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## Examining Representation in *RICK AND MORTY*

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### **Abstract**

Netflix's *Rick and Morty* provides a fictional space dealing with scientific innovations that allow movement within and beyond the current universe in which humans currently reside. In one of the episodes, Rick and Morty land up in an alternate universe which is completely ruled by women. This seemingly 'feminist' world mandates the process of keeping men as slaves, and deprives men of basic humanitarian rights, thereby forcing them to follow harsh regulations. The slightest traces of disobedience by men can lead to severe punishment.

By situating a feminist world in another dimension, the show attempts to provide a glimpse into the possibilities of modification in the current 'order' of human civilisation if such a world is erected. The eventual conclusion of the danger that a feminist planet can unleash colours the

perceptions of the masses. This is effectual in not only portraying that feminism is a threat to the peaceful existence of humanity, but also concluding that the present world cannot, and should not, be blinded by feminist movements. Space travel, therefore, acts as a mechanism to fuel the patriarchal motives that the show is inherently comprised of. The paper is an attempt to examine the versions of idealised femininity and identify other common trends that seem to dominate space travel as depicted in the series.

**Keywords:** Rick and Morty, space travel, feminism, representation.

## **Methodology**

The present research paper is the culmination of examination of data from various secondary sources namely books, magazines, websites, journals, etc. The focus has been paid to the seventh episode in the first season of *Rick and Morty* since the analysis of the entire series is beyond the scope of the paper keeping in mind the word limit. Further, because of the complexity of the definition of gender and the restriction on word limit, the paper is unable to discuss the LGBTQIA within the issue of gender.

## **Introduction**

The paper aims to study the employment of time travel as a mechanism that enables the patriarchal forces operating within and beyond the cinematic text to sanction the sexual exploitation of the feminine body. Rick is a

supremely talented scientist who travels across space and time along with his grandson, Morty, in pursuit of his scientific ambitions. The causes that necessitate such tours often stem from an urgent conflict that cannot be resolved in the absence of such a visit than Rick's mere interest in exploration. Since the academic space within the domain of science is typically inhabited by male figures, the element of patriarchal metaphysics dominates the entire landscape within the series, and encourages the manipulation, victimisation and suppression of women, thereby promoting textual harassment and advancing the cause of perpetuation of misogynistic ideals.

The analysis within the paper endeavours to focus on the incorporation and exploitation of a female sex robot, and the consequences of the unexpected creation of a new species following the sexual intercourse between Morty and the robot. Feminist arguments inculcated thereafter seek to question the perceptions that lead to the production of such sexist technology-induced transformative creatures by directors. Next, the paper interrogates the malignant portrayal of a feminist society that threatens the feminist movements in reality by misleading public opinion on the central premise of feminism and making the viewers wrongly question the inverse gender sexism within the politics of feminism.

### **Sexual Exploitation of the Feminine Body: The Female Sex Robot**

The episode begins with Rick and Morty's temporary departure from Earth dimension C-137 to another planet

for purchasing scientific supplies for Rick's experiments. Morty's sudden interest in purchasing a souvenir to create an everlasting memory of their regular adventures compels Rick to buy a sex robot for his pleasure. Although the pretext of purchasing the sex robot is Morty's willingness to create a reminder of their experiences, it is evident that his interest in the technological creature stems from his subconscious teenage desire to satisfy his libidinous fantasies.

Sexual satisfaction is problematic in the given context because of the multiplicity of complications. It is interesting to note that most anthropomorphic robot sex dolls are constructed to suit the physical needs of heterosexual men. This essentially ensures that the physical being of such robots resembles that of a woman. The sex robot in this series is the culmination of utilising socially approbated ideals that are celebrated in femininity: she is a white, slim-waisted creature with enormous breasts. The fact that she is deprived of mental faculties and reason reinforces the silence which women are traditionally expected to maintain within and beyond the ambit of romantic relationships. Her literal voicelessness intensifies the predicaments associated with the metaphorical implication of the deprivation of voice.

According to the series, the robot's homeland is the planet of Gazorpazorp in the Andromeda system. An adult male Gazorpian is one of the most aggressively violent creatures of the universe. Rick's brief historical narration after scientific inference from the surroundings informs

the viewers that the evolution of the Gazorprians is the reason for the replacement of women with sex robots that act as birthing machines for the mere purpose of procreation. This, according to Rick, must have allowed the male Gazorprians to focus on war, and they would have bombed themselves back to the Stone Age. It is later revealed in the episode that the Gazorprians are being manipulated through sex and advanced technology by a hidden ruling class that wholly comprises of female Gazorprians.

The series suggests that the female Gazorprians are forced to create birthing machines to ensure procreation while simultaneously distancing themselves from male Gazorprians for personal safety. The fact that the birthing machines end up getting assaulted and demolished by male Gazorprians during the process of sexual satisfaction that is discernably not governed by the need to regenerate, testifies to the grossly problematic components associated with the creation of the robots. Their bodies become the site of physical possession and sexual suppression, and the purpose of their existence is reduced to the traditional feminine purpose of reproduction.

Further, Rick's evaluation of the planet concludes that the 'evolution' of the Gazorprians is followed by the need to replace feminine beings with robotic structures. This essentially leads to two conclusions: first, the removal of the feminine is, according to Rick, directly linked with an increase in efficiency and is a consequence of evolution;

second, the primary function of the feminine body is highlighted as the ability to reproduce. Rick's statement also implies that the resultant removal of the feminine figure leads to the absence of distraction and is therefore effective in increasing efficiency. The consequence of the evolution of the male Gazorprians is ironic because it culminates in their bombing, leading to the interrogation of the state of evolution. The irony embedded within the narrative does not, however, negate Rick's equation of the total absence of female Gazorprians with higher efficiency for male Gazorprians. Such a remark not only implies the inevitability of indulgence in sexual pursuits but also serves to suggest the reduction of efficiency in the daily lives of male Gazorprians caused by the intervention of their female counterparts.

The conceptualisation of female sex robots in a patriarchal apparatus attempts to recreate the myth that sexual pleasure for heterosexual men can simply be purchased sans the consent of the female. This purchase can even lead to the suggestion that it is an aftermath of sexual assault in case the transaction is made improbable if consent is denied. The creation of female robots for the specific purpose of engaging in sexual activity is somewhat instrumental in symbolising that one of the roles of a female is to provide sexual pleasure. The aforementioned instance of symbolism is corroborated by Rick's misogynistic commentary and the reinforcement of patriarchal ideals throughout the entire series. Symbolic discourse is another means through which the world around men is objectified and reduced to his terms.

## ***Rick and Morty's Attach on Feminism***

The unfolding of events reveals that the females separated from the males during the "Great Passive Aggression" due to the increasingly aggressive behaviour of male Gazorprians. The foundation of an alternate technological homeland on the same planet by females highlights the projection of female Gazorprians as intelligent architects. However, the elements that have shaped the rubric of this homeland have largely been derived from the existing stereotypical images about women.

For instance, the female Gazorprians greet each other by saying "I am here if you need to talk." It appears to be a pleasing greeting that encourages discourse that might otherwise not occur because of societal engagements and perceptions. One might argue that the greeting is also effectual in normalising discussions on mental health. Unfortunately, a deeper inquiry into the origins of the greeting reveals the reiteration of prejudices associated with the feminine figure: the emphasis on the establishment of female Gazorprians as caring creatures supports the supposition that they are weak and vulnerable as per the socially accepted norms of the real world. Further, the transformation of a pleasant reminder of initiating conversation into a constant greeting essentially deprives the refrain of its meaning. This further gives the greeting an air of superficiality that has often been interlinked with female relationships. The series

forces the viewer to question the seemingly artificial nature of human relationships in this feminine space.

The sex robot mentioned earlier turns out to be a mechanical surrogate, which is constructed in large numbers to maintain the population on Gazorpazorp. Surrogates who have been fertilised are returned to the nursery where the female babies are placed into educational programs and the males are sent outside to play with other adult male Gazorpians. The technological space built by females thus remains reserved for female babies only. Even if the sex robot is intended to be a mechanical surrogate, the fact that it is perceived and used as a sex toy on Earth does not alter the dynamics of analysing it as a technology-induced transformative creature meant for sexual intercourse and procreation.

Morty's preoccupation with the son born after his intercourse with the Gazorpian surrogate lands up Rick with his granddaughter Summer on Gazorpazorp. Rick becomes the mouthpiece of inherently misogynistic ideals of the series. Initially, he claims that he doesn't "do adventures with chicks." His usage of the word "chicks," which is a product of modern-day coinage, highlights the lewd definition linked with the term being superimposed on his granddaughter. He proceeds to blame her "stupid boobs" for the attack of the male Gazorpians on them and for the destruction of the portal gun, an important instrument that facilitates the process of travel across space and time. Rick's shift of blame ends with his last

acrimonious remark: “The least you could do is be ashamed of your gender.”

Though Rick continually blames Summer for being a girl, the truth is that the absence of her physical being and mental wit would have led to his execution. Since the world of female Gazorprians is inaccessible to men, the female ruler Mar Sha infers that Rick is Summer’s slave and they are from a more primitive world where men are still permitted to be servants. This supports the implication that Mar Sha considers her world a product of evolution not because of the abolition of slavery, but because of the deprivation of the opportunity given to men to become personal slaves. The female Gazorprians remain mistaken about the true identity of Rick and Summer until she accidentally calls him “grandfather,” making them realise their origin from a planet dominated by men.

The female Gazorprians ascribe the fundamental foundation of patriarchy to the mere existence of men. The politics of feminism in the real world suggests that patriarchy promotes systemic suppression of women and perpetuates toxic ideals of masculinity. Patriarchy is, therefore, destructive to the peaceful living of both men and women. The creation of an alternate school of thought in this series inevitably instigates criticism against feminism in reality. Misogynist commentary is adduced to bolster the disjointed attempt to criticise feminist policies in this harrowing narrative. Viewers are compelled to revisit and appropriate the operation of contemporary

feminism as a misandrist mechanism in actuality. Further, the direct connection of feminism with females consolidates the 'popular' narrative that men cannot choose to be feminists.

The most artful instrument within the network of chauvinism is the mockery of women by the consolidation of instances that solely function to ridicule the ways adopted by females. Veronica Ann Bennet, for instance, is a female Gazorpian "sentenced" to silent treatment because she is found "guilty" of having a foul hairstyle and therefore committing the "worst crime a woman can commit." This highlights the deliberate attempt to malign an entire community based on gender and proves how *Rick and Morty* is influenced by patriarchal agents. In this way, female Gazorpian are shown to be excessively concerned about clothing and makeup so that they can accentuate their appearance.

Toward the end of Rick and Summer's sojourn at Gazorpazorp, they are sentenced to death because Rick's constant farts and sexist remarks insult the sentiments of the female Gazorpian population. The first instance of capital punishment in about five hundred years is avoided when Summer intervenes and presents the following argument concerning her yellow blouse:

"An Earth man made this top. Maybe on your planet separation of the genders is the right thing to do, but on Earth, a certain percentage of our males are born gay, which is why my clothes are better than all of yours."

Summer's eventual insistence that Gazorpazorp's laws cannot be applied to those who hail from Earth forces Mar Sha to conclude, "Give the Earth people a spacecraft so they may head back to their weird planet where women are kind of equal, but not really." Mar Sha perfectly captures the state of gender equality on Earth. This is the only dialogue that advocates an inquiry into the reality of progress in the field of gender and equality on Earth. Every other instance in the series is a calculated effort to champion the cause of supporting a male-dominated society.

After the events transpire at Gazorpazorp, Summer asks Rick if he will reevaluate his policy about taking girls on adventures, to which he firmly replies:

"No, I'd say given what we've been through, that I was right the whole time and any epiphanies about gender politics were a projection of your feminine insecurity. But hey, why don't you have a pink spaceship, go ride around and have a jolly old time? Maybe that'll shut you up."

Rick's statement is the ultimate projection of the explicit attempt to question the politics of feminism in the real world by making Rick the spokesperson of the gender prejudices that infiltrate the minds of the masses.

## **Conclusion**

The unreserved censure of feminism in *Rick and Morty* testifies to the deliberate attempt to defame the existence of a feminist planet if such a planet comes into existence. It portrays that the accomplishment of objectives pursued

by feminist movements can pose as a threat to men. Further, this episode acts as a cautionary tale against the adoption of a feminist framework because the seemingly feminist female Gazorpian symbolise a group of misandrists with ambiguous beliefs in gender equality and an excessive inclination toward consumerism. The concept of travel across space and time thus becomes an important agent that makes the achievement of the idea of male domination possible within this episode.

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