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Hell is a Teenage Girl: The Obsession with Female Rage in Media

Stephany Herrera Lucas · Monday, July 15th, 2024

For much of my childhood, I never felt like I could express myself emotionally. I lived in a household where mental health was never understood, so I kept all my turbulent emotions bottled up. At that time, I had a complicated relationship with my parents, and there wasn't a moment where I had the urge to scream or destroy everything around me out of frustration. Yet—I couldn't. I was too afraid of what my parents might think of me.

Recently, I've noticed a popular trend amongst young girls and women embracing female rage and female rage characters all over TikTok. Edits of female protagonists like Cassie Howard from *Euphoria*, Pearl from *Pearl*, Nina Sayers from *Black Swan*, and Jennifer from *Jennifer's Body* are all shown amid rage, screaming their hearts out while delivering the most bittersweet lines as melancholy music plays in the background. While the layout is aesthetically pleasing for sore eyes, the many comments from young girls and women expressing how much they relate to these characters' anguish struck a couple of thoughts.

As a woman in society, I've felt ashamed for harvesting such powerful emotions as anger. Women have been labeled crazy or hysterical for expressing such raw emotions. Society constantly misunderstands female rage which has created misrepresentation in the media for years that has meddled with the male and female perspective. Fortunately, it is rewriting itself and depicting female rage with more complexity that young girls and women feel inclined to take ownership of.

For starters, on-screen female violence and violent female characters tend to be sexualized in films catering to the male gaze. According to the Google, the male gaze is “the perspective of a notionally typical heterosexual man considered as embodied in the audience or intended audience for films and other visual media, characterized by a tendency to objectify or sexualize women.” Now, you may be wondering how this connects to female rage. Directors will often cast conventionally attractive actresses to star in revenge films. Take *Jennifer's Body*. Although the movie was directed by female director Karyn Kusama, the marketing for the movie intentionally fixated on the male audience. Casting beautiful actress Megan Fox for the role, the expectation was “hot demon schoolgirl out for blood.” The viewer is relentlessly teased throughout the movie with potential fanservice. However, the focus was on Jennifer and Needy's toxic friendship, with Needy stabbing Jennifer in the heart, representing the end of their friendship. If a man directed this movie, Jennifer would've been narrowed down to her sex appeal, erasing what humanized her—her relationship with Needy and becoming a one-dimensional character. The reason why *Jennifer's Body* is so beloved by the female gaze is not only because it represents revenge against a culture of

violence towards women but highlights female relationships. A girl's friendship is a sacred bond and to cut those connections means to let go of that sisterhood.



Photo by Fox Atomic/Kobal/Shutterstock (5884096a)

Megan Fox in *Jennifer's Body* – 2009; director: Karyn Kusama (Fox Atomic)

When comparing on-screen female violence to male violence, male violence is often depicted as exaggeratedly gory or heroic. Anger and aggression are socially accepted as a male trait. Society paints women as delicate and emotional creatures, not acknowledging that anger or rage can also be expressed yet if they were to, the motive would be attached to concepts of emotionalism and child-rearing or—simply get labeled as crazy. Women of color are more prone to this type of diminishment, introducing the “Angry Black Woman” and “Spicy Latina” trope. Two harmful stereotypes given to WOC for expressing anger or rage.

The “Angry Black Woman” is unhinged, ill-mannered, and aggressive. Her anger is not validated and expressing even the slightest hint of irritation or giving a reasonable complaint, she is automatically behaving irrationally and feeding into the stereotype. She doesn't get to be angry because she's a human being with emotions.

As a Latina, I've noticed that the “Spicy Latina” trope has been meant to fetishize us by men who see a woman's anger as being a turn-on. The “Spicy Latina” is feisty and toxic, but sexual. I've watched so many videos of both men and women feeding into this stereotype that now it has become the expectation when dating a Latina. My biggest concern is dating someone who fetishizes this behavior and doesn't take me seriously when I'm upset or becomes disappointed when I don't contribute to their fantasies. My anger is not me acting irrationally nor is it sexy. I'm angry because I'm human. Women should not be put in a box to undermine their human emotions. We just want to be heard and understood.



Black Swan

New depictions of female rage are beginning to empower women to accept anger as a human trait. Directors stepping up to portray female rage characters with more complexity. An example would be Pearl from the movie *Pearl*. Pearl's rage stems from her desire to escape her simple farm-girl life and pursue stardom. Pearl's violence is portrayed as very impulsive and gory. She insinuates traits of aggression and hostility—traits that are supposed to be “masculine.” This shines the light on gendered stereotypes where on-screen female violence has been centered around a woman's fragility and weakness, shying away from gory scenes that have been popularized in on-screen male violence.

This marks the beginning of the glamorization. Since female rage is now viewed in a new light, young girls and women are becoming drawn to female rage characters. I, myself made a connection with the character Nina Sayers from the movie *Black Swan*. Nina's spiral into madness resonates with the internal battles I fought with myself. Our anger is caused by ourselves and for Nina, it manifests into an evil alter-ego that torments her throughout the movie leading her to face life-threatening consequences at the end. Her anger is so tragic yet meaningful because it is her strong desire to reach perfectionism that causes her to go mad. One of the reasons why *Black Swan* is my favorite film is because it showcases Nina's struggles on a psychological basis. Anger is not only exhumed physically but also mentally which can be a lot more difficult to express. For other women, these female rage characters are their voices, expressing the anger they cannot express and finding comfort in the character's journey to madness.

With the uprising popularity of female rage and female rage characters in the media, it's time we cast the male gaze aside and claim our anger as our own. Society has concealed us inside a box of many expectations, a box that has kept us trapped and afraid. We've been undermined, diminished, and underestimated. Women are allowed to feel anger and we should not be ashamed of expressing it. After all, we're only human.

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