

Pop Feminism: An Analysis

In 2016, the cult classic *Ghostbusters* was remade. The original story remained largely unchanged save for one crucial detail – all the leads (and a few of the secondary characters) were women. This all female reboot has then gone on to inspire the recent all female *Ocean's Eight*, a remake of the previous *Ocean's Eleven* series. The remake was shrouded in misogynistic criticism from its inception. Feminism had gone too far! The notion of women was out of place and far fetched in a universe that had established ghosts as being a real thing. Of course - much of this criticism was transparently bad and on no solid rational grounds. It seemed that the movie had inspired many of feminism's critics to come out of the wood work and shroud it in more hate than it usually is in internet discourse.

Feminism today is an amalgamation of various different movements. There are many different wings of feminism and these can even contradict each other. Feminism is by no means a single movement – instead it's a group of people who are working under a broad umbrella term, for better or worse. Ultimately, all feminists are united by one thing – their desire for women and men to share an equal footing. What they disagree on is how to go about it. Unfortunately, this nuanced take isn't really seen in mainstream parlance. Feminism's criticism is often offered up with little to no nuance or complexity, and the medium of "HAHA! TRIGGERED SJW FEMINIST REKT" doesn't help advance any discourse.

There is an opposite side of the spectrum, however. There is, in the popular culture consciousness, at least, a quiet creeping up of neatly packaged palatable feminism served on a silver platter. The aforementioned *Ghostbusters* remake could maybe be considered a part of this feminism. "Pop feminism", as it's been designated is all about "Girl Power!". It's about the countless pop songs today, belting out women's rights. It's the "fierce" and "woke" celebrities who parrot the most basic foundations of feminism ("men and women should be equal, I guess?") and are heralded as the perfect social changemakers of our time. It's about the countless advertisements ranging from Dove's natural beauty campaigns to the numerous sanitary napkin advertisements that show a woman being practically invincible on her period. It's about wanting the "First Woman President of the United States!", just for the sake of having a woman president instead of critically examining the woman in question.

It becomes easy to see that for more involved activists, this seems like the literal lowest common denominator of feminism. This is socially acceptable feminism. This is feminism that challenges the status quo to the most minimum level possible. This is wealthy women who are in positions of power patting themselves on the back for doing so. This is, to put it best, marketable feminism. It becomes quite frustrating when you see less than ethical brands selling "GIRL POWER" and other feminist anthems, simple because it's the new "hip" thing, or to put it more eloquently, it's a consumable good. In today's capitalist society, it seems it's all about imaging and not concrete action or activism.

The most telling example of this campaign is Dove's "natural beauty/beauty coming in all forms" campaigns. Most of us are probably familiar with these feel good advertisements. Over the years, they've taken various forms – but the gist of all of them is the same. Women come in all shapes and sizes – and they're all beautiful. It's a great sentiment, which would be more palatable if it weren't for the brand's obvious hypocrisy. Critics have pointed out how Dove's "naturally beauty" campaign consisted of a lot of photoshopping and retouching. Worse, Unilever, Dove's parent company is also responsible for two other brands – Axe (also known as Lynx), and Fair & Lovely. Axe has an ad campaign which seems to be spiritual opposite of Dove's – with scantily clad models objectified in

multiple ways. Fair and Lovely's entire brand is built on making women insecure. This is soulless, divorced from reality feminism. This is feminism that is built for the sole reason of consumerism. This is vapid.

Another trope that I'm quite irritated by – and forgive me if this comes across as a minor pet peeve – is the "Strong Woman Character". Don't get me wrong – I have no problem with strong women in my media. What I have a problem with is the archetype of a "Strong Female Character". Often it seems that writers think that the only way to write a confident woman is to give her more traditionally male characteristics – make her more aggressive, make her make fun of weaker male characters, make her not like feminine gender expression etc. A woman who is feminine isn't often designated to "Strong Character" status. There are exceptions to every rule of course, but it seems that there are enough examples of this trope to make it irritating enough.

In the end, there are multiple stories one can cite about the demerits of the popular depictions of feminism. Whether it be the soulless corporations trying to cash in on something that's popular right now, or writers who seem to be unable to write female characters that are complex or nuanced, it seems easy to get disillusioned by this version of feminism. It's an interesting debate to note how exactly this introduction to feminism might even have adverse reflections on the rest of the movement as a whole. Getting people to rally up to buy overpriced T-Shirts with feminist slogans is easy – getting them to adopt them is harder.

Of course, it's not all bad. Feminism entering the public consciousness and being heralded is definitely preferable to the alternative – and as established, there are enough people demonizing the movement as it is. Pop feminism could prove an efficient gateway to more serious issues and to more intersectional feminism, in general. On the other end, we've seen examples of how these depictions of feminism can be soulless and uninspired – and that's where we need to draw the line. Because such harmful depictions of feminism might even lead to isolating people. We just need to do more good than harm.