FEMINISM AND FEMININITY IN VISUAL CULTURE

EDITED BY
MELANIE WATERS

Women on Screen

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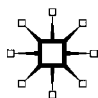

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Introduction

Screening Women and Women on Screen

Melanie Waters

Women on Screen provides a new critical overview of the representation of women and girls in contemporary television and cinema. In doing so, it builds on recent analyses of the relationship between feminism, femininity, and popular culture by Imelda Whelehan, Joanne Hollows, Diane Negra, Yvonne Tasker, and Angela McRobbie in order to shed light on the particular issues that swirl around on-screen portrayals of embodied female identity. Intervening in established and emerging debates about postfeminism, the 15 chapters in this book investigate the roles accorded to feminism and femininity in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century depictions of women's lives and ask why certain configurations of femininity – especially configurations of femininity that second wave feminism would seem to have rendered redundant or inappropriate – are not only persistent but also valorized within popular forms of visual culture.

Central to the examination of women on screen in this book is an analysis of the concept of screening itself: to be on screen, after all, is to have been subjected, already, to processes of screening. While the term "screening" typically denotes the practical processes of showing and viewing – the means by which the visual texts referenced in this collection are presented to, and consumed by, the public – it likewise refers to the systems of selection that inform the production and reception of these texts. In the first place, the chapters here are interested in the "screening" systems that lie behind the representation of women in any cultural text. In other words, they aim to focalize the decision-making strategies by which certain constellations of femininity are deemed appropriate (or otherwise) at particular historical moments, while also exploring how such judgements might be informed by feminist anxieties and/or anxieties about feminism. Secondly, they are

committed to an analysis of how portrayals of women in female-centred texts are "screened" within the space of feminist critical scholarship: What kinds of visual texts are screened within (and screened out of) this kind of scholarship? How are the attributes of women on screen identified, isolated, and delineated by feminist critics? What kind of value is apportioned to these various attributes, and why? In essence, then, "screening" simultaneously accounts for the showing and viewing of visual texts, as well as the processes by which particular images of women and girls are created or concealed, promoted or suppressed, then vetted and examined.

As I have already suggested, the precise ways in which women are screened in film and on television are illuminated by – and might also illuminate – ongoing debates about the relationship between feminism and femininity. As Charlotte Brunsdon notes in a 2005 article, it has become something of a commonplace within feminist discourses to characterize this relationship as "complex" and "contradictory" (113). While the contributors featured here acknowledge that such terms remain apposite to critical considerations of women on screen, the collection as a whole strives to avoid the critical impasse at which the use of such terms can leave us – an impasse where, it seems, any and every representation of female experience is understood as "vexed" or "ambivalent", and where feminism itself is regarded as an objective political standard against which popular constructions of femininity are measured and, invariably, denigrated or dismissed. *Women on Screen* seeks to move beyond this impasse by recognizing that the relationship between feminism and femininity – just like the relationship between any diverse ideological groupings – is always and already complicated, not least as a result of the various meanings which are ascribed to these respective terms. The chapters that follow, then, understand complexity and ambivalence as hallmarks of contemporary female-centred texts, but do so as a starting point for thinking about their wider implications. Rather than falling into the trap of using a "politically correct feminist identity" to render "other feminine identities . . . 'invalid' " (Brunsdon, 1991, 379), we wish to highlight how such critical manoeuvres have come to operate within existing scholarship and draw attention to the ways in which they can both limit and redefine the terms of feminist debates about visual culture. At the same time, *Women on Screen* aims to recuperate to the realm of feminist scholarship those areas of women's representation that such strategies tend to "screen out". We are, then, looking to uncover new layers of complexity within contemporary cultural texts, rather than implying that their complexity resides

solely in their negotiation of the relationship between feminism and femininity.

Postfeminism

At the heart of this collection lies a deep and necessary engagement with postfeminism and the various critical controversies by which it is orbited. Since the term began to acquire cultural currency in the early 1980s, feminist theorists have argued spiritedly over its meaning and usefulness, while trying to delineate its potential implications for critical and historical accounts of feminism.[1] For a number of thinkers in the 1980s and early 1990s, the concept of postfeminism invited interpretation alongside the media's increasingly antagonistic treatment of, or backlash against, the feminist agenda. As Brenda Polan contended in *The Guardian* in 1988, the endeavour of postfeminism to render itself nominally distinct from "older" incarnations of feminism – through its "post" prefix – indicates that it is not merely symptomatic of the backlash, it "*is* the backlash" (qtd. in Faludi 15; emphasis added). This proposal is significant in that it not only foregrounds the status of second wave feminism and postfeminism as discrete and monolithic movements (with postfeminism auguring a clear and deliberate break with the goals and politics of the second wave), but also indicates that postfeminism is a historically locatable reaction to the former – an idea which, as we shall see, is carried through into critical approaches to postfeminist cultural texts.

The "anti-feminist backlash" to which Polan refers is, of course, the subject of Susan Faludi's 1991 bestseller *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. Elaborating on Polan's logic, Faludi argues that the term "post-feminism" is part of a re-branding strategy, one of the means by which the media in the 1980s endeavoured to signpost the "past-ness" of feminism, using it to conjure up a "new story" for a "younger generation who supposedly reviled the women's movement" (14). Although she identifies postfeminism as a 1980s phenomenon, however, Faludi uses the term flexibly to denote other historical eruptions of anti-feminist sentiment, and traces the initial emergence of postfeminism back to the American media's treatment of feminist organizations in the 1920s. As Faludi's varied usage implies, the prefixation or "posting" of feminism is open to wide and wild interpretation, depending on one's understanding of "post" – namely, whether "post" is viewed as designating a rejection of, continuity with, or ambivalence towards the feminism(s) by which it is predated.[2]

As Imelda Whelehan observes, the "post" prefix implies the functional inadequacy of "feminism" as a term; though this, she makes clear, does not guarantee the distinctiveness of feminism and postfeminism:

> "New" and "post" are prefixes added to the term "feminism" when the writer or speaker wants to make it clear that they have a certain antagonism to the term, because of the connotations it generates, or because feminism by itself is seen to be inadequate to their own definition .... [A]ll imply that the word feminism is not enough to embrace their own political programmes or personal agendas, and that it has been manipulated to certain ends from which they want to exclude themselves. But as with most additions of prefixes, the central concept remains the same, so that "new" and "post" imply cosmetic changes rather than radical rethinking. Feminism is portrayed as a territory over which various women have to fight to gain their ground; it has become so unwieldy as a term that it threatens to implode under the weight of its own contradictions. (77–78)

These semantic ambiguities are alluded to more explicitly by Diane Negra in *What a Girl Wants* (2008). Situating postfeminism firmly within the cultural landscape of the 1990s and early 2000s, Negra shows how it operates as a "widely-applied and highly contradictory term [which] performs as if it is commonsensical and presents itself as pleasingly moderated in contrast to a 'shrill' feminism" that it regards as "rigid, serious, anti-sex and romance, difficult and extremist" (2). Although postfeminism is routinely associated with the negative characterizations of feminism that Negra here describes, the frequent signposting of its seemingly "contradictory" applications implies its status as a more complex and elastic phenomenon. In this vein, Genz, one of the contributors to this book, has remarked on the extraordinary number of terms – including "Girl Power", "popular feminism", and "do-me feminism" – that have been used in conjunction and/or interchangeably with postfeminism in recent years. For Genz, this polysemy not only liberates postfeminism from any fixed or singular definition but also speaks to its cultural currency, establishing its existence "as a conceptual entity in its own right". According to Genz, then, postfeminism need not be a "negation [or] sabotage" of feminism; rather, the "post" prefix may instead designate "reliance and continuity" or even "a contradictory dependence on and independence from the term that follows it" (18–19).

Perhaps the most salient, and least controversial, feature of postfeminism is its inextricability from popular, and particularly visual, culture. From Naomi Wolf's investigation into how mainstream images of female beauty shape women's social experiences in *The Beauty Myth* (1991) to the analyses of the impact of "raunch culture" on the behaviour and aspirations of young women in Ariel Levy's *Female Chauvinist Pigs* (2006) and Natasha Walter's *Living Dolls* (2010), the discourses of postfeminism are, increasingly, only intelligible within the context of the contemporary visual iconography by which we, as global citizens, are perpetually bombarded.

If the term "visual culture" can encompass everything from fine art, photography, and architecture to film, television, advertising, and digital media, its particular value lies in its gesturing towards the interpenetration of different visual forms and codes as a hallmark of postmodern culture, as well as in its recognition of the growing predominance of visual media over verbal/textual forms of communication within the mediasphere. These factors are especially significant in a collection of this kind, which focuses predominantly (though not exclusively) on film and television produced in the United States and the United Kingdom since 1990. Such contemporary texts, after all, are always and already marked by the issues of cross-mediation to which the term "visual culture" pertains. In using it, then, I hope to speak directly to the particularities of the current cultural moment, while at the same time telegraphing the persistence of links between feminist discourse and issues of female visibility – links which are writ large in everything from Laura Mulvey's seminal psychoanalytical account of women-on-screen in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) and Susie Orbach's delineation of the overweight female body in *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978), to Carol Dyhouse's recent work on fashion and femininity in *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (2010).

Feminism and popular culture

As Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley have observed, feminism is difficult to conceptualize outside of the popular: "apart from women actively involved in the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, most people's initial knowledge and understanding of feminism has been formed within the popular and through representation" (2). Even so, like other political campaigns of the time, the second wave was – and is – regularly "conceived of as a social movement that was 'outside' of, and

frequently oppositional to, the dominant culture" (4). In other words, it is assumed to take place in a hypothetical "real" space that lies, impossibly, beyond the sensationalizing tentacles of the mainstream media. Still, even the women who *were* "actively involved" in the second wave were eminently preoccupied with the issue of women's representation in the media. As is clearly evidenced in some of feminism's key texts, such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970), the second wave's social agenda was guided precisely by anxieties about representation, relating particularly to the circulation of "unrealistic" and "misleading" images of women in popular magazines, advertising, literature, television, and film.[3] Over the course of *The Second Sex*, for example, De Beauvoir traces gender inequality through a discussion of the roles occupied by women within the popular imaginary, from the witches, wicked stepmothers, and damsels-in-distress of common folklore to the modern-day Cinderellas of Hollywood cinema (in the films of Orson Welles and Edmund Goulding), and the complicated, conflicted women who populate the novels of D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. Friedan, with a background in journalism, was likewise concerned with the prescriptive models of domesticated womanhood that were offered up in post-war culture, exploring the conservative gender politics of the articles and short fiction that constituted the stock-in-trade of popular women's magazines like *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCalls*, and *Good Housekeeping* during the 1950s.[4] A few years later, in 1970, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* drew attention to the misogynistic dimensions of fiction by Henry Miller and Norman Mailer,[5] while Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) dissected the persistence of various feminine stereotypes across a widening spectrum of popular media.

The second wave thus maintained an interest in investigating the ways in which "real" or authentic womanhood has been distorted or elided within popular culture, while also viewing its agenda, in part, as a means of correcting these perceived representational injustices. For this reason, it is necessary for contemporary scholars to acknowledge and interrogate the tendencies within some existing scholarship to imply the existence of feminism(s) beyond the realm of representation. After all, as Hollows and Moseley suggest, such criticism "assumes that feminism, or the feminist, can tell us about popular culture, but does not examine what popular culture can tell us about feminism" (1). Given the inextricability of feminism and popular culture, any unilateral reading of the kind that Hollows and Moseley describe is destined to be partial and misleading. Part of the aim of this collection, then, is

to foreground the extent to which feminism, femininity, and popular forms of visual culture constitute a dynamic and influential nexus of activity. In this spirit, it seeks to focalize the potential limitations of conceptual frameworks that rely exclusively on straightforward distinctions between different "species" of feminism. Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford have already highlighted the potential restrictions imposed by the use of the wave paradigm, which tends to construct a monolithic account of each "wave" of feminist activity and in doing so "lends power to backlash politics and rhetoric" (177). As we will see, the backlash logic that Gillis and Munford identify with the wave paradigm is inscribed in many of the texts with which *Women on Screen* is concerned. In line with Gillis and Munford, the chapters here query the anchoring of particular conceptual models in presumptions about feminist conflict and inter-generational disagreements, while also acknowledging the ways in which such models continue to inform creative and critical configurations of contemporary female identities.

The chapters

The chapters here are divided into four discrete but interlocking parts: "Generations"; "Sex and Sexuality"; "Makeovers"; and "Violence". These parts reflect some of the key concerns by which popular representations of feminism and femininity are striated, but they also offer a framework for conceptualizing the dominant preoccupations of feminist media criticism at the start of the twenty-first century. While drawn together by a shared awareness of the extent to which postfeminist texts and contexts have been shaped by a particular issue – be it generational conflict, female sexuality, embodied identity, or gendered violence – the chapters in each part are marked by their sustained engagement with broader questions of power and visibility. Such questions are, after all, critical to considerations of the "postfeminist canon" and, more specifically, to the interrogation of postfeminism's exclusionary tendencies – most conspicuously apparent in its "limited race and class vision" (Tasker and Negra 14–15) – with which *Women on Screen* is necessarily concerned.

The first part of this book, "Generations", explores the ways in which generational models of feminism have informed fictional and critical approaches to feminine identities in popular culture. Each author acknowledges the role that such paradigms have played in shaping scholarly analyses of feminism and/or femininity, while endeavouring to show how they might also undermine or reduce the complexity of

these representations. Glitre and Cobb, for example, show how chick flicks dramatize feminist debates about independence and empowerment through the representation of women's personal and/or familial relationships. Focusing on the comedies of writer and director Nancy Meyers, Glitre argues that the evolution of these debates can be (re)viewed through reference to changing approaches to the figure of the working woman. From Goldie Hawn's society-girl-turned-soldier in *Private Benjamin* (1980) to Helen Hunt's high-flying advertising executive in *What Women Want* (2000), Glitre shows how Meyers' chick flicks register shifting attitudes to women in the workplace, while interrogating the persistence of the heterosexual romance motif in the wake of such shifts. In particular, she queries the use of the romantic resolution as a means of resolving the raft of dilemmas that the working woman presents.

The working woman is equally central to Cobb's investigation of the twenty-first-century chick flick. Demonstrating how feminist intergenerational conflict is often figured through the portrayal of antagonistic relationships between older and younger women, Cobb contends that chick flicks like *Monster-in-Law* (2005) and *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) routinely use the mature career woman as a visual shorthand for feminism that is selfish, anti-familial, outmoded, and generally ineffective in the context of contemporary Western societies. With close reference to their individual star personae, Cobb shows how the casting of baby-boomer female actors – like Jane Fonda and Meryl Streep – opposite their younger counterparts – namely Jennifer Lopez and Anne Hathaway – is used as a means of signalling the final, triumphant displacement of second wave feminism's "old", selfish careerism by "new" family-oriented models of postfeminist identity.

If the chick flick speculatively proposes a different, and emotionally fulfilled, future for the postfeminist woman, then this is, perhaps, challenged within certain types of quality American television. Redeploying the term "New Woman" to refer to female professionals in film and television at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, White discusses the politics of empowerment through close reference to the representation of working woman in *Alias* (2001–06). Accounting for the vexed positioning of women within the context of the New Economy, White analyses Jennifer Garner's portrayal of Sydney Bristow – the "empowered" New Woman spy – through the lens of the show's approach to the ageing female professional. In this way, White shows how the sinister machinations and betrayals of the older women in *Alias* are used to symbolize a potential – if undesirable – future for the New Woman professional, thus highlighting the persistence of

gender inequality with the global capitalist system, as well as the limited options that are available to the successful career woman as she gets older.

My own chapter, finally, shows how the trope of haunting has been used in recent feminist discourses to symbolize the spectral status of second wave feminism in contemporary culture. With this as a starting point, I investigate the representation of feminine identities in contemporary female-centred television fictions. Placing a special focus on the tensions between women, maternity, and domesticity, I analyse the extent to which mainstream representations of gender are haunted by anxieties about femininity and show how this is inscribed in a range of shows, from *Desperate Housewives* (2004–) and *Mad Men* (2007–) to *Medium* (2005–) and *Ghost Whisperer* (2005–10).

The second part, “Sex and Sexuality”, begins with Katherine Farrimond’s investigation of ways in which the compelling figure of the femme fatale has been re-appropriated and modified within contemporary cinema. Establishing the principal characteristics of the femme fatale through reference to the classic film noir of the 1940s and 1950s, Farrimond shows how her mystery, allure, and sexual maturity have been adapted to the figure of the teenage girl. Given the teenage girl’s usual marginalization or infantilization within popular culture, Farrimond interrogates the extent to which her reformulation as an intelligent, worldly, and sexually experienced antagonist – as it takes place within the thriller and neo-noir genres – might be indicative of her agency and her inherent threat to patriarchal systems of power.

Helen Fenwick returns the focus to quality television and the representation of female masculinity in *The L Word* (2004–09) and *The Wire* (2002–08). Over the course of her chapter, Fenwick traces the elusive presence of the butch lesbian within popular culture, and draws attention to the ways in which racial markers and the discourses of transgenderism are traditionally used to impose order on this otherwise renegade figure. As Fenwick goes on to explain, representations of lesbian relationships tend to pivot on a butch/femme dynamic in which the butch partner is black or mixed race, while the femme to whom she is coupled is lighter-skinned or white. Although this intricate tethering of butchness and blackness is progressively re-negotiated within *The Wire*, Fenwick signposts the remaining taboo of the white butch lesbian, acknowledging the threat this figure poses to white masculinity as one of the key justifications for her continued invisibility.

Martin Zeller-Jacques is also concerned with issues relating to the representation of sexuality on the small screen. Shining a critical light on

the Channel 4 Corporation's public service remit, which spells out its commitment to the production of "challenging and alternative" content that reflects the diversity of the British population, Martin analyses the increased visibility of lesbians within Channel 4 programming. Orienting this analysis around popular "post-lesbian" shows like *Sugar Rush* (2005–06) and *Skins* (2007–), Maz queries the formulation of teen lesbianism in particular, and considers the extent to which such content might be considered "challenging" or subversive when it tends to be so rigidly contained within the "hegemonic structures of family and friendship".

The chapters by Stéphanie Genz, Brenda R. Weber, Angela Smith, and Sarah Gilligan offer various theorizations of the ongoing prevalence of the makeover in contemporary film and television. The surgical modification of the female body – as it takes place in an ever-expanding raft of popular makeover shows, including *The Swan* (2004–05), *Extreme Makeover* (2002–05), and *Ten Years Younger* (2004–) – is used by Genz as a basis for investigating the intersections and divergences of femininity, beauty, agency, and choice. Bringing new light to bear on the modern culture of *chirurgia decoratoria*, in which the individual is encouraged to remodel herself in the pursuit of social status, sexual desirability, and personal contentment, Genz views makeover television in relation to the "paradox of choice" that Rosemary Gillespie identifies as a hallmark of postfeminist culture (79).

According to Brenda R. Weber, the term "affective domination" can assist in bringing some of the contradictions and ironies by which makeover shows are riven into sharper focus. Used to denote the strategies of shaming and support that are deployed by the makeover "experts" in order to gain social mastery of the participant, the concept of "affective domination" provides a framework for thinking about the trajectory of the transformation narrative. Reflecting particularly on *American Princess* (2005–07) and *Australian Princess* (2005), Weber shows how the makeover is presented as a positive means of reconciling the participant's outer appearance with his or her inner subjectivity. She exposes, moreover, the irony of the fact that it is the woman who submits most wholeheartedly to the affective domination who is situated as the most empowered.

Smith's chapter views the makeover show in light of the postfeminist media phenomenon of "Girl Power" and the contemporaneous moral panic about teenage behaviour in British society. With close reference to the *Ladette to Lady* (2005–) franchise – a UK reality show in which young, hard-drinking, promiscuous, rebellious young women are refashioned as dress-making, flower-arranging "ladies" – Smith questions the politics

of postfeminism and its putative valorization of traditional models of domesticated femininity.

Taking account of the proliferation of makeover shows in Anglo-American television schedules, Sarah Gilligan explores the transformation narrative as an enduring staple of feminine popular culture. From Hollywood classics such as *Now Voyager* (1942) and *My Fair Lady* (1964) to contemporary programming like *Gok's Fashion Fix* (2008–09), Gilligan establishes the rootedness of the transformation narrative in processes of consumerism and feminization. If a number of cultural texts trade on the premise that a woman's conformity to contemporary notions of "ideal" femininity will enable her to achieve the twin prizes of masculine approval and heterosexual romance, then some contemporary teen films generate a "postfeminist space" within which the female protagonists are permitted to experiment with identity more freely. In films like *She's All That* (1999), Gilligan argues, the centrality of vintage and homemade clothing to the "making over" of the protagonist implicates her in an endless cycle of (re)fashioning femininity that speaks, ultimately, to the performativity of gender identity.

This collection concludes with a section on "Violence", in which Lisa Funnell, Lisa Purse, Anna Gething, and Lindsay Steenberg explore the role that aggression and physicality have played in the construction of new feminine and feminist identities.

Funnell discusses the ways in which anxieties about feminism and feminist women are registered in the changing depiction of female villainy within the James Bond film franchise. As Funnell explains, if the Bond films of the 1960s speak to second wave feminism through their representation of powerful, sexually liberated "bad" women – who are, ultimately, punished for their perceived disobedience – then the female villains of the 1990s and 2000s are best understood as the Bond film's response to "Girl Power" and the broader discourses of postfeminism. Stressing the franchise's (often antagonistic) engagement with feminist politics, Funnell shows how the female villain is used variously as a means of challenging and/or (re)asserting Bond's masculine authority. In addition, however, she argues that some of Bond's female adversaries also function as figures through which new, empowered feminine identities can be productively envisioned and critiqued.

Lisa Purse is likewise interested in addressing shifts in the representation of empowered (or disempowered) feminine identities on the big screen. Establishing the "angry woman" as a staple of the rape-revenge and slasher cycles of the 1970s, Purse attempts to make sense of the recent reappearance of this traumatized, aggressive figure in films such

as *Kill Bill* (2003–04), *Monster* (2003), and *Hard Candy* (2005). Reading the representation of the "new" angry woman in relation to that of her would-be sisters – namely, the postfeminist action heroines of popular film series like *The Matrix*, *Resident Evil*, and *X-Men* – Purse shows how the active female body is ascribed different meanings in different cultural contexts. For Purse, then, the postfeminist action heroine has come to constitute the acceptable face (and body) of female empowerment in the twenty-first century; white, heterosexual, and demonstrably feminine, her physical prowess is routinely spectacularized and sexualized, without being explained through reference to her gender. Her "angry" counterpart, by contrast, exhibits a physical agency that is rationalized explicitly through reference to her motives, which are clearly gendered (usually relating to rape or maternal instinct). In the course of unpacking these differences, Purse situates the new angry woman as a "return of the repressed" – a dramatic re-materialization of female rage and aggression that is strategically disavowed in mainstream representations of the "action babe".

For Anna Gething, HBO's gangster drama *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) offers an interesting take on the relationship between femininity and violence. Establishing the ass-kicking, wise-cracking fantasy heroine as the prime exponent of female violence in contemporary television and film fictions, Gething examines *The Sopranos*' creative reinterpretation of gendered brutality. In particular, she considers the show's positioning of the ageing, physically impaired matriarch as the agent of aggression which – though psychological rather than physical – is as damaging in its long-term effects as any of the tortures inflicted by the male mobsters in the series.

Retaining a focus on representations of active and/or professional female identities, Lindsay Steenberg brings a critical light to bear on portrayals of the postfeminist criminal profiler in recent television and film fictions. As Steenberg explains, such fictions tend to centralize the relationship between the male serial killer and the female profiler, trading heavily on its predatory and eroticized dimensions. Taking into account the gendered nature of serial violence, Steenberg examines the ways in which the "pathological romance" between the killer and the profiler functions to enhance the latter's expertise, while also placing her in a situation where both her professionalism and her physical safety are compromised. In this way, Steenberg argues, the female expert is used to reflect a stubborn "postfeminist" scepticism about the ambitious woman who prioritizes her career over her femininity.

Covering a spectrum of feminist perspectives and drawing on a wide range of critical and cultural theory, this collection is intended to expand the parameters of existing debates about the plotting of modern female identities in the Western imaginary. The kinds of identities addressed here are broadly reflective of those with which postfeminist culture is predominantly preoccupied; as white, middle-class, heterosexual femininities continue to occupy positions of high visibility within mainstream cinema and television, then, so these femininities form the basis of many of the chapters that follow. This book is also, however, responsive to current shifts in representation and criticism. The recent mainstreaming of queer identities and storylines in contemporary programming and film has, for example, generated an urgent need for new critical investigations into the portrayal of non-heterosexual sexualities and the impact of these portrayals on adjacent representations of women and girls. This need is addressed here by the likes of Fenwick and Zeller-Jacques, who explore the construction of non-heterosexual identities in television fictions like *The Wire*, *Sugar Rush*, and *Skins* – fictions which have yet to be exposed to any sustained feminist scrutiny. *Women on Screen* is also interested in the role that class, age, race, and ethnicity have to play in shaping contemporary femininities: How do these factors interact in order to produce new female identities? How do they enhance or diminish women's visibility and/or power? How, if at all, are these factors implicated in the spectacularization or minstrelization of particular female identities? While the contributors to this book are attentive and responsive to the issues of class, age, race, and ethnicity – and to the kinds of questions mentioned above – the usual practical constraints of time and space apply, meaning that this collection is always and already a starting point for further discussions. Certainly, there remains a great deal of critical work to be done in these areas, and an ever-growing multitude of texts – and textual identities – to be accounted for. Through reference to some of these texts and some of these identities, *Women on Screen* seeks to add new fuel to the fires of feminist debate, reassessing the scope of popular culture and critical scholarship in the expanding mediascape of the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. As Stéphanie Genz reflects, much of the controversy about postfeminism has centred on the implications of the "post" prefix – namely, whether it heralds the success, failure, or irrelevance of the second wave agenda in the late twentieth century. While some scholars hyphenate the term (as in "post-feminism") or parenthesize the prefix (as in "(post)feminism") in order to

signal its discontinuity with feminism and/or its dubious status as a term in its own right, it remains unhyphenated here (unless it appears as part of a direct quotation). This is not to disregard the very valid reasons for hyphenation or parenthesization, but simply as a means of indicating the fact that these debates – which are addressed consistently throughout this book – are now so thoroughly inextricable the term that they form a vital part of its meaning. For more on this, see Genz 18–26.
2. For more on the "post-ing" of feminism, see Genz 18–26.
3. See De Beauvoir (1949), Millett (1970), and Greer (1970).
4. De Beauvoir's attempts to delineate the cultural mythologization of femininity are sustained throughout *The Second Sex*, but are analysed with particular vigour from 171 to 282.
5. See Millett 294–335.

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Part I

Generations