

New Media and Post-feminist Critical Pathways

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Postfeminist popular culture has long been fascinated by the question of the “work-life” balance, a negotiation that has been repeatedly articulated as the primary obstacle facing modern women. This conversation has taken place to the neglect of other, arguably more dire issues, yet it borrows from more organized feminist movements an interest in the quotidian realities of female lives. Whereas attention to the daily rhythms once led to theorization of, for example, inequalities in domestic labor, today the personal ceases to be political and routinely becomes merely personal.

The relentless focus on women’s life choices evidences the stronghold that neoliberal notions of individualism and self determination have in imagining female subjectivity, and this discourse runs through a host of not only popular culture products, but also serves to organize the very questions asked of female lives. To combat this myopia, one direction that postfeminist research might take is to ask what inquiries and issues are being precluded by current framings, which tend to rehearse the same old tired binary between coupledom/marriage/childrearing and professionalization. To this end, I here suggest a number of ways that we might look at current media trends, in an attempt to recognize both where feminist work is occurring, and to highlight spaces where forgotten feminist insights are increasingly more exigent.

Reimagining the feminist community online

New media realities suggest a potential reinvigoration of the now-anachronistic “consciousness-raising group” in that one might view sites where women share tales of for instance, health struggles, instances of discrimination, parenting issues, workplace dilemmas, or inquires regarding sexual identity, as spaces of collaboration and support. There is necessary work to be done to quantify first, the plethora of feminist inspired online sites, and to categorize the ways in which they frame their interventions and the different levels at which they invite participation. Secondly, we might investigate the sorts of experiences and rewards one gains from such online resources—for instance, how does posting one’s encounter with a street harasser on hollabacknyc.com differ from linking an article from salon.com’s feminist-inspired Broadsheet to their Facebook page? How might we differentiate these activities from participating in an online support group for female academics of color? Do users imagine themselves engaging in a participatory democracy when they undertake such actions? To what extent are these feminist acts, even though they may help to circulate postfeminist platitudes?

Combating life cycle determinism

One of postfeminism’s most hallowed adages is the idea that time is always running out for women, and yet one might argue that life cycles are being imaginatively reconstructed as a result of women’s longer life spans. This reformulation has perhaps also been spurred by attempts at economic recovery that have resulted in an increasing dependence on laboring women. To what extent are the large numbers of boomers, their impending (or delayed) retirements, and the swarms of younger people who are themselves now un- or under-employed helping to re-narrate the concept of life stages? Relatedly, narratives of motherhood appear less reliant on the nuclear family model, as

teen parents, adoptive families, and single women who choose assisted reproduction gain increasing visibility and even desirability. Postfeminist scholars might ask: should we celebrate the increasingly pervasive belief in women's financial independence as a means to evade biological determinism? Does this new focus on, for example, the "Cougar," suggest the dawning of a new era when women's worth is less measured by her claims to youth and reproductive potential, or is this merely a phase consistent with an obsessively capitalistic culture determined to assess value by economic calculation alone?

Western women as global tourists

Though the *Sex and the City* franchise is gradually ceding its privileged position as the object du jour for scholars of postfeminism, the obscene turn taken by *SATC 2*, whereby a fantasized Abu Dhabi is instrumentalized as a means for affirming that all women, everywhere, want to be like these fashioned, feminized four, suggests that the question of postfeminist imperialism deserves scholarly attention. In response to this text, and the apparently similar *Eat, Pray, Love*, we might ask: to what extent are postfeminist products underpinned by a touristic ethos? How frequently are the pleasures they promise premised on a narcissistic notion of Western life, whereby capitalistic celebration of the self is paired with essentialist assumption about the other? How have blindnesses that so wracked the second wave (particularly with respect to race and economic advantage) come to permeate postfeminist discourse? Such impoverishment in terms of global awareness and regarding the concept of female entertainment suggests that feminist scholars might assist in dismantling postfeminism's coupling of pleasure and narcissism and, in so doing, reframe what counts as female community.