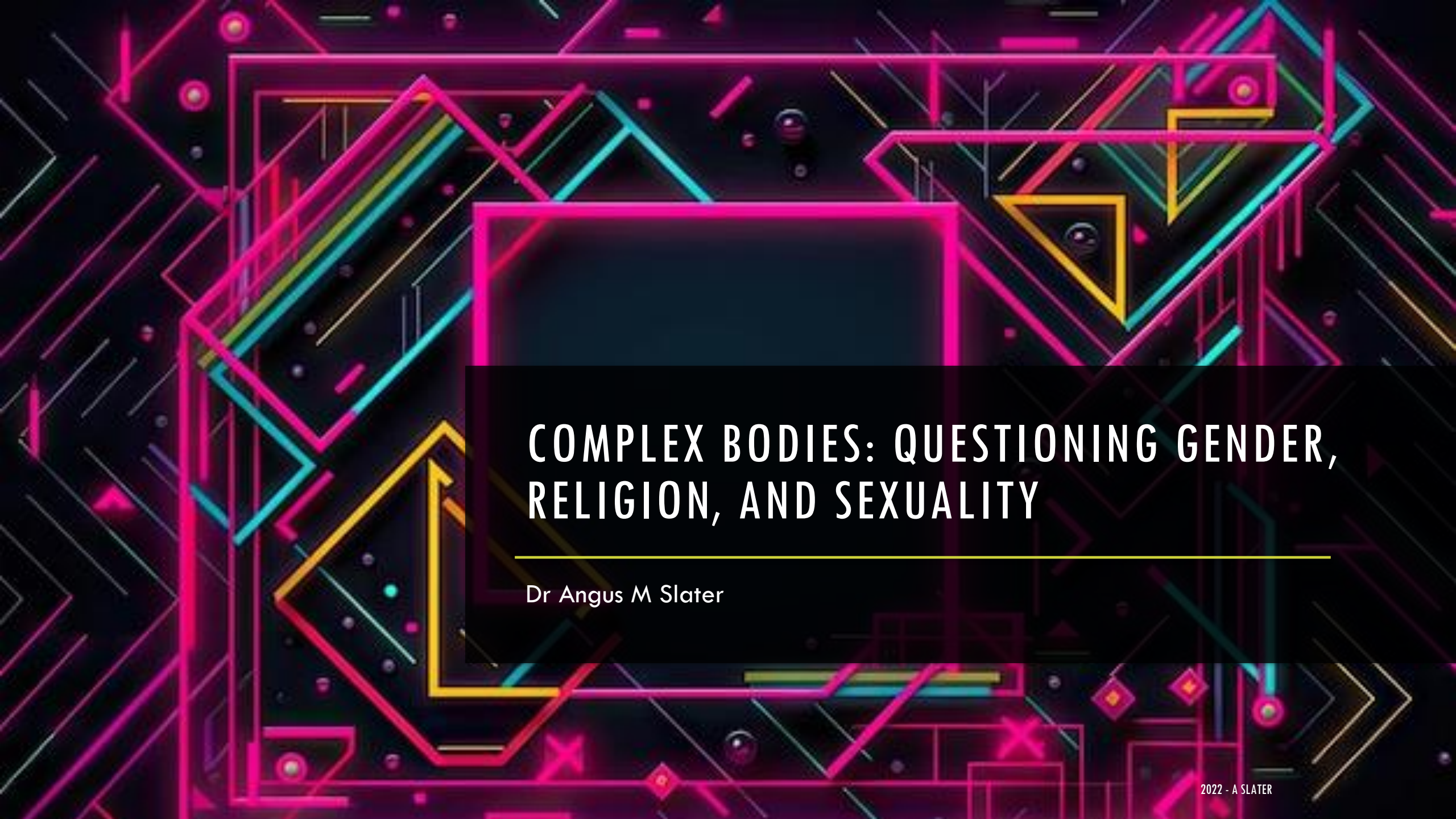
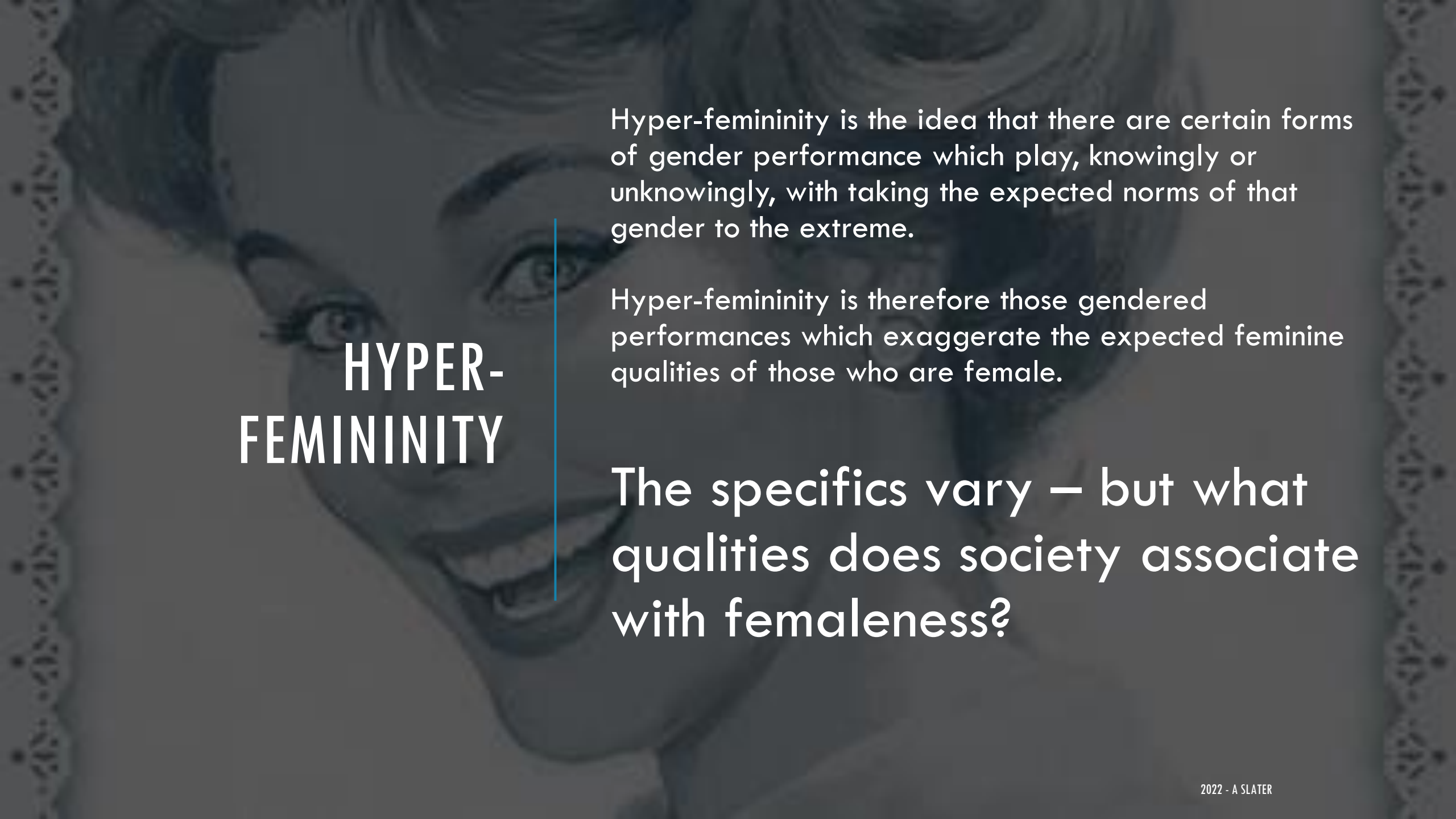


The background is a dark, almost black, space filled with a complex network of glowing, neon-like lines in shades of magenta, cyan, and yellow. These lines form various geometric shapes, including rectangles, triangles, and polygons, some of which are nested or overlapping. Small, glowing circles and dots are scattered throughout the composition, adding to the intricate, circuit-like or architectural feel of the design.

COMPLEX BODIES: QUESTIONING GENDER, RELIGION, AND SEXUALITY

Dr Angus M Slater



HYPER- FEMININITY

Hyper-femininity is the idea that there are certain forms of gender performance which play, knowingly or unknowingly, with taking the expected norms of that gender to the extreme.

Hyper-femininity is therefore those gendered performances which exaggerate the expected feminine qualities of those who are female.

The specifics vary — but what qualities does society associate with femaleness?



MARY

So how does Mary function as a symbol of hyper-femininity?

Mary operates as a model or ideal form of femaleness within much of the Christian tradition, particularly within medieval catholic forms.

The representation of Mary brings together a whole host of “female” themes which operate with and against actual women.



WOMEN, GENERALLY...

Origen (184-253) – *“Men should not sit and listen to a woman . . . even if she says admirable things, or even saintly things, that is of little consequence, since it came from the mouth of a woman”*

Tertullian (155-245) – *“You are the devil’s gateway: you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law”*

Augustine (354-430) - *“I don’t see what sort of help woman was created to provide man with, if one excludes procreation. If woman is not given to man for help in bearing children, for what help could she be? To till the earth together? If help were needed for that, man would have been a better help for man.”*

Aquinas (1225-1274) – *“As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence.”*

Martin Luther (1483-1546) – *“The woman, on the other hand, is like a nail driven into the wall”*

John Calvin (1509-1564) – *“On this account, all women are born that they may acknowledge themselves as inferior in consequence to the superiority of the male sex”*

MARY, SPECIFICALLY...

Jerome (347-420) – *“Even while living in the world, the heart of Mary was so filled with motherly tenderness and compassion for men that no-one ever suffered so much for their own pains, as Mary suffered for the pains of her children”*

Augustine (354-430) – *“The world being unworthy to receive the son of God directly from the hands of the Father, he gave his son to Mary for the world to receive him from her.”*

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) – *“Let us not imagine that we obscure the glory of the Son by the great praise we lavish on the Mother – for the more she is honoured, the greater is the glory of her Son.*

There can be no doubt that whatever we say in praise of the Mother gives equal praise to the Son”

Aquinas (1225-1274) – *“As mariners are guided into port by the shining of a star, so Christians are guided to heaven by Mary.”*

Martin Luther (1483-1546) – *“She is the] highest woman and the noblest gem in Christianity after Christ . . . She is nobility, wisdom, and holiness personified. We can never honour her enough.”*



WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?

MARY

Mary operates as a symbol of hyper-femininity by encapsulating the various primary characteristics of femaleness within one role model – mother, virgin, purity, meekness, obedience, submission – with these characteristics being promoted by men.

In doing so, the performance of femininity becomes an adjunct to masculinity – appropriate “femaleness” becomes whatever men say it is.



MARY

Mary is seen as, and promoted as, the apogee of all the things men want from women:

Chaste – because female sexual power is threatening

Motherly – because this role is defined by its relation to the Father

Submissive – following the order of God, following the order of men

Pure – eternally virginal, assumption to heaven, perfect ideal

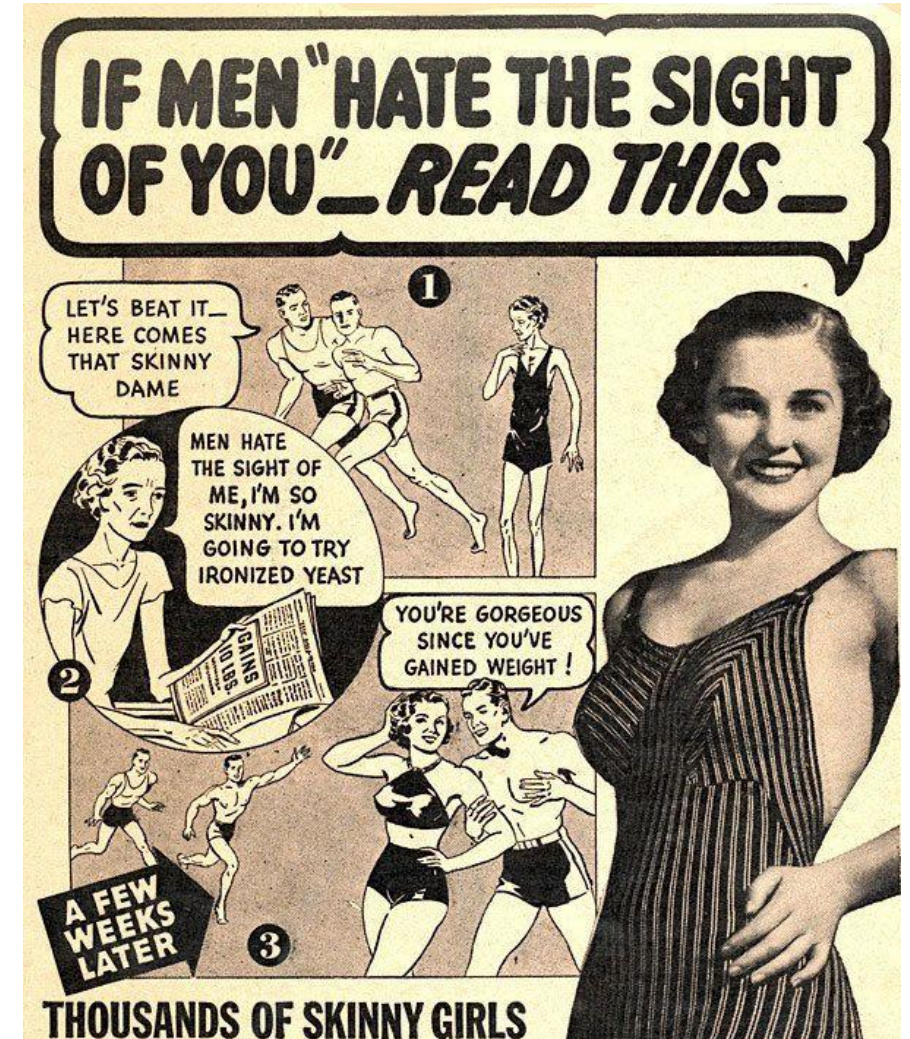


MARY

The hyper-feminisation of Mary therefore serves, in some ways, as an aspect of control over sexual / gender expression, by providing an ideal form that conforms not to the experience of those of the same gender, but rather to the fantasies of in power.

Politically, our gender ideals play a huge part in forming our sense of self, our idea of appropriateness, and our sense of shame.

What gender ideals do we have now and what do they operate to encourage?





GENDER SOLIDARITY

Much gender theory seeks to address the way that the expected gender roles we have serve to sustain the current system of power (Foucault, remember?)

How do our societies function to exclude those who do not, or cannot, conform to gendered expectations?

How do these systems overcome solidarity between men and / or women?

GENDER SOLIDARITY

Anthropologists (Fisher & Cox, 2011) have tackled the various ways this works and divided responses into two different forms:

Self-promotion tactics

Competitor derogation tactics

These are the ways by which expected gender roles function to control the expression of individuals – either by rewarding those who conform in some way, or punishing those who do not.



GENDER SOLIDARITY

Self-promotion tactics

Luxury Consumption – in order to complete within expected gender roles, outward presentation of status becomes important, usually physically, to better match a gender ideal

Cosmetic Surgery – this desire to match a gender ideal can extend to physical manipulation, the crafting of an outward model of perfection

Competitor derogation tactics

Female derogation – in order to promote their own conformance to a gender ideal, this behaviour is about highlighting the ways in which competition does not conform

Slut-shaming – an example of this is slut-shaming, where sexual activity is used as a symbol of non-femininity, and re-inscribes male desires for femaleness.



DRAG PERFORMANCE

But, we are not just caught with the gender roles we are given. We are also able to change those expected gender roles through our own conscious performances (Butler, remember?)

When I choose, or do not choose, to dress in a way that conforms / does not conform to my expected gender, then I am engaged in a process of conscious performance – to myself and to others.

In doing so, the inevitability of gender norms is challenged.

DRAG PERFORMANCE

Drag undoubtedly challenges notions of masculinity – most performers (not all) are biologically male, but chose to adopt the appearance, mannerisms, and performative characteristics associated with femininity.

This challenges the division espoused between genders and also challenges the nature of “masculinity” by associating it with feminine characteristics.

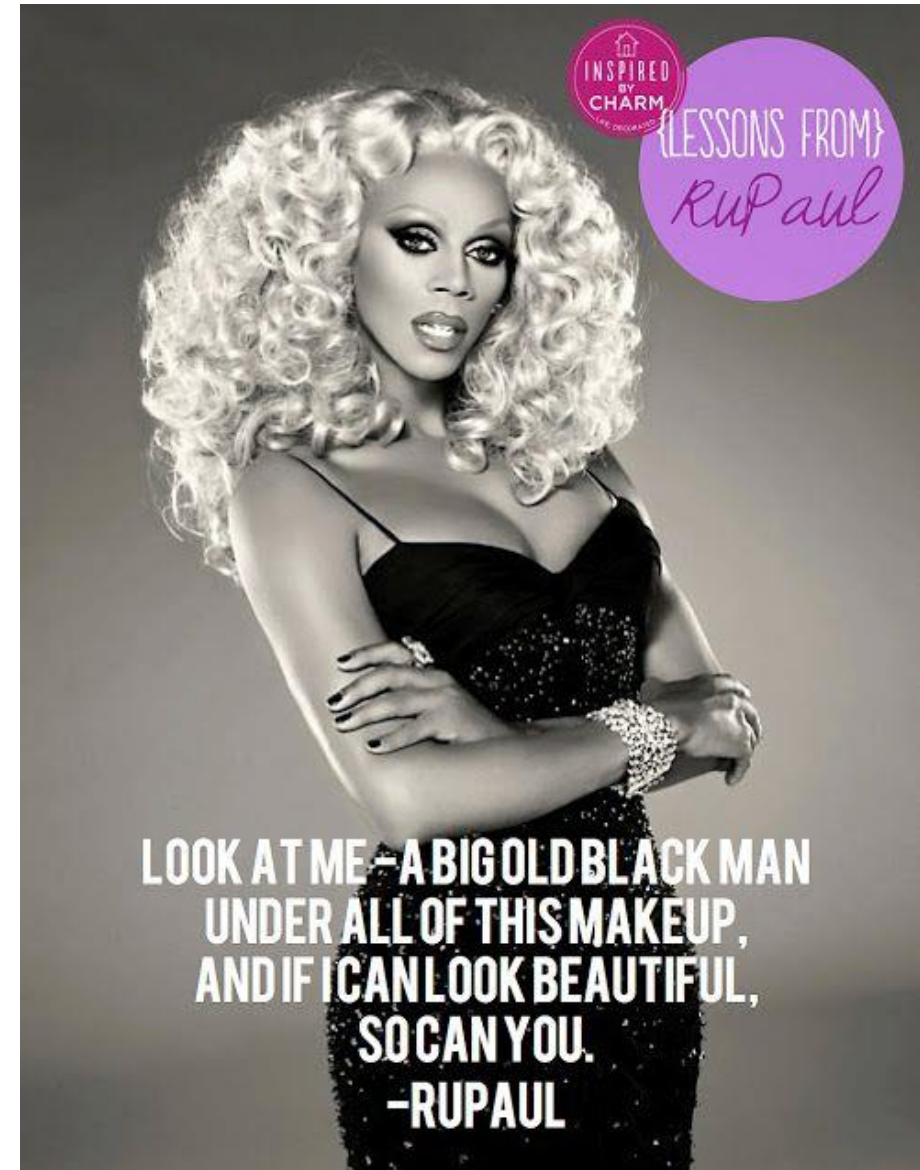


DRAG PERFORMANCE

Yet, there are questions about the representation of femininity in drag performances.

Do drag performances, which often valorize “fishiness” and traditional visions of femininity, work to disrupt traditional male-produced visions of femininity or work to re-inscribe it?

Is drag just male privilege being expressed in another way?



DRAG PERFORMANCE

Having said that, much drag seeks to undercut both male and female standards of gender appropriateness and beauty by challenging and reclaiming those aspects of performance often thought of as disgusting / monstrous and doing so in a positive way.

Eg. Pageant queens, Comedy Queens, Dragula etc etc.



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BEST MOMENTS DRAG RACE - FUNNY MOMENTS THAT I THINK ABOUT A
LOT - Part 2 (youtube.com)

"MEET OUR MONSTERS" - The Boulet Brothers Dragula S3 Cast (youtube.com)

The background is a colorful, abstract composition. It features a large, bright red circle in the center. Above this circle, there are three green, stylized, blocky figures that resemble running or jumping people, each with black outlines and small black lines indicating motion. Below the red circle, there is a yellow area filled with a black grid pattern, which is partially enclosed by a black outline. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century modern art or pop art.

JUDITH / JACK HALBERSTAM — FEMALE MASCULINITIES

FEMALE MASCULINITIES

Judith Halberstam's "Female Masculinities" opens with an exploration of the concept of masculinity as it intersects with female-bodied individuals – how do people within the category female relate to, and express, forms of masculinity?

For Halberstam, masculinity is not solely the domain of male-bodied individuals, but is instead a diverse spectrum of gender expression that can be embodied by individuals of any sex or gender identity.



FEMALE MASCULINITIES

At its core, this is a challenge to notions of gender essentialism – that the characteristics we associate with maleness have their essence in the physical reality of maleness.

Halberstam seeks to both identify and explore, but also uncover, the way in which this essentialism is false – where masculinity is performed without physical maleness, or beyond physical maleness.

This takes place both within the opposed category, e.g. femaleness, but also within sub-altern categories within maleness too.



FEMALE MASCULINITIES

Some examples of this include tomboyism, where girls exhibit traditionally masculine behaviours and interests, and butch lesbian identities, who embody a masculine gender presentation within a homosexual presentation of sexuality.

In both cases, the divergent presentation disrupts expectations of gender normativity, while elements of resistance are also apparent in both.

Halberstam examines how female-bodied individuals who embody masculinity challenge patriarchal power structures and disrupt heteronormative assumptions about gender and sexuality.



FEMALE MASculINITIES

Halberstam also acknowledges the intersections of gender with other social categories such as race, class, and sexuality - exploring how experiences of female masculinity are shaped by multiple axes of identity, such as race and class.

The examples of female masculinity identified are closely connected to the racial and class acceptability boundaries. In understanding them fully, we have to analyse how these representations both reflect and shape societal understandings of gender and sexuality, highlighting the ways in which female masculinities are constructed and contested within broader cultural contexts.



FEMALE MASculINITIES

Halberstam also focuses on the political and social implications of masculine performances within femininity, emphasising the validating and affirmative role that sub-cultures play on elements of masculine female performance.

Why might this positioning of female masculinities be different to male femininities?



JUDITH / JACK HALBERSTAM — THE
QUEER ART OF FAILURE

JUDITH / JACK HALBERSTAM — THE QUEER ART OF FAILUREJUDITH

In “The Queer Art of Failure”, Halberstam challenges traditional notions of success and failure, particularly within the context of mainstream culture and dominant social norms.

The central thesis revolves around the idea that embracing failure can be a subversive and liberating act, particularly for marginalized individuals and communities.

Failure disrupts normative expectations and opens up possibilities for resistance, creativity, and alternative modes of living.



JUDITH / JACK HALBERSTAM — THE QUEER ART OF FAILURE

Halberstam argues that the current cultural obsession with success and achievement, is deeply intertwined with capitalist ideologies and heteronormative ideals — producing an incredibly narrow definitions of success, which often marginalises and excludes those who do not fit within dominant narratives of achievement.

Drawing on queer theory and cultural studies, Halberstam explores how queer individuals and communities can and do embrace failure as a form of resistance against normative expectations. They highlight the ways in which failure can have upsides by disrupting linear narratives of progress and opening up space for experimentation, playfulness, and non-conformity.





JUDITH / JACK HALBERSTAM — THE QUEER ART OF FAILURE

Halberstam examines various cultural texts and phenomena, including literature, film, art, and popular culture, to illustrate the queer art of failure — including *Chicken Run*.

They explore how failure to be natural, to be acceptable, to follow the path to success, is depicted and celebrated within queer cultural productions, showcasing its potential to challenge dominant power structures and reimagine possibilities for living and relating.

JUDITH / JACK HALBERSTAM — THE QUEER ART OF FAILURE

Throughout the book, Halberstam emphasises the importance of failure as a political act and as a potential strategy for resisting oppression.

They argue that failure allows for the creation of alternative worlds and communities that exist outside of normative frameworks, offering spaces of belonging and solidarity for those who have been marginalised by mainstream culture.



READINGS

The background of the slide is a collage of three distinct images. At the top, a hammer is shown from a side profile, its head pointing towards the left. Below the hammer, on the left side, is a stack of many small, round coins or medals. On the right side, there is a person wearing a dark suit jacket and a light-colored shirt with a patterned tie. The entire collage is set against a warm, yellowish-orange background. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the collage, containing the text for the readings.

HALBERSTAM, JACK. "DRAG KINGS: Masculinity and Performance." *Female Masculinity*, Duke University Press, 1998, pp. 231–66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cwb00.12>.

The whole book is good!