

The Double-Edged Sword of Societal Femininity

“Men act, women appear. (John Berger 1972, 47)”¹

Grappling with my femininity is something that I never expected to struggle with growing up. I always liked the colour pink, never disliked wearing dresses, and played “house” with my other female friends. I did not think or know that these things predisposed me to a life of the patriarchal expectations.

As I got older, I shied away from activities that I thought were only meant for boys, because not only did I not want to participate in them, but I also thought that if I did that I would be liked less. No one ever tells you these things explicitly but somehow in primary school I already had this notion of not wanting to be disliked because of my gender identity. I think many women fear being disliked because so much of our worth is placed on the perception of being liked/desired by society. Wanting to be liked or desired inherently is not a negative notion. It is what we do to achieve this that puts us in jeopardy at times.

In high-school one of my female peers was called to the front of the whiteboard to complete a mathematical equation. She did the equation incorrectly and the teacher ‘jokingly’ said,

“I really hope you’ve learned how to cook, because you’re not getting very far with this level of math, but you might learn to feed your husband.”

In that moment I made my mind up to never learn how to cook because I did not want to be considered marriage material. I wanted to be able to sustain myself without the need of a male counterpart. I really thought that I was winning some invisible competition but all I was doing was refusing to learn a necessary life skill. And cooking was really only the beginning. I would spin these narratives in my head and walk on glass as to not tip this imaginary scale of femininity in either direction. I wanted to be considered feminine, but mentally I wanted nothing to do with femininity. All because society tells young women that femininity is inferior to masculinity.

¹ Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. BBC and Penguin.

I would like to conclude this piece by reiterating John Berger's quote. The patriarchy has deemed women to appear and act according to society's idea of femininity in day-to-day life. I personally believe that this has made us more susceptible to the patriarchy's commentary, because we have been taught to *deeply* care about society's perceptions of us. My advice to women and anyone who identifies as a woman in general is this: stop trying to balance out your femininity for society's sake, if you have preferences that do not align with traditional femininity that is normal and perfectly okay and if you have preferences that do align with traditional femininity that is also normal and perfectly okay. It is time for women to *act* and not just serve as visuals for men. So go out and ACT.

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