Sarah Banet-Weiser, **Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny**, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018, 240 pp., $83.89 (hardcover).

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Sarah Banet-Weiser's new book **Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny** offers an extensive critique of the current social, cultural, and economic landscapes that promote popular feminism and misogyny. Banet-Weiser illuminates the networked relationship between the two movements by analyzing various examples from advertising, politics, Internet forums, and campaigns from both feminist and men's rights organizations. According to the author, we are now living in an era when feminist discourses are highly visible in mainstream commercial media (p. 2). We can easily find seemingly feminist slogans or phrases in the corporate advertising campaigns of Nike, Dove, or Verizon, whose messages ostensibly "empower" young women who are vulnerable or lack confidence. The means of gaining this confidence, of course, is through consuming their brands' products rather than directly challenging patriarchal systems.
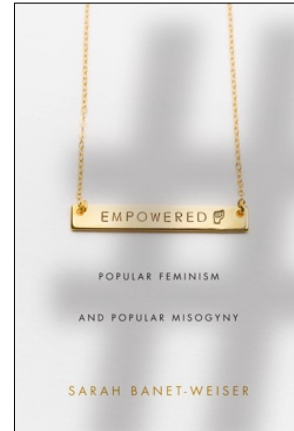
This form of popular feminism is not new. However, it substantially resembles the discussion on "evolved" feminisms influenced by a neoliberal society, such as postfeminism and neoliberal feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004; Rottenberg, 2014). The postfeminist ideal, as Banet-Weiser describes, positions women as autonomous agents who are now emancipated from outdated sexism and patriarchal restrictions. Thanks to these social changes, women are now able to take on responsibility of finding their own success by self-development and skill acquisition (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2007). Similarly, neoliberal feminism looks to resolve the inequality between men and women by situating women as individualized, entrepreneurial, and creative subjects who are capable of balancing family and work through effective utilization of resources (Rottenberg, 2014, p. 22). The logic of popular feminism also aligns with neoliberal feminism, in the sense that it acknowledges the vulnerable position of women, but it sees this only as an individualized problem that can be overcome by self-development, such as having a confident attitude. Banet-Weiser also emphasizes popular feminism's demand for inclusion of more women in social, economic, and political realms. Similar to liberal feminism, this too is framed as a cure-all solution for the gender problem (p. 12). This distinction is important to explain the networked relation between popular feminism and popular misogyny, since popular feminism positions women as vulnerable. This position helped instigate popular misogyny's backlash, a reaction explained later in the book.

The main contribution in naming current trending feminism discourses as "popular feminism" is that it effectively illuminates its central logic of "an economy of visibility." Its "networked relationship" with popular misogyny is a consequence of its hypervisibility. These are not individual social phenomena, but rather two movements connected as structural forces. In chapter 1, "The Funhouse Mirror," Banet-Weiser describes an economy of visibility, a system in which popular feminism expressions and practices are

circulated, and clicks, likes, or followers form a new kind of currency (p. 10). This system easily erases marginalized groups of women by only highlighting White and middle-class girls as the subjects who need to recover from the "crisis," creating a valuable market for empowerment (p. 47). She also points out that this system only makes certain media expressions hypervisible, which does not challenge any structural issues but only encourages the inclusion of women in business and the STEM realm. By using a voice that is intentionally "not angry" and that conforms to the neoliberal logic of the entrepreneurial subject, these media expressions and practices are actively reproduced and perpetuated. For popular feminism, visibility is not a means for achieving gender equity, but visibility becomes its only purpose.

In chapter 2, "Shame," Banet-Weiser addresses the popular feminist discourse "Love your body." The message, while "empowering" on the surface level, does not confront the structural issue of sexism and sexual crimes, but only focuses on young women's individual self-esteem and bodily asymmetries. This body positivity discourse "injures" men, as it does not recognize that women need men, bringing popular misogynists to shame women as a way to take back men's "agency" through revenge porn and online sexual harassment (p. 67). In chapter 3, "Confidence," she engages the topic of self-esteem from both the perspective of popular feminism and popular misogyny. To popular feminism, self-esteem refers to economic confidence. Situated within the context of the neoliberal vision of self-development, making money is often considered as a cure-all strategy for the gender wage gap and glass ceiling (p. 96). Within the discourse of popular misogyny, this increasing confidence among women apparently takes away confidence from men. To regain their "sexual confidence," men turn to places like the pickup artist industry, which encourages the view of women as sexual objects to be conquered and claimed (p. 113). In chapter 4, "Competence," Banet-Weiser brings the discourse around tech fields to further illustrate the neoliberalist vision of popular feminism and its backlash within popular misogyny. Popular feminism points out an exclusion of women in STEM fields, which are widely recognized as promising career options, and encourages young women to learn "how to code" to be more competitive (p. 147). This demand of inclusion threatens "nerds and geeks" and instigates "toxic geek masculinity," (p. 152) in which men feel entitled to their power and recognition in tech fields while fearing their expulsion into an outside world where alpha males rule.

Banet-Weiser warns in the book that, while the increased accessibility and visibility of feminism has limited power to influence sexisms and gender inequality as it avoids confronting the structural issue, a backlash from popular misogyny is referring not only to media expressions and practices formed in online spaces but also to a discourse that is reified into institutions. This includes the policy and legal realms of the US government, well illustrated by the passage of anti-abortion bills and laws, and undoubtedly, the election of Donald Trump (p. 33).

By unveiling the system that promotes popular feminism and its interrelation to popular misogyny, this book offers a nuanced and contextualized critique on the current trend of feminism and misogyny in popular US culture. Nevertheless, a topic left unquestioned throughout the book is the author's own positionality and self-reflexivity. I argue the author's reflection matters, especially because I do not contextualize this book as social scientific research that tries to achieve "strong objectivity" by proving a causal relationship between popular feminism and popular misogyny. As Banet-Weiser states, the examples cited in the book are not "sampled" because of their certain unique qualities; each of them was used as one social text to illuminate a point (p. 6). If this is the case, it is extremely important to let readers understand

how her perspective and identity might affect what counts as a valuable example and what does not. In the preface of the book, Banet-Weiser states her identity as a dedicated feminist. While I do appreciate her reflection on how a feminist lens has shaped her worldview, I hoped to see how the author's intersections of identity influenced her standpoint to observe popular feminism and misogyny.

The book offers an acute critique on popular feminism's lack of intersectionality, noting that its attempts to universalize all women as a single entity ends up focusing the attention only on White, cis-gendered, middle class, and heterosexual women. This critique aligns with the criticisms of feminists of color who argue that White feminists have ignored intersectionality by generalizing all women's experiences as identical (McCall, 2005). These same critiques are also present in the Conclusion, when the author mentions White feminism's charge on centering gender as the most central identity category reflected in the 2017 Women's March (p. 181). While the author recognizes the criticism directed at feminisms that lack intersectionality, which I do think is an important critique on contemporary feminisms, I couldn't find in the book how she navigates her own positionality around these issues.

Nevertheless, *Empowered* offers an extremely timely and critical perspective toward understanding the current topology of feminism and misogyny in popular US culture and can benefit a wide range of readers. With its various tangible examples to illuminate the theorization of popular feminism and misogyny, general readers who don't have prior knowledge on feminist research could enjoy reading it. In addition, the academics who are interested in transformed feminism in neoliberalist contexts will learn various tangible examples as well as gain a unique perspective to start research.

## References

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