

New Media and Post-feminist Critical Pathways

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For this roundtable discussion, I focus on the question, “Will a transnational focus be increasingly necessary, as Western, neoliberal notions of global capital and feminine identity take hold in other contexts?” Although postfeminism has received much attention among feminist scholars, it has been examined exclusively by Western scholars in Western contexts. My goal here is to deepen our critical ways of thinking about postfeminism in non-Western contexts.

Such a goal is especially crucial now that television programs that particularly target women viewers are not only largely being circulated on a global scale but also affecting programming practices in other countries. Among those, the transnational flow of what feminist media scholars have pointed out as postfeminist media texts has been much more active than any other kinds of media texts. For example, *Ally McBeal* has been syndicated to more than 50 countries. *Project Runway* has produced local variants in other countries including Canada, Norway, Australia, the Philippines, and Korea. This phenomenon in the traffic of transnational media raises some critical questions. How do we go about the transnational flow of postfeminist texts into different parts of the world? Does the Western concept of postfeminism hold the same meaning in other contexts?

There is an interesting story about *Sex and the City (SATC)* and Korean women. *SATC* was introduced in early 2000s in Korea by Orion Cinema Network (OCN), a popular movie cable network. The popularity of the show got even bigger when it was aired on the OCN’s sister channel called On Style. On Style, which was established in February 2004, identifies itself as a women’s channel targeting 20 to 34 years old women. According to a press interview, Jaehyun Kim, the channel director, has acknowledged, “The reason *Sex and the City* was so popular among Korean women is not because of [the four women’s] luxurious shoes and clothes, but because of their independent and honest lifestyle and their friendship.” Interestingly, while *SATC* was gaining popularity among the viewers, brunch businesses in Korea came along and started being popular among young Korean women. A popular column associates this new cultural lifestyle of young Korean women with the popularity of *SATC* that four single New York women always get together and talk about their lives (sexual lives mostly of course!) at their brunch meetings.

While having a brunch with friends at a cafeteria is nothing new for Western women as seen in *SATC*, this new cultural wave indicates a variety of things about contemporary women’s lives in Korea. Now having a 20,000 won (\$20) brunch at a cafeteria in a Sunday morning means that Korean women have more money and leisure time for themselves.

In Korea, Confucianism, the dominant ideological system persisted throughout centuries, arguably has sustained the patriarchal notion of femininity that women’s space is only limited to the domesticity. As many scholars have pointed out, the deeply rooted culture of Confucianism has existed through the industrialization and modernization of the state in the mid 20th century. In the historical context, it is not hard to understand where women spend their money and time: for others. In a culture in which women’s sacrifices for others have been normative, the scene that women spend money on themselves may be seen as a lack of morality. Consumption was used to fulfill traditional feminine virtues, which emphasize women’s roles as mothers, wives, and daughters-in-law. Yet, as they have slowly gained financial resource to express their desires and needs while adjusting themselves to the new system of capitalism, women started consuming things not only for others but also for themselves. Thus, in some sense, thriving consumerist

culture among young Korean women could be understood as a reaction to the long lasting culture of patriarchal notion of female consumption.

However, this is one side of the coin. Going back to the brunch story in Korea, we need to ask who are these women that have time and money to do a \$20 brunch on a Sunday morning. Of course, these women are likely to be financially stable and single and live in urban areas. Therefore, the feminist leaning of the re-characterization of postfeminist culture is limited to a certain kind of groups of privileged women. This kind of criticism echoes a critique of postfeminist culture in West, that is postfeminism works for and centers around the middle-class heterosexual white women.

As the transnational flow of postfeminist media texts from the West became active, Western, neoliberal notions of global capital and feminine identity seems to take hold in other contexts and this indicates that a transnational focus will be increasingly necessary in the study of postfeminism. Exploring how the Western notion of postfeminism is re-characterized in different cultural and historical contexts, Korea in this case, I argue that the concept of postfeminism needs a careful attention when it is examined in other contexts.