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MENTAL DISTRESS AND POSTFEMINISM IN *CRAZY EX-GIRLFRIEND (2015-2016)*

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO REALIZADO POR

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ABSTRACT

Given that media helps to shape the way we see and interact with the world, this final-year project is aimed at analysing the representation of mental distress on television, focusing its attention on the main character of musical television series *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (2015-2016). In order to do so, the project exposes what the main character's depression represents, as well as what we can discover from her moving from the East to the West of the USA. Moreover, it reveals how the influence of the men in her life and the idea of romantic love affect her mental condition and ideology. Furthermore, the project also explores the show in relation to postfeminism, and gives evidence of how it falls into the intertwining of feminist and anti-feminist ideas that characterises postfeminism. Lastly, it concludes with the finding that the show is indeed a postfeminist product, and that both diagnoses of mental distress and romantic love are social constructions used to oppress women and maintain the established gender roles.

RESUMEN

Dado que los medios de comunicación contribuyen a moldear el modo en el que vemos e interactuamos con el mundo, este trabajo de fin de grado tiene como objetivo analizar la representación de los trastornos mentales en la televisión, centrando la atención en el personaje principal de la serie musical *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (2015-2016). De esta forma, el trabajo estudia qué representa exactamente la depresión de la protagonista, así como su mudanza del este al oeste de los Estados Unidos. Además, se da evidencia de cómo la influencia de los hombres en su vida, así como la idea del amor romántico, afectan a su condición mental e ideología. El trabajo también examina la serie en relación al postfeminismo, aportando pruebas que respaldan cómo *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* entra dentro de la combinación de ideas feministas y antifeministas que caracterizan al postfeminismo. Por último, se concluye con la confirmación de que la serie es ciertamente un producto del postfeminismo, y que tanto los diagnósticos de trastornos mentales como el amor romántico son constructos sociales que se utilizan para oprimir a las mujeres y mantener los roles de género establecidos.

1. INTRODUCTION

The first season of ongoing television series *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (2015-2016) tells the story of Rebecca Bunch, a successful New York lawyer with a Yale diploma who suffers from a panic attack when she is given a promotion at the law firm she works for. While trying to understand why she does not feel happy about this new opportunity, she encounters Josh Chan, her very first love and also her first ex-boyfriend, since they dated for a few weeks when they both attended camp in their teenage years. Josh is happy to see her, but he is leaving New York for sunny West Covina, California. In Rebecca's mind, this is a sign, an excuse to reject the promotion she has been offered and fly to California, where she will find real happiness. From then on, in the following episodes of this first season we will see how Rebecca manages to explain (not just to others but to herself as well) the ulterior motive behind her moving to California.

Even though there are many representations of women in the media that fulfil a significant role in the identification of the general public with realistic and well-written characters[1], women still encounter satirical and highly offensive depictions of what it means to be a woman in the 21st century. Among this mocking portrayals, we find that of the "crazy woman": a woman who is perceived as too passionate, or too insecure, or too loud and not reasonable enough. In short, a woman who does not fall into the norm, into the idea that society has of what a lady should look and act like.

However, there are also some forms of media, especially contemporary television and cinema, that sometimes try to invert the sexist idea of the "crazy woman" by explaining where the mental distress comes from and by challenging the viewer's preconceived ideas of what this stereotype actually represents (Harper, 2009, p. 101). This action, taking a misogynistic term and turning it upside down so as to reflect the sexism behind it, is often done from a feminist approach. Nevertheless, feminist media products do not only display sexist behaviour from a female point of view but also allow the viewer to see women's living experiences in a more realistic way, since they are told by women (Blay, 2015). Hence, because the main idea behind the title of this television show is precisely to show mental distress from a female perspective (Bloom as cited in Emami, 2015), we could argue that the series is at least originally planned to be feminist.

Ehrenreich and English (1978) affirm that madness is seen by some feminist critics as a symbol of female oppression (as cited in Harper, 2009, p. 5). Understanding madness as a form of alienation is important in order to see the social implications of

[1] See *Mad Men*'s Peggy Olson; *Parks and Recreation*'s Leslie Knope; *How To Get Away With Murder*'s Annelise Keating; *Jane the Virgin*'s Jane Villanueva; or *Game of Thrones*' Sansa Stark

mental distress, as well as the feminist reaction against it. Since we find ourselves in the 21st century, we have to take into account that we are in what some feminists call a "postfeminist era". Postfeminism is, however, an ambiguous concept:

> On the positive side, it is understood to be a new form of feminism updated to late twentieth- to early twentyfirst-century modes of living that incorporate achievements of previous waves of the feminist movements. Post-feminism, it is argued, enables women to be both feminist (in the sense of demanding equal opportunities and rights) and feminine (in the traditional sense of beautification, emotionality, and consumerism) (Moseley & Read, 2002). On the negative side, post-feminism has been understood to be a form of backlash (Faludi, 1992) that undermines the achievements of ''second wave feminism". (Shifman and Lemish, 2010, p. 255)

There is, nevertheless, another way to see postfeminism. For Gill (2007), the term should be used to talk about a "sensibility" instead of a movement *per se*. In this way, postfeminism can be understood as a contradictory term in which both feminist and anti-feminist ideas are intertwined. If we take this definition, postfeminism must be regarded as a complex and nuanced concept which thoroughly describes the situation of feminism in the 21st century. What we will do here is to take the notion of postfeminism that Gill offers in order to analyse our chosen television programme..

The focus of this project is to study the first season of ongoing American musical comedy television series *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (2015-2016) by focusing on the main character of the programme, Rebecca Bunch. The main purpose will be to make an analysis of how mental distress is represented in it. In order to do so, we will revise some of the chapters of season one, with a special focus on two main themes: mental distress, and the men in Rebecca's life. The idea behind this is to expose how Rebecca's idea of romantic love, which is in part influenced by the men in her life, contribute to strengthen her delusional believe of love as salvation once she is an adult suffering from depression. Apart from exploring mental distress and romantic love, we will also discuss the different elements that make this show a postfeminist media product. All in all, this project argues that *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* falls within the contradictory term of postfeminism and that its representation of mental distress can be used to explain the oppressions and challenges that women face in the 21st century.

In this way, we will first address the theme of depression and analyse how this mental distress is displayed in the show. Furthermore, we will talk about Rebecca's move from New York to California and what this moving represents in her life and her understanding of her mental distress. Secondly, we will talk about the two most important men in Rebecca's life: her father and her first lover. This will allow us to have a better

understanding of Rebecca's development into a woman with depression and anxiety, and it will also help us explain her delusional thoughts and beliefs in romantic love. Lastly, we will discuss the different elements that make this a postfeminist media product by addressing, on the one hand, Rebecca's feminist ideology and, on the other hand, her anit-feminist backlash actions. Therefore, this analysis will help us explain in depth how mental distress affects Rebecca's living experiences and why this show falls into Gill's idea of a postfeminist sensibility.

2. MENTAL DISTRESS IN *CRAZY-EX GIRLFRIEND*

Since the first time we listen to the opening song of the first season of the show, we learn that Rebecca Bunch is not a reliable narrator. Not only that, but we also begin to understand the reason why "crazy" is used to depict her. Although it is the main character who starts telling her story, once she moves to West Covina, four supporting characters appear in animated form chanting that "she's the crazy ex-girlfriend" after every line she then tries to say. These four characters, who will eventually become her friends, seem to be a representation of her inner voices. Even though Rebecca tries to convince herself that the reason why she leaves New York and a striking promotion offer is not a boy, her subconscious seems to fail her. By the time the theme song finishes, the audience already suspects that Rebecca should not be trusted. The question, then, lies in the use of the term "crazy".

Now, if we focus on what madness means, we find that there is not one single definition, but rather several interpretations that often differ much from each other. As Harper (2009, p.16) states *"*different forms of mental disturbance vary significantly from one another in severity and there is not always much agreement among professionals about what 'counts' as mental distress*."* Moreover, as Ussher (2011) remarks, we have to take into account the gendered construction of madness. Like femininity, mental distress diagnoses can be seen as social constructions – "fictions framed as facts, used to regulate and control those deemed deficient, dangerous, or merely different from the norm." (p. 47). This is similar to what Scheff (1966) and Rosenham (1973) understand when they explain that "madness is a socially constructed label, based on value-laden definitions of normality, with a diagnosis of madness determining how a person's future behaviour will be seen and addressed." (cited in Ussher, 2011, p. 47).

The use that we choose to make of words can eventually affect not only their meaning within society, but the way those described people feel about themselves. That is to say, a word regarded as negative, as in the case of "crazy", may be used to devaluate and

take control over a person. By using labels we determine what is normal and what is not, marking a clear difference between "us" (normal) and "them" (not normal). Nevertheless, it is important to understand that there is no such thing as "normal", but rather "normative", and that it is society through discursive representations and practices what marks the difference between the feelings, desires and thoughts that people are supposed to have, and between those which they should avoid, thus fabricating realities in which different forms of social control are normalised (Foucault, 1972, p. 49).

In order to understand the reasons behind our study, it is important to acknowledge diagnoses of mental distress as a fabrication, specifically a gendered one used as a tool to oppress women (Ussher, 2011, p. 4). Although feminists have been dealing with this form of oppression for a long time, and there are many books and essays on this issue (see e.g. Harper, 2009; Ussher, 2011), *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* displays mental distress through musical comedy, thus presenting women suffering from madness from a fresh and different point of view than what the media is used to portraying.

What we have here is not men calling their exes "crazy", but a woman who actually suffers from mental distress and whose ultimate goal is nothing more than getting rid of her suffering and finding happiness. The show is about "how one comes to embody feeling crazy. And the idea that love and infatuation and feeling happy take away the power of your own mind from you" (Bloom as cited in Emami, 2015). Hence, this television series turns around the pre-existing misogynist idea of the "crazy ex-girlfriend" and turns it into an instrument used to challenge the viewer's preconceived ideas about this stereotype and about mental distress itself.

Coming back to the use of "crazy" in the programme, we find it interesting that not one single character addresses the term throughout the whole first season. As we have said, the expression is used during the opening of the show so as to present the contradictory term and the different ideas that the viewers may have when they are first introduced to it. When Rebecca's friends appear in cartoon form to sing that "*she's the crazy ex-girlfriend*", she defends herself by saying that "*that's a sexist term*" and that "*the situation is a lot more nuanced than that*" (Schlesinger and Bloom, 2015). According to Lotz (2006, p. 90), these type of inner conversations, both with themselves and with imaginary people, are often used to give depth to the character, as well as to show different viewpoints and information that would not be available otherwise[2]. By using this, the audience can be aware of the character's inner thoughts, creating a sense of intimacy

[2] Lotz gives the examples of late 20th century comedies such as *Molly Dodd, Sex and the Cit*y, and *Ally McBeal*. I would also add Disney Channel's *Lizzie McGuire* which, similarly to the musical number of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*'s theme song, displays this type of inner conversations by means of cartoon characters

between the character and the viewer. This action allows the spectators of the show to think for themselves, as it invites them into the mind of the character, thus permitting them to see the character's contradictions and flaws.

As we have previously stated, mental distress can be regarded as a social construction. However, it can also be understood as a "reasonable response" (Ussher, 2011, p. 1-2) to the constrictive social norms which women are under. As Chesler (1972) remarks, "most twentieth century women who are psychiatrically labelled, privately treated and publicly hospitalised are not mad (…) they may be deeply unhappy, self-destructive, economically powerless, and sexually impotent - but as women they're supposed to be" (p. 4). Therefore, mental distress is not seen as an illness, but as a reasonable response to the experience of being a woman in a patriarchal society.

With this in mind, we can analyse the main character of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* in regards to those social and life conditions that have affected and have led Rebecca Bunch to the state in which we encounter her when we start to watch the show. What we have here is a young woman who has been medically diagnosed with depression and anxiety. We learn this in the first episode of the show, when we see Rebecca running away from her office to get some air and re-order her thoughts. In the following scene, she is walking in circles, repeating to herself "What's wrong with you? This is what happy feels like" (Bloom, McKenna, & Webb, 2015) right before she tries to seat on the floor to calm herself because she is having trouble breathing. Although these symptoms would be enough to tell that she is having an anxiety attack, what actually gives us the answer is the pill bottle she takes out shortly after. Thus, we have a character that has been medically diagnosed and is medicated to control her condition.

As the show moves forward, we are presented with several characters and past experiences that may have had something to do with Rebecca's current mental situation. The first and most obvious one may be the stressful work life in the city, which is related to the notion of affluenza. According to de Graaf, Wann, and Naylor (2014), affluenza can be regarded as a malady of the 21st century characterised by anxiety, permanent dissatisfaction and a need to have more. These authors argue that "the pressures of work and consumption create stress and leave people little time for each other, increasing loneliness and unhappiness while at the same time creating a less inviting or sustainable natural and built common environment." (p. 23). As the opening episode shows, Rebecca is a top lawyer working in New York City, therefore her situation can explain why she would feel this way.

Furthermore, the series shows that Rebecca's mental distress is also affected by her upbringing. Because her parents divorced when she was still a child, she has grown up, on the one hand, without her father's presence and, on the other hand, with a single mother who has had to play both parenting roles. Because mothers sometimes see their daughters as an extension of themselves (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 37), her mother pressures Rebecca to succeed in her academic and working life. This, along with the fact that her father has abandoned her and she is an only child, causes Rebecca to feel lonely, contributing to a predisposition towards anxiety and depression.

2.1. Depression

As Ussher (2011, p. 16) affirms, several studies show that there is a greater propensity to depression in women than there is in men, which inevitably reinforces the idea that women are "crazier" than men. This, however, is not a reasoning of the 21st century. According to the same author, the concept of depression can be linked to hysteria, a form of mental distress which has been historically known to only develop in women (p. 10). Ever since ancient times, there have been several male authorities who have linked the fact that women are more likely to experience mental distress to their reproductive organs, implying that madness and, more specifically, hysteria, is inherent in women due to their reproductive body and the hormones that govern it (p. 18). Hence, the author finds that among the roots believed to be the cause of hysteria we have menstruation, pregnancy and menopause, as well as "menstrual pain and irregularity, absence of pregnancy, uterine disorders, and vaginal infections" (p.19). In short, we can argue that women were thought to be mad just for being women.

Today, hysteria no longer exists as a valid medical diagnosis, yet many still see women's sexual and reproductive body as one of the main causes of their mental distress. In 2008, USA's National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) published a report in which it was stated that "biological and hormonal changes that occur during puberty likely contribute to the high rates of depression in adolescent girls." (as cited in Ussher, 2011, p. 20). Nevertheless, other studies dismissed this belief, such as Blehar's (2006), in which the author concluded that "with the exception of post-partum onset affective psychosis and bipolar disorder, there is relatively little evidence for a causal role of sex steroids in clinical disorders." (p. 151).

Consequently, we could argue that depression is not necessarily affected by the biological differences of males and females. What may influence the appearance of depression, however, is gender inequalities and the consequent discrimination of women

(Ussher, 2011). As Kaplan (1986) argues, “depression may not be an ‘illness’ superimposed on an alien or indifferent personality structure, but rather may be a distortion - an exaggeration of the normative state of being female in Western society” (as cited in Ussher, 2011, p. 64). In this sense, we can see mental distress as “a form of alienation, the existential and psychological corollary of unequal social relations” (Harper, 2009, p. 6). Therefore, we can argue that, in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, Rebecca may already have a predisposition towards depression because she has been born and identifies as a woman.

Depression, like gender roles, has often been used as a tool to oppress women. According to Ussher (2011, p. 30), this happens because both insanity and women are regarded as “the other”, being men and sanity the norm in our society. Taking this into account, a sane woman would be a good woman, a normative one. Thus, by labelling someone as mentally unstable, society addresses those who have diverted from their expected role. In this way, a woman that suffers from depression is regarded as someone who has strayed from the norm, as a “bad” woman. Ussher argues that this reaction towards women who suffer from mental distress can be harmful because “once women receive a psychiatric diagnosis everything they do can be potentially interpreted as a ‘symptom’.” (p. 73). This results in people not taking into account the needs of the individual and the social environment that may be affecting them (Halleck, 1971, cited in Ussher, 2011, p. 73).

Furthermore, the gender of a person also affects how individuals understand and live with their mental distress. It is noteworthy to mention here that, oftentimes, “women who act out the conditioned female role are clinically viewed as ‘neurotic’ or ‘psychotic’.” (Chesler, 1972, p. 116). Moreover, as Ussher states, definitions of optimal mental health are often linked to definitions of masculinity, while femininity is more connected to mental instability (p. 75). This could explain why therapists are often moved by their gender role stereotypes when diagnosing depression in women. These clinicians “expect women to be mad (or ‘depressed’), so are more likely to look for it, and to see it even if it is not there” (Ussher, 2011, p. 76).

In addition, women have been taught to be more socially engaging, and thus they tend to see their GPs and report their health problems much more frequently than men (Pitula, 1995, p. 16B). Conversely, men have learned to be strong and aloof, which explains why they are “less likely than women to seek help because it may be seen as a weakness” (Ussher, 2011, p. 77). This author explains that, because men have more problems expressing their feelings, it makes it harder for therapists to detect and address

their mental distress. Because of this, Ussher believes that there may be a great number of men that suffer from depression but have not been diagnosed.

Like we have previously mentioned, addressing the woman's environment and upbringing is essential to understand her mental distress. According to Pitula (1995), "the risk for depression is highest at the times in a woman's life when she's learning what's expected of her and trying to fulfil those expectations." (p. 16A). With this in mind, we have a better understanding of Rebecca and her mental distress. Because she has been pressured all her life by her mother to get the best grades and the best job, the show implies that these high expectations that her mother has put on her have affected her mental health.

Apart from stress, among the most common symptoms of depression we also find feeling exhausted, being unable to focus, and feeling downhearted (Ussher, 2011, p. 15). We see in Rebecca all of these symptoms in episode 1 (Bloom, Mckenna & Webb, 2015) of the show. While having a panic attack after having been offered a promotion, she asks herself *"What's wrong with you? This is what happy feels like."* Rebecca feeling distressed towards something that would make "normal" people happy has its foundation in the fact that depression is often seen as a synonym of "sad". Furthermore, since she is in her late 20s, the show concurs with what Pitula (1995, p. 16A) implies when she remarks that there is a greater chance for a woman to get depression when they are young adults, because this is the time when they may be experiencing the most stress from their career, marriage, or experience as mothers.

It is noteworthy to mention, however, that Rebecca is aware of her mental distress. As we see in episode 5 (Hardcastle & Hitchcock, 2015), when she is asked the same question, 'what's wrong with her', by someone else, her answer is "low self-esteem, a lack of maternal affection and a genetic predisposition for anxiety and depression." Recognising her mental distress allows Rebecca to understand her inner self in a better way since, as Ussher (2011) points out, "recognition of 'symptoms' or self-referral for treatment is a process of active negotiation of psychological and bodily experience, current life events and lifestyle, and cultural, medical or psychological discourse about madness." (p. 52).

Nevertheless, like many other women suffering from depression, Rebecca has a complicated relationship with her mental distress. Although she does acknowledge that she is not "normal", she sometimes executes self-sabotaging actions. For example, right after having moved to West Covina, she decides to throw away and destroy all of her medication. Later on episode 7 (Patel & Trilling, 2015), she has a panic attack and feels

the need to get new pills. This is the first time since episode 1 that we are able to see Rebecca having a mental breakdown and acknowledging that moving to the other side of the country has not improved her mental distress. Even though realising that you have a problem is the first step towards improvement, Rebecca will still have a long path towards being okay with who she is.

However, we must also recognise that this show does give a new light on mental distress. Although "western culture has succumbed to an infantilising celebration of mental fragility, a development which undermines the capacity of human subjects to take control of their lives or to engage in political activity" (Harper, 2009, p. 7), this is not exactly what we see in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. Not only is Rebecca politically active (she is a proud feminist and often fights for what is right in her cases as a lawyer), but she also actively chooses what she thinks is best for her, even though she shows herself to be rather impulsive. Thus, we can see that this show is not just merely addressing mental health conditions like depression, but is also giving a new perspective on how people who suffer from this mental distress live with it.

In this sense, we must take into consideration that depression is "a whole-body experience involving mood, behavior, thinking, and sociability." (Pitula, 1995, p. 16B). Hence, we should not regard mental distress as just an illness, but as a part of one's life. Therefore, we can say that, although Rebecca is not completely defined by her depression, it is indeed a part of herself that intervenes in the way she thinks and interacts with other people, and that this show allows people to have a better understanding of how depression works on women in the 21st century.

2.2. Escape to the West

When Rebecca runs into Josh in New York, she feels that the universe is giving her a sign to change her life and chase her happiness. After having a small talk, she learns that Josh is moving back home to West Covina, California. In this first encounter, Josh compares New York to his home, rhetorically asking "Why get stuck in a rat race?". According to BusinessDictionary, a 'rat race' alludes to "the competitiveness between employees for upward mobility in the job market". It usually involves "no work-life balance, no independence, high stress, long commutes, and general dissatisfaction with life." Thus, when Josh uses this expression, Rebecca suddenly realises that she is in fact one of those rats running for something that is, now in her eyes, not worth it. In fact, this idea of her being part of a "rat race" is reinforced by Rebecca's superiors, who reveal that some of the reasons why she has been offered a higher position in the law firm are

the fact that she is “the hardest working young lawyer” and that she has “never taken a sick day” (in spite of her chronic depression). This, therefore, makes her the rat that has won the race. However, Rebecca does not seem to find the prize fulfilling.

In this first encounter, Josh also explains to Rebecca how the environment in the West Coast is much more relaxed, and how everyone seems happier there. The word “happy” then resonates in Rebecca’s mind. This is the sign she has been waiting for. She knew that something was missing when she did not feel joy after having been promoted. She now understands that, if she wants to be happy, she has to go to West Covina. This is the reason why, when rejecting her promotion offer, she implies that she needs to take control of her life, saying that she has to “obey the ticking clock that is destiny” – destiny being her ex-boyfriend and very first love, Josh Chan from West Covina, California.

Leaving a job in the East Coast to pursue a better life in the West is something that the American people are familiarised with. As Kupchick (2015) states, “the American story was one of westward expansion from the very beginning”. This author remarks that, for those coming from the east, the west side of America represents a freer, happier society, full of new ideas and different forms of expression. In this sense, moving from New York to California can be interpreted as an escape from the constraint and constant pressure that characterise the life in the big apple. Since life in the West Coast seems more relaxed and easy going than in the East, escaping to the golden coast might be a reasonable alternative to someone who has been participating in rat races for a while.

It is this search for happiness that moves Rebecca to the other side of the country. For many therapists and psychologists, moving to a new city can be filled with this “hope for new beginnings” (Kershaw, 2010) that the main character of the show feels. However, it can also be a sign of trouble, since, as Kershaw notices, the person moving may be “seeking external changes to change internal problems.” In the case of Rebecca, she is trying to change the way she feels by moving and going after who she believes is the love of her life. What she fails to realise is the fact that, as Stirling asserts, even if you move to a new city, “you still take yourself with you” (as cited in Kershaw, 2010).

“When you decide that a new residence is the best solution to a problem, your emotional baggage gets loaded in the moving van along with the linen and flatware” (Fisher, cited in Kaufman, 2013). Therefore, contrary to what Rebecca believes, her new place will not improve her life because the changes she is looking for must come from her inner self. As Reimer explains, “the location isn’t going to make a difference if the unhappiness is internal” (as cited in Kaufman, 2013).

Although a sudden need to run away may not always be the best reason to consider when moving, it can occasionally benefit those who desperately seek a change of scenery. As Kaufman indicates, sometimes, relocating can be therapeutic and bring a life improvement because the person going through it sees it as a chance to take control of their lives. Since one of the symptoms of depression is “feeling out of control” (Ussher, 2011, p. 25), choosing to turn her life around and move away allows Rebecca to feel in control of her actions and thus distance herself from her mental distress.

Kershaw (2010) also implies that having friends and a sense of community is a relevant aspect to take into account when deciding to move away. In New York, Rebecca feels isolated; she does not have many friends, and the only relative nearby is her mother, who actually does more harm than good because she is constantly pressuring her daughter to get the best job and the greatest salary. Once she moves to West Covina, she does not only free from her mother, but she also takes it as an opportunity to make new friends and chase her dreams. Liberated from the stressful life she had in the big apple, Rebecca sees in her move a new chance to start over.

Lastly, we should highlight the differences between Rebecca’s apartment in New York and her house in West Covina. In episode 1 we see Rebecca laying on an unmade bed in her bedroom in New York City. If we have a closer look, we notice that the room is barely furnished, with no curtains and blank walls. Furthermore, Rebecca’s clothes, along with what seems to be office papers, are spread out on the floor. This is noteworthy to mention because Rebecca has been living in this apartment for months, probably years, yet it appears empty and lonely as if she had just moved in. By contrast, her house in West Covina is shown with a new wall colour and decoration by episode 8, with further changes and more decorative products being added in the following episodes. This contradistinction seems to represent the different states of mind in which Rebecca finds herself in the two cities, helping the viewers recognise and understand the different changes that this character goes through in the West Coast.

Taking these facts into consideration, we can conclude by stating that the change in Rebecca’s state of mind is clearly visible when she is in West Covina. Even though she is not instantly “cured” from her depression once she has moved, the fact that she finds the will to decorate and fully furnish her new apartment is enough for the viewer to recognise the change in Rebecca’s attitude. Contrary to what she was feeling in New York City, the lifestyle of the West produces in Rebecca a sense of tranquillity, which also allows her to be more in control of her life.

3. THE MEN IN REBECCA'S LIFE

Rebecca's life and personality is significantly constructed around her upbringing and the problematic relationship she has with her father. Through a flashback in episode 3 (Bloom, McKenna & Davis, 2015), we learn that her father left their family when she was young. While Rebecca is having a party in the living room with a few friends, her parents start to argue. Not long after it is revealed that Rebecca's father is having an affair, he leaves, never to return again. This event leaves Rebecca devastated and with a fear of men leaving her.

As we have previously mentioned, mental distress can be regarded as a natural reaction to certain events in our lives. Thus, we can understand that her father leaving affects Rebecca's upbringing, and consequently her mental health. This is also related to the way she interacts with the people in her life as an adult. In fact, the first season shows that the way she feels about her father is not much different from what she feels about her ex-lover. This is the reason why we have decided to analyse both her father and her first love in the following pages, so as to have a better understanding of the reasons behind Rebecca's mental instability.

However, before we start to analyse the men in Rebecca's life, we first need to address the concept of romantic love. According to Wolkomir (2009), romantic love is "a set of beliefs that constructs only a particular configuration of sexual and gender practices as natural, normal, and right." (p. 494). In other words, romantic love is the normalisation of heteronormative practices. As Wolkomir puts it,

> romantic love frames the ideal intimate relationship as unique (e.g., "my one and only soul mate"), exclusive (e.g., committed monogamy), as well as inexplicable and naturally emergent - a sexual chemistry and emotional bonding that just happens when a man and a woman are "right" for one another. (2009, p. 495)

This idea of someone being 'right' for another person is intrinsic in Rebecca's understanding of life. At the end of episode 11 (Averick & von Scherler Mayer, 2016), while singing a song in which she expresses her self-loathing feelings, she says that Josh "completes" her. In this sense, romantic love works in relation to "the heterosexual imaginary" (Ingraham, 1994, p. 203), a type of ideology that hides how heterosexual relations influence gender roles and "normalizes sexuality" (Wolkomir, 2009, p. 494). By failing to see how her sexuality influences her understanding of love and relationships, Rebecca unknowingly participates in this "organizing institution" (Ingraham, 1994, p. 203) that is heteronormativity.

Additionally, we should take into account that, as Wolkomir remarks, romantic love is a cultural product "forged from the ideal of courtly love that developed in medieval Europe." (2009, p. 495). In this context, romantic love is based on the idea of monogamy and loyalty, contributing to the separation of gender roles inherent in heterosexual relationships (Coltrane & Adams, 2008, and Coontz, 2006, as cited in Wolkomir, 2009, p. 495). In the 21st century, however, a combination of "care and assistance with physical and emotional closeness" (Cancian, 1986, p. 693) is added to the model of courtly love. Since romantic love "reflects early family configurations" (Wyatt, 1985, p. 200), affection and protection, two of the characteristics of a child's relationship with their parents, are also part of the ideal of heterosexual relations. Because, as Wyatt states, romantic love is based on father-daughter relationships, Rebecca seeks the affection she lacked as a child in her love interest. With this in mind, we can have a better understanding of the connections between Rebecca's father and her first love, which we will discuss in the following pages.

3.1. Rebecca's Father

Parental post-divorce absence is not uncommon in Western society. In fact, in the 1990s the National Survey of Children stated that around 50 percent of divorced fathers in the United States did not have any contact with their children (Arrendell, 1992, p. 562). Since Rebecca is in her late 20s, she would be considered a child of the 90s, thus his father, although fictional, could fall into this type of survey. For many fathers, Arrendell finds, being absent in your children's life after the divorce is regarded as a valid option (p. 563); some men even see it as a right (p. 568). This point of view goes along the lines of a masculinist discourse in which the man, in accordance with our gender-structured society, is the highest authority and is therefore, unlike women, completely independent to choose his own path in life. Rebecca's father, like those who participated in Arrendell's survey, seems to accept the conventional gender believe of the mother as indispensable in the children's life, thus opting to leave Rebecca with her mother.

Even though there are some cases in which fathers opt to be absent from their children's lives because they feel as if their offspring do not want to be around them anymore, this is not what we see in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. Rebecca is constantly trying to maintain and develop her relationship with her father in spite of him not showing much interest in her. Through a flashback in episode 15 (Bloom, McKenna & Tsuchida, 2016) we learn that, after her parents get divorced, Rebecca pays her father a surprise visit.

Although he tries to act nice to her daughter, we can see how he calls her mum behind Rebecca's back to pick her up because he does not really want to be with her.

As Wyatt (1985) suggests, "a girl's relation to her father trains her to idealize a distant and mysterious figure whose absences she can fill with glamorous projections" (p. 202). However, Wyatt talks about short absences, the type that occur due to the father working outside the house. In the case of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, we have a prolonged absence, one in which the father does not seem to be coming back. This situation allows Rebecca to significantly idealise the figure of her father. Because she does not see him as much as her mother, her relationship with him is not based on actual contact but on a fantasy. This explains why Rebecca feels somehow closer to her father, even though it is her mother who has actually raised her without any involvement of the father in the process.

It is this idealisation of her father coming from his absence that contributes to Rebecca's mental instability as she grows up. As Cyranowski et al (2000) state, the lack of a secure parental base is believed to be linked to a predisposition of suffering from psychological distress (as cited in Ussher, 2011, p. 32). Because her father is not there for her, Rebecca feels the need to fill his gap with a fantasy, ultimately leading to her being quite delusional as an adult.

In relation to the absence of the male figure in the life of a girl, Wyatt (1985) also highlights women's perception of their time alone as mere prelude, as devoid of meaning, something that will make sense once the man in their lives, whether it is their father or their lover, appear. The man here is in charge of bringing the glamour and excitement that a woman's life apparently lacks. In this way, we have a better understanding of Rebecca's inner life. Although she is a Harvard graduate and has a successful working life as a lawyer, Rebecca's life does not seem to make any sense until she decides to follow her ex-lover to try and find happiness. Similarly, she feels really excited when she goes to pay her father a visit.

The similarities between these two events, impulsively deciding to go see her father and impulsively choosing to move to the other side of the country and chase her first love, are also highlighted in the show by the character of Dr. Akopian, Rebecca's therapist in West Covina. In episode 15, Rebecca coincides with her psychotherapist on a plane. After falling asleep next to her, Rebecca has a series of dreams that allow the viewer to see certain events of her past that have shaped her into who she is in the present. These past events are visited by both her and Dr. Akopian. In the previously mentioned flashback, when Rebecca pays her father a visit, Dr. Akopian reminds her that "West Covina wasn't the first time you made a rash decision to try to win back the

man you love." To which Rebecca responds that both situations are not related and that her mother "had been keeping us apart and we were meant to be together". Nevertheless, Rebecca soon learns that her mother was not the bad cop of the story, and that it was his father who did not want to be involved with the upbringing of his daughter.

Opposing the figure of Rebecca's father we find Darryl Whitefeather, her boss at the law firm she works for in West Covina. In episode 1 we learn that, similarly to Rebecca's parents, Mr. Whitefeather is going through a divorce. However, unlike Rebecca's father, he is very involved with her daughter and genuinely wants to win her custody. What we see in Whitefeather is an inversion of gender roles, with him portraying normatively feminine traits and being warm, caring, nurturer and oversharer. In fact, his love for his daughter comes as a surprise for Rebecca, because the father figure that she has is the opposite of Mr. Whitefeather.

Moreover, Darryl Whitefeather becomes a sort of father for Rebecca in her new home. By caring and worrying about her, and also by wanting to forge a real friendship with her, he appears as an opposing force to her real father, doing everything that he has never done for her. In short, Mr. Whitefeather becomes the father Rebecca did not really have, while also offering her a different point of view of the role that a patriarchal figure has. Therefore, with the character of Mr. Whitefeather, the show offers an antithesis of Rebecca's father, which contributes to a wider representation of what it means to be a father in the 21st century.

3.2. Rebecca's First Love

As Harper (2009, p. 61) explains, there are some media products that put sanity's restoration in the hands of true love. This author deffends that the understanding of love as a key to help people out of their mental distress is not only a common thought, but one that resonates with many people. Our main character seems to be one of these people. Right after having had a panic attack as a consequence of being offered a promotion at work, she encounters Josh Chan, his very first love, and she suddenly feels at peace. As we have previously remarked, for Rebecca, seeing him again is a sign.

Rebecca's delusional thoughts make her follow his ex-lover all the way to the other side of the country because she feels that, once they come back together, she will finally be happy. In fact, she never abandons this thought throughout the whole of season 1. At the very end of the season, in episode 18 (Gube & McKenna, 2016), Josh finally breaks

up with her girlfriend and “saves” Rebecca from a bad date, thus adding fuel to her wildest dreams and fulfilling the role of saviour that Rebecca herself had given him. This goes along the lines of Wyatt’s ideas on romantic love, when she argues that it “channels desire back into recreating the patterns of female subordination and dependency on a man that characterize the Western family” (1985, p. 201).

Among the features of romantic love, Wyatt (1985) highlights: “the glamor it gives to a distant or absent lover; the desire which hope and uncertainty impart to waiting for his call or his return; the attraction of alternatingly seductive and rejecting behavior” (p. 206). Some of these features, which are strongly linked to father-daughter relations, can be seen in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* both in Rebecca’s relationship with her father and in her interactions with Josh Chan. Because he has a girlfriend and cannot spend much time with Rebecca, Josh brings the ‘glamor of a distant lover’ and allows Rebecca to impatiently wait for his call and, because he has feelings for her although he is in a committed relationship, he also fuels the attraction that arises from alternating seduction and rejection.

In a similar way to what she feels towards her father’s absence, Rebecca feels that, by filling the void, by getting the man of her dreams, she will finally be complete. We find, again, the idea of a woman’s time alone as meaningless, something that needs to be filled with a male figure and the fantasies of a better life. As we have previously mentioned, romantic love is linked to father-daughter relations, and this is the reason why Rebecca’s interactions with Josh sometimes reflect her relationship with his father.

Although they differ in age and race, both Josh and Rebecca’s father are to a certain extent child-like and irresponsible, unable to own up to the consequences of their actions. The personality traits that the most important men in Rebecca’s life share allow her to fulfil the role that society has taught her to perform: being caring and trying to make her men feel as good with themselves as possible, often avoiding talking about themes such as responsibility or blame. According to Jack and Ali (2010, p. 7), women learn to understand others loving them in accordance with how well they react to and meet their needs. This results in the suppression of women’s desires and feelings, as they have been taught that who they are is not as important as what they can offer. As women, they are told that the best they can do is to be caring and pleasant. This characteristic can be seen in Rebecca in episode 4 (McDonald & Ehrlich, 2015), when she helps Josh with his resume, or in episode 10 (Schultz & Dolgen, 2016) when, while reading a letter she wrote to him when they were together, she sings “you're my hero. I believe in you.

There's nothing you can't do". All of these phrases show Rebecca empowering Josh, and thus fulfilling the role of caring and pleasing woman.

By changing her focus from her father to her lover, Rebecca is able to channel her initial fixation on his father and the idealisation of him into a fantasised future with Josh, thus freeing herself from the disappointment that initially came from not getting what she wanted from her father. In this way, Josh offers a replacement of her father. However, this is not a replica of him, but a chance for improvement for Rebecca's needed male figure.

As we have said before, Josh also performs the role of saviour in Rebecca's mind. This is clearly seen in episode 3, when Josh helps Rebecca liven up the party she is hosting at her new house. During the party, Rebecca's fantasies materialise into a musical number in which Josh becomes four members of a boyband. In the song, we can hear Josh singing

> *Baby, you can kiss all your childhood traumas goodbye*
>
> *You're never gonna miss all that stress you've been keeping inside*
>
> *All your psychological problems*
>
> *Girl, we're gonna solve them*
>
> (Bloom, McKenna, & Davis, 2015)

These lyrics show us that Rebecca sees in Josh the solution to her mental distress, thus contributing to the idea of love as salvation (Harper, 2009). As Harper argues, "it seems commonsensical to suppose that the experience of love may help many people to overcome some forms of psychological distress" (p. 61). However, this belief has not been proved to be true (Rosen & Walter, 2000, cited in Harper, 2009, p. 61).

Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that, although Rebecca feels the need to be saved by her love interest rather than looking for a solution within herself, what we find in this character is not always a performance of traditional gender roles. To begin with, Rebecca is incredibly smart. Besides, her intelligence does not come from her Harvard diploma, but from how resourceful and skilful she is both in her public and private life. In contrast to Josh, who seems stuck in his life, living with his parents and having the same girlfriend he has had since high school, Rebecca is always taking important decisions that impact the course of her life – moving to West Covina being one of them. Having exposed this, we find that Rebecca fulfils a much more active role than Josh, which in a

way helps to invert the established gender roles, changing the traditional understanding of men as the ones who take action and women as passive waiters.

Having a woman perform a role initially given to men helps to change the balance of power in a normative male-female relationship, while also distancing from the patterns of father-daughter relations (Wyatt, 1985). This shift of roles contributes to make Rebecca's relationship with Josh a more complex one, since it is not completely based on traditional dynamics. Their relationship is based, on the one hand, on a shift of powers in their interactions and, on the other hand, on Rebecca's passive role, her fantasies only revolving around love and the idea of a happy ending. According to Freud (1958, p. 48), men and women's fantasies differ in that, while women only dream of erotic wishes, men fantasise with erotic desires but are also able to have ambitious and selfish wishes. Since Rebecca cannot see past Josh's existence because she regards him as the solution to her problems, we could say that the show reinforces Freud's idea.

Therefore, what we find in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* is a complex dynamic because, although Rebecca has a more active role than her male counterpart in their interactions, these communicative acts are often backed up by traditional gender differences, quite apparent in our female protagonist. All in all, what we have here is a female character who, although with the tools to improve her life from within herself, innocently believes that her maladies will be cured once she gets the man of her dreams. In the following section we will analyse in depth this complex contradiction that arises in the character of Rebecca so as to further explain where her motivations and view of life come from.

4. REBECCA BUNCH: A POSTFEMINIST FIGURE

As we have previously mentioned, postfeminism is a contradictory term because its definition varies greatly depending on the author you read it from. According to Gill (2007), the expression can be used to describe either "a theoretical position, a type of feminism after the second wave, or a regressive political stance." (p. 148). This author explains that the different debates taking place about what postfeminism truly stands for should be considered because they deal with "the transformations in feminisms and transformations in media culture - and their mutual relationship." (p. 147). Since this project analyses a media product, understanding postfeminism as a change within the feminist movement that works in relation to media may result quite convenient. However, the author remarks that postfeminism is better understood as "a sensibility" (p. 148) rather than an analytic point of view. This approach offers a fresh perspective, since it allows both feminist and anti-feminist backlash ideas to coexist and intertwine.

For Gill, one of the aspects that characterises the postfeminist sensibility is the concept of “femininity as a bodily property” (p. 149). In this context, femininity is not fully seen as a social construction, but as something women can control and use to empower themselves. Key to this concept is the idea of identification through one’s body image. Because “the female body in postfeminist media culture is constructed as a window to the individual's interior life” (Gill, 2007, p. 150), a woman’s image is often used to understand her mental state. Nevertheless, if we take television shows like *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* in which people suffering from mental distress are portrayed, this approach may result extremely problematic. On the one hand, we must understand that just because someone is affected by depression or anxiety, this does not mean that their mental distress will always show in the way they carry themselves. Mental illnesses are often regarded as “invisible illnesses” (Sundbom, n.d.) for a reason. On the other hand, not caring about your image should not be linked to mental distress, since it is beliefs like these that contribute to the misdiagnosis of mental distress in women (Ussher, 2011, p. 76).

In relation to this postfeminist idea of a woman’s body being a reflection of their inner self we can see a connection between postfeminism and mental distress. As we have discussed earlier, mental distress can be regarded as a social construction used to control and oppress women (Ussher, 2011, p. 4). In the same way, femininity is also understood as an artificial construction “that estranges women from themselves” (Waters, 2011, p. 62). In the same way that femininity appears as masculinity’s “other” (Waters, 2011, p. 71), mental distress, as Ussher states, works as the opposite of mental health (p. 7). Within this context, we understand both femininity and mental distress to be regarded as opposite forces to the norm – mentally stable heterosexual men, socially constructed to undermine and constrain women.

Another postfeminist concept that works in relation to the idea of femininity as a bodily property is the sexualisation portrayed in the media (Gill, 2007, p. 150). The author states that this sexualisation is not only related to sexuality discourses, but also to “the increasingly frequent erotic presentation of girls’, women's and (to a lesser extent) men's bodies in public spaces” (2007, p. 150). Since bodily property is associated to sexualisation, women in the 21st century are taught to assume an active role in their objectification, contributing to a shift of powers “from an external, male judging gaze to a self-policing narcissistic gaze” (p. 151). In this sense, women are “free” to choose who they want to be provided that they become subjects that bear a likeness of cisgender heterosexual men’s fantasies (p. 152).

Since one of the first things we learn about Rebecca Bunch is that she leaves her well-paid job in New York behind to go after the man of her dreams, we could assume that *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* would fall on the anti-feminist side of postfeminism. Nevertheless, we must also take into account that Rebecca is a very knowledgeable woman who has studied feminism and who frequently points out the patriarchal and sexist activities the people around her perform. In this sense, we could say that Rebecca is a feminist in theory, but an alienated woman with a patriarchal ideology in practice. For this reason, we could argue that the show will fall into Gill's "postfeminist sensibility" that we have defined earlier.

What we see in this show is a complex perspective in which feminist and anti-feminist ideas intertwine and communicate with one another. For example, in episode 1, we are presented with a musical video that portrays what happens when women get ready for a date. In the number, called *The Sexy Getting-Ready Song* (Geier, Dolgen, & Bloom, 2015), we hear our main character state that she is going to "get in touch" with her "feminine side" to look good for her love interest. Although we listen to words like "fluffing, flouncing, giggling" that should influence us into thinking of women getting ready as carrying out an enjoyable activity, we are presented with elements that make us believe otherwise. For instance, we have a backup singer laboriously trying to make Rebecca fit into her spandex undergarment, and a chorus singing "bye-bye, skin" after the protagonist shaves her legs. In addition, we have a rapper who stops his lyrics mid-sentence to manifest his surprise and horror at seeing what truly happens when women smarten up, labelling it as "patriarchal" nonsense (Bloom, McKenna, & Webb, 2015).

Hence, what we find in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* is, on the one hand, a woman that has to learn how to cope with her mental distress and, on the other hand, an insightful portrait of the contradictions of postfeminism. Within the postfeminist ideology reproduced in the show, we can see that the representation and understanding of femininity is presented as one of the core ideas. Therefore, what we expect is to see feminist and anti-feminist approaches intertwining with one another in this musical television series. As Gill puts it, "what makes a postfeminist sensibility quite different from both prefeminist constructions of gender and feminist ones, is that it is clearly a response to feminism" (2007, p. 163). For this reason, in the following pages we will provide examples to show how and why *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* fits in this concept of postfeminism as a blending of feminist and anti-feminist ideas.

4.1. Empowering Feminism

This show employs an initially derogatory term used by men, the idea of this "crazy ex-girlfriend", and turns it upside down. Here, the "crazy ex-girlfriend" is a woman who actually suffers from mental distress. Moreover, the story is not told from a male perspective, but from a female one. Besides having a female protagonist and being written by women, the show offers insight into the mind of a mentally distressed woman without demonising or dehumanising her. In short, the show offers a thorough portrayal of a woman suffering from mental distress in the 21st century, allowing the viewer to understand how these characteristics, identifying as a woman and having depression, can affect and shape an individual.

Furthermore, we find that many aspects of the television series are not arbitrary, but contribute to the representation of a deeper, more complex idea that may not be apparent at first. For example, Rebecca moving to West Covina to find happiness does not only represent a side of her mental distress. From a feminist point of view, we could argue that moving to California can be interpreted as a rebellion against the patriarchal society that has been trying to control her. By taking control of her life and choosing to go after her happiness, Rebecca is contesting her depression. Since, as we have stated before, depression works as a tool for the alienation of women (Harper, 2009, p. 6), the mere action of attempting to fight against it can be seen as a response to this form of oppression.

In regards to her rebellion against her mental distress, the fact that Rebecca throws away her pills is also significant. As Ussher (2011) remarks, once a woman has been diagnosed with depression and takes prescription pills it is very difficult for her to stop taking them "because of both physical and psychological dependency" (p. 92). This author also states that there is hardly any information about how and when to stop taking medication destined to fight depression and anxiety because the pharmaceutical industry's main aim is usually "to increase market share for their particular product, not to help consumers to stop taking it." (2011, p.92). Since this industry contributes to the prolongation of mental distress in women, Rebecca getting rid of her medication may be seen as sign of rebellion against this repressive force.

The way in which Rebecca's antagonists are portrayed can also be positively regarded from a feminist point of view. On the one hand we have Josh's girlfriend, Valencia. In traditional representations of two female antagonists, we would find what Gilbert and Gubar (2000) call "the angel-woman and the monster-woman" (p. 36). In this good woman/bad woman dichotomy, the "monster" serves as a reinforcement of the

angel's virtue and integrity. This concept helps to validate the sexist idea that women are always competing with each other. If this happened in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, Valencia, the other woman, would be seen by Rebecca as a threat that needs to be removed in order for her to achieve happiness. However, what we see in this show is a female protagonist that admires and wants to get closer to this other woman.

On the other hand, we could see an actual antagonist in Rebecca's mother. Given that she has been pressuring her to be successful from a very young age, contributing to Rebecca's depression and anxiety, it would be understandable to identify Mrs. Bunch as Rebecca's real enemy. In fact, on episode 9, after her mother sees her new house for the first time, she provides us with enough information to understand why Rebecca does not want her mother around. Once Mrs. Bunch starts singing, we hear her say

> *You won't get a husband this way*
>
> *At least you have your career*
>
> *Oh wait, you threw out your career*
>
> *To chase this California dream*
>
> *I wasted all that dough on Harvard and Yale*
>
> *For you to be living in a dump*
>
> *In Nowhere, USA*
>
> (Specter, Wauchope, & Tsuchida, 2015)

Although Rebecca does see in her mother her worst critic, her perspective changes after episode 15, when Dr. Akopian appears in her dreams and revisits Rebecca's past with her. In that dream, Rebecca learns that her mother has been keeping to herself the ugly truth about her father (the fact that he did not really care about her daughter) in order to protect her. Hence, after this discovery, her mother, who would initially be considered the quintessential bad woman, turns out to be otherwise.

Nevertheless, not long before Rebecca changes the way she sees her mother, she learns who her real detractor is. In episode 14, Rebecca looks in the mirror and sees herself dressed as a witch. Here, her reflection sings that she's "*the villain in* [her] *own story"* (Patel & Ehrlich, 2016). Although she still feels entitled to have her fairy-tale-like happy ending, she also realises that she has selfishly got in the middle of Josh and Valencia's relationship. By looking in the mirror, she is trying to find her real self (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p. 36). Nevertheless, what she sees is this side of her that differs in a

great way from the image of good, selfless person that she has been trying to project.. As Gilbert & Gubar remark, the concept of the monster-woman is often closely related to portraits of mental distress (p. 76). Thus, when Rebecca sees in the mirror this dark, ugly woman facing her, she is not only acknowledging that she is "*the witch in* [her] *own tale*" (Patel & Ehrlich, 2016), she is also facing her mental distress. In this way, the monster-woman that we find in this show is not a contraposition of the main character, but rather a part that exists within this character. Similarly to postfeminism's connection of feminist and anti-feminist ideas, this fragmentation and intertwining of both angel and monster-woman within oneself contributes to add value and complexity to Rebecca's portrait in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

Closely related to the fact that the monster-woman in this television show is the main character, we find that, because Rebecca focuses all of her hatred on herself, she never talks badly about other women. In fact, whenever she talks about the women around her, it is always to praise them. In episode 2 (Bloom, McKenna & Scardino, 2015), after she meets Valencia, Rebecca cannot stop talking about how pretty and nice she is. In fact, when Paula does not believe her and says that "women of equal sexual viability hate each other", Rebecca replies that it is beliefs like that one that "perpetuate the very misogynistic myth that women can't get along". This reflects a feminist way of thinking in which women should empower each other, a concept Rebecca is very familiar with. In episode 10, for example, she offers to carry out a "female empowerment program" at a camp for disadvantaged teenagers to teach them about focus topics related to feminism such as "wage gaps, leaning in, glass ceilings, internalized misogyny, slut-shaming, etc" (Schultz & Dolgen, 2016).

4.2. Anti-feminist Backlash

Even though Rebecca goes to camp to work as a lecturer for young women, what moves her to go there is, foreseeably, Josh's presence. In the middle of her lecture on female empowerment, she breaks out crying and acknowledges that she is "not one to speak about feminism or empowerment. I am desperately in love with a man who will never love me back. I'm the one who needs to be empowered." Again, we find that, although she knows about the importance of feminism and has feminist opinions on institutional sexism and gender roles, she also seems to forget about all of this the moment she sees the man she is in love with.

In order to make her feel better, the young women at camp propose to help her get a makeover, implying that this action will make her feel empowered and better with herself.

Nevertheless, this concept of changing your appearance to make you feel better about yourself alienates women from "interrogating femininity or social relations, or what we as a society expect of women" (Gill, 2009, p. 157).These teenagers advice Rebecca to wear high-heels, get plastic surgery and change her appearance "just for yourself". Although they mean well and only want to get the message that you should "never put a man first, put yourself first" across, the original idea of empowerment gets lost in the middle of their speech.

This idea of girl power is, in fact, one of the contradictory notions of Gill's postfeminist sensibility. According to this author, in a postfeminist text, women are presented "as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever" (p. 153). Therefore, any political or cultural influence in women's choices is forgotten, failing to address "how socially constructed, mass mediated ideals of beauty are internalised and made our own" (p. 154). Consequently, the initial idea of women empowerment, if done without reflecting on where the discourse of "freedom of choice" comes from, becomes part of an anti-feminist backlash.

When talking about an anti-feminist perspective, we cannot forget to mention the predominant deification of romantic love that we find in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. In order to understand this, we first need to address the fact that Rebecca, like most girls in Western society, has been exposed to the idea of happily ever after that romantic love promotes from a very young age. As Verheijen (2006) states, "gender roles continue to be overwhelmingly presented in an affirmative traditional way" (p. 25) in the media. This goes along the lines of what we have previously discussed about how the patriarchal society that we live in uses marriage and heterosexual relations to maintain unequal gender roles (Wolkomir, 2009, p. 494). Because Rebecca fails to see this, she participates in the consolidation of these gender differences, which demolishes and invalidates her feminist discourses.

In addition to Rebecca's blindness to the societal institutions that lead her to find happiness in a man, she also seems to be oblivious to the existence of other women's problems. Within feminism, Rebecca can be considered a privileged woman. To begin with, she is white and from an upper middle class background, something that has allowed her to get a higher education in one of the best universities in the USA. Furthermore, although she does not look like a model, she possesses a normative, able body. Lastly and, perhaps, most importantly in our discussion, she is heterosexual. All of these characteristics, added to her obsession with Josh, which takes most of her time,

contribute to make her fail to see beyond her own experiences, forgetting to address the problems of women of colour, queer women, poor women or disabled women.

In this sense, we find in Rebecca what Breines (2002) would call a prototypical "white feminist" (p. 1906), incapable of addressing issues of race, class or sexuality that other women face. What white feminists tend to do is to embrace "a political image of universal community" that cannot and will not resonate with women who are not as privileged. In this context, we could say that Rebecca's viewpoint on women's issues is a liberal feminist perspective, a position that seems to be common in contemporary media products (Gill, 2007, p. 161).

The contradictions that feminism "inherited, generated, and struggled with" (Breines, 2002, p. 1097) in the liberal feminist position of the second wave influenced contemporary postfeminist perspectives. Therefore, it is not surprising to discover that, although postfeminist female characters like Rebecca appear as more active than pop culture heroines of the late 20th century, valuing "autonomy and bodily integrity and the freedom to make individual choices", their choices are still caught up in "normative notions of femininity" (Gill, 2007, p. 162).

5. CONCLUSION

This project has aimed to analyse how mental distress affects women in a different way that it affects men, and how this distress is represented in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. Furthermore, it has covered different topics concerning women in the 21st century in order to answer the question of whether or not Crazy Ex-Girlfriend and, more specifically, the character of Rebecca Bunch, falls into postfeminism, as defined by Gill (2007).

After having done so, we have learned that mental distress can be regarded as a construction meant to oppress women, as well as a response to the oppressions that women face in a patriarchal society. In this way, we have seen how the character's gender, upbringing, as well as her social condition, have contributed to develop her mental distress. Furthermore, we have discussed how Rebecca's search for romantic love, which reflects the dynamic of her relationship with her father, has been her attempt at "saving" herself and trying to find happiness. This belief, as we have seen, also comes from a cultural construction, that of the heterosexual imaginary we have talked about.

In this context, we can say that the construction and development of this character has been greatly influenced by these social constructions. On the one hand, her gender has conditioned and contributed to her mental distress. On the other hand, her mental

distress has led her to find a solution in the cultural construction of romantic love. Hence, we can conclude by stating that the character of Rebecca reflects how these social products can shape someone's development, personality and ideology.

Furthermore, we have analysed different elements of the show so as to see if it is actually a postfeminist product. What we have discovered is that, although Rebecca defines herself as a feminist and the show addresses problems that are only targeted at women, such as the gendered view of certain mental distresses, these characteristics are not enough to make this a feminist show, especially not a radical feminist one. Moreover, Rebecca's feminism can only be applied in theory, since many of her actions can be considered as part of an anti-feminist backlash. Therefore, we can say that these contradictions that arise within Rebecca's persona make *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* a postfeminist show.

It is noteworthy to mention, however, that this intertwining of feminist and anti-feminist ideas that characterises postfeminism and that are easily seen in Rebecca are in fact similar contradictions to those that we could see in many women of the 21st century. From our viewpoint, the postfeminist sensibility is characteristic of many millennials who have grown up with a revival of feminism through social networks, but who are also more exposed than ever to anti-feminist ideas normalised by society such as plastic surgery, hair removal, or consumerism specifically targeted at women. Hence, although the show is not completely feminist, it provides a significant attempt at reflecting the contradictions that many of today's women face when trying to understand and integrate feminism in their everyday lives.

Lastly, we would like to conclude by saying that, since this project has focused on the main character of the story, a woman who is driven by her impulses and who sometimes does not seem to be able to see beyond her own problems, our concluding findings reveal a postfeminist character. However, if we were to analyse the show as a whole, it would be easy to see that *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* may actually be intersectionally feminist. To begin with, both main and recurring casts feature latino, black, and Asian people. Furthermore, there are gay and bisexual characters, and bisexuality is thoroughly explored, contributing to give this sexual orientation more visibility. Besides, both non-white and non-heterosexual characters are perfectly integrated in the story without any need to fall into stereotypes. Therefore, we believe that a further analysis could be carried out on the supporting cast of this show because, like the awareness of mental distress, the representation of a wider range of ethnicities and sexualities also contribute

to a better understanding of this world, motivating cooperation and respect with one another.

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