Refashioning Femininity

a portfolio by Lauren Bietz.

About the Author

Hi! My name is Lauren Bietz. I'm a student at the University of Georgia and a long-time fashion enthusiast. Growing up, Project Runway was always on the TV as my mother and I bonded over commenting on the contestants' designs, always acclaiming or criticizing. My grandmother taught me to sew by hand at age 7, and I haven't stopped sewing since - doll apparel, stuffed animals, cloth fidgets and, most importantly, personalized clothes. I went into the ninth grade with hand-sewn circle skirts and eleventh grade with hand-painted graphic t-shirts (along with a pair of old jeans covered in patches and block prints and metal findings), never caught without a needle and thread. From eleventh through twelfth grade, I worked as the head costume designer for my high school's theatre program, costuming shows like *The Play That Goes Wrong*, *The Ugly Duckling*, and *The Little Mermaid* - my work on the program's production of *Mamma Mia!* was even nominated for a Shuler award. The dress Ursula wore in our production of *The Little Mermaid* was hand-sewn from cheap velvet and cutouts of sequin overlay and outfitted with a custom wire

rig of remote-controlled string lights mimicking tentacles, which took me and my team nearly two months to sew, build, and ornament to completion. I'm hoping to enter a design in next semester's Fashion Design Student Association fashion show. Until then, I plan to keep on cutting apart t-shirts and sewing buttons onto things that don't quite warrant buttons.

I haven't always worn my passion for fashion on my sleeve, though (no pun intended). In my younger years, I kept it secret from my peers for fear of judgment – I didn't want to be lumped in with the "girly" girls and overlooked like they were. But as my peers and I grew to be more understanding and accepting of girly girls and fashion enthusiasts, I slowly became comfortable in my own skin. I started wearing my own designs to school, costuming theatre productions, and even selling handmade jewelry for a short while, no longer leaving any aspect of myself unsaid or unworn. I can't say for sure whether I'd be so excited to share this passion of mine if there hadn't been such a substantial sociocultural shift toward acknowledging and understanding femininity – I consider myself lucky for not having to know that reality.

Introductory Reflective Essay

This class has challenged me in ways I thought impossible. Fresh out of the high school Advanced Placement system, I approached English 1102 with the arrogance of Icarus and the closed-mindedness of an unaware amateur. I had no idea what scholarly writing was, and yet I was convinced I could do it with my eyes closed. I had breezed through four years of high-school writing classes with exactly two tools: a structural formula (you know the one) streamlined for quick, easy grading, and my admittedly verbose sense of narrative. If I could stick to the formula, zhuzh up my essays with some five-dollar words, and sprinkle in a little sarcasm, I could usually make the grade just fine. All of my writing was transactional and objective - I said what I needed to say, and in return I received a printed rubric with a circled number grade, with few comments from my evaluator. This certainly works for developing a sense of proper grammar, diction, syntax, potentially even style if you so choose - but it does not prepare you for what writing really is. When we first started reading They Say, I Say as a class, though, something shifted in my understanding of academic writing. Hiding in plain sight, there it was: writing is communication, conversation, an exchange of thoughts and ideas. English 1102 taught me to question, What am I really saying? To whom am I speaking? What purpose does it serve? That sort of audience awareness was
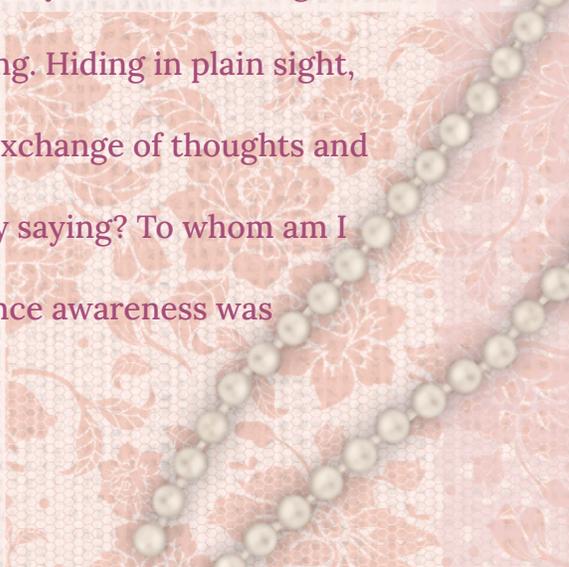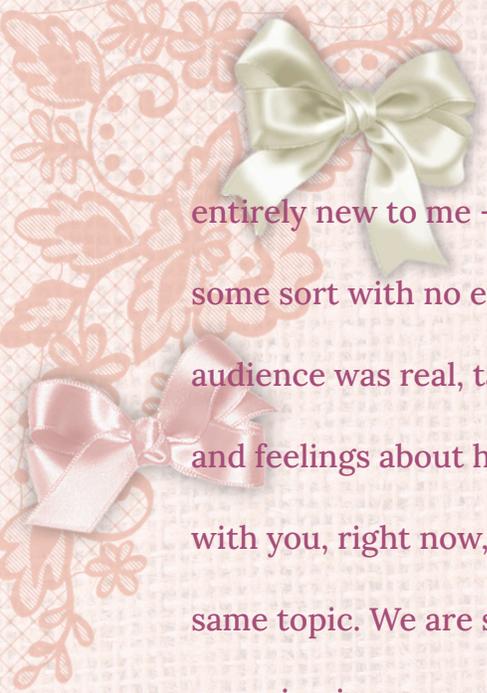
entirely new to me - my audience had, again, always been a neutral evaluator of some sort with no explicit position regarding the content of my writing. Now, my audience was real, tangible. You, my audience, are a real person, with real thoughts and feelings about how writing should and shouldn't be done. I am communicating with you, right now, expressing my own thoughts, feelings, and findings on that same topic. We are situated together, across a hypothetical table from one another, engaging in conversation. Further still, we converse within the larger space of a hypothetical coffee shop filled with people chattering about writing, butting in on and contributing to each others' conversations. I have learned that writing is not about receiving an extra two cents for your product, it is about contributing your own two cents to a pre-existing discourse. That requires grace and care, a certain sensitivity to and intuition for the thoughts and feelings of others.

Unfortunately, I have chronic, terminal foot-in-mouth syndrome. I got it from my dad. I have a natural tendency to overexplain, and thus, accidentally condescend. You can see in my Revision Exhibit that I spent around three drafts of my Researched Essay trying to find a balance somewhere along the sliding scale between overexplanation and underexplanation. My tendency towards overexplanation resulted in an unintentionally condescending paper. In my first few drafts, I even give the reader an imagination activity;

Picture a woman in a structured suit and dress shoes, hair tied in a bun. Now picture another woman next to her, wearing a lacy blouse, a midi skirt, and

heels, hair left to cascade over her shoulders. Who holds more power? Who will be listened to in a room of male peers? Who will attract more criticism from her female peers? Who works for whom? (Bietz 23)
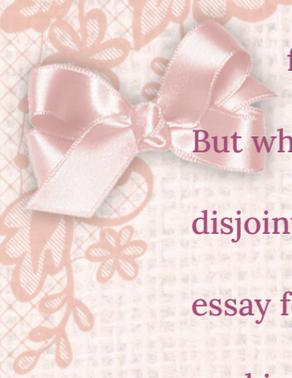
But when I deleted all the overexplain-y bits, I was left with a bunch of awkward, disjointed, seemingly disconnected points. Trying to pass that off as a worthwhile essay felt like trying to pass off a handful of flour, sugar, and chocolate chips as a cookie: no, it's not. One such case can be seen in a later version of the paragraph quoted above:

> So if a capitalist patriarchy encourages the assertion that those in masculine dress ought to be taken seriously, women who want (or need) to be taken seriously by men - such as feminists - ought to dress masculine, too. Women often achieve social power dressed in more masculine clothing, yet this practice has unintentionally reinforced the idea that a woman must dress masculinely in order to maintain and assert her social power. (Bietz 24)

That is not a finished cookie. That is a handful of ingredients. I haven't even stirred in the evidence or preheated my connections yet, I've just laid out my main points on the counter in a tidy row. Drafting this paper over and over, taste-testing each draft and going "hm, that's not quite right" every time, taught me how to fully bake a cookie that's not insultingly sweet.

This newfound intention behind my tone when speaking to an audience has also allowed me to more adeptly read an author's tone as an audience member.
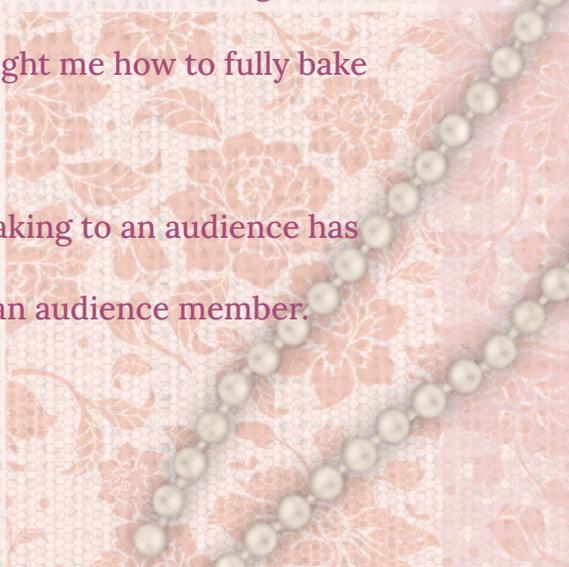
Because I speak to my audience with more sensitivity and care now, I've noticed I have a much better sense of an author's sensitivity to and respect for their audience. This allowed me to appropriately encourage extra sensitivity regarding the discussion of eating disorders in Acree's essay on male body image and social media, as seen in the Peer Review Exhibit. I said it best in my introduction to that exhibit:

> Extra attention paid to audience sensitivity and careful navigation of these topics establishes a sense of ethos within this discourse; to speak on individual disorders with care and grace implies a deeper understanding of sociocultural issues and those who struggle most with them. (Bietz 27)

This applies to more than just Acree's discourse, though. An audience will always know where they stand from an author's perspective; even if inarticulable by the audience, any work of writing establishes a clear tone of audience respect or condescension via its content alone. Does the piece navigate its own discourse with sensitive, respectful language? Does it leave much up to interpretation, or does it feel like the author is exhausting themselves trying to connect all the dots for you? All authors approach writing with pre-existing assumptions about their audience's level of understanding. By approaching reading with an acute awareness of the author's tone and balance of explanation, you, too, can gauge what an author thinks of you.
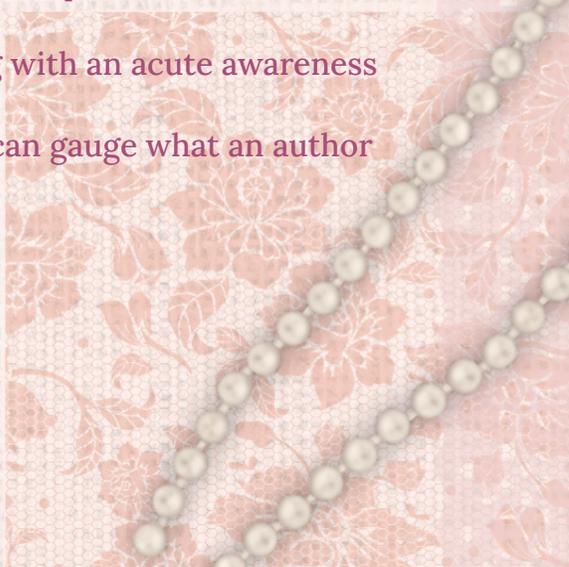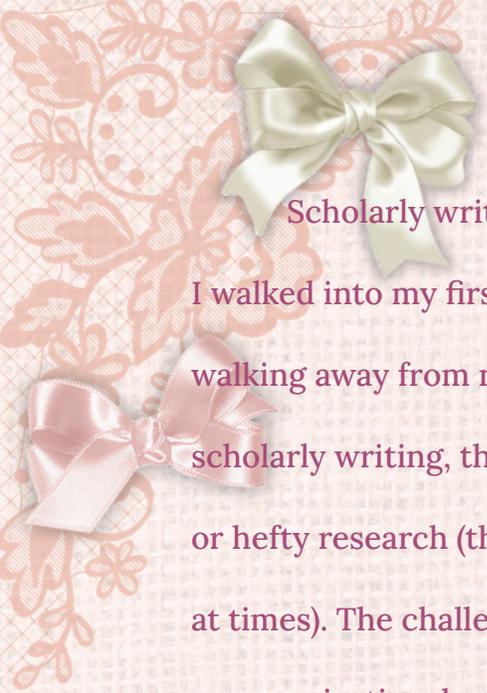
Scholarly writing is a much different kind of writing than what I am used to. I walked into my first English 1102 class meeting an arrogant snob, and I am walking away from my last class meeting thoroughly humbled. The challenge of scholarly writing, though, doesn't lie in grammar conventions, complex formatting, or hefty research (though those things can most definitely be difficult to navigate at times). The challenge of scholarly writing is exactly the challenge of all communication: how best can one respect their audience, maintain their attention, honor social convention, and be truly heard all at once? How must a perfect conversation sound? The answer is that no perfect conversation exists, and if it did, it could sound all sorts of ways. How will your perfect conversation sound? Now, put it in words. Say exactly what you mean to say, how you mean to say it, and get it published wherever the people you mean to say it to are looking. But say it with sensitivity, and say it with a thorough understanding of how they will hear it. I think that is the key to writing something truly meaningful. I think that is how best to be heard, within this hypothetical coffee shop, across this hypothetical table, in written conversation.

Thinking Pink: Recent Hyperfeminine Trends in Women's Fashion and Their Relationship to Popular Feminism

Abstract

Trends in Western contemporary women's fashion have begun to lean into feminine, even hyperfeminine aesthetics – think glitter, lace, frills, pink. Many see this as a simultaneous societal regression from the Western feminist ideals that have continuously built throughout the modern era. This is due to several sociocultural phenomena surrounding femininity, feminism, and the image of the modern feminist, including: the power dynamics of masculine and feminine dress as established by previous waves of feminism, and stereotypes of both the effeminate woman and the feminist that place the archetypes at odds with one another. This line of thinking regarding feminine trends in clothing is logically flawed, though. The tradition of masculinity in feminist dress has never been about masculinity for masculinity's sake – it arose as a form of subversion and statement. I argue that modern hyperfeminine trends in women's fashion such as bimbocore and Barbiecore exist similarly as novel methods of statement and subversion through clothing for today's younger generations of girls and women. When interpreted through the perspective of Judith Butler's performative theory of gender, one can even understand these trends as a satirization and consequent reclamation of hyperfemininity for a generation of girls that was taught from a young age to look down upon the feminine.
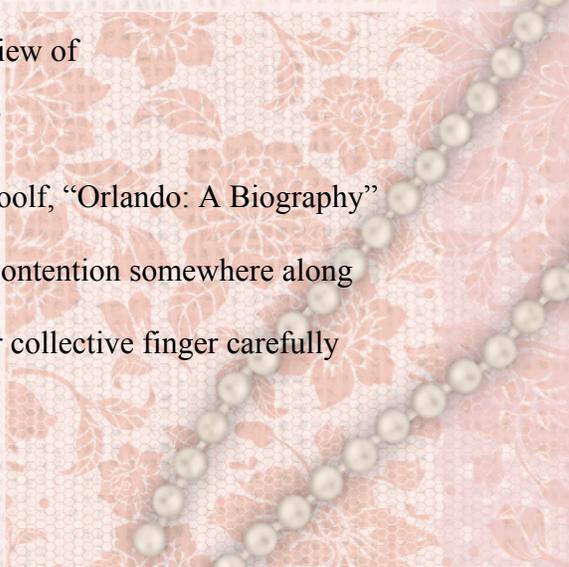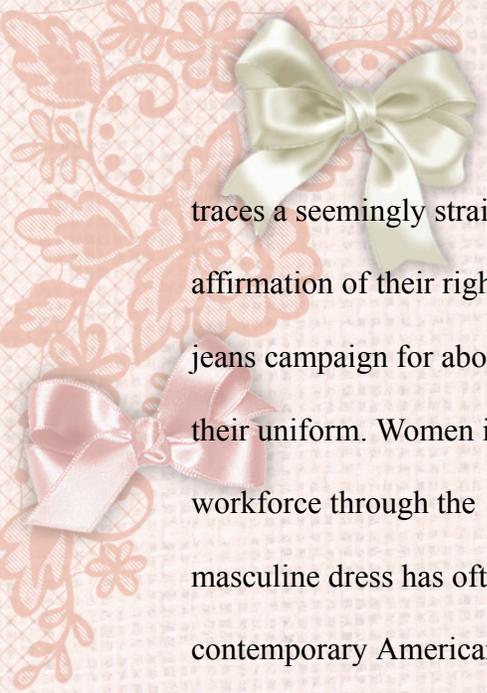
Essay

"Clothes have, they say, more important offices than

merely to keep us warm. They change our view of

the world and the world's view of us."

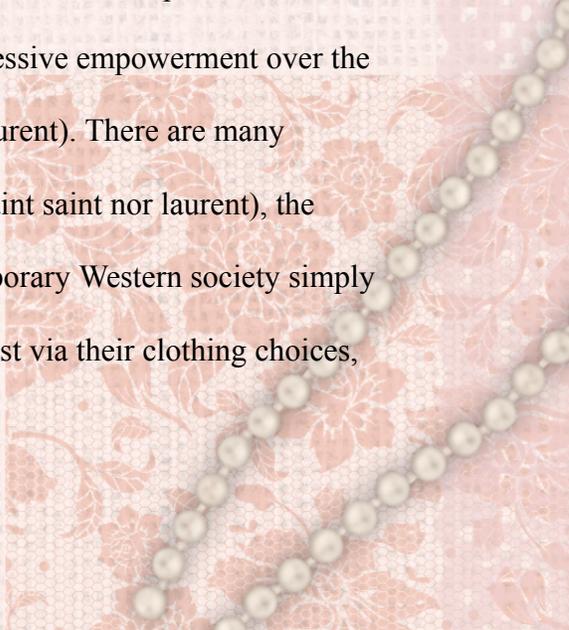– Virginia Woolf, "Orlando: A Biography"

Some casually engaged with popular feminism have found contention somewhere along the parallel timelines of fashion history and feminist progress. Their collective finger carefully
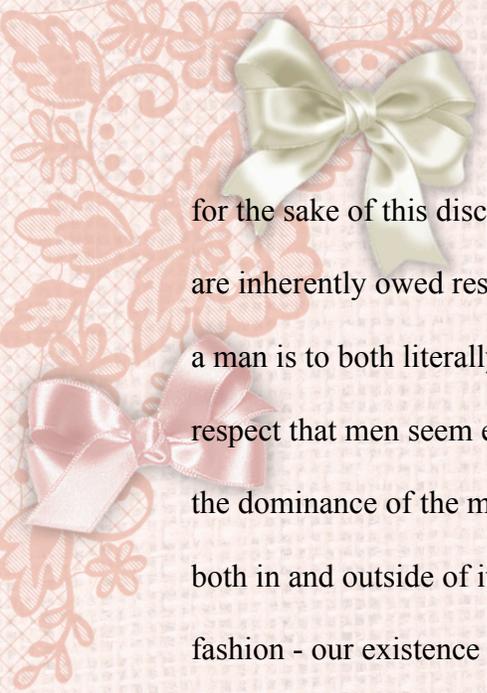
traces a seemingly straight path – concise, simple. Women in pants successfully retrieve legal affirmation of their right to wear pants in the 1920s. Women in structured sets of turtlenecks and jeans campaign for abortion rights in the 1970s, and the planned mothers of the 1980s inherit their uniform. Women in geometrically-cut, colorblocked pantsuits populate the American workforce through the 1980s. There is a clear and subconsciously understood pattern here: masculine dress has often acted as the armor in women's fight for equal treatment in contemporary American society. A woman dons a man's clothes, and she is empowered. But here is where the finger stops: the empowered young women of today do not armor themselves in the masculine silhouette, like their predecessors did. They instead opt for shiny lip gloss, showy eyeliner, fishnet tights, frilly skirts, poofy blouses, rhinestones, glitter, satin, lace, even tulle. It is natural to be taken aback by this progression towards the aesthetically hyperfeminine, as many of my peers are – if the tradition of feminist fashion is to adopt and adapt *menswear* to suit one's cause, it is entirely fair to conclude that the contemporary feminist cannot and should not adorn themself in overtly feminine fashions.

Pre-existing trends toward masculinity in women's clothing as feminists make further progress have come into existence and flourished, in part, due to the social power associated with masculinity. Powerful figures are often men in suits - businessmen, CEOs, federal representatives - and have been for many a year. While women's fashion has adapted to include more masculine pieces and silhouettes, converging with their progressive empowerment over the years, men's fashion has remained relatively static (aint saint nor laurent). There are many reasons male gender roles tend to reinforce themselves in fashion (aint saint nor laurent), the most relevant of which to this discussion being that men in contemporary Western society simply haven't needed to adapt to and overcome societal convention (at least via their clothing choices,

for the sake of this discussion) the way that women have. Men, societally, are treated as if they are inherently owed respect (Whitehead). Women have always had to earn it. Thus, to dress like a man is to both literally and figuratively step into his shoes; to, in a sense, earn the societal respect that men seem entitled to. Ilya Parkins suggests that we must consider first and foremost the dominance of the masculine figure within the fashion world, and the social power he holds both in and outside of it, when considering the sociopolitical implications of trends in women's fashion - our existence within a capitalist patriarchy largely dictates what we wear, regardless of any personal expression or artistry ("Introduction" 423-427). So, if a capitalist patriarchy encourages the assertion that those in masculine dress ought to be taken seriously, and that a woman can achieve societal respect via masculine dress, women who want (or need) to be respected by a male-dominated society - such as feminists - ought to dress masculinely. Unfortunately, the continuation of this practice has unintentionally reinforced the idea that a woman *must* dress masculinely in order to maintain and assert her social power.

The phenomenon of feminism's association with overtly masculine dress can also be partially accredited to the popular attribution of feminism to an individual's inability to properly execute the social convention of femininity. The modern American feminist is often considered bossy, unfashionable, and somewhat socially inept. She is ridiculed for her apparent misunderstanding of how a woman should act, and her overzealous anarchism with regards her own presentation. She is "crude, ugly, and anti-fashion" – sometimes even in the eyes of her cohorts (Parkins, "Fresh Lipstick"). She is, in the mind of her peers, likely chronically keyboard-bound and a relatively uninformed parrot of popular feminist ideals telephoned to her laptop screen via magazines and blogs (Dejmanee 345-354). She is not "polite, accommodating, and nurturing," as the social convention of femininity asserts that women should be (Planned
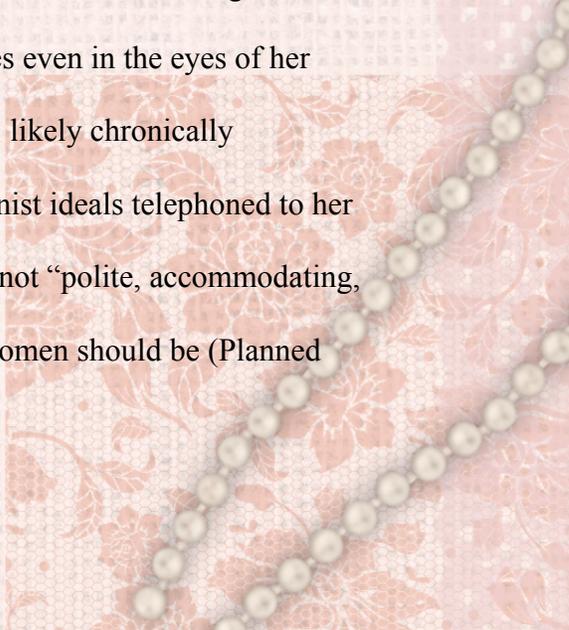
Parenthood). Many of my peers and much of the general public view the feminist and the effeminate fashionista as diametrically opposed, rival archetypes. Take, for example, the tomboy: an inherently feminist-adjacent archetype, often self-ascribed by individuals socialized as female, marked by the rejection of strict gender dichotomies - in both style of dress and interpersonal behavior - as well as the unintentional reinforcement of negative stereotypes surrounding the feminine figure. The tomboy, despite her existence as a confident counter to traditional ideas of what a girl ought to be, is riddled with anxiety at the thought of performing femininity, willingly or otherwise (Harpin and Holland 293-309). She should be allergic to fashion, beauty, and all things pink. For a woman, to care unapologetically about beauty and fashion and otherwise feminine or even domestic pursuits is to invite ridicule (Le 23:42-24:27) and unwanted (often sexual) attention (Rosenman 12-21). And if femininity entails a lack of respect from others, what empowered woman would want such a reality for herself? Ultimately, the tomboy wishes to escape the negative social ramifications of simply being a woman; she (I use the pronoun "she" here as a pleasantry) dresses in jeans and t-shirts and cuts her hair short and carries herself with a sort of masculine swagger in pursuit of unbiased acceptance and respect, even if her social identity is inherently counterculture. Feminists are often drawn to (and thus associated with) tomboyish styles of dress, whether consciously or subconsciously, because they recognize the social disadvantages of being perceived as feminine – and how can one best escape this? One solution is to stop appearing feminine. In this pursuit of perceptive neutrality in the social sphere, however, the tomboy has inadvertently alienated herself from her female peers. She has distinguished herself from them in pursuit of respect, subconsciously implying that those who do still dress femininely do not also deserve the respect she so adamantly seeks – an implication that doesn't go unnoticed by her peers.
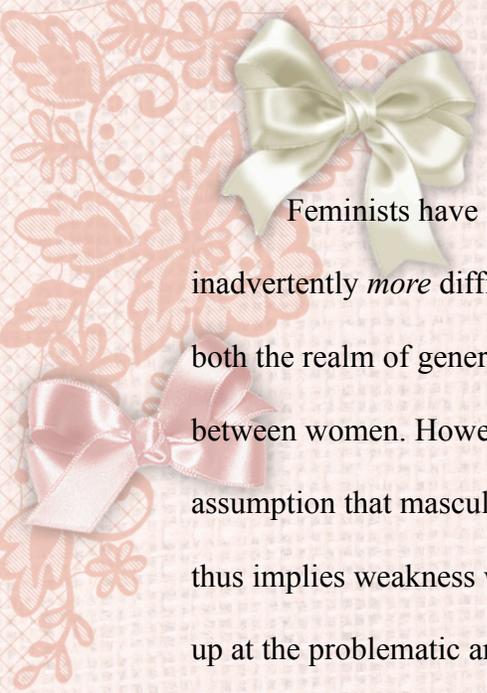
Feminists have an extremely accidental track record of making it easier to be female, yet inadvertently *more* difficult to be feminine. This places the feminist at odds with the feminine, in both the realm of generalized public opinion as well as the realm of interpersonal relations between women. However, if we rest our preconceptions of the modern feminist on the assumption that masculine dress is the key to achieving societal respect and that feminine dress thus implies weakness while posing an extreme opposite to popular feminist archetypes, we wind up at the problematic and logically flawed conclusion that the recent trend of hyperfemininity in women's fashion is somehow an interruption to feminism. This simply isn't true; feminism isn't going anywhere - especially not backwards - just because women and girls are choosing to wear more pink and frills.

Feminist dress has never, ever been centralized solely around masculinity - it has always been first and foremost about subversion and statement. The third-wave "craftivism" movement reimagined the traditionally feminine fiber arts of sewing, knitting, and crochet for the purpose of political statement, reclaiming domestic labor as a tool of female empowerment (Chansky 681-700). This wasn't a regression in the feminist movement simply because it revived a traditionally feminine hobby; it still actively furthered feminist ideology and progress. When the feminist donned trousers, turtlenecks, or pantsuits, it was never about masculinity for masculinity's sake. Though often motivated by the concept that a woman may earn societal respect by dressing like a man, it most centrally prioritized subverting the idea that a woman cannot achieve and expound upon the achievements of those who already wore those clothes: men. Women and girls today have different expectations to subvert – it is commonly understood by many in Western society that women are entitled to the same level of respect as men (though its true comprehension by most is debatable), but this respect is often conditional, influenced
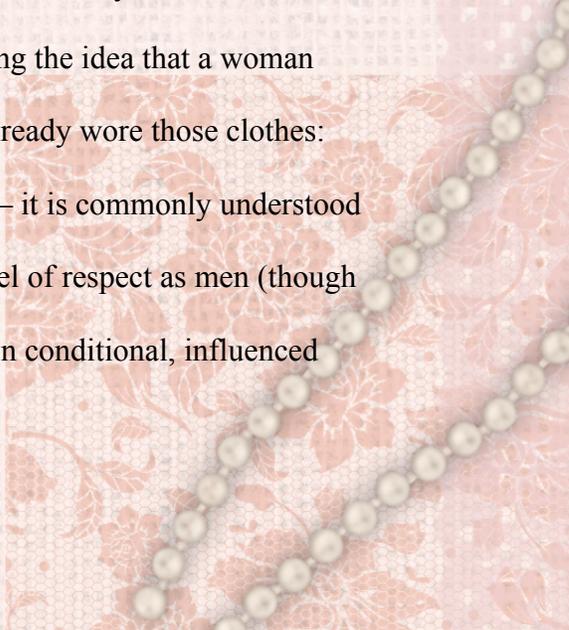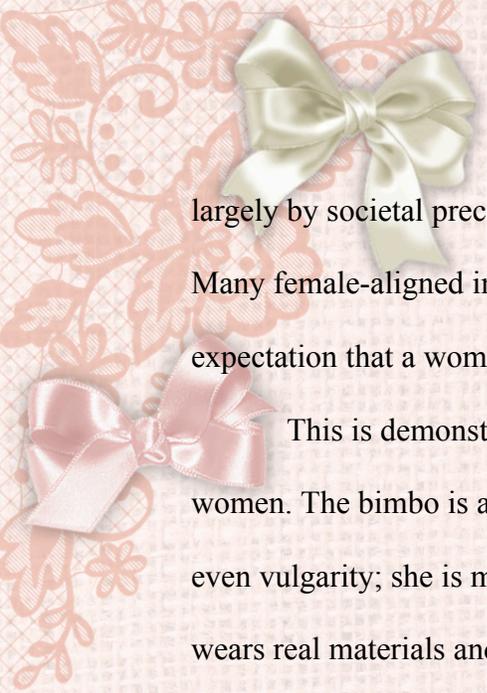
largely by societal preconceptions of what a woman who deserves respect looks and dresses like. Many female-aligned individuals today feel a particular inclination toward subverting the expectation that a woman *ought* to dress masculinely in order to achieve respect.

This is demonstrated best by the "bimbo" archetype and its current reclamation by young women. The bimbo is a hyperfeminine woman who maintains an aura of confidence, boldness, even vulgarity; she is made entirely of glitter, fur, silk, botox, expensive alcohol, and veneer. She wears real materials and fake features. She is fully and entirely comfortable in her identity as a woman. She is brash and unapologetic. To many, she is also vapid and shallow – and thus undeserving of respect. Think Regina George from *Mean Girls* (2004), Cher from *Clueless* (1995), and Paris Hilton in the early aughts. Many women and girls in the early 2000s avoided feminine dress for fear of being written off as such a character; nobody wants to be like the superficial harlots in pink push-up bras and bedazzled velvet tracksuits (it should be noted that similarly "trashy" hypermasculine individuals did not face the same collective disrespect at the time; see: "frat guy" archetypes).

So we pivoted to the "tomboy" archetype mentioned earlier in this essay, now relevant within the context of young girlhood: she is observant yet timid, intelligent yet humble, admirable for her rejection of all that trashy feminine ephemera. Think Hermione Granger from the *Harry Potter* films (2001 - 2011). We donned striped t-shirts and loose jeans, threw our hair in ponytails and buns, and pretended to be uninterested in makeup and frills and femininity as a whole. The majority of us did this to avoid ridicule and misunderstanding, not as an honest and unique expression of our individual girlhood (Le 23:42-24:27). I did this, too – some of my earliest memories are of proudly denouncing the color pink in the hopes of earning my classmates'
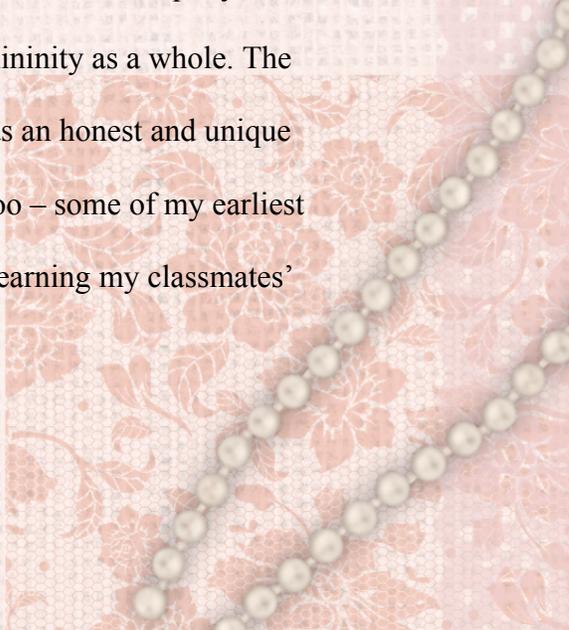
approval. Girly girls were not to be proud of the fact; femininity was reserved for ditsy, dumb, vapid girls.

A newer, less brazen fashion archetype has emerged in recent years, harkening back to childhood nostalgia and the unique maximalism characteristic of girlhood that many of us never felt comfortable expressing as girls: "Barbiecore." Barbiecore is bright, jarring, and "extra" – oh, and don't you forget it, Barbiecore is *pink* (By the way, sales in pink women's clothing are on the fast-track skyward and only projected to rise (WGSN).). This development is interesting particularly because of Barbara herself's highly controversial and still-disputed standing in the feminist movement (with arguments over this standing having been reanimated by the Summer 2023 release of Greta Gerwig's *Barbie)*. Barbie (the doll) "[embodies] the role of middle-class, thin, white girls" (WGSN Insider), and is often cited by women of all age groups as a source of childhood insecurity, for her design as a picture-perfect, impossible-beauty-standard-meeting young woman, as well as her status as a comparative symbol of casual wealth. Yet Barbie's iconic tagline, "You can be anything," sends a clearly feminist message to the young girls and women she's marketed towards. Her goal has always been to inspire and subvert expectations of domesticity for the modern woman; to go forth and achieve, in doll form, what the modern woman aspires to – and in turn, inspire that woman to go forth and achieve it. She is an astronaut, an explorer, a politician, an artist. *She* can be anything, so that *you*, her consumer and beholder, can be anything. Barbie leads a sort of double-life both as a feminist icon and an oppressive image of traditional femininity – beauty, wealth, etc – that feminists have been working against for almost three waves now. So for the progressive young women of the 2020s to pique interest in the stylistic aesthetics of Barbie and expand upon her vision via maximalist fashion is, nonetheless, interesting. Counter to the bimbo's gluttonous excess, the Barbie is a
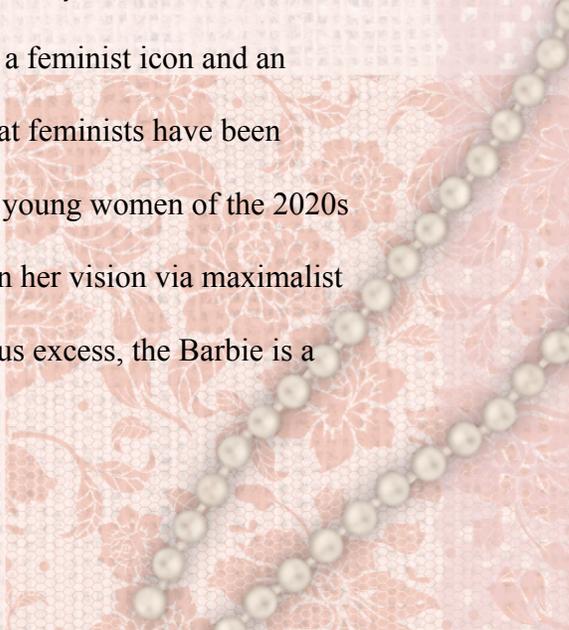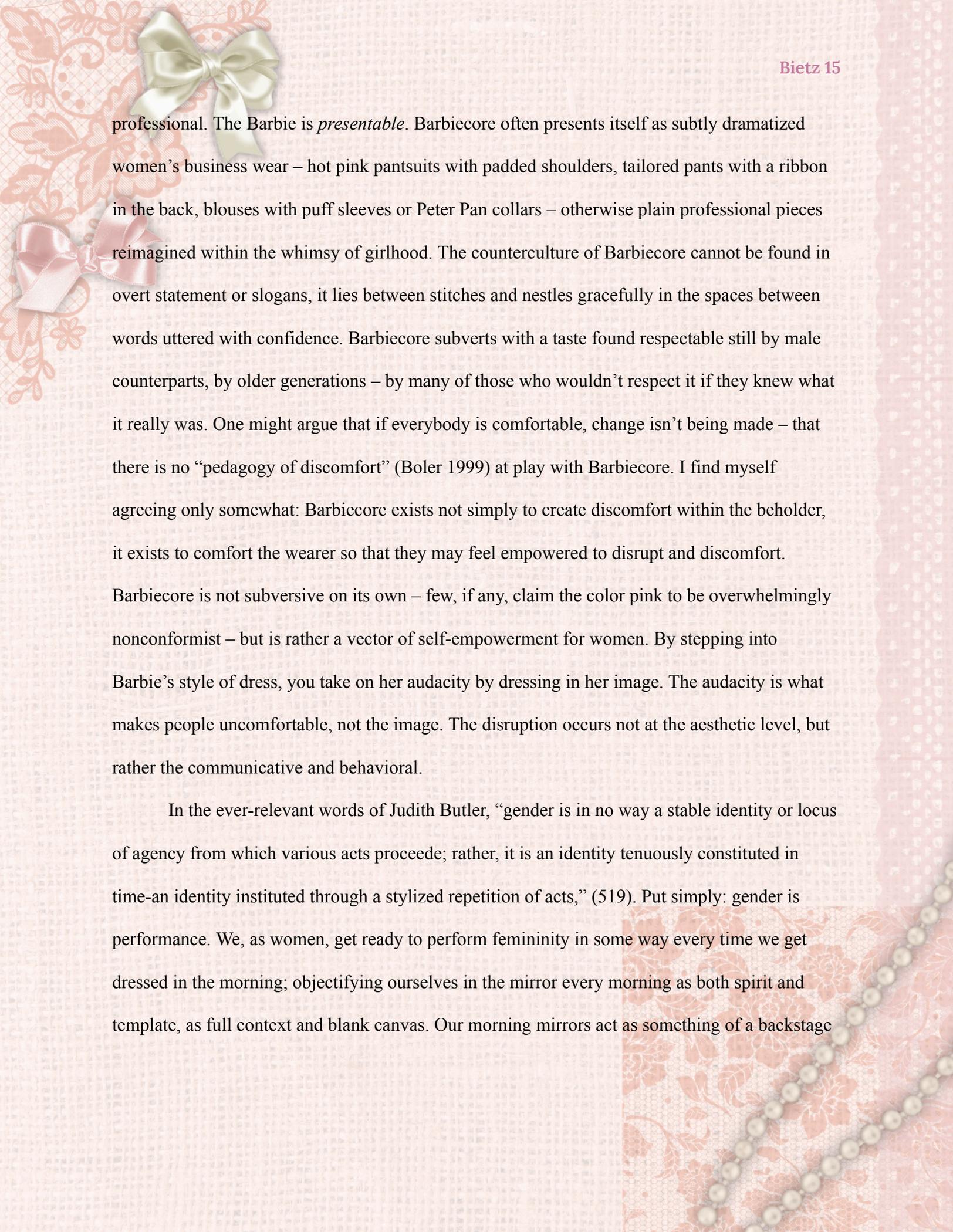
professional. The Barbie is *presentable*. Barbiecore often presents itself as subtly dramatized women's business wear – hot pink pantsuits with padded shoulders, tailored pants with a ribbon in the back, blouses with puff sleeves or Peter Pan collars – otherwise plain professional pieces reimagined within the whimsy of girlhood. The counterculture of Barbiecore cannot be found in overt statement or slogans, it lies between stitches and nestles gracefully in the spaces between words uttered with confidence. Barbiecore subverts with a taste found respectable still by male counterparts, by older generations – by many of those who wouldn't respect it if they knew what it really was. One might argue that if everybody is comfortable, change isn't being made – that there is no "pedagogy of discomfort" (Boler 1999) at play with Barbiecore. I find myself agreeing only somewhat: Barbiecore exists not simply to create discomfort within the beholder, it exists to comfort the wearer so that they may feel empowered to disrupt and discomfort. Barbiecore is not subversive on its own – few, if any, claim the color pink to be overwhelmingly nonconformist – but is rather a vector of self-empowerment for women. By stepping into Barbie's style of dress, you take on her audacity by dressing in her image. The audacity is what makes people uncomfortable, not the image. The disruption occurs not at the aesthetic level, but rather the communicative and behavioral.

In the ever-relevant words of Judith Butler, "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time-an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts," (519). Put simply: gender is performance. We, as women, get ready to perform femininity in some way every time we get dressed in the morning; objectifying ourselves in the mirror every morning as both spirit and template, as full context and blank canvas. Our morning mirrors act as something of a backstage

dressing room, where we don stage makeup and costume. If gender is performance, who's to say this performance cannot be satirical or caricatural in nature?

I point you to TikTok user @toothfairyfemme, who chronicles extensively her relationship to femininity via short videos shared publicly on the platform. One of her most popular videos reads:

> i want to be so feminine that it's offputting. i want to be too much, i want to be sickly sweet, enough to make people feel nauseated. i want to make men squirm, i want them to not be able to place what exactly it is that's off about me, but they're filled with a deep sense of dread regardless. i want to feel haunted. i want to be an omen. i want to be performative. i want to be unsettling. i want to be macabre. i want my femininity to be grotesque (0:00-0:13).

Another video reads:

> i'm actually just like other girls tbh. i love hair ribbons and high heels and smudgy lipstick and lace. i love killing and maiming and biting etc. i love rotting and tea parties and blood and guts. i also love pearls and shiny things and dirt. i love writhing. i love ROTTING!!! i love being gifted flowers and jewelry and hair and teeth. literally #justgirlythings (0:00-0:15).

To associate femininity with the confrontational nature of violence and vulgarity in a creative and hypothetical context forces viewers to confront and reexamine their expectations of those who express femininity, to separate the aesthetic presentation of femininity (pastel colors, lace, pearls, tea parties, etc) from the social conventions long associated with it. This mindset of "vulgar hyperfemininity" as a reclamation of the aesthetic has recently grown in popularity, gaining particular traction on social media, where fashion trends and their ideological roots
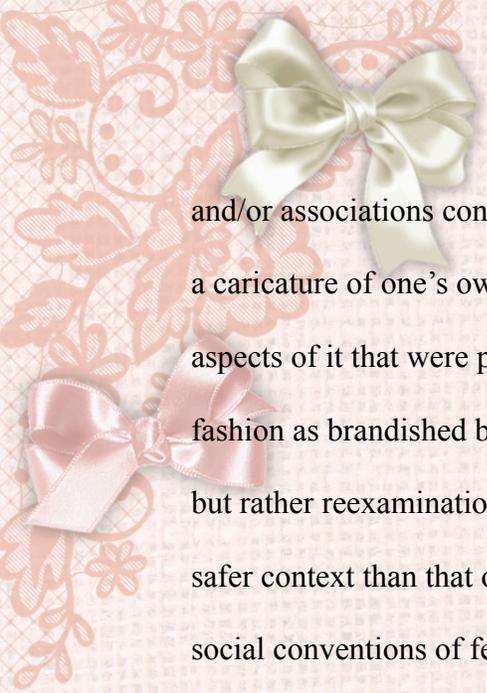
and/or associations converge most clearly and observably (Thompson & Haytko 15-42). To make a caricature of one's own femininity is to reexamine it within unfamiliar contexts, to reclaim aspects of it that were previously out of reach. I pose, then, that the function of hyperfeminine fashion as brandished by today's women and girls is not regression or even embracing tradition, but rather reexamination and reclamation of one's own femininity and girlhood within a newer, safer context than that of girlhood itself. Today's hyperfeminine trends aim not to reinstate the social conventions of femininity, but to instead flip those same conventions on their head. In girlhood, as discussed previously, this generation of young women faced social pressure to reject femininity. Now, as young women, we are empowered enough to explore and fully embrace our feminine tastes – via both more objective expression (see: Barbiecore) and more satirical/caricatural expression (see: bimbocore).

This does, however, raise new questions – when does satirical and caricatural performance of one's own gender go too far? Where is the middle line between empowering self-satire and accidental yet harmful, alienating satire of others, and how does one go about avoiding (or even purposefully crossing) this line? Is there potential for the current trends of hyperfemininity – comprised largely of young women performing femininity semi-satirically through fashion – to become harmful in misinterpretation or misperformance? In truth, I really do believe we needn't worry: young women and girls tend to have their best interests in mind – and historically, those best interests have aligned with the goals of feminism (as the nature and purpose of feminism is, of course, to empower that exact demographic). In other words, the kids are alright. It is not anyone's responsibility or civic duty as a feminist to criticize or to assume regression from trends that do not align well with what is tried and true. It is, however, a generally good idea to analyze, and to at least attempt to understand. By attempting to
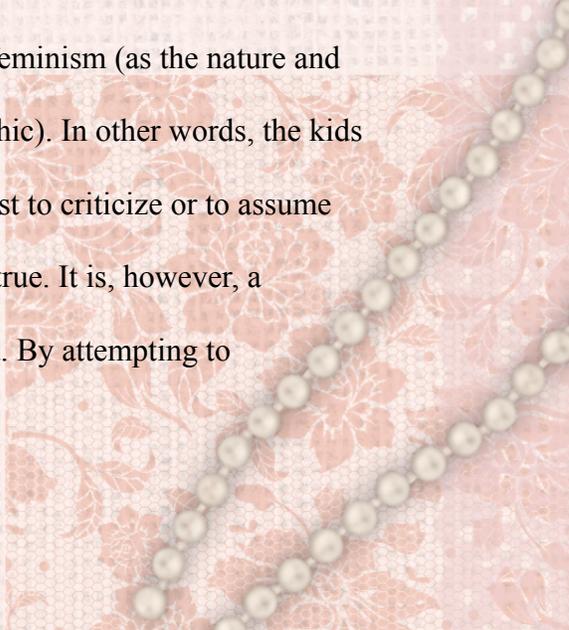
understand the hyperfemininity trend through the lens of progress and empowerment, one extends a sort of olive branch to the women and girls of today, expressing trust in their ability to empower themselves.

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Revision Exhibit

My development towards audience-considerate writing is most evident from the drafting progression of my paragraph on the inherent societal power/respect dynamics of masculine and feminine dress.

Pre-writing

The masculine presentation and carrying of oneself is often conflated with social power. Think of a woman in a structured suit with a pixie cut, standing tall. Now, think of a woman in a midi skirt and lacy blouse, ankles together and hands folded. Who seems more powerful? Which one is an activist? Which one is mutable? Ilya Parkins suggests we must consider first the dominance of the masculine figure within the fashion world before we draw conclusions regarding the sociopolitical implications of trends (423-427).

You can see me throwing different thoughts into the melting pot here - they're incoherent, but they get across what they need to for a largely utilitarian pre-write. It's extremely conversational, but overly colloquial, like I'm explaining my essay to my roommate. It almost reads as though I'm trying to explain it to someone unacquainted with the discourse at hand. At the time of writing, this sort of dumbed-down explanation felt appropriate - you never know if your audience is on the same wavelength that you're on, it can't hurt - but reading it back, it feels almost condescending, like I don't trust my audience to comprehend my point without giving them instructions.

Draft 1

The phenomenon of masculine trends in women's clothing as women's rights further progress is, in part, due to the social power associated with masculinity. Powerful figures are often men in suits – businessmen, CEOs, federal representatives – and have been for many a year. When women aspire to be taken seriously in professional settings, they are encouraged to dress in pants rather than dresses lest the inherently flirtatious twirl of a skirt lower the volume of their voice as it hits the ears of their counterparts. They tie their hair up and away, lest long, attractive tresses distract from their professional worth. Picture a woman in a structured suit and dress shoes, hair tied in a bun. Now picture another woman next to her, wearing a lacy blouse, a midi skirt, and heels, hair left to cascade over her shoulders. Who holds more power? Who will be listened to in a room of male peers? Who will attract more criticism from her female peers? Who works for whom? Ilya Parkins suggests that, when considering the sociopolitical implications of trends in women's fashion, we must consider first and foremost the dominance of the masculine figure within the fashion world and the social power he holds even outside of it – our existence within a capitalist patriarchy largely dictates what we wear regardless of any personal expression or artistry (423-427). So if the tradition of capitalist patriarchy asserts that those in masculine dress ought to be taken seriously, women who want to be taken seriously by men – such as feminists campaigning for their own fair treatment by them – ought to dress masculine, too. Women often achieve social power wearing more masculine clothing, yet this practice has unintentionally reinforced the idea that a woman must dress masculinely in order to maintain and assert her social power.

Oh, dear reader, it got worse. I've kept that sort of overexplanation and unintentional condescension and I've expanded upon it, giving the reader even *more* play-by–play instructions on how to think about my point. This is what happens when you develop an idea as you write - this draft was extremely rough and writing it felt like navigating an overgrown corn maze, clawing through gangly plants with tangled leaves (my evidence, of course) just to escape gasping for air, barely having made a clear point. It lacked concision, it lacked clarity, and it lacked audience sensitivity. There's no respect for myself or for the reader.

Pre-final Draft

The trend of masculinity in women's clothing as feminists make further progress is, in part, due to the social power associated with masculinity. Powerful figures are often men in suits - businessmen, CEOs, federal representatives - and have been for many a year. Ilya Parkins suggests that we must consider first and foremost the dominance of the masculine figure within the fashion world and the social power he holds both in and outside of it when considering the sociopolitical implications of trends in women's fashion - our existence within a capitalist patriarchy largely dictates what we wear, regardless of any personal expression or artistry (423-427). So if a capitalist patriarchy encourages the assertion that those in masculine dress ought to be taken seriously, women who want (or need) to be taken seriously by men - such as feminists - ought to dress masculine, too. Women often achieve social power dressed in more masculine clothing, yet this practice has unintentionally reinforced the idea that a woman must dress masculinely in order to maintain and assert her social power.

Here is where I start to realize I've been talking down to my audience - you can see I've deleted the whole mindscape imagination activity from before. But my connections between the first couple sentences and the rest of the paragraph are weak if at all existent. What do men in suits have to do with the power dynamics of feminine versus masculine dress? Why are men in suits relevant here? I've begun to trust my audience, but I'm not quite articulating my point enough for it to be *clear*. Here, I've left all connections implied without intention. It's as audience-hostile as its previous versions, but for opposite reasons.

Final Essay

Pre-existing trends toward masculinity in women's clothing as feminists make further progress have come into existence and flourished, in part, due to the social power associated with masculinity. Powerful figures are often men in suits - businessmen, CEOs, federal representatives - and have been for many a year. While women's fashion has adapted to include more masculine pieces and silhouettes, converging with their progressive empowerment over the years, men's fashion has remained relatively static (aint saint nor laurent). There are many reasons male gender roles tend to reinforce themselves in fashion (aint saint nor laurent), the most relevant of which to this discussion being that men in Western society simply haven't needed to adapt to and overcome societal convention (at least via their clothing choices, for the sake of this discussion) the way that women have. Men, societally, are treated as if they are inherently owed respect (Whitehead). Women have always had to earn it. Thus, to dress like a man is to both literally and figuratively step into his shoes; to, in a sense, earn the societal respect that men seem entitled to. Ilya Parkins suggests that we must consider first and foremost the dominance of the masculine figure within the fashion world, and the social power he holds both in and outside of it, when considering the sociopolitical implications of trends in women's fashion - our existence within a capitalist patriarchy largely dictates what we wear, regardless of any personal expression or artistry ("Introduction: Fashion and Feminist Politics of the Present" 423-427). So, if a capitalist patriarchy encourages the assertion that those in masculine dress ought to be taken seriously, and that a woman can achieve societal respect via masculine dress, women who want (or need) to be respected by a male-dominated society - such as feminists - ought to dress masculinely. Unfortunately, the continuation of this practice has unintentionally reinforced the idea that a woman *must* dress masculinely in order to maintain and assert her social power.
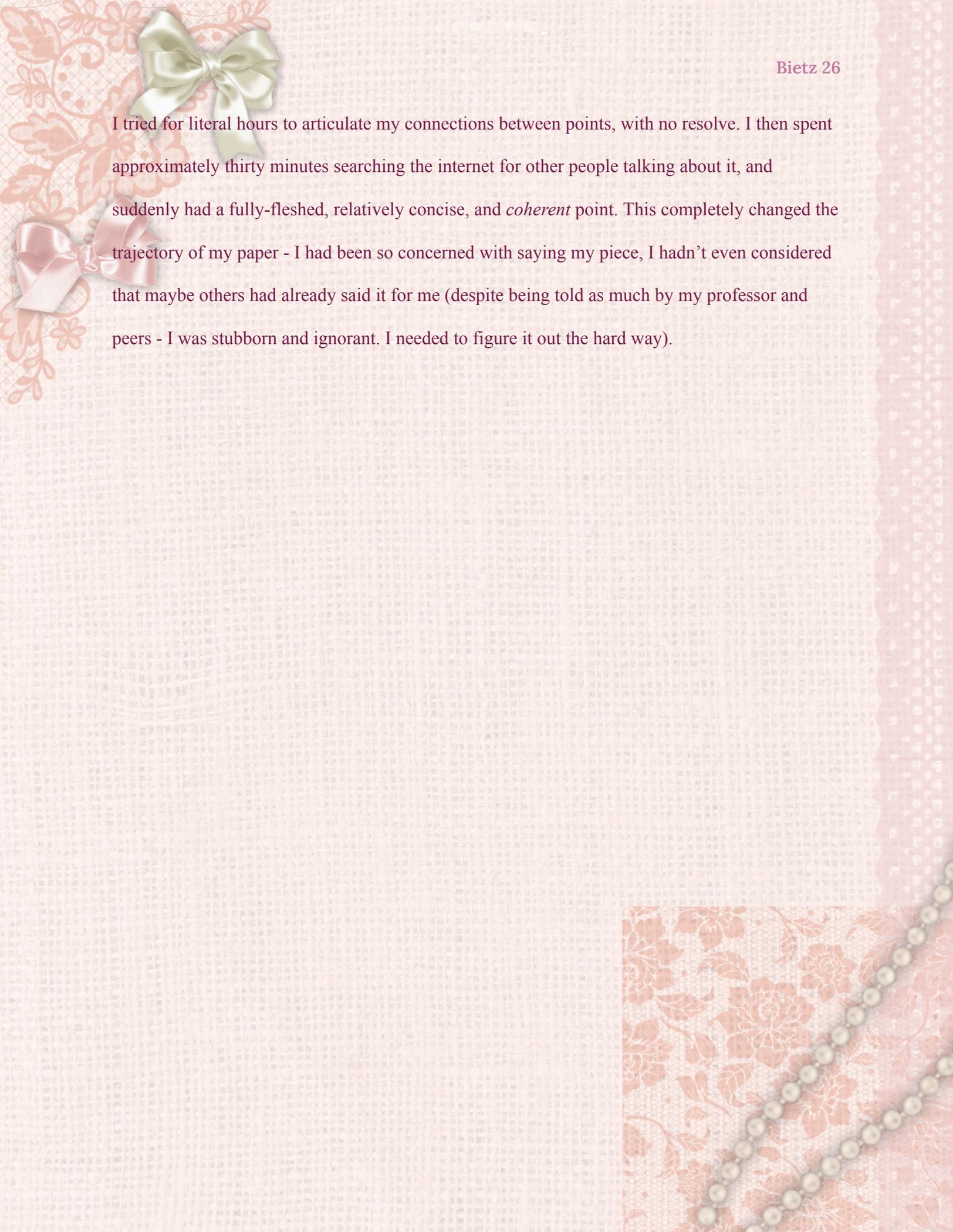
I tried for literal hours to articulate my connections between points, with no resolve. I then spent approximately thirty minutes searching the internet for other people talking about it, and suddenly had a fully-fleshed, relatively concise, and *coherent* point. This completely changed the trajectory of my paper - I had been so concerned with saying my piece, I hadn't even considered that maybe others had already said it for me (despite being told as much by my professor and peers - I was stubborn and ignorant. I needed to figure it out the hard way).

Peer Review Exhibit

Review for Acree Brock – Researched Essay Draft 1

The vast majority of my comments on Acree's work emphasize clarity and cohesion, polishing it best for optimal reader comprehension. Acree here is entering primarily a dialogue of psychosocial analysis. At several points, you'll notice the importance I place on audience sensitivity regarding eating disorders - because they are such a sensitive and often misunderstood topic (one which I am deeply familiar with), I thought it could potentially be helpful in my peer review to stress careful word choice when describing eating disorders and proper articulation of their symptoms/nature. Extra attention paid to audience sensitivity and careful navigation of these topics establishes a sense of ethos within this discourse; to speak on individual disorders with care and grace implies a deeper understanding of sociocultural issues and those who struggle most with them.

Highlighted in blue is my personal commentary.
Highlighted in purple is the chunk of Acree's text my commentary refers to.

Social Media's Impact on Male Body Image: Why This New Perception of an Ideal Male Body is a Problem.

Guys today are huge. This wasn't always the case. A couple decades ago, it wasn't the norm for guys to have thighs the size of a tree trunk. Now, if you walk around any college or even high school campus, you will see guys who look like they were a statue of a Greek god that came to life. The thing is, nobody finds this all that strange. If you go back to the turn of the century, most guys were a whole lot skinnier than they are today. It is almost becoming an expectation that a guy today works out every day. Men are constantly trying to one up each other asking one another "bro, how much do you bench?". For many men, it takes up most of their topics of conversation. Some don't know how to talk about anything else. So what has changed in the last few decades that has caused this trend of so many men becoming gym geeks? Some people would say that the latest wave of feminism is allowing women to express themselves in more ways than ever before and it is leaving men behind trying to catch up. [i see where you're coming from here, but i think it'd help to cite a source, even if that source is "i've heard peers say this"] So, instead of makeup or lipstick, they focus on their muscles. This may be partly true, and there is likely no one true cause of this sudden focus on muscles. Whether or not there is something that triggered this new wave of male gym obsession, social media has done nothing but worsen the problem. Most people today have acknowledged that there is a correlation between social media use and body dissatisfaction

in women. However, most people wouldn't see much of a problem in men. Nonetheless, in recent years with the creation of platforms such as TikTok, there has been more of a focus on fitness in social media than ever before. Most users wouldn't even consider this a problem. It doesn't seem like focusing more on health would do any harm. But, the increase of focus on fitness is not what it seems. Men are not exercising more with their mental and physical health on their minds. What is on their minds is getting as big as is humanly possible. Most men are simply seeking some way to feel good about themselves- to improve their self esteem. Scrolling through social media, a young man might see pictures and videos of various friends and influencers in the gym. These people are receiving a lot of likes and comments, and they seem to feel good about themselves and confident in their bodies. So, that young man starts to work out. As he sees his muscles grow, he starts to feel good about himself– but not satisfied. He starts to place all of his self value and self worth in his appearance. He becomes paranoid that if he misses even a single day in the gym, he will lose his physique and thus his value. Most users on social media platforms might think that this newfound emphasis on going to the gym is a good thing. However, exercise addiction is a problem, and more research needs to be done on how to avoid letting so many young men fall into this trap through their social media use.   A young man scrolls through his Instagram page for hours a day. He's in pretty good shape. He has played sports his entire life but has always been pretty skinny. As he goes through his Instagram feed, he sees video after video of guys in the gym talking about their workout routines. He has never really been the type to go to the gym all the time. After all, he never played football or any sport that required much weight training. However, as he sees all of these videos of guys with tons of likes and followers working out, he starts to feel something. He can't help but feel a desire to get in the gym and put on some muscle. He starts to dislike his skinny physique. Before he knows it, he is in the gym every day of the week for hours at a time. He spends less time hanging out with his friends or family and plans his entire schedule around working out. [these sections feel extremely similar to one another - maybe incorporate points from the first POV into the second POV to flesh it out and make every point necessary without being repetitive]

This young man is experiencing what many young men today are experiencing. His exposure to social media is making him dissatisfied about his body, which leads to him becoming addicted to exercise because that's what he starts to find his identity in. [this was the best example of your thesis i could find - i feel like i have an extremely clear understanding of what your thesis acually is from reading the essay, i just had some trouble finding your thesis explicitly stated anywhere. as a whole, i think your argument and thesis work perfectly together - your essay is extremely robust and your argument is well-fortified.]

This phenomenon is something new that is being seen in men, however it has been acknowledged for quite a while now that social media can lead to body dysmorphia in women ~~through~~ [and the consequent development of] diseases such as anorexia nervosa [,bulimia, and EDNOS.] So, why the sudden change in men?

Over the past couple of decades, there has been a dramatic change in what the ideal male body looks like. Kevin Dickinson uses a prime example of this in his article "Parents, Boys Also, Have Body Image Issues Thanks to Social Media". Dickinson describes the change in the physique of the well known "Wolverine", portrayed by Hugh Jackman. In X-Men (2000), Jackman's build is far less veiny and muscular than he is in The Wolverine (2013). This change in physique is a prime example of how the media has changed what people think of as the ideal body image. [i feel like expanding more on this point could really strengthen it.]

~~On social media today,~~ some of the most well known male influencers [on social media today] have a chiseled physique. Even those who do not ~~highlight~~ [showcase] gym-related content are often incredibly muscular as well. One such influencer, "The Liver King", is a 45 year old boasting a structure like that of a Greek god. He has 5.1 million followers, most of whom are teenage boys. Recently, he was given doctor ' s orders not to work out, yet is continuing to do so. [this could benefit from a source - did he post this on social media? is it a rumor? did someone else leak it? etc etc.] While many of them would likely claim to only be joking, it is not uncommon for people to reference "The Liver King's" logic in their workout life. [this might also benefit from a source, even if it's just a tiktok or a tweet or an instagram post where someone's like "yeah i live by the liver king's philosophy"]

Despite what most people might think, exercise addiction is real and it is not healthy. Exercise addiction; "a craving for leisure-time physical activity, resulting in uncontrollably excessive exercise behavior that manifests itself in physiological or psychological symptoms" (Hausenblas and Smoliga, 1) is being experienced by many more people than are being acknowledged. The latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders does not include exercise addiction, despite the fact that this addiction can show many of the same effects of alcoholism. Because it is not [often considered] an addiction, it becomes a clinical judgment, making it much more difficult for someone to get diagnosed (Hausenblas and Smoliga, 3). Therefore, while only about .4% of the American population has an exercise addiction, this number could be much higher if the addiction was given the attention that it deserves (Hausenblas and Smoliga, 1) [you cite the same source three times in this paragraph - it might work in your favor to just repurpose this paragraph into a summary and subsequent analysis of the study you're citing.].

So what makes exercise addiction an issue? Exercising in and of itself is a great thing that contributes to a healthy life. However, not knowing when enough is enough can lead to mental and physical consequences. For example, when someone works out too much without adequate recovery, they are increasing their risk for injuries. Working out is meant to break down muscle which is then built back stronger, but if there is not enough recovery post-workout, then muscles are more likely to be strained. Thus, says Dr. Emil Hodzovic, when a young man in high school or college stays up late night after night to finish assignments, this "can contribute hugely to inadequate recovery" (Wade, 1). Furthermore,

an exercise addict is likely to push past pain or illness to continue working out. This can lead to long-term chronic injury (Hausenblas and Smoliga, 2). Additionally, says Hodzovic, having constant strain on your body can alter hormone levels which could make it harder to detect certain diseases in the future (Wade, 1). All things considered, while exercising an appropriate amount is a very healthy thing, overexercising can do more harm than good.

Another thing that can come along with exercise addiction is orthorexia nervosa. Orthorexia, an eating disorder where one ~~is obsessed~~ [develops an obsession] with eating healthy food, has been found to be linked to increased time spent on social media. Orthorexia is different from anorexia nervosa ~~which is an obsessive fear of being overweight which leads to one essentially starving themselves~~ [, as orthorexia is an unhealthy obsession with "healthy" dieting behaviors, whereas anorexia is characterized by long periods of undereating or fasting, often due to an individual obsession with losing weight.] . According to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, anorexia is much more common in women with 9% of women being diagnosed with it [cite the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders here] . However, a conversation with most teenage girls today would lead one to think that many more girls have eating disorders than are diagnosed. Orthorexia, however, is not yet officially listed as a medical condition, so not as much research has been done on how prevalent it is among the general population. Regardless, "Orthorexia Facts and Statistics" page on *The Recovery Village* website mentions one very concerning statistic: "A recent study found that 49% of study participants who followed healthy eating accounts on Instagram met criteria for orthorexia." This would mean that 1 out of ever 2 people who followed a healthy eating account could be experiencing orthorexia. One might argue that not that many people follow a healthy eating account on social media, however in recent years influencers have emphasized healthy habits including eating more than ever before. More light needs to be shed on this issue and nowhere near enough research has been done.

More men work out today than ever before. But why is this so? What changed in the last 20 years that made the Wolverine so jacked. ? While there are many contributing factors such as improvements in technology and what we know about health, nothing has contributed more to this trend than social media. In the early 2000s, social media platforms started to launch left and right. In 2004, Facebook was launched and is still the most used platform today. Starting around the end of the decade, with Instagram joining the party in 2010 and Snapchat in 2011, trends in the incredibly muscular male body started to become more common. This kind of all culminated in 2016 when Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson was featured as the "Sexiest Man Alive" on the cover of People magazine. Over time, society has started to value big bulging muscles in males more than ever before. So what changed? [i can't place how exactly to fix this issue - you may know best - but this paragraph feels out of place. i feel like you could delete everything in between the first and last two sentences and move the remaining sentences to the beginning of the next paragraph, and your essay would be just as strong.]
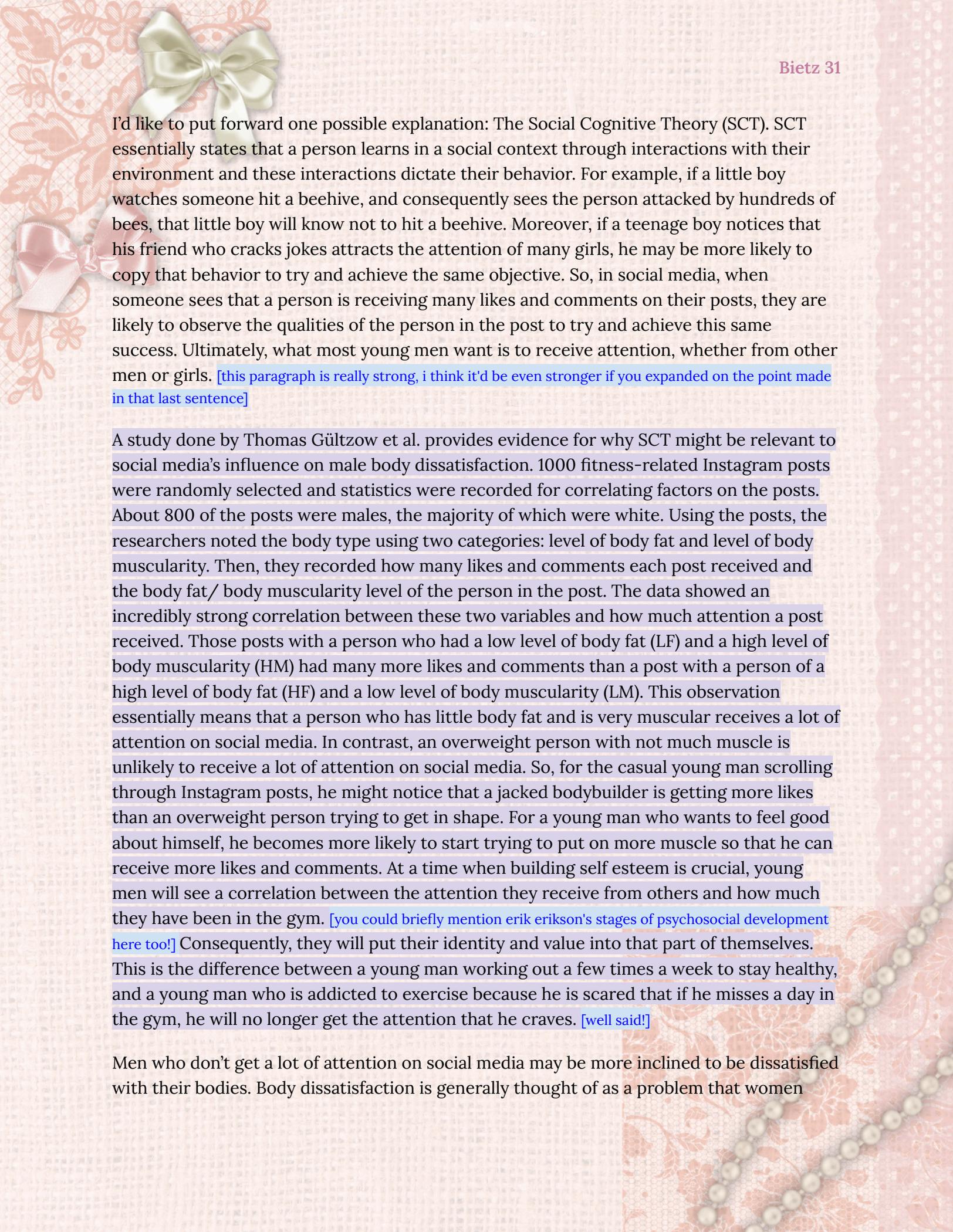
I'd like to put forward one possible explanation: The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). SCT essentially states that a person learns in a social context through interactions with their environment and these interactions dictate their behavior. For example, if a little boy watches someone hit a beehive, and consequently sees the person attacked by hundreds of bees, that little boy will know not to hit a beehive. Moreover, if a teenage boy notices that his friend who cracks jokes attracts the attention of many girls, he may be more likely to copy that behavior to try and achieve the same objective. So, in social media, when someone sees that a person is receiving many likes and comments on their posts, they are likely to observe the qualities of the person in the post to try and achieve this same success. Ultimately, what most young men want is to receive attention, whether from other men or girls. [this paragraph is really strong, i think it'd be even stronger if you expanded on the point made in that last sentence]

A study done by Thomas Gültzow et al. provides evidence for why SCT might be relevant to social media's influence on male body dissatisfaction. 1000 fitness-related Instagram posts were randomly selected and statistics were recorded for correlating factors on the posts. About 800 of the posts were males, the majority of which were white. Using the posts, the researchers noted the body type using two categories: level of body fat and level of body muscularity. Then, they recorded how many likes and comments each post received and the body fat/ body muscularity level of the person in the post. The data showed an incredibly strong correlation between these two variables and how much attention a post received. Those posts with a person who had a low level of body fat (LF) and a high level of body muscularity (HM) had many more likes and comments than a post with a person of a high level of body fat (HF) and a low level of body muscularity (LM). This observation essentially means that a person who has little body fat and is very muscular receives a lot of attention on social media. In contrast, an overweight person with not much muscle is unlikely to receive a lot of attention on social media. So, for the casual young man scrolling through Instagram posts, he might notice that a jacked bodybuilder is getting more likes than an overweight person trying to get in shape. For a young man who wants to feel good about himself, he becomes more likely to start trying to put on more muscle so that he can receive more likes and comments. At a time when building self esteem is crucial, young men will see a correlation between the attention they receive from others and how much they have been in the gym. [you could briefly mention erik erikson's stages of psychosocial development here too!] Consequently, they will put their identity and value into that part of themselves. This is the difference between a young man working out a few times a week to stay healthy, and a young man who is addicted to exercise because he is scared that if he misses a day in the gym, he will no longer get the attention that he craves. [well said!]

Men who don't get a lot of attention on social media may be more inclined to be dissatisfied with their bodies. Body dissatisfaction is generally thought of as a problem that women

have. It has been found that many women are dissatisfied with their bodies to some extent. An Australian study found that in a sample size of about 2000 people, about half of whom were female, 80% of the women were dissatisfied with their bodies. However, not too far below that number is the 60% of men in the survey who were dissatisfied with their bodies (Griffiths et al., 2). This survey had a demographic of mostly adults, so many of them were in a different stage of life than a teenager who might be dissatisfied with their body. But these statistics speak to the larger problem of body dissatisfaction that is growing today. Women's health as it pertains to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders is finally getting the attention it needs. It has been acknowledged as a problem by most people, and there are now some steps being taken to help combat the issue [definitely true but source this!]. Also, the fact that the issue is being acknowledged in the first place helps women to be aware of the problem existing in them. Furthermore, the body positivity movement is helping spread the idea that it's okay to not have the "perfect", skinny, supermodel body that so many women want. It may be a few years down the road before we as a culture start to acknowledge the body dissatisfaction issue that exists in men. To most people, the gym-obsessed trend in men today does not seem like a problem because it seems like men are focusing more on their health. However, to the uneducated eye, a woman who has anorexia because she is dissatisfied with her body may seem perfectly fine. She exercises every single day, and she looks as great as she ever has. In the same way, a young man today will get complimented by his friends on his newly muscular physique, however in reality he is pushing his body too far to where he hurts himself and is obsessing over what he eats and how he looks. They are essentially on the opposite side of the spectrum as a woman with anorexia, so they seem to be perfectly fine. However, some can even develop muscle dysmorphia (MD), which, according to the International OCD Foundation, is when someone thinks that their body is "too small" or "not muscular enough" (Olivardia et al., 1). Thus, it is, quite literally, the opposite of anorexia, yet yields the same mental problems. MD can result in suicidal thoughts or actions due to someone placing their self-esteem in how muscular they are. This person might never think that they are strong enough, and might never feel value because of it. [you do a great job here of relating known to unknown, this entire paragraph is wonderful.]

Most teenagers today are likely familiar with anorexia nervosa and the problem of body dissatisfaction in women. However, most of them have probably never heard of the phrase "muscle dysmorphia". The problem itself lies within the fact that so few people even know that this issue exists. Most experts agree that more research needs to be done on MD and orthorexia before we fully understand the extent to which they affect the population of young men in the world. Moreover, hardly any research has been done on how social media use might influence this increase in male body dissatisfaction. This is putting young males at a disadvantage because they don't realize what harm they might be causing themselves. As mentioned, despite the fact that it has some of the same effects as alcoholism, exercise

addiction has not officially been listed as a mental disorder. It would not be fair for someone to die from alcohol poisoning if they didn't know that was possible in the first place. While this is an extreme example, depression and suicide is an extreme effect of muscle dysmorphia. People with anorexia are 18 times more likely to commit suicide than those without it. This is an incredibly alarming statistic and speaks to how drastically body dissatisfaction can harm someone. If society does not acknowledge that trends of body dissatisfaction in men is becoming a problem, suicide rates may rise as a result of that as well.

So why does any of this matter? If we as a society acknowledge that social media is leading to more men experiencing body dissatisfaction due to social cognitive theory, then what would change? After all, even though most people know that girls who have social media are more likely to experience eating disorders, rather than seeing a decline in anorexia cases in the past couple of years, we have seen an increase (Sanzari et al., 1-4). What would change if young men knew that they were more likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies because of social media content? For one, parents could monitor their child's social media use. In the same way that a parent would want to avoid their child seeing pornographic images on social media, they could try to avoid them being too influenced by fitness gurus. Furthermore, if parents were aware that this problem could start through social media use, then they could monitor their child's behavior. For example, if they started wanting to go to the gym a lot, they could have a conversation with them about what a healthy level of exercise looks like. Next, in the same way that we as a society have started to counteract the toxicity in feminine culture that promotes a very skinny, petite physique, we could do the same with what is quickly becoming a toxic male culture. Young men don't need to be taught that they are inferior because they can't bench as much as someone else. Similar to the recent body positivity movement that focuses almost solely on women, we as a society can change the narrative that men need to have big, bulging muscles. Social media platforms could even try to change their algorithms that control the content that users see to be more supportive and accepting of all body types. If we start to do these things, we may catch the problem before it's ingrained in male culture. [great conclusion! maybe as you're making your final point, raise some new questions to "keep the conversation going," so to speak.]

Final Comments:

I said it somewhere earlier, but I'll say it again: this essay is really robust and its argument is well-fortified. Be wary of miscommunications like "social media can lead to body dysmorphia through diseases such as anorexia nervosa" - I think I annotated anything I saw like that, but accidentally misrepresenting something as serious as the topics discussed here can really tear down an otherwise incredible essay (like this one). The structure feels really strong for a first draft. I don't think there's any helpful advice I can provide in that

arena, but I get the vibe that as you revise this for the pre-final and final stages, things will settle into place more naturally and cohesively. Overall, I think you've got something really good going here.
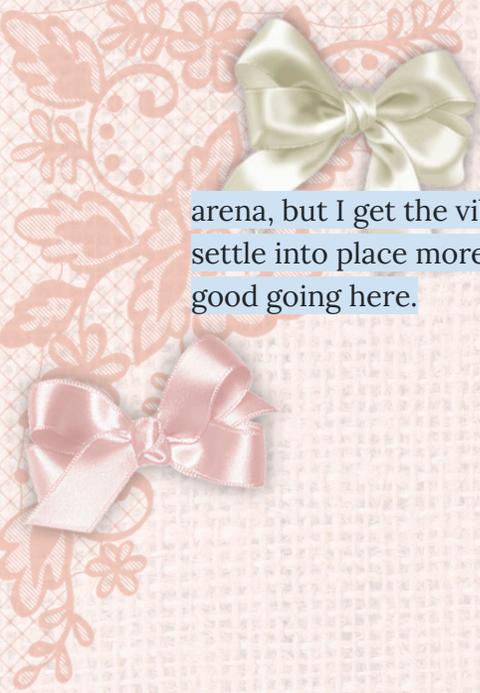
The "Birth of Venus" Dress
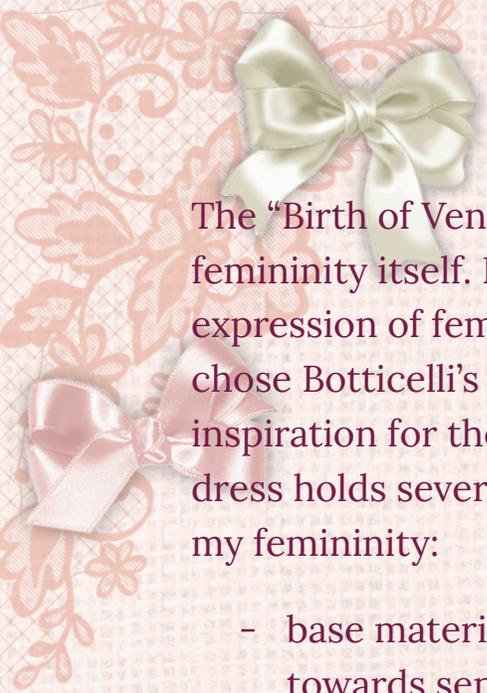
The "Birth of Venus" Dress is my personal, hand-sewn love letter to femininity itself. I feel like in recent years, my perspective on and expression of femininity has been, in many ways, reborn - hence why I chose Botticelli's famous painting "The birth of Venus" as my aesthetic inspiration for the dress (Venus acting as a symbol of femininity). The dress holds several references to my individual experience reclaiming my femininity:

- base material is scrap fabric, as a reference to women's tendency towards sentimentality and resourcefulness
- buttons, ribbon, lace, and beads, of course, as a nod to my love for fashion design and textile arts
- an hourglass, to acknowledge the time it took to reconnect with my femininity
- pearls, as a symbol of both the innocence and purity often associated with femininity as well as my personal connection to nature and the ocean
- shells as a symbol of creating one's own sense of security and shelter
- rips and tears, not as a marker of struggle or distress, but as a symbol of imperfection and a nod to working with one's hands
- a water pitcher charm as a reference to my personal connection to the ocean as well as the expectation of women to provide for one's family and community
- waist beads as a symbol of fertility - not one's physical ability to carry a child, but one's willingness to provide and care for the young
- very soft silhouette and draped structure as a reference to silhouettes of women's fashion in the ancient mediterranean and modern-day south asia
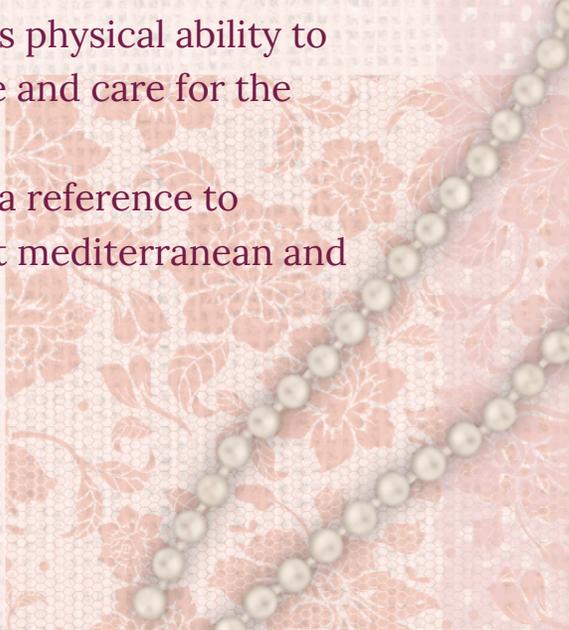
- photo transfers of seaweed as a symbol of grounding oneself within nature
- photo transfers of peach and plum blossoms as a symbol of both the purity and innocence often associated with femininity as well as hope and perseverance

This dress is a collection of everything femininity and womanhood means to me.