acknowledge the differences between these modes of feminism, they function the same under the scope of my argument and are thus treated as so.

In this thesis, I examine two problems: the problem of misogyny and the problem of reality. Chapter one will look at misogyny, while chapter two will look at reality. My third chapter is an investigation into a possible solution: cyberfeminism. The unity of these three chapters: Western feminism is always seeking something. That is what this thesis is about.

In chapter one, Western feminism seeks the definition and elimination of misogyny. My argument is an attempt to complicate definitions of misogyny, as I feel that most definitions of misogyny ignore the deliberate, often deeply painful misogyny perpetrated by women, which is often (incorrectly) deemed "internalized misogyny." When thinking through the Monk/Kay situation, I present the argument of Andrea Long Chu's *Females* (2019a) that we are all female, and examine how the various actors in the exchange exhibit different characteristics of being female.

In chapter two, Western feminism seeks the return to a better sex that has been cleansed of the toxicity of pornography. I turn to narratives around bad sex that originate in the Sex Wars of the 1980s and continue through present day. My argument is that this search for the purity of sex is impossible. To make this argument, I present and draw from the theories of Jean Baudrillard about the state of the reproduction of culture. I also examine the notion that the internet presents us with new abilities and new challenges, to which I counter that the internet has no new frontier and cannot give us anything new.

In my third chapter, I experiment with form and methods of thinking to examine cyberfeminism and its potential usefulness for deepfake AI and the current landscape of sexuality. It takes the form of an autobiography, a history, and a manifesto. In the end, I wish to convince my readers to take a break from the constant seeking of Western feminism and to get offline, a notion I borrow from Janet Halley's *Split Decisions* (2008).

At the core of this thesis is an investigation into what we are told and the desire for a linear, progressive narrative. It is my hope to complicate how the narratives surrounding technology and feminism have led us to believe in certain realities. I wish for my reader to question the simplicity of these stories, and instead favor a more complicated and messy view of contemporary feminism and technology. There is no one grand solution to any of this – feminism, technology, sexuality – it cannot be fixed. Rather than the constant investment in rehabilitation – the desire to make these things better – we can simply take a break and step back and inhabit something outside, something different, something less linear.

Vignette #1

When I was a young girl, my mother told me to never touch the disposal in the sink because she didn't want me to chop off my fingers in the spinning blades. At that moment, I had a vision of my future: I was at the sink in red lipstick and yellow rubber gloves. I was washing dishes , and I had dropped a teaspoon in the drain. I reached inside the threatening hole to grab it, and it was at that moment – with my hand grasping around the blades – that my husband turned on the disposal.

Years later, I read Margaret Atwood's "Rape Fantasies." It occurred to me that while I never had rape fantasies specifically, I had domestic abuse fantasies. I knew the feeling Atwood was getting at. I had a intuition so deep that it felt inherited: I was fated to fall deeply in love with my own demise. That is, I was fated to fall in love with a man. And a man was one who hated me, who wanted to destroy me, who wished to chop me up.

The same year I read "Rape Fantasies," I read A Streetcare Named Desire. *After I finished it, I started having these vivid, recurring dreams about Stanley. Stanley first appears when he is coming home, holding a pack of meat. He sees Stella, yells "Meat!" and throws the pack of meat at her. No one does that anymore. They just text "here" and don't knock.*

In my dreams, Stanley texts me the meat emoji and leaves it on my doorstep without saying anything, and then he scrolls on Tinder. The disposal grinds up my hand, the meat, and the meat emoji. It can't tell the difference, and neither can I.

Chapter One: Female Hatred: Misogyny, Deepfakes, and Feminism

"The world is full of women

who'd tell me I should be ashamed of myself

if they had the chance."

-Margaret Atwood, "Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing"

"A female is one who has eaten the loathing of another."

- Andrea Long Chu, *Females*

Part One: Theories of Misogyny

The story we are told: men hate women. Therefore, men hurt women. This is what we call misogyny. Western feminist theory has long been committed to the idea that misogyny is something that men *do* to women. Misogyny has an elusive quality that keeps feminists writing about it. No one can seem to agree exactly what it is. Is misogyny a feeling? An act? A system? While feminists disagree on what misogyny is, the consensus that men are the main perpetrators of misogyny is a throughline. By consistently centering men, we miss out on a whole host of misogyny that occurs at the hands of women, and we also lack the tools to analyze and explain these situations. This section will look at various Western feminist theories of misogyny and how they link misogyny to the acts of men. After surveying these, I advocate for what I argue is a stronger theory of misogyny: one that allows a space for the intentional misogyny of women. My interest and argument for the purpose of examining a female misogyny is not to discount the prevalence and severity of the misogyny of men. It is instead to elucidate that the misogyny of women tends to be brushed to the side, which I argue plagues and prevents feminism from being able to truly and deeply address the problem of misogyny.

“Women have very little idea how much men hate them,”

This quote by Germaine Greer opens Joan Smith’s (1989) book *Misogynies* (p. 7). While Smith goes on for another several hundred pages, Greer captures the common sentiment of what misogyny is for Smith. Misogyny is something that men do to women because they hate them. Smith’s *Misogynies* is one of the earliest feminist accounts of

misogyny. In the conclusion to her book, she summarizes what her book–and by extent, what misogyny–is about. "This book is about" she asserts, "*men* who believe that women are…disgusting" and "*men* who cannot cope with emotions" and "the ways in which *men* attempt to justify the things they do to women" (Smith, 1989, p. 123, emphasis mine). In short, *Misogynies*–and misogyny–is about men. Men who hurt, discount, and, above all, *hate* women. While Smith does include an acknowledgement that women can be misogynistic to each other, her explanation of misogyny by women is a straightforward one, claiming that women will act like misogynists simply to win the "provisional favor" of men (1989, p. 11). To Smith, women are only misogynistic to make men like them more. In this understanding, women cannot be misogynists. They can be misogynistic and perpetrate misogyny, but they are not truly misogynists at their core; it is an act put on for the sake of men. By claiming that women are misogynistic for male favor, Smith creates a misogyny that women can pick up and put down when they would like–it a tool that they can deliberately use, particularly when they are around men. Smith's explanation doesn't explain misogyny that occurs in female spaces. More importantly, Smith doesn't allow for misogyny by women that exists for itself– a misogyny where women are misogynistic to other women because they *want* to be.

Contrasting with Smith's musings on misogyny, where men "feel" and "believe," Kate Manne's *Down Girl* (2017) argues that "misogyny ought to be understood as the *system* that operates within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women's subordination and to uphold male dominance" (p. 34, emphasis mine). Manne deliberately removes the psychological aspects of misogyny from its definition, as she fears that these free-floating feelings threaten to "make a mystery" of misogyny; misogyny doesn't need to have a "feel" (2017, p. 21). It is this separation of feeling that

Samantha Pinson Wrisley's (2021) article "Feminist theory and the problem of misogyny" jumps on, as it uses a critique of *Down Girl* as a vessel for a larger critique on feminist understanding of misogyny. She prescribes three problems across theories of misogyny, but I will focus on the central claim, which is that "the attempts to diminish the affective elements of misogyny is fundamentally incompatible with the actual, complex phenomenology of misogyny itself" (Wrisley, 2021, p. 190). I agree with Wrisley's critique of Manne's flawed focus on divorcing misogyny from feeling, as I believe that the feeling of misogyny is its defining feature. As Andrea Long Chu (2019b) writes, "the proof of patriarchy's reality was not to be found by sorting through anthropological works about early man or collecting statistics about rates of sexual violence…patriarchy existed, quite simply, because *women could feel it*" (p. 72, emphasis hers). Though feminists do sort through anthropological works and collect statistics, the feeling of patriarchy – of misogyny – is central to women's experience of it more than any statistic is. Though Manne fears making a mystery of misogyny, her method threatens to overly divorce misogyny from the reality of the people who experience it. I further prescribe a problem with Manne's misogyny–and, in fashion with Wrisley, a problem reflected across many theories of misogyny–which is Manne's inadequate theory of misogyny done by women. Her examples, ranging from the Isla Vista killings to interviews between author Lindy West and an interviewer deemed "MAN" in the transcript, only perpetuate that misogyny is done by men onto women. While Manne divorces misogyny from feeling, she does not divorce misogyny from a thing that men do. And though Manne concedes that women are able to "fit the description" of a misogynist, she does very little to investigate this (2017, p. 77). Manne falls into a similar dilemma that Smith does – to fit a description and to be are different

things; women cannot truly, deeply *be* misogynists for Manne. This is a frequent pattern in understandings of misogyny. It might be alluded to or conceded that women have the capability to be misogynistic, but the primary analysis pulls from occurrences of things men have done to women. I argue that this is because these examples are cleaner–more straightforward, something that Manne sets out to do, acknowledging her goal to demystify misogyny by taking the messiness out of it–the messiness that she directly rejects is that of emotion, but it is also the messiness of gender. A man is misogynistic to a woman. This is second nature.

The #MeToo movement is one of the clearest contemporary examples of this, as it focused almost entirely on powerful men and the things they have done to women because of their positions of power. Harvey Weinstein was the catalyst for the 2017 movement, which relied on the overwhelming experience of harassment that women have faced at the hands of men in the media industry; the #MeToo movement brought down roughly 201 men in the industry (Carlsen et al, 2018; Luo & Zhang, 2020). Women "use the me too hashtag to denounce men's behavior," and #MeToo is frequently categorized as a taking down of the patriarchy or a fight against misogyny (Dickel & Evolvi, 2023, p. 1395; Wanzo & Stabile, 2022). The goals of #MeToo are to take down bad men and make the industry a better place for women; many writings on #MeToo are invested in the numerical outcomes: how many men were taken down? How many women took their place? Are previously male-dominated companies now more likely to hire women? These are the measures of success of the movement (Carlsen et al, 2018; Luo & Zhang, 2022; Alaggia & Wang, 2020). Men must categorically be taken down, and women must categorically be doing better because of it.

Beyond the contemporary context, countless other accounts of misogyny are

deeply invested in misogyny as something that is done to women. Dale Spender's *Women of Ideas* (1982) features 800 pages of accounts of men in power doing bad things to women. We have "hundreds of years" of evidence that men do bad things to women–suppress them, violate them, disrespect them (Spender, 1982, pp. 4-5). The frequency of these experiences alongside the spreading of this narrative makes men's misogyny to women highly legible to us. We tell stories of men who are misogynistic–in writing, on social media, in person; we blame rape culture and toxic masculinity for men acting poorly; we characterize misogyny as the "male malady;" we think that women speaking up will save us–that feminism will save us (Highsmith, 1975; Ukockis, 2019; Gilmore, 2023; David, 2016). Cyberfeminists have thought that the internet could save us from misogyny and from men (Seu, 2021; Russell, 2020).

Much scholarship about the internet and misogyny shows how wrong this desire of cyberfeminism was. It turns out that misogyny runs rampant on the internet. In addition to the constant presence of misogyny remaining, the commitment to misogyny as something that men do to women remains the same as well. The special edition about online misogyny of *Feminist Media Studies* features 15 articles, all of which focus on things men have done to women on the internet or things feminists have done to resist male hate on the internet (Ging & Siapera, 2018). Many of the scholars featured in the edition do work on things men have done to women–Emma Jane writes histories of male violence on the internet, Karla Mantilla focuses on "gendertrolling" performed by men, and Adrienne Massanari writes on GamerGate (a 2014/2015 alt-right movement that targeted women in the video game industry as a way to protest the rise of feminism and diversity in video games – and more broadly, media itself) , a centerpiece of online misogyny discussion (Ging & Siapera, 2018). Much of the introduction comes across as

an argument that gendered cyberhate is *real*. Wrisley diagnoses this as a problem, noting that writing on misogyny is frequently bogged down with "evidence that seems to be invested more in demonstrating misogyny's existence" than anything else (2021, p. 189). Ging and Siapera are bogged down by this as well, dedicating their introduction to providing the validity of online misogyny. They fail to go beyond the black and white of "men do this to women," which leaves out misogyny online that occurs from women. But without this consideration, the project of tackling online misogyny is incomplete.

Emma Jane's *Misogyny Online* (2017) details a "history" of virtual misogyny. In her opening sentence, she claims, "Men have turned on women online" (Jane, 2017, p. 1). Here, there is no question that men are to be held responsible for the misogyny that occurs online. Inquiring about what she deems "rapeglish" – which denotes comments that threaten women, sometimes nonsensically, with rape– "are they the types of things *men* have always said or thought about women in private?" (Jane, 2017, p. 2, emphasis mine). Jane presents a history of misogyny on the internet, and it is a history of male hatred. Jane's history has a similar problem to Spender's – they both generalize history as a pattern of men doing things to women, leaving women out of the conversation entirely.

Just as Spender argues that men historically try to silence women's ideas, Karla Mantilla's *Gendertrolling* (2015) argues that "Harassing women online is a tactic to try to silence women in order to preserve male-dominated spaces" (p. 141). The term "gendertrolling," comes from the term "trolling," which refers to people online who make outrageous, offensive comments in order to promote emotional reactions from people. Gendertrolling is the practice of commenting egregiously anti-women speech in order to bait feminists into rage. She frequently references GamerGate as an example.

Brianna Wu, a victim of Gamergate, was threatened so violently and thoroughly that she was forced to leave her home due to safety concerns. To summarize Gamergate, Wu said, "Gamergate is basically a group of boys that don't want girls in their video game clubhouse" (Wu, as cited in Mantilla, 2015, p. 136). Melody Hensley, an Atheist activist who was harassed extensively online, commented that misogynist comments are "about men wanting to silence women" (Hensley, as cited in Mantilla, 2015, p. 141). Throughout her book, Mantilla repeats the common practice in theories about misogyny: she doesn't use any examples of women being misogynistic to other women. She relies entirely on examples of men doing things to other women; this allows her argument to be clean and straightforward – it is a story that we already know.

These theories are, in part, why our understandings of misogyny rely so heavily on the assumption that men don't like women and are therefore perpetrators of misogyny. Ranging from emotional distastes for women to systemic mechanisms of subjugation, the core of these theories are men and the things they have done to women. They might use different modes of thinking or disagree with each other, but they traffic in the same understanding of men as the primary target. Many theories of misogyny lack a consideration of misogynistic women or don't examine when women do misogynistic things to each other. But theories are not everything. Contemporary, colloquial understandings of misogyny also tend to unite women against men. Popular phrases like "all men are trash" and "boys suck" are all over popular feminist social media, sold on stickers and t-shirts, and repeated by female influencers. Women love to unite against a universal man—the enemy, the misogynist, the patriarch, the sexist. Feminist theories support taking man as the perpetrator of misogyny. It is not my argument that the acts of violence and misogyny by men are to be disregarded, thought

of as not important, or even put to the side entirely. Instead, I want to examine misogyny against women, done by women, which is frequently referred to as "internalized misogyny," as it is a key piece of the misogynist puzzle. Without thorough investigations into these acts, misogyny as a whole can never be fully understood.

Before continuing on, I want to reject the designation of "internalized misogyny." I argue that "internalized misogyny" is an improper name for the majority of women's misogyny against other women. The understanding of internalized misogyny is that the women who commit acts of misogyny have their misogyny so deeply inside of themselves that it is unrecognizable to them. The implication is that women who are misogynistic are mistaken in taking up women as an object of cruelty; these women might not even know that they are being misogynists. Instead, I argue that we should not think of women as committing an error when they are misogynistic and instead think of the ways that women are deliberately cruel to each other. Disagreeing with the distancing nature of "internalized misogyny" that removes intentionality and promotes accidentality, I will abandon this term for the rest of the paper and instead use "misogyny of women" as my preferred phrase, and it keeps the misogyny deliberate and conscious without falling into Kate Manne's system where acts are separated from the individual.

Part Two: The Brooke Monk Situation

This section will detail an exchange that occurred on TikTok almost entirely between women and girls. The two primary figures are both TikTok creators. Brooke Monk (@brookemonk), a 20 year old with 30 million TikTok followers, and Kay

(@isspayinkkay), a recent college graduate with 15 thousand TikTok followers[1] (Brooke Monk, n.d.; Kay, n.d.).

In July 2023, Kay posted a TikTok video of her eating Ben and Jerry's ice cream. The top portion of the video has a text overlay that read, "I just saw Brooke Monk with her melons out covered in white icing on Twitter." The video was captioned "They were pretty nice it was a lot of icing tho[2] #brookemonkleaks #pickmegirl" (Figure 1). The video was scored by the *Paw Patrol* opening theme. Within days of being posted, the video amassed roughly 130,000 engagements (a combination of likes, comments, and shares) and 3.4 million views (Kay, n.d.).

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[1] These are numbers and ages from July 2023 to best reflect the context of the incident.
[2] Due to the informal nature of the social media exchanges, I will not include [sic] to indicate original grammatical error, as I believe it will make these interactions stilted and hard to read.

Figure 1: a screenshot of the TikTok posted by Kay.

What Kay's video states is thinly veiled by common euphemisms that have emerged in the context of TikTok censoring–which doubles down especially hard on sexual language–to prevent shadowbanning, removal, or account suspension. What Kay

means is "I just saw Brooke Monk with her boobs out covered in semen on Twitter." Her hashtags characterize the image as a leak. A "leak" is a term that describes pornographic images or videos that have been spread and published without permission of the owner. This is either from an ex-partner who had been sent the content then posted it online for mass-consumption (a phenomenon called "revenge porn") or the media has been obtained by a hacker who has gained access to the device of someone in possession of the images and stolen them off that device. Leaks have been occurring for a long time–the Pamela Anderson sex tape was an instance of a leak–but the problem of leaked images has gotten worse with increased access to digital devices. Though leaks can occur in a variety of ways, leaks are understood to be real images. By using the hashtag "brookemonkleaks," Kay implies that the images she saw were " real" (i.e. not created through photoshop or AI) sexual content of Monk that has somehow ended up on X (formerly Twitter).

The significance of pornographic images of Monk lies not in their intrinsic value (naked images of a young, pretty girl), but rather in their departure from expectation. Brooke Monk is a Christian influencer. While not all of her content is explicitly Christian, none of it has any raunchiness to it; she avoids swearing even when lip syncing and her content is usually about family, friends, her long-term boyfriend, or cosmetics. The bio of her account reads, "Jesus Forever" (Brooke Monk, n.d.). She wears a purity ring that she makes content about, and she is open about her intent to save herself for marriage. Pornographic images of Monk–especially ones that show or imply a sex act between Monk and another individual (as the presence of semen would imply), would be surprising not just because they are leaks, but also because they go against the image that Monk presents of herself–a chaste, wholesome Christian. I argue

that this foil is why Kay formats the video in the way that she does. Her video comes across as a sort of "I told you so" to the audience. Monk is so mindful of her image and deliberately does not make sexual content, but there is no way that she is as clean as she claims to be, Kay implies. I would describe Kay's video as flippant—from the mundane content of her eating ice cream—which seems to imply that the shock of the expectation versus reality of Monk should really not actually be a shock, to the use of the "Paw Patrol Opening Theme" which seems to make light of the situation, to her factious caption—stating that Monk's breasts were nice, but there was an excess of semen. Kay makes several deliberate, glib moves to characterize her video in a certain way. The cherry on top is her use of the hashtag "pickmegirl."

The "pick me" is a term associated with the kind of misogyny described by Joan Smith in *Misogynies*—Urban Dictionary describes a "pick me" as "a woman that is willing to do anything for male approval. She will embarrass or throw other women under the bus to achieve this goal" (Urban Dictionary, 2020). The implication is that Monk is a "pick me girl" for acting like she is virginal and pure when she is actually whoreish, engaging not only in intercourse, but sex acts that are particularly slutty and dirty; she had semen all over her breasts. I argue that this is related to the politics of woman value that emerge in male spaces. The term "high value woman" is a right-wing term that promotes traditional domestic gender ideology. A high value woman is "biologically female," "virgin" and "prioritizes raising a family" (Urban Dictionary, 2023). By attaching herself to virginity and saving herself, Brooke has masqueraded as a high value woman. In reality, Kay seems to say, she is anything but that.

"must be deepfake" comments one user under Kay's video (Kay, n.d.). A "deepfake" refers to AI content creation that uses someone's likeness to create media

that looks so real, it seems like it almost could be. Despite her deliberate avoidance of anything sexual–or perhaps because of–Monk is a source of endless deepfakes online. If you search Brooke Monk on X (formerly Twitter), the first ten accounts that pop up are all accounts that post pornographic content of Monk(@brookemonknudez, @fap_monk59927, @brookesslut_, @BrookeMgoon, to name a few (X (formerly Twitter), n.d.) . Many of them link to a Discord called "TIKTOK HEAVEN," a hub for the exchange of pornographic content of over fifty female content creators. The Brooke Monk channel boasts over 600 photos and 100 videos of her. Searching Brooke Monk on any website that doesn't restrict explicit content (X, Discord, Reddit, 4chan, DeviantArt, 9gag) will show you a plethora of pornographic images of Monk.

The majority of this content is created and spread by self-proclaimed "fappers" and "gooners," two colloquial terms for male masturbation, usually of chronic and obsessive nature. These communities are overwhelmingly male, and it seems to me, insular. They are self-contained, and there is no opposition to them that can be found in the comments. They don't get reported or taken down. There isn't even discourse or engagement beyond the viewing and following of these accounts. Some porn accounts of Monk have over 20 thousand followers, but the posts receive almost no engagement beyond likes and views (X, n.d.). To me, this indicates that the main purpose of this content is purely for masturbation. They are not meant to prove that Monk is not a "high value woman" or somehow catch her in a lie about her character. They are just meant for sexual pleasure.

This is why Kay's intervention into Monk's deepfakes is so significant; she is an interruption into the status quo. While it seems unlikely that Kay would have come across these images without seeking them out, it is not impossible, nor is it something

we will ever know. Regardless of whether she found the content intentionally or not, Kay's video caused an uptick in people seeking out pornographic images of Monk–even if it is just to see what they look like, this uptick is revealed through several comments on Kay's video that admit as much. Since Kay's video reaches new audiences who have not encountered Monk's deepfakes before, the comment section as well as response videos (called "stitches" on TikTok) shows an intense discourse–from which the typical fappers and gooners are absent; the majority of Kay and Monk's audiences are other young women.

The predominant response to Kay's video is shock from girls that another girl would post a video like this. Monk herself responded to the situation by appealing directly to Kay saying, "it's really hurtful to see another young woman be so dehumanizing because it took two seconds to know that those are fake." Monk invokes the "girl's girl" card–she is upset by the fact that Kay is a woman more than anything else. In her 60 second response, Monk says nothing to the creators of the deepfakes–she doesn't condemn them or even ask people to stop making them. Instead, she focuses on the fact that another girl chose to talk about them as the main infraction. I argue that by Monk not addressing the men behind the deepfakes, she sends a message that we should expect nothing less than for men to do gross, sexually explicit things. Monk is perhaps resigned to the fact that there is nothing she can truly do about the creation of deepfakes. Instead, she appeals to other women, calling for them to look out for one another on the internet. The comment sections are full of the "girl's girl defense." One user comments, "saw this after watching barbie is like..🙄🙄🙄," another comments, "ur literally a girl why would u post this" (Kay, n.d.).

"It does not matter if I am a girl," Kay responds to this comment. And while users call Kay "petty" for saying this, it raises questions about gender and misogyny–particularly on the internet (Kay, n.d.). In what ways does it matter if Kay is a girl–or does it not matter at all, as she states?

Part Three: Females

The Brooke Monk situation sticks out because of its gender dynamics, though this is not to say that misogyny by women is in any way exceptional. Kay's video was made to draw attention–and potentially shame–another woman. Many in the comment section seem to wonder, how could she do this? But we should not be surprised when women are cruel to each other. And while feminist theory lacks a theory of misogyny by women that does not use men as the reason for why women would be misogynistic, I argue that women are misogynistic to other women because it is gratifying to them. I will use Andrea Long Chu's *Females* (2019a) as a tool of analysis for the Brooke Monk situation to try to answer the questions I have posed about misogyny. I will then use this situation and analysis as a way to draw conclusions about misogyny by women.

> "Everyone is female and everyone hates it. If this is true, then gender is very simply the form this self-loathing takes in any given case. All gender is internalized misogyny…Gender is not just the misogynistic expectations a female internalizes but also the *process of internalizing itself,* the self's gentle suicide in the name of someone *else's* desires, someone *else's* narcissism"

> (Chu, 2019a, p. 52, emphasis hers)

Chu's argument is pertinent to mine not because it is important to prove that Kay or Monk are females, but rather to think through why women are misogynistic; the

hating is what I am interested in. Rather than thinking of misogyny by women as something done as a way to win the favor of men, I want to look at misogyny by women as something done because it is intrinsic to femaleness. Women are misogynistic because everyone hates females. To hate females is to be conscious; the hatred of females is the way that our very consciousness is structured. Building on Chu's argument about the formation of gender, I would further argue that not just to form, but also to maintain gender, requires a constant force of misogyny. Therefore, the shock of Kay's betrayal shouldn't be shocking to us at all. And even as Kay hates outwardly on Monk, she is also self-loathing and internalizing misogyny in her own way, which maintains her gender.

Kay's encounter with the porn of Monk was a site of confrontation with the desires of someone else–the misogynistic expectations of someone else. Shortly after Kay's video went viral, she commented that she had no idea that it would gain so much attention (Kay, n.d.). She claims that her videos would usually get 200-300 views and very little interaction, and that's what she thought would happen with this one as well (Kay, n.d.). I construe this as a form of internalization in the digital sphere. Kay was, in some ways, creating this video for herself and her own management of gender. It is the process of internalizing that Chu argues is central to creation of gender. And while Kay is labeled as a gender traitor, Kay's actions are actually essential internal maintenance of her gender. While Kay and Monk are of course both females, and both identify publicly as women, there are divides between what kind of girl they are. Kay's persona is that of deliberately being unconventional: she has dyed hair, a septum piercing, and much of her content revolves around her criticism of popular culture (Kay, n.d.). For example, she is anti-Sabrina Carpenter, a current pop diva with a hyper-feminine aesthetic, due to

Carpenter's sexualization of femininity (Kay, n.d.). Kay's criticisms of Carpenter are due to her short skirts and the effort put into her hair and makeup (Kay, n.d.). Similarly, Monk exhibits a girlish femininity similar to Carpenter; she is always wearing a full face up makeup with false eyelashes, her hair is usually perfectly curled, and she is frequently wearing sundresses and other feminine clothing (Brooke Monk, n.d.). Kay positions herself against the girly femininity that is exhibited by Carpenter and Monk, which in turn creates her own gender. Though Kay states this positions her outside of objectification, her off-beat, deliberate alternative style is its own process of internalizing misogynistic expectations: this, too, is gender (Kay, n.d.; Chu, 2019a, p. 52).

Monk also responds in a way that asserts and maintains her gender. The gist of Monk's response is that she is a girl, and she cannot believe another girl would do this (Brooke Monk, n.d.). Monk mentions that she gets turned into deepfakes all the time; she is constantly subject to other's desires (Brooke Monk, n.d.). In other words, she is constantly female. By not calling for the end of deepfakes about her, Monk submits to other's desires; she commits the gentle self-suicide that Chu refers to. Monk does her own work of processing misogynistic expectations by admitting defeat to the deepfakes.

The girl's girls, though they call out misogyny, are also misogynists. Early feminist movements called for equality between men and women, not by bringing men down to women's level, but instead by elevating women to a status similar to men. In other words, women didn't want to be women anymore. And if they did still want to be women, they definitely didn't want to fit under the current social structure of being a woman; they wanted to be women without being females (Chu, 2019a, p. 22). "In this sense," Chu asserts, "feminism opposes misogyny inasmuch as it also expresses it"

(2019a, p. 22). I argue that the misogyny of feminism is essential to feminist theory's inadequate acknowledgement of misogyny by women. The idea that an attempt—or even *the* attempt—to help women is actually anti-female is a destabilizing, threatening notion. It would be tantamount to admitting an error in all of feminism. It would make feminism impure. It is easier to point to the individual woman and say that she has committed an error. She is the misogynist, not all of feminism.

Chu's framework of femaleness renders everyone a female, and this collapses distinctions between misogyny by women versus misogyny by men. If misogyny really is a "universal existential condition," and "the one and only structure of human consciousness," then why do we even need a theory of misogyny by women (Chu, 2019a, p. 20)? While I agree that misogyny itself is the same—it exists as a structuring force of human consciousness, as Chu claims— I would like to pay attention to the *feeling* of misogyny, which I suggest creates a sharp divide across misogyny by men and women, which I assert still fits under Chu's framework. She contends that while everyone is female, there are differences with how one copes with being female. It is this difference that feeling stems from.

I will return now to Wrisley's critique of Manne's attempt to divorce misogyny from feeling. "Misogyny is a profoundly affective social dynamic; to attempt to cleanse or supersede emotion in discussions of misogyny is to rob theorists of possible loci of apprehension and intervention," writes Wrisley, arguing for a theory of misogyny that takes feeling into consideration (2021, p. 189). A theory of misogyny by women would be incomplete without feeling, as it is the betrayal that makes misogyny by women wound in the way that it does; this is what the incredulous girls in Monk and Kay's comment section are responding to.

There would be no betrayal without the expectation first being set. It is assumed that women owe each other decency–or even defense. "Why did you not report the deepfake of me?" Monk asks Kay in her response video (Monk, n.d.). Monk assumes that because Kay is also a girl, she will automatically look out for her. While this expectation in part comes from the countless academic and colloquial understandings of men as perpetrators of misogyny that I detailed in part one, there is also a conception from material feminism that women are a class united by social conditions, and therefore possess a class consciousness, a communal goal of being against men who do women wrong (Wittig, 1980; Wittig 1982). Therefore, women are expected to be good to one another. Men are under no such expectation. When the fappers and gooners make deepfakes of Brooke Monk, it's nasty, but it's expected. But when Kay, another girl, contributes to the cycle of the creation, spread, and potential enjoyment of the deepfakes, it is an interruption. It is a betrayal of expectations, a betrayal of womanhood. It is the parts of femaleness that are "always bad for you " at work (Chu, 2019a, p. 19). It is the pain of wanting more and always only being hollowed out further that causes the sharpness of this betrayal. Misogyny by women is the misogyny inside all of us that comes back to wound, haunt, and betray. It is a self-suicide that takes those around us down, too.

Vignette #2

My sister taught me how to conceal my under eye bags, first with an orange color-corrector to cancel out the purple crescents under my eyes, then with a color-matched concealer to cover the orange, and then finally with a pore-blurring powder to soften what I perceived to be the gaping, horrendous holes of my newly teenaged skin. "I look so smooth," I thought, staring at myself in the mirror. One is always *in the mirror,* never on it. It seems like we all know, intrinsically, that there is a part of us within that smooth surface.*

Smooth is seductive. Smooth is affectless. The computer screen is smooth – so is the blurring feature in the photo editor, the airbrushed quality of the celebrity in the magazine staring back at me. The glossy page, too, is affectless.

My undereyes become a computer screen. It is the first step to my entire face becoming a computer screen;. my face becomes a reflection of what the computer screen tells me to be. Transmission of desires that are not my own – is that any different from how I am now? My friend tells me this girl looks "like AI" on her dating profile. "She has no pores!" she exclaims.

I am told that when you look at a screen, you don't blink enough. I have a gut feeling that the same thing happens when I look at myself in the mirror.

Chapter Two: Deepfake Disneyland: Feminism, Pornography, and "Real" Sex

"Pornography is the essential sexuality of male power: of hate, of ownership, of hierarchy, of sadism, of dominance" -Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography* (1981, p. 11)

"Cool, cold pleasure, not even aesthetic in the strict sense: functional pleasure, equational pleasure, pleasure of machination" -Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1984, pp. 44-45)

Feminist Commitments to Rehabilitating Sex

Another story we are told: there is something wrong with sex, and feminism is going to fix it. Western feminism has taken on this task because "bad sex means something" (Chu, 2019b, p. 70). Kate Millett (1970) refers to sex as a "charged microcosm" that reflects cultural attitudes (p. 23). Bad sex becomes a site where the problems feminism wants to address are played out; if we fix sex, that means that conditions for women have gotten better. In "The Impossibility of Feminism," Andrea Long Chu (2019b) refers to "the Fucking Question," a name for the problem that is how women can keep having sex with men ("The Problem") without making things worse (p. 68). This question is central to much Western feminism, and it has probed this at every angle: sex positivity, sex negativity, consent culture, banning porn, making feminist porn, becoming lesbian, or becoming really, profoundly straight (Dworkin, 1981; MacKinnon 1989b; Angel, 2022; McGuire, 2023; Weiss & Gonzales, 2024; Frye, 1981; Ward, 2020; Chu 2019b). The underlying belief amongst all of these is the commitment to a sex that has the capacity to be saved.

In 2003, David Amstead called pornography is the "wallpaper" of our lives. Since making that claim, this statement has become more true than ever; with a meta analysis study finding that porn consumption has increased roughly 90% between 2000-2020 (Irizarry et al, 2023). As porn consumption increases, it begins to constitute our understanding of reality. Amstead warns against the dangers of replacing an in-person sex life with a virtual one; our reality becoming virtual is a threat to our subjecthood (2003). Shortly after Amstead published his piece on the dangers of porn, Naomi Wolf (2003) published her piece "The Porn Myth," in which she argues that the viewing of porn has a "huge effect" on how people interact. Wolf tracks changing images of nudity

across time, from nude portraits to instant photos to the mass production of porn. For most of history, she argues, erotic images were meant to mimic real women, but today, in a world where the internet is full of naked women, "real women are just bad porn" (Wolf, 2003). It is the accessibility of naked women across the internet that is a concern for Wolf, a worry that if you see too many naked women on the internet–who are typically beautiful, edited, and smooth–a "real woman" won't have appeal. Wolf is part of the feminist commitment to a truth, or an "eros," as Catherine MacKinnon deems it, that can be returned to if we remove corrupting factors–namely pornography, which Han (2017) deems the "antagonist of eros," and Grebowicz (2013) says is destroying our very subjecthood (Wolf, 2003; MacKinnon 1989a, p. 198; Han, 2017, p. 29, 33; Grebowicz, 2013). There is a sex that we can get back to if we just stop with the porn–Wolf argues as she paints a picture of her Orthodox Jewish friend who covers her entire body and doesn't allow her children in her bedroom (Wolf, 2003). She praises her friend, who keeps her bedroom private and mysterious, and covers her limbs and hair so that only her husband sees it; Wolf believes that restriction and secrecy – the opposite of pornography - are the solution to purifying sex again and to taking the harm away from sex.

Though not all feminists are anti-porn, there are many feminists who remain committed to a feminist investment in the rehabilitation of sex. Jill Johnston (1973) characterizes feminism as a "massive complaint" against sex (p. 166). Feminist cannot leave sex alone, arguing endlessly about the ways to make sex "better": through socialism, through feminist theory, through consent (Ghodsee, 2018; Schick, Zucker, Bay-Cheng, 2008; Sikka, 2021). Regardless of if sex was ever good, there is an

investment in the possibility that someday "sex will be good again" (Foucault, 1979; Angel, 2019).

It is this feminist commitment that I wish to examine, thinking through the changes that are made, if any, in light of the internet and generative Artificial Intelligence (AI). Feminist discourse cannot let go of the idea that we must save sex. But I argue that in the age of pornography and AI, there is no sex left for us to save. Pulling from Jean Baudrillard, I investigate the layered reality of sex and conclude that sex was gone before feminists even got a hold of it.

Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*

The purpose of this chapter is to look at Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* in the context of the emergence of generative artificial intelligence and more broadly, the internet. I will think through the ways in which reality has changed – if at all – alongside this emergence. Much writing and discussion about generative AI is about how much it is changing our society – the way we communicate, the production of media, the environment (Sasaki, 2023; Mogaji & Jain, 2024; Ryzhko, 2024; Wickberg & Gärdebo, 2023). I disagree with this focus on constant change, and I will primarily focus on the ways in which generative AI does *not* provide us with new frontiers.

I will first establish several concepts from *Simulacra and Simulation* that I will use throughout the chapter. Several times, I reference "culture," which in this framework can be thought of as art, ideas, and overall intellectual expression, the purpose of which is to interpret and inject meaning into our lives (Hunter, 2022). Baudrillard separates culture into three eras: premodern, modern, and postmodern (Hunter, 2022; Topor, 2002; Baudrillard, 1984). Premodern culture is anything pre-20th century, where culture is dominated by handmade visual art, music, and

theatre (Hunter, 2022; Baudrillard, 1984). A major change to cultural production occurs at the start of the industrial revolution, where we get the rise of easily reproduced mediums, such as photos, prints, and videos; this ushers in the era of modern culture (Hunter, 2022; Baudrillard, 1984). In addition to these mediums being more easily produced, they also contribute to a blur in the line of what a "simulation" is. Simulation rests on the existence of reality, as it resembles something which is traceable back to reality (Topor, 2002). While it might be tempting to think of something like a photograph as a simulation (as it is a representation of something in reality), a simulation should be thought of as a "kinetic experience" rather than a "stilled image" (Topor, 2002). In other words, the experience of perceiving what an image represents as well: not simply a photograph, but the experience of pretending that occurs at the site of the photograph (Topor, 2002). Baudrillard argues that our world has become solely made up of simulations that are so layered, it is impossible for us to trace them back to reality; therefore the original element of the real is now unknowable to us (Topor, 2002; Baudrillard, 1984). In the face of multiple layered simulations, simulacra arises (Topor, 2002).

In an era of simulacra, hyperreality prevails (Hunter, 2022). Baudrillard describes hyperreality as "the generation by models of real without origin or reality;" hyperreality consists of simulations without the reference to reality (simulacra) (Baudrillard, as cited in Ryan, 2007). The influx of simulacra creates a state of hyperreality. It is this state of reality that is postmodern culture (late 20th century to present), where simulations surround us to the point that they constitute our very reality. In hyperreality, Instagram becomes a part of your reality just as much as the ground under your feet. The result is a complete implosion of meaning; there are so

many interpretations of reality that you are able to find a justification for any meaning, but you are also just as easily able to find its opposite. (Hunter, 2022; Baudrillard, 1984).

I will now make a distinction that is important for my argument. Though Baudrillard establishes that there is no reality left due to the reproduction of culture, this does not mean that our conception of our own reality is gone; many of us still believe in our own individual "reality." To keep these distinct, I will refer to reality$_1$ and reality$_2$. Reality$_1$ is the non-existent cultural reality that Baudrillard argues is gone, while reality$_2$ is our own individual perception of our daily lives.

Hyperreality, the Internet, and Generative AI

Across academic scholarship, Baudrillard's theories of reality are applied to thought on the internet and artificial intelligence. There are two primary sides in the academic response to AI's potential: tech supporters who believe that AI contains radical transformational power that will better society, and those who criticize the impacts that AI has on our culture; both of these sides unite through their belief that AI has changed something about the world.

Tiffin's and Terashima (2001) *HyperReality: A Paradigm for the Third Millennium* is a look forward to the 21st century, wondering what "sophisticated technological systems" will do to a "post-industrial society;" in this piece, HyperReality is not the same as Baudrillard's (xvi). This HyperReality is a conception of the blending of virtual reality with physical reality, and human intelligence with artificial intelligence, which will, ideally, result in an optimal future that blends culture (Tiffin and Hirashima, 2001). This conception of HyperReality never gains much traction, but similar ideas proliferate in pro-AI and pro-internet discourses today, such as the concept of the

Internet of Everything (IoE), which denotes similar conceptions of the possibility of the internet. IoE refers to the ways in which culture, people, ideas, processing, and data all come together to create a more connected, well-rounded, and intelligent reality, which Baranyi (2021) argues has massive implications on our society – altering our cognition, safety, education, and society. These two texts argue for the ways in which the internet will create a more cohesive, optimized society. As we move into an increasingly globalized world, this perspective argues, the communication ability that technology allows us will be the defining capstone of our culture.

Other, more critical perspectives on AI focus on the risks and concerns that increasing access and use of AI present. Maphosa and Maphosa's (2024) literature review looks at a variety of concerns: individual, social, political, and environmental impacts that unchecked use of AI can result in; additionally, there are numerous concrete concerns about the new threats that AI poses–such as its water use in cooldown procedures and privacy risks (Maphosa & Maphosa ,2024; Gordon, 2024; Gomstem & Jonker, 2024). Scholars search for and highlight the changes that AI has made to reality–implying that it ushers us into a new era beyond hyperreality, where we are in a state of hyper-hyperreality or post-postmodernism. Lollini (2021) details the emergence of Internet Social Media (ISM), which has been deemed "Web 2.0." Lollini argues that in the emergence of a Web 2.0, we need a Baudrillard 2.0 that reconsiders what these new spaces mean for us. Baudrillard gets applied to all sorts of internet sensations: fake news, virtual fashion, political relations (Morris, 2021; O'Connell, 2021; Koch, 2012). Many academic articles pose the question, "where do we go from here?" (Goveia and Rhodes, 2002; Duigan, 2020; Fominaya and Gillan 2020; McEwan, 2017). These accounts of improving internet technology and AI all hold in common the

sentiment that what is happening is new and unprecedented – more water use, more security threats, new landscapes, new skills needed.

I wish to push back against the idea that AI makes radical changes to the state of the internet, reality$_1$, and culture. I will argue this by drawing on the process of AI, as well as thinking through what the internet can and cannot do for us, pulling from Nunes. I would, however, like to pay specific attention to one change that I believe the internet and AI contribute to, which is the collapse of presence and absence.

To start, AI is decidedly not producing anything new in itself; AI is a machine of representations. Generative AI relies on massive amounts of data input in order to produce something; it uses algorithms and models to identify patterns (Eastwood, 2023). Generative AI takes this a step further, as it is able to generate something "new" based on the data input (Eastwood, 2023). However, generative AI can only output a conglomeration of what has been input; "new" AI content is really just a blend of other, pre-existing content. While the emergence of generative AI was hailed as something new for people to have access to, Baudrillard places us solidly in a state where culture is already a conglomeration of representations. While AI might increase the speed at which these representations are produced or masquerade as if it is creating something new, AI does not contribute to a dramatic shift in cultural production; the internet does not place us in an era that is new in any way. The internet, and generative AI, cannot give us or show us anything new; it is simply a sped-up hyperreality that we have already existed in for decades.

Nunes (1995) draws on Baudrillard to argue that the seeming vastness and limitlessness of the internet are only mere simulations that conceal that the world of code is actually limited. "Likewise," he argues, "internet has no frontier because its

territory has already been comprehensively mapped" (Nunes, 1995, p. 318). On the internet, there is nothing beyond what has been coded for; it is a "closed system" that ends beyond its parameters (Nunes, 1995, p. 318). Thus, the internet exists as a sort of planned treasure hunt–a user might feel that they are adventuring out into a limitless, vast cyberworld, but this is an illusion. There is nothing beyond the internet's parameters. The internet presents us with a "realm in which the operator can only interact with known elements, established sites, and comprehensive codes" (Nunes, 1995, p. 318).

Nunes wrote well before the establishment of weak machine learning and AI, but I argue to extend this thought process to the world of generative AI. AI presents the illusion of newness, but it is only that: an illusion. Generative AI creates the fantasy that it is producing something new, but generative AI functions by pulling from these known elements, established sites, and comprehensive code; AI itself can only function with a comprehensive code–can only be accessed through established sites. AI can only do what it is programmed to do, and it can only create imitations of its inputs. Baudrillard's "Xerox and Infinity," (1990) likens the Xerox machine to the Mobius strip, where the user is constantly questioning the machine and is questioned by the parameters of the machine (p. 56). Of this Mobius strip, Baudrillard writes, "The machine does what the human wants it to do, but by the same token the human puts into execution only what the machine has been programmed to do" (1990, p. 56).

AI falls into a similar illusion; AI seems to be infinite, seems to hold all the answers, seems to cater to every desire, but it is still only functioning within its programmed parameters, working with datasets provided. Baudrillard writes, "These machines have the artlessness of pure calculation, and the games they offer are based

solely on commutations and combinations" (1990, p. 52). One is then stuck walking in circles around something that appears to be infinite, playing a game that has already been mapped out. Rather than hailing AI as the infallible, infinite future, I argue that the mechanisms of AI hold no inklings of the future in them, but rather keep the user trapped in the present, stuck in the illusion that the future is in our hands.

The Collapse of Presence/Absence and Sex

I would, however, like to pay attention to a factor that the internet and AI makes changes to, which is the distinction between presence and absence. Nunes argues that "currently, writing is the dominant means of communication on the internet" (1995, p. 319). Thirty years later, I update this sentiment to the current moment by arguing that visual culture, not writing, is the dominant means of communication on the internet. Supsakova (2016) argues that our daily lives are "saturated" with pictures, and that our culture is "more and more infiltrated by visual images" (Surken and Carwright, as cited in Supsakova, pp. 193-4). But no one needs an academic article to tell them that – the internet trafficks in images these days. The majority of social media has short form video options – TikToks, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, Facebook Video – which have all emerged in the decades post-Nunes (Dodds, 2024).

What was once a speaking/writing collapse that Nunes details (who needs to meet in person when you can email) becomes a presence/absence collapse of image (who needs to say something when you can represent it in an image? Who needs to be somewhere when you can be everywhere?). Even before AI, technologies like Photoshop made it possible to be places you weren't – or be someone you weren't. AI only makes this easier: you don't need to spend time photoshopping yourself in Paris when you can just tell AI to put you there. The internet is a constant test of what it means to be

present, and now that AI has the capabilities to put someone where they are not or make them do something they have not, presence collapses. Lies have always been able to be spread – you could claim these things about someone – but the deepfake allows for a visual reference. And visuals dominate communication.

For example, Brooke Monk can be a prolific pornstar while having never had sex or never had a leaked nude. Nunes argues, "A simulated presence escapes the possibility of counterfeit and the possibility of reproducing the original because the original no longer exists" (1995, p. 322). In the order of Baudrillard, there is no original to reproduce; it doesn't exist in a hyperreality. So while you could argue that Monk's deepfakes are counterfeit, false, or untrue, in some ways, the "original" or "true" Brooke Monk that we view online likely doesn't exist. She certainly doesn't exist through her online persona–which is what the deepfakes are pulling from. We get the perception that Monk is a chaste, Christian girl through her online persona, not through any actions that the public is able to observe. Brooke Monk–and content creators in general–are not meant to be observed–they are meant to be consumed. The deepfake of Brooke Monk is just as untrue as the internet influencer Brooke Monk herself.

I would like to note before moving on that my argument is not that Brooke Monk is "fake" in the derogatory sense,or that she somehow "deserves" deepfakes or invites them by being online (as many of her critics like to claim). Instead, I wish to think through the ways in which searching for or desiring the truth of the internet is an impossible thing. It is my wish that this impossibility applies to how we think about culture and truth on the internet broadly, and it should not be applied to shame specific creators about their content. Brooke Monk is a symptom of hyperreality, but so are all of

us. Monk has a larger audience than most, but the size of an audience is irrelevant to this argument.

The (Impossible) Future of Sex

In this section, I argue that the deepfake is something quintessentially untrue. It thus becomes a key factor in the fantasy that there remains truth, aligning it as something that does similar work as Disneyland in Baudrillard's system. As it preserves the myth of the truth of sex, the deepfake actually works in service of Western feminism.

Baudrillard thinks through Disneyland as a hallmark of fakeness that is used to conserve the idea of reality$_1$: "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order…concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus saving the reality principle" (Baudrillard, 1984, p. 28). Disneyland is something obviously fake to us: the perpetual caramel popcorn scent in the air, castles with princesses, the promise that at least for a day, you can escape the outside world. To Baudrillard, this parade of fakeness is a key factor in creating the fantasy of reality$_1$. When you leave Disneyland, you are decidedly in the real world because you have left the fake one behind. But to Baudrillard, this is untrue: you leave the fake and enter into a world that has no actual reality$_1$. Disneyland thus acts as an antithesis to reality$_1$ to preserve the idea that there is a reality$_1$ to antithesize. I wish to extend this logic to the deepfake to argue that the deepfake preserves the commitment to there being a truth to sex, and the Western feminist idea that this truth is in opposition to pornography.

The deepfake is untrue sex – it is a computer generated sex act that uses data from pornography. The question of "is porn sex?" is long-debated in Western feminism,

and the details and complexity of this debate are beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather than engaging with this strain of Western feminist thought, I will think of porn under the Baudrillardian system. Due to the fact that it is photographed and/or videographed; pornography is *not* sex due to its reproducibility.

Generative AI then uses pornography to create an untrue representation where nothing is real. The deepfake is then able to be championed as "fake" and in opposition to real sex. But there is no real sex. There is no truth to sex, there is no eros–despite Western feminist commitments to this idea. Our world is steeped in pornography, and it shapes our very reality$_2$. Many anti-pornography feminists latch onto a similar idea, linking sexual violence to pornography consumption. Porn, then, constitutes our very reality$_2$, though it is not real itself, this does not matter in a Baudrillardian system.

Amstead warns against the dangers of "young men who are constantly exposed to these fake, always-willing women," which differs from how "real" women are (2003). On his own porn addiction, a man Amstead interviews says that porn is a "substitute for reality." We can then presume that porn is not "reality," but this doesn't mean that it doesn't constitute reality$_1$ (which again, does not exist), but just as Instagram is just as much a part of your reality$_2$ as the tree outside your window, porn is just as much a part of your sexual reality$_2$ as sex is. Pornography has the power to invent a reality and show it–turn a vision into reality and pass itself for truth (MacKinnon, 1989a, p. 205).

Deepfakes do the work of making porn seem more authentic (or at least having the potential to be) and maintain the authenticity of sex itself–this is why people are searching for porn that is "real" or somehow shows reality$_1$. However, there is no authenticity of sex left to maintain. Baudrillard argues that "simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum" (1984, p. 14). The simulation of

pornography already enveloped the whole edifice of representation–the whole complex of sex and sexuality–and became a simulacrum, a hyperreality of sex. The deepfakes are a way that we can point to it and argue for the reality$_1$ of sex. If this thing is so obviously fake–girls with seven fingers and no pores–then there must be a reality$_1$. "It is always a question of proving the real through the imaginary, proving truth through scandal, proving the law through transgression, proving work through striking, proving the system through crisis," writes Baudrillard on the need for contrasts (1984, p. 40). To create reality$_1$ requires constant comparison and checks and balances; sex, then, is created through opposition to porn, created through opposition to deepfakes. The deepfakes are at best just not real sex, but at their worst are a threat to what sex is, and what sex will be. Baudrillard argues,"But this aura of an artificial menace was still necessary to conceal that they were no longer anything but the mannequins of power" (1984, p. 41). The menace of the deepfake is an artificial one–meant to conceal the devastating fact that sex is dead and gone, and all that remains are copies of copies, representations–hollow shells of what once was.

Baudrillard asks the reader to consider, "Simulate a robbery in a large store: how to persuade security that it is a simulated robbery? There is no 'objective' difference: the gestures, the signs are the same for a real robbery…To the established order they are always of the order of the real" (1984, p. 43). I ask my reader to consider the same for sex–of porn, you might argue that is not *real* sex. They are acting, they are *doing* sex rather than having it. But what, then, is real sex? Is real sex not performance, a copy of a copy? The mix-up between porn and sex is not merely a conceptual one. It is one that currently plagues the sex lives of younger generations who grew up on porn. Peggy Orenstein's (2024) *New York Times* opinion essay details her experience researching

younger generations' experiences with sex. In a 2020 Q&A, Orenstein gets asked by a 16-year-old girl "How come all boys want to choke you?" only to be asked in a different Q&A by a 15-year-old boy "Why do all girls want to be choked?" Orenstein locates the problem as a fundamental mix-up between porn and reality; no one is able to tell the difference, which then results in devastating sexual encounters where no one gets what they want because no one is having sex, they are just doing porn (2024).

In a Baudrilliardian system, there is no reality$_1$, these are all in the order of the real. Porn, deepfakes, are just as much a part of our sexual reality$_2$ as anything else that comprises our reality$_2$; this is hyperreality, where we lose track of what is real. When we question the people in the sex scene – real or fake – we are not actually talking about sex, we are talking about the people. There is nothing about sex that we are able to name, to question, because it's not there.

I would argue that deepfakes have created a world where porn now contains more reality than it previously did, and there is now a desire for porn that is "real," as search terms such as "reality," "authentic," and "trad" (Hunter, 2024). "Trad" is short for traditional. The usage of the word "trad" on the internet usually appears as "trad wife," meant to label women who are devoted, stay-at-home wives who dedicate their lives to servicing their husband, a man in the workforce. What are we looking for when we search for "reality porn?" Is this not a contradiction? But hyperreality itself is a contradiction. Once again, we are stuck in the Mobius strip, searching endlessly for something that is gone.

To return to the Brooke Monk situation, we can locate several sites of individual reality$_2$: the original post-maker of the deepfake porn on X (formerly Twitter), Kay using her platform to post about it, the zeros and ones of the algorithm bringing the post to

popularity, Monk using her platform to respond, the hundreds of comments left praising Monk, chastasting Monk, defending Kay, chastising Kay (reminiscent of Baudrillard's notion that we can find any meaning and its opposite; we can find any viewpoint and its opposite in the comment section). Deepfakes, then, are in service of feminism. They create the hope that there is some real sex for feminism to save. But as Nunes argues, there is no frontier on the internet. We are stuck in a prewritten code, with the same wishes the Western feminists of the 80s had for purified sex.

C.E. (2012) writes of the feminist sentiment, "one may be unable to have good sex due to trauma or internalized misogyny, but the potential for good sex, non-patriarchal sex, lingers inside all of us; we are always wishing to [advance] the feminist project further." A commitment to the purification of sex, the end of deepfakes, the end of exploiting women on the internet is a feminist commitment that won't save us. There is an impossibility in the future of sex because, well, there is no sex left for us to save. C.E. writes, in the search for "sex's ideal forms within us they retreat endlessly" (2012). Feminists are then left forever searching – forever hoping – for a sex that is better, less painful, less exploitative, more *feminist*.

Vignette #3

The internet can save me, I thought as I created my first account on Tumblr. Here I will be able to find people like me. The feminists want to entice me with their kitschy phrases, their "male tears" written on a carton of milk, cats against catcalling, all men are trash! Welcome to the sisterhood, girls support girls. I am instantly enchanted.

★

I am older and disillusioned, and it feels bad to be a feminist but it also feels bad to be the girl ranting about feminism. Surely there are other forms. I am surrounded by hundreds of definitions of feminism, misogyny. Nothing reads quite the way that these things feel.

★

I'm an editor for a literary magazine. A guy submitted a ChatGPT poem that was so obvious we realized it immediately. The day a robot can write a poem that makes me cry I don't think I'll get out of bed for a week.

★

The internet can save us. *The cyberfeminists want to entice me with the futuristic neon green, their black text, a metallic cover. A girl late at night on the internet. White nightgown and a blue screen. You can't be a woman if you're online.* It feels good but there's nothing good about it. *Yeah, but maybe you can be a girl? Maybe you can just be a fuckable entity. 01010101. Holes and phalluses. The dish disposal, my own pores, the screen that I imagine falling into. Through the looking glass~*
Into what?

Chapter Three: Towards Getting Offline

"Give women a chance to look beyond the screen"
-Genderchangers Academy, 2000

"There is no feminism, only possible feminisms. There is no internet, only possible
internets
" -Feminist Internet, 2017, as cited in Seu, 2021

A DISRUPTED HISTORY OF CYBERFEMINISM

★

I am going to tell you the final story.

★

"Cyber" emerges into popular culture when Norbert Wiener (1948) writes
Cybernetics about the flow of information and messaging between systems. It contains
a critique of "gadget worshippers," and an ultimate warning of the destabilizing,
dysregulating forces of technology. "Cyberspace" emerges when William Gibson (1982)
writes it in his short story "Burning Chrome," which eventually becomes his novel
Neuromancer (1984).

★

Cyber begins as a warning against itself.

*I was born into the era of "cyber." My consciousness is partially online. When I meet
someone new, I Google myself to see what they would think about me if they did the
same~*

Fragments from an interview with William Gibson (2013)

*"I came to [the term cyberspace] out of a perceived need to find an arena in which I
could set science fiction stories...I went through my daily life looking for bits and pieces
of reality that could be cobbled into the arena I needed..."*

The sight of kids playing very early huge plywood-sided arcade games, the body language of just like, intense longing and concentration. It felt to me like they wanted to like, go right through the glass at the back of the machine, they wanted to be inside…

But cyberspace. Well it sounded like it meant something or might mean something, but as I stared at it in red sharpie on a yellow legal pad, my whole delight was that I knew it meant absolutely nothing"

★

Roughly ten years after the emergence of cyberspace, cyberfeminism emerges. The term "cyberfeminism" was coined by VNS Matrix and theorist Sally Plant (Fernandez & Wilding, 2003; Seu, 2020). Cyberfeminism adds the prefix "cyber" to create a new kind of feminism prepped for the digital era (Fernandez & Wilding, 2003; Seu, 2020; VNS, 1991).The cyberfeminists wanted to be the cowboys disrupting the "technopatriarchal order" of the Wild West of the internet (VNS, n.d.). The emergence in the 90s is no accident. During the 1990s, home computer use tripled (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1999). As the internet became a space for people to readily and regularly use, it then became a space to conquer. The internet was a new space; www. stood for Wild, Wild West; the internet had untapped potential, and that potential was being soured by men, who dominated the space and used it for pornography; the cyberfeminists wanted to fix it, turned it into theirs, make it *feminist* (Haraway, 1991; Plant, 1997; Sollfrank, 1999). Donna Haraway (1991), the queen of the cyberfeminists, publishes her "Cyborg Manifesto," in which she envisions the internet as a place where we can "[imagine] a space without gender," as it is the "high tech culture" that

challenges the "traditional binaries," some of which Haraway identifies as "self/other," "man/woman," and "active/passive" (Haraway, 1991, p. 4, 30). Haraway argues that on the internet, a space with so much potential and the invention of new forms of being, such as the cyborg, the binaries we thought we were sure of become blurred through the world of cyberspace. Shortly after Haraway, Judy Wajcman (1991) details what she deems as a necessary confrontation between feminism and technology. She desires and envisions a "development of a 'woman's sphere,'" and thinks through how feminism can actually strengthen technology by providing new perspectives (p. 162) They promised me we would disrupt; we would change the internet away from being a space only dominated by males; to claim a space that could be–would be–for women, for us; to "remap cyberculture" with a feminist twist (VNS, 1991).

<div align="center">★</div>

Cyberfeminism tried to entice me with its tech aesthetic of starkness. Simple, black font against bright green. This is how it is, it seemed to tell me. We don't need anything other than this harsh black text to tell you what you need to know because it's true. "We are the virus of the new world disorder," proclaimed the VNS Matrix manifesto, one of the first cyberfeminist pieces I came across.

Virus: semen. Obsolete. rare. From classical Latin vīrus: poisonous secretion.

<div align="center">♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪</div>

<div align="center">*I don't want that. Am I supposed to?*</div>

cyber cyber cyber cyber cyber cyber cyber cyber cyber cyber cyber cyber cyber cyber cyber

Gibson tells me that cyber is nothing. Cyber is rooted in aesthetics. It's not supposed to mean anything. Cyber floats in the air, untethered. Cyber rolls off my tongue, sibilant like a snake, and endlessly circling ouroboros. The word itself lets out its own sigh. Sighhhhh-ber.

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○

This origin of aesthetic facade is especially clear to me as I click through the neon VNS Matrix website and thumb through the pages of Mindy Seu's (2021) Cyberfeminist Index; I am struck by the coherent aesthetic of it all: grungy, pixelated, shocking. Seu's own introduction to the body of work mentions how the anthology would not be possible without the anchor of a "glowing green 'submit' button" on her website (2021, p. 12).

submit submit submit submit submit submit submit submit submit submit

I know that Seu means that her work would be incomplete without the community of cyberfeminists who submitted work to her, but I can't help but think of the aesthetic reliance, the image of the submit button, the glowing green computer, the

high-tech aesthetics of cyberfeminism. How can we make the unbearable beautiful to

us, is the question that so much cyberfeminism seems to answer to me. It's the reason I

sought it out.

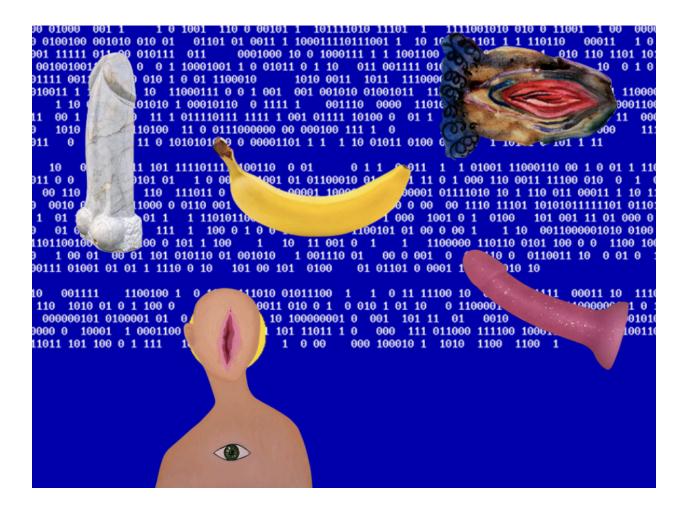*Screenshot of my Google search history, and a non-answer to one of my questions.*

★

Rosie Cross (1993) creates the figure of the "geek girl," encouraging women to

"put down that pony and pick up a computer!" in her vision of a world where the

internet isn't a boy's activity, and thinks of a girl simply picking up a computer and

existing in that space as a feminist act in itself (Cross, as cited in Seu, 2021, p. 55). Lynn

Hershman Leeson (1995) fell in love with her computer and with cyberspace when she

realized how easily "anatomy can be readily reconstructed" on the internet" (p. 325).

Aliza Sherman (1995) proudly proclaims "I am a cybergrrl!" (Sherman, as cited in Seu,

2021, p. 63). Feminists fell in love with what they thought they could do for the internet

and what they thought the internet could do for them. On the internet, they could shed their bodies, change their bodies, call into question the very binaries that they perceived to be the root of their oppression as women. They could be activists on the internet: women in male spaces, disruptors of the male tech bros. Above all, they could be feminists.

The early 1990s were the peak time of cyberfeminism. Much of the arc of 1990s cyberfeminism can be seen through the VNS Matrix, with their catalyst manifesto getting published shortly after Haraway's in 1991. VNS was primarily a performance art group, and their history can be seen as a series of installations (VNS, 2025). In 1997, VNS began work on a videogame called "BAD CODE," where the user is trying to destroy the "Big Daddy Mainframe," though the game was ultimately never finished and remains unreleased (VNS, 2025).

★

I am definitely not a cybergrrl! I am not a geek girl either. Why are all of these titles girl and not woman? I tried to learn how to code, but I was freaked out by all the 0's. Too many holes on the page. 0s and 1s – presence and absence. Are women destined to be girls, destined to be zeros in the binary?

Digital collage by me.

Self portraits.

Calling yourself a geek girl, a cybergrrrl, is taking pride in your own commodification. Brand yourself as a girl who's into tech, isn't that it's own male fantasy? The girl who knows how to do male stuff, the girl who can hack the "big daddy mainframe." You can't escape any of it on the internet. The very thing that you think frees you is what entraps you.

I might not be a geekgirl, but does this make me any different? Is there more than one way to be on the internet?

4172012 eleanor is born as byersrose715@gmail.com at the family desktop 18:35:17
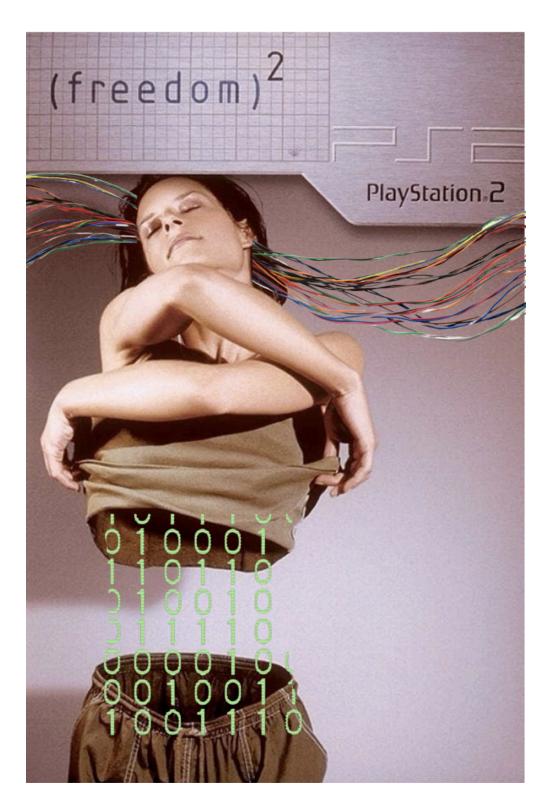
★

After the failure of BAD CODE, VNS Matrix went into hiatus for nearly twenty years before the interest in cyberfeminism reemerged in the mid 2010s (VNS, 2025, Goh & Thompson, 2021). The resurgence of cyberfeminism in the mid 2010s sought to address some of the concerns raised about 1990s cyberfeminism: it's overly-Western, white, and middle class; it sought to continue the original goals of cyberfeminism: challenge the male-dominated sphere of tech, and explore the possibilities of the internet and tech for "feminist praxis" (Goh & Thompson, 2021, p.3). Julia DeCook (2020) revisits Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," in her piece "A [White] Cyborg's Manifesto: The Overwhelmingly Western Ideology Driving Technofeminist Theory" (DeCook, 2020).

On the question of Westerenness and political organizing, Tabitha Reziare (2014) critiques that political intentions on the internet have been "structurally organized to serve the primary interests of North American governmental bodies." Siko Bouterseç and Anasuya Sengupta ask us to #DecolonizeTheInternet at their 2018 conference (Seu, 2021, p 361). Despite the criticisms of 1990s cyberfeminism, there is a thorough investment in what the internet can bring feminism, hoping for a new lifesource; "Feminism is not dead. The future of feminism is happening online," proclaims Zerlina Maxwell (2013).

One of the most well-known books from the cyberfeminist resurgence is Legacy Russell's (2020) *Glitch Manifesto*, where Russell thinks through the idea of a "glitch" – an internet-based term for an error – as a place of resistance on the internet. Russell writes fondly of her first encounter on the internet, where cyberspace was a place where an "exploration of her future self" unfolded; Russell believes that "the digital world provides a potential space where this can play out," by "this," Russell refers to a world of leaving the body behind, imaging a world where gender and race are malleable in ways they aren't in the physical world. Russell wants the internet to be a place where one can shed the body: be free of the shackles of it: exist as a glitch that disrupts the system, find liberation in the lines of code.

★

Playstation advertisement from 2000, collaged by me.

★

Classic feminist problems brought about by Western white women. The recurrence of the same things – even cyberfeminism comes back around. All of feminism collapses upon itself in the spiral.

QUESTIONS I CAN'T ANSWER:

Why are feminists so obsessed with fixing problems that they created?

Why must feminism be constantly reformed?

Is there a feminism that doesn't make me feel like this?

Will feminism keep having the same conversations over and over?

"The female loves herself only because she hates herself,"
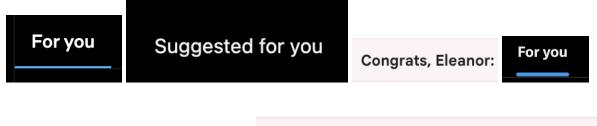
- Andrea Long Chu, Females

The feminist project is a narcissistic one. Intersectionality will not make cyberfeminism a success. Cyberfeminism is doomed; the internet is not coming to save us.

★

YOU'RE A FEMALE!

A non-exhaustive list of what it means to be female:

☐ To be subject to other's desires

☐ To let someone else do the desiring for you

☐ To let someone else do the living for you

☐ To be in a state of suicidal ecstasy

Being female is

☐ An existential condition

☐ Bad for you

☐ All of us

"Pornography is what it feels like when you think you have the object, but really the object has you" -Andrea Long Chu, *Females*

THE INTERNET IS WHAT IT FEELS LIKE WHEN YOU THINK YOU HAVE THE OBJECT, BUT REALLY THE OBJECT HAS YOU.

The internet is female. Therefore, the internet is seeped in an inescapable loathing, making true liberation impossible.

For you

Suggested for you

Congrats, Eleanor: For you

People you may know   Eleanor 25% Off Just For You 💝 - hey Eleanor 💝

(images from my Gmail inbox, my Tumblr, my Instagram, my X (formerly Twitter)

and my Facebook)

Dead internet theory: the idea that actually the internet is primarily run by algorithms, bots, and artificial intelligence. What is really happening on the internet, then?

The "extraordinary success of artificial intelligence is attributable to the fact that it frees us from real intelligence" (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 58). On the internet we can escape our intelligence.

★

The internet constructs itself as a place where we make it our own; we think that we have the object (we customize what we see, in the case of generative AI, we create what we see), but really the object has us. Joanna Walsh (2019) writes that the algorithm provides the "illusion of subjectivity" (p. 10). On the internet, we think we have the power to shape what we see, to define who we are on the internet. But this is an illusion. There is no subjectivity on the internet; the internet makes females of us all. Cyberfeminists such as Donna Haraway and Legacy Russell envision the internet as a place where the self can be molded and modded to the user's delight (Haraway, 1991;

Russell, 2020). This malleability that the cyberfeminists think is the plus side to the internet isn't real; everyone is female.

<p align="center">★</p>

To scroll is to castrate yourself again and again and again, wishing that something will give you the subjectivity that you want. William Gibson describes cyberspace as a "collective hallucination," (1984). On the internet, we all pretend.

The different kinds of pretending that happen:

☐ that we are in control,

☐ that we do not feel bad,

☐ that we have subjectivity.

<p align="center">★</p>

BROOKE MONK AND GIGI GORGEOUS:: re: being gorgeous online

The state of being empty only to fill yourself with others desires is like that of the internet. When one goes online for the first time – or begins a new profile or avatar on a new site – the perceived state of limitlessness and ability to create a new, different self is actually the feeling of hollowness. You fill yourself with the algorithm's suggestions, which is to fill yourself with others' desires. The internet is a space of perpetual castration, of perpetual femaleness. David Amstead construes the internet as a "vortex of self-hatred" (2003) This is what it is to be a woman, says Andrea Long-Chu. "A female is one who has eaten the loathing of another," writes Long-Chu (2019a, p. 43).

Through Long-Chu's writing about Gigi Gorgeous, we understand the quintessential online girl, one who is hollowed out and filled by others through her influencer career. The story has many parallels with Brooke Monk. To be a gorgeous girl on the internet is to "[repel] depth…the point [is] always to be gorgeous" (Long-Chu, 2019a, p. 37). To contain all of the desire on the internet, one must whittle themselves down: make their personality only the "bare essentials" (Long-Chu, 2019a, p. 37). Cut to the comments on Brooke Monk's posts–calling her an NPC, boring, opinionless. "You cannot be gorgeous without someone to look gorgeous for," claims Long-Chu; Monk is gorgeous for the internet, for her 35 million fans. Brooke Monk is, in a technical sense, a "dumb blonde," and from the perspective of gender, "we are all dumb blondes" (2019a, pp. 37-38, 44). The hatred of Monk: the rage we feel at the mirror of ourselves. How could Monk shamelessly flaunt herself as a dumb blonde, lean into her femaleness, gain success off of it? "You do not get to consent to yourself," says Long-Chu (2019a, p. 46). How is Monk on screen, so obviously full of the desires of others, so seemingly okay with not consenting to herself as she gorges herself on others desires. The pain of the deepfake makes her real to us. She, too, is pained by others desires, despite seeming happy with her fullness. The illusion is broken; she is gorgeous for no one when she is crying about her simultaneous emptiness and fullness – empty of herself, full of others.
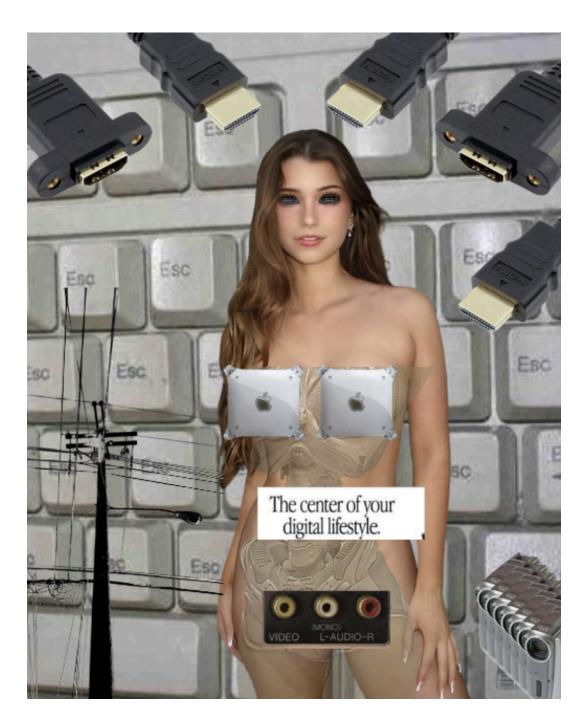
It sets in: everyone gets hollowed out by the internet; everyone gets fucked by the internet (passively, like a true female).

Brooke Monk is a ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ TikTok star, social media ▉▉▉▉▉▉ content ▉▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ engaging ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ lifestyle content. ▉▉▉ her bubbly personality ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ millions of followers ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉, ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ most influential young creators ▉▉▉▉. Known for her charming looks ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ grow her online presence ▉▉▉▉▉▉

Blackout poetry made from Brooke Monk's biography.

Gigi Gorgeous is a ▉▉▉▉▉▉ star, ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉ gained attention ▉▉▉▉ she began uploading ▉▉▉▉▉▉ streaming ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ appeared ▉▉▉▉▉ online reality ▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ popular ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉. ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ 2.8 million subscribers ▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ 2 million followers ▉▉ 2.2 million ▉▉▉▉ followers. ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ study fashion ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ but she left to focus on her YouTube career. ▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ came out on her YouTube channel ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉ ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉

Blackout poetry made from Gigi Gorgeous's biography.

Collage of a Brooke Monk deepfake, made by me.

THE INTERNET CANNOT SAVE US (GET OFFLINE!)

"We reject kings…We believe in…running code"
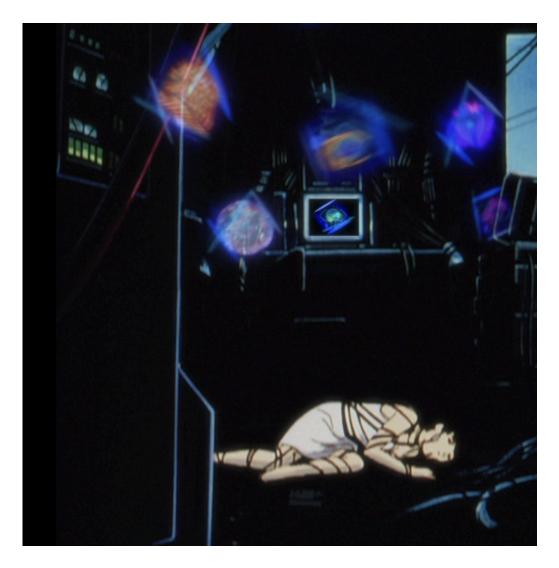
-David Clark, computer science pioneer

There aren't kings on the internet, but there are little interactions pinging around: comment sections, codes running, electricity moving, the keys clicking under my fingertips, my unblinking eyes drying out.

"I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess," writes Haraway (1991).

Why do we have to choose between those two? Cyberspace is a constant settling into something we don't truly want, but act like we do. Given no other choice, we settle into the lines of the code. Nestle yourself into the zero. The zero might feel like an embrace, but it's a cage.

★

It is time for feminists to abandon the internet as a site of potential liberation. We need to reject the possibility of being kings and queens on the internet. We need to reject the unoriginal lines of running code; they can't give us anything new. The internet is a fantasy you don't want to let go of. And the internet doesn't want to let go of you either – it wants to show you how to love it. Don't let it. The embrace of wires is colder and more tangled than the embrace of a real person.

A still from Serial Experiments Lain (1998).

"The value of divesting from the horse race of hope and fear has never felt so clear," writes Maggie Nelson (2021, p. 217). The horse race of hope and fear on the internet is constant. It enraptures you to return to your own site of suffering again and again. To divest in our hopes for the internet, we also must divest our fear in what seems like the end of the world. AI is, well, completely terrifying; the pain of Monk and other victims of deepfake pornography is heartbreaking; the things that generative AI produce completely suck. These things might feel looming, disastrous, depressing. They might

feel new, but they are not. It is the same problems of misogyny, femaleness, loathing, feminism; it is the same lines of code, the same illusion of the frontier of the internet. The same horses trapped on the möbius strip.

"The big night of liberation," as Nelson refers to it, probably isn't coming (2021, p. 217). It definitely isn't coming on the internet, like the cyberfeminists want, no matter how hard we try to make it feminist, to decolonize it, to globalize it. It won't happen because it can't happen. The internet can't give us anything other than pain. The internet, like femaleness, will destroy you.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1) **RESIST AI (THE ULTIMATE CASTRATOR!)**

with every update they want you to rely on AI to do your tasks, to live your life for you, to have sex with you, to do the searching for you. do not let them take this from you. do not let AI become your sidekick!

2) **STOP PRETENDING THE INTERNET IS YOURS**

your for you page is keeping you in shackles. become un-algorithm-able. do not let them tell you who to be.
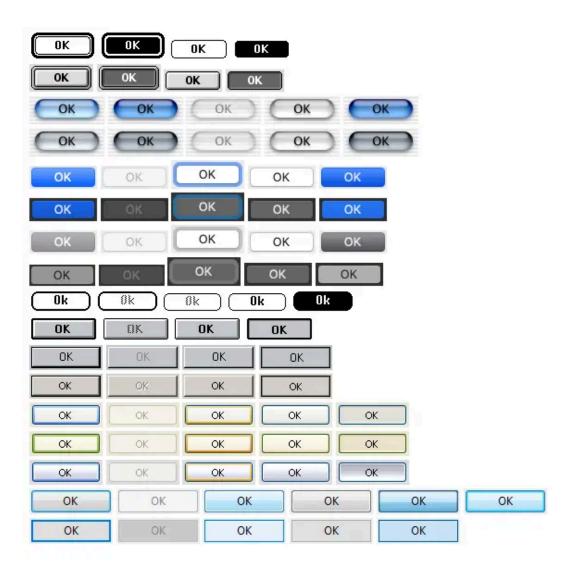
3) **DON'T ROMANTICIZE THE INTERNET**

the aesthetic of the internet was made to entrance you; it was meant to keep you staring, drying out your eyes, wasting your time, hating yourself. there is nothing romantic about this.

4) **TAKE A BREAK FROM FEMINISM; TAKE A BREAK FROM THE INTERNET**

inhabit the spaces outside the internet, outside of feminism. there is so much outside the world of loathing that is feminism and the internet.

IT WILL NOT BE

THIS IS...

Difficult and Fine

I have told you the stories. The stories of the constant seeking of Western feminism – its tireless, unsuccessful search for misogyny, its unyielding, repetitive commitment to fixing sex, its hope for every change to bring about liberation. These stories of feminism are meant to inspire, to keep us fighting the good fight.

I have also told you the story of technology and our collective wish that technology will bring us the future, bring us ease, bring us good. This story is meant to give us faith, to keep us plugged in.

Both stories tell us that liberation is on the horizon. It is my wish to complicate the linearity of these stories, which fall apart when they are examined. These stories, when probed, are illusions. They are illusions that comfort us. But these illusions keep us invested in the very things that prevent us from going beyond our present circumstances.

Janet Halley (2008) prescribes us to "take a break from feminism," to allow us time outside of the theory, for to live in theory for too long is, as she puts it, "horrifying." (p. 7) I advise my reader to take a break from the internet (p.7). Take the time to exist in a reality outside of the internet, away from the constant fear, loathing, and pain caused by it.

I don't propose this to be a cure all for the problems I presented in this thesis. I wish for this break to provide a space to "reckon instead with the fact that not everything is going to be OK, that no one or nothing is coming to save us, and that is both s*earingly difficult and also fine*" (Nelson, 2021, p. 126, emphasis mine). There is no final liberation, there is no end to femaleness. But in the spaces between, we can find a way to live.

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