

“Betches,” “Slams,” and Gender Construction: Satire (Mis)Use in *Total Frat Move* and *Betches Love This*

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Introduction

Contrary to the over exaggerated and glamorized college lifestyle portrayed by the media and entertainment industries, attending a university does not revolve around partying and drinking. In an attempt to show the real experiences of university and Greek Life students, *Total Frat Move* and *Betches Love This* offer their own interpretations of the college experience through articles, photos, social media and user-submitted content. The content is geared toward 20 something year olds who are looking for relatable and humorous content to aid in procrastination and filling free time.

College students across the country have been joining fraternities for hundreds of years due to the camaraderie, connections and long lasting friendships gained from their membership. While philanthropic activities, job connections, and personal development are some of the publicized and positive aspects of being in a fraternity, the nitty-gritty, behind-the-scenes, aspects of Greek life are often hidden from the public. It was not until 1978 with the premiere of National Lampoon's *Animal House* that society received a fictionalized look inside fraternity life.

With the recent popularity of online blogging and introduction of multiple social media sites, a new way of exposing and showcasing the "authentic" college life experience has developed. The development of new media and advancement of the Internet brought virality and accessibility to information. In addition, it brings a greater potential for others to author and be exposed to incorrect and negative information. In the forms of a website and book, *Betches Love This* and *Total Frat Move* (TFM) attempt to offer an "authentic" and "relatable" inside look into the college experience. With the hopes of showing the world the hidden attractions of being in a university student and Greek Life member, topics include everything from drugs and drinking to

sex and partying. The authors of both sites attempt to expose the college lifestyle through satirical content; however, one site accurately uses satire to mock sexist ideals, while the other hides behind satire to promote patriarchal ideals.

Both sites employ sexist content, however, there are distinctions between the language, examples and mechanisms used. By developing a bizarre word, “betch”, The Betches intended to mock all the negative connotations associated with the word bitch. The ultimate goal of *Betches Love This* is to combat sexism via over exaggerated sexist language and examples. The Betches knew they could achieve a greater impact by relating to their intended audience with humor, sarcasm, and entertainment examples. *Total Frat Move* does not effectively employ satire because it is promoting the socially acceptable acts of sexism and patriarchy instead of ridiculing them. Based off its narrow-minded content, one should not rely on *Total Frat Move* for an accurate description of the college experience. While the site is geared toward fraternity members and sorority members, non-Greek life members read the site and enjoy the “satirical” content. But why is it that women get enjoyment out of being called “slam-pieces” and how does this effect society’s perceptions of women? (Livingstone, 2013; Total Frat Move: Total Sexism, 2011)? Should these women take name-calling as a joke or as something more serious?

While both sites were initially geared toward college students, they have widely gained importance and significance beyond their envisioned audiences. For multiple reasons, these sites have sparked interest from the media, feminists and rhetoricians. For university students, significance of these sites lies in the “realistic” and relatable nature of the content by embracing the “true” college culture. Both websites put a stereotypical and over exaggerated spin on the day-to-day activities of university students. However, *Betches Love This* does so in a way that correctly uses satire to combat sexism and encourage feminism.

The purpose of this paper is to dive deeper into the “satirical” nature of *Total Frat Move* and *Betches Love This* and look at its use of satire, gender construction, and impact on public opinion in terms of sexism, patriarchy, and feminism. Through effective satirical mechanisms, wordplay on the word bitch and symbolic reversal, *Betches Love This* uses over exaggerated examples, sexist language, and stereotypical topics to combat sexist ideals and promote feminism. Paradoxically, *Total Frat Move* negatively constructs females, promotes patriarchy, and fuels a hegemonic society through its misuse of satire.

Literature Review

Satire

Contrary to what some may believe, satire and humor are not interchangeable. While satire uses aspects of humor and sarcasm the definition of satire carries a significant social and societal impact. According to Jonathan Gray et al.:

Satire’s calling card is the ability to produce social scorn or damning indictments through playful means and, in the process, transform the aggressive act of ridicule into the more socially acceptable act of rendering something ridiculous. Play typically makes the attack humorous in turn enlisting the audience in a social rebuke through communal laughter (12–13).

Irony is one of the key building blocks of satire and many scholars have examined both of these literary devices in a variety of contexts. Satire has been most commonly examined through the platforms of theatre, politics, books, news, television, movies, and, more recently, websites. For example, many political cartoons showcase the technique of satire by trying to expose the stupidity or dishonesty of another party’s beliefs. *The Onion*, an entertainment website, is a classic example of satire because it prides itself on satirical reports of local and worldly news.

The use of satire is often cautioned by scholars within the fields of communication studies, journalism and film because of the potential for audiences to misinterpret the rhetorical direction of the piece. In her analysis “Missing the Joke: A Reception Analysis of Satirical Texts”, Ann Johnson suggests that misinterpretations are due in part to the nature of irony, upon which satire rests. When using irony, “possibility of misinterpretation is always there” (Tindale and Gough 10). With satire comes the potential for multiple understandings and evaluations of the text. Different audiences can interpret satire in very different ways, which also leads to its unpredictability. In addition to multiple meanings, some audiences may not realize the text is satire or vice versa. In some cases, an audience could read and interpret a text without realizing its satirical nature and interpret it in a way that actually goes against everything the author was trying to accomplish with the piece. While the author’s intention for a piece cannot be certain, the artifacts can invite an interpretation and construct an idea of supposed author’s intent, which then shapes the audience’s evaluations of the piece. If an audience interprets the author’s intentions as good then they will likely have a more favorable interpretation of the piece.

A study by Johnson et al., showed what they felt were blatantly obvious satirical videos and asked for evaluations immediately following (400). Only one of the four video clips from this study was considered to have a backfire effect, in that the participants took a satirical video to be serious instead of satire. The researchers gathered that audiences were indeed able to successfully analyze and distinguish satirical and serious texts. Accordingly, when audience members interpret a satirical text as reality, it is often because they believe the message to be “persuasive, credible or insightful” (Johnson et al. 411). In a more recent popular media example, Dave Chappelle often finds many of his satirical and humorous pieces to be misunderstood (Perks 290). Chappelle often uses racial satire as a way to critique society. An

essay by Lisa Perks, analyzed the implications of Dave Chappelle's often-misunderstood humor and how it can be seen as racism. A viewer can often have multiple understandings of a single piece. To ensure the proper use and understanding of satire, "Gring-Pemble and Watson asserted that 'both irony and satire require intense audience engagement' with the viewer/reader and author collectively creating a text's meaning" (Perks 293). While the audience may have very different understandings of a text, it is important to try and understand the author's serious or satirical intentions with the piece. How genuine and credible an audience views the author will also affect how the satirical text is interpreted.

There are strong social consequences associated with the racial stereotypes that *The Chappelle Show* employs. Because it is so well-known that the show is a comedy, viewers often take the "it's just comedy" defense (Perks 298). Contrary to what the participants might believe, the "it's just comedy" defense can still have negative social consequences on the acceptance of racism. Having the mindset of "you can make fun of anything about our society or people because it's a comedy show" is a naïve statement based on the assumption that all audience members will realize the satirical and comedic nature of the show and not let any of the racist stereotypes affect their future racial schemas (Perks 298). The participants understood that the show dealt with sensitive topics, but used the comedic frame as a defense to exonerate the show (Perks 291). Participants often interpreted the racial representations in literal terms instead of satirical. Rather than being accused of racial stereotyping, satire is used as a defense by the viewers for why they find the show funny. Because Chappelle is an African American comedian, he has more authenticity and credibility when speaking about racial topics.

In addition to comedy shows, satire is widely used throughout sitcoms. While examining the sitcom satire in *King of the Hill*, Ethan Thompson concluded that, "any humor that draws on

controversy, contemporary events, or simply the cultural context outside a particular program's fictional universe tends to have the term *satire* attached to it" (40). The reasoning and truth behind this statement could have a lot to do with the author's intended purpose of the piece. Authors could potentially be claiming "satire" as a form of defense and scapegoat for their actual intended purpose and audience interpretations. In order to avoid backlash from the public, controversial topics are often labeled as satire. In the case of comedy programs, there is often a "mock intolerant" character (Thompson 41). This is a critical part of "sitcom satire" and can be intolerant to races, gender, religions and more. The outrageousness of the character is one mechanism for asserting the satirical nature of a sitcom TV show, the result being that the content of the show is so outrageous that it cannot possibly be serious and consequently must be satirical.

Few studies have focused on the contexts of online media and social media. A study by Victoria Crittenden et al., surveyed the use of satire via online media, particularly social media (174). Since anyone with an electronic device can shape public opinion via the Internet, this paper focused on how satirical messages via online and social media can revolutionize public belief. Unlike movies and TV shows, anyone can voice their opinion via the Internet. Due to the virality of information, it is likely that social media will further the (mis) interpretations of satirical pieces of people all over the world.

Gender Construction

Media is society's gateway for receiving news. But often time's political and economic issues overpower other social issues such as gender stereotyping and power distribution among genders. Being such a powerful tool, media is highly influential over the masses by controlling what and how much of certain issues are covered. This control greatly influences society's

values (Sharda 43). Media's uneven distribution of content among genders is highly skewed, which leads to gender discrimination and the perpetuation of patriarchal values. Patriarchy is defined as "systems of ideology, social structures and practices, created by men, that reflect the values, priorities, and views of men as a group" (Wood 328) and that have both emotional and quantifiable components (D'Enbeau 18). In general, women are often characterized as being the weaker gender. This consequently makes society desensitized to important social and gender issues.

The media is known for desensitizing public perceptions of gender discrimination, especially in terms of sex and violence. Important issues such as sexual violence and rape are being pushed to the side for other "more important" issues such as politics and the economy. Not only is this putting the importance of rape below political and economic issues, but it is also creating an inequality among genders. As Adhikari Sharda notes in his "Media and Gender Stereotyping: The need for media literacy", "the power of the media in shaping the world's perception had increased manifold over the years" (43). The power and influence of the media will only continue to grow and the longer that the media continues to unequally display gender and social issues, the worse gender discrimination and stereotyping will become. For example, "less than one fourth (24 percent) of the people made visible or heard or read about on Television and print news worldwide is female" (Sharda 44). Not only is the array of topics covered unequal, but the amount of media coverage of women is highly skewed as well. By only showing women for 1/4 of all news coverage, society is constructing the mindset that women are less important, less valued and less significant compared to men. In terms of "politics and government", Sharda also notes that only 4% of those stories are about women (44). While more

and more women are becoming political leaders and government officials, the gender bias in the media coverage still remains.

Why is it that media portrays highly influential males as hard workers and achievers, while highly influential females are looked down upon as aggressive and unfeminine? Women in positions such as CEO, President, Senator, etc., should not be deemed “unfeminine” solely based on the stereotypes that are attached to their gender. Women are past the stage of being looked at as solely housewives’, however; there are still gender stereotypes within society and the workforce that need to be broken. Through its lack of female coverage, the media is perpetuating society toward patriarchal and hegemonic values. While feminists have made great strides toward equality, gender discrimination still remains throughout media, literature, and society.

Beyond news coverage, United States sitcoms are also fascinating platforms in which gender constructions promote patriarchal ideals. A study by Kimberly Walsh et al., compares earlier portrayal of genders to present day portrayals. Previously, men were portrayed as intellectually superior to women, but now more sitcoms portray women as physically and/or intellectually superior to men. Contradictory to what one might think, this does not solely help the feminist cause, but can instead fuel patriarchy. Sitcom gender constructions are actually belittling and making a joke of the bigger picture at hand society’s — acceptance of sexism. The study claims that the humor behind these sitcoms stems from “the myth of female dominance and breakdown of male authority” (Walsh et al. 124). The idea of female dominance, let alone equality, should not be a cause for laughter. While it is naïve to think that all sitcoms fuel patriarchy, scholars have argued that sexist humor and gender constructions can restrict and empower feminism. The study notes, “that even when it appears that women have become more powerful characters on television, hegemonic narrative devices are often used to maintain

patriarchal ideology” (Walsh et al 125). Instead of blatantly and exclusively showing women as housewife bimbos, the entertainment industry has found more discrete tactics and mechanisms to maintain the patriarchal ideology. *The King of Queens* and *According to Jim* reverse the standard husband and wife roles by showcasing a smart and hard working wife with a fatter and unmotivated husband (Walsh et al. 125). However, while women might be placed in the powerful/more masculine positions, this reverse sexism fails to break the negative gender stereotypes associated with being a woman.

The root of inaccurate gender construction in media is that “patriarchal ideology is so embedded in everyday discourse that it becomes normal to general audiences, and its presence easily goes unnoticed” (Walsh et al. 126). Society is caught up in this cycle of discrimination where gender inequality within TV shows often goes unnoticed without a second thought. This goes back to the rationale of “its just comedy,” when actually the issue at hand is far more significant than “just comedy.” The short and long term affects of news and TV shows using humor to overshadow their chauvinistic gender constructions cannot be overlooked. While it is no longer socially acceptable to be blatantly sexist and there are many laws that forbid sexism, gender inequality still exists and will continue to exist if media’s constructions of gender do not even out.

Lastly, advertisements influence media’s construction of gender and the perceptions of women. More recently, there have been ad campaigns trying to combat objectifying advertisements of women, but as some say, “sex sells.” Women are constantly portrayed as sexual objects with big boobs, scandalous outfits, and faces covered in makeup. These demeaning representations of women do nothing for the cause of gender equality. While some women argue that it is empowering to showcase their femininity via sex, others argue that there

are other, less sexual and objectifying ways, to get the point across. It seems counterproductive to promote sexual exploitation and objectification in order to gain respect and gender equality. While there are many approaches and platforms through which one can end sexism, the fight for gender equality should not promote the very thing feminists are hoping to end.

Satire combatting Gender Inequality

There are many different mechanisms that work to fuel or resist patriarchy. Due to its polysemic nature satire allows people to have a varying interpretations of one text. For example, a feminist piece using satire might be interpreted as fueling patriarchy and sexism while its intended meaning is to actually combat patriarchy. Why is it acceptable for sexism to be a laughing matter and can it actually be used to achieve gender equality? Many scholars hope that sexist humor has the potential to promote feminism; however, others do not seem to be convinced. Sexist media fails to understand that “what is told as a joke is not really a joke at all, but instead a form of power used to oppress and subordinate entire groups of people” (Bemiller & Schneider 4). Sexist jokes come in many different forms and while the media may not be proposing direct violence toward women, their indirect suggestions and stereotypes support a patriarchal society, which further oppresses women. What people fail to understand is that these sexist jokes can have lasting impacts on one’s life. Because these jokes reinforce the gender stereotypes within society, it makes it harder for women to break the cycle and obtain equality with men.

Because of the potential for highly negative consequences, studies have explored how online sexism affects sexual gender roles, violence against women and objectification of women (Bemiller & Schneider 1). While jokes can be fun, they can also reinforce the power imbalances of various groups and create a tolerance or desensitization of important social issues. It is

disturbing that skewed gender constructions still exist and continue to reinforce the old sexist ideals from the 1900s and prior. Bemiller and Schneider found that violent jokes about women trivialize violence toward women and desensitize the public to female sexual violence (23). In terms of advertisements and the ideal image of women, sexist jokes regarding women's appearance can actually reinforce the stereotypes. It seems that women are often the targets of most sexist jokes and thus males remain less aware and more accepting. The complexity of sexist humor stems from its potential to fuel sexism and patriarchy. Does sexist humor further hegemonic ideals or does it break down the patriarchal ideals? Satire can be used as a cover up and disguise for the hegemonic ideals promoted by a site. The remainder of this essay will assess the content of *Total Frat Move* and *Betches Love This* and how the websites employ satire to fuel or restrain sexism within society.

New Media Patriarchy and the Concern with Satire

Total Frat Move: Background

Upon entering college, many students are faced with the choice: to become a member of Greek life or not. In the form of a website and book, *Total Frat Move* (TFM) offers an “authentic” and “relatable” inside look into the college fraternity experience. Madison Wickham and Ryan Young launched the *Total Frat Move* website on June 1, 2010. According to Stats Tool, *Total Frat Move* garners approximately 5,000 unique visitors per day (“Totalfratmove.com”). The *Total Frat Move* book has a 3.8 out of 4 ranking on GoodReads and reached #10 on the New York Times Best Sellers for Hardcover Non-Fiction in February of 2013 (“Total Frat Move”; “Best Sellers”).

With the hopes of showing the world the hidden attractions of being in a fraternity, topics include everything from drugs and drinking to sex and partying. *Total Frat Move* was derived

from two other widely popular sites, “Texts from Last Night”, which is a blog filled with shocking and scandalous texts and “FML”, which is a blog where every day life’s unfortunate moments and other fail funny stories are shared (Shontell). Along with the book and website came an infamous hashtag, #TFM. Examples of this hashtag include, “Themed parties: the gentlemanly way of telling girls to wear something slutty #TFM”, “Telling fat chicks that the frat castle is at capacity #TFM” and “The ‘hey beautiful’ mass text to every girl in your phone at 2:00 a.m. #TFM” (*Total Frat Move*). The creative and fictional depiction of Greek life is pulled from real life stories or the author’s own personal experiences while being in a fraternity (Levine). According to the author of the book, W. Ross Bolen, *Total Frat Move* is intended to be a satirical form of humor and entertainment with a targeted audience, fraternity and sorority members, who also have a specific brand of humor to which they all relate (Galluccio; Livingstone).

While the site is geared toward fraternity members and sorority members, non-Greek life members read the site and enjoy the “satirical” content. The men hoped to make a viral site that would expose the unique side of college Greek life humor that was normally hidden within the community. The purpose of TFM is to show the “real”, “authentic”, and uncensored side of Greek life via personal stories and exposés. Topics on the website include, “Your Dad Knows Why You Wear Yoga Pants, And So Do I”, “50 Things Sorority Girls Should Know About Fraternity Guys” and “Sterling Cooper’s Guide to Raging Effectively” (*Total Frat Move*). While the website includes a “news” column, the focus of TFM is on humor and entertainment, not moral issues.

As the site continues to grow, so does its audience. People of all ages have either heard about or read the site and are aware of its notoriously humorous and outrageous Greek life

content. As with any controversial media site, there are those who enjoy the content and those who do not. With its increased popularity, TFM has gained attention beyond the initial fraternity and sorority members. After reading countless blog posts and book and website reviews, the audience of *Total Frat Move* can be divided into three subsections: those who support the content and see it as a true and authentic description of Greek life; those who believe the site to be satire with the sole purpose of humor and entertainment; and, finally, those who do not support the site due to its sexist content and negative portrayal of Greek life. Though not entirely, the last group contains many feminists who disapprove of the sexist content, negative and inaccurate impression of Greek life and the way TFM rewards sexist language and actions. Due to the artifact's controversial, humorous and questionable "satire", each audience identifies and interprets the artifact in a different manner. While one audience may love the site and consider its content equal to that of the Bible, others may find the site completely appalling and a form of prejudice and patriarchy.

Total Frat Move: Analysis

Total Frat Move falls into the category of online sexist humor and could be a strong modern-day component in examining online sexist humor and its implications on a hegemonic society and violence toward women. While TFM may not propose direct violence toward women, their obscene images and articles about women are patriarchal forms of power used to oppress women. Through graphic sexually explicit images and degrading and offensive language, *Total Frat Move* successfully constructs the gender of women as nothing more than a group of loose, good-looking girls who wear minimal to no clothing, like to drink and have sex. Consequently, *Total Frat Move* constructs males in a very positive light with great knowledge, authority and power.

In a world where women are trying to be seen and treated as equals to men, *Total Frat Move* halts this effort and continues the cycle of patriarchy and the hegemonic male. For example, there is currently a contest happening on *Total Frat Move* to see which sororities across the United States have the “hottest girls” as seen via their sorority’s Tumblr. This contest is depicting women as nothing more than a pretty face or nice body. The images posted on *Total Frat Move* are almost always exploiting women in some shape or form. Many of the images involve alcohol, lack of clothing or something sexually constructed. These images include women bending over with bathing suits on, shirtless women with only TFM stickers over their chests, women in lingerie and more. *Total Frat Move* has columns titled “Instagram Babe of the Day”, which shows a picture of a “hot” girl each day and “Rush Boobs of This Week”, which displays pictures of topless women with “Rush XYZ fraternity” written on them (*Total Frat Move*). In previous examples, women are allowing and self-promoting sexist ideals against their own gender. How are women supposed to achieve gender equality when the only thing sites like *Total Frat Move* care about and showcase are good looks? While *Total Frat Move* does include some images of males in poor frames of mind, the main focus is usually drawn to the big-chested blonde “bombshell” doing a keg stand at a fraternity party. The patriarchal portrayal of males leaves females with nothing more than good looks. *Total Frat Move* has no shame in promoting the objectification and misrepresentation of women via their site.

Terms such as “slam piece”, “sluts”, and “fat chicks” are just a few of the negative titles women are frequently referred to on the *Total Frat Move* site. The chauvinistic language serves as a barrier for gender equality. Through diction, the site is negatively classifying and promoting a sexist view of women. Diction is one of the most powerful rhetorical devices used by *Total Frat Move*. The choice of words, reinforced with a superior chauvinistic tone, construct the

female gender in an unequal and objectifying light. While the tone could be considered satirical, many fail to see this based off the frequency of demeaning posts, style of writing and consistently undignified topics covered. Not only is the choice of words by the *Total Frat Move* writers degrading to women, the terms also perpetuate the notion that it is acceptable to publicly call women these names.

Due to its content, portrayal of women and furthering of a hegemonic and patriarchal society, TFM has widened its audience and gained attention from many feminists (Woszczyzna). Through its objectifying and stereotypical content about women, *Total Frat Move* stands for everything feminists are working to fight against. Feminists continue to look into the reasoning behind *Total Frat Move*'s popularity and into why both men and women take enjoyment out of reading such distasteful and objectifying content. The blog *Feministing* discusses how "readers of this site subscribe to this kind of sex negative humor, hence why the site sustains" ("Total Frat Move: Total Sexism"). Additional bloggers have also questioned women's participation these horrifying articles. Nicole Woszczyzna writes about this issue in her blog post on Feminspire:

Why would a woman want to encourage sexist and violent behavior? And why is feeling accepted and desired by such awful members of the male community so important to so many young women? This is infuriating because of how much it goes against the ideals of feminism (and common sense as well), but it is also unbelievably sad to think that so many women are either ignorant to their own oppression or they simply do not care enough to stop it. (Woszczyzna, 2013)

Ignorant audience members and sites like *Total Frat Move* are the exact barriers that stand in the way of breaking the cycle of inequality between men and women. The perpetuated cycle of inequality and patriarchy is overshadowed by TFM's satirical disguise and entertainment. By

acknowledging and enjoying the humorous façade that TFM displays, readers and subscribers are condoning a hegemonic society filled with sexism and the misrepresentation and objectification of women.

While both genders have the ability to submit potential articles for the site to publish, the agency lies in the hands of the males. Males are dominating the site with sexist content, for

example in Image 1 broker1856 comments on the “Instagram Babe of the Day” article saying “Looks pretty trashy, and I like it.” In addition, it can be seen in the upper left hand corner of each comment that 187 up-voted and approved of broker1856’s

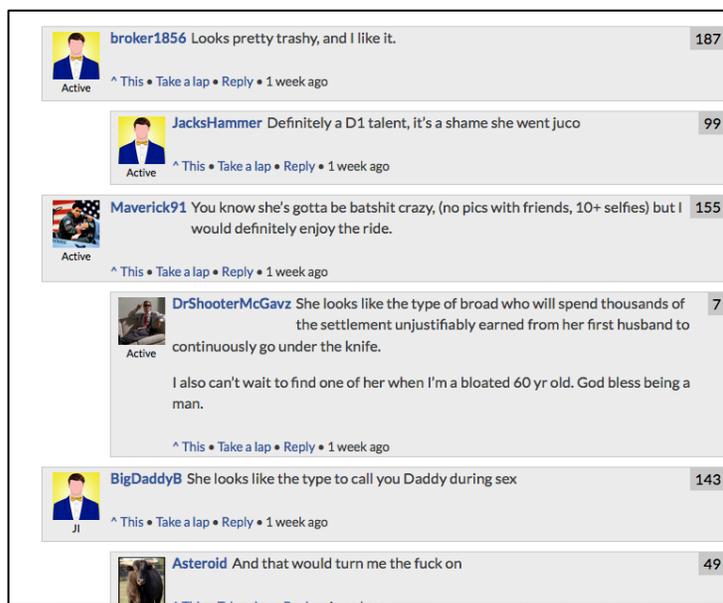


Image 1: Sexist user comments from an article on the *Total Frat Move* Site. “Instagram Babe Of The Day: Julianne From Palomar College”.

comment. Females accept and promote sexism on *Total Frat Move* by reading the articles and even

submitting their own content. In order to be considered for the “Instagram Babe Of The Day”, females submit their Instagram accounts. Not surprising, most posts include exposed body parts, minimal clothing and objectifying male comments. In addition, in an article titled “Sexist or Awesome”, many comments approved of the sexist images and laughed at the “humor”. Call sign_Goose in Image 2 claims he is not a sexist, however his comment on this article speaks otherwise. He states in Image 2, “I’m not really an advocate of sexism, sexism is wrong, and being wrong is for women”. In addition, his comment was up-voted 237 times.



Image 2: Sexist user comments. “Sexist or Awesome”.

For the most part, males are in control of what gets published thus leading them to continually post content that demeans women. Women have little control over the posted content and how their gender is displayed on the site. *Total Frat Move* has already formed their brand and does not seem to be changing it anytime soon. Because agency is given to the males, *Total Frat Move* has full ability to control the negative portrayal of women and sexism throughout their site. The audience’s condoning and accepting of this sexist content is only fueling male domination over women. The site has been successful so far and will continue to catch people’s attention with their risqué and over the top content that both patronizes and degrades women.

While the spread of information via the internet and social media has become a well-researched topic, the reasoning behind the acceptance and spread of “satirically” sexist websites and content is still unclear, especially when accepted by the oppressed gender or group. A study by Ashley L. Arnold found that Greek males thought sexist jokes to be significantly funnier than did Greek females and non-Greek males and females (97). The spiral of sexism within society continues because of this type of sexist content.

Total Frat Move’s misconstrued use of satire leads audience members to have mixed interpretations and understandings of the website’s sexist content. TFM is a modern-day attempt at satire with the purpose of disguising the patriarchal and sexist language and humor. Because

the boundaries of satire are still unclear, rhetoricians could explore the negative effects on an audience and society when satire is not properly used and understood. By failing to understand the definition of and the effective use of satire, *Total Frat Move* actually mimics the function of an exposé.

The creators of *Total Frat Move* claim that the content of their site is satire (Galluccio). However, as seen through the articles themselves and the audience's reactions, it is unreasonable to classify the site as satire. The overt disrespect of women via degrading images, language, and name-calling supports patriarchy and the hegemonic male. Because of its deceptive satirical nature, *Total Frat Move* invites audience members to read their content in three different ways. The first audience supports the content for its authentic description of college life as seen in the comments from an article titled "How To Get Better Head from your Slam?", ThatMadFratter comments on the article stating "Well written, informative & insightful" while ThunderFucked comments saying "I Love how there was zero sarcasm in this".



Image 3: User comments demonstrating the support for sexist articles and content. "How To Get Better Head From Your Slam".

The second audience reads the site as satire. Even though many individuals claim to not take the site seriously, there is little evidence via comments on the site of people showing a clear understanding of the so-called satirical nature of the posts. Most comments on the website approve of the sexist content, while comments defending the satirical nature of the site can be

found in the comment section of feminists articles condoning *Total Frat Move*. For example, a user named Frat Bot comments on a feminist blog saying, “you have to realize that a lot of it isn’t serious. It’s just so obnoxious and repulsive it’s funny. I have a few posts up and I don’t mind GDI’s.”

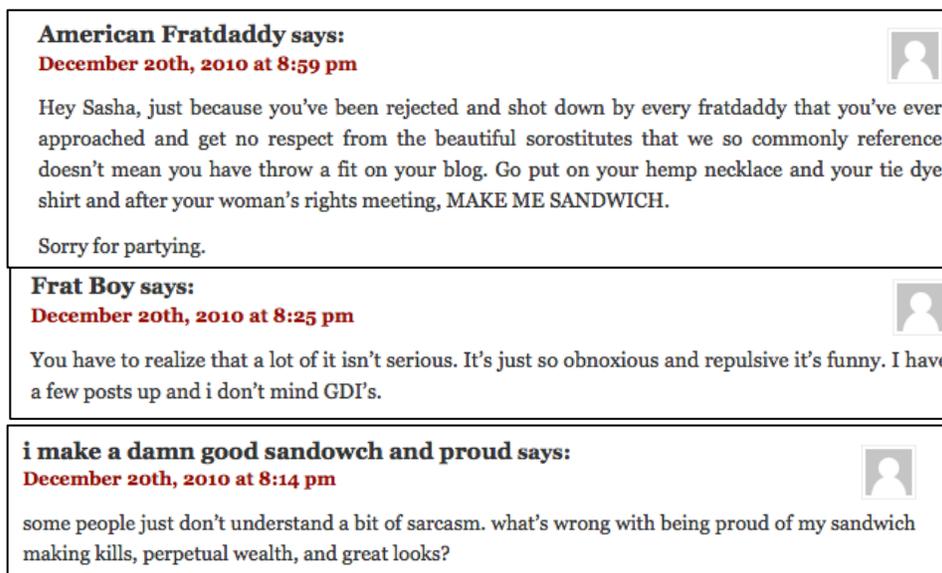


Image 4: Users commenting on the satirical nature of *Total Frat Move*. “Total(ly Desplicable) Frat Move”.

The last group involves audience members who do not support the site due to its sexist portrayal of women. Most of the audience members who do not support the site are females and have voiced their opinions via blogs, not on the comment section of the *Total Frat Move* site. These blog posts are often criticized by males (and some females) who respond with sexist comments or claims that the website is sarcastic.

Regardless of whether the audience actually supports the content or not, *Total Frat Move* negatively portrays women in a discriminatory manner and promotes the ideals of a patriarchal society. *Total Frat Move*'s claim of being satire is nothing more than a cover-up for the sexist and patriarchal ideals it is propagating. The misuse of this rhetorical device adds confusion to

many audience members' interpretation and understanding of *Total Frat Move's* content and motives. While some many find the content humorous and do not take it seriously, others view these articles as accurate representations of women and Greek Life. Nicole Woszczyzna, a blogger from Feminspire, argues that while "sites like these are meant to be somewhat satirical and taken lightly... they become an issue when they perpetuate problematic aspects of our society, such as outdated gender roles that can be directly tied to sexism and even rape culture" (Woszczyzna). The simple presence of this content fuels patriarchy and sexism throughout the world. The men on the site are the ultimate hegemonic males, believing they have power and authority to treat and represent women as inferior. Too caught up in the entertainment aspect of the site, many audience members fail to realize the underlying societal problems *Total Frat Move* promotes.

Even if the site is supposed to be satire, the content further perpetuates a cycle of inequality. At first glance, the immediate theme of the site seems to be portraying the humorous ins and outs of Greek Life. However, looking deeper into the site, it is nothing more than sexism hidden behind an alleged claim of satire. Since many are unsure whether the site is actually satire or not, the message of *Total Frat Move* is unclear and ambiguous. TFM is using humor to mask inequality and perpetuate atrocious principles such as sexism, gender inequality and the hegemonic male. The site constructs gender in a degrading way where there is a superior gender (males) and an inferior gender (females). While some may view the site as just comedy, audience members need to understand the underlying issues *Total Frat Move's* humor is trying to mask.

As with any piece of writing, there is potential for people to interpret it in numerous ways. *Total Frat Move* easily gives society an avenue to publicly read about and promote a negative gender construction of women. It also serves as a resource for bigots to showcase their

sexist behaviors and ideals. While most of the posts are done by the staff of fraternity members, anyone can submit a post to *Total Frat Move* and share their opinion. The creators of the site have explicitly stated that there is no moral component to *Total Frat Move* (Carroll). The lack of morals allows for the sexist and patriarchal content to be accepted and posted. Furthermore, the site negatively over exaggerates Greek Life to seem nothing more than partying, drinking and having sex.

Not only does the content support patriarchy, but it also gives off the impression that all Greek Life members share these same ideals and support this type of behavior. If an outsider were to use *Total Frat Move* as their only source of Greek Life information, they would likely assume fraternity members are nothing more than jock-like egotistical guys who have no morals or respect for women. Not only does this look bad on the Greek community, it hinders any chance of ending gender stereotypes and achieving gender equality.

Betches Love This: Background

The *Betches Love This* website was created by Jordana Abraham, Samantha Fishbein and Aleen Kuperman in 2011 while seniors in college (Seligson). With its blog-like style and content, *Betches Love This* primarily targets the demographic of collegiate females. Many of the articles focus around various topics such as Greek life, entertainment, fashion, boys and gossip. For avid followers, some of the most-well known columns include, “The Betch List”, “Betch of the Week”, “Top 10 Lists”, and “Betches Love This College” (*Betches Love This*). *Betches Love This* has a primarily female target audience and does not limit the content to strictly Greek life related posts. According to the site:

A betch is the one who has everything figured out. Everything she (or sometimes he, we're looking at you Gay BFFs) associates with is trendy, every guy she interacts with

wants to date her and every girl she meets is desperate to be her friend. She speaks her mind and commands a room just by being in it. She's never waited on line at a club or bar in her life. She wears the best clothes and can pull off risqué, cool outfits with ease and without looking like a whore, or Lady Gaga ("About a Betch").

This definition is primarily targeting a collegiate 20 something year old female, who is known for drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, getting all the guys, going to the gym, drinking Starbucks, and getting everything handed to her on a silver platter. On many occasions the founders have stated that the site uses it funny and sometimes offensive language in the form of satire. The articles are meant to poke fun at the ridiculousness of the female lifestyle portrayed through media standards and celebrity trends. According to Jordana Abrahams, "We provide an outlet for people to laugh at these behaviors" (Seligson). This relatable sense of humor is one of the biggest draws to the *Betches Love This* site, many female followers have agreed that they love the straightforward and blunt sense of humor because its often things they have thought themselves. For example in Image 5, many females took to the comment section of the article "The Best Bachelor Recap You'll Ever Read: The Women Tell All" to share how funny they thought the article was. Brianne comments, "LAUGHING OUT LOUD. Great recap, where has this been all my life?!"

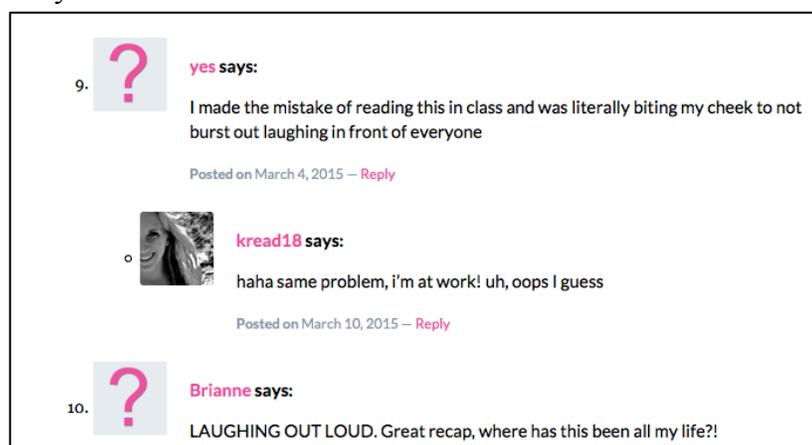


Image 5: Users commenting on the hilariousness of the Bachelor recap article. "The Best Bachelor Recap You'll Ever Read: The Women Tell All".

The Betches are not afraid to stir up a little controversy and give their audience a good laugh. There are many articles talking about ways to skip class, avoid becoming a nice girl and how to master drunk vomiting. While these posts are not things your mother would approve of, they are posts many collegiate females can relate to and often times are too afraid to actually admit. The blunt and widely accepted humor has proven to be a little too much for some individuals who view the content as sexist and downright mean. While quotes like “Betchiness comes from the inside, unlike beauty” are intended to poke fun at society’s standards of beauty, it is understandable how the fine line between reality and satire could be unclear (“About a Betch”).

Regardless of the slight resistance, the *Betches Love This* website has 3 million monthly unique visitors and 6.5 million monthly page views (“Media Kit”). The primary website audience is 80% women and 60% between the ages of 18 – 24 years old. In addition, *Betches Love This* is very active on social media with 54,000 Facebook likes, 1.2 million Instagram followers and 148,000 Twitter followers. Beyond the *Betches Love This* website, they released a book called “Nice is Just a Place in France” in March of 2013 (“Media Kit”). According to the website, “Nice is Just a Place in France” reached #12 on the *New York Times* Best Seller's List and has been at #1 in the Paid Humor category on iTunes for over 6 months after its initial release” (“Media Kit”). The book is also available in three different formats: paper book, e-book, and audio book.

While the writers of *Betches Love This* have stated the site is not meant to be a “self-help book”, it most definitely appears as a guide for women to survive college by getting all the guys, attending the best parties and dressing to the nines. The wide variety of posts all relate back to achieving a thriving social status in which everyone wants to be you and envy’s you. *Betches*

Love This is a site written by and for women. To an outsider, this site can be seen as promoting the stereotypical sorority lifestyle. And to some, *Betches Love This* is the modern day “Mean Girls”. The site thrives off of the self-obsessed, mean and well-dressed sorority girl who loves partying, her friends, boys and daddy’s bank account. Almost every post incorporates at least one of society’s stereotypical expectations of women through over exaggerating the stereotype in a sarcastic and satirical tone.

Betches Love This: Analysis

Through the definition of a “betch” as one who “wears the best clothes and can pull off risqué, cool outfits with ease and without looking like a whore, or Lady Gaga”, the creators of *Betches Love This* are portraying women as loose, sexual, drunk and conceited individuals. Forget studying and trying to become doctors, a betch’s only obligations are to partying, drinking coffee, tanning and shopping. The goal of feminism is to promote equality among genders, but how can a betch ever be seen as an equally independent individual when women are portrayed as only picking husbands based off wealth and relying on their dads for financial support? For a feminist, the fundamentals of a betch can easily be seen as promoting patriarchy.

Quite obviously the term “betch” is a play off the word “bitch”. This mechanism is a symbolic reversal in which betch can be seen as a form of mockery toward the typical use of bitch. According to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, symbolic reversals “transform devil terms society has applied to women into god terms and always exploit the power and fear lurking in these terms as potential sources of strength” (Campbell 516). The Betches took a word that negatively portrays women and made it into something empowering and positive. Referring to women as bitches has a very negative connotation, especially when coming from the mouth of a male. More recently, however, women (and feminists) began using the word “bitch” as a way to

actually fuel feminism and stop patriarchy. The Betches took this mechanism a step further and created a whole new word in order to combat the negative connotation and stereotypes associated with being a bitch. They took a word that negatively portrays women and made it into something empowering and positive. This symbolic reversal is actually helping women break the stereotypical society norms. Women do not always have to be perceived as nice and innocent in order to be judged positively by society. Campbell and other scholars agree that these devil terms actually help women break social norms and show society the real implications of sexist behaviors and stereotypes.

The word “betch” is deliberately similar to the word “bitch”. Using the word “betch” instead of “bitch” clears up some uncertainty and allows women to bash patriarchy and all things commonly associated with being a “bitch” via a strategically misspelled word. The switching of one letter was an ingenious move that differentiated the “betches” from “bitches”. The creators did not necessarily intend the actions associated with being a betch to be taken literally. Rather, the authors saw this term as a chance to bring attention to the important issue of gender equality via a reliable and authentic satirical mechanism. Using the word betch instead of bitch creates a disassociation that adds credibility and authenticity to The Betches fight for feminism. Using satire allows The Betches to combat sexism towards women with sexist examples. By combining satire and reverse psychology, *Betches Love This* hopes to positively construct females via negative and stereotypical language and examples. The content is meant to be sexist and ridiculous; the authors are poking fun at a betch by exaggerating all the stereotypical gender constructions of women throughout society.

Through multiple popular culture references and an entertainment column on the website, *Betches Love This* satirically represents women as obsessed with the latest trends and celebrities

in order to combat this stereotypical assumption by society. While it might be accurate to assume that many women enjoy their fair share of popular culture, it would be sexist to assume that is the only thing women care about. The polysemic nature of the book and website provides proof as to why some people view the site as sexist and others view it as a key proponent of the modern-day feminist movement. It is no secret that American society is obsessed with being skinny, pretty, and perfect. *Betches Love This* satirically mocks these ideals in a way that could leave women questioning whether the site supports or disapproves of society's standards of women. The polysemic interpretations of satire comes into play when readers cannot determine whether *Betches Love This* is advocating drunken sex or satirically mocking the assumed drinking habits of most collegiate Greek Life females. The writers purposefully employed the satirical mechanism, "betch", to confirm that *Betches Love This* is indeed using satire to combat controversial gender stereotypes and expectations within society.

Articles such as "The Betches Guide to Feminism" are tackling societal problems head on, while also using humor and mockery to advance and enhance their argument ("The Betches Guide to Feminism"). According to this guide, Beyoncé "shows us that feminism has less to do with burning your bra and man-hating and more to do with loving yourself and getting the respect you deserve, it's time for betches to embrace the term and not puss out when somebody asks them point blank if they're a feminist. (Note- the term "puss out" probs not super pro-feminist but, whatever. We all take on what we can handle.)" ("The Betches Guide to Feminism"). While it is important to keep in mind the explicit feminist argument, it is also important to recognize the significance of the phrase "puss out". "Puss out" is a variation of the phrase "pussy out", which implies that someone is backing out of a commitment via the use of a derogative, sexual and sexist word - pussy. Using the phrase "puss out" in a pro-feminist article

seems controversial and paradoxical. The Betches acknowledge the use of the phrase and even make note that its usage is not “super pro-feminist.” However, this type of exaggerated and obscene language demonstrates just how far The Betches are willing to go to showcase society’s accepted sexual phrases that many individuals approve and use. Again, The Betches are using satirical and sexually charged expressions to combat the sexually based stereotypes and expectations of women throughout society. This “guide” to feminism is using popular culture

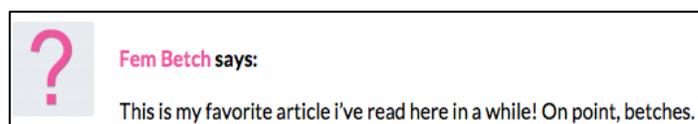
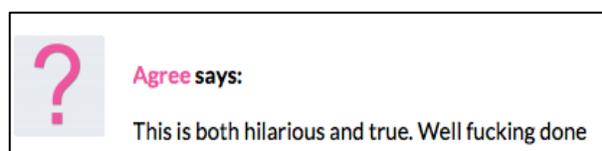


Image 6: Users supporting feminism and Betches Love This. “The Betches Guide to Feminism”.

stand up for gender equality. Many women took to the comment section on “The Betches Guide to Feminism” to share their support for The Betches and feminism. According to a user

named “yayyy!!!!” in Image 6, “love this article, feminism and betchism go

hand in hand.” A user named

“Agree” comments, “This [article]

is both hilarious and true. Well fucking done.”

The media stigmatizes powerful women as being unfeminine and aggressive, however, *Betches Love This* uses the definition of a betch to actually empower and encourage females to be “aggressive” and “betchy” while still maintaining and flaunting their femininity. *Betches Love This* proves that women can be powerful, strong AND feminine. The site constantly encourages women to dominate and empowers them to speak their minds, especially with males. *Betches Love This* is becoming the modern-day bra burning and emboldening women to flaunt all the aspects that make women, women. For example, in an interview with HerCampus (HC), the

Betches Love This (BLT) answered a question regarding the feminist and anti-feminist purposes of the site. Her campus asked, “How do you respond to the critics who say that your site is anti-feminist? BLT: We say: LOL critics, LOL. What's anti-feminist about knowing you're the shit? We're a new kind of feminist...the hot kind” (The Betches). This response is not surprising since The Betches are purposely striving for a cocky and arrogant demeanor as a way to showcase and combat the double standards between men and women. The use of satire combined with feminism gives The Betches power to distance themselves from the widely-accepted stereotypes of passive and unaggressive women. Therefore, the highly aggressive stance is meant to expose the skewed perceptions of men and women, while fueling feminism. While the Her Campus interview response could be taken as hard-hitting and bold, if this response came from a male, it is likely that no one would think twice about the remark. In addition, the added element about beauty attempts to attack the stereotypical expectations of all women needing to be “hot”.

With more recent new media satire, there have been ongoing discussions about whether certain websites should be considered satire or not. Many discuss whether the aggressive, exaggerated and sexist content of *Betches Love This* is actually a form of satire used to support feminism. While some believe the site is working against the cause of feminism, many feminists have failed to examine the strategic use of the word “betch” as a mechanism that promotes the feminist ideals. The founders are using “betches” as a satirical mechanism to bring to light the highly controversial and stereotypical standards of women in media and society. In an interview with Hannah Seligson from the *New York Times*, the founders of *Betches Love This* confirmed that the site is indeed satire (Seligson). Using the word betch creates a form of authentic satire as compared to *Total Frat Move*, which does not use any obvious mechanisms to clarify the satirical nature of the content. The polysemic nature of online media and satire shed light on why

some people see *Betches Love This* as reality rather than satire. While the objectives of the site might be unclear to an outsider, one should focus on the use of “betch” as a guiding step to understanding the satirical purpose of *Betches Love This*. Contrary to what some people might believe, satire is being used as a weapon against sexism.

The previously mentioned “Betches Guide to Feminism” describes important concepts such as patriarchy, slut shaming, and gas lighting in a very light-hearted manner with an emphasis on popular culture. Defining important words via satire instead of formal language creates a common ground with the audience and establishes rapport. The writers are describing the critical issue of feminism in a way that the audience can understand and relate to. The article “Not Having Sex with Bros (Sometimes)” is The Betches way of telling women to avoid being too sexually promiscuous and avoid having sex on the first date. The article states, “the difference between your average slut and a betch is that a betch doesn't just use her hotness to get laid, she uses it to manipulate the bros who think they're in charge” (“Not Having Sex with Bros (Sometimes)”). Addressing important matters such as femininity and self-respect with satire makes the issues seem more relevant and relatable to the standard female. Satire combined with vulgar language and popular culture references, allows many college women to feel connected to the site and understand critical societal issues via applicable examples and terminology. A Women’s Studies blog project examined the site and came to the conclusion that *Betches Love This* “argues that women who use their appearance solely for sexual appeal are just sluts, but women who use their appearance to manipulate men are powerful” (“Media Culture Midterm Project: ‘Betches Love This Site’ Blog”). What the blog fails to understand is that The Betches are not urging women to manipulate men in order to be powerful, rather they are using exaggerated satirical examples to show that women should strive to be powerful no matter what

society is telling them. *Betches Love This* is calling attention to the hypocritical standard that women should focus on their appearance and not worry about being powerful. Since that is the expectation that the media has of women, *Betches Love This* satirically encourages all women to use their looks to their advantage and empowers them to be strong, powerful women. The mechanism through which *Betches Love This* tries to showcase the inequalities between genders should not be taken literally. The examples are purposefully exaggerated and extreme in order to shed light on the ridiculousness of female beauty and sexual appeal standards perpetuated by society. *Betches Love This* is not actually encouraging women to exploit their bodies to be powerful, but rather using extreme examples to establish that women are not inferior to men and good looks do not equal gender inequality. Throughout the entire site, *Betches Love This* is tackling highly controversial and sensitive subjects, with extreme and humor-driven examples that prove to be relatable and motivational to their audiences. While satire is not an effective type of persuasion for every type of audience, *Betches Love This* has examined their main audience and established the importance college women place on relevance and humor.

While posts like “The Betches Guide to Feminism” obviously promote feminism, other posts seem to solely focus on promote partying, alcoholism and maintaining a high social status. How can one read these provocative posts and recognize the deeper meaning is not actually promoting poor life choices? Is it correct to assume that the intended audience will understand the indirect message behind articles such as “How to: Drink Like a Betch”? Again, the Betches are taking extreme measures to prove a point and contradict the mainstream societal expectations of college women, especially those in a sorority. One could even argue that the Betches are using a form of reverse psychology by advocating drinking and partying to their readers. While it cannot be assumed that all readers will understand the satirical nature of the site, the mechanism

of the word “betch” offers some clarity and authenticity to the meaning behind the site. The site is intentionally controversial, causing readers to think twice about what they are reading. It is with satire that these young women are able to poke fun at highly controversial and important issues in society. The varying levels of satire, humor and vulgarity, is one of the biggest draws for readers. One should not judge the content of an article by its title because often times the title is a purposefully misleading attention-getter. The purpose of a satirical comedy is to expose the shortcomings of society via humor and that is exactly what *Betches Love This* is endeavoring to do. Whether right or wrong, *Betches Love This* is a satirical piece showcasing how many college women live their day-to-day lives.

Conclusion

In summation, *Total Frat Move* promotes a patriarchal society through its misuse of satire, while *Betches Love This* resists sexism through its proper use of satire. Through multiple examples of articles and comments, this analysis shows how satire can call attention to significant social issues through humor and mockery when used properly. Determining whether or not an author effectively uses satire can be quite complicated due to the polysemic nature of the device. Often times the use of satire can lead to multiple interpretations and misinterpretations. While it is impossible to guarantee that audience members will interpret the site like it was intended to be, authors can employ various literary devices and techniques to make the purpose of the site as clear as possible.

As seen through two different artifacts, *Total Frat Move* and *Betches Love This*, claiming the use of satire is different from correctly employing satire. Just because an author claims his or her work is a form of satire, does not mean it is properly engaging in satire. Using a mechanism, such as wordplay, can help the audience determine if the writing should be read and interpreted

at face value or if there is a deeper literary device in use. While both *Total Frat Move* and *Betches Love This* claim to be satire, *Betches Love This* uses a mechanism and *Total Frat Move* does not. Without a mechanism it can be difficult to determine whether satire was effectively and legitimately used. The made-up word, “betch”, sets *Betches Love This* apart from other websites who claim they are using satire. *Total Frat Move* does not have a technique to demonstrate the deliberate switch from serious to satire. A reader could easily come across *Total Frat Move* and interpret the content at face value. This interpretation would likely facilitate and promote negative, sexist and stereotypical beliefs about females.

In addition to an overlooked satirical mechanism, people can submit their own content on *Total Frat Move*. Many of the individuals submit sexist content because it is in line with what they read on the site. While audience members might be the ones writing some of the sexist content, *Total Frat Move* is condoning sexism by ignoring the chauvinistic remarks and leaving the content on the site. There is no denying the freedom of speech for individuals, however, *Total Frat Move* should take responsibility for the negative and sexist environment they are promoting. Since the Internet significantly influences public opinion, the patriarchal ideals promoted by *Total Frat Move* have the potential to influence societal norms and expectations.

Besides the author’s explicit claim about *Total Frat Move* undeniably being satire, there is no mechanism or bizarre word to back up these claims. Regardless of the author’s intentions, *Total Frat Move* perpetuates a socially accepted sexist culture, while *Betches Love This* promotes feminism. It is understandable how these sites may seem very similar on the surface, however readers should look deeper and compare the use of language, humor and sarcasm before making assumptions regarding similarity. *Total Frat Move* lacks authenticity and serves as an exposé rather than a form of satire. *Betches Love This* combats sexism through over exaggerated

examples and language, while *Total Frat Move* is more concerned with exposing, condoning and laughing at college life shenanigans. The Betches ridicule and attack society's stereotypical expectations of women through satire and symbolic reversals. Unlike *Total Frat Move*, The Betches turn a negative portrayal of women into something empowering and positive. Through an unexpected platform, powerful use of language and stereotypical examples, The Betches are uncovering and tackling a critical social issue. The Betches' mockery of gender stereotypes helps women break down negative gender constructions, whereas *Total Frat Move* fuels them.

Total Frat Move and *Betches Love This* are just two modern-day examples that attempt to employ satire via the blog posts and social media. These examples demonstrate the evolution of satire in new media. While the literary device remains the same, the techniques for employing satire vary depending on the platform through which it is used. If not used correctly, satire can actually promote the ideals that were intended to be ridiculed. Future research should dive deeper into the various techniques and requirements of satire when used via social media. In addition, researchers should examine the power of satire on gender constructions via social media. As seen through its use via multiple platforms and types of discourse, satire can be a very persuasive tool when used correctly. *Betches Love This* and *Total Frat Move* are exemplary examples of how satire can be interpreted in a variety of ways. As seen through the satirical mechanism of symbolic reversal, being referred to as a betch can empower women and encourage them to fight for gender equality. However, being referred to as a "slut" or "slam-piece" will always put women in a degrading and negative light. The Betches hope to end sexism and gender stereotypes, while *Total Frat Move* does nothing more than perpetuate it.

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