

Snap Theory and why I am Not a Killjoy Feminist

By Alexandra M. Lopez

“Feminism: a history of willful tongues” (Ahmed 191).

The buzzing of the fan competed with Stephano’s voice booming through the TV speakers. I peeled off one of my sticky thighs from the black leather couch, readjusting my body towards the fan. I closed my eyes and imagined that the warm air parting my bangs was the December wind that chilled my knees, exposed by ripped jeans, as I waited for the bus. Dramatic violin strings directed my focus back on the TV, pulling me into the dry August heat. My grandmother strained her wrist and aggressively clicked the ‘skip’ button on the remote. I watched as she sped past Tony the Tiger, dramatized scenes of how this brand of hemorrhoid cream will have their users running through fields of daisies and other insignificant sale pitches. The levitating hourglass appeared on the screen, and I urgently yelled “Press play!” Her fingers moved slower than she commanded, causing her to play on two characters standing nose to nose. I side-eyed my grandmother, hoping she registered the tension, and rewind the show. To my discontent, she let the control slip from her hand and onto her lap, fully enthralled by the intimate moment unfolding on the screen. I glued my eyes to the family portrait on the TV stand. I studied the way my father’s collar folded, how my sister’s eyes twinkled with annoyance, and the tight grip my mother had on both our wrists.

“Alexandra, you are a young woman, you can watch people kissing.” I twisted my neck towards her face, mortified by the possible directions this conversation could go. “Do you see the way they kiss?” She pointed to the TV with the remote. “This is a bad way to kiss. When you get a boyfriend, you can only give one kiss like this.” She pouted her lips and smacked them together; the sharp sound made my shoulders rise reflexively. “After this, you give no more, and don’t let him touch you anywhere.” She began to mimic passionate kissing, outlining the parts of the body no one should touch and slapping her hand away. My cheeks swelled red. Flustered, I told her that I had learned this already and that I was only thirteen. She giggled at my discomfort and ceased her movements.

“Alexandra, you should never be afraid to say no.”

“Yes, I know.” I whined, dragging on ‘w.’

“If that man leaves you because he can’t touch you” she rubbed her hands together as if she were brushing off dirt, “then good for you, he never respected you.” I sprang up and landed with my feet on the couch. I wrapped my arms around my legs and rested my chin on my kneecaps. With a smirk playing on my lips, I asked “So you never let Abuelito kiss you?” A film of melancholy laid over her eyes and she laughed at a resurfaced memory.

“I always said no to my husband. You know, he came to my house every weekend with chocolates and flowers. My Abuela would open the door and he would ask ‘Can I please speak to Adelia?’ I would go to the door, take the gifts, and say no, I don’t want to go outside and speak with you.” An animated laugh escaped her mouth. “Alexy, I never even ate the chocolates, I gave them all to my sisters.” She pushed my arm playfully. “One day, he came to my house and asked me to go to the movies. I said okay, as long as I could bring my sister Lucila. He agreed, so all

three of us walked to the movies. He tried to sit beside me, but I said no, and made Lucila sit between us. Throughout the whole movie he poked and pinched the back of my neck to get my attention, but I slapped him away.” She smiled wildly as she continued to reminisce, revealing her gapped front teeth, a trait we both shared.

Her stories of defiance melted into the fabric of my identity. I wanted to be as outspoken as my grandmother. My family complained about her stubbornness but refused to acknowledge the mental fortitude it took to construct a willful personality in a place where she was taught to be silent. Whenever my family would compare me to my grandmother, my chest puffed with pride because that meant I inherited her willful tongue.

“...resilience is a technology of will, or even functions as a command: be willing to bear more; be stronger so you can bear more” (Ahmed 189).

“Elaine, the craziest thing happened to me at work yesterday.” Elaine looked up from her latte, frothed milk coated her upper lip. She raised her eyebrow to urge me to continue speaking.

“Remember the guy I told you about last week? He’s bald, short, and Russian?”

“Yes,” she claimed as he placed her drink onto the saucer.

“Okay well you were right, he came back again, and this time he was so much weirder.”

“What did he do?” She questioned, fiddling with her porcelain flower earrings.

“So I was closing last night right, and he came through the door wearing a backpack. It looked stuffed. I thought whatever, the faster I take his order the faster he will leave so I slapped on my smile and yelled irasshaimase!”

“I forgot you were forced to say that” she teased, kicking my foot under the table.

“Anyway, he came up to the counter and took one strap off of his shoulder so that his bag was swinging on the other. Before I could even say anything, he heaved his back forward and slammed his backpack onto the counter. I backed away with my hands up because I didn’t know what was in there.” I let out a weak laugh and raised my hands to mimic the action. She smiled through squinted eyes.

“So, I asked him, ‘What are you doing?’ He didn’t respond but began to open up his bag to pull something out. At this point, my heart was racing. Hugo was the only person left in the restaurant, but he was in the back washing dishes with his airpods on. If I screamed, I don’t think he would hear me.” I sat on top of my hands. They were shaking. “Well, he reached into his backpack and pulled out a picture book. Elaine, you don’t understand the wave of relief that washed over me. He told me that he bought it for me because he saw a deep sadness in my eyes. Like no buddy, that was always fear.” I paused, waiting for Elaine to laugh but her features were contorted with concern. My eyes watered, but I did not understand why. This was supposed to be a funny story. I blinked rapidly to recenter myself. “That was it. I took the book, and it had a note inside with a handwritten playlist. I wish I had brought it. If you saw the songs on this list, you would die.”

“You kept the book and the note?”

“I mean yeah, I feel bad throwing it out, he spent money on it.”

“Alex, he’s been like borderline harassing you, why do you care about being nice? Did you tell your boss about him, or tell the guy to fuck off?” There was a pressure in my throat that climbed up my face and into my sinuses.

“Elaine, why are you making this so serious? This is supposed to be a fun story. Plus, you know Herman wouldn’t care, he would say it’s just part of the business.”

“So you didn’t say anything is what I am hearing.” The annoyance in her tone enveloped me in shame.

“Elaine, it isn’t a big deal. You know me, I would speak up if it got too much.” She leaned back in her chair and picked up her coffee. The bustling of the shop made my ears feel plugged.

“You are too nice sometimes Alex. You can’t please everyone, you need to have a backbone. I’m worried about you.” My tongue felt engorged and heavy with complacency. Shame poured into the cracks of my thoughts, and so I hid behind my arrogance.

“I can stand up for myself, and if I am being completely honest, I may have exaggerated how creepy this guy was. You know I love dramatic stories.”

“Yeah okay, Alex.” She held her gaze forward so we could lock eyes, but I kept mine plastered on the vinyl floor. With a sigh she disengaged.

“So, do you like all of your professors this year?”

Why couldn’t I say no?

“ The moment of not taking it is so often understood as losing it. When the snap is registered as the origin of violence, the one who snapped is deemed as violent” (Ahmed 189).

From across the counter I watched the wind slam snowflakes into the windows. A couple sat across from each other, at the furthest end of the restaurant, analyzing the menu silently. The woman would occasionally glance up to see if the man was looking at her, but his eyes were always glued to the alcohol menu. I felt my heartbeat in my feet, and my ponytail tugged on the nerves in the back of my head. All that kept me from my bed was this couple who came in right before closing. The kitchen pushed me with aggressive whispers to take their order, even though the man’s nose was still buried in our limited alcohol selection. I dragged my feet towards the table, the eyes of the kitchen burrowed holes in my back.

“Hello! Do you guys need any help with the menu.” I tried not to wince at the sound of my voice, I hated interrupting people.

“We still need more time, thank you,” said the woman. Her blond hair sat on top of her head with a scrunchie, and her sun spotted hands were weighed down by diamonds. I bet they just returned from a cruise, an escape from the wet and gray Canadian winters.

“No problem, just wave me over when you need me.” Before I could turn to leave, the man raised his finger in the air, his eyes remained steady on the menu.

“Can I help you sir?” My voice was too high. I blinked away the embarrassment.

“Yes, you can. Do you have any Sake?”

“Yes, we do! We have-”

“Is it hot or cold?”

“We only have warm Sake, sir.”

The man rolled his eyes and ran a hand through his peppered hair as if my answer tormented him. “When I was in Japan” he muttered, “the sushi restaurants had any Sake you could think of. They even gave me samples of each Sake so I could choose my favorite one.”

“I apologize for the lack of selection-”

“Are the owners even Japanese?”

“No, they’re Chinese, but they have been in the Sushi restaurant industry-”

“That explains it. Alright dear that will be all. I will call you over when we are ready to order.”

My mouth felt dry, the sound of blood rushing to my head filled my ears. I leaned forward and opened my mouth, waiting for my tongue to thrash at the man. The useless piece of flesh remained still.

“Do you need anything?” His tone was sharp, my fingertips went numb.

“No, sorry. I’ll come back to take your order.”

Behind the safety of the counter, I found my voice. I imagined myself storming toward the man with a glass of warm sake and throwing it all over his white polo. I would yell at him, tell him I refused to serve a bigot and kick him out of the restaurant. Naturally, he would try to intimidate me, but my gaze would scare him into submission. Once the bells on the doors rang, the kitchen would howl with laughter and high five me for my willfulness.

“Are you awake? We are ready to order.” He called, shattering my fantasy. His finger stood straight in the air, moving back and forth to summon me. I scurried towards the table, already regretting my display of artificial eagerness. “Hey guys, what can I get for you?”

I wrote down the orders he barked at me. My fingers gripped the pen with white fury as I added each item to my list. I repeated the orders and he avoided eye contact, his clear displeasure with my presence made my skin crawl. From the force of habit, I asked if they were sure they didn't need a drink. On hearing my words, the man lifted his gaze and stared into my forehead.

“I don't want to drink anything on this menu. If I am to be completely honest, warm sake is disgusting. Could you be a doll and run to the liquor store across the street to buy me something acceptable to drink?” The absurdity of his request infused my speech with my grandmother's obstinate cadence.

“For sure, why don't you just give me your card and I'll run on over” I mocked, unable to wipe the disbelief from my face. A nasal voice interjected, “He is not joking!” The blond woman was now the same shade as her lip gloss. “He is an engineer! You can't speak like that to him.” I adjusted my gaze towards the man who had remained silent. His jawbone protruded from his cheeks, and the valves of his forehead veins were visible. I began to tremble, my tongue had scourged his pride.

“I am so sorry sir!” Why was I apologizing? “I would love to grab that drink for you, but it is against company policy.” No, I wouldn't, I felt dehumanized. He spoke to me like he was ordering on a delivery app. I am mad. Tell him I'm mad. I have a right to be mad.

“That’s fine, go put in those orders” he muttered. His attention was already averted from my comment to his emails.

It was twenty minutes past close when they finished eating. With my head hanging from my collapsed shoulders, I walked towards them. I held a machine in one hand and the bill in the other. I lifted the corners of my lips to smile, but my eyes drooped like a tragedy mask.

“You are a very disrespectful young girl” he expressed offhandedly as he inserted his card into the machine. My tongue was limp and withered, I found comfort in my silence. He passed me back the machine, the tip was one dollar.

As I got ready to leave my boss asked me how much he tipped me. I scoffed and flashed him the receipt. He exhaled a deep laugh and questioned how I could anger a customer to that extent. I sighed and gave him a recap of what was probably going to harass me as I tried to sleep. “Alex,” he expressed flatly, “why didn’t you just tell him to fuck off?”