



the rise of the *Bimbo*

WRITING

Elena Plumb

MODELING

Estelle de Zan

PHOTOGRAPHY

Estelle de Zan

DESIGNER

Thandiwe Tembo

Everything men want *visually* whilst being everything they *hate*:
self-aware, sexually empowered, politically conscious,...

TikTok creator Chrissy Chlapecka bats her false eyelashes, flips her bleached-blond hair, and stumbles over her stilettos as she twirls for the camera — a fitting introduction to “Glitter Island,” a niche corner of the popular video platform in which “the girls, gays, theys and non-binary babes,” as Chlapecka lovingly articulates, experiment with hyperfemininity.

Chlapecka guides her 2.5 million TikTok followers through a day in the life of a “bimbo” with a cutesy compilation reminiscent of Elle Woods’s Harvard video essay in *Legally Blonde*. “On Glitter Island, we learn how to count to five! One... uhhh,” she stammers, staring vacantly into space as the video cuts to the next clip. “We also learn how to read,” she continues. “‘A’ is for ‘Abolish the Police,’ and ‘B’ is for... ‘Bimbo!’”

Chlapecka is perhaps the most prominent figure fighting to reclaim the word “bimbo” on the platform. The historically misogynistic stereotype, which profiles attractive, traditionally feminine women as unintelligent, has been wielded as an insult for decades against the likes of Marilyn Monroe and Kim Kardashian. But today, the term has experienced a re-awakening — Gen-Z TikTok users now regard it as an aspiration rather than an insult. They’re leaning into everything the bimbo stereotype entails, from pink Juicy Couture sweatsuits to glittery makeup looks to an unabashed acceptance that math is, in fact, pretty hard.

Anyone who wishes to embrace their femininity and sexuality is welcome on the bimbos’ glittery island, regardless of gender expression — Chlapecka address her audience as “bimbos, thembos, himbos, bimboys, or any ‘bo’ you wanna be” in a “get ready with me” video on her profile. But who isn’t invited? The straight, cisgender man.

The bimbo performance involves a breathy voice, poor enunciation, a consistent deer-in-the-headlights expression, and an air of blissful ignorance. However, by playing into every facet of the stereotype, these TikTok creators gain the power to subvert it.

With a high-pitched voice, bouncy gait, and exaggerated smile on her face, creator @Bamlarotten teeters into the frame. As she runs her impeccably-manicured fingernails through her blonde wig, she offers an enlightening perspective on the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

“We spent the last four years pretending that these people were just ‘ignorant hicks’ who didn’t know any better — we literally hold the entire wealth of human information in our hands right now. So they do know better, and they’ve known better this entire time,” she said. “In 2021, I am begging everyone to stop infantilizing racist white people and hold them accountable like you should.”

Visually, she adheres to the bimbo aesthetic, almost inviting viewers to make assumptions about her intellectual capabilities based on her

appearance. At the same time, she challenges these assumptions with insightful commentary on our society's inclination to justify racist behavior. She thus creates a disconnect between the viewer's expectations and their actual experience, which weakens the long-accepted stereotype that feminine women are vapid, uneducated, and not to be taken seriously.

To TikTok creator @BimboKate, this is the very crux of the bimbo movement — triggering a sort of cognitive dissonance within the straight male viewer. She told Rolling Stone that the bimbo performance enables her to become “everything men want visually whilst being everything they hate: self-aware, sexually empowered, politically conscious, etc.”

While some creators might find this strategy to be empowering, critics have found reason to pause. In a recent video, Youtuber Jordan Theresa fairly points out that the heavy make-up and revealing clothing often associated with the bimbo aesthetic are ultimately “living up to straight men's sexual preferences.” Can a performance that panders to the male gaze really be considered feminist? Are these creators truly rebelling against patriarchal oppression if they are fulfilling cisgender, heterosexual male fantasies?

@Bamlarotten dismisses this critique in one of her TikTok videos. “Can we talk about how heterosexist it is to assume that feminine-presenting people, especially hyper-feminine people, are doing it for the sake of and the attention of men?” she asked. “There's nothing feminist about demanding a certain form of gender presentation in order for marginalized people to ascertain validity in your eyes.”



@FauxRich, another one of the platform's more visible bimbos, echoes this sentiment. “Just because hyperfemininity is tied to the male gaze doesn't mean that's why women are doing it,” she said in a video. “Hyperfeminine women have been made fun of and literally demonized in traditional media and in person. Being a bimbo is so empowering to some people because they feel as though they had to hide their femininity to be taken seriously.”

“Bimbo TikTok” is not the first pop culture phenomenon to examine how society regards femininity — the ever-iconic film *Legally Blonde* challenged the bimbo stereotype back in 2001. Elle Woods, a peppy sorority girl with an affinity for the color pink and a valley-girl dialect, is repeatedly underestimated by her peers at Harvard Law, despite having fairly earned her spot at the institution. On the other hand, when Vivienne Kensington dresses in pantsuits and muted colors, her peers perceive her as intelligent and serious. Both women possess the intellectual capacity to succeed in law school, but the woman who abandons her femininity will always be taken more seriously in an academic setting.

Society's mold for intelligence is sculpted to favor masculinity, so much so that 65% of women reported workplace discrimination and 40% reported a struggle to be taken seriously by company leadership in a Hired.com study. Feminine individuals, including women, LGBTQ+ men, and non-binary individuals, should not have to "prove themselves" or erase facets of their identity in order to be taken seriously. Femininity is rarely associated with intellect, therefore unlearning these implicit biases will take time — which makes the mission of "Bimbo TikTok" that much more important. We must continue to challenge such ideals and challenge the way that we as a society measure intelligence and perceive femininity.

Further, this feminist crusade must be intersectional in nature. Even with BIPOC bimbos like @FauxRich and @Bamlarotten asserting that the bimbo lifestyle is "not a white aesthetic" in their videos, it's natural for women of color to feel excluded from the trend — after all, the mainstream media's bimbo archetype has historically been white, blonde, and thin. Chlapeccka, the epitome of the media's archetypal bimbo, boasts 2.5 million followers, compared to @Bamlarotten and @FauxRich's 100,000. As enjoyable as her content may be, her white privilege has undoubtedly contributed to her ascension.

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Despite its critiques and shortcomings, the intentions behind "Bimbo TikTok" remain clear: wearing pink and engaging in an educated debate about politics should not be mutually exclusive events, and embracing femininity should never lead to one's categorization under an outdated, misogynistic stereotype. As the movement to reclaim the term "bimbo" gains traction on TikTok, hopefully creators will continue encouraging people of all shapes, sizes, colors, and backgrounds to follow Chlapeccka's key advice: "finesse the capitalist society, finesse the misogynistic man, and wear cute clothes while doing it babe!"

