

Gender Essentialism and Violence in Eating Practices: Queering Girl Dinner

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This paper attempts to map the nuances of gender essentialism and covert self-inflicted violence in eating practices, specifically with regard to the viral TikTok trend 'Girl Dinner'. Through a comparative analysis vis-a-vis three films, namely, *The Substance*, *Death Becomes Her*, and *Dumplings*, I attempt to foray into performative, gendered trends such as Girl Dinner that has violated and isolated femme bodies from the self through eating practices. Applying queer theory to eating practices, one encounters a 'third space'. The first two spaces being that of the 'server' and the 'served', the third space is distinct from traditional sites of eating practices; one where femme bodies occupied the position of being the 'server'. Here, the subject occupies a position that *seems* to occupy the position of the 'server' and the 'served', essentially the decision-maker and yet succumb to the compulsions and internalised misogyny and violence of being a 'girl', thus giving up 'control' on eating behaviours. Intertwined with diet and wellness culture and a 'girlhood' constructed according to 'maleness', trends such as 'Girl Dinner' have caused much harm to intersectional feminist movements. One also encounters the "horrors" of ageing here and the capitalistic industrial complex that has time and again pushed "ageing is the worst thing that can happen to the physical self". While the trend emerged as a "softer", "more aesthetic" response to trends such as 'Girl Boss' (involving reclaiming back power from the patriarchy), Girl Dinner quickly turned into a gateway for disordered eating, unrealistic beauty standards, amplified the fear of ageing and contributed to essentialist behaviours necessary to claim 'being a girl' or 'girlhood' as the Internet understands it.

Keywords: gendered eating practices, girl dinner, third space, ageing, gender essentialism