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TOP GIRLS? YOUNG WOMEN AND THE NEW SEXUAL CONTRACT

Since early decisions on education and employment influence later possibilities, it is only younger women who are able to make many of the major work and life decisions in a context of legally enforceable equal opportunities. Age is thus crucial in new forms of difference and inequalities between women. (Walby 1997: 41)

The education of girls is probably the most important catalyst for changes in society. (Augusto Lopez-Claros Chief Economist at the World Economic Forum quoted in the *Guardian* 18 May 2005: 8)

And now it's quite clear that the danger has changed. (Foucault 1984: 344)

Resurgent patriarchies and gender retrenchment

This chapter presents an analysis of a new sexual contract currently being made available to young women, primarily in the West, to come forward and make good use of the opportunity to work, to gain qualifications, to control fertility and to earn enough money to participate in the consumer culture which in turn will become a defining feature of contemporary modes of feminine citizenship.¹ The analysis interrogates the terms and conditions, the inclusions and exclusions, as well as the social and political consequences of such a contract. A range of technologies are set in motion, so that these invitations to come forward can be issued. Young women are being put under a spotlight so that they become visible in a certain kind of way. The Deleuzian term luminosity is useful here, supplanting Foucault's panopticon as a mode of surveillance (Deleuze 1986). The theatrical effect of this moving spotlight softens, dramatises and disguises the regulative dynamics. I also use the term 'spaces of attention' to examine these luminosities in everyday life.

The chapter takes as a starting point some passing comments by a number of feminist theorists in the last few years. First, as discussed in the previous chapter, there is Butler's mention, in regard to her rich and complex equivocations on

gay marriage and her reflections on the politics of kinship, that there has been a decline in radical sexual politics (Butler 2004). Second there is Mohanty's important argument in her article '“Under Western Eyes” Revisited', that the restructuring of flexible global capitalism now relies on the willing labour of girls and women and that this entails both a decisive re-definition of gender relations and also forms of retrenchment on the part of 'patriarchies and hegemonic masculinities' (Mohanty 2002). (Labour and the capacity to work will be key themes throughout this chapter.) Mohanty argues that young women are allocated a pivotal role in the new global labour market, but that this coming forward coincides with the fading away of feminism and the women's movement, such that post-Beijing, the most significant site for pursuing struggles for gender justice has been the anti-globalisation movement.

With feminism giving way to women's rights, and women's rights now largely integrated into the vocabulary of human rights, there is, Mohanty acknowledges, a good deal of scope for feminist scholarship to track, from the perspective of the poorest of women, the chains of expropriation of knowledge and resources on the part of global corporations (e.g. biopiracy) which intensify the disadvantage and dependency of non-First World women. And it is in this kind of scholarship and associated pedagogies that Mohanty sees the possibility again for feminist transnational cross-border solidarity. But when she wrote 'Under Western Eyes' there had been, she recalls, 'a very vibrant, transnational, women's movement, while the site I write from today is very different' (Mohanty 2002: 499). Mohanty suggests that the general shift in global politics towards the right, and the decline of social welfarist models coincides with 'processes that recolonise the culture and identity of people' (ibid: 515). (I will return to the word 'recolonise'.) Both of these observations by Butler and Mohanty chime also with the analysis of gender, media and popular culture presented in Chapter 1. There I argued that emerging from largely First World scenarios, the attribution of apparently post-feminist freedoms to young women most manifest within the cultural realm in the form of new visibilities, becomes, in fact, the occasion for the undoing of feminism. The various political issues associated with feminism are understood to be now widely recognised and responded to (they have become feminist common sense) with the effect that there is no longer any place for feminism in contemporary political culture. But this disavowal permits the subtle renewal of gender injustices, while vengeful patriarchal norms are also re-instated. These are easily overlooked, or else a blind eye is turned to them, by those who are well versed in sexual politics, but who are now weary and perhaps persuaded by the high-visibility tropes of freedom currently attached to the category of young women. On this basis post-feminism can be equated with a 'double movement', gender retrenchment is secured, paradoxically, through the wide dissemination of discourses of female freedom and by what Jean-Luc Nancy has

called the 'pretences of equality' (Nancy 2002). Young women are able to come forward on condition that feminism fades away.

Sylvia Walby's rationale for the shift away from earlier and more autonomous forms of feminist practice to the engagement with mainstream politics on a national and global stage stands in sharp contrast to this analysis of the new constraints on female equality (Walby 2002). It is because there have been various feminist successes, Walby argues, that it is now appropriate to re-position feminist politics within the mainstream. Feminism has had a major impact in the field of global human rights and has in effect transformed the human rights agenda. It has also been effective at the level of the nation state so that gender issues are now thoroughly integrated into the wider political field. These changes, along with the participation of women in work, give rise to a new 'gender regime'. Walby's model is therefore accumulative in terms of gains which have been made, and linear, in that feminism moves from localised actions and autonomy onto the world stage and because of this presence and participation, and in the light of possibilities which emerge from globalisation, feminism itself changes to comprise advocacy networks, alliances and coalitions which are capable of being tailored to meet particular or culture-specific requirements. Walby endorses a kind of multi-faceted, gender mainstreaming politics on the basis of institutional recognition. She offers a top down account of the professionalisation and institutionalisation of feminism (her involvement in the UK Women's Budget Group has been important). But this model of gender regime is quite different from what I pose in the pages that follow. This is because Walby implies that institutionalisation and capacity-building and indeed participation as well as the growth of feminist expertise and the presence of women professionals on the world stage, have come about in a progressive way. She does not engage with the wider and punitive conditions upon which female success is predicated. Nor is she alert to the new constraints which emerge as the cost of participation, and, more generally, the re-shaping of gender inequities which are an integral part of resurgent global neo-liberal economic policies. I will return to Walby and the question of gender mainstreaming in the concluding chapter, for now we might also note that Walby acknowledges women's place as workers and producers in the global economy, but overlooks their significance as consumers of global culture, even though it is within the commercial domain that processes of gender change and re-stabilisation are most in evidence.

This chapter asks the question: how do we account for the range of social, cultural and economic transformations which have brought forth a new category of young womanhood? If such changes find themselves consolidated into a discernible trend in the UK (and elsewhere) in the last 10 to 15 years, what are we to make of the decisive re-positioning of young women this appears to entail? Transformations such as those which will be described

below, tend to be seen as positive. Across the spectrum from left to right the apparent gains made by young women are taken to be signs of the existence of a democracy in good health, these are palpable reminders that women's lives have improved, living testimony that social reform and legislation has been effective. But the feminist perspective I present here is alert to the dangers which arise when a selection of feminist values and ideals appear to be inscribed within a more profound and determined attempt, undertaken by an array of political and cultural forces, to re-shape notions of womanhood so that they fit with new or emerging (neo-liberalised) social and economic arrangements. And, within a context where in many parts of Europe and in the US there has been a decisive shift to the right, this might also be seen as a way of re-stabilising gender relations against the disruptive threat posed by feminism. Its not so much turning the clock back, as turning it forward to secure a post-feminist gender settlement, a new sexual contract.²

Young womanhood currently exists within the realm of public debate as a topic of fascination, enthusiasm, concern, anxiety and titillation (see Harris 2004). The fact that the volume of attention has reached such an unprecedented level is not entirely attributable to the expansion of both popular and so-called quality media. Nor can it be wholly explained on the basis of there now being a much more substantial female audience, a population of women consumers (mothers and daughters alike) for whom such material is directed. Neither is it only the case that this concern can be understood within the cycles of moral panic, which periodically fix upon and demonise a seemingly dangerous sector of the population, so as to permit an intensification of social control, usually along some new axis of anxiety. The meanings which converge around the figure of the girl or young women, are more weighted towards capacity, success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility and participation. The dynamics of regulation and control are less about what young women ought not to do, and more about what they can do. The production of girlhood now comprises a constant stream of incitements and enticements to engage in a range of specified practices which are understood to be both progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine. What seems to underpin these practices is a suggestion that young women have now won the battle for equality, they have gained recognition as subjects worthy of governmental attention and this has replaced any need for the feminist critiques of what Mohanty labels hegemonic masculinities. This abandonment of critique of patriarchy is a requirement of the new sexual contract, the terms of which are established in key institutional sites dedicated to the production of the category of young women.³ The girl emerges across a range of social and cultural spaces as a subject worthy of investment. Within the language of Britain's New Labour government, the girl who has benefited from the equal opportunities now available to her, can be mobilised as the embodiment of

the values of the new meritocracy. This term has become an abbreviation for the more individualistic and competitive values promoted by New Labour, particularly within education. Nowadays the young woman's success seems to promise economic prosperity on the basis of her enthusiasm for work and having a career. Thus a defining feature of contemporary girlhood is the attribution of capacity, summed up, as Anita Harris describes, in the Body Shop phrase the 'can do' girl (Harris 2004). This begs the question, what is at stake in this process of endowing the new female subject with capacity? The attribution of both freedom and success to young women, as a series of interpellative processes, take different forms across the boundaries of class, ethnicity and sexuality, producing a range of entanglements of racialised and classified configurations of youthful femininity. So emphatic and so frequently repeated is this celebratory discourse that it comes to function as a key mechanism of social transformation. From being assumed to be headed towards marriage, motherhood and limited economic participation, the girl is now endowed with economic capacity. Within specified social conditions and political constraints, young, increasingly well-educated women, of different ethnic and social backgrounds, now find themselves charged with the requirement that they perform as economically active female citizens. They are invited to recognise themselves as privileged subjects of social change, perhaps they might even be expected to be grateful for the support they have received. The pleasingly, lively, capable and becoming young woman, black, white or Asian, is now an attractive harbinger of social change.

This is certainly not the first time that such a youthful female figure has been used to signal progress and modernity, the girl was invoked in a similar manner particularly in the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed in a recent study which 're-cast(s) gendered modernity within an international frame' Barlow et al. show, in a way which confounds the more usual equation of the 'modern girl' with Western urban modernity, that 'Everywhere the Modern Girl indexed the racial formation of the nation or colony in which she resided' (Barlow et al., 2008: 247). Later in this chapter the racial inflections of contemporary girlhood will be examined in more depth, but for now it is significant to note that there are novel features in this recent deployment within dominating Western discourse. Seemingly post-feminist vocabularies are drawn upon to establish a kind of gender settlement, a new deal for young women. This is a strategy which forcefully rejects the importance of a renewal of an autonomous sexual politics, with a series of pre-emptive moves. In the pages that follow I examine this new standing of young women by considering four 'luminous' spaces of attention, each of which operates to sustain and re-vitalise what Butler has famously called the heterosexual matrix, while also re-instating and confirming, with subtlety, norms of racial hierarchy as well as re-configured class divisions which now

take on a more autonomously gendered dimension. Defining such spaces of attention as luminosities I will propose that these comprise first the fashion-beauty complex (a phrase I borrow from Bartky, 1990) from within which emerges a post-feminist masquerade as a distinctive modality of prescriptive feminine agency. Second there is the luminous space of education and employment, within which is found the figure of the working girl. Third, is the space of sexuality, fertility and reproduction from which emerges the phallic girl. Fourth is the space of globalisation and in particular the production of commercial femininities in the developing world, including impoverished countries, as well as countries like China now undergoing rapid transformation. This luminosity comprises a new deal for the global girl and it is one which seeks to supplant other more social democratic, gender-mainstreaming and human rights based models for gender and social change in the so-called Third World. This is a brash, commercial, updating and translating of a liberal feminist model now being made available as a style of global femininity. The sexual contract on the global stage is most clearly marked out in the world editions of young women's fashion magazines like *Elle*, *Marie Claire*, *Grazia* and *Vogue*. The friendly (hence unthreatening), beautiful and somehow pliable, global girl who exudes good will, thus marks out the spaces of undoing of post-colonial critical pedagogy as well as of post-colonial feminist critique. Or at least we might understand this to be the underlying (and re-colonising) aim of the promotion of global girlhood by the global media, the commercial domain (the fashion-beauty complex) and through specifically neo-liberal forms of governmentality.

Shining in the light: the post-feminist masquerade

Young women have been hyper-actively positioned in the context of a wide range of social, political and economic changes of which they themselves appear to be the privileged subjects. We might now imagine the young woman as a highly efficient assemblage for productivity. (This also marks a shift, women now figure in governmental discourse as much for their productive as reproductive capacities.) In the UK the young woman has government ministers encourage her to avoid low paid and traditionally gendered jobs like hairdressing. She is an object of concern when a wide discrepancy is revealed between high levels of academic performance, yet pervasive low self-esteem.⁴ She also merits attention of government on the basis of remaining inequalities of pay and reward in the labour market. She is addressed as though she is already gender aware, as a result of equal opportunities policies in the education system. With all of this feminist influence somehow behind her, she is now pushed firmly in the direction of independence and self-reliance (Budgeon 2001, Harris 2004). This entails self-monitoring, the setting up of personal plans and the search for individual

solutions. These female individualisation processes require that young women become important to themselves. In times of stress, the young woman is encouraged to seek therapy, counselling or guidance. She is thus an intensively managed subject of post-feminist, gender-aware biopolitical practices of new governmentality. What are we to make of this attention? Does it ultimately seek to re-install re-traditionalised styles of normative femininity to be adhered to, despite these winds of gender change (Probyn 1988/1997, Adkins 2002). This certainly would be one way of understanding the full force of triumphant neo-conservatism in its address to women. But the term re-traditionalisation does not completely capture the incorporation and appropriation of liberal feminist principles which are then taken into account so that they can be acknowledged as no longer relevant. Feminism taken into account is also feminism undone, and this movement permits re-configured and spectacular modes of femininity to come to prominence.

Deleuze, writing about what Foucault meant by visibilities, suggests that they are not 'forms of objects, nor even forms that would show up under light, but rather forms of luminosity, which are created by the light itself and allow a thing or object to exist only as a flash, sparkle or shimmer' (Deleuze 1986: 52). This luminosity captures how young women might be understood as currently becoming visible. The power they seem to be collectively in possession of, is 'created by the light itself'. These luminosities are suggestive of post-feminist equality while also defining and circumscribing the conditions of such a status. They are clouds of light which give young women a shimmering presence, and in so doing they also mark out the terrain of the consummately and re-assuringly feminine. Within this cloud of light, young women are taken to be actively engaged in the production of self. They must become harsh judges of themselves. The visual (and verbal) discourses of public femininity, come to occupy an increasingly spectacular space as sites, events, narratives and occasions within the cultural milieu. The commercial domain provides a proliferation of interpellations directed to young women, with harsher penalties, it seems, for those who refuse or who are unable to receive its various addresses.⁵ 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. There are new norms of appearance and self-presentation expected not just in leisure and in everyday life but also in the workplace, and government concerns itself with this aspect of self-management through various initiatives.⁶

Drawing on Lacan's concept of the Symbolic as the source of patriarchal authority, the oedipal portal which requires subjection to its presiding order as a condition of acquiring both language and sexual identity, Judith Butler has already conjectured that this patriarchal power (or the Symbolic) has been confronted in recent years by feminism as a political antagonism (Butler 2000a). Butler's analysis can be drawn on here to argue that this feminist

confrontation has forced some adjustment on the part of the Symbolic. And this required shift has also coincided with transformations within the economic realm such that countries of the affluent West now find it expedient to employ women, across the boundaries of age, sex, class and ethnicity. Of course women, especially poor women across the world, have always worked, usually for low wages in low status sectors. My point is that work and wage-earning capacity come to dominate rather than be subordinate to women's self-identity, and this inevitably has a ripple effect within the field of power. The Symbolic is faced with the problem of how to retain the dominance of phallogentrism when the logic of global capitalism is to loosen women from their prescribed roles and grant them degrees of economic independence. Of course this raises the question, does access to work and earning a living necessarily permit possibilities of independence? For the global girl working 18 hours a day in a clothing factory in an Export Processing Zone and sending most of her wages home, independence is surely a very different thing?

The Symbolic is thus presented with a triple threat, first from the now-outmoded and hence only spectral women's movement, in the activist sense, second, from the aggressive re-positioning of women through these economic processes of female individualisation, and third, a newer threat which emerges from feminist theory itself, and especially from Butler's work and from its popularity and wider dissemination. This is a threat because what Butler does, after all, is to expose and explain those features of heterosexual power which tend to remain inscrutable and unquestioned on the basis of being so deeply embedded, so resistant to challenge. More broadly we could say this is the danger to the Symbolic posed by queer theory. The Symbolic has had to find a new way of exerting its authority and does so by delegation. Just as power (including sovereign power) in late modernity is increasingly dispersed across many institutions and agencies, and as it, in these dispersed forms, directs itself towards bodies, their well-being, their productive as well as reproductive capacity, then we might surmise that the Symbolic allows itself to be dispersed, or governmentalised. The luminosities of femininity provide the spaces for this authority to be exerted anew. The Symbolic discharges (or maybe franchises) its duties to the commercial domain (beauty, fashion, magazines, body culture, etc.) which becomes the source of authority and judgement for young women. The heightening of significance in regard to the required rituals of femininity as well as an intensification of prescribed heterosexually-directed pleasures and enjoyment are among the key hallmarks of this de-centred Symbolic. In the language of health and well-being, the global fashion-beauty complex charges itself with the business of ensuring that appropriate gender relations are guaranteed. This field of instruction and pleasure oversees the processes of female individualisation which requires the repudiation of feminism which is frequently typecast as embodying bodily failure,

hideousness or monstrosity. Repeated incitements to perform a register of restricted acts to confirm the illusion of an appropriately gendered self, have, of course, been understood by Butler, as imperative to the social fiction of sexual difference, even though there is always scope for failure and even though the need for repetition reminds us that femininity is never so easily secured (Butler 1990, 1993). Because the commercial domain is now so dominant, as social institutions are reduced in their sphere of influence, we can detect an intensification in these disciplinary requirements and also we can perceive new dynamics of aggression, violence and self-punishment, as I show in the following chapter.

Confronted with the prospect of women becoming less dependent on men as a result of participation in work and with the possible de-stabilisation of gender hierarchy which might ensue, so it becomes all the more important for the Symbolic to re-secure the terms of heterosexual desire. Great effort is invested in this task of maintaining and consolidating masculine hegemony for the very reason that there are forces that appear to threaten its dominance. Thus the paraphernalia of marriage culture assumes such visibility within popular culture at the very moment that its necessity is being put in question. If for women in the West survival itself, and the well-being of children, no longer rests on the finding of a male partner who will be a breadwinner, then the cultural significance of marriage is much reduced. This is precisely the dilemma which emerges out of social welfare regimes making provision for women and children and so substituting for the male breadwinner so that the role of husband is no longer necessary. As various feminist critics have argued the so-called crisis of welfare especially in the US and the UK can be understood as a fearful response to this scenario (see e.g. Brown 1995, Fraser 1997). For younger women without children this degree of independence introduces a new tension into the field of dominant heterosexuality. This is a case of what is no longer economically central becoming, for this very reason, culturally necessary. Such a scenario also gives rise to a veritable minefield of sexual antagonisms, on the basis that women are no longer intelligible primarily in terms of their exchange in the marriage market. And the social anxieties that arise as a result of this have repercussions right across the cultural field.

Within a framework marked out in various ways, as post-feminist, the commercial domain undertakes to carry out the work of the Symbolic by means of the attention it pays to the female body.⁷ The authoritative voice of consumer culture is intimate, cajoling and also encouraging. It produces a specific kind of female subject within the realm of its address. By generating bodily dissatisfaction, the beauty and fashion industries respond directly to the fraught state of non-identity which we all inhabit and which is predicated on unfathomable loss, a loss which is incurred as the cost of acquiring language and sexual identity. The young woman is congratulated, reprimanded and encouraged to

embark on a new regime of self-perfectibility (i.e. self-completion) in the hope of making good this loss. And now that she is able to make her own choices, it seems as though the fearful terrain of male approval fades away, and is replaced instead with a new horizon of self-imposed feminine cultural norms. Patriarchal authority is subsumed within a regime of self-policing whose strict criteria form the benchmark against which women must endlessly and repeatedly measure themselves, from the earliest years right through to old age.⁸ A key feature of the work of the fashion-beauty complex in this new post-feminist situation is that it wrestles to re-gain control over disrupted temporalities. These have challenged the inevitable cycle of life-events associated with the categories of woman and also girl, through sexual freedom, control of fertility, delay in age of marriage, delay in childbearing, low birth rate, the viability of remaining unmarried, etc. The fashion-beauty complex, standing in for the Symbolic, is charged with the role of imposing new time frames on women's lives. As a result there is a proliferation of activities which impose new temporalities through, for example, beauty products routinely recommended to very young girls as well as so-called age defying treatments for young women who are barely in their twenties. There are also relentless warnings about fertility, and there is also the creation of new age-related categories of feminine pathology (e.g. middle-aged anorexia).⁹ The opportunity to work and earn a living is thus offset by the emphasis on lifelong and carefully staged body maintenance as an imperative of feminine identity. Temporality finds itself re-defined according to the rhythms invented largely by the fashion and beauty system to manage and oversee other disruptions brought about by the call of the labour market, which could in turn de-stabilise and put into crisis the heterosexual matrix. There is then a tension in regard to time and this provokes the production of a proscribed new time for young women.

Butler, by means of her concept of lesbian phallus, embarks on a kind of social rendering of Lacan's Symbolic. She does this in her book *Bodies That Matter* (1993) where she subjects to close analytical scrutiny the means by which Lacan posits as universal his concept of Symbolic. There is no space here to discuss how Butler arrives at this more social rendering of the Symbolic, but it is a theme which she also pursues in her later book *Antigone's Claim* (2000a), where there is, she argues, an inevitable entanglement of psychic processes with changes in social and political culture.¹⁰ What I propose here is that a key containment strategy on the part of the Symbolic, faced with possible disruption to the stable binaries of sexual difference, and to the threat posed therein to patriarchal authority, is then to delegate a good deal of its power to the fashion-beauty complex where, as a 'grand luminosity', a post-feminist masquerade emerges as a new cultural dominant. This strategy pre-empts and re-contains the threat posed by Butler's work on gender's fictive status, its artifice and its performative existence in daily life. It

permits the possibility of distance from the unbearable proximity of femininity, as described by Doane, through a licensed, ironic, quasi-feminist inhabiting of femininity as excess, which is now openly acknowledged as fictive (Doane 1982). The Symbolic here shows itself to be highly adaptable and capable of operating at high speed, to pull back into the field of constraint, actions which have sought to subvert the subordinate status of femininity. It is as though the post-feminist masquerade is a direct response to the feminist theorising of both Doane and Butler. It openly acknowledges and celebrates the fictive status of femininity while at the same time establishing new ways of enforcing sexual difference. The masquerade, as defined by Riviere in 1929, and engaged with by Doane in her highly influential essay 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator' (1982) and then returned to by Butler in 1990/1999, has re-appeared as a highly self-conscious means by which young women are encouraged to collude with the re-stabilisation of gender norms so as to undo the gains of feminism, and dissociate themselves from this now discredited political identity (see Figure 1, advertisement for *Grazia* magazine in the *Guardian* 17 January 2006). As a psychoanalyst, Riviere was interested in how 'women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men' (Riviere 1929/1986: 35, quoted in Butler 1999a, 2nd edn: 65). Riviere understands womanliness and 'masquerade' to be indistinguishable, there is no naturally feminine woman lurking underneath this mask. Butler is interested in the 'homosexuality of the woman in masquerade' and in the question of what exactly the masquerade conceals, if not an authentic femininity. She suggests that Riviere disavows the complexity and ambivalence of desire in the masquerade. Butler claims this to be a site of both 'the refusal of female homosexuality and hyperbolic incorporation of that female other who is refused' (Butler 1999a: 65).

This leads Butler some pages later to develop the idea of heterosexual melancholia. While this is indeed a persuasive engagement with Riviere, I want to introduce the post-feminist masquerade as a new form of gender power which re-orchestrates the heterosexual matrix in order to secure, once again, the existence of patriarchal law and masculine hegemony, but this time by means of a kind of ironic, quasi-feminist staking out of a distance in the act of taking on the garb of femininity.¹¹ The Symbolic permits the presence of a feminist gesture as it adjusts to ward off the threat of feminism. There is a useful slippage in Riviere's account between the actuality of the masquerade as a recognisable phenomenon which she perceives in her female patients and their encounters, and images of femininity found in the cultural realm. This intersection between the styles of femininity that Riviere observes in everyday life, and those portrayed in feminine popular culture, permits me here to propose the post-feminist masquerade as mode of feminine inscription, across the whole surface of the female body, an

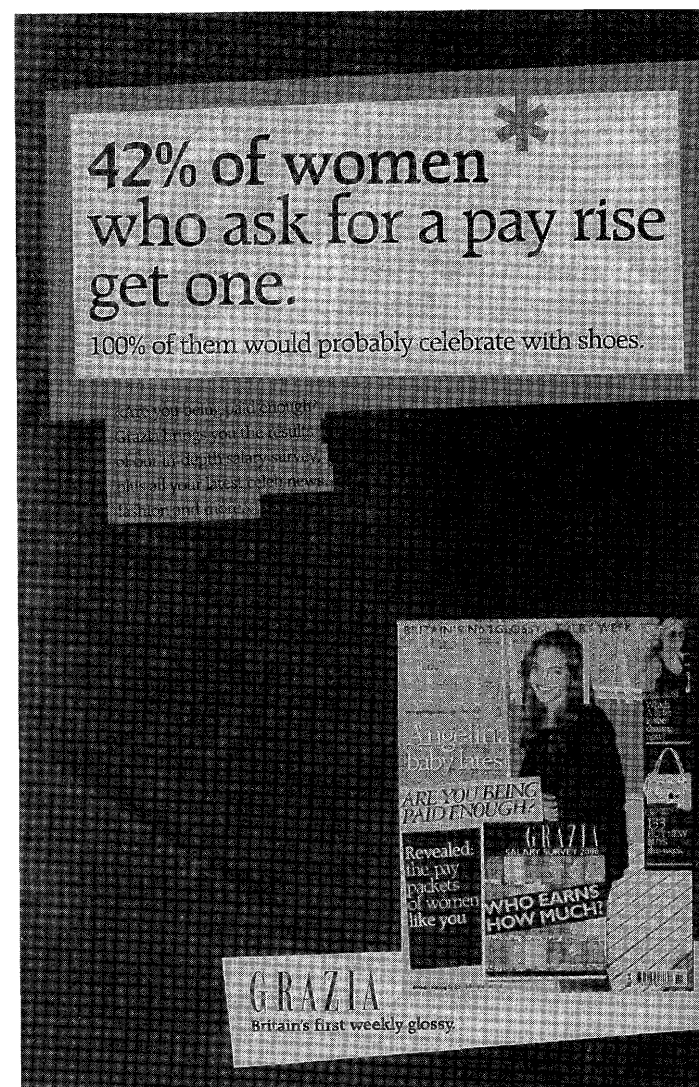


Figure 1 *Grazia* advertisement in the *Guardian* 17 January 2006. Courtesy *Grazia* magazine.

interpellative device, at work and highly visible in the commercial domain as a familiar (even nostalgic or 'retro'), light-hearted (unserious), refrain of femininity. It has been re-instated into the repertoire of femininity ironically (as the wearing of clothes in inverted commas). This signals that the hyper-femininity of the masquerade which would seemingly re-locate women back inside the terms of traditional gender hierarchies, by having them wear spindly stilettos and 'pencil' skirts, for example, does not in fact mean entrapment (as feminists would once have seen it) since it is now a matter

of choice rather than obligation. The element of choice becomes synonymous with a kind of feminism. But what the young woman is choosing is more than just participation in consumer culture. No aspect of physical appearance can be left unattended to. The post-feminist masquerade functions with this microscopic attention to detail. As ever more obscure beauty procedures are made available, traditional feminine practices of self-maintenance, like manicures and pedicures, are also re-instated as norms of feminine grooming. Such routine practices as these are required by all women who want to count themselves as such, and these rituals constitute the post-feminist masquerade as a feminine totality.

This new masquerade constantly refers to its own artifice. Its adoption by women is done as a statement, the woman in masquerade is making a point that this is a freely chosen look. The post-feminist masquerade does not fear male retribution. Instead it is the reprimanding structure of the fashion and beauty system which acts as an authoritative regime; hence the seeming disregard for male approval, especially if the outfit and look is widely admired by those within the fashion milieu.¹² The masquerade creates a habitus for women who have now found themselves ensconced within fields of work, employment and public life, all of which hitherto had been marked out as masculine domains. The masquerade disavows the spectral, powerful and castrating figures of the lesbian and the feminist with whom they might conceivably be linked. It rescues women from the threat posed by these figures by triumphantly re-instating the spectacle of excessive femininity (on the basis of the independently earned wage) while also shoring up hegemonic masculinity by endorsing this public femininity which appears to undermine, or at least unsettle the new power accruing to women on the basis of this economic capacity. There are many variants of the post-feminist masquerade (sometimes summed up in the word immaculate) but in essence it comprises a re-ordering of femininity so that old-fashioned styles (rules about hats, bags, shoes, etc.), which signal submission to some invisible authority or to an opaque set of instructions, are re-instated.¹³ In practice it can be read as a nervous gesture on the part of young women (think of Bridget Jones's short skirt and flirty presence in the workplace and her 'oh silly me' self-reprimands), who have become aware that their coming forward and competing on the labour market with men as their equals has certain repercussions. They are nervous because they are still unused to power, it ill-befits them, they are inexperienced, they cannot afford for it to be relaxed or casual, they are anxious it will make them unfeminine. It is not so much fear, as recognition that this appropriation of power which they have found themselves assuming, impacts on their negotiation of heterosexuality and potentially detracts from their desirability. The post-feminist (anti-feminist) masquerade comes to the young women's rescue, a throwback from the past, and she adopts this style (assuming for

example the air of being 'foolish and bewildered' (Riviere, 1929/1986: 29) to help her navigate the terrain of hegemonic masculinity without jeopardising her sexual identity, which, because she is actually and legitimately inside the institutional world of work, from which she was once barred or had only limited access to, can become a site of vulnerability (she might be made to feel herself too old, past her best, still on the shelf, etc). Or else she fears being considered aggressively unfeminine in her coming forward as a powerful woman, she fears being mistaken for a feminist, and so adopts the air of being girlishly distracted, slightly flustered, weighed down with bags, shoes, bracelets and other decorative candelabra items, all of which need to be constantly attended to. She is also almost inappropriately eager to please. The new masquerade draws attention self-consciously to its own crafting and performance. The post-feminist masquerade (embodied in the figure of the so-called *fashionista*) is then a knowing strategy which emphasises its non-coercive status, it is a highly-styled disguise of womanliness which is now adopted as a matter of personal choice. But the theatricality of the masquerade, the silly hat, the too short skirt, the too high heels, are once again means of emphasising, as they did in classic Hollywood comedies, female vulnerability, fragility, uncertainty and deep anxiety, indeed panic, about the possible forfeiting of male desire through coming forward as a woman.

Both Riviere and Butler refer to the sublimated aggression directed towards masculinity and male dominance in the form of the masquerade. Riviere uses words like triumph, supremacy and hostility to describe the female anger which underpins the façade of excessive feminine adornment, she pinpoints the fury of the professional women who perceives her own subjugation in the behaviour of her male peers. All of this gets transmogrified into the mask of make-up and the crafting of a highly styled look. This strategy re-appears today in very different circumstances. Women now routinely inhabit these masculine spheres, they now find themselves in competition with men on a daily basis. They take their place alongside men thanks to the existence of non-discriminatory policies, and more recently to systems of meritocratic reward as advocated by New Labour. The woman in masquerade wishes to have a position as a 'subject in language' (i.e. to participate in public life) rather than existing merely as 'women as sign' (Butler 1990/1999a). It is precisely because women are now able to function as subjects in language (i.e. they participate in working life) that the new masquerade exists to manage the field of sexual antagonisms and to re-instate women as sign. The successful young woman must now get herself endlessly and repetitively done up, so as to mask her rivalry with men in the world of work (i.e. her wish for masculinity) and to conceal the competition she now poses because only by these tactics of re-assurance can she be sure that she will remain sexually desirable. She fears the loss of her own desirability, so

she gets all done up, but where in the past this was a necessity, now it is a personal choice, and male approval is sought only indirectly. And in any case patriarchy and hegemonic masculinities have removed themselves from the scene and are now replaced by the cultural horizon of judgement provided by the fashion and beauty system. This becomes the source of reprimand, this is where punishment is meted out. Women disguise their bid for power by means of masquerade and patriarchal authority absents itself from the scene of judgement and delegates this power to the beauty and fashion system which requires constant self-judgement and self-beratement, against a horizon of rigid cultural norms. This makes it look as though women are 'doing it for themselves'. If patriarchy, at the time when Riviere was writing, objected vigorously to women's bid for power and threatened punishment, the only way in which women could avoid this punishment was by retreating from the bid for power into re-assuring femininity thereby letting men know that they posed no threat. But the need for masquerade in a post-feminist context remains also a source of sublimated anger. This becomes privatised or even illegible for the reason that the critique of masculinity would return complaining women to the camp of the repudiated feminist, thus there is a good deal of searching about for an appropriate cultural space for the venting of this anger. In some ways there is a 'damn you men' gesture in the narcissistic self-absorption of super-fashionable young women today. The controlling and constraining aspects of the post-feminist masquerade, recognises and panders to the sublimated critique of masculinity, and even to heterosexual melancholia as described by Butler. This melancholia lurks beneath the surface, threatening to transmogrify into rage, as will be discussed in the chapter that follows. The heroines of popular fiction (including so-called chick lit) regularly express anger, outrage and frustration in their diaries that they have, once again, to make themselves submissive in order to appeal to men.

Riviere argues that by exaggerating the way in which she inhabits her gender and sexuality so as to draw attention to objects and the accoutrements of her femininity, the woman both masks her bid for masculine power and retreats from it at the same time. She is fearful of seriousness (hence the comedic nature of spectacular femininity) and even when positioned as authoritative she will allude to her inhabiting of femininity so that she remains recognisable within the terms of male desire.¹⁴ Riviere describes how the prominent woman demonstrates her professional skills in a public environment (giving a lecture) but goes on to undermine the effect of proficiency and expertise with an excessive display of 'coquettishness' and feminine gestures. She reassures her male colleagues that she remains nonetheless a real (and thus subjugated) woman. The masquerade functions to re-assure male structures of power by defusing the presence and the aggressive and competitive actions of women as they come to inhabit positions of authority. It

re-stabilises gender relations and the heterosexual matrix as defined by Butler by interpellating women repeatedly and ritualistically into the knowing and self-reflexive terms of highly-stylised femininity. The post-feminist masquerade works on behalf of the Symbolic pre-emptively in the light of the possible disruptions posed by the new gender regime. It operates with a double movement, its voluntaristic structure works to conceal that patriarchy is still in place, while the requirements of the fashion and beauty system ensure that women are in fact still fearful subjects, driven by the need for 'complete perfection' (Riviere 1929/1986: 42).

But the next question, which must be asked, concerns the racial underpinning of the post-feminist masquerade.¹⁵ How is whiteness inscribed within this re-ordering of the feminine? How do black and Asian young women find themselves interpellated (or not) by the addresses which seek to encourage the adoption of this bodily norm of 'complete perfection'? The post-feminist masquerade is also a means of re-instating whiteness as a cultural dominant within the field of the fashion-beauty complex. This too is a moment of profound undoing, a mode of re-colonisation through a range of complex strategies which can be identified within the visual discourses of popular culture. What do I mean re-colonisation? What do I mean undoing? In the addresses to young non-white women across the media and culture, there is an insinuation or a suggestion that the fight for racial equality is no longer relevant. Overt anti-racism combined with feminism, is also associated with the past, with the angry period of the 1970s and 1980s which pre-dated the more enlightened time of the New Labour government. As already noted in the previous chapter, this coincides with the shift in governmental thinking away from endorsing multi-culturalism and the policy strategies associated with anti-racism, and instead the encouraging of new styles of integration and assimilation, while also of course celebrating black and Asian success as key features of the new meritocracy. New integrationism has the (post 9/11) ring of the contemporary, and the visibility of black and Asian people including 'modern' young women within the ranks of the talent-led economy would ideally replace the need for arguments about institutionalised racism and the prevalence and reproduction of racial inequalities. The particular element of undoing relevant to discussions of femininity resides in something as straightforward as the sustained, marked, inattention by predominantly white editors, journalists, and other people occupying important roles in the world of media, culture and inside the social institutions, to what used to be called issues of equal opportunities and to, as discussed in the previous chapter, questions of representation. In the last few years, there is a very noticeable decrease in images of black and Asian women on the pages of the women's and girls' magazines, but equally important, this is no longer a focus for discussion.

Questions about the numerical representation of black and Asian people in the media, takes us right back to the early days of feminist and anti-racist

research and scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. It is almost too crude a point to make. My mention here of an observed decline in black models and in coverage of issues relating to non-white women in the field of feminine popular culture bears the hallmark of just that, a kind of instinctive noticing, that even on the pages of the liberal press which now devotes so much space to fashion and beauty and which so forcefully pursues a female readership, most often there are no black or Asian bodies at all to be seen amongst the endless pages of fashion tips, beauty schedules, information about cosmetic surgery and so on. It is as though, in a climate now openly critical of so-called 'political correctness', and thus no longer expected or required to engage with equal opportunities issues, as they might have done in the recent past, editors and journalists, revert to relying on the norms and conventions which governed their practice in the era prior to the rise of feminist and anti-racist politics. Thus there is an undoing of anti-racist feminist cultural politics in the press and across the popular media. Black and Asian girls have a minimal presence as a result in the various styles incorporated within post-feminist masquerade. The luminosities of femininity are unapologetically and invariably white. The clouds of light which fix upon the figures of female success and the top girls can accommodate to black and Asian femininity but only on condition that there is a subsuming of difference (into Western glamour) so that it complies with specific requirements endlessly repeated by the fashion and beauty system. Otherness is also signalled, and there are prescribed pathways for cultural difference to find some negotiated space within the post-feminist masquerade (the occasional black female celebrity featured in the magazines, as a style icon) but overall the post-feminist masquerade implicitly re-instates normative whiteness and it exacts a violent exclusion of diversity and otherness thereby resurrecting and solidifying gendered racial divisions in the cultural realm.

Thus we might say that the post-feminist masquerade re-secures the terms of submission of white femininity to white masculine domination, while simultaneously resurrecting racial divisions by undoing any promise of multi-culturalism through the exclusion of non-white femininities from this rigid repertoire of self-styling. This amounts to a double process of re-subordination, with again, somewhere in the background the hint that of course feminism and anti-racism have been already dealt with, they have been taken into account, young black and Asian women now have the opportunities to succeed alongside their white female counterparts. Of course they are included in the encouragement to achieve 'complete perfection'. This element of confident coming forward, which is so central to the dominant discourses of governmentality, makes it all the more difficult to resurrect a language of discrimination, injustice and exclusion. But the idea of complete perfection embodied within this post-feminist masquerade

is elusive, unviable, and beyond reach, it seems, for non-white women, unless they relinquish almost all signifiers of racial difference and subsume ethnicity into the dominant repertoire of normative white femininity.

These current interpellative addresses of the fashion and beauty system to black female subjects has not attracted the attention of feminist scholars in the way such issues did in the 1980s and early 1990s (see Young 2000). The feminine commercial domain operates then with a limited and thus exclusionary address, inviting young (light skinned) black and (respectably demure) Asian women to accept minimal terms of representation within these visual economies. This readership only has the option of adjusting to the norms of dominant white glamorous and high maintenance femininity. There are very few black celebrities whose everyday lives are the subject of paparazzi attention for the gossip magazines. The film version of *Bridget Jones's Diary* evokes a landscape of whiteness with barely a gesture towards London as a multi-cultural city. There was no black girl among the main cast of characters in *Sex and the City*, no black girl in *Friends* (other than the occasional 'date'). There is a successful genre of Asian chick lit, and there are a handful of black models who embody 'complete perfection', but the pool of light which attempts to bring order and stability to the landscape of change for young women by means of a post-feminist masquerade offers young non-white women only the option of mimicry, accommodation, adjustment and modification. This is a kind of racial violence within the celebratory white visual economies of the fashion-beauty complex which goes almost unnoticed. The post-feminist masquerade derives its meaning from the hey-day of (white) Hollywood glamour, and from the conventions of high fashion glossy magazines like *Vogue*. The retro, nostalgia for this kind of whiteness ensures that the new masquerade, if not unavailable to black or Asian women, is then only available at the cost of negating modes of style and beauty associated with blackness, with cultural diversity and ethnic difference (Dyer 1997). The fashion-beauty complex functions on behalf of patriarchal authority so as to ensure the stability of the heterosexual matrix especially when it is threatened by social changes brought about by women coming forward into the world of work and employment. It is also a key mechanism in the active production and reproduction of racialising differences. And likewise the various forms of feminine popular culture whose focus of attention is sexuality, desire, and the conduct of love and intimacy, here too the interpellative address of heterosexuality is simultaneously one which generates and reinforces racial and ethnic difference. These systems of racialised meaning are so deeply inscribed within the dominant language of love, and what young women now need to do to secure a partner or husband (the so-called rules), that the only available logic of difference, within the commercial domain, is the production of an equivalent system of feminine popular culture for black or Asian young women. Hence the

proliferation of self-help handbooks for black or Asian women, black fashion magazines, Asian fashion labels, Asian chick lit and so on.

Education and employment as sites of capacity: the visibility of the well-educated working girl

The luminosities of the post-feminist masquerade and the clouds of light bestowed on the figure of the young women by the fashion and beauty system are matched, if not surpassed, by (and frequently intersect with) the visibilities which produce the well-educated young woman and the working girl. Together these comprise two key elements of the new sexual contract. It is the wage earning capacity on the part of young women which is the critical factor that underpins the exuberance of the commercial domain, as commerce embraces the possibilities opened up by the disposable income of young women, who now are expected to not just have an occupation, but to prioritise earning a living as a means of acquiring status, ensuring an independent livelihood, and gaining access to the world of feminine goods and services. And the ability to earn a living is also the single most important feature of the social and cultural changes of which young women find themselves to be the privileged subjects. Governmental activity is put into making young women ready for work, and this requirement takes the form of urging young women towards agency across the whole range of talents and abilities (Rose 1999b, Allen 2008). As I attempt to demonstrate, within the terms of the UK government's modernising project, the prescribed manner of acquiring capacity also ensures the re-stabilisation of gender hierarchies. In this next section I consider some of the ways in which education and employment play this role of re-designating young women as subjects of capacity who will refrain from challenging existing gender hierarchies as they come forward to occupy a position of visibility. Young women are now integral to social change and to processes of social re-structuring with all that entails in relation to social divisions, new polarities between wealth and poverty and the creation of what New Labour labels the new meritocracy.

As well-trained women gain their own more independent middle-class status so also are they encouraged to repudiate their social inferiors and celebrate their own individualistic success. As I show in Chapter 5, the re-appearance of hierarchy, class disdain, indeed hatred, in regard to the habits and appearance of low-income women, gains acceptability in the guise of entertainment, in popular culture and the media, as a mark of women no longer needing the support of each other now that they have access to the means of becoming successful and competitive. Implicit within this discourse of popular culture (BBC TV programmes like *What Not To Wear*) is the idea that women's lives have changed dramatically. Working-class

women are urged to abandon fatalistic ideas about the inevitability of ageing, the decline in appearance and the traditional requirement of mothers and wives to be self-sacrificing. This landscape of self-improvement substitutes for the feminist values of solidarity and support and instead embraces and promotes female individualisation and condemnation of those who remain unable or unwilling to help themselves. The new temporalities of women's time mean that they are now called upon to attend to body image and personal skills so that they will remain presentable in the workplace and employable in the longer term. Occupational identity and the acquisition of qualifications mean that young women are no longer classified primarily according to their place within structures of family and kinship. Their highly visible bodies are now marked by the possession of grades, qualifications and occupational identities. As they emerge through the education system, young women, more so than their male peers, come to be associated with the gaining of qualifications. Until the late 1980s, being in proud possession of a clutch of high graded GCSEs and A levels was the privilege of a small number of middle class and largely white young women, so much so that it was not a subject which attracted wide public attention. This has changed dramatically. The impact of class inequalities, racism and the sheer persistence of unsurmountable obstacles for girls growing up in poverty are eclipsed by the emphasis on improvement, success and the significant increase in the numbers of young women going to university.¹⁶ These changes also feature prominently in the process of young women coming forward, and being seen to benefit from the attention of government. The education system now looks favourably towards young women and rewards them for their effort. The result is that the young woman comes to be widely understood as a potential bearer of qualifications, she is an active and aspirational subject of the education system, and she embodies the success of the new meritocratic values which New Labour have sought to implement in schools. This re-positioning is a decisive factor in the new sexual contract. The contractual dimension entails an offer made to young women which cannot be refused, without painful repercussions. But this requires further unpacking and contextualisation. How, for example, have feminist scholars responded to a situation which suggests that young women have now gained equality in the education system and thus might appear no longer to be subjects of injustice or discrimination?

Education has been a site in which years of feminist struggle have indeed reaped some rewards. If second wave feminism paid great attention to the gender inequalities across the school system, with socialist feminists and black feminist scholars also mapping this vector of disadvantage together with those of class and ethnicity, this longstanding commitment to achieving equality in schooling for young women could be understood in Walby's terms as having resulted in the mainstreaming of gender issues as matters

for attention within the wider political arena. The increase in educational qualifications referred to above, as well as the growing numbers of girls staying on at school after 16, and going to university, means that it is in effect primarily young women who are providing the New Labour government with reasons to claim that their policies are successful.¹⁷ This could also be seen as an example of women coming forward and feminism fading away on the basis of its work being done, substantial degrees of equality having been won, and enduring inequities are now attended to by mainstream governmental processes. However my emphasis here is rather different. And this is not just a matter of pointing to the unevenness of success, the discrepancy between the rates of achievement and under-achievement on the basis of class, and the continued pernicious impact of racial disadvantage on young black and Asian women across the class divide. The violent impact of racial prejudice on young black and Asian women's educational prospects continues to undermine any straightforward notion of feminist gains in the educational field, particularly as these are described within a vocabulary of gender mainstreaming. We need a much more detailed empirical account of the educational experiences of young black and Asian women in the UK and in Europe which would, we might assume, temper any premature optimism about success and social mobility. What can be argued however is that the coming forward of young women and the attribution of capacity to these now seemingly privileged subjects also plays a role within the modernising agenda of New Labour. Indeed this is a key role, it shows that there remains a solid, social democratic 'heart' to New Labour, and that indeed wise investment in education has proved to reap rewards especially with a social group, i.e. young women who in the past were destined to under-achieve.

There are a range of studies from the US, the UK, Australia and Europe which provide detailed accounts of inequities newly generated by changes to welfare regimes, the decline in state funding of education, and the emergence of meritocratic systems of reward. These show how such policy shifts towards an audit and target-based system, as well as privatisation, impact negatively on the educational achievements of young women from low-income families (Walkerdine et al. 2002). Middle-class girls and those from privileged Asian and black families (who will still of course experience discrimination) will become part of the new competitive elite, while lower middle class girls and many of their working class counterparts will now be expected to gain degree level qualifications and enter the labour market in occupations appropriate to the qualifications gained. As Kim Allen shows, overall in the UK in the early years of the twenty first century there is an exceptionally high level of activity for girls, in schools, in training, in further and higher education and in employment, leaving only 2% of girls who finish school with no qualifications and who are, as a result, now singled out more forcefully as educational failures (Allen 2008). Such a distribution of

young women, by means of educational qualifications, looks like a simple reproduction of existing class divisions, with the double proviso, first that women are now gaining their own class identity through work and qualifications, and second that there are specifically feminine pathways of social mobility.¹⁸ The acquisition (or not) of qualifications therefore comes to function as a mark of a new gender divide. Young women are ranked according to their ability to gain qualifications which provide them with an identity as female subjects of capacity. (They can become obsessed with grades.) The principles that underscore the new gender regime require willingness, motivation and aptitude on the part of young women that if instilled within the school system will be sustained and further developed in the workplace. In singling out young women for special attention, New Labour and other governments seem to be fulfilling some of the hopes of earlier generations of feminists, while in fact they are encouraging female activity as a new form of social mobility. Government substitutes for feminism, and instils in place of those now outmoded values, styles of feminine competition which also give rise to new and more opaque entanglements of class, race and gender.¹⁹ Because the language and ideas which circulate across the culture in relation to young women's working lives are so dominated by personal narratives, and by colourful 'self-biographies', and by TV programmes like *Fame Academy* or *The Apprentice*, which emphasise talent, determination and the desire to win, and which feature highly motivated young women, it becomes more and more difficult to discern the real sociological intersections of structural factors of ethnicity, social class and gender, in regard to young women. In the individualising narratives of popular culture, for example in the *Daily Mail*, a good deal of attention is given to the young woman who will step forward as an exemplary black or Asian young woman on the basis of her enthusiasm for learning, her taste for hard work, and her desire to pursue material reward.

High rates of success in gaining qualifications have become the benchmark of equality as achieved. It is assumed that gender inequities have now (more or less) been successfully dealt with, such that young men are now the losers, and they are in effect discriminated against. Thus one form the backlash against feminism takes is to argue that it has gone too far, that it has overstepped its limits and that having succeeded in achieving equality for young women it has indirectly contributed to male under-performance through the feminisation of schooling.²⁰ And the extent to which this argument is taken up by government, makes it all the more difficult to continue to make a case for young women's inequality despite apparent success in schooling. A range of sociological studies have challenged the sensational headlines in the press about female success and male failure, and have provided important qualifications to such inflated claims, see Arnot et al. (1999), Harris (2004), Driscoll (2002), Safia-Mirza (1997), Bettie (2003),

Budgeon (2001). Arnot et al. writing about UK schooling both contextualise and historicise female success. They point to how feminist practice on the part of teachers in schooling from the mid-1970s, was gradually supplanted by a more harshly competitive, Thatcherite, target-oriented and accountability-directed, regime. However, as a result of residual feminist pedagogic principles still intact, it was possible for the former nonetheless to be translated so as to accord with the meritocratic logic of the latter, with young women thus able to reap some benefits from both old feminist and New Labour policies. Arnot et al. describe the way in which the attack by the new right on educational practices associated with the left and feminism, forced teachers to abandon the vocabulary that had been in place in regard to girls and schooling, in favour of one which emphasised results, targets and external ratings. Feminism was made to fold into the new values of competition and excellence so that the high-achieving girl came to embody the improvements and changes in the educational system as a whole. Notwithstanding the perpetuation within secondary education of glaring inequities, the authors say 'successive generations of girls have been challenged by economic and social change and by feminism' (Arnot et al. 1999: 150). However this notion of challenge remains rather vague. The new educational vocabulary addressed to young women is actually more aggressive in its attempts to eradicate the traces of feminism so that feminist pedagogy is seen to be a thing of the past, frozen in educational history as marking out a moment of outmoded radicalism. This coincides with recent parallel efforts to associate anti-racist educational practices with similar meanings, in the move, in the aftermath of the events of 9/11 to find ways of re-instating vocabularies of assimilation and integration rather than those of cultural difference and multiculturalism. For black and Asian girls there is the impact of a double process of discrediting the radical values which had been established in the school system from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s and which had also shaped at least parts of the curriculum.

The account I have presented so far of educational changes is certainly schematic, and aims more at drawing attention to the shift away from debates which historically focused on questions of girls and schooling, to those which now assume that young women are being relatively well-catered to by education and consequently understood as subjects of capacity, subjects who are in a position to do well. The actuality of the schooling process for young women and the re-drafting of inequalities clearly require a good deal more analysis. But in regard to the process of young women as subjects of capacity we might also point to the convergence in values between the UK endorsing of competitive female individualisation and the comments made by Gayatri Spivak about the forms of pedagogy advocated within Western aid programmes ostensibly to the benefit of the new global girl. Spivak (in contrast with Nussbaum) urges caution in endorsing the seeming support for

girls' education on the part of governments in impoverished Third World as well as wealthy countries of the West (Nussbaum 2003b, Spivak 2002b). The investing in girls as subjects of educational capacity as a sign of progress, she argues (contra Walby), must be countered with recognition that they will now most likely be educated according to pedagogic principles which are completely compliant with the values of neo-liberalised global capitalism. Spivak questions the role of such forms of knowledge and the paternalism which underpins the categorising of the girl as worthy of investment. Of course she is not saying that young women should reject the possibilities for becoming educated, rather that the terms and conditions within which this provision is made be subject to critical scrutiny. The attention of Western government to the category of girl shows the extent to which the global girl is now a figure who promises a great deal within the new international division of labour. Where once she was simply known for her nimble fingers, the global girl now emerges as a subject of micro-credit worthiness, gender training, enterprise culture as well as an active practitioner of birth control (Spivak 1999, 2002a, 2002b, Mohanty 2002).

If education remains the privileged space within the countries of the affluent West for promulgating female participation, the recent attempts on the part of government to create more direct links between education and employment by emphasising work experience, internships, employability, and enterprise culture, have particular resonance for young women. Right across a range of recent studies of young women's self-identity it is apparent that occupational status has become an overriding factor in the presentation of self. Interviewees, across the boundaries of class and ethnicity, are motivated and ambitious, they have clear plans about what direction they might hope to follow from a young age and they frequently refer to the support they receive from their parents, especially from their mothers (Budgeon 2001, Harris 2004). Having a well-planned life emerges as a social norm of contemporary femininity. And conversely the absence of such styles of self-organisation becomes an indicator of pathology, a signal of failure or a symptom of some other personal difficulties. As Harris and others have pointed out this governmental vocabulary of self-responsibility also personalises disadvantage and marks out poverty and economic hardship as issues connected with family and dysfunctionality rather than as socially generated phenomena. For those young women who appear to be in possession of the social skills of confident self-presentation and ambition, the question that arises is how these are transposed into the workplace? For those without such advantages, the transition to work will surely entail being pushed towards low pay, low skill work but with the proviso that for those who wish to improve their chances in the labour market there are indeed pathways to further education, day release schemes and training. The result is that those young women under-achievers, and those who do not have the requisite degrees of motivation and ambition to improve

themselves, become all the more emphatically condemned for their lack of status and for other failings, than would have been the case in the past.

At the opposite end of the scale, we might ask how the middle class and lower middle class young women, who have, as Arnot et al. argue, benefited both from the feminism of the earlier period, and then have been designated as subjects of immense capacity through the ethos of meritocracy and competition by the New Labour government, find themselves positioned within the field of work and employment? If this section of the female population are the winners, can they also be losers? Are their grounds for claiming that here too gender retrenchment takes place, despite a façade of opportunity and capacity and despite the various attentions which produce specific visibilities around the figure of the working girl or the young career woman? Certainly it is the hard working and aspirational young woman who in popular culture transmogrifies into the luminosity which surrounds the figure of the 'working girl'. She has benefited from feminism, and can now afford to wave goodbye to its values, in favour of pursuing her own personal desires. She again is invariably white and finds herself the subject of countless narratives in film, TV drama as well as within the repertoire of features in girls and women's magazines. Charlotte Brunsdon writing in the 1990s on films like *Working Girl* (directed by Mike Nichols in 1989), shows exactly how post-feminist meanings emerge in popular cinema directed at a female audience through narratives which acknowledge, or make some gestures to the impact of the women's movement, on ordinary women's lives and their current investment in work and careers. Brunsdon reflects on the disavowal of feminism in a number of 1980s and early 1990s Hollywood women's genre films, and in many ways my argument in this book takes Brunsdon's notion of disavowal further by looking at how feminism is actively taken into account, in order that it is also undone, and so that it might never happen again (Brunsdon 1991, 1997). The prevalence of powerful and attractive working girls across the landscape of media and culture and the incorporation of working identity as integral to the post-feminist masquerade comes to provide a benchmark against which young women are invited to measure their own capacity in the world of work.

The film *Working Girl* provides a narrative account of young women's movement, or coming forward, to occupy these spaces of luminosity. Indeed this film enacts a passage from masquerade to post-feminist masquerade by means of two competing female figures. The middle class, feminist-influenced executive figure, Katherine, played by Sigourney Weaver is eventually eclipsed by her rival and social inferior in the typing pool (played by Melanie Griffith) who studies her closely, and learns how to dress so that she too embodies 'complete perfection', but who remains endearingly feminine and succeeds in work and in love by these means. In the film Melanie Griffith plays Tess McGill, an office girl with poor taste in dress. An opportunity

arises (her boss has a skiing accident) which allows Tess not just to emulate the immaculate style of her boss Katherine, but also to seduce her boyfriend and turn herself into an equally high-powered executive by means of a combination of old-fashioned feminine conniving and instinctive intelligence. Tess's post-feminist masquerade entails learning and applying all the fashion rules, but she remains nervous, unsure of herself, and eager to please, and playing these qualities up, she attracts the attention of the handsome executive and Katherine's long-term boyfriend played by Harrison Ford. This is only one of many working girl narratives, but, as is often the case with mainstream Hollywood films, it anticipates with perspicuity many of the key themes of gender and social as well as cultural change of the last 20 years. These include post-feminist competition and unbridled rivalry among women, female social mobility, working-class ambition, and the post-feminist masquerade as feminine performance which succeeds for Tess for the reason that she works out why Katherine, despite her expensive wardrobe, will fail when it comes to men and sexuality. Katherine is too near to being a feminist. In her style as well as her manner, she presents herself as equal to men, and she is beaten in love by her less well-educated rival who is better able to adjust to the requirements of masculine domination.²¹

The post-feminist masquerade exacts then on the part of the working girl a kind of compromise, she takes up her place in the labour market and she enjoys her status as a working girl without going too far. She must retain a visible fragility and the displaying of a kind of conventional feminine vulnerability will ensure she remains desirable to men. This compromise enacted in the cultural field also finds expression, as social compromise, in the field of work and employment. I borrow this term from Rosemary Crompton to account for the way in which the new sexual contract operates in the workplace, setting limits on patterns of participation and gender equality (Crompton 2002). Rosemary Crompton focuses on women who are also mothers and their re-positioning in the labour market on return to work after the birth of children. The relevance of this work to the discussion here lies in the implicit abandonment of critique of masculine hegemony in favour of compromise. Young working mothers, it appears, draw back from entertaining any idea of debate on inequality in the household in favour of finding ways, with help from government, to manage their dual responsibility. This links with the previous discussion of the post-feminist masquerade as a strategy of undoing, a re-configuring of normative femininity, this time incorporating motherhood so as to accommodate with masculine domination. In the social compromise there is then, once again, a process of gender re-stabilisation. Rosemary Crompton points to the significant rates of retention in employment or return to work shortly after having children by UK women. This corresponds with government's focus on women's employability and the transition to lifelong work for women as an

alternative to traditional economic dependence on a male breadwinner. The compromise requires that woman play a dual role, active in the workplace and primarily responsible for children and domestic life (Crompton 2002). Instead of challenging the traditional expectation that women take primary responsibility in the home, there is a shift towards abandoning the critique of patriarchy and instead heroically attempting to 'do it all' while also looking to government for support in this Herculean endeavour. The transition to this feminine mode of activity comes into existence by means of a series of luminosities (the glamorous working mother, the so-called yummy mummy, the city high-flyer who is also a mother, and so on) images and texts which are accompanied also by popular genres of fiction including best selling novels such as *I Don't Know How She Does It* (Pearson 2003).

The UK government substitutes for the feminist, displaces her vocabulary and intervenes to assist working mothers who are coming forward, and to avert the possibility of critique by women of their double responsibilities and thus of possible crisis within the heterosexual matrix.²² Government thus acts to protect masculinity hegemony by supporting women in their double role, while the media and popular culture endeavour to re-glamorise working wives and mothers through post-feminist styles of self-improvement, hyper-sexuality and capacity. This feature of the new sexual contract requires compromise in work as well as within the home. Despite the rhetoric of heroism in the combining of primary responsibility for children with maintaining a career, in practice the emphasis by various agencies whose subject of attention is the young working women, entails the scaling down of ambition in favour of a discourse of managing following the onset of motherhood. In the light of these new responsibilities the young woman is counselled to request flexibility of her employer. Government is certainly not encouraging women back into the home after having children. The new sexual contract instead offers support and guidance so that the return to employment (often part-time) is facilitated in the form of a work-life balance. There is an implicit trade off, what the working mother wants or needs from her employer is recognition of her dual role, and some degree of accommodation in this respect. The work-life balance is now underpinned in the form of better safeguards in law for part-time workers and also pension rights for women.

Government also makes strenuous efforts to encourage men to become better fathers and to make family life important. Important as these initiatives are, this looking to government for support for working mothers brings a new dimension to feminist public policy debate about the state replacing the husband i.e., 'the man in the state'. But in this scenario the state intervenes not to replace the husband (by supporting single motherhood) but rather to allow the husband the chance to pursue his working life without female complaint, without the requirement that he curbs his working hours

so that he can play an equal role in the household. A kind of post-feminist realism, or governmental pragmatism prevails. Ideally men will devote more time to the family, but that must be a personal choice. Thus we might argue that in this case women come forward as willing subjects of economic capacity, while also undertaking to retain their traditionally marked out roles in the household, rather than radically challenge the division of labour within the home, as feminists did with noticeable effect from the mid-1970s onwards. How successful the individual heterosexual woman might be in achieving equality in relation to domestic labour and childcare then becomes a private affair, or rather evidence that she has chosen well or fortuitously from the range of possible partners. Her life-plan in this regard has worked to her advantage.

The social compromise defined by Crompton is then a key element of the new sexual contract, which is premised on the management of gender and sexuality by a wide range of biopolitical strategies which pre-empt the possibilities of renewed feminist challenges to patriarchal authority. Of course this settlement could also be understood as part of the process of gender mainstreaming, New Labour have now fully incorporated women's needs into their wider political programme of modernisation, and feminist issues of the past have been taken up and are now being seriously addressed at the level of national government. However true this may be, it is also the case that what is quite absent from these discussions are any elements drawn from the old feminist 'demand', that men be prepared to relinquish some of their privileges and advantages in work and in the home, in order to achieve equality in the domestic sphere. A decade ago Nancy Fraser argued that men must again become more accountable to gender inequities in the household, while what I have attempted to demonstrate here are the forces which prevail against this kind of expectation re-emerging as a possibility (Fraser 1997). Fraser also argued that the Universal Breadwinner Model increasingly takes precedence over the Caregiver Model which was associated with the older welfare regime which took into account women's role as care-givers and the limits that role put on possibilities for economic activity (Fraser 1997). This care role was central to feminist debate from the mid-1970s onwards and still figures in feminist discussion today (Lister 2002, Williams 2002). At the heart of these debates was the tendency towards maternalist essentialism on the part of those who defended the Caregiver Model. But what the social compromise now suggests is that the Universal Breadwinner Model requires of women a joint responsibility which also, more or less, guarantees subordinate status in terms of wage earning capacity in the realm of work and employment over a lifetime. At the same time the coming forward of women into work offers government the best opportunity of cutting the long-term costs of welfare.

If we extend this model of assumed activity into the field of the new flexible economy the question arises as to how women fare under these new

more competitive often casualised and precarious conditions? Armed with good qualifications and having been encouraged to display enthusiasm and willingness to pursue careers as a mark of new and independent sexual identities, this female participation becomes an important feature of the success of the new economy. Labour market participation over a lifetime reduces the cost of welfare to women as traditionally low paid earners, and it will ideally bring down the high rate of female poverty in old age. And in addition this immersion in work also creates a thriving and re-energised consumer culture directed towards women. It is for these reasons that we can make a claim that young women are privileged subjects of economic capacity and it is on this basis that we can also expect degrees of social mobility to be more marked among women without children.

We have already discussed how gender re-stabilisation is achieved through the social compromise on the part of working mothers, but do young women without children also find themselves subjected to a new work regime where their presence and their coming forward is also however the occasion for their re-subordination? The most obvious indicator of enduring inequality in employment is of course the pay gap, the substantial discrepancy between male and female wages, a feature of the labour market which has indeed given rise to close governmental attention in recent years. But the decline of bureaucracy, public services and trade unionism in the light of privatisation and de-regulation, the growth of enterprise culture and the so-called cutting of red tape all contribute to the diminishing role and significance of sex discrimination policies in the workplace. As already discussed in Chapter 2, Scott Lash remarks that women are 'reflexivity losers' in the context of the information society (Lash in Beck et al. 1994). And Lisa Adkins has explored in more detail the way in which re-traditionalised gender relations re-emerge in the de-regulated workplace and with the return to small-scale family-run enterprises which are integral to the production processes which underlie global consumer culture (Adkins 2002). There are also various exclusions generated by the informal networking practices which come to dominate the freelance precarious economies in the cultural and creative sector. Wittel's analysis of 'network sociality' overlooks the way in which these reproduce social elites and create material barriers to those who lack the social and cultural capital to participate (Wittel 2001, McRobbie 2002). Project work, informal recruitment procedures, the opacity of structures and pathways into new media and cultural work, as well as the long hours culture based on competition and aggression (see for example Nixon's recent account of grossly unequal gender relations and the unashamedly resurgent hegemonic masculine cultures inside the UK advertising world) are all features which become more widespread in an era of de-regulation and privatisation (Nixon 2003). Thus there is a paradoxical situation that the young women who are so visibly coming forward, and flowing into the labour market, are doing so just at

the point in which the social democratic conditions which were recently propitious to their arrival are being dismantled. The new sexual contract to women requires that they compromise career aspirations to fulfil domestic obligations which in effect means complying with existing gender hierarchies. They must also acquire the individualised capacities to fulfil the demands of the new flexible economy by emulating the pathways to achievement associated with the competitive values of corporate culture rather than by attempting to retrieve or uphold the more anonymous cultures of the workplace and the less individualistic values of the public sector and bureaucracy.

Phallic girls: recreational sex, reproductive sex

The post-feminist masquerade, and also the figure of the working girl, are two of the means by which the new sexual contract, as an urging to agency, makes itself available to young women. Here I introduce a further figure, the phallic girl,²³ and then in the final section, the global girl. Butler envisages the 'phallic lesbian' as a political figure who wrestles some power from the almighty Symbolic. In an interview Butler is asked if heterosexual women might also be able to pick up the phallus in this way and she responds that this might be an important thing to do (Butler 1994). But now, more recently, and within the terrain of Western post-feminist culture, the Symbolic reacts swiftly to the antagonism which not just feminism has presented, but also which Butler's lesbian phallus and queer theory per se present by pre-emptively endowing young women with the capacity to become phallus-bearers as a kind of licensed mimicry of their male counterparts. This also precludes any radical re-arrangement of gender hierarchies despite, indeed because of this 'pretence' of equality, that permits spectacles of aggression and unfeminine behaviour on the part of young women, seemingly without punishment. The phallic girl gives the impression of having won equality with men by becoming like her male counterparts. But in this adoption of the phallus, there is no critique of masculine hegemony. I have already rehearsed some aspects of this scenario, which, within the landscape of UK popular culture, culminates in the figure of the so-called 'ladette' (McRobbie 2005). This is a young woman for whom the freedoms associated with masculine sexual pleasures are not just made available but encouraged and also celebrated. She is being asked to concur with a definition of sex as light-hearted pleasure, recreational activity, hedonism, sport, reward and status. Luminosity falls upon the girl who adopts the habits of masculinity including heavy drinking, swearing, smoking, getting into fights, having casual sex, flashing her breasts in public, getting arrested by the police, consumption of pornography, enjoyment of lap-dancing clubs and so on, but without relinquishing her own desirability to men, indeed for whom such seeming masculinity enhances her desirability since she shows herself to

have a similar sexual appetite to her male counterparts. But this is a thin tightrope to walk, it asks of girls that they perform masculinity, without relinquishing the femininity which makes them so desirable to men. If the post-feminist masquerade undercuts the power of young women coming forward into the world of work and employment through the encouragement to once again adopt the mask of submission and servitude and to invest time and effort in the crafting of a self which ensures desirability, youthful female phallicism (and it cannot be old) is a more assertive alternative to masquerade. It can also be understood as a kind of strategic endowment to young women, a means of attributing to them degrees of capacity but with strict conditions which ultimately ensure gender re-stabilisation. The taboo-breaking phallic girl also emerges as something of a challenge, not only to the repudiated feminist, but also to what Butler again calls the spectre of the 'phallicised dyke' (Butler 1990). By being able to take up some of the accoutrements of masculinity, the drunken, swearing and leering young woman who is not averse to having sex with other girls, demonstrates that within the presiding realm of Symbolic authority, many things are possible. A version of lesbian desire can be accommodated within this space of female phallicism, as long as it remains visually coded to conform to the requirements of the fashion and beauty system which, as has already been demonstrated, sits in judgement, substitutes for hegemonic masculinity and presides over the management of the capacity, in this case sexual capacity, with which young women are endowed. (In the novel *Brass* by Helen Walsh the main character Millie adopts a 'licensed' lesbian phallicism which entails consuming large quantities of drugs, alcohol and picking up prostitutes, Walsh 2004.)

This licensed transgression is also facilitated not just by the fashion and beauty system but by the wider leisure industries which have responded vigorously to the possibilities opened up by women's disposable income, daring indeed, to define themselves as champions of women's rights. Consumer culture, the tabloid press, the girl's and women's magazine sector, the lads' magazines and also downmarket, trashy television all encourage young women, as though in the name of sexual equality, to overturn the old double standard and emulate the assertive and hedonistic styles of sexuality associated with young men, particularly in holiday locations, or in the context of the UK city centre leisure culture which has developed around late night drinking and the relaxation of the laws in regard to the consumption of alcohol. This assumption of phallicism also provides new dimensions of moral panic, titillation, and voyeuristic excitement as news spectacle and entertainment. The phallic girl is epitomised in the so-called glamour model, who earns most of her money posing naked for the soft-porn pages of the press and magazines and who, if successful, will also launch herself as a brand, lending her name and image to various products, usually ranges of underwear, make up, perfume or other fashion items. But for her ordinary

counterpart, the girl on the street, assuming phallicism more often simply means drinking to excess, getting into fights, throwing up in public places, swearing and being abusive, wearing very short skirts, high heels, and skimpy tops, having casual sex, often passing out on the street and having to be taken home by friends or by the police. Under this pretence of equality which is promoted by consumer culture, such female phallicism is in fact a provocation to feminism, a triumphant gesture on the part of resurgent patriarchy. There is also hostility to women underpinning this particular form of freedom. In coming forward and showing herself to be, in common parlance, 'up for it', the phallic girl also allows herself to be the target of old-fashioned sexist insults and hostility from the men she seeks both to please and to emulate. The Symbolic uses the field of popular culture and entertainment to accommodate some prior feminist demands in relation to the right or entitlement to sexual pleasure, for example challenging the old sexual double standard, so that women are no longer punished in quite the same way for pursuing sexual desires, but this 'right' is then totally disconnected from any notion of a renewed feminism, quite the opposite. The champions of this new freedom, the phallic girls like TV presenter Denise Van Outen, glamour model Jodie Marsh and even Spice Girl Geri Halliwell are all vociferously disparaging of feminism.²⁴

So as long as she does not procreate while enjoying casual and recreational sex, the young woman is entitled to pursue sexual desire seemingly without punishment. Indeed the appropriate uses of sexual pleasure are prescribed within the many manuals and forms of instruction which constitute the terms and conditions of this new sexual contract. Delay in age of marriage and also delay in the birth of a first child on the part of young Western women, are directly connected with their being able to come forward into the labour market. It is this movement on the part of women, which has accelerated in recent years, that gives rise to the focus on reproductive capacity. Young motherhood, across the divisions of class and ethnicity now carries a whole range of vilified meanings associated with failed femininity and with disregard for the well-being of the child. Poor white and black young women alike are targeted by government because the high rate of teenage pregnancy (set against the falling birth rate among older and better educated young women) is almost exclusively concentrated within this group. Middle-class status requires the refusal of teenage motherhood and much effort is invested in ensuring that this norm is adhered to. If the young woman is now envisaged as an assemblage of productivity, then she is also now more harshly judged for inappropriate reproductive activity. The concept of planned parenthood emerges in Western liberal democracies as an address to young women so that they may postpone early maternity to accrue the economic advantages of employment and occupational identity and thus contribute to the solving of the crisis of welfare. Single mothers are seen as feckless or else

are charged with depriving a child of his or her 'human right' to a father. As Harris and others have described, the subsidised availability of IVF treatment and the investment in reproductive technologies implicitly address this postponement of childbirth into the 30s and the encouragement of this as a mark of respectability, social responsibility and citizenship (Harris 2004).

Despite, or rather because of the proliferations of different modes of kinship in increasingly multi-cultural and sexually diverse cultures, the marital couple re-emerges as the favoured form for family life. Here too there is a case to be made for the re-stabilisation of gender norms against a perceived threat of disruption from non-Western forms of kinship, from feminism and from the gay and lesbian movement. Interventions to ensure that help is given to those who abide by the rules of responsible parenthood, means that those young career women in the UK who have followed the advice of New Labour, and have postponed childbirth until they have secured wage earning capacity, become deserving subjects of investment in scientific research.²⁵ More so than in the past the reproductive years are intensely monitored by government, from the debate about 12 year old girls being given the pill, to lesbian couples hoping for genetic parenthood, to older women in their 50s also having access to IVF treatment. And it is on condition that she does not reproduce outside marriage or civil partnership, or become the single mother of several children, that the young woman is now granted a prominence as a pleasure-seeking subject in possession of a healthy sexual appetite and identity. In the UK such is the importance to government of discouraging teenage motherhood, that contraceptive and morning after facilities are easily available to most teenage girls. The enjoyment of sexual pleasures on the basis of practising effective birth control as well as safe sex, is one of the most visible features of so-called female freedom today. However this activity, when set within a wider social environment where de-regulated dominant (consumer) culture intersects sharply with already-existing patterns of class and racial inequalities, gives rise to unanticipated consequences such as rising rates of sexually transmitted diseases, alcohol abuse, as well as conflicts and anxiety on the part of young women in regard to what they might now expect of sex and intimacy within the heterosexual matrix. The seeming freedom of the phallic girl, her openness to sexual adventure, is also, in fact, a means of re-constituting and shoring up divisions between heterosexual and lesbian young women, in the light of the perceived threat that such boundaries might also come tumbling down. The 'real lesbian' is reviled in much the same way as the repudiated feminist. The rigorous requirements of the commercial domain addressed to young women are radically uninhabitable by young lesbian women, and so the phallic girl like her counterpart who inhabits the post-feminist masquerade, functions on the part of dominant culture to re-instate boundaries,

with the effect that life outside the heterosexual matrix requires the production of distinctly other queer spaces and temporalities, despite the illusion promoted within the commercial domain that gay and lesbian identities are now also mainstreamed (Halberstam 2005).

The global girl

The account so far of recreational sex as practised by phallic girls, and then of reproductive sex now the subject of even more intense government attention than in the past, offers further illustration of how the terms and conditions by which young women come forward, take the form of invitations to specified modes of self-actualisation. Female phallicism is as restrictive as the post-feminist masquerade in that its endorsing of licentiousness and bad behaviour also ensures this plays out in a field of leisure activity which assumes a white female subject. These figurings of young womanhood are also boundary-marking practices within popular culture. It is one thing for young white women to playfully disrupt the divisions which underpinned the old double standard between the good girl and the whore, but adopting the appearance and the street-style of whore, brings starkly into visibility, the divisions which exist between white privileged femininity and its black and still disadvantaged counterpart. For Afro-Caribbean young women, whose sexuality is always regarded as suspect by the state, being drunk and disorderly while also dressed like a prostitute is not a risk worth taking. As various black feminists have argued, within a context dominated by the prevalence of the racist imagination, notions of respectability and constraint in the field of desire have been embedded within black women's sexual identities, a response to the virulent racism which assumes sexual availability, appetite or else which assumes that poverty makes prostitution or addiction a likelihood (Noble 2000). It is not surprising then that expressions of sexual autonomy and enjoyment on the part of young black women tend to be channelled towards black music subcultures such as hip hop, or else are located more specifically within leisure forms associated with the black community (e.g. Jamaican dance-hall culture).²⁶ For young Asian women we could surmise that white female phallicism functions as a provocation to the assumed norms of submissiveness to patriarchal and religious authority, typically attributed again within the racist imagination, to those Asian girls who do not embrace Western styles of fashion and sexual display. The phallic girl is a summation of the sexual freedoms which have been granted to young Western women. Her activities appear to transgress all the boundaries of feminine docility, even though as I have argued above, her active pursuit of sexual pleasure, remains not just thoroughly subjected to patriarchal authority and judgement, but is also completely compatible

with the requirements of a re-adjusted and seemingly liberalised heterosexual matrix. There are good reasons then why the spectacle of skimpily dressed, drunken, shouting, black or Asian girls, baring their breasts on the street at closing time in city centres to groups of passing boys, black and white, and eventually getting picked up by the police and bundled off to the police station to dry out, is an unlikely scenario.

These considerations suggest that both the figurations of the post-feminist masquerade and the phallic girl mark out by subtle means processes of exclusion and re-colonisation. There are patterns of racialised retrenchment embedded within these re-configured spaces of femininity. The post-feminist masquerade fulfils this notion of re-stabilisation by extolling the virtues of dissembled feminine weakness, and fragility. But playing at tradition in this way, adopting a style of femininity which invites once again a display of masculine chivalry, gallantry, power and control, resurrects norms of white heterosexuality from which black women and men have historically been violently excluded. Since the first post-war waves of migration, black women in the UK have always worked and earned a living, usually in menial jobs. Black feminist history has over the years demonstrated that in the context of labour exploitation of black women, from slavery to the modern international division of labour, the feigning of feminine fragility has been a mark of racial privilege. The post-feminist masquerade as a cultural strategy for re-stabilising gender relations within the heterosexual matrix produces a new interface between working life and sexuality which is implicitly white and which assumes kinship norms associated with the Western nuclear family. In line with the new ethos of assimilation and integration rather than the now failed multi-culturalism of the 1980s and 1990s, aspirant young black women are invited, as readers of magazines like *Grazia* or viewers of television programmes like *Friends*, or films like *Bridget Jones's Diary*, to emulate this model.

The global girl comes forward, primarily in the advertising images from fashion companies like Benetton, and also through the different editions of global fashion magazines like *Elle*, *Marie Claire*, *Vogue* and *Grazia*, which are customised from one country to the next, as emblematic of the power and success of corporate multi-culturalism. This envisages young women, especially those from Third World countries, as enthusiastic about membership of and belonging to, a kind of global femininity. There is both difference and homogeneity in this fashion and beauty system in a way which is very similar to that analysed by Barlow et al. in the course of their study of the Modern Girl of the 1920s and 1930s (Barlow et al. 2005). The modernity of the global girl today is expressed in her new found freedoms, her wage earning capacity, her enjoyment of and immersion in beauty culture and in popular culture, and in her pleasing and becoming demeanour which lacks the

ironic inhabiting of femininity of her post-feminist masquerading counterparts, and the aggression and sexual bravado of the phallic girls. Indeed global girls are defined in terms of an intersection of qualities which combine the natural and authentic, with a properly feminine love of self-adornment, and the playfully seductive with the innocent, so as to suggest a sexuality which is youthful, latent and waiting to be unleashed. This marks out a subtle positioning, a re-colonisation and re-making of racial hierarchy within the field of normative femininity. But there is also a different spatial and temporal momentum invoked in the mobilisation of the global girl. Unlike her American or British counterpart there is less underpinning of this figuring of femininity by the full range of governmental discourses, precisely because this young woman is increasingly mobile herself and thus often inhabiting a kind of transnational status. The idea of a sexual contract as a convergence of attentions, spanning a range of bodily activities, and permitting modes of coming forward on condition that any residue of sexual politics fades away, is a Western formulation addressed to those who are assumed to have full citizenship and the right to remain in the country of abode. In this contract economic activity is foregrounded and politics reduced to the margins of significance in favour of the seeming attractions of consumer citizenship. However we might surmise that for those who are excluded from this privileged model of freedom based on the state provision of education, followed by participation in training and in the labour market, there are other spaces of attention, and also undesignated spaces and liminal zones marked out by brutalities, cruelties and hardship. We might point here to the global flows of young women, who, as they somehow find the means of moving from the country to the city, or from the east to the West or from south to north, as they also find themselves in various border zones, are the subjects of a globalised political economy which orders and re-orders these other femininities according to fears and anxieties about 'immigrant' fertility. In such a context the consumer-led discourse of the global girl functions as an ideal, these are girls who do not threaten the West with migration and uncontrolled fertility, instead they stay put and yearn for the fashion and beauty products associated with Western femininity and sexuality (Hoefinger 2005).

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an account of the means by which young women in contemporary sociality, in a post-feminist gesture which implies that feminism has been taken into account, and that equality is in the process of being achieved, are called upon by a range of commercial and governmental forms of attention, to come forward as subjects of agency and capacity on the basis that there is also a relinquishing of political identities accruing from perceived inequities of gender or sexuality associated with those styles of feminism which have, as well as being taken into account, also been repudiated and vilified. The chapter charts

the process of feminism being undone through high levels of intervention and attention being directed towards the young woman, whose significance in terms of wage earning capacity is now substantial. There is a new sexual contract issued to young women which encourages activity concentrated in education and employment so as to ensure participation in the production of successful femininity, sexuality and eventually maternity. The commercial domain requires that young women prioritise consumption for the sake of sexual intelligibility and in the name of heterosexual desire, and this in turn intersects with and confirms the neo-liberal turn by contemporary government (especially in the UK) with its emphasis, as we shall see in the chapter that follows, on consumer-citizenship. The spaces of attention and the luminosities I have described, supplant and substitute for the various forms of political mobilisation which were associated with feminism as a social movement, they also relegate politics to the margins of women's lives, and political culture comes to be dominated by a technocratic style of 'corporate managerialism'. As Chantal Mouffe has argued this marginalisation of the sphere of formal politics puts the 'civic bond in jeopardy' (Mouffe 2000).

By focusing on the links between governmental and commercial discourses it has been my aim to demonstrate in this chapter how sexual politics is presented as irrelevant. This chapter also reflects on the young women who as global girls are the subjects of different forms of attention but whose wage-earning capacity within the international division of labour marks them out as emergent and becoming. I have argued that these 'movements of young women' or 'coming-forwards', in the various figurations I have described, which are also created through specific 'spaces of attention', function as a kind of shadow feminism, a substitute and palliative for the otherwise forced abandonment of a new feminist political imaginary.

Notes

- 1 I use the phrase sexual contract in the manner which Stuart Hall might use it, i.e. to refer to a form of power which entails negotiation at the social and cultural level with the objective of a settlement within the field of sexuality. In this current context the term permits an analysis of a combination and intersection of forces constitutive of an address to young women, a 'space of attention', the regulative dynamics of which are subsumed within a language which implies this attention as the outcome of a progressive concern for sexual equality.
- 2 The term is associated with Pateman's important book *The Sexual Contract* (1988). However I use the phrase in a quite different sense.
- 3 I use the term patriarchy with some hesitation. It has been used within feminism as a universalising and homogenising strategy, a means of proposing that women across the world share the same forms of subjugation. This has been subjected to extensive critique and bearing this in mind it I propose it can be

re-employed particularistically by drawing on Mohanty's terminology and her use of the word patriarchies.

- 4 The Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell (Minister of Culture from 2000–2007) made comments to this effect in the context of the Body Image Summit 21 June 2000, see www.sizenet.com
- 5 For how the contemporary fashion-beauty complex intersects with lesbian sexuality, see Lewis (1997).
- 6 The UK New Labour government adopted a model for assisting unemployed single mothers into the workplace similar to the US Dress for Success initiative which encouraged well-paid working women to donate cast-offs suitable for office wear. The UK version comprises second-hand clothes shops and outlets such as the Camden Job Train shop in London NW5.
- 7 See also *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf (1991).
- 8 Butler makes the point in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that the Symbolic merges with, to become indistinguishable from, dominant culture.
- 9 Recent reports in the press indicate anorexia extending beyond teens and twenties into middle age, not unconnected, we might surmise, with the above discussions and with the prevalence of advertisements like those discussed by Ros Gill (in conference June 2006) showing an older woman in a bikini shot from behind with the caption, as though spoken by her daughter looking on at this unsightly body, that although she loved her mother she didn't like her cellulite (See Gill 2006).
- 10 See McRobbie 2003.
- 11 Mary Ann Doane's essay shapes my own thinking here. Drawing on feminist psychoanalytic writing which problematises femininity as 'claustrophobic closeness', as 'presence to itself', as 'spatial proximity', as a place of either masochistic or narcissistic over-identification, then, argues Doane, that dangerous closeness which locks women into this rigid position, can somehow be opened up and loosened through distance-producing strategies, such as the masquerade. 'The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance' (Doane 1982: 135). Doane argues that the masquerade in effect skewers or re-aligns femininity so that a gap or a distance is produced, this in turn re-positions the woman away from simply occupying that subordinated, powerless, space of male desire within dominant heterosexuality. This is achieved through the 'hyperbolisation of the accoutrements of femininity', (ibid: 139) which throw the male gaze off course, which make it strange and unfamiliar, perhaps unseemly. In short the masquerade is a distance-producing strategy, and my claim here is that this subversive possibility has now been incorporated, indeed promoted by consumer culture, as a sign of female independence and empowerment.
- 12 This is a regular theme in *Sex and the City*, Carrie's date may not care for her silly hat which she knows only fashion experts would appreciate. Thus the wearing or not of the hat provokes much self-reflexivity. Should she or shouldn't she? Carrie tends to cling onto these seemingly ridiculous items, as a mark of her own independent identity. But we (the audience) know that in the end these items work to the advantage of her femininity. They actually make her more endearing to men. Their excessive quality shows her vulnerability, and her child-like enjoyment of dressing up. If she gets it wrong and she looks a little foolish, it is because she is still a girl, unsure of herself as she takes on the mantle of womanliness. Indeed getting it wrong is a mark of her girlishness, and this failing makes her all the more desirable to men.

- 13 Fashion journalists in the serious press, especially in *The Independent* and *The Guardian* frequently adopt a self-mocking tone when they are making recommendations about what to wear and how to look. They imply that, along with their readership drawn from the liberal to left middle classes, they share some ironic distance from the more didactic, authoritative and judgemental language of fashion writing. But this use of irony also has the effect of safeguarding such journalists from critique.
- 14 Cherie Booth QC, the wife of former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, exemplified this inhabiting of the post-feminist masquerade. At every available opportunity she drew attention to her investment in the paraphernalia of femininity, as though to deflect attention from her status and power as a barrister. In July 2003 she allowed a *Marie Claire* journalist into her bedroom, and even let her have a quick look inside her chest of drawers, which was predictably full of frilly feminine lingerie.
- 15 Riviere in her masquerade work uncritically draws on the racist stereotype of white women's fears (and fantasies) of being attacked by a 'negro'.
- 16 For detailed accounts of changes in educational qualifications see Arnot et al. 1999 and Allen 2008.
- 17 See Kim Allens's PhD Thesis, Goldsmiths College 2008, also thanks to Kim Allen for pointing me in the direction of www.dfes.gov.uk/regateway/DB/SFR/s000708/SFR04 for information on activity rates of young school leavers.
- 18 This is a certainly a topic on which there are different views. While most sociologists dispute the reality of social mobility in the UK during the New Labour years, i.e. from 1997 onwards, the activity rates of young women in the labour market and the staying on rates in further and higher education, taken alongside the cultural emphasis on doing well and on becoming aspirational subjects suggests that, what I here refer to as the new sexual contract, comprises an encouragement to young women to themselves become socially mobile, or to aim for some degree of upward mobility. This may take years to become visible statistically, but if so many young women are now gaining university degrees, then the argument that there is no social mobility seems questionable (Devine et al. 2004, Walkerdine 2004 and Skeggs 2005).
- 19 Arnot et al. 1999 refer to a study which showed the Asian young women interviewed to be aiming for upward social mobility into professional occupations.
- 20 Making it also more difficult to insist that it remains important and relevant to engage with the new as well as the old inequalities facing young women today, for example significant under-achievement in science subjects, across all member states of the European Community, see www.europa.eu/research/science-society/women/wir/pdf
- 21 Several essays by Charlotte Brunson (1997, 2005) analyse, with prescience, the emergence, in film and television of a post-feminist sensibility.
- 22 See the work undertaken by the Women and Work Commission 2006 (www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/women_work_commission) which implicitly blames women themselves for making the wrong choices of career which in turn locks them into the low pay sector.
- 23 See Bennett and Woollacott (1987) for an analysis of the phallicism of the Bond Girls in the fiction and films based around Fleming's James Bond 007 character.
- 24 In a recent interview with the glamour model Jodie Marsh in the *Guardian* following her humiliating experiences on *Big Brother*, where her 'tarty' appearance and her reputation as a 'slapper' made her the butt of a series of hostile

- and misogynist comments, she nevertheless directed her own anger against 'those feminist bitch women'.
- 25 The London *Evening Standard* ran a headline in May 2006 'Fertility Test For Career Women' as though to imply that these women were the only deserving subjects of this new test.
- 26 The exuberant sexuality of Kelis in the video for her single 'Milkshake', as well as the more explicitly soft-porn videos for a range of hip hop acts, requires more extensive sociological and cultural analysis than is available to date (see Rose 1994, Noble 2000).