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## Becoming a (Seductive) Woman: The Societal Production of the Gendered Real

*“One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman.”*  
*Simone De Beauvoir*

“Chick lit” has recently received a bad rap among many feminists. They often claim it reduces women to mere fragments of flesh that live for fashion and desire to “get a man.” While at face value this may appear to be the case, there is perhaps a more labyrinthine structure to chick lit than meets the eye. Judith Butler’s exploration of gender and identity through societal processes, or *regulatory practices*, as she puts it, arouses interest in the most base form of these terms. Furthermore, it generates an investigation into relational elements such as: gender performance, “seduction,” and how society attempts to *produce* seductive women through *gender performativity*. It appears that chick lit is a part of society that promotes the *production* of seductive women. In today’s society, it is no longer good enough simply to *become a woman*, as Simone De Beauvoir states. American and European societies deem the *performative discourse* of being a woman must include being seductive. Society compels women to act seductively—alluring, attractive, irresistible—because it is what engenders and enables them to become “women.” It would seem as though seduction is what encapsulates the “woman” of today.

The recent societal creation, and immense rise in popularity of the literary genre called chick lit has produced what it regards as a mirroring effect of the “real women” currently populating American and European societies. Chick lit concludes that women in “real” life are seductive creatures, and if a woman is *not* seductive she must become seductive in order to be a *she* at all. This genre of literature has overtaken American and European markets. Evidence of that can be shown by best-selling books like *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *Jemima J.*, as well as the massive number of movies that have been made from chick lit like the aforementioned *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *Confessions of a Shopaholic*. According to female characters of chick lit, women in “real” life are either seductive and have a man, or are not seductive and need a man to be happy and essentially, to be a true “woman.”

Moreover, the latest trend in social media which includes, “blogs” and online blog-style magazine articles have rampantly promoted this new form of female gender performance, i.e., woman equals creature of seduction, or needs to be such a creature to be considered a “woman” at all. These blogs and online articles are full of “self-help” to become a seductive woman. There are blogs specifically related to the subject of seduction, one of which is called “The Seductive Woman.” Magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *RedbookMag*, and others of that nature sculpt specific articles that also help sexed women become gendered “women.” Societal processes insist that women should *perform* as seductive women in order to be performing their “real” female gender.

While Butler’s conceptual movement of gender performance and regulatory practices are important to this discussion of what “women” are, there is another step to be taken. The question is: what happens when fiction such as chick lit assumes to copy the “real” women of society, and

blogs in the “real” world also attempt to produce and copy “real” women, where do the “real” women of society end up? Do the simulations of “real” women threaten to overtake the “real,” or have they already? Jean Baudrillard’s seminal study, *Simulacra and Simulation*, and particularly the chapter on the “Procession of Simulacra” provides an avenue for analyzing and interpreting this question. He writes, “Simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’” (Baudrillard 3). It appears then, that women in today’s society are no longer sexed women simply performing as gendered “women.” The societal fusion of the “false,” for example, chick lit, and the “real,” like blogs, has formed a simulation of women that blurs the boundaries of what is “imaginary” and what is “real.” The lines are blurred because both the “false” and the “real” promote the *production* of a specific gender of woman. The investigation of the “real” woman goes further than simulation, because society has effectually produced the gendered woman. This gendered woman has become a new version of the gender, because of societal processes like chick lit and blogs. The new gendered woman is the *hyperreal* woman.

Before any further investigative steps can be taken in regards to chick lit and blogs, a short extrapolation of both Butler and Baudrillard’s theories is necessary. Judith Butler’s 1990 study *Gender Trouble* examined the concepts of feminism and the subversive nature of gender identity. She coined the terms “performative discourse,” and “gender performativity.” The terms stand for the concept that gender is performed, and in order to become a “woman” one must consistently perform societal and physical acts that are labeled “woman.” In addition, Butler explores the very basis of human identity, and for this discussion’s purposes, a woman’s identity. She believes that societal constructs, known as regulatory practices, design and influence what a woman’s gendered performance should be. She says of the matter, “Gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (Butler 25). Gender, in this instance, the female gender, is “performatively produced,” which means the production of continuous performativity as a gendered woman is what creates the gender of “woman.” Furthermore, it is compelled, or pressured by regulatory practices such as societal influences of what the gendered woman is supposed to perform. In regards to American and European societies, the “gender coherence” of regulatory practice demands women perform as seductive, attractive, feminine women to properly perform as a gendered “woman,” and not simply as a sexed woman. Butler continues to explain that because of the “inherited metaphysical discourse” (Butler 25), or theoretical discourse, gender is a performative act that constitutes and engenders identity.

While Butler’s gender theories are expansive, they are not the end point of gender inquiry. They merely set the stage and open the door for further examination of the topic. Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* extends performativity theory as he is interested in cultural and societal influences on the “real” and how copies of the “real” can overtake and become a hyperreal simulation of the “real” itself. Baudrillard claims the fact that although media culture (i.e., magazines) are supposed to report the “real,” it is in actuality a step away from the “real.” Although it, being media, is a step away from the “real” is it just as “real,” or is it hyperreal? Baudrillard writes of the simulacral concept:

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real ... never again will the real have a chance to produce itself ... A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving

room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences. (Baudrillard 3)

He suggests that the question of simulating the “real” does not lie within “imitation,” “duplication,” or “parody.” Society has moved beyond false imitations that can easily be depicted as such. By continually imitating the “real” society has progressively lapsed into a new model of simulation, a substitution of the signs of the real for the “real” itself. In other words, signifiers of the “real,” like the gendered female protagonists in chick lit have replaced the “real” gendered woman. He continues to argue that (using the gender example), “real” women are no longer able to create or produce themselves because they are now being produced by the hyperreal gendered women. The hyperreal woman has been created by the popular literary genre of chick lit and “real” world blogs that promote the composite “woman.” Although chick lit is admittedly fiction it has been “sheltered from the imaginary” because it is now within the realm of the hyperreal. There is no distinction between the “real” women of society and the “women” produced by fictitious chick lit and “real” blogs. Now, there is only room for the continuous “recurrence of models” and the “simulated generation of differences.” To express this concept differently, society only allows for a continuation of certain models or copies (such as types of female gender performance), as well as generational simulations that are different but “real” or hyperreal all the same.

The addition of Baudrillard’s concepts regarding reality and hyperreality to Butler’s gender inquires allows for an exploration of the complex implications that chick lit and “real-life” blogs place on the “real” women of American and European societies in the current era. While most loosely understand the term chick lit as a fun *Bridget Jones-y* type novel, there is quite a bit of intricacy and heated debate over the term and genre itself. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young authored *Chick Lit: the new woman’s fiction*, in which they defend and explain the genre. They describe chick lit as, “A literary form yet does not avoid alliances with popular entertainment. As a result, it calls attention to the tensions between high and popular culture” (Ferriss and Young 33). Ferriss and Young see the genre as a direct attack on the differences between “high” and “popular” culture, as well as promoting the ties between the literary genre and “popular entertainment.” However, the connections between chick lit and the real world of popular entertainment (such as blogs and magazine articles) seem to move beyond a mere non-avoidance. It appears to be a blurring of reality, as Baudrillard would suggest, between the “false,” or chick lit and the “real,” known as blogs and magazine articles.

Ferriss and Young do insert different interpretations of the term chick lit into *Chick Lit: the new woman’s fiction* by way of Jessica Jernigan, writer for *Bitch Magazine*. She claims, “‘There’s so much cloying sameness to chick lit’ (71). ‘Most of chick lit,’ she continues, ‘is grounded in a jumbled, half-fantasy version of reality, a reality in which a better wardrobe, a better body, and a better man are not yet out of reach’” (Ferriss and Young 7). Although she is belittling chick lit, Jernigan is hitting at a key aspect of the genre, which is the supposed “realness” of the literature. She feels most pieces belonging to chick lit are fantasy representations of “reality.” This notion implies there is a blurring of the “real” world—where women perhaps are not as seductive and don’t have as good of jobs—and the “false” where women are seductive and have great jobs. And, in chick lit if a woman does not have the better body and better man she is able to achieve those things by performing as a gendered “woman.” She must merely act as a woman by being more seductive, more outgoing, and more attractive and she will henceforth become a gendered woman from her active performativity. Such is the same with “real” women. Either they are accurately performing as “women,” and thus seductive,

or they must access blogs and magazine articles (regulatory practices) that will produce within them the “correct” societal performativity to be a gendered woman. Therefore, fictitious women (characters) in chick lit and “real” women in society must perform the same type of recurring gender performances in order to be “women,” which utterly smudges the line between what is “real” and what is “false.”

Chick lit is on the “false” side of the line, while blogs and magazine articles are on the “real” side. Recently, blogs and blog-style online magazine articles have been tailored to be a part of societal regulatory practices that produce what is currently deemed the female gender, which is the seductive “woman.” Therefore, “real” women must continuously perform as seductive women in order to be a part of the female gender. Blogs such as “The Seductive Woman” are set up to “help” assumedly sexed women become “real” gendered women by outlining exactly how to be a seductive and attractive “woman.” The blog known as “The Seductive Woman,” offers this heading, “Discover the Secrets Of the Most Seductive Women ... Learn The Methods of Seductresses. The Art of Being a Woman” (“The Seductive Woman”). Instantly, “real” women have access on how to be a seductive woman, and more importantly, how to be a “woman,” period. “The Seductive Woman” blog works in unison with other regulatory practices, such as chick lit by promoting the production of seductively gendered women.

Blogs and online blog-style magazine articles play a pivotal role in the blurring of the “real” and “false.” They specifically cater to women in the “real” world by reenforcing and promoting the gender performativity of “woman as seductress.” As previously mentioned, the “Seductive Woman” blog gives sexed American and European women access to becoming seductive gendered women. The blog is designed to *produce* the female gender that society desires. The “Seductive Woman” blog states:

When we've identified ourselves with a certain seduction archetype, we can develop our powers of attraction from our own natural qualities ... Nature hasn't endowed us all with the very same attributes, and when we've recognized our gifts, we can ... develop our traits around them, and add mystery and charm to our personality. (“The Seductive Woman”)

The anonymous blogger claims that when “we’ve” (meaning women who live in the flesh and blood “real” world), have identified ourselves as a certain type of seductress we will be able to become truly gendered women. The blogger appears to believe “real” life women have various “natural qualities,” and that is *okay* but in order to be a gendered woman one must conform to the regulatory practices of utilizing “mystery,” “charm,” and assumedly, seduction. Regardless of any natural qualities an actual living, breathing, woman may have, she must have these other seductive “qualities” to be accepted as gendered. This action of requiring women to societally perform seductively is part of what has spawned the creation of the hyperreal woman of the twenty-first century American and European societies.

The “Seductive Woman” blog not only states that women must identify themselves as seductresses, but it also lays out the societally prescribed ways in which to be a seductress. This blog essentially describes how to be a gendered woman by claiming:

I think that women can almost be as complex and as DIVERSE as the stars in the universe ... A feminine seductress is always interesting to men, and can keep any man's interest because she; Respects and values herself. Takes very good care of her appearance. Is ultra-feminine. Is strong and assertive. Takes initiative ... Really start to LIVE your life - a full, juicy life! (“The Seductive Woman”)

In order to be a gendered woman, living a “full, juicy life,” women need to act in such a manner that conforms to society’s established gender discourse. The blog asserts that “real” women are “DIVERSE” and each woman’s personal traits can vary, but if a woman wants to be seductive she must perform in specific ways. Furthermore, a woman is gendered only when she is “ultra-feminine,” and “takes initiative.” American and European society’s expect gendered women to continuously perform as: attractive, feminine, confident, and ultimately, seductive. Accordingly, when a sexed woman acts in the above mentioned manner she is gendered and can hold a man’s attention, thus she is able to “get a man.” The “Seductive Woman” blog delves into what seductive gender performativity entails, much the way chick lit does by laying out a list of how to act. Once a “real” woman performs in the prescribed gender, she is able to truly live as a “woman.”

Alongside blogs, there are also online blog-style magazine articles that promote the production of seductively gendered women as well. One such article is from *RedbookMag* entitled “15 Ways to Channel Your Inner Seductress.” The article stresses the importance, no, the necessity of being a seductive “woman.” Before a woman can “get a man,” or perform her gender, she must be: sexy, attractive, and wanton. The article says, “Plan a trip and pack light. Surprise him with a vacation to a beachy destination. Give him the tickets, a skimpy bikini, and note that says, ‘This is the only thing I’ll be wearing the entire time.’ He’ll get the idea” (“15 Ways to Channel Your Inner Seductress”). Clearly, this article implies that a true “woman” will “pack light” and shock her man with a sexy little number that will make him immediately think of sex. The thought process is that women in society need to perform seductively by wearing “skimpy” clothing and penning steamy love notes. By doing these things, they are performing the female gender as society wants to *produce* it. The interesting fact is that articles like this are excruciatingly popular. Evidence can be seen in the mass circulation of magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *RedBook*. According to the Hearst Corporation *Cosmopolitan*’s circulation “reached three million in 2010” (“*Cosmopolitan* Circulation”). Women all over the United States and Europe read “How-To” articles on seduction because they want to be viewed by society as gendered “women.” The influx of such articles has helped initiate the hyperreal woman. The attempt to mimic “women” who are successfully gendered has gradually created a new original. Instead of representing, or semi-simulating “real” life women, these articles and blogs have produced a new woman, a hyperreal woman.

The immense popularity of blog-style online magazine articles like “15 Ways to Channel Your Inner Seductress” has bolstered the strength of already trendy blogs like the “Seductive Woman.” One of the most popular blog-style magazines that offers “help” on how to be a seductive (gendered) woman is *Cosmopolitan*. The majority of the magazine’s online blog-style articles are rooted in the realm of: how to be sexy, how to get a man, or how to make your man shake. Women are busily reading how to be seductive everyday, which aides in the production of the promulgated female gender. One article from *Cosmopolitan* “Boost Your Sex Appeal in 30 Days” explains how to truly become seductive, rather just simply stating “you should be seductive by doing x” as the *Redbook* article does. This *Cosmopolitan* article claims, “Perfect your come-hither look. Tilt your head slightly down and to the side, then look up from under your lashes and smile. This pose shows guys it’s okay to approach — trust us, it works” (“Boost Your Sex Appeal in 30 Days”). This article not only says “get your skimpy bikini” on, as the *Redbook* article does, but it also commands women to change their facial and body positions. The act of altering one’s physical body by producing a “come-hither” look systematically changes one’s persona. Now, the sexed woman who previously changed into a skimpy bikini (as

*Redbook* suggested) has masked herself in a supposedly sexy facial position. This woman—because of the societal process/pressure of magazine articles—has transformed herself physically and emotionally to become a different woman, therefore completing the process of the socially manufactured gendered woman.

Furthering the notion of having to completely alter oneself to become a gendered woman is Alisa Bowman's blog "Happily Ever After," and particularly the section on "How to Become the Sexiest Woman Alive." In it she says, "A sexy woman is: Confident. Completely at home in her God-given glorious body. Competent. Physically fit ... Take a look at that list again. Do you see anything there that you can't change? Didn't think so" (Bowman). This passage expands on the previously discussed "Seductive Woman" blog, which explained certain attributes "real" seductive women possess. According to the "Seductive Woman," seductive women are assertive and feminine. Bowman's "How to Become the Sexiest Woman Alive" also claims that a seductive woman is "confident" and comfortable in her "glorious" body, which implies assertive and feminine. Bowman goes so far as to say (sexed) women can "change" each aspect of their personal selves that do not conform to the (gendered) woman's persona. She argues that before a woman can attain the desired "happily ever after" she must be all the things listed in the blog: confident, happy in her own skin, competent, and physically fit. It is ironic that before a woman can be comfortable in her own skin she must alter the way in which she acts, looks, and feels. The only way for a woman to be gendered by today's American and European society is to perpetually perform the prescribed gender discourse of the seductive.

Articles and blogs have set in motion the slide from mirroring to hyperreality, and the addition of chick lit has completed the transformation and creation of the hyperreal woman. The clash of the two worlds—"false" or "imaginary" and "real"—has formed a unique "woman," a woman society purports to be "real," but there can be no true original, because of the constant societal production of the gendered "woman" who must perform as such. Chick lit is an active player in the production of the gendered woman. Apart from being persecuted by many feminists, Chick lit is known for being fun, flirty, and *representative* of "real" flesh and blood women. *Jemima J. a novel about ugly ducklings and swans*, written by Jane Green, is a popular work from the genre. It portrays itself (through fictional character Jemima) to mirror the life of a "real," actual woman who simply wants to live happily in her own skin. Yet there is a subversive message beneath the surface that beckons "real" flesh and blood women to perform society's prescribed gender role as seductress much the way "real" life blogs do. Jemima Jones is the protagonist of the novel, which is set in London, England. When the reader first meets Jemima she is largely overweight, unattached, and unhappy. Before Jemima can be happy, she must actively perform as a gendered woman. She takes after a woman, Geraldine, who is *performing* as a seductive woman, and who presumably has everything a "woman" could ever want: a good job, a steady boyfriend, and skintight jeans. The novel follows Jemima on her journey to become a "real" gendered "woman," instead of simply remaining a sexed woman.

The first words out of Jemima's mouth appear to be what a "real" woman could think or say every day. She says, "God, I wish I were thin. I wish I were thin, gorgeous, and could get any man I want. You probably think I'm crazy, I mean here I am, sitting at work on my own with a massive double-decker club sandwich in front of me, but I'm allowed to dream, aren't I?" (Green 1). Here, Jemima is actively desiring and dreaming to be a "real" gendered woman, so she can have all the things "real" gendered women have: a man and incredible good looks. Of course not all women in society have these things, because society claims only gendered women can attain them. *Jemima J.* is merely illustrating that women are encouraged by society to be

seductive in order to be “real,” accepted, and gendered. Jemima’s performative discourse must follow the allocated societal processes before she can be considered a part of the “real.” Current blogs and online blog-style magazine articles function in the same way, because they persuade women to become what society deems to be *the* female gender.

*Jemima J.* is the perfect piece of chick lit to depict the false or “imaginary,” meshing with the “real” because the protagonist, Jemima, is obsessed with magazines that promote the seductive gendered woman. She says, “Half an hour to go of my lunchbreak. Half an hour in which to drool over the latest edition of my favorite magazine ... I sit and study each glossy photograph for minutes at a time, drinking in the models’ long, lithe limbs, their tiny waists, their glowing golden skin” (Green 1). Jemima desires to perform as a gendered, seductive woman. In the beginning of the novel, though, she is one of those women earlier categorized as *not* being a gendered woman. Jemima is a sexed woman and therefore needs to immerse herself in blogs and magazine articles that depict how to look like, or perform like, a seductive gendered woman. She drools over images that portray the gendered woman: “lithe limbs,” “tiny waists,” and “glowing skin” all of which compose the seductive, and therefore the “real.” By visualizing herself becoming such a woman, Jemima has already begun the process of performing her prescribed gender.

Ultimately, Jemima does indeed become a gendered woman that society, and men, recognize. She puts herself through a physical and emotional bootcamp and loses over one hundred pounds. She changes into better clothes and gets a better job as Ms. Jernigan wrote of in *Bitch Magazine*. Jemima even ends up “happily every after” because she finally gets a man. The epilogue explains Jemima’s new self:

Jemima Jones is now a voluptuous, feminine, curvy size 10 who is completely happy with how she looks ... fairy tales can come true, and just like Jemima Jones, or Mrs. Ben Williams as she known outside of the glossy magazine where she know works, if we trust in ourselves, embrace our faults, and brazen it out with courage, strength, bravery, and truth, fate may jus smile upon us too. (Green 373)

As readers (flesh and blood “real” women) can see, Jemima is now sexy and seductive. In fact, she is now “voluptuous,” and “feminine,” performing as the ultimate gendered woman. This novel is a form of regulatory practice because it reaffirms the blogs and magazine articles that say: *One must become a seductive woman in order to be a “woman” at all.* “Fairy tales” come true when sexed women perform properly as gendered women, or so the novel promotes. The epilogue attempts to say if we (flesh and blood “real” women) “embrace our faults” we can be showered with love and affection from a man, too. We can be happy, and be considered a “real” woman. In actuality, though, before *Jemima J.* could become “Mrs. Ben Williams” and get the job of her dreams, she had to actively perform as a seductively gendered woman. The first sentence of the epilogue shows she is still performing, because she is sexy, confident, and voluptuous. When readers first met Jemima, she was none of those things. She was heavy and burdened with unhappiness, because she did *not* have a good job and she did *not* have a man. She was a sexed woman but not a gendered “woman.” The final proposed bright lining for Jemima and readers alike is that if *you* (“real” life woman) correctly perform your societally seductive prescribed gender, you will become a “woman.”

The interwoven nature of blogs, blog-style articles, and chick lit has not only promoted the societal production of becoming gendered seductive women, it has produced a hyperreal gendered woman. This hyperreal woman is the “woman” society has created to become the gendered woman of today’s American and European societies. There no longer exists, if there

ever did, a “real” woman. Before a woman can be gendered as a “woman,” and be acknowledged by society, she must consistently act out her gender performativity as a seductive woman. For today’s society, the hyperreal woman is the seductive woman. In the future, societal processes will design a different hyperreal. The seductive may vanish to make way for a new, but there will always be a hyperreal that usurps and overruns the “real.”

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