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Face-Shaping Power of the Postfeminist Gaze, or Digital Rhetorical Lateral Surveillance in Armenia

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Abstract: This article draws on feminist surveillance theoretical work to discuss digital lateral surveillance that objectifies the female body on social media and normalizes conformity with popular beauty standards. It studies how female social media users allow the postfeminist gaze to control, condition, and modify their bodies and identities. The piece argues that digital lateral surveillance has rhetorical character because it is a product both of the synopticon where many observe the few, an interpellation of the institution of patriarchy in the digital age, and the gynaeopticon, a type of neoliberal female peer surveillance. The analysis focuses on the functioning of the postfeminist gaze in social media posts and user comments regarding the unconventional appearance of an Armenian model. The study further theorizes rhetorical practices of techno-feminist resistance which can help female social media users revise their relationship with technology to regain agency over the construction of their bodies, identities, and realities.

Keywords: rhetorical surveillance, lateral surveillance, gynaeopticon, postfeminist gaze, Armenian culture

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Introduction

In 2020, one of the world's leading fashion designers and Gucci's creative director, Alessandro Michele, brought Armine Harutyunyan to the catwalks of the luxury Italian fashion house. Italian social media exploded with criticism of the "unusual looks" of the 23-year-old Armenian model and her introduction to the world fashion scene. According to the critics, Armine's angular facial features, long nose, and thick eyebrows—a hallmark of traditional Armenian appearance—did not meet the accepted beauty standards for Gucci models, considered to be the sexiest women in the world (Hughes). The debate naturally took place on Instagram, an image-driven global social network with culturally diverse international users. Despite the diversity of its audience, social media has contributed to the cultivation of rather narrow beauty standards, zealously safeguarded by its users.

Instagram and Facebook are among the most popular social media platforms in Armenia, home country of the publicly shamed Gucci model Armine Harutyunyan (Martirosyan; Movsisyan). It does not come as a surprise then that Armenian young women share and uphold beauty standards that are set and safeguarded by social media users worldwide. But there is a paradox. Armenian culture strives to preserve traditional gendered conventions of public behavior in both dress and beauty (Ziemer). Like other countries

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in the South Caucasus, families in Armenia, specifically parents and older siblings, closely monitor young people to ensure that they behave according to the decrees of traditional values (Aliyeva). Enforced by the methods of patriarchal body surveillance, the Armenian woman's public performance must conform to the societal expectation of her as "sacred mother" responsible for the maintenance of the family and the preservation of its values and norms (Ohanyan 231). Traditional Armenian values permeate the view on dress and beauty standards too—women need to attend to their appearance to make themselves desirable brides and consequently secure their roles as married women and mothers in order to fulfill their duty to the society and the nation.

When I moved to Armenia five years ago, I was surprised by the number of women with taped-up noses strolling down the street. It did not take long to discover that the bandaged faces were a consequence of surgical procedures intended to straighten the traditional Armenian aquiline nose. Although there is no official data, medical evidence suggests that rhinoplasty is the number one cosmetic surgery in the country (Molenaar). Since Armenian culture has preserved its traditional conventions regarding courtship and marriage, the rules for young women stipulate that they should have a serious suitor by sixteen years of age. And if by that point there is not a prospective husband in the picture—many of my Armenians students testify—the family suggests that the young woman consider rhinoplasty: a clear deviation of the call for adherence to local tradition regarding beauty standards.

Further, the patriarchal culture requires that a woman's behavior, dress, and look conform to traditional norms. But to preserve the conventions regarding marriage and family, the culture bends the rules on traditional appearance to adopt Western beauty standards and correct an ancestral Armenian feature—the aquiline nose—together with other traditional facial features. In the past few years, I often observed how the faces of some of my Armenian female students would transform over a short period of time to become new, different, and sometimes hardly matching their original picture from the class roster. Young women in the street, in professional places, and at universities publicly take selfies and post these images to social media networks not simply to report to the world about their day, work, and activities but to seek approval of their appearance. The initial question of patriarchal interpellation gets further complicated by the role of digital spaces in mediating the normative expectations regarding beauty. Both the values of local patriarchy and global makeover culture affect the surveillance of female bodies to exercise control over them, condition them, and ultimately modify their appearance.

Scholarship on surveillance has addressed personal identity in the digital age with focus on the individual self as the ultimate target of surveillance practices (Magnet; Rosen and Santesso; Christmas). But the individual self and the resulting personal identity are regulated differently in local and global contexts even within digital environments. Moreover, surveillance through technology can problematically prescribe our bodies and identities (Frost and Haas). Digital surveillance practices influence young women's self-esteem and behavior, often persuading them to undergo cosmetic surgery procedures (Zhao). In this article, I am specifically interested in exploring the ways vertical female body surveillance, performed by the local

patriarchy, intersects with digital lateral surveillance that is underlined with neoliberal values. The resulting hybrid form of surveillance empowers female peer-policing together with self-regulatory practices.

To explore such surveillance tactics, I study the case of the Armenian Gucci model Armine Harutyunyan further theorizing how digital lateral surveillance operates and how it becomes rhetorical. I begin by drawing on feminist surveillance theoretical work (Bordo; Dubrofsky and Magnet; Gill) and discuss digital lateral surveillance (Andrejevic; Gill) that objectifies women's bodies and normalizes cosmetic surgery through social media practices. I argue that digital rhetorical lateral surveillance is a product both of the synopticon (Mathiesen) where many observe the few, an interpellation of the institution of patriarchy in the digital age (Trottier et al.), and the gynaeopticon, a type of female peer surveillance. The fusion of the two types of surveillance grants young women on social media the rhetorical power to ask their female peers to either comply with or resist the normative societal expectation for beauty (Brooks).

From Foucault to Bordo to Gill: Development of the Postfeminist Gaze

Surveillance—the combination of information collection and its use with power (Andrejevic)—allows for the state or society to produce docile bodies essential to its operation. In *Discipline and Punish,* Michel Foucault explains that state control is not achieved only through external forms of policing but also through internalization of surveillance. He famously uses the spatial organization of Jeremy Bentham's prison to explicate the production of docile bodies—the architecture of the panopticon induces a state of conscious and permanent visibility which makes power automatic and independent of the person who exercises it (i.e., there may not be even a guard in the prison's tower) (Foucault). This disciplinary apparatus homogenizes the effects of power and distributes it evenly to all individuals under surveillance; it both partitions and diffuses the power to the spaces individuals occupy (Foucault). Visibility in the panopticon is the central mechanism that produces docile bodies: those who know that they are in the field of visibility perform the power relation as both the observer and the observed; they police themselves without the need for a surveillant.

Surveillance operates in ways that directly affect the bodies and mental state of those being surveilled. Foucault thinks of surveillance not in ideological but rather in practical terms: through the organization and regulation of bodies and their movement. Susan Bordo recognizes the primacy of practice over belief in Foucault's theory and further elaborates on bodies as a locus of social control, specifically paying attention to the surveillance ramifications for women with explicit demands on the female body. Socially imposed disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress organize the time and space of women, making them inscribe in themselves the power relation in which they end up playing both roles—of the surveillant and of the surveilled. By measuring their bodies against the elusive ideal of femininity, they become the principle of their own subjection. The mechanisms on which power operates are not repressive; on the contrary they are constitutive (Bordo). They do not come from above and are not imposed by one group but rather are grown from below and are distributed through a network of practices, institutions, and technologies that constitute the power and exercise control over the female body. All these networks incorporate in one way or another

visibility as a primary mechanism of control over the female body and offer practices of looking at what is made visible voluntarily by women.

Contemporary digital media and culture enhance and multiplie the practices of looking to produce a novel and powerful regulatory gaze on women. Rosalind Gill tracks down the origin of this gaze dubbing it postfeminist, or representative of sensibilities that are developed from the neoliberal values of autonomy, self-actualization, and risk-taking. To show the connection between surveillance and postfeminist culture, Gill explores the links between neoliberalism and postfeminism and argues that both are structured by a grammar of individualism which has completely displaced notions of the social and the political where individuals are not any more subjects to pressures and constraints from the outside. Instead, the postfeminist sensibilities are intimately related to neoliberalism and are driven by "entrepreneurial selfhood"—a commitment toward self-discipline and improvement (Gill 150). The postfeminist gaze focuses on the body as a main site for the exhibition of achieved self-discipline and self-improvement thus breaking away from the traditional practices of looking at the female body. The postfeminist media culture has shifted from women's passive objectification to a new form in which women seemingly have choices and agency but most importantly are able to construct themselves as active and desiring sexual subjects (Barker et al.).

Gynaeopticon, or Female Lateral Surveillance in Digital Spaces

The postfeminist gaze achieves its targeted regulatory function over women's bodies and appearance through the modes of visibility available to the contemporary users of digital media. It homogenizes and diffuses the effects of power to the observed through their awareness of the possibility of being observed. In social media culture, this possibility is both desired and, in most cases, guaranteed: many women voluntarily and actively circulate images of their bodies as a testimony to their conformity with the demands of the postfeminist gaze, seeking approval of the surveillants when their image is seen and "liked." Foucault's metaphor of the panopticon works to explain the internalization of disciplinary power for the surveilled but in the digital culture it fails to account for the visibility of the surveillant. In the panopticon, the internalization of power happens because the observed cannot see the guard in the tower, and often there is not even a surveillant. In social media spaces, the visibility is reciprocal.

Thomas Mathiesen revised Foucault's metaphor of the panopticon to account for the changed nature of visibility in the new media culture. Mathiesen argues that in media-dominated societies there is a reversal of Foucault's model of surveillance where rather than the few watching the many (like in the panopticon), the many are watching the few (e.g., the "masses" following celebrities). Mathiesen dubs this type of mass surveillance "synopticon." More recently, Alison Winch has introduced her own revision of the surveillance model of Bentham's prison: "gynaeopticon," a gendered, neoliberal variation of the panopticon where "the many women watch the many women" (229). In this type of surveillance, control is shared and internalized, and policing happens through digital groups of women connected through female friendship. These "intimate publics" monitor and regulate women's bodies, sexualities, and intimate life (Berlant 5). Winch argues

that, through digital networks of female friends, women in online spaces establish codes of acceptable femininity that also meet market values with an emphasis on self-management for competitive purposes. Peers in digital spaces disseminate the normative discourses defining a successful feminine skill set. The subject in these spaces police her behavior in search of approval by the gaze of her friends, thus making the lateral surveillance rhetorical.

Andrejevic defines lateral surveillance as peer-to-peer monitoring of spouses, friends, and relatives. He underscores the importance of technologies in the functioning of this type of do-it-yourself surveillance driven by the incentives of risk management in a neoliberal society. The mutual monitoring becomes an extension of state interests and is a mechanism that offloads to the populace the governmental responsibilities to uphold practices reinforcing security and productivity. The deployment of new information and communication technologies plays a major role in the workings of lateral surveillance. Communication and rhetoric scholars have drawn on Andrejevic' concept to write about peer monitoring of bodies and behaviors of others through digital technologies, networked environments, and more specifically on social media (Trottier; Ivana; Frost and Haas). Trottier, for example, studies interpersonal surveillance on Facebook and its effects on the presentation of the virtual self in social media. Like Andrejevic who sees lateral surveillance as a means for the state to don responsibility on citizens, Trottier observes that Facebook users become both the agent and the subject of surveillance thus employing practices of visibility which monitor and control the behavior of the other social media users and at the same time are controlled by their gaze.

These practices of visibility are primarily rhetorical because they require adherence to a set of neoliberal skills and values of both surveilled and surveillant. However, the postfeminist gaze does not exercise control by looking only at one aspect of the female body and identity. Ericson and Haggerty observe that surveillance is not a centralized practice but rather relies on a collection of information designed to govern the activities of populations—a "surveillant assemblage" (4). In line with the focus of the postfeminist gaze on the body as its primary site of control, such assemblages refer to data that genders, sexualizes, races, and classes the surveilled subject's body and behavior. Dubrofsky and Magnet develop a critical feminist lens to offer an approach to studying surveillance with an emphasis on intersectionality. A feminist praxis, they argue, does not limit the exploration to gender issues but sees it as part of a bigger system of interlocking oppressions based on sexuality, race, class, and ableness. In the same edited collection dedicated to feminist surveillance, Dubrofsky and Wood show how gender and race intersect in the production of a virtual self on social media. They explore the way female celebrities of color, who are framed as agents, sexualize their bodies by controlling objectification and willingly self-objectifying.

The Postfeminist Gaze and Its Rhetorical Shape-Shifting Power in Armenia

As part of the Soviet Union, Armenia and its female population has been influenced heavily by the Communist party and its normative view of women. Soviet magazines like Rabotnitsa (Working Woman) and Krestyanka (Peasant Woman)––published in Moscow and distributed throughout the country––estab-

lished the socialist agenda on beauty, cosmetics, and fashion. Starting in the 1920s, these magazines disseminated state propaganda regarding the working woman as naturally beautiful and financially independent. These publications juxtaposed the Soviet woman to the one in capitalist societies arguing that the latter needed to use cosmetics to attract a financially stable man for her economic survival (Attwood). The Western woman also needed to hide her poor health ensuing from the capitalist dismal life which she undoubtedly lived (Attwood). The Soviet state as a quintessential masculine figure in every Soviet family (Ashwin) exercised the regulatory "male gaze" projecting its expectations on the female figure which consequently was styled accordingly (Mulvey). The Armenian equivalent of these beauty magazines, Hayastani Ashkhatavoruhi (Հայաստանի աշխատավորուհի)— Working Women of Armenia— featured images of women consistent with the Soviet ideal of beauty.

After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the representation of femininity in Russia was revamped to capitalize on sexual liberation and to focus on a slim, groomed, and sexy body appearance (Davidenko). The end of the Soviet Union also gave a chance to new independent states to reevaluate the gender politics imposed by the USSR. In the Armenian example, it brought about a move toward "re-traditionalization" (Shahnazarian and Ziemer 30). In the 1990s, the traditional expectations of women's behavior and appearance in public spaces were revived and with that the respective surveillance practices were reinforced. Like in other countries of the South Caucasus, Armenian traditional values are still foundational to family and community life and decree a certain level of propriety in dress and behavior in public (Aliyeva; Ziemer; Ohanyan).

At the same time, with the end of the Cold War and more specifically after the 2018 Velvet Revolution when the first democratic government came to power, Armenia has deliberately been moving away from the Russian sphere of influence and looking to the West for economic and political alliances (Broers). Because of the country's new liberal politics, Western social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook have entered the Armenian media landscape to become popular spaces for public discourse (Martirosyan). Facebook and Instagram in particular have become vehicles of Western values, beauty standards included. Beauty practices have been inevitably influenced by neoliberal ideology which promotes individual responsibility and entrepreneurial selfhood (Gyulbudaghyan).

Armine Harutyunyan and Digital Lateral Surveillance

The case of the Armenian Gucci model Armine Harutyunyan sheds light on the intersection of traditional and neoliberal values in the lateral surveillance practices in online spaces. It also showcases the emergence of a new hybrid model of surveillance that is fundamentally rhetorical in nature. In September of 2019, when *Arajin News* posted a success story about Armine's rise to fame, social media comments ranged from highly approving to severely condemning. Social media users who were genuinely happy for her success and proud of the Armenian girl representing their country were fewer in number compared to those who not only publicly disliked the girl's appearance but also ridiculed her natural features (Fig. 1).

On the Facebook page of *Arajin News*, some female users posted in reaction GIFs showing their shock and disapproval of Armine's body as representative of Armenian beauty standards. Others used abusive language to pejoratively liken Armine's looks to those of animals (pig, monkey, donkey, etc.). Some social media comments went as far as to give Armine advice on how to improve her appearance. Similarly, on the Instagram page of the Italian Fashion magazine *Grazia*, Italian-speaking users called Armine "ugly," "monkey," and "monster," advised her how to style her hair, and wondered if the purpose is to provoke the viewers to think about standardized beauty standards. Social media users measured Armine's body against the neoliberal ideal of femininity and beauty. In their comments, they pronounced their judgment based on postfeminist practices of looking where women need to self-regulate their behavior and appearance in accordance with the notion of entrepreneurial selfhood—everyone can modify their body to meet the beauty standards and become a desired sexual objects. The postfeminist gaze of the surveillants has become rhetorical with its neoliberal demands on women's bodies and behavior.

Fig. 1. Armenian model Armine Harutyunyan.

Mathiesen's synopticon as a model of surveillance is at work in the case of a fashion model–many observing the few. The celebrity culture evokes reactions that redefine the surveillance practices of the panopticon in terms of numbers: the surveillants are far more than those being surveilled. Additionally, within the networked digital culture of social media, the surveillants are also in the field of visibility and therefore accountable for their looking practices. Social media users get to see each other's profiles and respond to the comments of others. Users who like the "unusual looks" of Armine and appreciate the challenge to the approved beauty standards write back to those who condemn her facial features. The visibility of social media users attributes accountability to the surveillants in their call for conformity. Those who require others to comply with the popular beauty standards are also required to conform with the neoliberal beauty standards and the associated rules of visibility as they construct their virtual selves accordingly. Moreover, with their

public gesture of interpellation they add symbolic value to their authority as surveillants since their argument is seen by the whole community.

This performance of symbolic authority in the social network space is rhetorical in its nature exactly because of the observant's self-proclaimed role as surveillants. Since social media users see the profiles of others, they are aware of their audience and can craft logical fallacies in their argumentation to specifically target other users. For example, a couple of Italian social media users, aware of the cultural background of the fashion magazine's audience, referred to a famous line from the well-known 1975 satirical film *Fantozzi* in which the main character's daughter, Mariangela Fantozzi is often likened to a baboon by her father's colleagues who find her ugly. These users commented on Armine's features with a quote from the film comparing Mariangela's to Armine's looks. A form of association fallacy, this argument utilizes a well-known cultural trope—albeit politically incorrect today to even be in circulation—and appeals to shared cultural histories as it asks other social media users to identify with the offered position on Armine's appearance. The objectification of the surveilled gains rhetorical character because it is performed in the public space of the social media, affirming the dominant masculine subject position of the surveillant.

If rhetorically successful, the postfeminist gaze objectification on social media can be internalized by the observed subject to gain self-regulating and self-surveilling power with devastating consequences for the subject's self-esteem and sense of personal worth. The debate around Armine Harutyunyan's choice by Gucci has directed the popular audience's attention to body-shaming and the mental health harm resulting from such lateral surveillance practices—many articles and social media posts discussed the case with a focus on it. Armine herself has stood up and spoken against the normalization of the postfeminist gaze. In an interview for the Italian daily newspaper *La Repubblica,* Harutyunyan states, "I am more than just a face. I ask girls not to conform" (Tibaldi). With her ongoing modeling career and media presence, Armine continues to challenge the authority of the lateral surveillants and their harmful rhetoric.

The authority of the surveillants in the synopticon, however, is self-proclaimed; it has symbolic value if the other users endorse it. When the postfeminist gaze is at work in a digital space with users emplaced in a local patriarchal context, the surveillants often fail to interpolate their digital peers. The most common comments criticizing Armine's looks evaluate her beauty per the standards of neoliberal values. However, many Armenian users are not convinced of these arguments. They celebrate the success of the model as an Armenian national and are proud of her. Armine, too, utilizes similar cultural rhetoric. In one of her Instagram posts after her international success, she says, "We need to preserve, we need to promote our culture and values." Armine's facial features, strictly speaking, belong to the set of Armenian traditional beauty standards: thick eyebrows, long dark hair, elongated face, and an Armenian trademark—an aquiline nose.

Whenever the rhetorical surveillance of the synopticon model does not persuade subjects to conform, its female version of it—the gynaeopticon— has the potential to be more effective. Female lateral surveillance relies on friendship bonds between girlfriends, and the communication happens in digital intimate

publics that regulate women's bodies, sexualities, and private life. Within such intimate environments, peer judgment can have a more pernicious effect and prove to be more persuasive. In Armine Harutyunyan's case, most of the negative comments by women on Facebook and Instagram posts announcing her success either body-shame her, inform her that her fame will be short-lived, advise her to get a rhinoplasty, or simply insult her using animal imagery to describe her looks (e.g. donkey, monkey, etc.). There are users who congratulate her, praise her unusual appearance, and often commend the fashion luxury house for featuring unique models like Armine. Some even read Gucci's novel approach to marketing as a challenge to the narrow range of beauty standards popularized through social media and the globalization of standardized makeover culture. Technologies of visual culture—social media platforms included—contribute to defining and categorizing bodies and histories and simultaneously prescribing identities and realities in relation to these definitions (Frost and Haas).

At the same time, social media as a platform for global information flow allows for the revision of power dynamics relative to identities and bodies. The model's Instagram page @DearArmine has an international audience with users from Italy, Azerbaijan, and Armenia dominating the comments. The self-proclaimed lateral surveillants rely on diverse cultural data designed to govern the activity of the surveilled. The collection of such wide international data intended to control bodies, a surveillant assemblage (Ericson and Haggerty), refers not only to Armine's appearance and gender but it also intersects with other aspects of her identity—it racializes her. In addition to hate posts about her appearance, Armine gets comments by haters from Azerbaijan—the neighboring country with which Armenia has waged several wars in recent years. These users condemn not only the girl and her appearance but view her as a representation of Armenia, and Armenians to further demonize her based on her national provenance. This type of lateral surveillance advances rhetoric that transposes the non-conformity with globalized beauty standards to national stereotypes.

The case of the Armenian model shows that rhetorical resistance can happen even in a digital world cross-pollinated by patriarchal and neoliberal values where women are surveilled both vertically and laterally. In response to the criticisms of her appearance, Armine Harutyunyan tells *La Repubblica*, "People are scared by everything that is different, there are many different ways of being beautiful" (Hughes). On her social media site, Harutyunyan continues to post images of herself that accentuate her features. Her statement and online behavior are in line with the postfeminist values where female celebrities willingly self-sexualize and self-objectify by making their bodies visible and with that gain a form of agency (Dubrofsky and Wood). Harutyunyan is determined to ignore the negative comments about her appearance. Abiding by neoliberal values of entrepreneurial selfhood and at the same time representing the traditional Armenian appearance, she declares, "It is better to be different than conform to others, even if this is not understood by everyone. My advice is to concentrate on yourself, on who you are and what you really love" (Hughes).

At the same time, Harutyunyan is a female model from a racialized group, and her self-sexualization and self-objectification has different implications in the digital environment. Dubrofsky and Wood analyze the situated and contextual racialization of Armenian American model Kim Kardashian to show that bodies

of women of color are always an object of male desire since they are conceived to possess inherent and animalistic sexuality. Such bodies of color are subject to different kinds of postfeminist imperative since they do not need to self-sexualize. Yet, racialized female models continue to do so by posting sexualized images of themselves, and with that, Dubrofsky and Wood argue, they perpetuate white supremacist rhetoric. Harutyunyan, however, does not fall into the category of inherently sexually appealing female models. But she has captured the public attention with the debate over her unconventional beauty, and therefore is better positioned to produce powerful rhetoric in resistance to female lateral surveillance. She speaks and behaves using neoliberal language and values, willingly making her unusual appearance visible to the postfeminist gaze and at the same time resisting its face-shifting power.

Armine Harutyunyan's story teaches us an important lesson about our agency and about the power of the rhetorical choices we make in seemingly mundane interactions in online spaces. Resisting female lateral surveillance in the digital environment means challenging the rhetoric of those who partake in postfeminist gaze practices and allowing space for difference and non-conformity. To counter rhetorical lateral surveillance means to regain control of how through discourse and technology we construct our bodies and identities. When female users on social media interact with others, they need to be aware of the complex relationship between gender, sex, sexuality, and technologies with the associated effects on the physical and mental health of young women. As individual users and as part of larger digital communities, we have the choice to revise our relationship with technology to challenge stereotypes and advance values that celebrate our individual differences, prioritizing unconventional ways of being and resisting conformity.

Conclusion

As Armine Harutyunyan's story unfolds in public online spaces, it effectively demonstrates the way the postfeminist gaze performs rhetorical lateral surveillance on the female body. Moreover, it represents a battle between neoliberal values and traditional normative expectations in the global context of social media. The female subject will continue experiencing lateral surveillance practices if she allows the postfeminist gaze to control and modify her body and identity, accepting the disciplinary power of the self-proclaimed surveillants. The visibility of the surveillant and the surveilled on social media further complicates the predicament of women, especially in situations where local cultural practices of looking and controlling intersect with global trends in makeover culture and its lateral surveillance.

Yet, the female subject can make rhetorical choices that allow her through discourse and technology to regain control over the construction of her body, identity, and realities. Armine Harutyunyan's case illustrates that techno-feminist resistance is possible even in the intricate context of patriarchal society, which employs neoliberal ideology to uphold its traditional values. To further explore feminist digital resistance tactics, we can look at Schoettler's study of feminist activists and learn how to create affective counterpublics, enact community care, and embrace productive discomfort. We can also explore strategies to exercise control over how we present ourselves in social media spaces, as we acknowledge the pitfalls of discursive

dissonance arising from our inability to control our image and its digital circulation (McGill). Most importantly, as female participants in online communities, we need to understand that we have the power to challenge stereotypes and celebrate our differences, promoting unconventional ways of looking and being. Only in this way can we regain agency over our bodies and identities, allowing us to construct realities that reject conformity and the regulatory power of the postfeminist gaze.

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