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The musical number as feminist intervention in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*

ABSTRACT

In just four seasons, Rachel Bloom and Aline Brosh McKenna's musical dramedy Crazy Ex-Girlfriend (2015–2019) has established itself as an important space for contemporary explorations of gender and genre on US television. In this article, we examine how the musical numbers operate as a feminist intervention into a postfeminist diegesis. The musical numbers in Crazy Ex-Girlfriend often parody different popular music genres by simultaneously drawing attention to and subverting their conventions. In doing so, the series critiques the gender norms of traditionally patriarchal and heteronormative Hollywood musicals and misogynistic music videos. The Hollywood film musical genre is typically framed by a tension between the narrative and the numbers. Crazy Ex-Girlfriend exploits this tension to offer a feminist critique of how patriarchal neo-liberal culture encourages women to invest in romantic love and post-feminist forms of appearance-based empowerment. This article argues that the musical numbers in Crazy Ex-Girlfriend are a feminist space where the series critiques the postfeminist reality of its diegesis.

KEYWORDS

television
the musical genre
gender
feminism
music video
parody

INTRODUCTION

In just four seasons, Rachel Bloom and Aline Brosh McKenna's musical dramedy *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (2015–2019) has established itself as an important space for contemporary explorations of gender and genre on US television. *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* centres on Rebecca Bunch (played by co-creator Rachel Bloom) who leaves her life as a successful lawyer in New York City to move to West Covina, California. After running into her summer camp boyfriend Josh Chan (Vincent Rodriguez III) in New York, Rebecca quits her job and moves across the country. She quickly secures a new job at a small local law firm and entrenches herself in Josh's West Covina life. The subsequent seasons follow Rebecca's romantic entanglements with Josh and other suitors. Rebecca frequently bursts into song to express her thoughts and feelings. As the series continues and more characters enter Rebecca's orbit, they also perform their own musical numbers.

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend is acutely aware of its place within the US television landscape, its relationship to various popular music genres and forms, and its use of gendered tropes and stereotypes. The numbers in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* reference a wide range of popular music genres, both recent and historical, including classical Hollywood musicals and Broadway hits, as well as pop, rock, R&B, disco, funk, alternative, rap and electronic dance music, among others. For instance, the number 'The Moment is Me' (3.03) parodies recent Broadway hit *Dear Evan Hansen* (Grief 2016), while 'The First Penis I Saw' (3.03) is a comedic take on ABBA's 1970s disco hit 'Mamma Mia' (Andersson et al. 1975). Parody and pastiche have a long musical history, from a compositional technique of using pre-existing styles in classical music, to the parody of alternative genres and styles in opera and musical theatre (Tilmouth and Sherr 2001). Parody has more recently become a popular genre of user-generated music video on YouTube. While some *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* musical numbers, such as 'After Everything I've Done for You' (1.07) and 'Ping Pong Girl' (2.02) are straight parody, most numbers are a mixture of parody and pastiche, such as 'We Tapped That Ass' (2.04) and 'Let's Generalize About Men' (3.01). The musical numbers are united in their use of irony and knowingness as a form of feminist critique.

Irony and knowingness are key features of parody and pastiche, but they are also important characteristics of what Rosalind Gill calls 'post-feminist media culture' (2007: 159). As Gill writes, 'in post-feminist media culture irony has become a way of "having it both ways", of expressing sexist or homophobic or otherwise unpalatable sentiments in an ironized form, while claiming this was not actually "meant"' (2007: 159). The musical numbers in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* expose the double-bind of postfeminism through their ironic engagement with popular culture. The irony and knowingness in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* is typical of twentieth-century forms of parody. As Linda Hutcheon notes, twentieth-century parody is 'a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion [...] [p]arody is, in another formulation, repetition with critical distance' (2000: 6). Similarly, Ingeborg Hoesterey argues that pastiche can be 'art that fosters critical thinking' (2001: 45–46). *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* fosters critical thinking as feminist thinking.

The musical genre is typically framed by a tension between the narrative and the numbers (Feuer 1993: 68–69). *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* uses this tension to offer a feminist critique of the modes of empowerment that the titular 'crazy ex-girlfriend', Rebecca, often employs and embraces. While Rebecca

participates in diet culture and grooming regimes, and seeks to attain heterosexual desirability, the musical numbers often critique her and the other characters who encourage her erratic behaviour. The numbers parody particular musical genres by purposely drawing attention to and subverting their conventions. Those conventions are then used to critique how patriarchal neoliberal culture encourages women to invest in romantic love and postfeminist forms of appearance-based empowerment. This article argues that the musical numbers in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* are a feminist space where Rebecca (and the series itself) criticizes the postfeminist reality of her world (and ours). The musical numbers in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* therefore operate as a feminist intervention into a postfeminist diegesis.

This article examines the aesthetic, stylistic and musical conventions used and subverted in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* and how they produce a 'feminist space' through song and dance. In particular, this article will examine how the series uses its musical numbers to critique two elements of postfeminist media culture: heterosexual desirability and the drive towards romantic coupling. Before unpacking how the series' musical numbers perform a feminist critique, we will situate *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* within a recent renewal of the musical genre in screen culture, the rise of the parody music video on YouTube, and the resurgence of explicitly feminist discourses in popular culture.

CRAZY EX-GIRLFRIEND AND THE RESURGENCE OF THE MUSICAL NUMBER

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend sits within a period of renewal for the musical genre across a range of screen media. In the first two decades of the new millennium, the musical experienced a period of revitalization, development and expansion across film, television and video forms. American film musicals of various subgenres experienced renewed popularity with cinema audiences during the 2000s and 2010s. From the year 2000 onwards, the musical appears as a key component of many of the era's most financially successful films. Nine of the top ten highest grossing live-action film musicals at the US box office since 1974 occurred after the year 2000, including *Chicago* (Marshall, 2002), *Mamma Mia!* (Lloyd, 2008), *La La Land* (Chazelle, 2016) and *Beauty and the Beast* (Condon, 2017) (Box Office Mojo 2018c). Furthermore, millennial musical biopics, such as *Ray* (Hackford, 2004) and *Walk the Line* (Mangold, 2005), are some of the top ten highest grossing musical biopics in the United States ever (Box Office Mojo 2018a). Like their biopic counterparts, musical comedies made after the year 2000, such as *School of Rock* (Linklater, 2003) and the *Pitch Perfect* trilogy (Moore, 2012; Banks, 2015; Sie, 2017), are also in the top ten highest grossing musical comedies in the United States (Box Office Mojo 2018b). This renewed interest in film musicals has resulted in an increased literacy around the musical genre, which has no doubt influenced the creation and success of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

In addition to its renewed popularity in the cinema, the musical genre also developed and spread throughout various television and video forms in the 2000s and 2010s. The expanding networks of distribution and consumption afforded by the digital media landscape extended the possibilities for the musical genre beyond its traditional locations in the theatre and cinema (Flinn 2013: 252). This expansion is particularly true for the 'musical number', which is generally understood as a form of diegetic musical performance, whether song- or dance-based or both (McDonnell 2013: 251). The new millennium

has ushered in different forms of the musical number – particularly song-based musical performance – that increasingly appear in a range of US screen media formats and genres. Television scholar Julie Brown (2001: 275) notes the growing use of musical numbers and musical episodes in fictional non-musical television shows in the late 1990s and early 2000s, such as dramedy *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002) and teen fantasy *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2001).

In the 2000s and 2010s, music-based television series with regular musical numbers increased in popularity (Kessler 2015: n.pag.). Musical dramas, including *Eli Stone* (2008–09), *Smash* (2012–13) and *Nashville* (2012–16) achieved moderate critical and commercial success, while musical comedy series *Flight of the Concorde* (2007–09) and *Galavant* (2015–16) became cult favourites. Teen television series with regular musical numbers were also extremely popular during this era. Disney's 'tween' musical drama *Hannah Montana* (2006–11), the subsequent film *Hannah Montana: The Movie* (Chelsom, 2009), the made-for-television movie franchise *High School Musical* (Ortega, 2006, 2007, 2008), and the musical teen television series *Glee* (2009–15) all achieved sizeable audiences, and proved popular enough for spin-offs and continuations. Live broadcasts of Broadway musicals have also become popular in the 2010s with NBC's recent live musical *Jesus Christ Superstar: Live in Concert* (2018) featuring pop star John Legend, winning five Emmy Awards.

While all this song-based screen media can be considered part of the musical genre's development into new film and television formats, it can also be understood as part of the expansion of the music video. The 'traditional' music video began growing its distribution and consumption networks in the early 2000s. While professional music video content on television declined in the 1990s as channels such as MTV programmed more lifestyle offerings, it found a welcome home on the Internet in the 2000s, with video-sharing sites such as Vimeo, Vevo, and most prolifically, YouTube. New types of music video also began appearing on these video-sharing platforms. Professional commercial pop music videos on YouTube sit side-by-side and cross-fertilize with a whole range of short song clips by emerging artists, grassroots users, remixes, mashups and almost the entire history of recorded music and recorded musical performance.

Several scholars have also noted the influence of the music video on contemporary film and television (Bordwell 2002; Dickinson 2003; Vernallis 2013). Many musical numbers in contemporary film and television are now shot and edited in a style that resembles the music video and they are often uploaded to YouTube as individual music videos (either through the official YouTube channels, or as pirated copies uploaded by fans). These 'new' types of music video on YouTube include late-night variety performances such as 'Carpool Karaoke' from *The Late Late Show with James Corden* (2015–present), but also individual musical numbers from *Glee* and performances from *American Idol* (2002–16, 2018–present), and other musical reality talent shows. *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*'s musical numbers are likewise designed and produced as distinct music videos; they circulate online independent from the series. The most viewed *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* video, 'The Sexy Getting Ready Song' (1.01), has 1.4 million views on YouTube at the time of writing.

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend is a product of this increased musicalization of cinema and television and the parody music video culture on YouTube. Carol Vernallis notes that parody music videos form part of the larger parody aesthetic that permeates the Internet (2010: 246). Parody music videos, she suggests, have

become so prevalent because of the number of nonprofessional creators uploading videos to YouTube; these DIY users adopt easy compositional strategies that gain them traction online, such as mixing and mashing up original content (Vernallis 2010: 246). A parody of a popular music video can piggy back off the attention on the original (Vernallis 2010: 246). Bloom started as a YouTube performer, with her parody music videos racking up millions of views on her channel 'Racheldoesstuff'. Brosh McKenna, a screenwriter known for *The Devil Wears Prada* (Frankel, 2006), saw Bloom's viral music video 'Fuck Me Ray Bradbury' (Briganti 2010) and approached her about developing a musical television series, which became *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. The 'gags' in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*'s musical numbers reflect the spoof culture on YouTube. While the visual style and the parodic music video tone of the series' musical numbers resemble a particular YouTube aesthetic, they are also symptomatic of a growing feminist discourse in popular culture.

SPARKLY POPULAR FEMINISMS

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend circulates within a popular culture landscape where explicitly feminist discourses are currently experiencing a resurgence. This resurgence, often described as fourth-wave feminism, manifests in the articulation of explicit feminist language, ideologies and issues in movies, television, music videos and other forms of popular culture (Chamberlain 2017; Rivers 2017; Baumgardner 2011; Cochrane 2013). Within the umbrella of fourth-wave feminism, there are various overlapping feminisms at work across and around US television, including popular feminism (Banet-Weiser 2018), neo-liberal feminism (Rottenberg 2018), celebrity feminism (Taylor 2016) and hashtag feminism (Lane 2015). Each of these overlapping feminisms are different kinds of fourth-wave feminism with their own logic and internal stakes.

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend is best understood as engaging with and employing what Sarah Banet-Weiser calls 'popular feminism' (2017). Popular feminism refers to various contemporary feminisms that take elements from second and third-wave feminist ideologies and adapt them to be legible in post-feminist culture (Banet-Weiser 2017). Banet-Weiser coins the term as a way of discussing the kinds of mainstream, visible, capitalist-focused feminisms promoted by celebrities and popular culture texts. Popular feminism encourages women to 'be confident in the workplace' and tells women that 'they are beautiful despite societal norms that tell them that they're not' (Banet-Weiser 2017: n.pag.). Most importantly, however, Banet-Weiser notes that 'popular feminism is "safe"', because 'it implicitly encourages more women to work within a system that is already designed to devalue (and underpay) the labor of women' (2017: n.pag.). Popular feminism best describes the kinds of feminist sensibility found in popular culture and on television today. This brand of feminism is broadly invested in upholding the status quo and not enacting any kind of systemic overhaul. Recent articulations of popular feminism on US television, such as those in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, are both a reaction to and in conversation with postfeminist media culture.

Gill uses the term postfeminist media culture to conceptualize how in western popular culture, women (rather than men) are constituted as ideal neo-liberal subjects (2007: 249). From the 1990s onward, US television functions within and contributes to postfeminist media culture. Angela McRobbie argues that in postfeminist culture, feminism has been exchanged for a notional form of equality, education and employment opportunities, and equal

participation in consumer culture and civil society (2009: 2). According to McRobbie, postfeminism is an active process in which feminism is integrated into popular culture only to be disarticulated, rendered futile and subsequently alienated from its political roots (McRobbie 2009: 25–27).

In postfeminist media culture, which *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* operates in and depicts, women's empowerment is often framed in terms of neo-liberalism and consumerism. Postfeminist media culture manifests in popular culture texts that promote bodily femininity, diet culture, choice rhetoric and self-objectification. While postfeminism and popular feminism may appear similar, Banet-Weiser asserts that they are different in form and function. She writes that popular feminism is 'decidedly not postfeminist – it does not deny the need for some version of feminism – but it ensures the reproduction of a specific iteration of feminist ideology that has a similar effect to postfeminism' (Banet-Weiser 2017: n.pag.). While the logic of popular feminism and postfeminism is different, ultimately the outcome is similar.

In postfeminist media culture, women's bodies are a primary site of negotiation, debate and contention. A number of feminist scholars have noted the increased emphasis on aesthetics in popular culture due to the rise of visual-based social media and networking sites, such as Instagram and YouTube. Rachel Moseley's work on glamour, femininity and 'sparkle', highlights how women's power is often 'located and articulated through appearance' (2002: 409). Mary Celeste Kearney highlights how 'ironic knowingness of postfeminist glamour' works to promote a veneer of power and empowerment (2015: 270). However, as Kearney notes, glamour, femininity and sparkle have a complex and often contradictory relationship to power and empowerment. Kearney highlights the double bind of contemporary postfeminist media culture, whereby women need to negotiate the contradictory messages of postfeminism, as well as entertain critical reclamations of femininity (2015: 270).

The contradictions of postfeminist media culture and the demands of performing femininity are evident throughout *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. From the first episode, it is clear that the musical numbers operate in a different discursive and ideological space to the rest of the series. This allows the musical numbers to critique the postfeminist diegesis. Glamour, sparkle and femininity are often used to mark the musical numbers as outside of or distinct from the series' non-musical spaces. Depending on the genre and/or era being parodied and/or referenced, Rebecca will often appear in glamorous costuming and make-up for musical numbers, which marks a break from reality.

Irony, knowingness, parody and pastiche enable *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* to not simply recreate or rearticulate postfeminist discourses wholesale. The musical numbers complicate the series' engagement with and representation of postfeminist culture by incorporating examples of how women are indoctrinated into a world-view that privileges heterosexual desirability and romantic coupling. Movies, television, music videos and other forms of popular culture, all perform a regulatory role whereby idealized feminine behaviours and modes of femininity are modelled for viewers. The musical numbers in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* make this indoctrination explicit through intertextual references to various forms of popular culture that then critique that culture's subjugation of women. The series uses parody and pastiche to make the tropes of a particular musical form or genre visible, then plays with and subverts those tropes to critique popular cultural norms. In doing so, the numbers in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* offer a gendered critique of traditionally patriarchal and heteronormative classical Hollywood musicals as well as misogynistic music videos,

and women's place in both. The following sections will explore how the musical numbers use the conventions of different musical styles and genres to create a popular feminist space.

GROOMING RITUALS AND BODILY FEMININITY

While the contemporary moment is marked by a resurgence of explicitly feminist discourses on-screen, popular screen culture is not necessarily more feminist. McRobbie argues that while women's engagement with feminist activism has increased, there is simultaneously an increased emphasis on bodily representations of 'perfect' femininity and punishment for those who do not meet these standards of perfection (2015: 9). In *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, Rebecca feels this pressure to meet these standards of physical perfection. In season three, after Josh has broken up with her, Rebecca undergoes a makeover, complete with a spray tan, blonde hair extensions, and a new boho wardrobe. While Rebecca and the other characters seem to value the power of the makeover in the storyworld, the short musical number 'Makey Makeover' (2.04) undercuts Rebecca's enthusiasm. 'Makey Makeover', a take on Toni Basil's 'Mickey' (Chapman and Chinn 1981), highlights the hollowness of Rebecca's desire to change her look to meet more conventional standards of beauty. One lyric, 'Old you was a diaper/ New you is a diamond', punctures the absurdity of the makeover narrative often featured in romantic comedies and teen films. While the makeover is often depicted as empowering it is yet another way that women's bodies are tamed.

Idealized bodily femininity is a key element of postfeminist media culture, and plays a complex role in popular feminism, because empowerment discourses are largely tied to appearance. *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*'s musical numbers perform a running critique of idealized bodily femininity because they often make visible (and make light of) the lengths that women go to, to meet prescribed standards of heterosexual desirability. In the number 'Put Yourself First' (1.10), Rebecca is volunteering at a school camp when the young girls she is mentoring regurgitate the kind of proto-feminist rhetoric that Rebecca herself spouts. The number, which is a parody of girl group Fifth Harmony's song 'Worth It' ft. Kid Ink (Renea et al. 2015), highlights the kinds of commodified female empowerment prevalent in advertising that encourages women to alter or 'improve' their outward appearance 'for themselves'. For example, the chorus lyric is 'Put yourself first in a sexy way / So when dudes see you / Put yourself first / They'll be like "damn, you're hot, let's buy a house in Portland"'. This kind of rhetoric, which Rebecca largely espouses outside the musical numbers, encourages women to internalize the need to alter their appearance as a form of social empowerment.

'Put Yourself First' also mocks the overt sexualization of young women in pop videos, as the teenage girls dance for a photographer who resembles Terry Richardson, a real-life photographer and music video director who has had numerous allegations of sexual harassment made against him. Richardson became infamous after he received criticism for his involvement in a pseudo-pornographic advertising campaign for youth-targeted clothing company American Apparel. 'Put Yourself First' highlights how rhetorics of empowerment in pop videos and other forms of popular culture aimed at women are often delivered through hypersexualized images. The parody therefore exposes the limits of this rhetoric when it is explicitly linked to idealized feminine beauty.

'The Sexy Getting Ready Song', by contrast, instead focuses on the labour undertaken in the pursuit of idealized feminine beauty. This number is distinctly extra-diegetic as it is a fantasy that takes place in Rebecca's head. After leaving her life in New York behind and moving to West Covina, Rebecca is invited to a party by one of Josh's friends, Greg Serrano (Santino Fontana). Rebecca agrees to attend the party with Greg in order to orchestrate a 'chance' encounter with Josh. The number starts with a match-on-action cut from Rebecca in the bathroom singing to the mirror to her turning to the camera in a full face of make-up. While her bathroom was dark and grey, the music video studio space is brightly lit, which indicates that the number has now moved into a dream space within Rebecca's mind.

'The Sexy Getting Ready Song' mirrors the *mise-en-scène* of late 1990s and early 2000s R&B and pop videos; the numerous candles and chandeliers, the water feature, and a black and white theme resemble typical music videos in this genre. As Vernallis notes, R&B music videos are commonly set in luxurious interiors, with high ceilings and smooth surfaces (2004: 79). These staged interiors connote the melodramatic nature of the song and inform the viewer of the musical genre, rather than any particular place (Vernallis 2004: 73–75). 'The Sexy Getting Ready Song' is a pastiche of R&B/pop videos by singers such as Mariah Carey and Toni Braxton. For example, Rebecca's heavy eye makeup and silk robe resemble Carey's own in her video 'We Belong Together' (Ratner 2005), while the black and white theme with chandeliers resembles the *mise-en-scène* of Braxton's 'Yesterday' ft. Trey Songz (Woodruff 2009). The pastiche of 1990s and early 2000s R&B music videos highlights the modes of femininity valued in popular culture – thin, groomed, beautiful women in erotic lingerie, lounging in moody interiors – and how Rebecca attempts to emulate this idealized feminine aesthetic.

'The Sexy Getting Ready Song' also incorporates elements of pop star Selena Gomez's 'Hands to Myself' (Keshishian 2015) music video. In this recent video, Gomez breaks into a man's house, rolls around on his black and white bed in her black underwear while touching herself. Gomez tries on his clothes, walks around in his white silk bedsheets, before she has a bath in his bathroom. This bath sequence is replicated in 'The Sexy Getting Ready Song'. Both videos include an overhead shot of the women lying in a bath tub with their hands crossed over their chests, looking alluringly at the camera as they sing. The Gomez video perpetuates the stereotype of the television series' misogynistic title, the 'crazy' ex-girlfriend or love interest, while also sexualizing this erratic behaviour of a home invasion. 'The Sexy Getting Ready Song' intercuts typically erotic music video-style shots, such as Rebecca and her dancers touching themselves suggestively in their underwear, with Rebecca in the bathroom plucking her eyebrows and waxing herself. The decidedly unsexy act of female grooming subverts the hypersexualized and glamorous nature of videos by female pop and R&B stars, such as those by Carey, Braxton and Gomez. 'The Sexy Getting Ready Song' does not move the narrative forward, but it is a commentary on Rebecca's current situation and works to establish the series' perspective on bodily taming rituals.

While the visual style of 'The Sexy Getting Ready Song' parodies classic R&B and pop videos, Bloom says she was inspired by the number 'How Lovely to Be a Woman' from the musical *Bye Bye Birdie* (Sidney, 1963). In an interview with popular culture site *Vulture*, Bloom says:

The actress sings about how lovely it is to be a woman, to get your braces off, to put on lipstick, to wear high heels [...] I remember talking to Aline and being like, *that's so funny, she's getting ready and all of the horrifying things she's doing is because of the underlying anxiety of the man she loves.*

(Ivie 2016, original emphasis)

Within postfeminist media culture, women's power is often expressed through taming the female body to rid it of its 'inherent unruliness' (Gill 2007: 255). In 'The Sexy Getting Ready Song', Rebecca is assaulting her body to make it smooth and hairless. The musical number underlines the violence of taming the female body through blood and close-up shots of Rebecca's face in agony. The number also includes a typical rap interlude with misogynistic lyrics. This is performed by an African American man who raps, 'Hop on my dick with that tight little dress then/ Turn that ass around like you tryin' to impress and [...]'. He stops mid-sentence when he sees the tools involved in Rebecca's grooming – wax sheets, cuticle cream, eyelash curlers, foot scrapers and other paraphernalia that covers her bathroom counter – and realizes the labour involved in getting ready. The joke is that the rapper has to leave the music video to – in his own words – 'apologise to some bitches' for the 'patriarchal bullshit' that women have to go through to get ready for a date.

Many of the musical numbers in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*'s early seasons, like 'Makey Makeover', 'Put Yourself First' and 'The Sexy Getting Ready Song', are fantasy sequences in Rebecca's head. However, in later seasons more and more characters begin to sing spontaneous numbers within the diegesis. As the series progresses, the distinction between the 'reality' of the diegesis and the 'fantasy' of the musical numbers become blurred. While this perhaps reflects the series' confidence and its willingness to take formal and aesthetic risks, it also reflects *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*'s strong level of self-reflexivity and feminist critique.

ROMANTIC LOVE AND HETEROSEXUAL COUPLING

In *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, bodily taming is largely undertaken in the pursuit of romantic heterosexual love. Like other films, television series, books and magazines aimed at women, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* is invested in romantic love and heterosexual coupling. In many Hollywood movies, music videos, magazines, television and other forms of popular culture aimed at women, romantic coupling is a sign of success and something to be eagerly pursued. For example, the classical Hollywood musical is typically characterized by a heteronormative drive towards heterosexual romantic courtship (Altman 1987). Rick Altman has described the American musical as structured around a 'dual-focus' narrative, where a romantic heterosexual couple have a series of matched musical numbers that ultimately end in their romantic pairing (1987: 16).

In *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, the reoccurring musical number 'You Stupid Bitch' (1.11; 2.11; 2.13) parodies a love ballad but makes explicit the difficulty of postfeminist subjecthood. The ideal postfeminist subject is heterosexually desirable, eagerly performs bodily femininity and is desirous of romantic love (McRobbie 2015). While Rebecca attempts to embody this ideal, she ultimately finds it difficult and unattainable. In 'You Stupid Bitch', Rebecca berates herself for investing in romantic love, yet again. She sings, 'You're just a lying

little bitch / Who ruins things and wants the world to burn / Bitch, you're a stupid bitch / And lose some weight'. The number mimics a cabaret-style power ballad akin to Bernadette Peters singing at Carnegie Hall, or Celine Dion at her Las Vegas stage show. During the performance, an unseen audience sings back to Rebecca 'You stupid bitch' again and again, and she encourages the flagellation, nodding and saying, 'I deserve this'. Rebecca's mental health cannot be discounted here, but it is also clear that she has internalized the expectations of postfeminist femininity.

Rebecca's internalization of romantic love equating success can also be seen in season two's 'The Math of Love Triangles' (2.02), which parodies Marilyn Monroe's number 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend' from the classic Hollywood musical *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Hawks, 1953). The number uses the love triangle trope popular in romantic comedies to explore the difficulty of performing heterosexual femininity. Rebecca is caught between Josh, the dim but sweet guy she moved to California for, and his best friend Greg, a cynical business school dropout. In the number, Rebecca dons a blue version of Monroe's character Lorelai Lee's glamorous pink outfit from 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend'. The series also invokes other iterations of this number, including pop star Madonna's music video 'Material Girl' (Lambert 1985), which also parodies Monroe's version. 'The Math of Love Triangles' teases the potential of a queer relationship configuration between Rebecca, Josh and Greg; however, this never eventuates. The conservatism of popular culture eventually wins out as Rebecca never seriously entertains polyamory, because she (and the series) is ultimately invested in heteronormative monogamous romantic love.

'The Math of Love Triangles' also uses irony and knowingness to draw attention to how popular culture often teaches women how to perform ideal femininity. As in 'Put Yourself First' and 'The Sexy Getting Ready Song', Rebecca is struggling with the demands of contemporary femininity. However, in this number, the popular culture references are from classic Hollywood cinema, rather than contemporary music video culture. This distinction is important because it places Rebecca's struggles and the series' understanding of these struggles within a historical lineage. Monroe's star image was solely based around sexuality and heterosexual desirability, with most of her film roles framed as 'the girl' for male characters to pursue (Dyer 2004: 18–19). 'The Math of Love Triangles', while focusing on Rebecca's self-indulgent feelings of self-worth because she is the love object for two men, places this desire in a long history of women as the object of the male gaze in popular screen history. The number parodies Monroe's sex symbol status, as Rebecca takes on the star's famous breathy baby voice and plays dumb while her surrounding male dancers attempt to explain the geometry of triangles to her. The ridiculousness of her enjoyment in the male sexual gaze is punctured when the group of male dancers/math professors sing 'Lady we're all gay/ We get nothing out of this'.

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend also makes use of irony and knowingness through the number 'Settle For Me' (1.04). This number is sung by Greg to Rebecca in an attempt to convince her to go on a date with him, even though he knows she is in love with Josh. The irony is that the visual and musical style parodies a Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers' number, 'Night and Day', from the iconic Hollywood musical *The Gay Divorcee* (Sandrich, 1934). Greg initially sings the first verse in the bar where he works as the lighting slowly dims. When he spins and snaps his fingers to sing the chorus, the shot cuts to a black and white image of him in a tuxedo in an art deco ballroom, directly mirroring the

1934 film. In 'Night and Day', Astaire's character Guy Holden tries to convince Rogers' character Mimi Glossop to stay and dance with him because he has fallen in love with her. Mimi is initially reluctant but, as with many Astaire and Rogers' numbers, her body gives her away and she naturally falls into dancing with him. In 'Settle For Me', as Rebecca becomes more convinced of Greg's argument, he twirls her around and the camera cuts to her wearing a shimmering gown that mirrors Rogers' own; Rebecca has now entered the world of the number and sings in response to Greg's chorus line 'Settle for me', that it is 'A practical proposal'.

Astaire-Rogers dance numbers were often framed by tension and resistance, 'as a battle over the appropriateness of sexual expression', in which Astaire represents the pleasures of entertainment that overcome Rogers' uptight or socially repressed nature (McFadden 2008: 681). Their ultimate perfect dance pairing and eventual romantic union represented the re-establishment of the status quo (McFadden 2008: 683–86; Altman 1987: 158–77). In 'Settle For Me', *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* knowingly subverts the expectations set by its explicit reference to the Astaire-Rogers' number. Greg's self-deprecating lyrics and Rebecca's agreement to date him undercuts the romanticism of the Astaire-Rogers films and their drive to heterosexual coupling. The use of visual motifs from the classic Hollywood era make the disconnect between the lyrics and the visuals even more pronounced.

The Hollywood musical is a rich space for interrogating the limits of heterosexual romantic love (as constructed in the movies) and the ways women are encouraged to invest in it. *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* uses parody, pastiche, irony and knowingness in its musical parodies of Hollywood musicals to question the centrality of screen culture to postfeminism and the indoctrination of women into postfeminist ways of thinking.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we argue that many of the musical numbers of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* are used by the series to make a feminist critique of what Rebecca takes seriously – postfeminist subjecthood, bodily femininity, heterosexual coupling, and romantic love as 'success'. Through their ironic and parodic engagement with popular culture, the musical numbers critique postfeminist media culture. Using a wide variety of popular cultural references, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* relies on the audience's knowledge of the conventions and visual styles of different musical genres and forms to make its feminism legible. The series uses the narrative tension between the musical number and the story to explore the tension between popular feminism and postfeminist culture. 'Makey Makeover', 'Put Yourself First' and 'The Sexy Getting Ready Song' highlight how rhetorics of empowerment are tied to women's appearance in postfeminist media culture. In the 'Sexy Getting Ready Song', Rebecca attempts to fulfil the role of the ideal postfeminist subject by taming her unruly body in the pursuit of romantic love. However, as the 'The Math of Love Triangles' makes clear, Rebecca's desire to pursue heterosexual desirability is the result of her indoctrination into a postfeminist world-view. 'The Math of Love Triangles' and 'Settle For Me' highlight how Rebecca's struggles with postfeminist subjecthood sit within a lineage of the feminist struggles in popular musical screen history. The musical numbers of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* enable Rebecca to both desire heterosexual love and be critical of all the entanglements that it involves.

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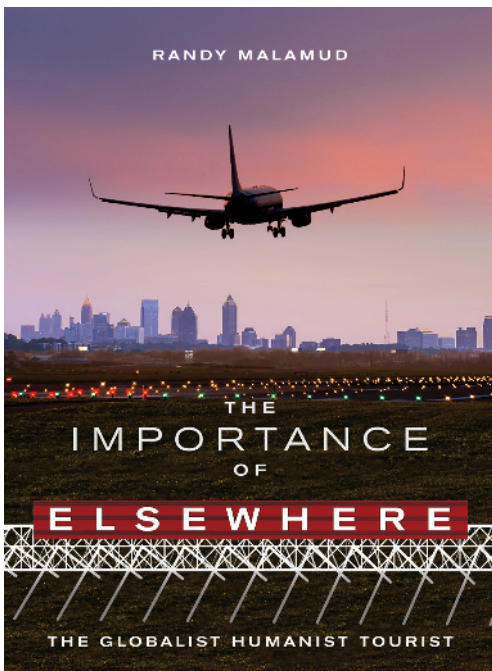
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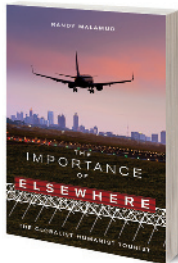
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