

The Intersection Between Broadway and Borderline Personality Disorder:

A Review of the Subversive Musical-Comedy, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*

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Season One advertisement featuring *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* co-creator and star, Rachel Bloom, as Rebecca Bunch. Photo Source: [Crazy Ex-Girlfriend Fandom Wiki](#)

As it approaches the ten-year anniversary of its release date in October, I find myself with the urge to return to the comfortable embrace of one of my favorite shows, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. The satirical musical comedy never fails to comfort me with its distinct sense of humor and musical theater campiness. I first watched this show sometime in late June 2019. I chose it at random from a list of comedies on Netflix and ended up falling in love with the outlandish songs and eccentric characters. I certainly did not expect the show to transform from a self-aware romcom into a portrayal of mental health issues and the path to self-improvement. Yet co-creators Rachel Bloom and

CRAZY EX GIRLFRIEND

Created By: Rachel Bloom and Aline Brosh McKenna

Starring: Rachel Bloom, Vincent Rodriguez III, Santino Fontana, Donna Lynne Champlin, Pete Gardner, Vella Lovell, Gabrielle Ruiz, Scott Michael Foster, Skylar Astin

Rating: TV-14

Genres: Romantic, Comedy, Drama, Musical, Satire

Seasons: 4

Episodes: 62

Premiere: October 12, 2015

Finale: April 5, 2019

Network: The CW

Where to Watch: Apple TV, Amazon Prime Video, Fandango at Home, YouTube

Aline Brosh McKenna have managed to create a show that is able to seamlessly blend real life experiences and struggles with comedy. It's no wonder that *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* is so critically acclaimed, even if the show itself had a historically low number of viewers during its runtime, to the point that bringing this up became an inside joke in the show itself. While it's premise may seem niche, this show truly has something for everyone.

The Plot

Warning for Spoilers

The plot of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* revolves around Rebecca Bunch, who is played by co-creator Rachel Bloom. The pilot introduces the audience to Rebecca as a miserable yet successful lawyer in New York. After a chance encounter with her ex-boyfriend, Josh Chan, Rebecca makes the impulsive decision to quit her job at a high-profile law firm and move to Josh's hometown of West Covina, California with the intention of rekindling their relationship. The rest of season one follows Rebecca's attempts to reconnect with the charming but not too bright Josh in increasingly convoluted ways that vary in terms of legality and morality.

Here is where *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* diverts from the norms of a traditional romcom, by depicting Rebecca as an emotionally unstable and questionable protagonist. Her behavior becomes increasingly more irrational through the progress of the show, culminating in the show's

Supporting Characters:

Josh: Rebecca's ex-boyfriend from when they were teenagers. Played by Vincent Rodriguez III.

Darryl: Rebecca's awkward and incompetent boss. Played by Pete Gardner.

Paula: Rebecca's coworker and new best friend. Played by Donna Lynne Champlin.

Heather: Rebecca's cool neighbor and friend. Played by Vella Lovell.

Greg: Local bartender and Josh's best friend. Played by Santino Fontana, later Skylar Astin

Valencia: Josh's beautiful and vicious girlfriend. Played by Gabrielle Ruiz.

Nathaniel: Rebecca's broody boss in later seasons. Played by Scott Michael Foster.

emotional tipping point halfway through season three. In this season, a suicide attempt leads to Rebecca being diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, a mental disorder that is characterized by intense and unstable moods and difficulty with interpersonal relationships. From here, the show becomes about Rebecca coming to terms with her disorder and taking accountability for her past actions.

The Music

The main element of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* that makes the show so unique and fun is the use of musical numbers during significant moments in the plot. If you're the type to enjoy elaborate musical sequences shows, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* has more than enough to satisfy you. These songs are essential to the show, with each episode containing somewhere between two to four songs and 157 total songs across the show's four seasons. Each song parodies a specific musical genre or artist. Some of my favorites of these parodies include the season two song "The Math of Love Triangles" which is an homage to Marilyn Monroe's "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" performance, and the season three song "Let's Generalize About Men" that has an 80's pop influence.



"The Math of Love Triangles" from S2E3. Performed by Rachel Bloom.
Photo Source: [Crazy Ex-Girlfriend Fandom Wiki](#)



"Let's Generalize About Men" from S3E1. Performed by Donna Lynne Champlin, Rachel Bloom, Vella Lovell, and Gabrielle Ruiz. Photo Source: [Crazy Ex-Girlfriend Fandom Wiki](#)

As someone who loves musical theater, I've always found the use of songs to add depth to a story. Music can have just as much nuance when it comes to storytelling as any other method, and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*'s execution certainly doesn't disappoint. Rachel Bloom—along with her co-writer Jack Dolgen and producer Adam Schlesinger—uses her experience with musical comedy to create songs that are not only entertaining but contain important details about the plot and characters. It is revealed in season one that these musical numbers are actually a method of escapism the main character, Rebecca, developed to cope with her traumas and mental health issues through her love of musical theater. This gives the audience the context that most of these songs are a direct reflection of Rebecca's psyche and feelings towards people and situations.

A direct example of how Rebecca's feelings about a situation are shown through these songs can be seen from the beginning in the season one song "I'm So Good At Yoga", where the character Valencia is depicted as bragging about how talented and desirable she is while teaching a yoga class Rebecca is attending. By the end of the song, however, it is clear that Rebecca is just projecting her own insecurities about who she is and using it to justify her hatred towards Valencia. The song version of Valencia says cruel things to mock Rebecca, like "Screw you, you're fat" and "My father didn't leave me". Rebecca so strongly believes that Valencia is better than her that she vilifies her



"I'm So Good At Yoga" from S1E2. Performed by Gabrielle Ruiz.
Photo Source: [Crazy Ex-Girlfriend Fandom Wiki](#)

We're in a yoga class
Now is the time
To let your mind go blank
And focus instead
On how awesome the yoga teacher is.

Look at me, look at me
I'm so good at yoga!

- "I'm So Good At Yoga" [S1E2 Lyrics](#)

without even getting to know her. Meanwhile, real-life Valencia actually gets along with Rebecca and only starts to dislike her once she realizes that Rebecca is Josh's ex later in the same episode. This song not only shows Rebecca's jealousy, but also her self-hatred to the point of her own detriment.

Mental Health

While a comedy at its core, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend's* focuses heavily on Rebecca's mental health issues and the impact they have both on her and those around her. This show doesn't shy away from depicting the darker and unglamorous side of borderline personality disorder, but it also makes sure to handle the topic responsibly and with the respect it deserves. We can even see this in the earlier seasons when the illusion of Rebecca just being a quirky girl in love is often undercut by her delusional and obsessive behavior, but show's writing ensures that Rebecca still remains a relatable and loveable character. Her desperate search for true love, fear of rejections, and need for validation from those around her are experiences the audience can relate to and empathize with, even as they become more extreme and difficult to watch.

After her suicide attempt and diagnosis, the show is refreshingly candid about the time and effort that goes into treatment. The episode "Josh is Irrelevant." (S3E6) is one of my favorite episodes for this reason. This episode follows the immediate aftermath of the attempt. Rebecca goes from being excited to receive a diagnosis to fearful of the stigma and the idea of needing lifelong treatment, leading her to ask her therapist, Dr. Akopian, for a new diagnosis. Later, when

Valencia and her other friends express their fear that Rebecca will attempt again, Rebecca apologizes and admits that she cannot promise that she won't try again in the future. Both of these moments are relatable for those who have experience with mental health struggles, but often are ignored or sanitized when depicted in



A scene from S3E6 where Rebecca discusses her diagnosis with her friends Heather, Valencia, and Paula. Photo Source: [PoGDesign TV Calendar](#)

media. *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* portrays the feelings and struggles of both Rebecca and those around her with respect, which is consistent throughout the entirety of the series.

While the show may have started as a love story between Rebecca and Josh, by the last season it is a love story between Rebecca and herself. This is even reflected in the literal episode titles. Season one's episodes formatted to always include Josh's name and an exclamation point,

Evolution of Episode Titles:

"Josh Just Happens to Live Here!"
(S1E1)

"Getting Over Jeff." (S3E7)

"I Want to Be Here" (S4E1)

indicating Rebecca's love and excitement. From there the exclamation point shifts into a question mark to show her questioning, then into a period to denote surety, and finally into no punctuation to indicate what I perceive to be a hopeful and open-ended possibility. Josh's name is also slowly phased out, and by the fourth season is replaced with I.

My Thoughts

There's a lot of good about this show, but like everything it has its weak moments. I consider the show's strongest seasons to be one and two. Season one is the perfect set up for the premise and lures the audience in with its humor and lovable characters. The unhinged actions she takes here and in season two set in motion the rest of the show and are the catalyst for her growth. I also personally found the plot lines and writing in these seasons to be the most interesting. Season three starts off strong and has the bulk of the show's wonderful discussion of mental health. Yet it ends oddly with the introduction of a prison arc that I personally did not enjoy, although this is up to personal interpretation. The interpersonal relationships between the characters in this season, however, are some of my favorite in the show. Season four is personally my least favorite for several reasons. In addition to the jarring subplot at the beginning, this season contains several time jumps that make the plot feel disjointed and rushed. However, the depiction of Rebecca's journey towards healing in this season makes it worth the watch.

If you're looking for a new comfort show, I cannot stress how highly I recommend *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. I often find myself revisiting my favorite episodes and songs, even almost six years after I first watched the show. While it is not perfect by any means—I'm always going to skip most of season four—it is truly a one-of-a-kind show that deserves all the acclaim it has received and more.

About the Author

Heidi Nantz is an undergraduate student at East Tennessee State University majoring in English with a minor in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She enjoys watching women's hockey, reading weird novels, and petting every cat she can find. She can be contacted at nantzhc@etsu.edu
