POPULAR FEMINISM

AND POPULAR MISOGYNY

SARAH BANET-WEISER

EMPOWERED

EMPOWERED

POPULAR FEMINISM

AND POPULAR MISOGYNY

Sarah Banet-Weiser

Duke University Press Durham and London 2018

© 2018 DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS. All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Courtney Leigh Baker
and typeset in Warnock Pro and Avenir
by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Banet-Weiser, Sarah, [date] author.
Title: Empowered : popular feminism and popular misogyny /
Sarah Banet-Weiser.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2018. |
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018014915 (print)
LCCN 2018016343 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478002772 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478001683 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN 9781478002918 (pbk. : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Feminism—United States. | Misogyny—
United States. | Popular culture—United States. |
Feminism. | Misogyny. | Popular culture.
Classification: LCC HQ1421 (ebook) | LCC HQ1421 .B355 2018
(print) | DDC 305.420973—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018014915

Cover art: "Empowered" necklace by Fierce Deer (etsy.com
/shop/FierceDeer).

This book is dedicated to my mother,

ANNE LAVERNE BANET.

She is the strongest person I know,

and taught me the two crucial things about life:

believe in yourself,

and don't take shit from anyone.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

On November 9, the day after Donald Trump was elected president of the United States, I wrote the following:

> On election night, on my way home from work, my 15 year old daughter texted me. Her text read: "OMG. I yelled at my entire team about Donald. It was so cool!" I responded with encouragement. A bit later, she texted me again and said "it will be bad if he wins." I replied immediately: "he won't." Another while later, she texted "I'm scared." I replied that I was on my way. She texted back: "momma hurry he's winning." In a short text trajectory, my remarkably mature, self-possessed daughter moved from a position of empowerment to one of a frightened child, wanting her mom to rescue her from what was starting to look like a national catastrophe. But I couldn't rescue her—I could only cry with her.
>
> It's hard for me not to read the election of Donald Trump as President through the lens of my 15 year old daughter, or my young female undergraduate students. It is difficult to explain to young women, who see and experience a volume of messages and initiatives telling them to be confident, to lean in, to just *be* empowered, why a known misogynist and racist has just been elected president. Popular feminism exists most spectacularly in an economy of visibility, where it often remains just that: visibility. Popular misogyny, on the other hand, seems to fold into state and national

structures with terrible efficiency—like the election of Donald Trump as president.[1]

I wrote this short piece because the election of Trump as US president initially derailed me (as it did many others) from finishing this book, from thinking in intellectual ways about what just happened. But I have been a feminist theorist for longer than I have been anything else. The first two university classes I taught were Introduction to Women's Studies and Women of Color in the United States. While I've written on topics other than gender, I have approached all of those topics with a feminist methodology. My personal relationships are shaped within a feminist worldview. The politics of feminism informs the way I think, the way I write, the way I organize my life. And the contemporary moment is in many ways a remarkable one in which to be a feminist. After so many years of defending feminism to others, and struggling to make it visible as an expansive politics, rather than a niche politics, this is an exciting time, one in which I think, "Finally, finally."

All that is to say: it was often difficult for me to write this book, in which I critique some of the processes and practices of feminism today. Even though I believe that critique is warranted, I cannot deny that I also feel ambivalent about it. For instance, when Verizon launched an ad campaign pointing out the gender disparity within the technology industry—of which the company is a part—the more cynical side of me found it ironic and unsettling, but another side of me also thought, "Well, at least that's something." I recognize the importance in the goals of "girl empowerment" organizations, because it is essential to see the asymmetries of power in culture, politics, and everyday life. Yet I also think it is actually *disempowering* to focus on the empowerment of girls who are privileged because of race and class. And while I worry that the ever-expanding reach of neoliberalism is *restructuring* today's feminist politics as an individual politics rather than a collective one, I remain hopeful that I am not alone in my unease, and I am bolstered by the presence of collectivities that protest this very shift all around the globe. It is ambivalence—both in my own intellectual critique of popular feminism and in the ambivalent spaces these politics create—that is the feminist project for me. Because of this ambivalence, it is unproductive to simply dismiss popular feminism as just another branding exercise that serves the ever-expanding reach of neoliberal markets, or to try to determine the authenticity of certain femi-

nisms over others. Rather, the overlaps and intersections of affect, desire, critique, and ambivalence that characterize popular feminism are potentially opening spaces for, and connections to, mobilizing feminist practice.

I began this project with a focus on popular feminism; I quickly learned that this focus would necessarily require me to engage with a contemporary response to popular feminism: popular misogyny. If I thought being a feminist made it difficult to intellectually critique popular feminism, it turned out to be much, much more difficult to analyze popular misogyny. I had to read, see, hear, and experience misogyny in a multitude of forms, and because I identify as a woman, it often felt viscerally personal. The expressions of popular misogyny, from men's rights activism to comments on social media to #GamerGate to the growing state-by-state retraction of abortion rights, are often terrifying, and give me a what-the-fuck-kind-of-world-are-we-living-in kind of feeling. I found myself a bit unprepared as a scholar to know what to do with and how to think about this version of misogyny and the way in which it is created and expressed within a context of the popular. And aside from feeling overwhelmed by the wide and varied continuum of popular misogyny, I felt unequipped as well to think through the best coping mechanisms when researching popular misogyny so as not to incur lasting psychic damage. I had to change my typical method of doing research, which is taking a deep dive into a topic, because the water I dove into was so toxic. I often found myself in tears, or sick to my stomach, or generally in despair. Still, as I moved closer to finishing this book, it was clear that recognizing, and then theorizing, popular misogyny as a deep structuring force in culture and politics is politically important. While I may feel ambivalent about critiquing popular feminism, my experience researching popular misogyny was not at all ambivalent; I feel quite certain in my critique of misogyny.

I also feel strongly that it is important to challenge the typical journalistic move that treats misogynistic acts as individual anomalies. In this book, I approach popular misogyny as a *structural* force. Of course, not all practices of heteronormative masculinity are misogynistic. Part of what makes this moment feel different is the vast amount of information, the sheer volume of expressions, that comprises practices of masculinity. I attempt in this book to parse through some of these expressions as a way to demonstrate how popular misogyny functions to shore up hegemonic masculinity while also creating new ways to objectify and devalue women. And understanding popular misogyny as a structural force, one

often invisible *as* misogyny, is crucial in a moment when popular feminism has gained such spectacular visibility. This book is about the relationship between popular feminism and popular misogyny; it is necessary to take a structural approach to popular misogyny at a time when popular feminism is visible across multiple media platforms. Misogyny has existed for centuries, to be sure. In the current moment, however, popular misogyny responds to, reacts against, and challenges popular feminism—precisely because it is so visible.

Understanding the structural power of popular misogyny became all the more urgent for me on November 8, 2016. Again, I initially felt that a book on popular feminism and popular misogyny was beyond the point. For me, critical writing has captured my optimism, my hope for social change. But I then realized that the relationship of popular feminism and popular misogyny that I write about in this book is about the ascendency of someone like Trump to president of the United States, and it was worth writing about.

This book is my attempt to make sense of this relationship, as well as an attempt to remain optimistic in a time when politics often feel hopeless. It is my attempt to think through, and to somehow challenge, the dynamics of power that provide the context for a fifteen-year-old girl to go from feeling empowered to feeling vulnerable and powerless. And it is my hope that the visibility of popular feminism will continually remind us that the struggle is worth it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is an intensely personal book for me. It was, without a doubt, the most exhilarating—and the most difficult—intellectual project I've done. During the five years I was writing and researching this book, many of my worlds collapsed, others changed radically, and still others were rebuilt. Relationships I never thought would end did just that, my children became adults, and I found joy and inspiration in new partners, friends, and places. As with everything I have ever written, this book is the result of a collaboration—with friends, lovers, children, scholars, students, and people I've never met but have read or listened to. But this collaboration is also different, and even more rewarding: I have found, and been nurtured by, an amazing feminist community during the book's journey, so while it is the angriest book I have ever written, it is also the most hopeful. My friends enabled me to survive writing about misogyny, and their feminism sustains me and convinces me that things will get better. I know I will forget some people here, and for that I apologize. But I am grateful to have an opportunity to thank those who continue to make a profound impact on my life and my thinking.

There are a few people who were, quite simply, essential to this book; I literally couldn't have written it without them. Jack Bratich, with his brilliant, capacious mind, was loving, supportive, and deeply engaged in this project. So many chapters began as conversations with him; so many points I was able to clarify because of his gentle provocations. Collaborating with him has made me smarter, more nuanced, and open to so many new

thoughts and experiences. I am forever grateful to him. Inna Arzumanova, my wonderful, smart, generous friend, has been patient and kind throughout all of my freak-outs about life and love, not to mention the book. It is so rare to have someone in your life who, when you feel lost, pushes you to find your own voice in not only your work but your life as well. Also rare is my friendship with Daniela Baroffio, which is unbelievably sustaining to me—our many conversations about love, parenting, politics, and friendship make my life so much richer. I can't imagine doing any of this without her. My dear friend Josh Kun has been an essential support and friend during this process; more than that, he provides all of us with an incredible model of what it means to be a public intellectual and do necessary political work. I'm not sure what I'd do if I didn't have him to make fun of me. During the course of writing and researching this book, I became friends with the lovely, brilliant Rosalind Gill. It was her important, crucial feminist work that inspired me to write this book in the first place; it was her expansive, compassionate heart that made me love her. She opened her house, and her incredible friendship network, to me in London, and I will never forget it. It is always lovely to experience the transformation in one's relationship with an advisee to one of a cherished friend, and I am so lucky to have this experience with Laura Portwood-Stacer. She was an essential editor of this book—it is in much, much better shape due to her efforts. She was also a great partner in life issues, from outfits to parenting to text coaching. Finally, my editor at Duke University Press, Courtney Berger, is simply fantastic. She has been an incisive reader, a source of support, and endlessly patient throughout this project. The day after the US presidential election, I texted her, "My work is hope for me but now it feels hopeless. Tell me to keep writing." She immediately texted back, "You MUST keep writing. It is even more important now." It was moments like these that kept me writing in these distressing times, and I hope she knows how much it means to me.

There are some friends who generously read entire drafts of this book, at different stages, and their feedback has made this a much better book. David Lobenstine, a truly gifted editor, read this book at a too-early stage and managed to be incredibly helpful and thoughtful anyway. The book has definitely benefited from his thoughts and provocations. Dana Polan has read every manuscript I've written—I cannot express how grateful I am to him. He is the most generous person I know. Melina Sherman, my passionate feminist student, not only read the manuscript but also engaged

in spirited conversations about feminism, life, and politics. Kate Miltner provided incisive feedback on the entire manuscript and also coauthored a piece with me—I am so grateful to her for thinking through networked misogyny with me and for our many conversations about, well, everything. Perry Johnson also read the entire manuscript and offered many useful suggestions; her own work on popular feminism has been an inspiration. I am also grateful to the two anonymous readers of the manuscript, who pushed me to clarify my thinking and my key concepts.

This is a book about feminism, and it wouldn't have been possible without my incredible feminist community. My friends helped me not only with navigating the theories that frame this work but also with navigating my personal life in times of upheaval. I am forever grateful to my rock, my comfort, my personal finance planner, and my best friend, Joyce Campion. I don't know what I would do without my unstoppable, intrepid girlfriends Laurie Ouellette and Roopali Mukherjee. Our many collaborations and friendship rituals have helped give this book a truly personal form. I am grateful for my cherished friend Alison Trope, who is my model for feminism and social justice, and is also the bravest person I know. I am so privileged to know and love Val Hartouni (who, years ago, gave me a vocabulary for my feminism), Marita Sturken, Carrie Rentschler, Alison Hearn, Herman Gray, Barbie Zelizer, Karen Tongson, Anne Balsamo, Nitin Govil, and Sarah Sharma. The book—and my life—also benefited from my friendships with Cynthia Chris (who generously read my introduction), Shana Redmond, Kara Keeling, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Nayan Shah, Safiya Noble, Tara McPherson, Tania Modleski (who read the introduction at a late stage and gave crucial feedback), Aniko Imre, Sara de Benedictis, Rachel O'Neill, Angela McRobbie, Jonathan Sterne, Michael Delli Carpini, Jessa Lingel, Nancy Baym, Diane Negra, Jo Littler, Jayson Harsin, Karine Lacherchere, Nic Sammond, Stephanie Schulte, Steve Duncombe, Brenda Weber, Lisha Nadkarni, Sue Dvonch, Keri Ravelo, Stephanie Lees, Julie Main, Catherine Rottenberg, David Craig, and Mauricio Mota.

I am so grateful to all of my colleagues, staff, and friends at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. First and foremost, they recognized that in order for me to be a good director of the school I needed to maintain my identity as a scholar, and I am so fortunate that I was given the time and resources to do this work. The staff in the director's office—Imre Meszaros, Billie Shotlow, Ally Arguello, Sarah Holterman, Christine Lloreda, Jordan Gary, and Anne Marie Campian—literally

made my job possible; I cannot thank them enough. From my (very complicated!) travel plans to their vast institutional knowledge to their patience and compassion in listening to me complain, they have been my rock. Many others at the Annenberg School have made my life and my job so much easier, and I am grateful to them: Tracy Mendoza, Deb Lawler, James Vasquez, Dave Racewicz, Bruce Massagia, Anna Kanauka, Diana O'Leary, Cindy Martinez, Marisa Evans, Charles Peyton, Ray Barkley, and Bryan Sylvester. I am so thankful for my colleagues, especially François Bar, Hernán Galperin, Colin Maclay, Mike Ananny, Ben Carrington, Hye Jin Lee, Tom Hollihan, Patti Riley, Rebecca Weintraub, Geoff Cowan, and Ernie Wilson, for their support and guidance along the way. Larry Gross and Sandra Ball-Rokeach are cherished friends and incredible mentors. Henry Jenkins has been, as usual, a warm and supportive friend and interlocutor; he read parts of this book and gave me frank and important suggestions. It has been so lovely to become friends and colleagues with Christina Dunbar-Hester; I'm sad that my time with her at USC is short, but I'm confident that we have become lifelong friends. Stacy Smith's work on difference in Hollywood is an inspiration; I'm grateful for all of our many conversations. My treasured friend Taj Frazier has shown me what true dedication to racial justice means at an institution of higher education. Gordon Stables has become a cherished friend; I absolutely rely on him and his expert, considerate guidance on all the academic labyrinths we have to navigate each day. Becoming friends with Willow Bay over the past four years has been wonderful; she has been a source of inspiration and guidance. Collaborating with her on this adventure has been a true gift. My dear friend Manuel Castells has also been a remarkable source of support and guidance, and I look forward to all our future collaborations.

My students, undergraduate and graduate, former and present, have sustained me throughout my entire career. Their passion, intelligence, and investment in a more just world motivated me to begin—and finish—this book. I want to thank Melissa Brough, John Cheney-Lippold, Cara Wallis, Travers Scott, Lori Lopez, Dayna Chatman, Brittany Farr, Evan Brody, Kate Miltner, Melina Sherman, Perry Johnson, Courtney Cox, Garrett Broad, Nick Busalacchi, Tisha Dejmanee, Sam Close, Simi Dosekun, Lauren Sowa, Lauren Leavitt, Tyler Nygaard, Anjali Nath, Anna Loup, Bianca Nasser, Kate Oh, Clare O'Connor, Sarah Myers West, Lin Zhang, Renyi Hong, Stefania Marghitu, Lara Bradshaw, and Paromita Sengupta.

This book took shape over the course of many years, but especially the last five. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to workshop these ideas in talks and lectures during this time, and I am grateful to the individuals and institutions who supported my visits: the first presentation of these ideas was at the invitation of Carrie Rentschler from the Institution of Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies at McGill University; Jayson Harsin supported me at the American University of Paris and has since engaged in fruitful conversations with me about the work; Nick Couldry and our collaborative Communication Futures research group between USC and the London School of Economics gave me an opportunity to present a version of this work; Clementine Tholas invited me to present at the Sorbonne University in Paris; Michel Wieviorka at the Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme generously hosted me for two summers in Paris so that I could write; Tarleton Gillespie and Hector Postigo gave me the opportunity to get my ideas out early in my first blog ever on Culture Digitally; and the faculty and students in the first three years of the Annenberg Summer Institute on Difference and the Media offered crucial feedback in framing this project. I would also like to thank Melissa Click and Julie Elman at the Console-ing Passions conference; Sarah Sharma, the amazing director of the McLuhan Center at the University of Toronto; Gustavo Cordosa at the University of Lisbon; Stewart Hoover, Deborah Whitehead, and Nabil Echchaibi at CU Boulder and the Center for Religion and Media; Mónica Moreno Figueroa from Cambridge University and the Politics of Beauty conference; Cheryl Cooky from the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport; Lawrence Wenner from Loyola Marymount University Forum on Media Ethics and Social Responsibility; George Mason University and the Critiquing Culture conference; Jonathan Gray and the media studies department at the University of Wisconsin–Madison; and Nancy Baym, Mary Gray, danah boyd, and Kate Crawford at Microsoft Research/New England. I am also grateful to the New England Science Club for Girls and the Lower East Side Girls Club for opening their doors to me and allowing me to experience the hope and inspiration that goes on there.

One of the things I learned through writing this book was that I needed both personal and professional renewal in my life. I am so immensely grateful that my colleagues and friends in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics are giving me the opportunity to do both. They have been incredibly supportive and inviting, and I am looking forward to the next stage of my career with them.

I am especially grateful to Nick Couldry, Terhi Rantanen, Sonia Livingstone, Shani Orgad, Charlie Beckett, Myria Georgiou, Ellen Helsper, Lilie Chouliaraki, Robin Mansell, Seeta Gangadharan, Bart Cammaerts, and all of the faculty there.

Duke University Press has been a gift to me; I've already mentioned the extraordinary talent of Courtney Berger. I also want to thank Ken Wissoker, Sandra Korn (who has been very patient with me and all my requests), my excellent production editor Liz Smith, and the copyeditors for the press. Courtney Baker designed a truly beautiful cover for this book. Anne Metcalf was a fantastic indexer; I was so pleased to work with her.

Not everyone is lucky enough to have a supportive and loving family. I am. My family, my love for them and their love for me, has literally made this possible. My sisters, Angela, Suzannah, Genevieve, Yurima, and Candice, are the embodiment of what sisterhood truly means. My brothers, Matt, Joey, Sean, Cary, and Ron, have loved me and supported me throughout. All of my nieces and nephews (thirteen of them!) are a constant source of joy and inspiration. Bill Weiser has been very supportive during a very difficult time. My own children have shown me what strength, love, and brilliance look like every day: Sam and his incredible light; Luke and his steadfast generosity; and Lily and her exuberant joy of life and love have not only sustained me but have given me real hope, and I have found true friends in each of them. My other daughters, Whitney Kistner and Payton Smith, in their beauty, kindness, and love for my sons, also give me hope. My father, who passed away ten years ago, continues to pop up in my life and in my mind, encouraging me to keep going. And finally, my mother, Anne Laverne Banet, the strongest woman I know. She raised seven children by herself with no money, she encouraged us—especially her daughters—to be strong and resilient, and she never, ever lost faith in us. She taught me what it means to be a feminist. This book is dedicated to her.

A SMALL PORTION of this work appeared in earlier versions in previous publications. I am fortunate to have a bi-monthly column with the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, where I discuss popular feminism and misogyny. Sections of the introduction and the conclusion earlier appeared in that column ("Popular Feminism: #MeToo," January 27, 2018; "Popular Feminism: Structural Rage," March 30, 2018), but have been significantly revised for this book. Part of the introduction appears as my keynote

address published as "Keynote Address: Media, Markets, Gender: Economies of Visibility in a Neoliberal Moment" in *Communication Review* 18, no. 1 (2015). Part of "Am I Pretty or Ugly? Girls and the Market for Self-Esteem," published in *Girlhood Studies* 7, no. 1 (Summer 2014), appears in chapter 2. Chapter 2 also includes some parts of my article "'Confidence You Can Carry!': Girls in Crisis and the Market for Girls' Empowerment Organizations" published in *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 29, no. 2 (2015). Finally, my ideas about networked misogyny were originally fleshed out with my coauthor Kate Miltner in "#MasculinitySoFragile: Culture, Structure, and Networked Misogyny" in a "Comments and Criticisms" section of *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 1 (2016). I am grateful for all these publishers.

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, we are living in a moment in North America and Europe in which feminism has become, somewhat incredibly, *popular*. It feels as if everywhere you turn, there is an expression of feminism—on a T-shirt, in a movie, in the lyrics of a pop song, in an inspirational Instagram post, in an awards ceremony speech. Feminism is "popular" in at least three senses: One, feminism manifests in discourses and practices that are circulated in popular and commercial media, such as digital spaces like blogs, Instagram, and Twitter, as well as broadcast media. As such, these discourses have an accessibility that is not confined to academic enclaves or niche groups. Two, the "popular" of popular feminism signifies the condition of being liked or admired by like-minded people and groups, as *popularity.* And three, for me the "popular" is, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1998) argued, a terrain of struggle, a space where competing demands for power battle it out. This means that there are many different feminisms that circulate in popular culture in the current moment, and some of these feminisms become more visible than others. Popular feminism is networked across all media platforms, some connecting with synergy, others struggling for priority and visibility. Popular feminism has, in many ways, allowed us to imagine a culture in which feminism, in every form, doesn't have to be defended; it is accessible, even admired.

But feminism isn't the only popular phenomenon we need to contend with in the early twenty-first century. Each time I began to investigate a popular feminist practice or expression, there was always an accompanying

hostile rejoinder or challenge, regardless of the mediated space in which it occurred—whether that was social media, the legal realm, or corporate culture. For every Tumblr page dedicated to female body positivity, there were fat-shaming and body-shaming online comments. For every confidence organization for girls, there was yet another men's rights organization claiming that men are the "real" victims. For many women—and more than a few men—a broader acceptance of feminism as an identity, concept, and practice is exhilarating; yet, for those who find feminism to be a threat, this acceptance also stimulates fear, trepidation, aggression, and violence. When feminism is "in the water," so to speak, as it is in popular culture today, it is not surprising to witness a backlash from patriarchal culture. It is not surprising because opposition to feminism is not new. There is clearly a relationship between the creation and expression of popular feminism and what I began to call "popular misogyny."

Misogyny is popular in the contemporary moment for the same reasons feminism has become popular: it is expressed and practiced on multiple media platforms, it attracts other like-minded groups and individuals, and it manifests in a terrain of struggle, with competing demands for power. For me, popular misogyny in some ways follows a conventional definition of misogyny: a hatred of women. But I also want to make a more nuanced case for popular misogyny: it is the instrumentalization of women as objects, where women are a means to an end: a systematic devaluing and dehumanizing of women. Popular misogyny is also, like popular feminism, networked, an interconnection of nodes in all forms of media and everyday practice. Of course, misogyny is not only expressed and practiced by men; women are also part of this formation. Misogyny is also challenged and critiqued by many, even as it is often expressed as an invisible norm.

The relationship between popular feminism and popular misogyny is deeply entwined: popular feminism and popular misogyny battle it out on the contemporary cultural landscape, living side by side as warring, constantly moving contexts in an economy of visibility. This economy of visibility, as I elaborate later, is a media landscape that is many things at once: a technological and economic context devoted to the accumulation of views, clicks, "likes," etcetera; a backdrop for popular feminism and popular misogyny; the battlefield for the struggles between them; a set of tactics used by some feminisms and some misogynies to move into the spotlight with more ease than others. Both feminism and misogyny deploy

the popular, albeit in different ways. The sheer popularity of popular feminism provides spaces for a specific kind of political action along themes that resonate within an economy of visibility, such as empowerment, confidence, capacity, and competence. As such, popular feminism is *active* in shaping culture. However, the "popular" of popular misogyny is *reactive*.

The contemporary networked media context in which popular feminism and popular misogyny are expressed makes for a particular manifestation of the struggle between feminism and misogyny that has existed for centuries. While networked culture has provided a context for a transfigured feminist politics, it has also provided a context for misogyny to twist and distort the popular in ways that seem new to the contemporary era. Because popular misogyny is reactive, it doesn't have the same consistency, history, and political motion as popular feminism. Clearly, the intensification of misogyny in the contemporary moment is in part a reaction to the culture-wide circulation and embrace of feminism. Every time feminism gains broad traction—that is, every time it spills beyond what are routinely dismissed as niched feminist enclaves—the forces of the status quo position it as a peril, and skirmishes ensue between those determined to challenge the normative and those determined to maintain it. This happened with suffrage and abolition, with the US civil rights movement and the liberal feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s. It happened in the 1980s, as Susan Faludi (1991) and others have documented, and these challenges continue into the current moment, where among other things, US states such as Texas and Arkansas, in their fight to eliminate abortion rights for women, have decimated women's health care in general. Feminism is framed, by media and society alike, as a set of risks—risks that emerge anywhere and everywhere: feminism threatens conventional definitions and performances of masculinity; it threatens work culture, especially perilous in a global recession because when women have jobs this is somehow seen as taking away a man's natural right to have a job; and it threatens conventional performances of heteronormative femininity, particularly in the ways that femininity functions to reassure men of their dominant position.[1] Such efforts to dismantle and delegitimize feminism have been occurring at regular intervals for centuries. Misogyny has certainly long existed as a norm, built into our structures, laws, policies, and normative behavior. As such, it has been relatively invisible as a politics, existing rather as common sense, the "way things are." But the contemporary version of misogyny is also a new outgrowth of its

reactive nature. The contemporary networked visibility of popular feminism, available across multiple media platforms, has stimulated a reaction, mobilizing misogyny to compete for visibility within these same mediated networks.

In the following pages I contend with how, and in what ways, the rise of popular feminism has encouraged both a response and an intensification of popular misogyny. I attempt to show some of the social, cultural, and economic conditions that define and describe particularly visible forms of popular feminism and popular misogyny. *Empowered* is organized around some of the key themes I have recognized within popular feminism: *shame*, *confidence*, and *competence.* These are also themes that are then taken up by popular misogyny, though the meaning of them is distorted, and deflects attention away from women and toward men, and is then targeted actively *against* women. In turn, each of these themes is dependent on a logic that revolves around the twinned discourses of *capacity* and *injury.* By this I mean that both popular feminism and popular misogyny tap into a neoliberal notion of individual capacity (for work, for confidence, for economic success), but both also position injury—for women, the injury of sexism; for men, the injury of feminism and "multiculturalism"—as a key obstacle to realizing this capacity. I also situate popular feminism and popular misogyny as practices that are simultaneously residual and emergent: there are clear ways that both feminism and misogyny have been engaged in a particular dynamic for centuries—just as it is clear that the current networked moment shifts this dynamic in important ways.

Popular feminism exists along a continuum, where spectacular, media-friendly expressions such as celebrity feminism and corporate feminism achieve more visibility, and expressions that critique patriarchal structures and systems of racism and violence are more obscured (see McRobbie 2009; Gill 2011; Rottenberg 2014). Seeing and hearing a safely affirmative feminism in spectacularly visible ways often eclipses a feminist critique of structure, as well as obscures the labor involved in producing oneself according to the parameters of popular feminism. The visibility of popular feminism, where examples appear on television, in film, on social media, and on bodies, is important, but it often stops there, as if *seeing* or purchasing feminism is the same thing as changing patriarchal structures. To be clear: the popular feminism I discuss in this book focuses on media expressions and their circulation, the social, cultural, and economic conditions that provide a context for a specific version of popular feminism to emerge

as highly visible. That is, this book is not about the political intentions that energize a variety of feminist practices; it is about how some of these political intentions are marshaled by institutions and structures, and what they make available and what they foreclose in terms of politics. Yet, while popular feminisms are often framed by this kind of ambivalence, popular misogyny, in contrast, frames itself in deterministic and resolute terms. The spaces that are opened up by contemporary iterations of popular misogyny are framed not in ambivalent terms but as a zero-sum game: according to popular misogyny, men are suffering because of women in general, and feminism in particular. Women are taking over space, jobs, desire, families, childrearing, and power. For popular misogynies, every space or place, every exercise of power that women deploy is understood as taking that power *away* from men. In this historical moment, popular feminism is in defense against, among other things, structural gendered inequalities. Popular misogyny is in defense against feminism and its putative gains.

The risks posed by popular feminism share some similarities with historical moments, but it is also clear to me that we are in a new era of the gender wars, an era that is marked by a dramatic increase in the visible expression and acceptance of feminism, and by a similarly vast amount of public vitriol and violence directed toward women. Both feminism and its repudiation abound online and offline, which means that our avenues for expression—indeed, our very means of expression, from emoji to the media platforms on which we type them—are radically different from the wars of generations past. Misogyny, once a social formation that was expressed primarily in enclosures (home, locker room, board room, etc.) now increases via the connection, circulation, publicness, networks, and communication across and through those enclosures.[2] But while it circulates with relative ease in digital networks, misogyny is also reified in institutional structures: the workplace (unequal pay, sexual harassment, glass ceilings); organized religions (many of which continue to denigrate women); state politics (where women remain in the vast minority, and, as we have seen in the Trump administration, are often interrupted, diminished, and outright silenced).

Because I conducted research for this book while living in the United States, many of the examples are US-based, though popular feminism is not confined to the United States. Popular feminism and popular misogyny are expressed and practiced around the world in different ways, in a variety of contexts. Indeed, not a single day has gone by in the last several years

that there hasn't been new material in both popular feminism and popular misogyny across the globe; it has been difficult to determine which examples to include, and which to leave out. Ultimately, I selected some of the examples that became particulary visible within the popular, be that a social media–shared campaign, a cable reality television show, or a confidence organization that made headlines. Some of these enjoyed an especially heightened visibility, such as the Always #LikeAGirl campaign, which aired during the Super Bowl in 2015, the annual US football championship, which is one of the most watched events on American television, and one of very few broadcast events that is widely watched by diverse (rather than niche) audiences; for this reason, the event has become particularly known for the very expensive advertisements aired during the broadcast. Others, such as the #DontMancriminate campaign I discuss in chapter 1, were the creation of a small online magazine based in India. However, the images from #DontMancriminate circulated widely and swiftly on social media, and they were then picked up by popular blogs and websites—so it became quite visible as an example of popular misogyny. I do not attempt to be exhaustive with my examples, nor do I present examples that are necessarily equal in their popularity and visibility. Indeed, this variety is part of the point I am making: the examples gesture to a set of networked cultures rather than to a specific political mechanism. I use them as a lens through which we can see the active response and reactive call of popular feminism and popular misogyny operating. In other words, the examples I analyze in this book are not characterized by their specificity or uniqueness but rather by how they form a broad contemporary context, one that shares similarities with histories of feminisms and misogynies, but also one that represents a shift happening now.

Popular Feminism

I began this introduction with three senses of the "popular" in popular feminism: as media visibility and accessibility, as popularity, and as a struggle for meaning. Surely there are other meanings of "popular," but in surveying the cultural landscape over the past decade, it is these three that signify most powerfully with popular feminism; thus I will use them as a map to clarify what I mean by "popular feminism." What does popular feminism look like? How does it circulate? Who are its ideal constituents? What are its goals? These questions have been asked more and more over

the past decade, as versions of popular feminism have circulated more broadly through American and European culture. A key signifying moment in popular feminism, for many girls and women, was when Beyoncé performed at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2014 with the word "feminist" lit up behind her. Despite the fact that I've spent many years investigating commodity feminism, there seemed to be something special about that moment (a specialness that was then replicated in thousands of memes and images on social media). After the performance, columnist Jessica Valenti (who is herself part of popular feminism) proclaimed in the *Guardian*, "The zeitgeist is irrefutably feminist: its name literally in bright lights" (Valenti 2014, n.p.). Earlier, in February 2014, the popular blog *Jezebel* asked, "What does it mean for feminism if feminism becomes trendy?" (Beusman 2014, n.p.). Valenti similarly wondered, "If everyone is a feminist, is anyone?" (Valenti 2014, n.p.). So while Beyoncé's performance was spectacular, it was only one of many popular feminist images and expressions within the contemporary media landscape; in asking these questions, the authors refer to popular feminist practices, from organizing marches to hashtag activism to T-shirts. Indeed, these questions have only grown more urgent, as feminist manifestos have crowded most media platforms, making a specific version of feminist subjectivity and its parent political commitments both hypervisible and normative within popular media.

Of course, the architecture of many of these popular media platforms is capitalist and corporate. As we have seen historically, specific messages of feminism are often incorporated into advertising and marketing, and contemporary popular feminism is no different. One after another, major global companies—from the technology company Verizon to the beauty corporations CoverGirl and Dove to the automobile companies Chevrolet and Audi—have churned out emotional advertising campaigns, urging us to pay closer attention to girls and the opportunities available to them (or the lack thereof). American girls, this new marketing narrative typically goes, have been excluded from a plethora of professional and personal fields, from science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) careers to music to athletics, because they feel unqualified and have low self-esteem. However, these ads declare, an answer is at hand, and with only the right products, anything is possible.

Successful female entrepreneurs have become eager spokeswomen for the cause: Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg (2013) wrote a best-selling memoir and feminist ode, offering her own brand of motivational and aspirational

FIGURE INTRO.1. Beyoncé, MTV Video Music Awards, 2014.

corporate feminism, pleading with girls and women to overcome "imposter syndrome" and to "lean in." Girl empowerment organizations, in both US and global development, insist that focusing on gender equality is "smarter economics," and again, that girls and women need to "lean in" to be economically successful. Teaching girls and women to code in computing, as a way to address the marginalization of women in technology industries, became a hot new industry itself. Social media has exploded with feminist campaigns, from #bringbackourgirls to #solidarityisforwhitewomen to #yesallwomen to the campaign in 2016, inspired by US president Donald Trump's casual dismissal of sexual assault, #NotOkay, to the 2017 (and continuing) explosive movement about sexual harassment in the workplace, #MeToo. Blogs and websites, such as *Black Girl Dangerous*, *Feministing*, *Feminist Current*, *Crunk Feminist Collective*, and *Jezebel*, are filled with passionate defenses and celebrations of feminism and exhortations toward feminist and antiracist activism. Meanwhile, the question du jour for female (and some male) celebrities has become: "Are you a feminist?" *Cosmopolitan* magazine and the Ms. Foundation, in an unlikely partnership, announced a "top ten" list of celebrity feminists at the end of 2014, with actress Emma Watson awarded as the "celebrity feminist of the year" (Filipovic 2014). Last but certainly not least for our particular era, feminist ideology is now sartorial—and just a click away. Etsy and others offer feminist tank tops, buttons, and entire wardrobes. High fashion has also taken note: as part of collections in 2017, designer Christian Dior

created a $710 T-shirt that proclaimed "We Should All Be Feminists," and Prabal Gurung's more modestly priced version (at only $195) stated "This Is What a Feminist Looks Like." The manifestations of popular feminism are numerous, from hashtag activism to corporate campaigns to intersectional political and social action. Surely an ad campaign from Dove about body positivity is seen by far more viewers than critical commentary on sexual violence toward women of color. Yet it is important to see these two manifestations of feminism as related; to consider them as completely discrete is to simplify the context that enables and propels both of them into a simultaneous existence, even if this existence is asymmetrical in terms of visibility.

In other words, there are many different feminisms that are popular in the current moment. Indeed, media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have enabled a visibility of feminisms that have long struggled for a broader space and place in culture, which makes it often difficult to distinguish between and among them. This mediated circulation around and within different spaces is crucial to popular feminism. J. K. Gibson-Graham envisioned feminist politics as one that is about a kind of network; a "vast set of disarticulated economic 'places'—households, communities, ecosystems, workplaces, civic organizations, enterprises, public arenas, urban spaces, diasporas, regions, government agencies—related analogically rather than organizationally and connected through webs of signification" (2006, 38). Popular feminism is analogical, in that feminist practices share similar experiences and particularities, but it is also more broadly networked, connected through webs of signification. *Empowered* explores and theorizes this networked characteristic of popular feminism and locates it within a dynamic relationship with a similarly networked popular misogyny.

The Popular as Media Accessibility

It is important to analyze the "popular" in popular feminism to see how it is distinct from other feminist practices and expressions. What are its boundaries, its borders? Is it defined by its politics, its visibility, where it emanates from? The popular feminism I analyze in this book generally materializes as a kind of *media* that is widely visible and accessible. It appears on broadcast media, in television and advertising. It appears in popular music. In the contemporary context, it appears perhaps most urgently in social media, with media companies such as Instagram, Tumblr,

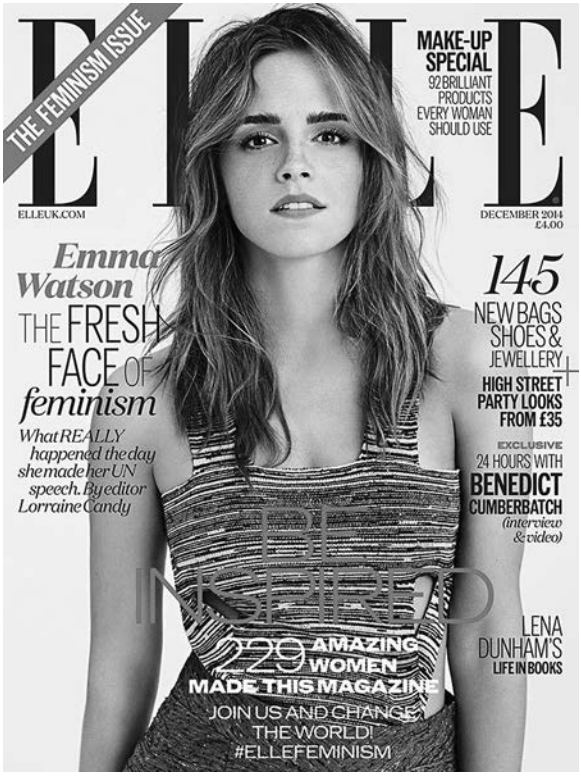

FIGURE INTRO.2. Emma Watson, "The Fresh Face of Feminism," *Elle* magazine, 2014.

Facebook, and Twitter providing platforms for its circulation. As I expand on below, popular feminism circulates in an economy of visibility. Yet visibility is never simple. Media scholars, feminists, critical race scholars, LGBTQ scholars, and others have worked over many decades in the name of visibility; in a media context in which if you are visible, you *matter*, visibility matters indeed (e.g., Grewal 2005; Hegde 2011; Gross 2012; H. Gray 2013; Smith, Pieper, and Choueiti 2017). Part of this visibility means being accessible to a large, popular audience. As a set of practices and expressions that circulate in an economy of visibility, popular feminism is part of the larger "attention" economy, where its sheer accessibility—through shared images, "likes," clicks, followers, retweets, and so on—is a key component of its popularity. And this popularity and accessibility are measured in and through their ability to increase that visibility; popular feminism engages in a feedback loop, where it is more popular when it is more visible, which then authorizes it to create

FIGURE INTRO.3. "Empower Women" T-shirt, H&M retailers, 2017.

ever-increasing visibility. Visibility is not a static thing; it has to be in a constant state of growth.

But, as we also know, in a media context in which most circuits of visibility are driven by profit, competition, and consumers, simply *becoming* visible does not guarantee that identity categories such as gender, race, and sexuality will be unfettered from sexism, misogyny, and homophobia. The popular feminisms I explore in this book are typically those that become visible precisely because they do not challenge deep structures of inequities. That is, in order for some images and practices to become visible, others must be rendered invisible.

In this sense, the popular feminism I discuss throughout this book is not disruptive to capitalism or mainstream politics, but rather follows what Catherine Rottenberg (2014) has called neoliberal feminism. Rottenberg argues that neoliberal feminism is one in which the values and assumptions of neoliberalism—ever-expanding markets, entrepreneurialism, a

focus on the individual—are embraced, not challenged, by feminism. In her words, "Unlike classic liberal feminism whose *raison d'être* was to pose an immanent critique of liberalism, revealing the gendered exclusions within liberal democracy's proclamation of universal equality, particularly with respect to the law, institutional access, and the full incorporation of women into the public sphere, this new feminism seems perfectly in sync with the evolving neoliberal order. Neoliberal feminism, in other words, offers no critique—immanent or otherwise—of neoliberalism" (Rottenberg 2014, 419).

While the popular feminism I analyze in this book clearly connects to neoliberal principles of individualism and entrepreneurialism, it also does, in fact, owe a debt to liberal feminism's critique of gendered exclusions in the public and corporate spheres. That is, this corporate-friendly popular feminism emanates from an increasing visibility of a gendered disparity in dominant economic spheres—a lack of female CEOs, a lack of female Hollywood directors, a lack of women in technology and media fields, and an increased awareness of sexual harassment within corporate industries such as media and technology. The popular feminisms I analyze in this book are, like liberal feminism, in many ways a call to bring more women to the table, simply because they are women. It thus has a history in what feminist historian Joan Scott has called an "add women and stir" kind of liberal feminism, in which the presence of women is sufficient to call feminism into being (Scott 1991). The inclusion of women becomes the solution for all gender problems, not just those of exclusion or absence. It is, of course, important to have bodies at the table, but their mere presence doesn't necessarily challenge the structure that supports, and builds, the table in the first place; as Scott points out, merely including women does not address "the framework of (historically contingent) dominant patterns of sexuality and the ideology that supports them" (Butler and Scott 1992, 25). In this way, popular feminism and its exhortations to simply have *more* women in various cultural, political, and economic realms is similar to liberal efforts to include people of color within a widened field of whiteness, one that continues to shape representation, work, and politics without interrogating the racism that forms the boundaries of whiteness from the ground up.

The focus on inclusion by popular feminism makes it specifically corporate friendly; it has benefited from decades of neoliberal commodity activism, in which companies have taken up women's issues, especially

those that have to do with individual consumption habits, as a key selling point for products (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser 2012). I explore many of these recent campaigns in this book and argue that there is a market for feminism; the popular feminisms I discuss mainly contribute to, rather than challenge, this market. This historical context of commodity feminism provides a backdrop for the expansion of popular feminism into other capitalist, consumerist realms. Within neoliberal brand culture, specific feminist expressions and politics are brandable, commensurate with market logics: those that focus on the individual body, those that connect social change with corporate capitalism, and those that emphasize individual attributes such as confidence, self-esteem, and competence as particularly useful to neoliberal self-reliance and capitalist success. In a capitalist, corporate economy of visibility, those feminisms that are most easily commodified and branded are those that become most visible. This means, most of the time, that the popular feminism that is most visible is that which is white, middle-class, cis-gendered, and heterosexual.

The Popular as Popularity

Popular feminism is also about specific *exclusions*, which leads to the second definition of "popular" in popular feminism: that of *popularity.* A basic definition of popularity is being admired by like-minded individuals. But a more practiced definition of popularity recalls for many of us the cliques and exclusionary practices of high school. Memorialized in films from *Grease* to *Pretty in Pink* (and the rest of the John Hughes oeuvre) to *Mean Girls*, popularity means the privilege of some to say to others, as the character Gretchen Wieners did in *Mean Girls*, "You can't sit with us." One can't sit with the popular clique unless one conforms to the norms of that group; again, the dominant culture of the popular feminism I examine in this book is primarily white, middle-class, cis-gendered, and heteronormative. This is the popular feminism that seizes the spotlight in an economy of visibility and renders other feminisms less visible. We witness this kind of exclusion in the popular feminist insistence on a universal definition of "equality" between men and women as its key definition. When feminists of color have challenged this universality, pointing out that "universal" equal rights have historically meant equal rights for white people, and insist on specificity and history as part of feminism, it is often met by popular feminism as an obstruction. In a similar move to the challenge to

FIGURE INTRO.4. "All Lives Matter" protest against Black Lives Matter, 2015.

the Black Lives Matter movement with "All Lives Matter," or the response to LGBTQ pride of "heterosexual pride," popular feminism insists that a universal gender identity must be the central category of analysis. This is a classic liberal move, denouncing specificity, insisting on a universal definition of identity—even as this "universality" typically signifies white, middle-class, cis-gendered, and heterosexual identity. In this way, popular feminism frequently refuses intersectionality, and often erases and devalues women of color, working-class women, trans women, and non-heteronormative women, even when it claims to include all women. The Women's March in 2017, as I discuss in the conclusion, is an example of popular feminism that makes that type of all-inclusive claim.

The "popular" of popular feminism is structured by this dynamic of inclusion and exclusion. But because of its indebtedness to corporate feminism and a desire to not alienate consumers, popular feminism also depends on affectively resisting the "mean" in mean girl cliques. Despite its exclusions, popular feminism is often an *accommodating* feminism, and in particular, accommodating men (even when this appears in ironic misandrist feminism). This accommodationist strategy is not just conducive to corporate expression; it exists in part in order to become *available* to corporate expression. Popular feminism thus also emanates from an affec-

tive space: historically, the visibility of feminism in the US media has predominantly been as angry, defiant, man-hating women. The current manifestation of popular feminism directly challenges this representation; while recognizing that gendered relations of power marginalize women, this critique is expressed in a friendly, safe way. Popular feminism is decidedly not angry—indeed, anger (at sexism, racism, patriarchy, abuse) seems to be an old-fashioned vestige, a ghost of feminism's past, one not suited to the popular media context of contemporary feminism. What we see today, as Gill puts it, is a "feminism that is actually encumbered by its desire not to be angry, not to be 'difficult,' not to be 'humourless'"—a version that is implicitly "positioned against the figure of the 'feminist killjoy'" (Gill 2016b, 618).

In her book *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed defines the feminist killjoy thus: "The feminist killjoy 'spoils' the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness. In the thick sociality of everyday spaces, feminists are thus attributed as the origin of the bad feeling, as the ones who ruin the atmosphere" (2010, 65). Popular feminism is decidedly not a spoilsport, it is not the origin of bad feeling. We see this in its corporate-friendly expressions (because bad feelings are not good for marketing). We see this clearly in celebrity Emma Watson, who has become visible within popular feminism with her United Nations campaign "HeForShe," where she explicitly says that feminists need to invite men into a conversation about gender inequalities. We see this in the way that popular feminism is framed by heteronormativity and heterosexuality. To be clear, men *should* be in a conversation about gender inequalities. But popular feminism accommodates men through its heteronormativity, which is of course defined by gendered norms that already prioritize the logic of heterosexuality.

The Popular as Struggle

Finally, I theorize popular feminism through my third definition of the popular, as a terrain of struggle over meaning. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall famously said, "Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. . . . It is the arena of consent and resistance" (1998, 453). The dynamic between consent and resistance is a key mobilizer within popular feminism, where it is privileged in an economy of visibility, and is firmly within the "culture of the powerful." This is a

culture of racial and economic privilege. The most visible popular feminism is that within the arena of consent: it consents to heteronormativity, to the universality of whiteness, to dominant economic formations, to a trajectory of capitalist "success."

There are, of course, other feminisms that share some of the characteristics of media visibility and popularity but are positioned more within Hall's arena of resistance than consent: those that challenge and expose the whiteness of much of popular feminism; those that use the media visibility as a way to expose structural violence; those that are nonheteronormative; those that insist on intersectionality. Black Twitter, for example, as Caitlin Gunn (2015), Dayna Chatman (2017), André Brock (2012), and others have shown, has become a place for feminists of color to create campaigns for social justice. Many feminist blogs, such as *Black Girl Dangerous*, *Crunk Feminist Collective*, and *Feministing*, specifically critique the whiteness of much popular feminism and offer important intersectional analyses of gendered power relations in contemporary culture. There are popular feminist authors, such as Laurie Penny and Jessica Valenti, who write incisive critiques of gender and capitalism. In relation to these practices, popular feminism can be seen as a kind of backlash against feminism's goals of critiquing racism, capitalism, and patriarchy (and their deep relations). By commodifying and making feminism "safe," popular feminism resists structural critique.

The struggle between a consenting popular feminism and one that is more resistant became clearly evident in October 2017 in the United States, when multiple accusations of sexual harassment against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein were publicized; the Weinstein case mobilized, as is now well known, hundreds of other stories from women about harassment, which were manifest in the multimedia movement #MeToo (Kantor and Twohey 2017, n.p.).

As many have pointed out, the phrase "me too" was actually created in 2006 by an African American activist, Tarana Burke, a survivor of sexual assault, who wanted to share her story as a way to connect with other victims of sexual assault, especially women of color (Garcia 2017, n.p.). The fact that Burke, the originator of "me too," was largely eclipsed by the high-profile, mostly white female celebrities who came forward in the Weinstein (and Roger Ailes, and Matt Lauer, and what seems to be countless others) scandal is not insignificant. *Time* magazine's 2017 "Person

of the Year" was named the "Silence Breakers," and the issue featured women who have come forward to expose sexual harassers and predators (Zacharek, Dockterman, and Sweetland Edwards 2017). Yet Burke, who created the movement, was inside the pages, not featured on the cover. The mainstream media has covered the #MeToo story expansively, which is an important move—but the stories are often about the powerful men who are accused, or the celebrity women who accuse them. Not surprisingly, there soon was a market for #MeToo, ranging from cookies to jewelry to clothing, as well as the emergence of new apps and other media technologies that attempt to document workplace sexual harassment.

In other words, while the public awareness of #MeToo has helped reveal how widespread and normative sexual harassment is, it is also more spectacularly focused on very visible public figures. This is not to dismiss the accusations in any way; rather, I want to point out that while "me too" existed in the early 2000s as a mechanism for building intersectional feminist community, it became spectacularly visible under the logics of popular feminism; this is the struggle of the popular. The #MeToo movement is expressed on those media platforms that easily lend themselves to commodification and simplification, those industries that provide platforms of visibility (entertainment, news media) already designed and scripted for *any* mode of spectacular spotlight. Some of the more spectacular #MeToo moments, such as when the celebrity components of the story distract us from systemic, structural sexism across all industries, can end up working against the calls for social change promised at its beginning, producing more and more visibility—and increasingly narrowing the discourses of that visibility in the process.

I argue that contemporary popular feminism reimagines and redirects what "empowerment" means for girls and women, and thus is restructuring feminist politics within neoliberal culture. Historically, feminisms have used "liberation" as a goal and specified this liberation as one from sexist and unequal social, political, and economic structures. Within popular feminism, empowerment is the central logic; with little to no specification as to what we want to empower women to do, popular feminism often restructures the politics of feminism to focus on the individual empowered woman. Here, the historical feminist politics of "the personal is the political" are often understood in the reverse, as "the political is the personal."

Why has popular feminism become popular now, in the twenty-first century? What are the various conditions that produce it in the current moment, that authorize its circulation? Popular feminism relies on other feminisms from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for its gendered logics. Many of the issues popular feminism supports are not new: recognizing that women are hypersexualized and commodified in the media; identifying inequities in labor and the workplace; pointing out gendered asymmetries in individual self-esteem; and challenging the policing and regulation of the female body. The historical antecedents of popular feminism—such as antiracist movements, liberal feminism and women's liberation feminism, LGBTQ movements, third-wave feminist movements, and postfeminism—provide necessary conditions for a popular feminism to flourish in the current moment. Other feminist iterations and practices, such as intersectional feminism, queer feminism, and materialist feminism, also circulate and compete within an economy of visibility, which is organized around exclusion and inclusion. Yet popular feminism becomes the central feminism within an economy of visibility. Popular feminism is thus partly a residual movement, energized and authorized by decades of political organizing around identity issues, such as gender, race, and sexuality. But the popularity of popular feminism is also new and emergent—we see feminist slogans, messages, and practices in everyday spaces, on social media, and in afterschool programs. So what are the social, cultural, and economic conditions that need to be in place for popular feminism to flourish in this moment?

Perhaps most importantly, in order to emerge so forcefully, popular feminism needs a neoliberal capitalist context. Related to this, it needs digital media and its affordances, its commitment to capitalism, its expanded markets, its circulation capabilities. Digital media has afforded spaces and places for popular feminists to create media, voice their opinions, and launch businesses. These conditions have often been called "platform capitalism," implying the emptying or flattening out of the *content* of meaning, emphasizing instead the endless traffic and circulation of this content (see Srnicek 2016; Hearn 2017). These logics of visibility—composed of metrics, numbers, clicks, "likes," etcetera—form the social, cultural, and economic conditions for popular feminism, though the implications of these logics is not just for feminism, but also for social movements in general. The

logics of platform capitalism emphasize metrics, numbers, "likes," and followers; given the predominance of digital media platforms that are predicated on the accumulation of numbers, where their business depends on these numbers, to make oneself visible or to express oneself is then also dependent on this kind of numerical accumulation. Jose van Dijck calls this the "popularity principle," where, despite differences among media platforms, these platforms are invested "in the same values or principles: popularity, hierarchical ranking, quick growth, large traffic volumes, fast turnovers, and personalized recommendations" (van Dijck 2013, n.p.).

And, as Brooke Erin Duffy (2017) details in her work about social media and aspirational labor, women largely populate many of the most visible genres of social media production, and digital media in general is crucial to the heightened visibility of popular feminism.[3] As Duffy theorizes, digital media encourages "aspirational labor," in which the successes of some women in digital spaces mobilize a general ethos where "everyone" can be creative and succeed (McRobbie 2016). The logic of aspirational labor depends on the popular feminist themes I examine in this book: self-esteem, confidence, and competence. This digital context, with its rapid circulation and loyalty to numerical accumulation, authorizes expressions and practices of popular feminism to an audience that has a wider reach than ever before. At the same time, these digital affordances also partly enable media to hyperbolize and bifurcate political positions, thus helping to generate a discursive climate of extreme views (such as misogyny).

More than any other historical influence, popular feminism emerges within the ongoing ethos and sensibility of postfeminism (Gill 2007). Postfeminism, as Rosalind Gill (2007), Angela McRobbie (2009), Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker (2007), and others have argued, is dedicated to the recognition, and then repudiation, of feminism—and it is through this repudiation, an insistence that feminism is no longer needed as a politics, that women are empowered. Women, that is, are empowered within postfeminism precisely because feminism is seen as having done the political work needed to eradicate gender asymmetry.

In this way, postfeminism celebrates a kind of gendered "freedom" in which women are apparently free to become all they want to be. Women just have to be a "Girl Boss" or "Lean In" in order to overcome sexist history. Materially, what this means is that neoliberal values such as entrepreneurialism, individualism, and the expansion of capitalist markets are embraced and adopted by girls and women as a way to craft their selves.

These values are privileged within postfeminism, rather than feminist politics, which are seen are unproductive and obsolete. Postfeminism can be characterized as a set of ideas, elements, feelings, and emphases that operate as a kind of gendered neoliberalism. Importantly, the "post" in postfeminism is not necessarily temporal, as in a new "wave" after second- or third-wave Western feminism (Dosekun 2015). Rather, postfeminism and popular feminism are entangled together in contemporary media visibility. Postfeminism remains a dominant, visible iteration of feminism in culture, and is not displaced by popular feminism but rather bolstered by it. As Rosalind Gill points out, "New cultural trends do not simply displace older or existing ones. A momentarily visible resurgence of interest in feminism should not lead us to the false conclusion that antifeminist or postfeminist ideas no longer exist" (Gill 2016a, 2).

Yet, on the face of it, popular feminism seems quite distinct from postfeminism's disavowal of feminist politics. After all, popular feminism takes up the mantle of traditional feminist issues, pointing out that girls and women have experienced crises of gender in the twenty-first century, from low self-esteem to low numbers in leadership positions. Popular feminism asks: If the postfeminist claims of gender equality are actually true, why aren't there more female CEOs? Why are more women reporting sexual assault? Why is there such a discrepancy between women and men in technology fields? The early twenty-first century saw the emergence of a newly forged feminist avowal: popular feminism explicitly *embraces* feminist values and ideologies and is dedicated to recognizing that gender inequality still exists. Popular feminism recognizes the vulnerability of women in a sexist context, shifting away from the vague "girl power" slogan of postfeminism. The popular feminist recognition that vast gender inequities still organize our cultural, economic, and political worlds is important, and a necessary correction to the false optimism of postfeminism. Again, though, popular feminism in the current moment also shares great structural similarities with postfeminism (Gill 2016b). While postfeminism and popular feminism are oppositional on the surface, they are actually mutually sustaining. Indeed, the feminist visions that come into dominant view in the current moment are shaped by the same affective politics that shape postfeminism: entrepreneurial spirit, resilience, gumption.

The "feminist standpoint" that Nancy Hartsock theorized in 1983 was connected to a Marxist notion of a proletarian understanding of in-

equality—and is a perspective that emerges from struggle and collective achievement (Hartsock 1983). One doesn't just "have" a feminist standpoint simply because one is a woman, in other words. It is a political commitment, a struggle over power, an activist responsibility. There is no postfeminist or popular feminist standpoint; on the contrary, it is more a kind of attitude, a feminist weightlessness, "unencumbered by the need to have a position on anything" (Gill 2016b, 618). The success of postfeminism and popular feminism seems to begin and end with ease: you merely need to identify as female, but don't need to identify with the murky realms of gender's social construction, or with an identity that is unequal from the ground up. So despite this seeming contradiction, between disavowal and avowal of feminism, it does not necessarily mean that popular feminism critiques the roots of gender asymmetry; rather, popular feminism tinkers on the surface, embracing a palatable feminism, encouraging individual girls and women to just *be* empowered.

These discourses of post- and pop-feminist empowerment are intimately connected to cultural economies, where to be "empowered" is to be, as Angela McRobbie (2007) has pointed out, a better *economic* subject, not necessarily a better feminist subject. Post- and popular feminism utilize different subjectivities to become visible, but for both, visibility is paramount. For this, both post- and popular feminism require an economy of visibility.

Economies of Visibility

In *American Anatomies*, Robyn Wiegman (1995, 8) defined "economies of visibility" as "the epistemology of the visual that underlies both race and gender: that process of corporeal inscription that defines each as a binary, wholly visible affair." In this formulation, race and gender are defined in large part by their visual representation: they are easy to decipher and understand, their visible bodies, or "corporeal inscription," become the stuff of who, and what, they are. Wiegman traces this visual inscription of the body historically, in both the pre– and post–civil rights eras, and links the economy of visibility to the proliferation of cinema, television, and video and the representation of bodies as kinds of commodities. While surely media such as film and television continue to serve up bodies as narrative commodities, I'd like to extend Wiegman's definition to thinking about how economies of visibility work in an era of advanced capitalism and

networked, multiple media platforms—and how these economies both create and validate popular feminism and popular misogyny. Within this mediated context, visibility becomes an end in itself, what is visible becomes what *is* (H. Gray 2013).

Feminist media studies scholars, critical race theorists, and cultural studies scholars have long been invested in studying the *politics* of visibility. The politics of visibility usually describes the process of making visible a political category (such as gender or race) that is and has been historically marginalized in the media, law, policy, and so on. This process involves what is simultaneously a category (visibility) and a qualifier (politics) that can articulate a political identity. Representation, or visibility, takes on a political valence. Here, the goal is that the coupling of "visibility" and "politics" can be productive of something, such as social change, that exceeds the visibility. "Politics," then, is a descriptor of the *practices* of visibility.

The politics of visibility has thus long been important for the marginalized, and continues to be. To demand visibility is to demand to be seen, to matter, to recognize oneself in dominant culture. As Nathaniel Frank has put it in relation to LGBTQ visibility, it is "the notion that increasing familiarity with marginalized groups is key to expanding respect for their rights" (Frank 2017, para. 1). The insistence of marginalized and disenfranchised communities—women, racial minorities, nonheteronormative communities, the working class—to be *seen* has been crucial to an understanding and an expansion of rights for these communities. So when, for example, civil rights activists mobilized to bring attention to the vast and varied racist practices of mid-twentieth-century US culture, it was to change those practices, to pursue social justice. When US media activists in the later part of the twentieth century challenged networks or other platforms to change representational practices in media in terms of race, gender, or sexuality, it was to change the way identities matter and are valued socially, politically, culturally. When social activists insist on calling attention to the "99%" of people who have the least amount of wealth in the world, as the Occupy movement did, they do so in an effort to change and disrupt wealth divisions and subsequent power relations. Of course, not all politics of visibility result in social change; the point here is that visibility is understood as leading to something, as part of a political struggle.

In the current environment, however, while the politics of visibility are still important and remain politically efficacious, *economies* of visibility

increasingly structure not just our mediascapes but also our cultural and economic practices and daily lives. In the contemporary media and digital moment, media outlets and systems can easily absorb the visualization of basically any experience. Economies of visibility fundamentally shift politics of visibility so that visibility becomes *the end* rather than a means to an end. In this way, political categories such as race and gender have transformed their very logics from the inside out, so that the visibility of these categories is what matters, rather than the structural ground on and through which they are constructed. For example, wearing a T-shirt that says "This Is What a Feminist Looks Like" transmutes the political logic of what it means to be a feminist, as a political subjectivity invested in challenging gender inequities, into what a feminist *looks* like, her visual representation (even if the person wearing the T-shirt practices feminist politics). Visibility is thus restructured to stop functioning as a qualifier to politics. The T-shirt *is* the politics; the politics are contained within the visibility—visual representation becomes the beginning and the end of political action. Within this constraining framework of visibility, race and gender, as visibilities, are then apparently self-sufficient, absorbent, and therefore enough on their own. Identifying oneself as someone who looks like a feminist becomes sufficient political action. The identification, and announcement, of one's visibility is both the radical move and the end in itself (H. Gray 2013).[4] Economies of visibility do not describe a political process, but rather assume that visibility itself has been absorbed into the economy; indeed, that absorption *is* the political.

Here, it is useful to think about visibility in terms of the direction a spotlight takes, what a light focuses on. When discussing postfeminism, McRobbie relies on philosopher Gilles Deleuze's notion of luminosity to explain contemporary notions of empowerment, in which he describes visibilities not as objects of vision but rather as "forms of luminosity which are created by the light itself" (2009, 60). The "light" is composed of the conditions that make some objects seen and others unseen, and similarly, that make some bodies visible even as others are obscured. This is one of the moments when postfeminism and popular feminism overlap; for example, the popular feminist focus on confidence is directed toward those white middle-class women who are privileged enough to *expect* they are entitled to confidence. For McRobbie, the "light itself" is the conditions of contemporary neoliberal capitalism, which allow particular subjects and objects to be worthy of our vision.

FIGURE INTRO.5. "This Is What a Feminist Looks Like" T-shirt, 2016.

In other words, in the current moment of neoliberal capitalism and digital culture, the demand for a visibility *politics* competes with an *economization* of visibility. These demands for visibility are quite different; the goals and consequences of visibility transform when they are part of an economy of visibility. In fact, visibility itself is not necessarily the key logic in the contemporary moment but rather how visibility *is managed and controlled.* As Zeynep Gambetti says about the Gezi Park protests in Turkey, "The management of visibility controlled the signification of the event, pinning it to available structures without letting new meanings emerge" (Gambetti 2013, para. 1). The available structures for popular feminism's visibility in the current moment are usually those that are dominant centers of power: media companies, corporations, and the technology industries. In this sense, within the context of popular feminism, visibility often becomes synonymous with "trending," whether in the mainstream news media or on social media. To trend is a different process of visibility than to agitate to be seen in order to be granted basic rights. Trending is about recognition, and about making oneself available for normalization, as Herman Gray has argued; the visibility that fuels trending is a demand to be recognized in an attention economy (H. Gray 2013; Gambetti 2013). As Eunsong Kim has argued, "Trending is visibility granted by a closed,

private corporation and their proprietary algorithms" (Kim 2016, para. 10). We are easily tempted to the popular and the luminous: we "like," we retweet, we repost, we encourage trending. Importantly, this does not supplant a politics of visibility; an economy of visibility does not simply produce a universal subject that is constructed by capitalist markets and circulation. It does signal, however, an acquiescence to a demand for a specific kind of visibility, one that is economized and bounded by corporate logics and desires.

To be clear: I'm not using "economy" as a mere metaphor. Rather, I adopt a more nuanced account of the logics and moralities of both economics and culture as a way to understand how identities are constructed within the economy of visibility, and to ask what is at stake in this kind of construction. For girls and women, adopting the logics and moralities of an economy of visibility means that despite the fact that popular feminism claims to be about empowerment, this kind of empowerment is often achieved through a focus on the visible body—precisely one of the aspects of patriarchy feminism has been fighting against for centuries. The visible body is also the commodifiable body.

All bodies are not commodifiable in the same way. For example, race, in the context of an economy of visibility, relies not only on the seen body but also on *how* this body is seen, so nonwhite and white bodies are mobilized differently. Again, the demands for visibility have different goals and consequences. An economy of visibility depends not only on the visible but also on a mechanism of surveillance: who is being watched and seen, and for what reason? An economy of visibility is thus dependent on the dynamic relationship of visibility and invisibility—and the boundaries between these are not always clear. Nonwhite people, nonheteronormative, nongender conforming individuals and communities, and the working class are subject to intense surveillance as a way to enforce social discipline; as such they are kept in a "state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault [1977] 1995, 201). Marginalized subjects, subjects of difference, are punished and disciplined precisely *when* the spotlight falls on them. Hypervisibility also functions as a figuration of difference, of threat, of terrorism. There are thus different ways to be visible; and visibility isn't always the solution. Visibility hides as it reveals. This not only frames the marginalized in discriminatory ways, it also works to render the complexities of intersectionality less visible, and does not attend to the spaces

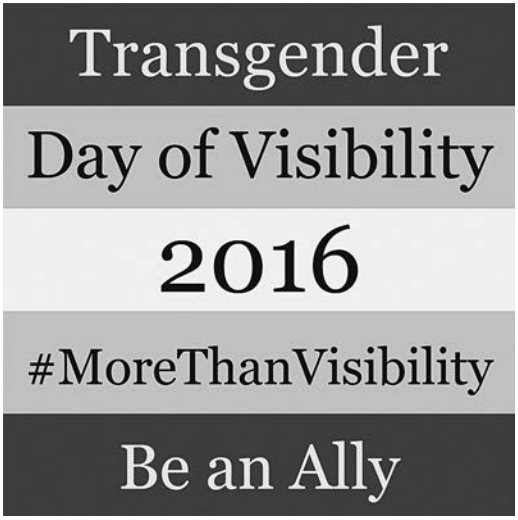

FIGURE INTRO.6.
Making the invisible seen: Transgender visibility.

that are created by those who do not "fit" within a popular feminist visible frame (Kim 2016).

The spotlight can also become the site of misogyny. Because an economy of visibility functions most effectively on a surface, rather than on a structural, level, for marginalized groups, to be "seen" has limitations. As critical race theorist Grace Hong has argued, "Visibility is not inclusion but surveillance" (Hong 2006, xxviii). When the borders and boundaries of visibility are economized, "inclusion" is about widening an already established set of norms. Thus, those who do not fit those norms because of difference become particularly vulnerable targets. We see this clearly with trans communities, who have recently occupied an ambivalent connection to visibility: on the one hand, it is crucial to be seen, to matter, as a non-gender-conforming community, one that has been hidden for so many years. But visibility can come at a cost at a moment when the visible is ever more primary, ever more difficult to move beyond. We witness this with the "bathroom bills" that have been recently passed in some US states, a series of legislations that define access to public facilities, specifically restrooms, for transgender individuals, and subjects them to extreme surveillance and violation. Trans activist and artist Reina Gossett argues that for trans women, "visibility is a pillar of criminalization, not a tenet of liberation" (Gossett cited in Kim 2016, para. 6). Within this context, Herman Gray's argument that visibility, a "proliferation of differences" in the media and cultural scapes, allows for structural racism to remain in place, is particu-

larly important. Visibility is actually less powerful than invisibility in the maintenance of hegemonic structure, because visibility is more susceptible to critique (H. Gray 2013).

Yet economies define themselves as neutral. Crucially, economies are about individuals—consumers, buyers, sellers. In this definition, economies are seen in a way that validates capitalism, where production is invisible, and commodities, markets, and consumption are prioritized. Economies privilege and give value to the individual who can participate in that economy, and because they focus on individual bodies, they are by definition gendered, raced, and classed economies. Within the *politics* of visibility, bodies that are disenfranchised and marginalized are moved into the spotlight so as to highlight that disenfranchisement and marginalization. Within an economy of visibility, the *spotlight* on their bodies, their visibility, the number of views, is in fact its politics. This spotlight is literally designed for social media such as Instagram, Tumblr, and Snapchat.

Elements of an Economy of Visibility

What does it mean to "economize" visibility? Every economy is made up of different components. For example, as a basic concept, an economy relies on a space wherein forces of supply and demand operate, where buyers and sellers interact to trade or buy goods, where the value of products is deliberated, where consumers are identified, and where specific forms of labor and production occur. The spaces of supply and demand in an economy of visibility are largely mediated spaces—social media, television, film, digital media. These are the spaces where feminism becomes popular, viewed by millions of users, so that there is an opening of space to hear, think, and feel feminism. These are also the spaces that enable visibility of the body, that ask users to evaluate and judge the body, that function as spaces for public shaming. The spaces of an economy of visibility are networked spaces, interconnected nodes between and within multiple media platforms, and where profit is in some ways contingent on number of views.

In an economy of visibility, buyers and sellers interact to trade or buy goods—and within popular feminism, those "goods" are the themes I discuss in this book: self-esteem, confidence, competence. For example, the market here manifests in girl empowerment organizations, where girls who are the most visible in the media, such as white middle-class girls, are the ones seen as in need of being empowered because of issues of low

self-esteem and self-confidence. As I discuss in chapter 2, many of these organizations, such as SPARK and AfricAid, use corporate, nonprofit, and governmental funds to form organizations. It also manifests in the form of the "girl effect" in international development discourse, where the girl is positioned as the prominent agent of social change, a heretofore unrecognized competent individual.[5]

The product in gendered economies of visibility is the body (most often the bodies of heteronormative cis-gendered women). Its value is constantly deliberated over, surveilled, evaluated, judged, and scrutinized through media discourses, law, and policy. We see this deliberation of value in misogynistic comments on social media, in campus rape culture, in conservative efforts to curb reproductive rights for women, in revenge porn, in slut and fat shaming. We also see it in popular feminist practices such as the "Love Your Body" discourses, corporate empowerment campaigns, and confidence organizations.

Consumers and producers are clearly identified in the economy of visibility. As with all economies, some are considered more valuable than others (though this does not mean that other sorts of consumers and producers don't exist). As I discuss in chapter 1, two of the most visible female consumers and producers in the contemporary economy of visibility are those that Anita Harris calls "Can-Do girls" and "At-Risk girls" (Harris 2003).[6] These two subject positions circulate with ease within an economy of visibility, where the Can-Do girl, typically white, middle-class, and entrepreneurial, embodies the themes of popular feminism: confident, empowered, entrepreneurial, filled with capacity. The Can-Do girl is positioned in opposition to the At-Risk girl—typically a girl of color or a working-class girl, and one who thus is seen as more susceptible to poverty, drugs, early pregnancy, and fewer career goals and ambitions. Visibility thus yields different gazes, or forms of surveillance, based on race and class. This constant surveillance, in turn, encourages girls' and women's participation in the circuits of media visibility. The demand for girls' and women's bodies, the economy of visibility's hunger for those bodies, endures from postfeminism to the current moment of popular feminism.

Within economies of visibility, there are markets. In the current environment, I see these markets as industries that are built around gendered consumers. These are industries that support and validate the Can-Do girl or invest in the At-Risk girl, that illuminate and make visible specific bodies over others, indeed, that create and sustain the demarca-

tions between the Can-Do and the At-Risk girl. Some of these markets are more immaterial than material, focusing on confidence building, high self-esteem, and vague notions of empowerment. Others are markets that profit on skill sets such as coding that will ostensibly lead to confidence and empowerment.

And of course, in every economy, there is labor and work. In a gendered economy of visibility, there is a dominant presence of the emotional labor of femininity. In a context of neoliberal capitalism, as many have noted, the content and shape of work shifts, so that work becomes more and more about what Arlie Hochschild calls "emotional labor" (Hochschild 1983; see also Weeks 2011; Neff 2012; Gregg 2013; Baym 2015; Duffy 2017). Within dominant practices of neoliberal capitalism, work is more "insecure and casualized" (Gill and Pratt 2008), so that different kinds of labor emerge. In an economy of visibility, work and labor are primarily self-care and care work. This is in part because of labor shifts since the 1970s that Lisa Adkins (2001) describes as the "cultural feminization of work," in which, regardless of gender, more workers are expected to incorporate relational work into their routine practices. There are different definitions of self-care, and what it means to care for the self depends on cultural contexts such as institutionalized racism, conditions of poverty, and so on. Self-care, in a context of an economy of visibility, often involves precarious, informal modes of labor, in which girls and young women cultivate and acquire status as a form of currency, in order to make themselves marketable (Marwick 2013). Again, we see this on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr, which become platforms for self-branding, as well as the places where self-care is both "proven" (through its visual statement) and also often monetized.

Within today's capitalism, specific girls and women are rendered visible only if they embody what McRobbie refers to as the "spectacularly feminine": "Women are actively engaged in the production of self. That is, it becomes increasingly difficult to function as a female subject without subjecting oneself to those technologies of self that are constitutive of the spectacularly feminine" (2009, 60). Here, McRobbie points to the tenuous connection between personal empowerment and visibility. Visibility can be the route to a kind of empowerment, but one that is "consummately and reassuringly feminine," and that enables women to be, as Akane Kanai points out, "attributed with capacity, depending on their ability to articulate socially valued versions of femininity in these domains" (Kanai 2016, 18–19).

Kanai's point about the ways in which young women "may be attributed with capacity" depending on how well they can articulate and perform "socially valued versions of femininity" is key to the current moment of empowerment. Becoming visible and capacious—in media, law, policy, education, and so on—is necessary in this version of empowerment, but we need to think about how limits and parameters are drawn and maintained within popular feminism. Whose body can be a socially valued version of femininity within a popular feminist context? According to popular feminism, who is deemed worthy of empowering? And what are we empowering girls and women *to do*?

Within the context of neoliberal capitalism and its intense privileging of individual entrepreneurship and self-governance, contemporary discourses of empowerment stress the goal of becoming capable of governing oneself. In Barbara Cruikshank's (1999) work *The Will to Empower*, she thinks through the various ways that liberal democracies produce citizens who are capable of governing themselves, focusing particularly on the poor. She argues that in order for governments to motivate the poor to help themselves (thus abdicating state social responsibility), the poor had to be *known*: "Empowerment was planned to become, effortlessly, 'self-empowerment.' Expert reformers, private foundations, voluntary associations were and continue to be nongovernmental means of government" (Cruikshank 1999, 69). I see this "nongovernmental" means of government shaping gendered empowerment as well, though with different feminine bodies—white, heterosexual, middle-class—from Cruikshank's subjects. These subjects become known through economies of visibility, where they articulate a "socially valued version of femininity" and are thus justified as in need of empowerment. This is what Nikolas Rose (1999) theorized about the ways advanced liberalism is invested in "governing at a distance," where the onus of governing is on the individual, and empowerment is understood as *self*-empowerment. When girls and women are told to "be" confident and empowered, it is framed as an individual choice: they just need to believe it, and then they will become it. This confidence will help them become better economic subjects, without interrogating the broad economic context that encourages women and girls to not be confident in the first place.

Again, these are the elements that comprise an economy of visibility: supply and demand, buyers and sellers, and deliberation of value, products, consumers, and specific forms of labor and production. Though

I have laid them out here as separate elements, they are, importantly, deeply interrelated and intertwined. In other words, if the product in the economy of visibility is the feminine body, women and men are also the buyers; the consumers in this economy are also the products. The Can-Do and At-Risk girls can be conflated in the same girl, if one is empowered by her own choices, such as sexual choices, but the specific content of these choices place her At-Risk. The markets *for* girls, where girls are recognized as a key consumer demographic, exist alongside literal, much more malicious markets *in* girls, such as increasing numbers of girls and women who are sexually trafficked.[7] These components are not discrete but rather inform and constitute each other.

Economies of visibility can illuminate the importance of feminism to a larger public. To be sure, the increasing public awareness of feminism is important and has political meaning. Yet the popular feminist practices that are most visible are often those that "articulate socially valued versions of femininity," or what Mia McKenzie (2013, n.p.) has called White Feminism™, a description of the way that "white women put their own needs and well-being above black women everyday and call it 'feminism.'" This book is my attempt to position some of these different versions of feminism in relation to each other, and to offer a conjunctural analysis of the capitalist context that sustains and values some feminisms over others, a context that enables some women to be luminous and to have spectacular visibility, while others are obscured and eclipsed.

Popular Misogyny

The economic goal of empowerment, sustained by the economy of visibility, is a key logic of popular feminism: the size and reach of a contemporary economic market for both feminist paraphernalia and ideology is staggering. Available across various media platforms, this popular feminism often takes on the quality of a spectacle-based neoliberal set of commodities that offer inflections on the meaning of "popular" at each destination. Again, though, it is unproductive to simply dismiss popular feminism as just another branding exercise that serves to accumulate capital. Rather, what *is* productive, and what this book aims to develop, is a critical examination of the interlocution of feminism and misogyny in popular culture. In order to ferret out the mechanics and stakes within which popular feminism operates, we need to examine the simultaneous

popularity of misogyny. Popular misogyny is expressed more as a norm, invisible, commonplace. Girls and women are hypervisible because they are so often understood as bodies. Boys and men are less conducive to spectacular visibility because they aren't conceived of as bodies in the same way. Masculine desire is regularly displayed in the media, but it is not marked as *masculine* but rather the norm. The result is that popular misogyny lives in widespread sentiments that "boys will be boys" when they commit sexual violence, and in media representations of heteronormativity. It is bolstered through anonymity online, where rape and death threats become routine. Masculinities are not so urgently, so violently, demanded as femininities in economies of visibility.

Despite this, popular misogyny also circulates in an economy of visibility, perhaps now, in the twenty-first century, more than ever before. The technological affordances of social media have authorized popular misogynistic expressions in a similar manner as popular feminism—the audience is wider, the circulation happens on many interconnected networks with relative ease, and the broader cultural political context, symbolized by the election of Trump, as well as other extreme-right successes around the world, endorses an aggressive, defensive popular misogyny. Yet while popular feminism instantiates primarily as visibility, popular misogyny is not only expressed in an economy of visibility but is also reified into institutions and structures.

While forms of misogyny, of course, existed before popular feminism's recent rise, *Empowered* contends with how, and in what ways, misogyny has altered its media tactics and tropes in response to popular feminism. Popular feminism and popular misogyny are engaged in a constant dynamic, one that continuously shapes and reshapes not only feminism but also patriarchy. While we can think of the ways that popular feminism uses media and networks to (ironically) restructure feminism to be focused on the individual rather than collective politics, misogyny also transfigures patriarchy in this moment. In the contemporary context, patriarchy is perceived to be threatened in specific ways by feminism, in which the "injuries" dealt to masculinity and whiteness are seen as in need of repair and recuperation. While some of the forms of popular misogyny I discuss in this book are brutally vicious and violent, others are more conventional acts of objectification. And while misogyny takes different forms, in the following pages I mainly examine those forms that borrow from a heteronormative playbook in order to enact rage and vitriol, and

those that wage demands on women's bodies based on the entitlements promised by heteronormativity.

Like popular feminism, popular misogyny takes on a range of forms, from live-tweeting sexual assault and rape cases to an increase in death and rape threats expressed on social media platforms toward women who either identify as feminists (such as Jessica Valenti or Mikki Kendall) or those who enter into previously male-dominated professions such as game development and commentary (such as Anita Sarkeesian or Brianna Wu) to revenge-porn websites to a rise in men's rights organizations to an increase in global sex trafficking of women and girls. While economies of visibility frame much of contemporary popular culture, popular feminism and popular misogyny are positioned in different ways within these economies. Popular misogyny, while seemingly present in all areas of social and cultural life, is not spectacularly visible in the way popular feminism is. But like popular feminism, popular misogynistic practices exist along a continuum. While the men's rights activism of websites such as Return of Kings, with its unapologetic hatred of women that informs all of its writing, is an important part of popular misogyny, so too are the more moderate voices of other men's rights organizations, such as the National Coalition for Men and their efforts to change policy on custody and paternal rights. And, despite the increasing visibility of popular feminism, popular misogyny seems to have more and more success in inserting itself in policy and legal discourse, where the legacy of patriarchy legitimates misogynistic arguments as common sense, allowing for the conversion of misogynistic ideas into action with terrible efficiency. We see this insertion of popular misogyny in the vast number of anti-abortion bills and laws that have been proposed and passed in the United States since 2008; in the continued disparity between men and women who work in the technology industry; in the ways that the first woman to be a major party's nominee for US president, Hillary Clinton, is objectified and devalued because of her gender. We see it in the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States.

Popular misogyny isn't openly embraced or even often given headlines—at least not in a way that *acknowledges* it as misogyny. When misogynistic acts become visible, it is often by emphasizing outlier individuals, who, if they are white men, are often characterized as mentally ill, such as Elliot Rodger, the twenty-two-year-old man who killed six people and wounded thirteen others in Santa Barbara, California, in 2014. Rodger documented

FIGURE INTRO.7.
A men's rights organization's attempt to reroute the message of popular feminism: "Stop violence against women but not against men."

his rage against women online and apparently went on the rampage because women rejected him sexually, yet dominant media sources described his issues with depression and mental illness as the reason for the rampage. Much media representation of misogyny is framed in such a way, with a focus on anomalous individuals, thus consciously or unconsciously ignoring and obscuring the deeply embedded networked aspect of popular misogyny.[8]

A networked misogyny means that the concept itself is constantly moving from one node to another, emerging in different spaces, with varied manifestations. Popular misogyny cannot be characterized in the same way as popular feminism, which because of its heightened visibility in the contemporary moment often has concrete, material representations. For me, to confront popular misogyny means to confront the notion that patriarchy itself needs to be assessed differently than it ever has been before; it is not just a discrete group of organizations, or roles, or spaces, but rather, we must see it as *networked* (Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2015). Both are networked movements, finding expression in nodes ranging from social media to global meet-ups to fashion to neomasculine boot camps. Through this dynamic, both feminism and misogyny are reimagined, take

new forms, and have a variety of effects. This is how networks work: they allow for different spaces of expression simultaneously in that they function through rapid and asynchronous communication; they decentralize power even as they remain loyal to hegemonic institutions (Castells 2007, 2012). Again, we see this norm in the election of an unapologetic misogynist as president of the United States, in federal policy deliberations on health care that include only male representatives, in the continuing disparity in wages between men and women (not to mention wage disparities between white people and people of color).

Popular misogyny is also an ongoing recuperative project. Despite the fact that misogyny has long existed as a norm in policy, culture, economics, and the political realm, in the current moment there is an overt claim that masculinity, and more generally, patriarchy, are under threat. Popular misogyny is often expressed as a need to take something "back"—such as patriarchy—from the greedy hands of women and feminists. We see this palpably in the increasing visibility of the extreme right across the globe. While the racist ideologies of the extreme right have often been correctly identified as white nationalism, the extreme right has always also run on an overtly misogynistic agenda; as Matthew Lyons points out, "Harassing and defaming women isn't just a tactic; it also serves the alt-right's broader agenda and long-term vision for society" (2016, para. 8). Again, a key logic of the extreme right is recuperation: men's rights organizations in digital culture are filled with proclamations about how women and feminists have not only destroyed society but emasculated it. As Corey Savage, writing on the men's activist website Return of Kings, puts it: "We have been robbed of our lives as we've been trained from childhood to serve a matriarchal system with 'tolerance' and 'equality' as our religion" (Savage 2017, para. 29). Like popular feminism, much of the logic of popular misogyny revolves around twinned discourses of capacity and injury. Expressions of popular misogyny often rely upon the idea that men have been *injured* by women: men are seen to be denied rights because women have gained them; men are no longer confident because women are more confident; men have lost jobs and power because women have entered into previously male-dominated realms, regardless of how slowly. Men's rights organizations and other forms of popular misogyny dedicate themselves to restoring the *capacity* of men, the restoration and recuperation of a traditional heteronormative masculinity and of patriarchy itself. This often is seen as a backlash to popular feminism, and surely it is that. But

it is also more than that, as backlash implies a linear direction—misogyny lashes "back" at feminism. In contrast, popular misogyny lashes out in all directions, finding expression in obvious, and not so obvious, ways.

To consider the "popular" in popular misogyny, then, is to take account of the way it refuses to sit still. It may not always emerge in recognizable forms, but it is nearly impossible to escape it. It exists along a continuum, where at the radical end, such as the extreme right, it is often disparaged by the status quo (at least superficially). But when misogyny is extreme and read as an anomaly, as an unfortunate expression of a few deranged individuals, this works to validate and render invisible the other, less obvious ways it works as a norm. Thus, contemporary expressions of popular misogyny are seen *not* as structural but as the anomalous expressions of individuals responding to feminism. If misogyny were acknowledged as a social, political, economic, and cultural structure, then it could be subjected to criticism and challenged in a way that individual expressions, often dismissed as anomalous and insignificant, cannot be. And even when it is considered, as it sometimes is, as a movement, it is minimized as a kind of autonomous force, the "fringe," rather than a condensed version of structural expression. The networked nature of popular feminism and popular misogyny allows for this kind of restructuring, as networks are inherently flexible, reprogrammable, and infinitely expandable. That is, this confrontation with patriarchy in the contemporary moment returns us to the familiar, the ongoing—the various microaggressions we confront, the presumptions of male privilege—but those familiar problems are now equipped with digital tools, such as online comments sections and social media sites. This networked misogyny is similar to the way J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006) described feminism as "analogically" rather than institutionally organized. Different misogynies across networks, in other words, inform each other, constitute each other, are related to each other.

This networked continuum is the backdrop for all expressions of misogyny, whether that be the extreme right, a political norm, a labor practice, or a backlash against popular feminism. I examine many of these popular misogynistic expressions throughout this book; there are some examples, such as the UN Women campaign and the "don't mancriminate" campaign I analyze in chapter 1, where there is a clear and obvious response, a backlash, from popular misogyny. There are others, such as the pick-up artist industry I examine in chapter 3, that present as a recuperative project, aiming to restore sexual authority to men. And still there

are others, such as the toxic geek masculinity context that is the subject of chapter 4, that consider the encroachment of women in the technology industries as an injury to masculinity.

Bad Romance: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny

Empowered seeks to make sense of the constellation of popular feminist expressions, ideologies, practices, activism, and commodity objects through a range of texts, cultural practices, and organizations, as well as the misogynistic responses to them. Clearly, popular misogyny does not neatly map onto historical movements of feminism. Popular misogyny is not a movement; it is a deeply embedded networked context, one that structures not only the material world of law, policy, and regulation but also identity, affect, and sexuality. Among other things, it is a reactive response to popular feminism; a waging of battle, a call to arms. This does not end with one round; both feminism and misogyny are continually restructured through this dynamic.

The spectacle of popular feminism is part of the way that popular misogyny maintains an invisibility, even as it is becoming more difficult in a contemporary media climate to remain invisible. Herman Gray's critique of visibility, and what he calls the continuing "investment in the cultural politics of representation for the liberal subject of identity," is crucial here (H. Gray 2013, 772). Gray questions what visibility might mean as a political practice in an era of a shift from *race* to *difference.* Gray's focus is on race, specifically African American identity, but I want to think about what this also means for gendered identity. The cultural conditions that made it important to demand visibility in the first place—not enough representation, representation that is highly stereotypical, institutionalized sexism—have shifted in an age of popular feminism and popular misogyny, so that the demand *looks* different. Rather, the demand for visibility as something that is not coupled with a political project is becoming more and more paramount. As popular feminism makes increasing demands for visibility, the political project of popular misogyny continues on more powerfully as a less visible, structuring force. To be clear: the visibility of popular feminism has been in large part about making what is hidden, routinized, and normalized about popular misogyny more public, displayed, and explicit.

The luminosity that spotlights some feminisms, and feminine bodies, over others also garners a misogynistic reaction. The digital context for a

contemporary economy of visibility is also one that enables and validates what Jack Bratich (2011) has called "affective divergence." Bratich, as well as scholars such as Mark Andrejevic (2002), Beth Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, Gilbert Rodman (2013), and others, argue that along with the more positive implications of convergence culture, we also need to take account of the ways in which our new technologies and networked publics enable a *divergence*: cultures of judgment, aggression, and violence. As Bratich argues, "We are in the midst of a media fueled popularization of bullies, a convergence of micro-violence perhaps comprising a cultural will-to-humiliation" (Bratich 2011, 66). It might be the case that the visibility of popular feminism, no matter how commodified or banal, allows for an opening of space and mind to think about broader opposition to structural sexism and racism. But popular misogyny performs a similar function, and opens up spaces and opportunities for a more systematic attack on women and women's rights—it is the context for a "popularization of bullies, a convergence of micro-violence" that coalesces in a neutralization of antagonism.

Indeed, the "cultural will-to-humiliation" is what makes contemporary popular misogyny a *shifted* set of discourses and practices from previous historical moments. Popular misogyny is a constellation of a "popularization of bullies," present not only online but offline as well. This is the wider political and popular context for the most recent crisis in masculinity: networked misogyny operates as a way to consolidate a "cultural will-to-humiliation" that promises the restoration of male privilege, prerogative, and rightful ownership of economic, cultural, and political spaces (Bratich 2011).

This restoration of male privilege is the logical crux of the mirroring effect I see between popular feminism and popular misogyny. Indeed, in the contemporary US context of the Donald Trump administration, the federal government is organized around white male injury. For example, Cynthia Young (forthcoming) argues that civil rights rhetoric has been appropriated in the United States by a contemporary white identity politics: "Civil rights rhetoric helps express a form of whiteness that is both racist and avowedly antiracist, a form of whiteness that simultaneously claims to be disadvantaged and uniquely empowered to 'take the country back.'" (Young, forthcoming). Young argues that a confluence of factors—including the attacks of September 11, 2001; wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; the global economic collapse in 2007–8; and the election of Barack Obama—have "combined with significant cultural shifts [and] have contributed to the remaking of white identity as uniquely vulnerable and victimized in the con-

temporary moment." The reimagining of white Americans after 9/11 as victims of global terror has partly enabled a reactionary identity politics, one that promises to "take America back," and that has reached its most grotesque incarnation to date in the rise of Donald Trump as the president of the United States, with his campaign promise to "make America great again." Echoing Young, Nicholas Confessore (2016, n.p.), in the *New York Times*, points out that Trump's popularity among white people who feel disenfranchised has a number of origin points as well: "The resentment among whites feels both old and distinctly of this moment."

As Young (forthcoming) incisively argues, "taking America back" and "making it great again" is both overtly and covertly about whiteness; immigration and people of color predominantly *cause* the apparent threat to America, as this "imagined victimhood" is also crafted as a response to the predicted demographic demise of white Americans of European descent, who will be a statistical minority by the middle of the century. This whiteness identity builds on America's history of racism, and at the same time excludes the experiences of other claims of the present-day burdens of that racism.

Young's argument about whiteness extends to masculinity as well. Indeed, this is how the funhouse mirror of popular feminism and popular misogyny works: the injuries caused by centuries of structural racism and sexism are turned on their head so that it is white men who feel these injuries most deeply in the contemporary moment. This white masculine identity denies structural racism, seeing white individuals as uniquely injured. Needless to say, not all white middle-class men feel that they are victims, and not all extrapolate their sense of individual victimization onto the victimization of the American nation. However, this context—that white men are under threat through a kind of reverse racism, or sexism, positions men as those who are being discriminated against.

One of the persistent questions I ask in this book is thus one about structure: Who feels entitled—and is rewarded—for taking up social space in public? How is this space distributed? Who does the spotlight shine its light on? This question is partly about digital spaces, but it also encompasses more than that. Clearly, the affordances of technology contribute to a misogyny that is both networked and popular. But a focus on these particular *facets* of the problem of misogyny blinds us to the larger problem of misogyny itself. When we seek to understand popular misogyny by seeing it as a manifestation of digital culture, we can then write it

off as merely a negative effect of technology. Instead, I argue that we need to see it for what it is: a manifestation of neoliberalism, a consolidation of the logic of neoliberal violence. Neoliberalism and popular misogyny are just as interconnected as neoliberalism and popular feminism, despite a general mediated discourse that positions popular misogyny as an outlier, a deviation from the culturally acceptable norms of traditional masculinity. Neoliberalism, however, produces not only ideology but also violence, and it is a structuring force that is both popular and networked.

In the following chapters, I explore the relationship between popular feminism and popular misogyny. In each chapter, I examine what I feel to be one of the major themes that shape this relationship: shame, confidence, competence, and, finally, rage. Using these themes as an optic, in each chapter I attempt to take account of the networked nature of popular feminism and popular misogyny, and argue that these networks, circulating in an economy of visibility, allow for a deeper understanding of the relationship between the two: sometimes it is mirroring, sometimes appropriation, sometimes backlash, sometimes explicit violence. This book is my attempt to make sense of this interrelated dynamic between popular feminism and popular misogyny; the way the two movements are conjunctural even as they are asymmetrical, intersecting in their various patterns of actions and expressions, echoing each other in complex and contradictory ways. This means challenging the normalization, and the sheer *popularity,* of popular misogyny, and not shrugging it off as an inevitable expression of boys being boys. It also means recognizing—and mobilizing—the ambivalence of popular feminism, and parsing through the way in which the "popular" of popular feminism means that it doesn't sit still; it is a struggle over meaning, a way to imagine a different future.

NOTES

Preface

1. This is adapted from a post I initially wrote on November 9, 2016, on the Culture Digitally blog at http://culturedigitally.org/2016/11/at-culture-digitally-were-thinking-about-our-scholarship-in-the-harsh-light-of-this-week/#banetweiser.

Introduction

1. The "risks" of feminism can be understood as part of a larger "risk society," as theorized by Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck. For both theorists, risk society is a manifestation of modernity; as Beck puts it, risk society is "a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernisation itself" (Beck 1992, 21). Feminism, in this context, is also a result of modernity, and presents itself to broader society as a set of "hazards and insecurities" that garner a reactive response.

2. See Trump's comments on the released video tape, where he said that powerful men can "grab 'em [women] by the pussy." These comments were dismissed by Trump as "locker room" talk ("Transcript" 2016).

3. Of course, as Duffy argues, these genres, and the women who labor within them, rely "on historically constructed notions of femininity—particularly discourses of community, affect, and commodity-based self-expression" (Duffy 2017, 9).

4. When visibility is an end in itself, it can also be transformed by the opposition, as when people of color signal something as racism, they are in turn called racists for seeing it. For more, see Ahmed 2012.

5. Indeed, Malala Yousafzai, the young woman who defied the Taliban in Pakistan by insisting the girls should be educated and was then shot for her activism, is a clear example of the "girl effect." In 2014, Yousafzai became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, and has continued her activism.

6. While Harris was theorizing a postfeminist, rather than a popular feminist, moment, the dynamic between the Can-Do and the At-Risk girls is similar in the current moment.

7. We see this conflation of the empowered girl and the At-Risk girl in the successful film franchise *Taken*, in which a privileged American girl is kidnapped by terrorists as part of a sex trafficking scheme.

8. Indeed, the "lone wolf" motif plays out in other acts of violence, such as terrorism. As many have pointed out, when white men commit acts of domestic terrorism in the United States, the media almost always frames these men as mentally ill, acting alone. When a Muslim man commits violence, it is almost always assumed to be a terrorist act (usually connected to radical Islam).

1. The Funhouse Mirror

1. In addition, I believe that the "power" in "girl power" is more complicated than the Nike posters and the valorization of the US women's soccer team would lead us to believe. The particularities of that power are just as important as the particularities of the girl herself, and still need rigorous theorization (Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001; Harris 2003; Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Projansky 2014).

2. Their campaign was also good counterpublicity for the sweatshop scandals of this same period: In 1995, when the "If You Let Me Play" campaign hit the airwaves, there was a stream of media and activist critiques detailing Nike's horrendous labor practices (especially outside the United States, in impoverished parts of the world), which would end up permanently damaging the company's reputation—especially in terms of gender, since most of the workers in the sweatshops were women. The "If You Let Me Play" campaign not only distracted consumers away from Nike's labor issues, it also established Nike as a company committed to gender equality. So while this video, and the general campaign, resonated with women, it also helped to obfuscate other issues involving the company, such as the women who make Nike products who can't afford to "play" even if someone lets them.

3. One of the key texts of second-wave feminism in the United States was Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975), which called attention to the vast prevalence of rape in American culture. Almost twenty years later, in 1993, graduate student Katie Roiphe published her book *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus*, where she argued, among other things, that feminism and its apparent culture of fear has made young