

Written Document

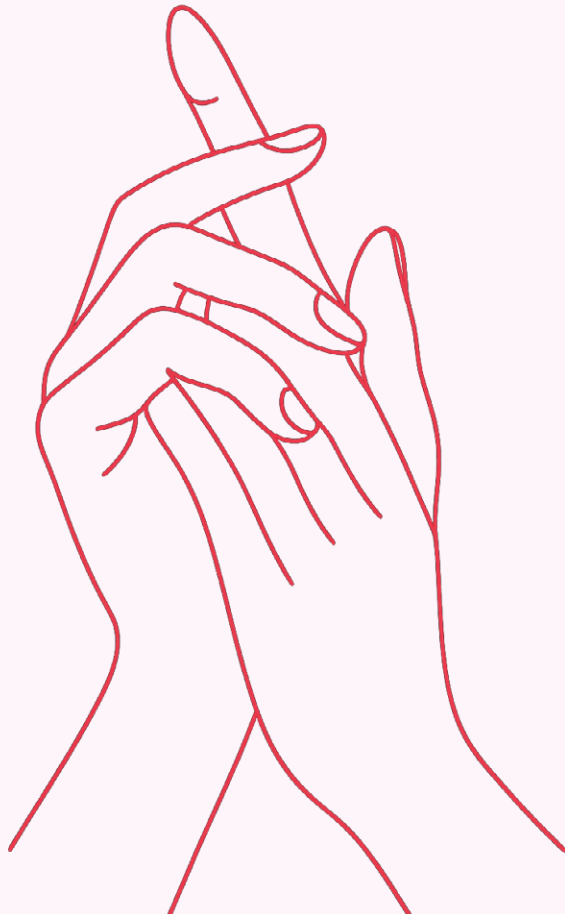
Selling the Girlboss: A Critical Study of the Commodification and Decline of Feminist Empowerment Tropes in Fashion Media

Bethan Gwynne

00216925

Vogue College of Fashion: Final Masters Project

7,424 Words



“We came to understand ourselves, consciously or not, as ‘human capital’: subjects to be optimised for better performance in the economy.”

Anne Helen Petersen, *Can't Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation* (2020)

Contents

4	Introduction Background and Context Project Origins Research Question and Aims Scope and Relevance Structure of Study	
6	Literature Review 2.1...Post Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism 2.2...Popular Feminism and Media Visibility 2.3...The Girlboss as a Cultural Icon 2.4...Fashion Media, Visual Culture and Representation 2.5...Intersectionality, Labour and Resistance	
10	Methodology 3.1...Research Scope and Focus 3.2...Secondary Research 3.3...Primary Research Design 3.4...Rationale for the Research Approach 3.5...Research Limitations 3.6...Ethical Considerations	
14	Analysis and Discussion Multimodal Content Analysis Interview Insights Audience Survey Findings Comparative Visual Analysis Intergrated Analysis	
26	Conclusion Key Findings Implications for Media and Fashion Relation to Practical Project Recommendations for Future Practice	
28	Bibliography Full List of Referenced Texts	
29	Image List	
30	Appendices Interview Transcripts and Consent Forms Survey Results Visual Materials Ethical Approval	

Introduction

caricature of an empowering movement. This study explores how fashion media and journalism have fuelled both the rise and cultural decline of the girlboss parody, and what this has revealed about the relationship between feminism and media and commerce.

The girlboss is not just a marketing strategy; she is a media figure constructed through postfeminist discourse that prioritises individualism, self-confidence and consumer agency (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). These narratives are often presented in fashion images like streamlined dressing, posing, luxury austerity and reiterated in editorial spreads and posts that marry ambition with femininity. Fashion media thus becomes a key site where empowerment is performed and on sale. But as cultural consciousness shifts after burnout culture and social media countertrends, so too has the girlboss icon come under scrutiny. The phrase “gaslight, gatekeep, girlboss,” a meme born on the internet around 2020, is today deployed as a cultural insult for the hollowness of the icon and of brand-friendly feminism (Phipps, 2020).

Fashion media plays a critical role in building the visibility and legibility of feminist narratives. As Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) argues, the rise of “popular feminism” in the market indicates a wider trend toward feminism as a consumer identity rather than the originally rooted political movement. Fashion media both enforces this transition and actively re-produces it through editorials, advertorials and images of women posed as powerful icons. This text therefore asks: What has fashion media’s role been in the collapse of the girlboss figure, and what does this signal for feminist narratives within editorial culture?

The study is accompanied by a functional end product: a satirical zine titled *Unfinished?* which pictorially deconstructs and reconfigures feminist representation within fashion media. The written component underpins the zine by placing the topic and exploring not just how the girlboss has been constructed and commodified, but also how fashion media can begin to move on from her. Together, the practical and written components of the project aim to challenge the limits of aesthetic feminism and set forward alternatives that are more inclusive and intersectional in worth (Hooks, 2000; Ahmed, 2017). The study begins with a reading of the literature of postfeminism, neoliberal feminism,

and media commodification. These theories allow for critical interrogation of how the girlboss is situated in relations of capitalist productivity and gender performativity (Rottenberg, 2018; Gill & Orgad, 2015). The research has a qualitative feminist approach, involving consumer interviews and content analysis of editorials and an audience survey to examine how the girlboss figure is constructed and perceived.

Lastly, this project argues that the girlboss is not only a fallen feminist icon, but a reflection of a media and capitalist culture which will pay image over substance. Her failure is a sign of a culture more and more disenchanted with empowerment narratives that validate individual success over structural injustice. As fashion media continues to evolve, there is a clear obligation and opportunity, to cover feminist narratives further. This study therefore positions itself at the confluence of fashion criticism, feminist theory, and editorial practice to not only deconstruct a trope, but to consider what comes next.



Image 1: @MillerandHarlow. n.d. Instagram.

In recent years, fashion media has banded together for feminist causes, advocating for empowerment through slogans, editorial pages and branded storytelling. Campaigns such as Dior’s “We Should All Be Feminists” S/S 2017 campaign and publications such as *Refinery29*, *Maire Claire* and *The Cut* have not only made feminism visible, but fashionable. But what is effective on the page or runway doesn’t necessarily get through. In its most commodified forms, feminism has been repackaged into multiple aesthetics, a move that politicises ideology into lifestyle sales (Banet-Weiser, 2018). One of the most familiar results of this is the ‘girlboss’: a term initially created to celebrate female enterprise and motivation, but one which has since been co-opted to represent neoliberalism and hustle culture (Rottenberg, 2018). What began as a celebration of empowerment has, for some, become a

Literature Review

The fashion media commodification of feminism has more and more become an object of intellectual debate over the last few years, particularly through the lenses of neoliberal cultural critique and postfeminism. The following review will outline the key arguments around the rise of so-called “popular feminism,” the branding of empowerment, and the gendered ideologies informing and reproduced by the fashion industry. It will also examine the emergence, peak and what-could-be-called the fall of the “girlboss” trope as a case study of the depoliticisation of the feminist debate and the way this trope was essentially built to box women up in working society and build a narrow image of what success looks like for a woman. It will also try to situate this topic within wider visual representation, labour and identity debates in contemporary editorial practices.

Postfeminism and Neoliberal Feminism

Theoretical basis for this study is the conceptualisation of postfeminism and neoliberal feminism. Postfeminism is generally understood as a cultural consciousness that assumes gender equality has been achieved more or less and thus departs from the shared struggle to individual preference and self-formation (McRobbie, 2009). Rosalind Gill (2007) defines postfeminism as an ambivalent discourse that requires women to envision themselves as empowered agents and simultaneously reproduces conventional power hierarchies and beauty standards. Angela McRobbie (2009) also condemns the “undoing” of feminism within the media through celebratory narratives of women’s success masking enduring inequalities that exist within society.

Neoliberal feminism, developed by Catherine Rottenberg (2018), borrows postfeminist logics but is fundamentally rooted within market values. It promotes self-responsibility, entrepreneurialism and resilience as feminist practices, inclined to equate empowerment with capitalist achievement. Nancy Fraser (2013) proposes that neoliberalism appropriated feminism, away from its redistributive goals to recognition of culture and establishing a form of feminism that serves economic power instead of opposing it. This is vital to understanding how the girlboss emerged, not just as an icon of culture but as a commodity to sell.

Popular Feminism and Media Visibility

Sarah Banet-Weiser’s (2018) pop feminism describes how feminist discourse has also become disseminated by media, brands and celebrity culture. Her identified “confidence culture,” subsequently also developed by Gill and Orgad (2015), identifies the degree to which empowerment speech turns around self-esteem and image management as much as it does structural criticism. In this regime, women are encouraged to be confident and aspirational women, yet always within the framework of market reasoning and aesthetic standards. This is the root of the ‘girlboss,’ which is a cultural icon created to put a roof on how far women can grow and become affluent by setting an idealised set of values that successful women must abide by, and more importantly, not stray from.

This media-friendly feminism can be observed in campaigns like Dior’s “We Should All Be Feminists” (2017), where Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s feminist manifesto was commodified into upmarket fashion t-shirts and clothing. Negra and Tasker (2014) have suggested that these moments of feminist branding minimise complex histories into slogans that taste nice and sell nicely. Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad (2015) caution that the ubiquity of such content can create an illusion of feminist success while inequality persists.

The Girlboss as Cultural Icon

Sophia Amoruso’s (2014) book #Girlboss popularised the girlboss phenomenon, telling of her ascension from outsider to CEO of fashion retailer Nasty Gal. Initially celebrated as a feminist hero story, Amoruso’s brand soon imploded into bankruptcy and allegations of workplace discrimination, pushing critiques of the girlboss movement as a facade for exploitative business behaviour and fake success (Petersen, 2021). This is an example of where idealised values of success allow an audience to put a brand/person on a pedestal, and a very wobbly one at that, due to the rigidness of the values they were expected to adhere by. Their heightened success then makes their fall from grace look disproportionately hard.

The girlboss is the neoliberal feminist ideal: entrepreneurial drive, aesthetic completion and upward aspiration. Yet, as Amanda Hess (2021) identifies, she also shows the contradictions of the girlboss model: her own success is typically individualistic, exclusionary and dependent on the systems she claims to subvert. Alison Phipps (2020) argues that mainstream feminism is typically whiteness-centred, cisnormative and class-based, traits often encapsulated within the girlboss icon.

The criticism that has trailed the girlboss, such as the memes like “gaslight, gatekeep, girlboss,” expresses a cultural fatigue with shallow empowerment discourse and the narrow idea of what a successful woman looks like. This whole notion is not so much anti-feminist, but a demand for a feminism that is labour rights-based, intersectional, inclusive, and rooted in grassroots power (Kanai, 2019).

Alongside the criticism and contradictions previously mentioned, the girlboss is also a narrow and highly proscribed understanding of how women can ‘make it’. She is constantly presented in a highly constructed aesthetic: blazers, stilettos, clean minimalism etc...; and her personality is emitting self-assurance, discipline and ambition. This closely bound image has no room to include the emotional nuance, softness or exposure so many women actually feel. A prime example of this is the debate across Tik Tok over the popular influencer ‘@Ballerinafarm’ in which influencer Hannah Neeleman received constant criticism surrounding her family life, as she posted story times about her time at the prestigious Julliard dance school and then leaving her career behind to build a large family with her husband, Daniel, at only 21. She spoke of the fact that she felt building a family and a home was her idea of being successful and not being the professional dancer she appeared destined to be at 17. Yet, her audience seems to ignore this fact and continues to express sadness and sympathy over the idea that ‘she’s thrown her life away.’ This is a great case showing the narrow idea of the ‘girlboss,’ in which her audience only seem to think of her successful if she’d continued her dance career.

Empowerment then becomes a performative and visible act where deviation from the norm stands to be excluded from the category of empowerment. Feminism will not survive in structures that reduce women to commodifiable tropes, according to Ahmed (2017), but rather must facilitate multiplicity of existence, such as exhaustion, scepticism or refusal. By proscriptively dictating one ideal, the girlboss discourse actually restricts more than it liberates. It encloses a narrow set of outcomes under the undesirable banner of being “for everybody,” compressing women into pre-determined brackets rather than encouraging multiple forms of achievement. The result is a homogenised feminism that is more interested in branding than belonging, and performance than authenticity. This construction is most damaging in fashion media, where editorial direction continues to overemphasise thin archetypes in the guise of inclusion and consistently usurping the embodied lives of those who do not conform.

Fashion Media, Visual Culture and Representation

Fashion media plays a key role in replicating and spreading these narratives. Fashion, as argued by Joanne Entwistle (2000), is a visual and cultural system that simultaneously expresses identity and social values. Visual representation in fashion media is most commonly linked with empowerment in the form of hyper-feminine or masculinised fashion styles like power suits, minimalism and clean lines, which expresses a narrow vision of what empowered femininity entails.

Visual semiotics, outlined by Barthes (1972) and later by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), gives tools for analysing the way fashion photographs convey ideological meaning. An elegantly fitted blazer or confident stance doesn't just represent individual taste; it means gender, authority and professionalism. In the case of the girlboss, these visual signs add to the notion that power is appearance-based, performative and commodified.

Self-determined fashion publications like *Galdem*, *Polyester* and *Sabat Magazine* have reacted to these norms by appropriating more politicised, diverse and co-operative visual practices. These publications show other ways of editing that decline of individualism and affirm intersectionality, motivating useful projects like *Unfinished?* that work towards subverting current visual aesthetics.

Intersectionality, Labour and Resistance

A critical analysis of the girlboss must also involve intersectionality, a theoretical framework created by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in order to describe intersecting systems of oppression. While the girlboss is applauding the arrival of one great, ideal woman, it works to erase the mundane lives of women of colour, working-class women, and queer, trans, or disabled individuals.

Furthermore, the girlboss iconises labour without challenging the conditions of that labour. Anne Helen Petersen's (2021) study of burnout culture shows how the pressure to 'never stop working' is particularly burdensome for millennial women. Miya Tokumitsu (2014) also contends that the "do what you love" ideology is a form of labour discipline that conceals exploitation, relating to Petersen's studies of burnout culture and the deeper meanings behind the idealised girlboss work ethic.

These criticisms suggest that feminist media must move beyond the possibility of one isolated success and embrace narratives of rest, refusal, solidarity, and protest. Publications such as *Unfinished?* can be utilised as interventions which materialise these possibilities, on the basis of a feminist ethics of care, collectivity and resistance (hooks, 2000).



Image 2: Sophia Amoruso for Collabwith. 2021. Collabwith Masterclasses.

Methodology

3.1 Scope and Research Focus

This research views the commodification and demise of the girlboss phenomenon in fashion media with a particular emphasis on its visual and narrative articulation within editorial context. The research is situated within the field of fashion journalism and employs interdisciplinary media studies, cultural studies and feminist theory methodology. The study includes mainstream and independent fashion magazines, with a critical analysis of how such empowerment processes are aestheticised and how these images affect, represent or counteract neoliberal and postfeminist ideologies.

The research is consistent with the applied outcome: the zine *Unfinished?* in that it explores how fashion media narratives do or do not support or undermine dominant feminist stereotypes. The aim is to provide a theoretically informed critique that will inform the visual experimentation of the applied project and provide new interpretations of prevailing editorial practice.

This research is guided by the central question: *What role has fashion media played in the decline of the 'girlboss' trope and what are the implications for feminist narratives?* By studying both representational content and audience reception, the research addresses how feminist messages are made, circulated and consumed across fashion media.

3.2 Secondary Research

Secondary research offers the theoretical and contextual underpinning for this research, with critical analysis to feminist debates, media commodification and fashion culture. Extensive academic literature has been drawn upon, such as books, journals, and articles from feminist media theory, postfeminism, neoliberal cultural critique, and visual semiotics. With key thinkers previously cited, the project cites scholars such as Rosalind Coward (1985), questioning the construction of glamour and femininity in mainstream culture, and Angela Y. Davis (1983), whose intersectional analysis shatters white-feminist analyses.

The work also engages recent theory on digital culture, including Gillian Rose's (2016) written critiques of visual methodologies and Brooke Erin Duffy's (2017) research into the gendered labour of self-branding across social media platforms. These texts enable a rich critique of empowerment discourses as being not just textual in nature but highly visual and performance based. The hybrid nature of fashion journalism, as it is both editorial and commercial, warrants a corresponding hybrid theoretical approach, and this review delivers it. Industry journals such as *Business of Fashion*, *The Fashion Studies Journal*, and trade magazines such as *Drapers* and *Vogue Business* are also added to place academic discussion in the context of current practices. Materials like this help bridge the gap between theory and practice, particularly concerning audience engagement, brand activism and performative feminism in media.

Together, this secondary research provides a comprehensive basis for analysing the rise and decline of the girlboss icon and provides guidance to the primary research design.

3.3 Primary Research Design

In addition to the theoretical insights from the literature review, this research employs a triangulated qualitative methodology with three related methods: semi-structured interviews, content analysis and an online-based audience survey. Each method analyses a different component of the research question: production, representation and reception to get rich and textured insights into how the girlboss trope functions within the discursive space of fashion media.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 6–7 participants, attempting to have a mix of people with industry experience and others who merely consume and are aware of the concept. The approach is chosen for its ability to produce rich and thoughtful responses while maintaining some flexibility to pursue emergent themes (Longhurst, 2010). The interviews are rooted in feminist research traditions preoccupied with dialogue, subjectivity and lived experience (Oakley, 1981; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Through one-on-one engagement with people, the research obtains insider knowledge regarding how feminist values are, or are not, negotiated in the course of editorial and commercial pressures.

Furthermore, a handpicked selection of fashion media outputs, including mostly editorial outputs, which visually incarnate the girlboss aesthetic, will be the focus of content analysis. Sources will be taken from mass-market publications (e.g. *Elle* and *Forbes Women*) and independent platforms (Polyester, Galdem, Sabat). The method will adopt a multimodal methodology based on the visual codes established by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), in an effort to unravel how style, stance, colour and composition convey ideological meaning about femininity and power. Content analysis can track recurring visual motifs and measure their conformity to feminist storylines or marketplace values.

Finally, a short online questionnaire will be distributed to respondents online via various outlets such as LinkedIn and social media. It will be aimed mostly at an audience between 18–35 but welcoming participants of any age. The target audience is a demographic similar to that of fashion consumers today and the target audience for the zine, however receiving responses from over 35s will also allow the survey to expand on the thoughts of people who are perhaps unaware of the girlboss and anti-feminist connotations and allow for analysis of all perspectives. The *Google Forms* online survey uses closed-ended and multiple-choice answers to measure the audience familiarity with the girlboss trope, comprehension of empowerment in fashion and receptiveness to other stories such as rest, softness, or the resistance of many. Survey responses provide quantifiable data regarding the reception of feminist branding, thus completing the triangulation by quantifying public opinions (Bryman, 2016) and providing some digestible statistics to support this research.

Combining these methods ensures analytical depth and breadth. Interviews capture behind-the-scenes and thought-provoking conversations, content analysis maps the current visual landscape and surveys offer a grounded foundation of audience participation. This format is especially appropriate since discourse, image and identity converge in this subject. It assures there is theory and lived experience for theoretical, practical and written aspects of the project and that critical evaluation and creative experimentation have a firm foundation to stand in.

3.4 Rationale for the Research Approach

A mixed qualitative approach has been selected to engage in a critical examination of the functioning of the girlboss trope within fashion media and audience culture. Visual discourse analysis, semi-structured interviews and a condensed audience survey will be employed to achieve this. The rationale behind this approach is the project's intervention into three interrelated zones: the production of feminist images, its representation in editorial and media content, and the reception of fashion audiences.

This method draws upon feminist epistemology, emphasising positionality, reflexivity and experiential knowledge (Harding, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 2007). Visual analysis provides close reading of fashion imagery, while interviews provide insider accounts of editorial choice-making. Surveys provide a snapshot of audience sentiment, enabling cross-comparison between institutional production and public interpretation. A pluralistic methodology of this sort underpins richer, more subtle understandings of how empowerment is constructed and subverted in today's fashion culture.

The research is also informed by practice-based approaches common in design research and visual culture (Barrett and Bolt, 2007; Sullivan, 2005), recognising the practical outcome not only as an illustration of theory, but as a form of research in itself. The zine is a form of research dissemination, testing out how various feminist storylines can be conveyed visually and understood.

Image 3: Gianfranco Ferré by Geof Kern, 1995



3.5 Research Limitations

While this approach produces a good qualitative richness, it will have its limitations. Firstly, the relatively small sample size of interview participants (due to time constraints and availability) may limit representativeness. Secondly, the audience survey, while useful to establish trends, is reliant on self-selecting participants and may be skewed towards respondents already engaged in feminist or fashion content-related issues, or with people completely unfamiliar with the concept at all. The other limitation is the interpretative nature of visual analysis, which will be based on this researcher's own positionality. To counter this, a reflexive approach will be adopted throughout, mindful of subjective thought whilst working towards rigour through open coding and documentation.

The intersectional scope of this project similarly presents challenges. While every attempt is made to include as extensive a diversity of voices and perspectives as possible, there are necessary exclusions based on available resources. These are acknowledged as part of the ethics and methodology of openness of the project.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Any original research will also follow the ethics set by the *Vogue College of Fashion*. Complete information regarding the study purpose and rights will be provided to all participants in interviews and surveys. Consent will be obtained in writing or electronically, and all data will be anonymised where participants request it.

Care will be used when discussing sensitive issues of identity, work, and feminism. While this research criticises structural injustices, it may intersect with felt marginalisation or burnout. Interview questions will be framed in a manner that is sensitive to emotional boundaries, and participants will be provided with a debrief on completion, as well as the opportunity to not answer and skip any questions they may so choose.

The zine itself will be produced with ethics of representation, avoiding appropriation, tokenism, or visual commodification of activist imagery. However, this will be managed while considering the creator's access to models and writers for the zine. The creative choices will be informed by the research that the project is conducting, with a focus on care, collectivity, and resistance, instead of individualised empowerment. All collaborations with other creatives will be appropriately credited. In addition, all work that is not my own will be correctly referenced and credited.

Analysis and Discussion

Survey

Overview of the Dataset

The survey sample (N ≈ 41) is female-dominated (85.4%) and focused on the 18–24 age range (85.4%). Respondents report high fashion content engagement levels (58.8% daily) and use predominantly Instagram as the primary platform (90.2%). These compositional factors are analytically important: the results reflect the views of a young, visually literate, digitally saturated audiences who consume and reproduce the visual and rhetorical discourses of contemporary fashion media. The following survey analysis employs these empirical findings to reflect on fashion media’s place in the cultural death of the “girlboss” trope and to interrogate the broader implications for feminist narrative in editorial practice.

Digital Consumption, Visual Literacies and Platform Ecology

Nearly all participants recognised Instagram as their primary place of contact with fashion content, indicating that the girlboss circulates predominantly in a networked, image-led environment. The affordances of Instagram: feed curation, influencer-branded storytelling, sponsored posts etc...facilitate the rapid dissemination of highly stylised feminist signifiers (slogans, curated “empowerment” portraits, productised activism). The platform’s visual emphasis partially explains that the respondents most commonly associated empowerment with corporate aesthetics: 73.2% named “powersuits/tailoring” and 39% named “high heels and polished glamour” as the dominant visual codes of empowerment. This persistence of the corporate visual code for power concurs with accounts of postfeminist visual culture that explain how images of individual success are re-written as neutral, aspirational style (Gill, 2007).

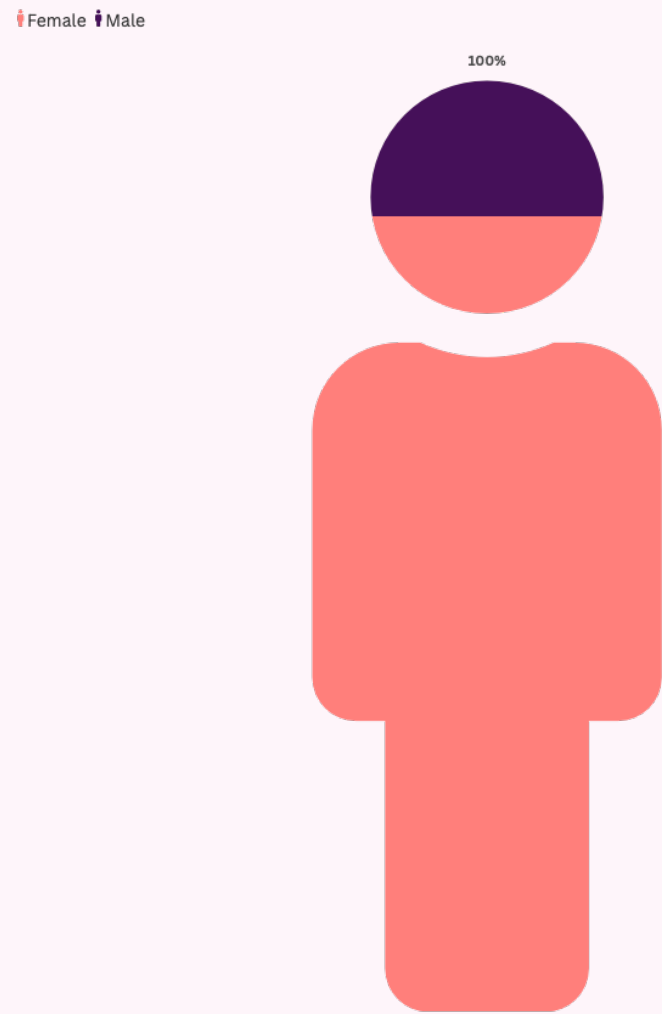


Image 4: Graphic showing the proportion of male and female participants in this primary research survey. 2025.

Do you think fashion media promotes genuine feminist values?

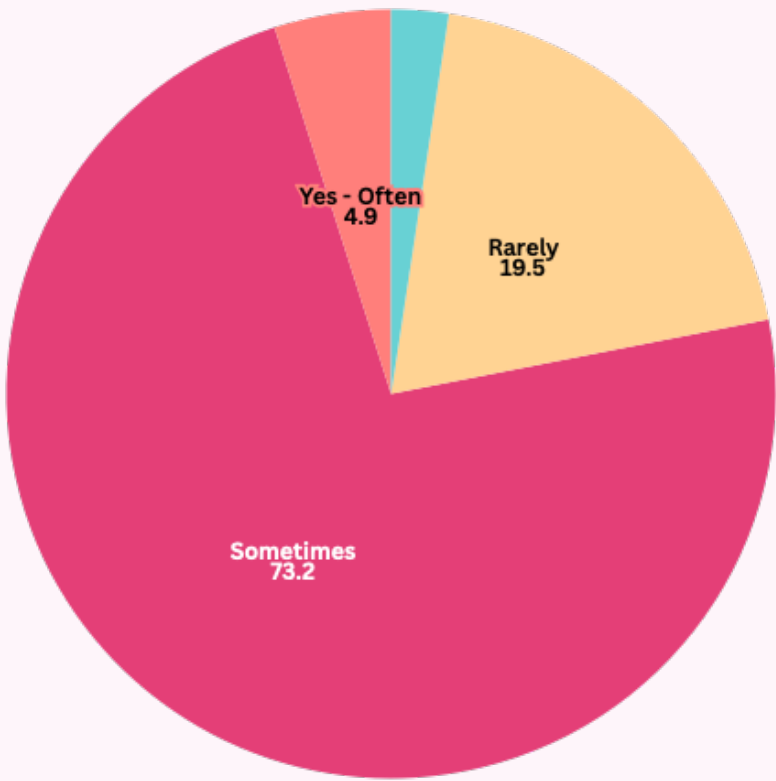


Image 5: Graphic showing participant’s views on whether fashion media promotes feminist values. 2025.

Conditional trust and the Perception of Performative Feminism

Sceptical and conditional trust was voiced in the feminist credentials of fashion media: 73.2% of participants stated that fashion media portray feminist values only “sometimes,” and 78% concurred that feminism is used as a marketing tool in the fashion sector. These results map directly onto academic criticism of popular feminism, whereby the rhetoric and imagery of feminism are ubiquitous but frequently de-politicised and commodified for brand gain (Banet-Weiser, 2018). One respondent spelled out this mediational thinking fairly explicitly: “If a particular cover star is a celeb/ icon known for their political or pro-feminism values, the magazine may use them as a way to theme that particular issue as feminist” This comment demonstrates audience awareness of instrumental editorial strategies in which individual visibility (the celebrity) is repurposed as an institutional sign of virtue without the structural commitments.

Associated Imagery

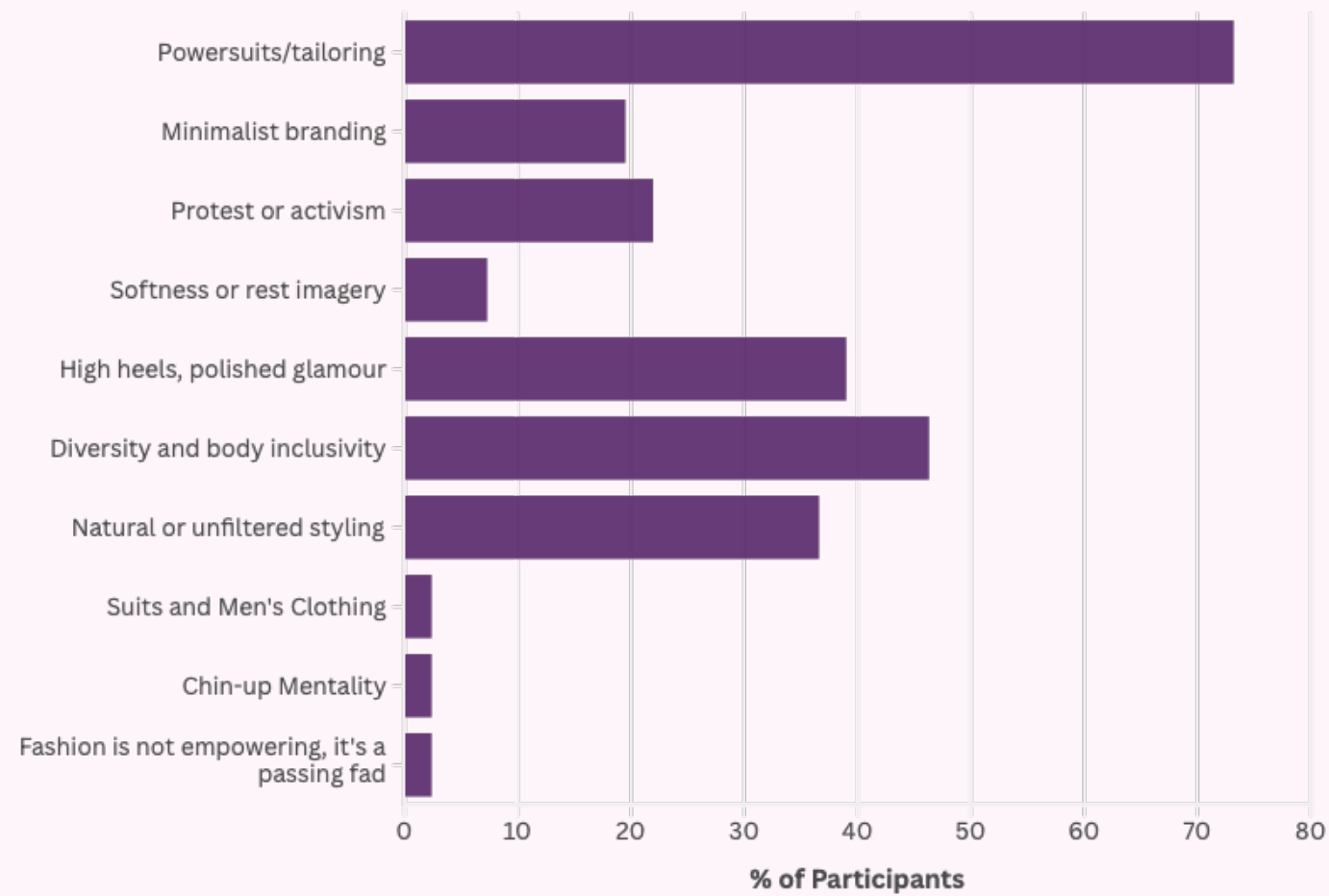


Image 6: Bar chart showing survey participants' imagery associations with the girlboss.

Consumer Resistance and the Limits of Virtue-Signalling

A significant minority (41.5%) reported that they had not supported a brand simply because of its feminist messaging. This finding complicates narratives of the monolithically “woke consumer” that unfailingly rewards performative allyship (Edwards, 2019); instead, it suggests an audience that distinguishes between aestheticised claims of progressiveness and actual, material practice. Participant testimony also complicates this scepticism: “Sometimes brands or the fashion media portray ‘body inclusivity’ but it is still not ALL bodies.” This indicates that even when corporate communication or editorial content gestures to inclusivity, its partial realisation can generate distrust rather than loyalty. Academically, this is consistent with Phipps’s (2020) contention that mainstream feminism is vulnerable to co-option and can thereby lose political traction as it is reduced to marketable signifiers.

Familiarity and the Declining Cultural Capital of the Girlboss

Nearly half the sample (48.8%) reported being “very familiar” with the term “girlboss,” yet familiarity has not translated to unqualified endorsement. Respondents expressed doubt: 41.5% considered the girlboss still relevant but in need of refreshing; also, 43.9% reported “mixed” feelings (once empowered, now less so). This discursive shift, from idealisation to irony, and critique reflects a broader cultural reassessment of the trope amidst reports of burnout, exclusivity and organisational abuse (Petersen, 2020; Tokumitsu, 2014). A typical response plotted this trajectory: “I feel like I sometimes find the whole girlboss branding thing empowering, but I sometimes also find it a little cringey and overdone... the actual beliefs of girlbossing have been a little lost in the pink, over-the-top, swirly branding and messaging.” The quote indicates how aesthetic over-determination and brand amplification have eroded the trope’s emancipatory promises, rendering feminist aspiration as a marketable aesthetic that alienates as much as it recruits.

Slogan Fatigue and the Hollowing Out of Political Rhetoric

Approximately 39% of respondents described the girlboss tropes (e.g., “The Future is Female”) as “superficial.” This ‘slogan fatigue’ is significant in two ways. First, it suggests that rhetorical hypervisibility does not equal political legitimacy in the eyes of consumers; second, it demonstrates how editorial reliance on sound bites and summary phrases can substitute for empirical accountability and reportage content. One respondent articulated this tension: “It is nice to see women portrayed in powerful positions but... they’re working 100 hours a week, always cold, never have children... it excludes women who do not want to be like this and still want to be... successful.” This comment illustrates how sloganisation has the consequence of collapsing several experiences into one, often exclusionary representation of success. Theoretical literature warns that such flattening is a characteristic of neoliberal femininity, whereby success for the individual is valorised while structural inequalities are made invisible (Rottenberg, 2018; Banet-Weiser, 2018).

The Double Role of Fashion Media in the Trope’s Downfall

The quantitative trends and qualitative findings taken together indicated fashion media has played a double, contradictory role in the girlboss’s cultural career. In one respect, editorial outlets magnified the trope’s popularity, marking entrepreneurial aesthetics as aspirational and fashionable; in another respect, however, the same institutional practices: reduction of aesthetics, selective representations and marketing instrumentalisation; have delegitimised the girlboss by laying bare the gap between branded discourses and everyday experiences. That is, fashion media has been both the vehicle for the popularisation of the girlboss and the vehicle for the undermining of its political legitimacy and feminist foundations.

Practical and Theoretical Implications for Editorial Practice

These empirical findings have practical implications for my zine *Unfinished?* that accompanies this thesis, and for fashion journalism more broadly. First, due to the audience’s platform preference (Instagram) and visual literacies, critical editorial practice must occupy and rewire dominant visual codes (powersuits, glossy portraiture) rather than simply rejecting them. Second, given that respondents dismiss empty slogans, editorial work must prioritise contextualisation, worker testimony and intersectional storytelling.

Finally, the results imply a move away from individualised empowerment rhetoric toward collective models: rest, mutual aid, and solidarity between women, that the survey data implies would more adequately fulfil audience needs for substantive feminist media.

Methodological Reflections and Limitations

Several limitations qualify these findings. The sample is self-selecting and skewed toward young women, limiting generalisability. Responses are self-report and therefore potentially overestimate critical reflexivity. Furthermore, while the open-text quotes are revealing, they are also not representative of the entire sample and should be used to illustrate themes rather than being employed to set them in a conclusive way. Along with previous literature on neoliberal feminism and postfeminist aesthetics, however, the survey provides firm, practice-relevant affirmation that the “girlboss” trope has lost discursive legitimacy among a critical segment of fashion audiences.

How do you feel about the girlboss image in fashion media?

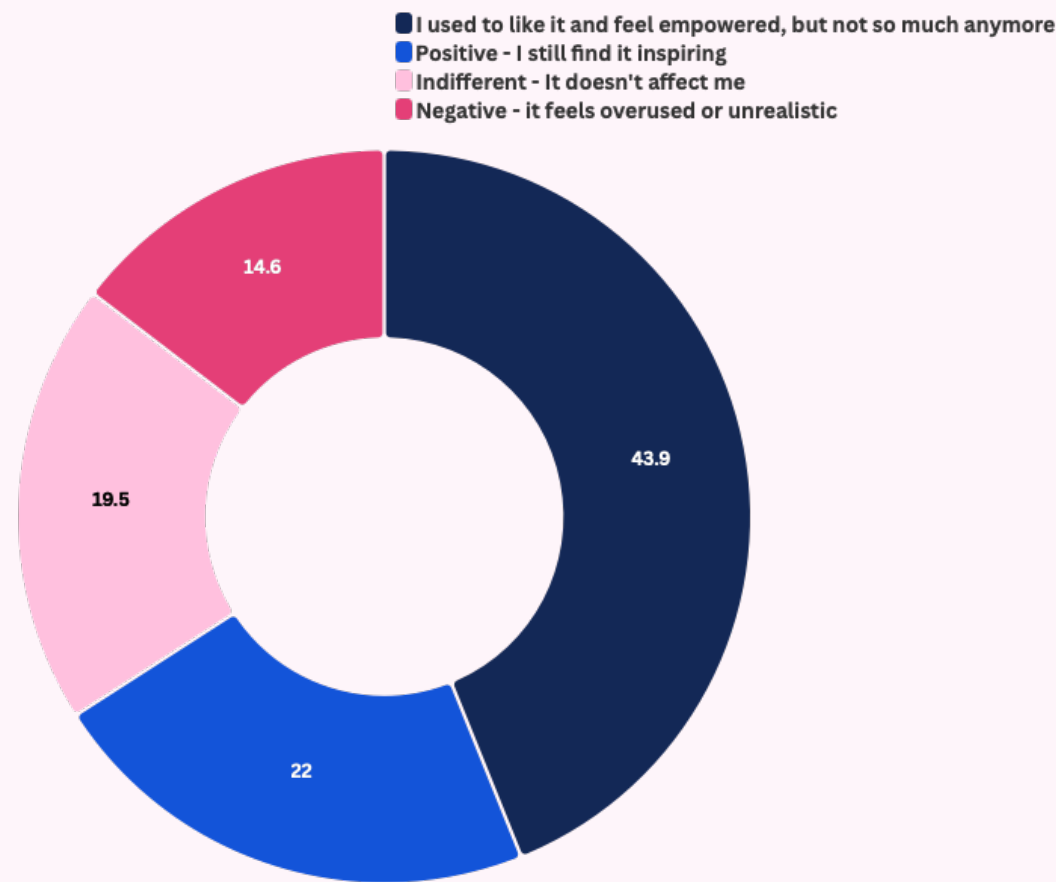
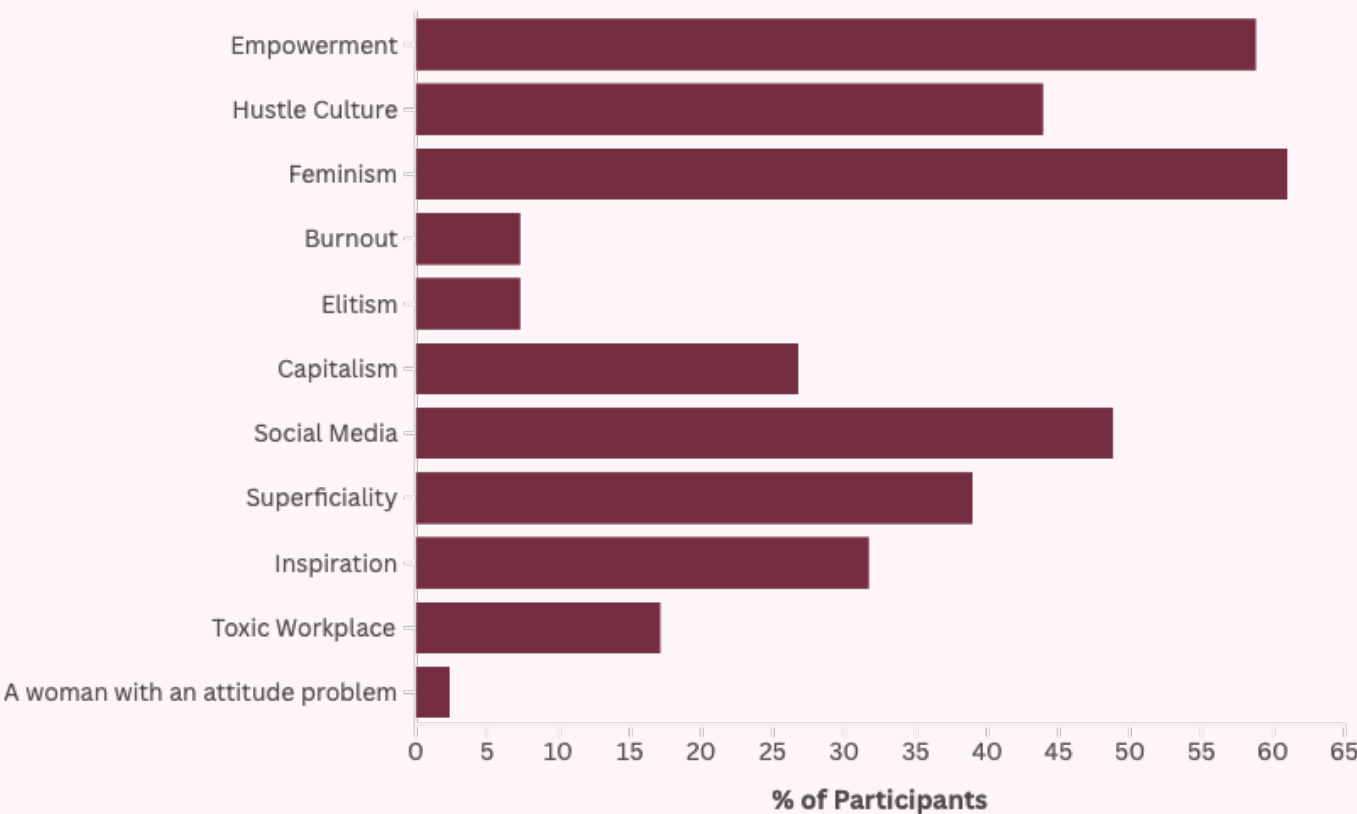


Image 7: Graphic showing survey participants' thoughts on the girlboss, 2025.

Image 8: Graphic showing the traits survey participants' associated with the girlboss, 2025.

Associated Traits



Interviews

Semi-structured interviews picked up on a subtle, and often ambivalent, investment in the ‘girlboss’ icon, consistent with scholarly critiques of postfeminist commodification (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2007). All six participants concurred that the girlboss ideal, initially greeted as empowering, had been reduced to a prescriptive visual and behavioural code, one highly mediated by fashion photography and digital culture. This supports McRobbie’s (2009) contention that postfeminist celebratory discourses mask enduring inequalities and reinterpret empowerment as a lifestyle choice.

Commodification and Performative Feminism

Participants expressed keen scepticism regarding the authenticity of feminist framing within fashion media. One participant’s observation that feminism is now “a label rather than an actual stance” describes Banet-Weiser’s (2018) criticism of “popular feminism,” where empowerment is repackaged for financial gain. Ongoing engagement with marketing practices, including translating empowerment slogans onto clothing without substantive ethical alignment, validates industry critique of virtue-signalling (Negra & Tasker, 2014).

Such scepticism was helped by references to brands advocating ‘female empowerment’ by sacrificing labour exploitation, substantiating Fraser’s (2013) argument that neoliberal capitalism has reappropriated feminism for market ends and repressed its redistributive desires. The interviewees’ sensitised awareness of such contradictions points towards an expanding reading public that is increasingly literate in deciphering dissonance between brand image and the reality of work.

“The girlboss ideal, initially greeted as empowering, had reduced to a prescriptive visual and behavioural code, one highly mediated by fashion photography and digital culture.”

Narrow Visual Codes of Empowerment

People tended to associate the girlboss with highly stylised corporate fashion: power suits, minimalism, heels, which, as Gill and Orgad (2015) point out, orbit a restricted visual rhetoric of empowerment. Lauren’s testimony that she would “look at a lady in a pinstripe suit...and think girlboss” testifies to the long-lasting power of traditionally masculine corporate wear as code for power, even though respondents recognised the arbitrariness of these correlations.

Reflexes of certain participants concerning people such as ‘Ballerina Farm’ on Tik Tok illustrate how moving away from such a look, towards domestic or non-corporate achievement, remains culturally underappreciated. This is in line with Ahmed’s (2017) contention that feminist stories limited to one idealised vision of success close down forms of life which are incompatible with capitalist productivity.

Burnout, Pressure, and the Hustle Narrative

Among the dominant themes that came up repeatedly was the bodily toll of acting up to girlboss expectations. Several participants spoke about burnout, and one described “standing in a toilet crying” in drama school and blamed it on an extension of a culture of perpetual productivity. This is consistent with Petersen’s (2021) ideas of millennial burnout as an effect of neoliberal labour morals, and with Tokumitsu’s (2014) critique of the “do what you love” ideology as a regime of labour discipline.

While others labelled the girlboss as empowering, one respondent argued that it kept women “less vulnerable” when things went wrong. This was offset by acknowledgment of pressure generated through social comparison cultures around social media. Having to be “put together” online chimes with Duffy’s (2017) research on the gendered labour of self-branding, where presentation is part of intangible work.

Inclusion, Intersectionality, and Cultural Decline

The interviews confirmed Phipps’ (2020) contention that dominant feminist symbols like the girlboss are likely to be white, cis, and middle-class in makeup. One of the participants disregarded gender-directed branding in favour of “treating everyone for their worth,” which suggests fatigue with identity-based branding that is indifferent to structural injustices. Some interviewees suggested that a “more honest and inclusive” empowerment would include more than one success story, such as rest, domestic work and non-conformist acts. This supports hooks’ (2000) argument for feminism on the basis of shared care, rather than individual progress. The legitimization of rest as radical (both by interviewer and participants) suggests counter-narratives which are emerging in the wake of the failure of girlboss, contesting the conflation of busy-ness with value.

Implications for Fashion Media

Together, these findings indicate that fashion media’s role in the demise of the girlboss trope is twofold: firstly, by over-relying on an homogenised visual discourse that excludes multifaceted expressions of power; and secondly, by using feminist signifiers as advertising tools at the cost of their political potency. The resistance of the respondents to such representation, in the forms of scepticism, personal reinterpretation of achievement, and valuing of counter-narratives, assumes audience demand for editorial strategies that de-centre individualism and embrace multiplicity.

For feminist narratives to win back respect in fashion media, there must be a shift away from image-based empowerment towards representations rooted in lived experience, emotional complexity and structural analysis. As the interviews illustrate, empowerment cannot be sustained when it is solely aestheticised; it must be anchored in equitable labour practices, multiform narratives and deconstructive critique of exclusionary archetypes.

The interviews serve as significant proof that fashion media has deconstructed and accelerated the death of the girlboss stereotype by over-marketing empowerment and anchoring it in limiting, sellable archetypes. Although initially framed as a figure of freedom, the girlboss has become depoliticised through capitalist co-optation and denial of alternative success narratives. Evidence from participants clarifies that publics are coming to discern more and more this dissonance, abandoning image-only feminism in favour of more authentic, multitudinous and intersectional expressions of power.

Answering directly the research question: *What role has fashion media played in the decline of the ‘girlboss’ trope and what are the implications for feminist narratives?* the evidence suggests that media is having a non-peripheral but formative role. By prioritising market-friendly aesthetics over political content, fashion media have produced a cultural fatigue that undermines trust in feminist narrative. The lesson for future editorial practice is clear: in order to be relevant and authoritative, feminist presentation in fashion must break free of the commodified display of the girlboss to multiple, structurally engaged presentations of empowerment that celebrate rest, refusal, and collective care as much as ambition.

Content Analysis

This section includes a multimodal content analysis of carefully chosen fashion media products to examine how girlboss style is enacted in terms of visual language through the medium of modern editorial and branded content. Through examination of a series of editorial spreads, advertisements and influencer images that show up on both mass-market and independent media platforms, this section uncovers the visual codes, narrative tricks, and ideological subtexts placed in feminist power representations.

Images, as Kress and van Leeuwen describe in their visual grammar system developed in 2006, convey structured and patterned means of communication of specific ideologies. The approach best suits the media of fashion because they communicate primarily about gender, success, and value through visual signs. Using their system, this analysis focuses on key factors such as composition, gaze, framing, modality, colour, and symbolic resources in an effort to unlock implicit narratives of power, identity and empowerment that underpin girlboss imagery.

This discussion began with the selection of 12 media outputs in a broad range of formats and tones. They are *Dior’s “We Should All Be Feminists”* campaign; *Elle* and *Forbes* Women cover shoots of women in exec positions; lifestyle accounts’ branded influencer content that engages in entrepreneurial aesthetics. These were contrasted with outputs from feminist magazines *Polyester* and *Galdem* presenting more subversive or radical feminist perspectives. Each was analysed for its stylistic elements and narrative structure.

Among the omnipresent motifs of mainstream girlboss visuals is the power suit, which is usually seen in hyper-feminized hues like blush pink or beige. On one *Elle UK* cover (2025), a woman CEO is presented in a rigid pastel suit, smiling confidently at the camera. The picture accords with Kress and van Leeuwen’s definition of a “demand image,” where the subject of the image speaks to the viewer directly, assuming power and presence (2006, p. 118). But this power is also very staged: there is no makeup, there is no backdrop, and the gaze is impassive, defining a cold, disciplined femininity.

High modality is yet another unique feature of girlboss images. Visual tone is glossy, sharp, and over-lit, which transmits realism and authority. This hyperreal depiction might disconnect the image from women’s lived experience in some manner. It reinforces a perfection aesthetic commensurate with neoliberal ideals of optimisation, performance, and mastery. Fashion images can reproduce hegemonic gender roles to the letter according to Entwistle (2015) through such high-level visual standards.

Against this, *Polyester* or *Galdem* productions release low-modality forms: grainier textures, natural light, unposed stances, or dishevelled compositions. These editorial decisions disrupt the perfectionist encoding of power. A *Galdem* shoot featured a group of three women, differing in age, shape, and race, laughing and looking at each other: a photograph that emits vulnerability and intelligence rather than performativity and high gloss. Here, the eye is not looking or not looking; what Kress and van Leeuwen would class as an “offer” picture, where viewers are able to look on in safety. This is a sign of a less hierarchical, more collaborative visual rapport with the object.



Image 9: Kylie Jenner for Forbes. Forbes, 2018



Image 10: Sheryl Sandberg for Forbes. Forbes, 2012.



Image 11: Summer 2019 Cover for Forbes France. Krick, 2019



Image 18: Gal-dem Issue 4. Stack Magazines, 2019.



Image 12: Regan Hillier. Elle Business. 2025



Image 13: Ananya Birla for ELLE India. ELLE India, 2025



Image 14: Devita Saraf Editorial Shoot for ELLE. ELLE, 2023



Image 15: Polyester Issue 3, 2015



Image 16: Sleater-Kinney on 'Little Rope' for Polyester. O'Neill, L., 2024.



Image 17: Sleater-Kinney on 'Little Rope' for Polyester. O'Neill, L., 2024.



Image 20: Getty Images. Dior Spring - 2017



Image 19: Estrop/Getty Images, 2017



Image 21: Gwynne. 2025, FMP Zine 'Unfinished?' Cover.

Colour also functions as a significant ideological signifier. In girlboss imagery, the use of pink, red and gold has come to represent “empowered femininity.” Yet, this colour palette itself constitutes a coded language, reducing diverse experiences to consumable, aestheticised gestures. Such branding machines are, according to Negra and Tasker (2014), a postfeminist realism, appearing progressive while upholding market-conducive femininity. Even gestures in girlboss content obey strict grammar. Arms-crossed positions, upright posture, or striding walk all visually summon control and authority. But in a 2015 *Polyester* editorial cover, a model with heavy, artistic makeup eats grapes with a sour and non-conventional expression on her face. This visual chaos performs what Ahmed (2014) terms a feminist killjoy refusal to create happiness or productivity. The subject in this instance is powerful not because she necessitates attention but because she declines it.

This content analysis illustrates that girlboss media outputs are not just visual aesthetics but calculated, ideological procedures. Their persistent use of high-modality, hyper-feminine, and corporatised visual codes serve to domesticate feminism, making it safe, profitable and depoliticised. Conversely, alternative platforms’ refusal of these norms illustrates how visual narrative can challenge market logics and reframe feminist representation on terms of softness, honesty or fragmentation. In fashion journalism, all of this matters. It indicates the manner in which editorial leadership not only reacts to societal shifts but also makes them more complicated. The zine *Unfinished?* resides in opposition: rejecting the sheen of girlboss culture for complex, disordered, and collective representations of rest and femininity. It is embracing what hooks (2000) calls “a love ethic,” not marketing, but an ethic of values founded upon care, community, and criticality.

“the ‘girlboss’ icon, once shorthand for aspirational corporate femininity, now lacks cultural legitimacy.”

Integrated Analysis

Throughout the survey, the interviews and the content analysis, there was a clear trend: the “girlboss” icon, once shorthand for aspirational corporate femininity, now lacks cultural legitimacy, a process both facilitated and accelerated by fashion media. Even though survey responses showed familiarity with its visual markers; respondents reliably saw them as homogenised marketing tropes and not genuine feminist statements.

Interviews reinforced such scepticism, with interviewees placing the trope both as exclusionary and complicit in neoliberal hustle culture. Interviewees described a rift between its symbolic promise of independence and its experiential actuality of burnout, self-surveillance and social comparison which are issues aligned with Petersen’s (2021) theory of millennial burnout and Tokumitsu’s (2014) critique of the “do what you love” ideology. The majority pointed out the absence of intersectionality, in line with Phipps’ (2020) and hooks’ (2000) demands for shared care-based feminist politics beyond the narrow horizon of a white, cis, middle-class subject.

Content analysis showed how these views get reproduced visually. High-modality images, forceful poses and closely controlled corporate visual styles of mainstream editorials and campaigns, such as Elle UK’s executive profiles or Dior’s ‘We Should All Be Feminists’ produce hierarchical visual relations, as suggested by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). This visual grammar performs authority as it covers up structural injustices below. Conversely, autonomous spaces like *Polyester* and *Galdem* employ eye-catching and somewhat strange imagery and embody rest, exposure and collectivity, offering counter-aesthetics that run counter to neoliberal norms, but which are at the periphery of the wider media landscape.

Together, these observations confirm Banet-Weiser’s (2018), Gill’s (2007), and Rottenberg’s (2018) descriptions of postfeminist commodification: the girlboss was invented and drained by the same institutional powers that rendered her marketable. Her legibility and meme-worthy visuals permitted quick spread across media such as Instagram and TikTok, but also overexposure, parody and political devaluation. Participants characterised this as a type of “feminist fatigue,” sustained visibility of empowerment symbols without real transformation. The research specifies two required changes for feminist discourses in fashion media: broadening visual and rhetorical toolboxes beyond corporate clichés to labour rights, care work and non-optimised identities; and adding intersectionality and structural critique to editorial stories.

Conclusion

This study has examined fashion media's role in the rise and fall of the "girlboss" trend in postfeminism, neoliberal feminism, and the commodification of empowerment. Using a triangulated approach of audience survey, semi-structured interviews and multimodal content analysis, it found that the girlboss was a cultural icon and ideologically loaded subject, made for marketability and editorial repetition. Fashion media commodified the trope through stylised corporate aesthetics, but overexposure, reduction and avoidance of structural critique dissolved its political legitimacy.

Audiences, and young, media-literate women specifically, were explicitly cynical about empowerment discourse stripped of material change. Participants associated the girlboss with few corporate signifiers such as power suits, high heels, minimalism, repeating Gill's (2007) account of postfeminist style-as-empowerment. Some were tired and cynical, describing this type of imagery as commodity branded feminism rather than actual feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The trope's exclusivity, adherence to neoliberal productivity expectations (Rottenberg, 2018; Tokumitsu, 2014), and inability to accommodate other definitions of success like rest or care work (hooks, 2000; Ahmed, 2017) increasingly undermined its allure, especially in the aftermath of burnout culture (Petersen, 2021) and in light of the criticisms against mainstream feminism's failure to be intersectional (Phipps, 2020).

“Editorial practice must shift from individualised, corporate empowerment towards collective, intersectional and materially grounded representation, with labour rights, care, refusal and non-conforming identities. Fashion media must move beyond sloganised empowerment, incorporating structural critique into content and production.”

Content analysis revealed mainstream editorial websites continue to use high-modality images, hierarchical “demand” gazes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), and rigid corporate visual code, commodifying feminist representation into signifiers. In contrast, independent magazines such as Polyester and Galdem use collaborative, close-up aesthetics that announce alternative feminist possibilities, though marginal in the broader media landscape, attesting to commercial logics’ dominance.

The girlboss's death is more of a structural consequence of neoliberal feminist contradictions than it is a meme rejection. As a branded identity, she was always precarious, held up by the same capitalist institutions that inevitably hollowed her of politics. As soon as her aesthetic was overdetermined and evacuated of content, a cultural pivot toward irony and criticism was unavoidable. For feminist fashion media storytelling, the implications are significant. Editorial practice must shift from individualised, corporate empowerment towards collective, intersectional and materially grounded representation, with labour rights, care, refusal and non-conforming identities. Fashion media must move beyond sloganised empowerment, incorporating structural critique into content and production. Without redistributive ambitions, as Fraser (2013) warns, feminism will be appropriated by the very systems it is seeking to challenge.

The practical outcome, *Unfinished?* is critique of the current landscape, offering visual narratives that resist the narrative and foreground softness, vulnerability and solidarity. In such, it aligns with Ahmed's (2017, p. 1) call for feminism as “loud acts of refusal and rebellion,” in which complexity trumps cohesion and politics polish.

The girlboss's death is not the end of feminist storytelling but instead a beginning. In admitting its own complicity in commercialising the trope, fashion media can create room for a reflexive, intersectional practice that maintains feminism's political momentum and works with the messy, radical complexities of women's lives instead of selling ideals.

Bibliography

Ahmed, S., 2014. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ahmed, S., 2014. *Willful Subjects*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S., 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Amoruso, S., 2014. *#GIRLBOSS*. New York: Portfolio.

Banet-Weiser, S., 2018. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Barthes, R., 1972. *Mythologies*. London: Paladin.

Crenshaw, K., 1989. Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), pp.139–167.

Edwards, F., 2019. Performative allyship: Understanding the paradoxes of visibility in social justice movements. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75(4), pp.1014–1036.

Entwistle, J., 2000. *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Entwistle, J., 2015. *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fraser, N., 2013. *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*. London: Verso.

Gill, R., 2007. Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), pp.147–166.

Gill, R. and Orgad, S., 2015. The confidence cult(ure). *Australian Feminist Studies*, 30(86), pp.324–344.

Hess, A., 2021. When did ‘girlboss’ become a bad word? *The New York Times*, [online] 7 June. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/07/style/girlboss.html> [Accessed 7 July 2025].

hooks, b., 2000. *All About Love: New Visions*. New York: Harper Perennial.

hooks, b., 2000. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Kanai, A., 2019. *Gender and Relatability in Digital Culture: Managing Affect, Intimacy and Value*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kress, G. and van Leeuwen, T., 2006. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

McRobbie, A., 2009. *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. London: Sage.

Mendes, K., Ringrose, J. and Keller, J., 2019. *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Negra, D. and Tasker, Y., 2014. *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Petersen, A.H., 2020. *Can’t Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Phipps, A., 2020. *Me, Not You: The Trouble with Mainstream Feminism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Rottenberg, C., 2018. *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tokumitsu, M., 2014. *Do what you love: And other lies about success and happiness*. New York: Regan Arts.

Tokumitsu, M., 2014. In the name of love. *Jacobin Magazine*, [online] 12 Jan. Available at: <https://jacobin.com/2014/01/in-the-name-of-love> [Accessed 7 July 2025].

Image List

Cover Image: *Intertwined Hands*, 2025. AI Generated using ChatGPT.

Image 1: Miller & Harlow. (n.d.) Miller & Harlow (@millerandharlow) [Instagram]. Instagram. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/millerandharlow/> [Accessed 15 July. 2025].

Image 2: Collabwith, 2021. First Image: Sophia Amoruso. Free Masterclass with Sophia Amoruso. [online] Collabwith. Available at: <https://collabwith.com/2021/03/free-masterclass-sophia/> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2025].

Image 3: Ferré, G. and Kern, G., 1995. Editorial image for Gianfranco Ferré, photographed by Geof Kern. [photograph] Gianfranco Ferré Archive.

Image 4: Gwynne, B. (2025) Survey response breakdown by gender. [Graphic] Created using Flourish. Unpublished.

Image 5: Gwynne, B. (2025) Survey response to true feminism. [Graphic] Created using Flourish. Unpublished.

Image 6: Gwynne, B. (2025) Survey response to associated imagery of the girlboss. [Graphic] Created using Flourish. Unpublished.

Image 7: Gwynne, B. (2025) Survey response to feelings about the girlboss. [Graphic] Created using Flourish. Unpublished.

Image 8: Gwynne, B. (2025) Survey response to associated traits of the girlboss. [Graphic] Created using Flourish. Unpublished.

Image 9: Forbes, 2018. How 20-Year-Old Kylie Jenner Built a \$900 Million Fortune in Less Than 3 Years. *Forbes Magazine*, August 2018. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesdigitalcovers/2018/07/11/how-20-year-old-kylie-jenner-built-a-900-million-fortune-in-less-than-3-years/> [Accessed 31 July 2025].

Image 10: Forbes, 2012. Sheryl Sandberg: Facebook’s COO on the Rise. *Forbes Magazine*. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesdigitalcovers/2012/05/01/sheryl-sandberg-facebooks-coo-on-the-rise/> [Accessed 31 July 2025].

Image 11: Krick, S., 2019. *Forbes France Summer 2019 cover*. *Forbes Magazine*. Available at: <https://models.com/work/forbes-magazine-forbes-france-cover> [Accessed 31 July 2025].

Image 12: Hillyer, R., 2025. *Elle Business magazine cover*. Available at: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/reganhillyer_reganhillyer-ellemagazine-haveitall-activity-7353961583569481728-YqPJ/ [Accessed 31 July 2025].

Image 13: Wikipedia, 2025. Ananya Birla. Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ananya_Birla [Accessed 31 July 2025].

Image 14: Livemint, 2023. Devita Saraf becomes the first businesswoman in the world to grace the cover of ELLE magazine. *Livemint*. Available at: <https://lifestyle.livemint.com/brand-stories/devita-saraf-becomes-the-first-businesswoman-in-the-world-to-grace-the-cover-of-elle-magazine-111685711072544.html> [Accessed 31 July 2025].

Image 15: Polyester, 2015. *Polyester Issue Three* [digital download]. Available at: <https://www.polyesterzine.com/shop/p/polyester-issue-three-digital-download> [Accessed 31 July 2025].

Image 16: O’Neill, L., 2024. Sleater-Kinney on ‘Little Rope’, London Fans and Letting the Music Do the Talking. *Polyester*. Available at: <https://www.polyesterzine.com/features/sleater-kinney-on-little-rope-london-fans-and-letting-the-music-do-the-talking> [Accessed 31 July 2025].

Image 17: gal-dem, 2016. *gal-dem print issue #2*. Available at: <https://galdemzine.bigcartel.com/product/pre-sale-gal-dem-print-issue-2> [Accessed 31 July 2025].

Image 18: Stack Magazines, 2019. *Gal-dem Issue 4*. Stack Magazines. Available at: <https://stackmagazines.com/magazine/gal-dem-issue-4/> [Accessed 31 July 2025].

Image 19: Dior, 2016. Spring-Summer 2017 Campaign: We should all be feminists. Dior. Available at: https://www.dior.com/diormag/en_ie/article/11786

Image 20: Dior, 2016. Spring-Summer 2017 Campaign: We should all be feminists. Dior. Available at: https://www.dior.com/diormag/en_ie/article/11786

Image 21: Gwynne, B. 2025. *FMP Zine ‘Unfinished?’ Front Cover*. Mixam, London.

Image 22: Mary Schepisi, 2011. *Beauty Interrupted*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_art_movement#/media/File:Beauty_Interrupted.jpg [Accessed 14 May 2025].

Appendix



Please click the Google Drive logo on this page to access all materials for this document's appendix. In the folder you will find:

- Survey results and responses (Excel) and link
- Survey visuals
- Primary interview questions
- Interview recordings (all 6 interviews in 1 .mp3 audio file)
- Primary interview consent forms (6)
- Content Analysis Images
- AI Declaration Forms (Written Document and Practical Project)



Image 22: Mary Schepisi , 2011. Beauty Interrupted