No Right Way to Be a Woman: Comment Culture and the Digital Policing of Femininity

Journal: Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific
Publisher: The Australian National University
Guest Editors: Dr Somjeeta Pandey and Dr Trishna Chaudhuri
Abstract deadline: 24th November 2026

When, in September 2026, a post declaring the actress Katrina Kaif "finished" following her return to public life after childbirth accumulated lakhs of views and comments, the disproportion between judgement and object became, itself, the more legible text. A comparable structure recurred that same year for the South Korean singer Jennie, whose performances at Mad Cool Festival and Lollapalooza Chicago drew, alongside widespread acclaim, a coordinated wave of "netizen" commentary deriding her "leaner frame" — two women, two national contexts, two entirely unrelated bodily "failures" (one insufficiently youthful, the other insufficiently substantial), and yet an identical infrastructure of mass, public, collectively affirmed judgement.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's account of homosocial desire — the triangulated structure in which relations between men are conducted not directly but through a woman positioned between them (Sedgwick 1985) — offers an unexpectedly precise vocabulary for what such comment threads perform. The derogatory remark addressed, nominally, to a woman's body is rarely a message she is expected to receive; its true addressee is the cascade of commenters — disproportionately male, though not exclusively so — whose likes, echoes, and escalations constitute the speaker's actual reward. Judgement of the woman becomes, in this structure, the pretext for a display of consensus.

Existing scholarship on online misogyny has developed a substantial apparatus for its most legible forms — coordinated harassment, explicit threat, abuse severe enough to be flagged and removed (Jane 2014; Ging and Siapera 2019) — but this apparatus was built for the troll, a figure sufficiently identifiable to be named, reported, and, on occasion, prosecuted. It offers little purchase on a different and arguably more socially revealing structure: the comment that requires no concealment, that is openly derogatory, and whose power derives not from evasion but from the volume of its endorsement. Rosalind Gill's account of a postfeminist sensibility in which women's bodies are constituted as permanently available for surveillance and correction (Gill 2007), and Sarah Banet-Weiser's argument that popular misogyny arises as a direct, structural reaction to the very visibility popular feminism generates (Banet-Weiser

2018), together describe the cultural terrain on which this comment-and-endorsement structure operates — but neither theorises the comment section itself, across Asia and the Pacific's varied digital publics, as the site where that terrain is publicly, collectively rehearsed.

The pattern recurs across otherwise unrelated categories of women, and across otherwise unrelated national and platform contexts, with striking consistency. The childfree woman is told, in threads that accumulate substantial affirmation, that she is selfish or incomplete. The working mother is told, with the same structure of endorsement, that she has abandoned her children. The pregnant, postpartum, or simply insufficiently conventional body of a public woman — Kaif's "finished," Jennie's "leaner frame" — draws derogatory comment that routinely outperforms, in reach and reply, any comment offered in defence. The same woman, indeed, may be condemned from opposite directions within a single news cycle: Deepika Padukone's second pregnancy announcement at forty drew comment framing "late pregnancy" as a selfish, elite-driven trend with "negative effects on children," the identical register in which Anne Hathaway's pregnancy at the same age was met with open mockery of her age itself (Feminism in India 2026) — motherhood too young and motherhood too old converging, within the same threads, as equally available grounds for derogation. Deniz Kandiyoti's notion of the patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti 1988) suggests why this endorsement is so readily available across such different cultural settings: for the commenting individual, affirming a shared judgement of a woman's failure to conform costs nothing and secures a small, immediate dividend of belonging.

This special issue invites scholarship that reads the derogatory comment and its endorsement as a connected structure rather than as isolated incivility, with particular attention to how this mechanism operates across the diverse linguistic, platform, and cultural contexts of Asia and the Pacific.

We invite abstracts of 200–250 words, accompanied by a bio note of no more than 100 words.

Contributions may address, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Derogatory comments and their mass endorsement: likes, replies, and collective affirmation
- The comment as an address to a homosocial audience rather than to the woman it targets

- Policing of childfree women through comment culture
- Policing of working mothers and the "abandoning mother" trope in reply threads
- Body-based derogation of celebrities and public women across Asia-Pacific media industries (Bollywood, K-pop, and beyond)
- Platform architecture — like counts, reply-ranking, algorithmic visibility — as reward structure for derogatory consensus
- Comparative patterns across categories of "non-conforming" femininity and across national/platform contexts
- Resistance, counter-commentary, and feminist reply cultures as contestation within these threads
- Methodological approaches to studying comment engagement and endorsement patterns

Submission Guidelines

- Deadline for abstract submission: 24th November 2026
- Notification of acceptance: 13th December 2026
- Full paper submission deadline: 31st March 2027
- Decision following referee process: 30th September 2027
- Final revisions submission deadline: 30th November 2027
- Publication date: mid-2028

Kindly send your submissions to both Dr Somjeeta Pandey (pandeysomjeeta@gmail.com) and Dr Trishna Chaudhuri (trishjune13@gmail.com).
The special issue will be published in the journal *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, also known as Intersections (Australia). Its ISSN is 1440-9151. It is published by The Australian National University and has a long and rich history of publishing scholarship on gender and sexuality as an open-access journal without charging any APC.

Editors' Bios

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