

Are We the Bimbos from Hell?

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The viral economy of social media has inevitably distorted the definition of bimbo. Despite the negative connotations of the word “bimbo” used to label conventionally attractive women as unintelligent and clueless, Gen Z is spearheading the effort to reclaim the word. The New Age bimbo shatters the phallus-governed society by her performative acts of vanity and cluelessness. In the post-2016 Hilary Clinton pantsuit era of #girlbossing, bimboism subverts the ‘Girlboss’ persona by (re)claiming hyper-femininity. Above all, bimbo feminism realizes there is more to her college degrees and resumé. The modern bimbo is back.

In this essay, we dish out the juicy details of bimbo feminism, exploring first how bimbo feminism is situated within an intersectional feminism framework, untangling the multifaceted dimensions of inequality. From there, we dissect the larger cultural context of bimboism through pop culture digital mediums, such as TikTok. Tracing the genealogy of bimboism, we examine how bimboism has emerged and gained virality across the digital landscape. Lastly, we explicate how bimboism is tied to the theme of “the personal is political” through an emphasis on self-actualization as a method for subverting phallogocentric norms.

Intersectional Feminism x Bimbo Feminism

Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate and leading scholar of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and law, coined the term “intersectionality” nearly 30 years ago. Situated in Black feminism and CRT, intersectionality argues that identities such as “gender, race, sexuality, and other markers of difference intersect and reflect large social structures of oppression and privilege, such as sexism, racism, and heteronormativity” (Kelly et al. 2021). Intersectionality is foundational in conceptualizing feminism and feminist theory. At its core, Crenshaw defines intersectional feminism as “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate and exacerbate each other” (Steinmetz 2020). This begs the question: *How do we situate bimbo feminism within an intersectional feminist framework?* Situating bimbo feminism within an intersectional feminist framework calls attention to the larger social structures of oppression that dictate how women are supposed to act, talk, and carry themselves under the regime of the heteropatriarchy. Ever since the premier of the Barbie movie, Bimbo feminism has (re)gained traction on TikTok (as it originally emerged on the platform around 2020), now coined BimboTok. At its core, Bimbo feminism embraces a multi-faceted representation of feminism: (re)claiming hyper-femininity; pushing back against the capitalist ‘Girlboss’ aesthetic; and ultimately, arguing that it is okay to be hot, dumb, and depressed! Since the rise of BimboTok, there have been waves of backlash, criticizing self-described bimbo feminists as sexist, obnoxious, and essentially, detrimental to the feminist movement. Operating under these rigid rubrics of oppression, bimbo feminism seeks to expose the ways in which sexism, racism, and heteronormativity circulates in society, ultimately (re)claiming her feminist power.

Who is a Bimbo?

To begin identifying who a bimbo feminist is, you might ask the question: are you hot, queer, and climate conscious? Then you might be a bimbo (Chlapecka 2023). Emerging as a

response to the post-2016 Hilary Clinton pantsuit era of #girlbossing, bimboism reclaims hyper-femininity and frivolity as powerful and subversive expressions of feminism within the realm of digital media, actively contradicting the suppression of girlishness inherent in the grind culture and capitalistic sentiments of the girlboss trend. Generated largely by Gen Z content creators and users, the genealogy of bimbo feminism can be traced back to TikTok creator Chrissy Chlapecka, who began making videos clad in head-to-toe pink, and making unabashed remarks on the polemics of the male gaze, sex-positivity, and taking pleasure in simply existing as a woman in the world (Haigney 2022). Though bimboism presents itself through ultra-feminine optics, self-identified bimbos like Chlapecka make it clear that a bimbo is a gender-neutral term: “there’s bimbos, thembos, himbos...”, and further a bimbo will always be there for their “girls, gays, and theys” (Chlapecka 2020), which points to bimbo feminism’s intersectional nature, as it actively pushes against the historical and contemporary strains of whiteness and heteronormativity within the feminist debate. A nod to drag is necessary here, as drag queens have historically been employing these same polemical tactics in their personas and performances and continue to do so. Drag queens, The Sugar and Spice Twins (popularized on TikTok and later on RuPaul’s Drag Race) construct their twin personalities around the persona of bimbos, utilizing hyper-femininity and sarcasm to boldly reclaim bimbofication, as is exemplified in their music video “Dingaling” and “Bimbofied” (Sugar and Spice Twins 2023). The queerness of bimboism cannot go unnoticed, and in the words of Chrissy Chlapecka, “if you’re homophobic, I’ll castrate you!” (Chlapecka 2020).

Self-Actualization and Subversion of Phallogentric Discourse

This reclamation of identity and self-actualization at the core of bimboism is not broadly understood or valued as inherently feminist. This is due in part to the optics and political character of the TikTok bimbo encouraging frivolity and femininity, though the trend is condemned for this exact audacity, which some criticize as reinforcing gendered stereotypes. As such, a criticism of the TikTok bimbo is that it only serves to benefit the heteronormative and patriarchal male gaze (Elliott 2022). A bimbo, though, would say that they are conscious of their own frivolity, and that it is precisely the hyper-feminine, yet politically critical, commentary that satirizes the heteronormative expectations of someone who may present as a bimbo. How dare a woman be both a bimbo *and* have a political opinion! Cheeky comedy has been woven through bimboism from the beginning, when Chrissy Chlapecka began making videos and people (mostly men) commented on her videos, dismissing her as bimbo as a way to belittle and insult – fortunately it had the opposite effect, as Chlapecka decided to go with it and claim the label of bimbo with confidence and pride, effectively rendering the notoriously heteronormative male-driven insult useless.

The Personal is Political: From TikTok to Hollywood

Broadly, bimbo feminism re-frames the second-wave feminist phrase “the personal is political” in a digital and intersectional context, where the emphasis on self-actualization subverts phallogentric norms through conscious frivolity and cheeky comedic commentary. Chrissy Chlapecka in her first video on defining who a bimbo is, “Who is a gen z bimbo”, states: “I don’t do this for the misogynistic male gaze, I do it for my gaze! And d@mn, my t!t\$ look good! <3” (Chlapecka 2020). This sentiment gets to the core of bimboism and self-actualization as political resistance. The statement of “damn, my tits look good” as an off-shoot comment to the casting

aside of the male gaze essentially renders the undoubtable weight of the heteronormative patriarchal judgment weightless. Years later, in 2023, Chrissy Chlapecka, along with a fellow bimbo, celebrated three years of bimbofication. In it, the bimbos overview what makes a bimbo, stating that: “A bimbo is hot, queer, and climate conscious” (Chlapecka 2023). Bimbofication remains prolific on TikTok, and if you’re still curious about whether or not you might be a bimbo, refer to TikTok user fauxrich’s video where the diagnosis includes questions such as: “Are you hot? Do you not care about society’s elitist view on academic intelligence” (Fauxrich 2020)? If yes, then fauxrich would might just diagnose you as a New Age Bimbo, where the only treatment is juicy couture and pink glitter (2020). Bimboism, at its essence, is the political as deeply personal, because its critical nature is intertwined at its core with individual identity and the reclamation of feminine confidence within the self. Bimboism has been amplified in the larger popular culture context since the premier of Hollywood blockbuster, *Barbie* on July 21st, 2023. The most iconic scene in *Barbie* – a powerful monologue by Gloria (America Ferrara) – reinforces the juxtaposing role of women operating under heteronormative power structures. In an attempt to de-program the Barbies from the patriarchal brainwashing, Gloria proclaims, “[Women are] supposed to stay pretty for men, but not so pretty that you tempt them too much or that you threaten other women because you’re supposed to be a part of the sisterhood” (*Barbie*, 1:19:04). Yes, living as a woman under the patriarchy is wildly contradictory. Bimboism aestheticizes and exaggerates these contradictions to reveal the ways in which embracing the turbulence of being feminine may actually be liberating. Even under the contradictory norms of the patriarchy, bimboism teaches us to live boldly and powerfully: to affirm our individual identities as a reclamation of feminine confidence within the self.

It seems that we have certainly not seen the last of bimbo feminism, or the potential implications on broader intersectional feminist discourse. It is perhaps not such a bad thing to consider how the core values of self-actualization and polemical comedy can address the political polarization, disinformation, and increasing gendered, queerphobic, and racial violence within the ubiquitous mediascape of online platforms like TikTok. The Hollywood blockbuster *Barbie* may not be the only or last theatricalization of bimboism in a larger popular culture context, and we can be optimistic about the wider adoption of its progressive ideals. Regardless of what happens, we can remain hopeful, as in the words of drag queen Sugar, “a bimbo never dies.”¹

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