

**Washed Up Mess**

by

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## The Gaze and its Resistance

The male gaze has been used in society for decades, centuries even, to attain some sort of control over the female population. For so long women have been controlled and deemed of their worthiness within societies based on the way they look, and it was based on the male gaze that these decisions were made. The male gaze has several different contexts. There are many forms of the gaze that can be followed, using the male aspect as a starting off point. There is the gaze as Laura Mulvey describes it in her writing, all of the intricacies that makes the male gaze as it is. There are discussions on how it has been used in the past, and in the present, and how the stereotypes created by the gaze have affected all women in between. There is also the toxicity of the gaze, and how that has negatively impacted women all over the world. Then there is the current response to the gaze in the form of Selfie-feminism, a way to take the gaze back into a woman's hands. The male gaze has affected the world in several different ways, most noticeably starting in the Renaissance era, and moving on into film and cinema and evolving its way into the everyday life of an average woman.

Laura Mulvey, the author of *Visual and Other Pleasures*, and the one who coined the term the male gaze, theorizes on the male gaze and its use on the male outlook of filmmaking. For a long period, males were the prominent filmmakers. As well, there were more men cast in films than women, and the women that were cast were typically written into the film for the same stereotypical role. There are three types of male gazes in cinema. The first is that of the filmmaker. The second is that of the male actor on screen. And lastly, it is the gaze of the male audience watching the film. Furthermore, there is also a voyeuristic gaze, and a fetishistic one. As stated by Mulvey:

This second avenue, fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The first avenue,

voyeurism, on the contrary, has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt, asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness. (*Visual and Other Pleasures*, 15)

Voyeurism leads to the scenes in films, and even in life, where the male character takes the lead role, head of the house, or just plain overpowers the female character. Fetishistic scopophilia, as stated, builds beauty, so in films, women are often dressed and made up to look visually pleasing to any of the males watching her. This can further lead into real life as well, where women feel obligated to look certain ways to please the men in their lives. Women are forced to act in one of two ways throughout films. They are either sexually active, or powerless. As stated by Mulvey, “The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (10). In cinema, women are not shown as they typically look. It does not show what an average woman tends to look like. Instead, they use an actress to look and act perfectly and precisely as a man would like them to, their fantasy. And then they produce and screen these films to fulfil other male fantasies. Films were once created with the male gaze in mind, and nobody else’s.

Mulvey was one of many to discuss the way women operate under a male gaze world.

Another to speak upon this topic was John Berger. In his article, he states:

One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of the woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (*Ways of Seeing*, 47)

It is known that men have active parts, while women slow the movie down. Due to the prolonged use of a prominent male gaze within the world, women have started to look at themselves under

a male eye. She learns to objectify herself, just as a male might. She learns to make herself up as a male would like to look at her, not on how she would like to look herself. Furthermore, under these circumstances, the gaze does not return back to men. Women do not hold them to a gaze that is visually pleasing to them. “But the essential way of seeing women, the essential use to which their images are put, has not changed. Women are depicted in a quite different way from men... because the ‘ideal’ spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him” (Berger, 64). Berger does not only speak about film. He also discusses this use to the times of the post-Renaissance era, more particularly the art produced during that time. He discusses the paintings created, typically a nude with a revealing position, and how even during that time, the world lived under a male dominated gaze. “To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men...” (Berger, 46). From the second they are born, women are immediately faced with disadvantages. And starting at a young age, they are taught how to survive in this male ruled world. And they are often under the control of the men in their lives, first under their fathers and then onto their husbands. And this is also shown in cinema, females undertaken by the male lead, powerless and with no one else to rely on.

A famous director in the 1930’s, Dorothy Arzner, one of the few female directors at the time, uses her films to try and dismantle a part of the male gaze. In one film, *Dance Girl, Dance* Judy, a ballerina, is the opening act at a burlesque show, but is used as a stooge to rile the audience up and make them even more excitable for the main act.

The moment in *Dance Girl, Dance* when Judy faces her audience is a privileged moment in feminist film theory and criticism, foregrounding as it does the sexual hierarchy of the gaze, with female agency defined as the return of the male look, problematizing the objectification of woman. (*Lesbian Looks, Dorothy Arzner and Female Authorship*, Judith Mayne, 4)

During one scene in the film, Judy addressed the audience in front of her and called them out on their behavior. She turns the gaze back out on them, pointing out the problems, indirectly, that the male gaze has. It is not only men in the audience, but women as well watching Judy perform. It shows that women have conformed to act just like the men in their lives do. Also stated by Mayne, “[T]he discovery of Arzner, and especially of Judy’s ‘return of the gaze,’ offered some glimmer of historical hope as to the possibility of a female intervention in the cinema” (4). Scenes like this were never seen in films, especially those by male filmmakers. A scene like this could create a stepping stone for other females working in cinema. It shows the possibility that women could turn back to gaze onto men and show them all of the problems with it. It could help to point out all of the other problems with the male gaze, as well as start a change, albeit a slow moving one, to rid of the male gaze entirely.

The male gaze is not just cut and dry; women are used for male visual pleasure. There are real women behind the character they play on screen. These are real women that have to live with the effects of this gaze. Back in 2010, both Jennifer Aniston and Owen Wilson were being interviewed about a movie they had acted in together. They had both recently turned forty years old. Only Jennifer Aniston was asked about her age. “All the media coverage around [her age] was about that, and about basically how that was the apocalypse for her” (*The Toxic Female Gaze*, Emma Jones). A woman's worth, while it can be measured by many things, is often based off of the age she is. This can backtrack to how women are seen most valuable during their child making years, and the age of 40 is not ideal in that situation. This can also relate to the fact that oftentimes women are made to think beauty fades with age, and if they cannot be beautiful then what else could they be. Especially in the film industry, an older woman can typically be cast in

very few and very similar roles, instead of the lead. And the Gaze does not just end with celebrities. It trickles down into every average woman as well. “[T]his has been at the cost of a woman’s self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself” (Berger, 46). Even though this was published in the 1970s, this statement is still true for many women in this day and age. Women can be separated into two parts, who she actually is, and who she shows off to those around her. If there is a slip up, she just might ruin her self image, possibly for the rest of her life. She has to act certain ways so the people around her think that she is perfect, that she is happy, that she lives without a care in the world. Meanwhile, she is often none of those things as she has to constantly look over her shoulder to ensure that that image stays in place and prevents anything from destroying it. For nearly their entire lives, they feel like they have to upkeep this facade because it is what they were always taught to do.

*Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* directed by Todd Haynes is an example of the toxicity of the gaze. The film follows Karen Carpenter, a famous singer from the late 1960s to the early 1980s before her untimely death. Karen suffered from anorexia nervosa, an eating disorder. In high school, Karen had been recommended a diet by a doctor, so starting at a young age she became very conscious about what she put in her body, and how much of it. It only worsened when she became famous. In an interview, Todd Haynes states:

Superstar was also our way of trying to understand anorexic behavior, which, as we learned, often occurs within very controlling families, and in Karen Carpenter's case, was compounded by the extraordinary pressures on a young girl who was suddenly in the spotlight and whose every change in body fat was being discussed worldwide. Her desire to take back control over her life was something that we understood and tried to create some sympathy for. (*From Underground to Multiplex: An Interview With Todd Haynes*, Scott MacDonald, 57)

Comments are often made about a woman's body, but for one whose every move was being watched, those comments came more often and more critical. To handle the pressure of stardom, especially at such a young age, as well as being judged for the way she looked, it became too much for Karen. And Karen is not the only young woman to have faced these types of hardships. These types of comments, comments made to make women feel like they need to look a certain way, can negatively affect any women they are spoken to. They are even often made by one's family members, particularly ones who always make the child feel like they can only act and look in a certain way. Todd Haynes also states in that interview, "She had become a figure of ridicule, even cruel ridicule, in some circles (I'll never forget that Grammy Awards where Bette Midler introduced Karen Carpenter and had to say some nasty thing about her)" (MacDonald, 57). Karen had not only been talked about by the media, but by her famous peers surrounding her. The way she looked became a joke. Her illness with anorexia nervosa had become a punchline. Instead of being helped, she was kept even more isolated with her problems. In those times, illnesses like anorexia nervosa had not been taken as seriously as they are today, young women in the film and music industry were not always taken as seriously, and the price had been Karen's health, and eventually, her life.

A more recent movement in which women have tried to gain some control in their lives, especially those who are celebrities is the Me Too movement. The Me Too movement is an effort to stop sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace. In 2017, many female celebrities came forward to talk about their negative and traumatizing experiences they faced in the workplace due to their sex. Men often hold a position of power, and use that position to control a woman's career, often in the film industry but it could happen anywhere. The Me Too movement

was started to elicit change to help make women feel comfortable in their workplace, as is their right to.

When Ashley Judd revealed to the *New York Times* an encounter she had with Harvey Weinstein—in which he invited her to his room, appeared in a bathrobe, and asked for a massage—the story played as old-fashioned consciousness-raising. It was a highly personal accounting of tacitly accepted, oppressive, systemic conditions for women beneath the humming, glamorous world of a male-dominated entertainment industry. The subsequent revelations from big stars like Salma Hayek, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Lupito Nyong'o were an astonishing blend of star power and intimate revelation that gained force through the new positioning of celebrities as 'one of us.' (*Editorial: Celebrity, Politics, and the "Me, Too" Moment*, Ann Larabee)

For years women were silenced from speaking on the harassment they faced in fear nobody would believe them and it would end their careers. The Me Too movement opened a safe space for women to speak on the injustices they faced in the entertainment industry, and in turn more 'normal' women around the world felt more comfortable talking about the sexual harassment they faced in the work place. This is a step in a direction that helps women keep the control of their lives and jobs out of the hands of men by displaying the wrongdoings and urging others to do better, or to implement stricter rules to do better.

In recent years, there has been more of an uproar to try and dismantle the male gaze society. Selfie-feminism is a woman's way of taking back the camera. After centuries of mainly male directors being the eye, modern women have been able to use today's technology to take back their voice in how they are displayed in society and the media. "Selfie-feminists believe that by rejecting current norms, shyness, shame and exposing themselves, particularly via social media, such as Instagram, they can emancipate from the patriarchal culture and existing stereotypes" (*Selfie-feminism, the Sad Girl Theory and the Sad Girls of Instagram*, Wojtek Rożdżeński). As stated, for so long women were tried to be forced into a box, to act a certain way, modest, conservative, docile and quiet. By using Instagram, they can post any type of



picture of themselves to claim back their bodies. They go against all the years of training to act like someone they are not, by acting just as they want to be. They post pictures of themselves in different kinds of dress, sometimes not even dressed at all, to break away at the stereotypes brought on by the male gaze. These stereotypes are explained by a Selfie-feminist herself. “Zofia Krawiec, one of the central figures of Polish Selfie-feminism argues that an attractive woman is immediately recognized as unintelligent, mostly because she pays attention to her looks” (Rozdzeński). It is assumed that just because a woman is pretty, that is all there is to them. That they cannot also have a brain of their own and know how to use it, not unless it is only being used on how to make themselves look better. It is a one off judgement men, and even other women, make when seeing an attractive female. It is part of the stereotype that has become so ingrained in society. In the same article, it states:

She fights that assertion by proving that a woman can be intelligent, well-educated, and appealing at the same time. Krawiec is an artist, art critic, and a curator herself. She posts selfies which are a blend of glitter, BDSM, nudity, and sadness, contradicting the opposition between intelligence and physical attractiveness... Krawiec, on the other hand, argued that by using tools and methods which were used to objectify women, she deprives them of their former power (Rozdzeński).

While men enjoy women visually in certain dress, poses, acts, they are also quick to shame them on those same things. For the longest time, no matter what, women were in a lose-lose situation. When men want them to act outside of their stereotypical way, they are also the first to make women feel badly about that. But as Krawiec stated, women can reclaim their power by using these certain things - glitter, nudity, BDSM, and genuinely showing sadness - and reducing the hold men had over them before. There is no better way to reduce the power of something that was once held over you than taking that power for yourself and using it in the way you best see fit.

The selfie is not only used by women to take back the camera, but also to reclaim their femininity back from men. The selfie offers a new tool that was never available before, a tool to help women reclaim what should have always been theirs, and social media helps to showcase this.

It is not surprising then that many of the selfies we see in circulation conform, at least at a surface glance, to norms of femininity. Rather than viewing them as a missed opportunity to flout convention, it is perhaps more productive to consider how this apparent conformity speaks to the power and complicated pleasures of women's relationship to images of the feminine, including images of themselves. (*How The Light Gets In: Notes on the Female Gaze and Selfie Culture*, Mary McGill)

Women are trying to reclaim their femininity. For years, under the male gaze, it was under the male control. Their femininity was based on what was most visually pleasurable to men. Now, women focus on themselves and how to make them more visually pleasing to their own eyes. While at first glance, a selfie can seem very straight cut, but every selfie taken gives women the option to grow their opinions and strengthen their relationship with their bodies and looks. It is a new way of seeing themselves, through their very own eyes. Also stated by McGill, "...the ability of women to inhabit the male gaze cannot account for the distance that exists between the lived experience of womanhood and visual culture attempts to represent femininity." Femininity does not have a straight cut definition. Femininity can mean different things between men and women. It can even mean different things from one woman to another. Even though women can now enter the context of the male gaze with a selfie, there is still a gap that needs to be filled between actual womanhood, and the not entirely accurate ways it is shown within the media.

Furthermore, while the selfie can have positive effects for a woman's relationship with herself, a woman taking and posting a selfie online can often be judged.

...what often appears as narcissistic behavior in women is in fact a response to the demands and limitations of femininity. These demands and limitations may alter over time and across cultures, perhaps even diminish, but wherever they exist, they direct women's energy towards the body, the self, a terrain over which she has primacy and control. In the current age, it is this notion of control that seems to me to be an integral part of the selfie's appeal to women. For so long the object of the gaze or invisibilized by it, without the means to represent themselves publicly on their own terms or to preserve their reflection, digital technologies allow women the means to represent themselves as they wish to be seen. (McGill)

As stated, a selfie can appear quite narcissistic. A woman taking a picture of herself, loving the way she looked enough to post, shows a sense of love for themselves and only themselves. But instead, the selfie is one of the first opportunities that women have had to take the camera and the gaze back into their own hands and power. For the first time, they can show themselves off exactly the way they want to be seen, rather than being only an object of desire to be looked upon by men. They are ending their objectification and claiming back their rights to be women, their rights to be actual people for the first time in centuries.

In many ways, [Amalia Ulman's] work highlights exactly the kind of superficial assumptions people make about women based on image alone. "It's more than a satire," she said. "I wanted to prove that femininity is a construction, and not something biological or inherent to any woman. Women understood the performance much faster than men. They were like, 'We get it – and it's very funny.' The joke was admitting how much work goes into being a woman and how being a woman is not a natural thing. It's something you learn." (*Are selfies empowering for women?*, Laura Bates)

Femininity did not just exist on its own, but was created by society. It is really a construct, and one woman had no control over for years, some their entire lives. It was just who they were made and told to be by society. And it is not an easy job, but one that takes hours to perfect so that a woman can be accepted by her peers. Ulman created this project to showcase different stages of a fake woman's life, posting pictures as any woman typically would. This earned her many comments, often on the picture of her "self destructive" stage

that tried to belittle her, her pictures, and the life she was displaying online. But even so, this project succeeded in once more taking control of the camera, because it was used to showcase the problems that most women tend to face, but are at times too ashamed to discuss.

Resistance to the gaze has been slow coming and only more prevalent within the last few decades. Another way in which women could claim back the gaze was by taking the time to figure out their identities. For so long, women were told what to look like which can affect the way one thinks and feels about themselves, but more recently women are given the chance to act more gender-fluid. “And what can be more revolutionary than the affirmation of the right to negotiate one’s identity, to choose the when and how of one’s embodiment, to move freely within the multiple masculinities and femininities of the gender order, to erase borders and reject the structures and strictures of binaries?”

*(Resisting the Male Gaze: Feminist Responses to the “Normalization” of the Female Body in Western Culture, Diane Ponterotto, 146).* Women can tear down the walls between femininity and masculinity and decide for themselves where exactly they fit along the scale. This is a different way to reject the gaze and all of the rules of femininity that comes along with it. Under this structure, there would be no more strict masculine and feminine aspects, but a dismantling of the gaze, for if feminine traits and habits became more open to males the male gaze could not single out women any longer. “And that is why perhaps the best form of resistance is, first of all, the simple awareness that the female body is a gazed-upon body and secondly, the unrelenting conviction and steadfast commitment to reject that condition” (Diane Ponterotto, 148). Just women rejecting the gaze is an extremely strong form of resistance. For years, the male gaze was just as accepted as is. But

once a revolution against the gaze began, the gaze held less power than it once had. Women cannot just pretend that the gaze does not exist and equality is readily available. They must acknowledge the gaze, and then they must fight against it, because if they do not the gaze will remain around.

Therefore, the male gaze has weaved its way into many past and current issues. Starting with Mulvey who stated how the voyeuristic and fetishistic gazes impact the male lead in taking control over the woman and situation, and teaching the women how to look visually pleasing. And then onto John Berger, who tracks back the male gaze on post-renaissance art, and who discussed further how women are made to act in films to please the male viewers. Onward to the film *Dance Girl, Dance* by Dorothy Arzner a first step to show the problematic way in which men objectified women. Then the toxicity of the gaze, how many women, famous or not, are negatively affected by the gaze, and how comments made to them and about them can tarnish their self-worth and lead to unfortunate circumstances, specifically in the case of Karen Carpenter. Lastly, there is Selfie-feminism. This is a modern way for women to take a claim back on the view of the camera and to show themselves in a way on social media on how they want to be seen. The selfie is also used in a way in which women can reclaim their femininity and show it off. Additionally, acknowledging the gaze and giving women the ability to choose their identities is another form of resistance towards the gaze. It's a first step on a long road ahead, but already has had its desired effects of trying to dismantle the part of the patriarchy that tries to control women in a way that is most visually pleasurable to men.

### **Washed Up Mess**

Until college, I had never been taught about the male gaze. It was always present and ready for me to notice in the media I had consumed, but there was never any explanation or

discussion on why I was seeing women overtly sexualized or submissive. It had always just felt like that was the fact of the matter, and there was no way to change that. It was how I thought I was supposed to act when I grew older. It was an eye-opening experience to finally learn the patriarchal norms displayed in film and television. Even the perception of the male gaze I have currently is not what it was when my research began. I learned the basics of the male gaze. I learned it in its purest form, as described by Mulvey. But I was advised to write down and figure out my own feelings on the topic. This was to help find out exactly where I fit among all the research I had completed and create my own narrative, which in turn became my final project.

I was inspired after watching *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* to create my own character. It was the first true starting off point I had after nearly three months of trying to figure out a medium to showcase my work. From there, it went into creating a story to be told. I believed that would be the easiest part, but that was sorely incorrect. How does one create a story that perfectly and correctly incorporates the male gaze in the broadest sense, but also points out all of the nuances? At first, there were three different storyboards I had created, none of which made the cut for the final version. There was at first that of an everyday woman, bogged down by society's expectations, but finds herself using the techniques of Selfie-feminism of 'defeating' the male gaze. A traditional coming of age story, if you will. But that felt too cut and paste, and highly unrealistic, at least to my life. And if it did not sound realistic for me, I knew chances were it would not be to any viewers. The next two storyboards were scrapped halfway through, sounding too familiar to the first one I created. There was always a happy ending, one I knew was not always as likely in real life. There was a stagnant few weeks in which nothing was written. There were only half-formed ideas that would never make it to paper. But I pushed

ahead in creating the character and other digitally physical elements I knew I would need once I did finally write the script.

The character was created using the 3D computer application Blender. The first problem I faced was realizing I did not know much about creating and drawing a person's body, nor the exact anatomy that went into it. There had to be a front body view, but also a side view. There were many videos watched and a few day's worth of attempts in a sketchbook before I settled on one of each view I thought fit best. I knew this character had to explicitly follow the perfection some women feel they must achieve to mean something in a male gaze centered world. Then came the actual modeling through Blender. The first model was created only using the cubes the program offers, just so I had some sort of 3D template that proved I could do anatomy on this application. After a few tweaks, this template ended up becoming the male characters in my story, to contrast how much effort women typically have to put into their looks, compared to how little men tend to have to. Next I started modeling the character. There was a mirroring technique I used with the tools to ensure each side of the body was proportionate. I needed the templates I had created to know exactly how I wanted the body shaped and to make sure it represented the human body in some shape. Creating the hair for the character took severely longer than it took to shape the body. Each strand had to be made individually, and I had to shape it so there were some bangs and angles around the face instead of the hair looking like it was falling out of the characters head. There were several techniques I had watched on to create the hair, and even the one I settled on took me hours to finish and shape.

At this point, I knew I had to finally write this script. There was nothing more I could do without some type of direction. At some point during creating the character, I had changed tactics a bit. The character was now going to be famous and living under the pressures of the

media as well as her parents. I centered more on her father being the controlling one, and her mother acting more submissive as is seen in half of the female characters in a male gaze centered film. I knew the feelings the character would have, and that is because I fell back on some of the writing I had done a few months prior. I figured the best way to create the emotions on this piece was if I had experience with them myself. The situations the character finds herself in my piece are not ones I have faced in my own life, but I used the feelings I once had and created scenes around them. The lack of control, confusion on why certain things happen to oneself, panic, sadness. I knew this would create a connection between myself and the piece where before there had been some sort of disconnect. At that point onward, this piece would now mean more to me as it reflected off of me. It was no longer something I was creating off of a topic I had been interested in and researching, but moved forward into a territory in which it felt more personal. Still, the writing process was slow, and I often felt like I was thinking faster than I was typing and I was forgetting certain scenes I wanted to implement into the story because of that. So I moved on to just recording and telling the story orally. First I recorded what I had already written, which ended up being harder than expected because I would mess up the order the words were written in or I was so focused on getting everything right that I wasn't speaking in the rhythm I had planned. But from there on, making up lines and scenes on the top of my head or based off of a few notes I had written down was much easier. That entire process just flowed smoother.

The recordings themselves ended up being nearly thirty minutes long. There were lots of cuts made that first night, and even more so through the next following weeks. I had always planned using some sort of filter or audio editing over my voice. It never felt right to me to use my own voice to tell this character's story, especially so because I knew the video would become



more abstract and my own voice might create a disconnect. From there, I wanted to create a song. This was inspired by the video project *I've Been Afraid* by Cecelia Condit. I watched it the year before when it first came out, and I had been obsessed with the idea of having a song in my own project. To me, the song adds a lightness to an otherwise heavy topic, but through the lyrics the effect of the piece does not change, but is instead elevated. The song adds something that the narrative itself could not. It introduces the character and her life and her relationship with her father in a way that did not have the narrative outright saying it at the start. It set the rest of the story up. Originally there were to be three versions of this song, and it would break up the story to signify a change in the characters life. The first version, which is the only one that made it into my video, states "Who am I supposed to be other than the trophy my father keeps," and "Make your father happy in any way he pleases." The second verse was supposed to change the word father to husband, and the third was supposed to state "Other than the trophy the world makes me," and "Make a man happy in any way he pleases." Due to cuts I made towards the end, there were not enough scenes featuring the characters husband nor her life after her divorce to justify using them. Instead, I decided to use the first version again towards the end when the credits start playing to round out the story. This ended up being crucial to the piece, as it sets the scene at the start of the video, but also gives the viewers ears a break after listening to the rougher speaking voice for four plus minutes.

The next step was adding visuals to my audio. Again, this took me three official tries before finally finding the correct aesthetic. I had a very hard time grasping what a video collage really was. I believed it to be just connecting different clips and images one after another, rather than laying them on top of each other. With my first version, I was taking the script too literally. I was implementing the recordings I had taken in Unity to display the exact scenes I had written

and recorded of the narrative so it played more like a film of sorts. But my visuals did not line up with the level as my audio, as my skills in filming in Unity were not up to par. My second version fared very similarly, because even though I had started layering images and film, they did not match up and work together. After that, I took a few days to regroup before creating an entire new After Effects file. I fought my way out of my comfort zone to try new techniques I hadn't before. I worked off instinct and layered images that first came to mind. Some of it was successful, and some of it not so much, but this was an essential moment moving forward in this project. It gave me the courage to continue this technique and just have fun with it. And even still I was at times having trouble finding the correct visuals, but I was able to work through this the longer I worked on the project and the more practice I had. Towards the end, my initial instincts for certain scenes worked out a lot better than they had at the start. I knew I wanted to mesh together my animated characters against real locations in the world. I wanted it to be a little funky and out there.

This process taught me how to trust myself more, as in I should stop second guessing myself and do whatever it is that I originally think of or feel in my gut is right, because oftentimes it was. One of the biggest struggles I faced while doing this project was worrying that it was not good enough. I think in the time between which the audio was complete and I found the correct visuals, I really got down on myself. Especially those first two versions of the project I had, I knew they weren't good but I had no idea where to go from there. I feel I am the most critical of my work, and I was extremely nervous to show the parts of what I had for critique. For months and months it was just myself and my advisor looking at what I'd completed. I had no idea what the reactions would be, and I definitely did not expect them to be as great as they had

been. That too gave a big confidence boost that I needed to continue in that direction of the visuals and finish off the project.

Next, I want to speak on the inspiration that influenced the character and her life. I discussed above how certain scenes were based on feelings I had in the past, but the characters' life was also based on women in the media, past and present. As stated above, I was inspired to create a character after watching *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*. But my narrative was also inspired by Haynes' work. When I decided to create and write a script on a female celebrity, my mind first went to Karen Carpenter and the life she lived under the pressures of being a woman celebrity in a male gaze industry. And of course, when thinking of more modern celebrities, Britney Spears was the first to come up. While writing the script I tried not to exactly model the storyline after one specific celebrity. I tried to make my own story, but in so there are still major similarities between Karen Carpenter and Britney Spears and countless others that that had to be a common theme in my video, which is the pressure put upon young woman to be perfect and wonderful and docile either by the media or those surrounded by them in their daily life. There is also Janet Jackson after her Superbowl Performance when her career went severely downhill and she was never able to truly recover it. And more recently Paris Hilton who spoke on the traumas she faced as a teenager but felt too ashamed to come forward at the time. In a sense, she was silenced, because she felt nobody would believe her. And there are several other female celebrities who face the same pressures. When first creating the story, I was worried I would over exaggerate things or dramatize them and the scenes would not be taken seriously, but as I was recording them I became fully aware that these things that happen in my video could very likely have happened in real life to some woman at some point. This piece is an art of resistance against the male gaze as it points out and showcases the pressures of being a young

woman in fame, and how often women like her succumb to it in the end because of the lack of help and support offered to them. The objective was to showcase the toxicity and harmful behaviors that the male gaze inflicts, and how women's lives can be ruined by this. I do think I successfully achieved this through *Washed Up Mess*. A fictional young woman's life was ruined, but her story was based on several women in real life.

The title of the piece, *Washed Up Mess*, was something I had pushed off until the end. It comes from the ending part of my song "Hold tight to your shape and figure, Or you'll end up a washed up mess." When writing this song, I had not originally thought of using that part as a title. The decision was finalized towards the end when I was nearly complete with editing the video. I do not even truly remember the moment I decided *Washed Up Mess* would be the title, only that once it had been decided it was never going to change. I was also surprised with myself that it took me that long to make the connection of using part of the song, as I had the song completed for over a month at that point. As per my research above, there is a certain standard in which women must always achieve to still be considered beautiful and worth giving work. As they get older, their worth goes down, and that standard does not hold up for older men. A term closely associated with this, one in which I've heard throughout my entire life, is washed up. And I knew I did not want my character to have her life work out and to be better, because I knew that was not as realistic and I wanted to keep it so. Britney Spears is still in her conservatorship with her father. Janet Jackson's career still has not been revived. Karen Carpenter had died. I did not give my character a specific ending because I knew it could have gone any of those three ways or in several other directions. She disappeared, and although options are given at the end, it is up to the viewer to decide what happened to the character. But the point was, as an actress the character was officially considered 'washed up' and was essentially forgotten.

This is the longest working project I have ever created. My past projects often have to deal with my immediate feelings or ideas on topics and are completed within a few weeks. Doing research before delving into the creative aspect definitely added another layer on what this project means to me. It was a true journey from start to finish, one in which I always knew I had to do but could never visualize getting to. The research portion opened my eyes into topics I had never thoroughly thought through, such as the toxicity of the gaze and its effects, nor even realized it was such a thing, such as Selfie-feminism. And the project has taken more out of me creatively than anything else has ever done. It was the first project that really got me to explore areas outside of my comfort zone. Creating *Washed Up Mess* was definitely a learning experience, and one that has taught me quite a lot.

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