

angela mcrobbie



Off feminism gender, culture and social change

angela mcrobbie the aftermath of feminism

'McRobbie has written a profound and profound, disturbing analysis of the state of feminism in contemporary Britain. This is a superb demonstration of why cultural studies matters, and of why McRobbie remains one of its most original and important contributors. This book will enlighten you, anger you, inspire you and force you to ask questions - I can't ask for anything more.'

'McRobbie has produced a landmark text. The aftermath of feminism is highly sophisticated and theoretically informed, yet also readable and inspiring. It is essential reading for anyone interested in contemporary cultural politics.'

In this trenchant inquiry into the state of feminism in contemporary Britain, angela mcrobbie challenges the notion of the 'feminist self' as a model of female empowerment. The author argues that invidious forms of gendered behaviour are still dominant in consumer and popular culture. In this vein, the book is appearing supportive of female subjects, yet revealing their neurotic dependencies. With her own distinctive feminist analysis, McRobbie examines diverse socio-cultural phenomena from the lives of Bridget Jones, fashion designers, and the media to eating disorders, body anxiety and racism. The central theme of women's empowerment and gender equality is the driving force behind the book.

A turning point in feminist theory, this book is an agenda for gender studies and cultural studies.

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The Aftermath of Feminism

Gender, Culture and
Social Change

Angela McRobbie



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INTRODUCTION: IN EXCHANGE FOR FEMINISM

This book examines a social and cultural landscape which could be called post-feminist if, by that term, one means a situation which is marked by a new kind of anti-feminist sentiment which is different from simply being a question of backlash against the seeming gains made by feminist activities and campaigns in an earlier period, i.e. the 1970s and 1980s. I argue that something quite unexpected has happened. Elements of feminism have been taken into account, and have been absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life. Drawing on a vocabulary that includes words like 'empowerment' and 'choice', these elements are then converted into a much more individualistic discourse, and they are deployed in this new guise, particularly in media and popular culture, but also by agencies of the state, as a kind of substitute for feminism. These new and seemingly 'modern' ideas about women and especially young women are then disseminated more aggressively, so as to ensure that a new women's movement will not re-emerge. 'Feminism' is instrumentalised, it is brought forward and claimed by Western governments, as a signal to the rest of the world that this is a key part of what freedom now means. Freedom is revitalised and brought up-to-date with this *faux*-feminism. The boundaries between the West and the rest can, as a result, be more specifically coded in terms of gender, and the granting of sexual freedoms. If this sounds like a conspiracy thesis, then one of the tasks I must set myself in this book is to demonstrate how this takes place at ground level, and how the consent and participation of young women is sought, and seemingly secured, in a multiplicity of ways that defy the notion of a centralised power in charge of the demise of feminism, in such a way that it will never again rise from the ashes. Granted, at one level, this is done through active vilification and negation conducted mostly at the cultural level, which makes feminism quite unpalatable to younger women (the words repulsive or disgusting are often used). A kind of hideous spectre of what feminism once was is conjured up, a monstrous ugliness which would send shudders of horror down the spines of young women today, as a kind of deterrent. But this is only one side of the

equation, and the abandonment of feminism, for the sake of what Judith Butler would call intelligibility as a woman, is amply rewarded with the promise of freedom and independence, most apparent through wage-earning capacity, which also functions symbolically, as a mark of respectability, citizenship and entitlement. There is a kind of exchange, and also a process of displacement and substitution going on here. The young woman is offered a notional form of equality, concretised in education and employment, and through participation in consumer culture and civil society, in place of what a reinvented feminist politics might have to offer. If this seems fanciful, or even excessively vague, it is clearly my task in this book to make a coherent case for this as a kind of settlement, as Stuart Hall might call it, or as a new form of sexual contract. Another simple way of putting this is to say that women constitute half of the world's population and their subordination and experience of inequality, though changed, remains unequivocal and substantial. The idea of a global, through highly differentiated feminist polities would indeed be a considerable challenge to the current global and still patriarchal system of economic power and domination. Self-declared feminists have always been small in number, but their principles and ideas and beliefs and commitments have flowed out into and across the everyday world of women and girls in different countries across the world. It has been clear that this is, or was, a self-organised politics, taking place from the ground up, a kind of disputatious and contentious force, especially in matters of sexuality and family life, and this small force for change nevertheless has had enormous potential to create disruption and to bring about change. At the same time what feminism actually means varies, literally, from one self-declared feminist to the next, but this does not reduce its field of potential influence, quite the opposite. So it is this potential which I argue is the source of anxiety, concern and pre-emptive action, on the part of those bodies and institutions and organisations which do not wish to see established power and gender hierarchies undermined. I argue in this book that for this potential to be re-awakened and realised, we must understand fully the forces which are opposed to such a realisation, especially since they now take the guise of modern and enlightened 'gender aware' forms of governmentality.

This book also marks some changes in my own writing, and there is an element of self-critique. Some years ago I subscribed to a way of thinking which was influenced by the work of de Certeau, which sought to give value and meaning to the subversive strategies, the ways of 'making do' which ordinary, often seriously disadvantaged people took part in, and which became, as a result, vernacular features of resistance and opposition, visible within and across the landscapes of everyday life (de Certeau 1984). However, when it transpired that this kind of argument could so easily be rolled out, in a 'cultural populist' vein, and end up being a defence of women's capacities to turn around or subvert the world of consumer culture in which they were invested, for possibly subversive purposes, many alarm bells began to ring. When feminist cultural studies pursued this pathway, a concern to understand dynamics of power and constraint gave way to celebratory connections with the ordinary women, or indeed girls, who created their own, now seemingly autonomous pleasures and rituals of enjoyable femininity from the goods made available by consumer culture (e.g. television programmes like *Sex and the City*). If this could be done with what capitalism made available, then there seemed to be no real reason to challenge the principles upon which capitalism was based. Just how oppositional were these seemingly subversive practices? How far did they reach? What value did they deliver to women in the context of the relations of power and powerlessness within which they still found themselves inscribed? How did they articulate with other activities beyond the interface with popular culture? My rising discomfort encompassed a number of issues. Does capitalism actually give women more or less what they want, if indeed it provides them with such cheap and available narrative pleasures, in the form of popular entertainment, which also now incorporate something like a feminist agenda in their plots and story lines? What need might there be for a feminist politics at all, if women could simply subvert the meanings of the goods and the values of the dominant cultural world around them? Would this mean a suspension of the critique of capitalism, that has always been such a defining feature of the tradition of socialist-feminist scholarship? This work in media and cultural studies was also far removed from the earlier feminist psychoanalytically-inspired work, like that of Cora Kaplan which, for example, examined in depth the complexity of being a feminist reader troubled and intrigued by the fact that she found great pleasure in a conservative genre of popular romances, such as *The Thorn Birds* (Kaplan 1986). By the turn of the century some of the strands in feminist media and cultural studies which were optimistic about the power of popular feminism ran into difficulties when this gave way, to something more aggressive, the mainstreaming of pornography, for example. While many feminists, including myself, were never part of the pro-censorship and anti-pornography campaigning back in the 1970s and 1980s, there was nevertheless disquiet on my own part when 'confronted with new issues such as the trend for pole-dancing being promoted as yet another form of women's empowerment. It is not as though some puritanical streak buried inside myself surfaces in reaction to this kind of phenomenon, it is simply noticeable how little serious scholarly debate there is about what widespread participation in sex entertainment by women means for the now out-of-date feminist perspectives on pornography and the sex industry (McRobbie 2008).

Through the 1990s there seemed to be no longer a theory of sexual power in contemporary feminist media and cultural studies. Little attention was

being paid to the complex ways in which women were being increasingly invited, by the forces of consumer culture that were now thoroughly tuned into, and able to adopt a feminist voice, to pursue new freedoms including sexual pleasure, as a kind of entitlement that was now being granted. Was it the case that some sort of rapprochement with capitalism had taken place, with the demise of socialism, and with the development of what was called for a short time, 'third way' politics? Or had the appetite for critique somehow faded? I did not find a rehearsal of such a political shift inside feminist media and cultural studies from the early 1990s onwards. And if a conversation was taking place about how to align a new left-feminist social democratic politics in relation to changes in global political culture, it was not happening, as far as I could see, within this particular feminist academic field. For more forceful and socially engaged critique, one increasingly had to look to debates about feminism and the micropolitics of becoming, in the work of feminist philosophers like Rosi Braidotti and Claire Colebrook, or to post-colonial feminist theory (Spivak and Ahmed) or to the psycho-social examination of gender and power found in Butler's writing. Meanwhile queer theory, of course, pushed ahead during this time, producing marvellously rich work, as did the new Deleuzian-influenced sociology of the body. (But in some ways, with the exception of writers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler and Wendy Brown, whose work I draw on in this book, the whole question of leftwing politics and the impact its current state of crisis, or indeed its demise, has had for feminism, was left to the side.) Feminist media studies had never fully engaged with psychoanalysis and this remained, in my mind, a deficit. It had promised however, by means of the interest in audiences and reception, to develop a full-blown cultural and media anthropology of how women participated in everyday life, but somehow the energy for this as an undertaking seemed to dissipate. Instead attention to everyday life was replaced by a proliferation of fan-based studies. In the light of what seemed like a fading away of feminist cultural studies, several feminist scholars took flight and de-camped to the fields of television and film studies, often embarking on important historical work in what was then to become a thriving area of new scholarship. It is only very recently that there has been a more forceful and critical engagement with the world of women's media and feminine genres, connecting anti-feminist elements with the resurgent values of neo-liberal political culture (see the work of Gill 2006).

Perhaps at this point I need to write myself into this narrative, since so much of the contents of this current book marks a revision of some of my own old ways, and points in the direction of an analysis of new constellations of gender power. I should address some of my misjudgements, for example, writing about women's and girls' magazines in the 1990s, I attributed too much hope in the capacity of the world of women's

magazines, to take up and maintain a commitment to feminist issues, encapsulating a kind of popular feminism. I was over-enthusiastic about the impact the recruitment of feminist-influenced graduates might have on the editorial policies of young women's magazines, and I did not fully engage with the way in which the battle for circulation figures could see an editor sacked for displeasing a company with a lucrative advertising contract. Nor did I take into account the need for magazines to be constantly re-inventing themselves, which of course means that a strong feminist voice might well only last for as long as a couple of fashion seasons and then be discarded in favour of a new counter-trend. I found myself acknowledging, rather than confronting, the generic features of the magazine format, which seemed to be set in stone, the centrality of the fashion-and-beauty complex, for example, the dominant heterosexuality, the hermetically sealed world of feminine escapist pleasures, and in this respect I was perhaps myself complicit, without abandoning a feminist perspective, in accommodating to the genre itself, and reducing the level and intensity of critique, in favour of a kind of compromise position which aimed at having the staple contents co-exist with a strong but nevertheless popular feminist voice. (Doubtless this position on my own part was connected with my encouragement to students who were keen to find work in this world. Now I can see that this interface with the magazine industry and these forms of feminist 'knowledge transfer' need to be better understood, and subjected to scholarly scrutiny within a critical culture industry perspective). In actuality the idea of feminist content disappeared and was replaced by aggressive individualism, by a hedonistic female phallicism in the field of sexuality, and by obsession with consumer culture which in this current book I see as playing a vital role in the undressing of feminism. It is arguably the case that the self-definition as decisively post-feminist gave to the world of young women's magazines a new lease of life, as though they became unburdened through this transition.

It is perhaps relevant to note at this point also, that I was also over-optimistic about the election of the New Labour government in 1997, and in my assumption that Tony Blair would support women's issues and would engage with feminists involved in policy issues and in campaigning. In the early days of the New Labour government I even briefly held out some hope for the so-called third way agenda, never imagining that this government would prove to be hostile to feminists, and that it would in effect seek to reverse, or undo feminism, substituting for it the promise of seemingly more modern freedoms, along with ideas like the work-life balance, while at the same time introducing a kind of swaggering, resurgent patriarchy, the political equivalent of the world of the lads' mags, where women had little choice but to fall into line, or risk the Siberia of feminism (McRobbie 2000a).

Feminist retrieval and renewal

There is some work of retrieval in the chapters that follow. In particular I look back to the feminist psychoanalytical writing on film and on the fashion image of the 1980s and I seek to reinstate its importance in understanding the mechanisms of identification and desire which come into play in the processes of consuming images. This body of work seems to have been lost from current discussion, and its absence marks a weakness in some of the most interesting work about how, for example, young girls look at images of themselves and of models and celebrities in magazines. Recent Deleuzian work rejects the rigidities of desire formulated within Freudian psychoanalysis, but just by referring back to the writing of, for example, Leslie Rabine or Diana Fuss, we can see how invaluable it was for understanding the technologies at play in the composition of images which sought to mobilise both the unleashing and the containment of female desire (Fuss 1994; Rabine 1994).

The chapters that follow introduce a number of concepts which are developed in the course of the analysis which combines elements of feminist sociology with cultural studies in an attempt to map out the field of post-feminist popular and political culture, primarily but not exclusively within a UK framework. These chapters are presented as suggestive in relation to the terrain they examine, they are not based on specific fieldwork undertaken, they are neither empirical nor ethnographic. Instead they survey changes in film, television, popular culture and the world of women's magazines. They also engage with recent writing by various scholars working in this area, and in particular they draw on Judith Butler's books and essays, translating them into a sociological vocabulary that in turn can be applied to concrete social and cultural phenomena. In an earlier response to Butler's short book *Antigone's Claim* (2000a) I presented some reflections on a 'double entanglement' which referred to the way in which there was in regard to sexuality and family life, both a liberalisation on the part of the state through the granting of specific family and kinship rights and entitlements to gays and lesbians, and also a neo-liberalisation in this same terrain of sexuality, with a more punitive response being shown to those who live outside the economic unit of the two parent family (McRobbie 2003). Likewise there was the way in which feminism had achieved the status of common sense, while it was also reviled, almost hated. In this book I continue to develop these ideas, and introduce concepts designed to provide a 'complexification of backlash' through this idea of 'double entanglement'. These concepts include the 'spaces of attention' which I use to examine the spotlight effect of power, or in Deleuzian parlance the Luminosities which bring young women forward, as individualised subjects, and which attribute to these young women, a range of capacities such that they can be understood as agents of change. This also

marks the field of 'feminism undone'. There is a re-drafting of gender hierarchies, I claim, which has repercussions for questions of social class and race and ethnicity. The coming forward of young black or Asian women, along these individualised pathways, entails the granting of unusual, if not exceptional, and exemplary status, while elsewhere within the field of luminosities, where anti-racism is also undone, there is also a kind of 'nostalgia for whiteness' and indeed a process of cultural re-colonisation. White women in the UK increasingly live out their class positions, to re-phrase Stuart Hall, through the modality of gender and femininity. They have also become more autonomously feminised (and glamourised) in their class identity, no longer taking this status or adhering to it, from their position as wives of men, or as daughters of fathers. Black and Asian women also find themselves caught up and inscribed within this re-drafting process. They live their class identity through the modality of race as Hall argued, but their femininity also increasingly comes forward as a key factor in the more meritocratic society, such that the intersection of gender and ethnicity finds new social meaning and significance. I also refer, not to a new women's movement, but to the opposite, to a 'movement of women'. This is a key aspect of the new forms of gender power that have emerged and that seek to manage the requirements of the new global economy and the availability of a feminised workforce through producing and overseeing changes for women, young women in particular.

In Chapter 3 I provide a number of concepts for understanding post-feminist femininity, what in Foucauldian language we might refer to as technologies, each of which are made available to young women as part of a process of substitution and displacement, and each of which also appears to offer possibilities of freedom and change in the status and identity of young women today. These are first, the 'post-feminist masquerade', second, the figuration of the 'working girl', third, the 'phallic girl' and fourth, the 'global girl'. I argue these emerge as new constraining forms of gender power which operate through the granting of capacity to young women. Later in the book I draw on Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence to examine the changing dynamics of class, race and gender which are played out through the genre of make-over television programmes, arguing that here too there is an enforced 'movement of women', for the sake of recognition and cultural citizenship. In the final chapter I continue to reflect on the movement of women through processes of educational migration, as young women from across the world flow to cities like London and to institutions of higher education to increase their qualifications. So diverse are these globalised biographies that they refute the possibility of immediate sociological understanding, while also raising a whole series of new questions about female individualisation, the new international division of labour, the role of well-educated young women and the economic rationale which underpins this form of female migration

(Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). Spivak, for example, would surely see this as a capitalist mobilisation of 'global girls' in the service of the now multicultural corporations, and at the expense of the impoverished people who remain at the point of departure, who also lose a class of possible radical teachers, educators, doctors and others, who are lured into a kind of migration-trap (Spivak 2002). We can see then a re-configuration of young womanhood emerging through these different assemblages, indeed we might think of them as sharing a kind of kinship or sisterhood, they are part of the same extended family, all four figures interconnect with each other, the immaculately groomed young woman in masquerade, the sexy adventurous phallic girl, the (hard) working girl and her 'pleasing' global counterpart.

The chapters in this book examine what we might mean by 'complexification of backlash'. In Chapter 1 I trace a double movement which was taking place concurrently in the early 1990s, both inside the feminist academy and outside in the world of popular culture. In the academy, for good theoretical reasons, feminism dismantles itself, by asking questions about foundationalism and universalism, and about representational claims. It queries for example the processes by which feminists speak on behalf of other women. Who are these other women who are the subjects of such representational claims? What hierarchies underpin certain feminist agendas? At the same time in popular culture there is also an undoing or dismantling of feminism, not in favour of re-traditionalisation, women are not being pushed back into the home, but instead there is a process which says feminism is no longer needed, it is now common sense, and as such it is something young women can do without. I use the film *Bridget Jones's Diary* to develop the argument about feminism taken into account. Feminism has a ghostly existence in the film, Bridget has it to thank for, it has given her, to paraphrase Ulrich Beck, 'a life of her own', yet she is not sure that this is what she wants, i.e. to be single and childless in her early thirties, even though she pokes fun at the narrow world of the 'smug marrieds'. The prominence of wedding culture, apart from contributing to the expansion of consumer culture, rides on this tidal wave of celebratory post-feminism, as though to say, 'thank goodness, girls can be girls again, that time of dourness and censoriousness is over, and who can really object to something as light-hearted and innocuous as a 'hen party'? Who would dare to challenge the consensus that prevails in relation to the empowerment of women manifest in the ladies' night at the local pub featuring male strippers performing the 'full monty'? And since gay men and lesbians are also now invited to take part in weddng culture, there is, it seems, even less reason to inquire as to what might also be entailed in these rituals of enjoyment.

In Chapter 2 I trace a line of connection between the forces of the new right which from the start of the 1970s, mobilised against the women's movement through various actions and strategies, many of which were

documented by feminists including Judith Stacey and Susan Faludi in the US and Bea Campbell in the UK, and the more recent practices which operate through incorporation and instrumentalisation. I make use of Hall's theory of articulation but put this into reverse gear, and through the idea of disarticulation I show how cross-border solidarities, for example, between black and white feminist and anti-racist struggles, between single mothers and lesbians and gay men also living outside the fold of the nuclear family, are eroded, and how feminism's 'chains of equivalence' are broken down. Disarticulation is a defining feature of the process of undoing. Feminism's wider intersections with anti-racism, with gay and lesbian politics, are written out of the kind of history which surfaces even in serious journalism, and the feminism which is then vilified and thrown backwards into a previous era, is a truncated and sclerotic anti-male and censorious version of a movement which was much more diverse and open-minded. I argue that this denigration is also increasingly directed to anti-racist and multi-cultural politics of the same period, they too are reduced to clichés of 'political correctness' and their demise is seen to usher in a new period of more enlightened and modern community politics, where righteous anger and self-organisation are replaced by a politics of role models or mentoring or assimilation and integration or through cultural leadership programmes. Black politics *per se* fades and new racialising pathologies become visible, including a 'nostalgia for whiteness'.

In Chapter 3 I disentangle some of the new technologies of young womanhood, emphasising a movement of coming forward while feminism fades away. I also stress the spectacular dimension of this visibility, or luminosity, as government and its willing helpers, the fashion-and-beauty complex take young women by the hand, and lead them towards a modern kind of freedom. There is a great deal of drama in this process of coming forward, young women are endowed with capacity and are as a result expected to pursue specific life pathways which require participation in the workforce, which in turn permits full immersion in consumer culture. This new sexual contract rests on economic and cultural activity, and consumer citizenship at the expense of a newly defined feminist politics.

In Chapter 4 I focus more directly on feminine pathology and on its prominence, indeed its normalisation, in contemporary culture. Young women are increasingly 'made up' in accordance with a horizon of expectation within which various disorders become naturalised, and even seen as the high price of freedom. I argue that these illegible rages and pathologies come close to confronting the limits of Butler's heterosexual matrix, but they are acted upon and constrained within this grid of sexual normativity. Better to be still recognisably positioned as an, albeit, ill anorexic girl within a properly oedipal family, than to be interrogating and breaking out of such psycho-social arrangements. In Chapter Five I examine the 'movement of women' which is undertaken within

the genre of make-over television programmes. What I argue is that there is a specific entanglement of class and gender relations underpinning these programmes, the desirable outcome of which is a more glamourised and individualised feminine subjectivity. The woman who is made-over embodies the values of the new, aspirational lower middle-class, in which she has a more autonomously feminine identity.

In the final chapter I engage critically with some of those strands in contemporary feminism which are affirmative and optimistic about the progress that has been made. These include 'gender mainstreaming', third wave feminism, and I also find some sociological grounds for being cautious in regard to Rosi Braidotti's philosophy of feminist affirmation. I end the book by reflecting on my own feminist classroom, a space where one might imagine a strong case for feminist affirmation could be made. But reality is always more unpredictable. It is a challenge and also a privilege to be teaching in an environment which is now populated by young women (and young men) from literally all over the world. This process of what appears to be educational migration, since so many of these young women hope to find jobs in London or else in some other global city, raises many questions about young women's role in the new international division of labour, and about what is entailed in this movement, about the strains on family and kinship, on the seeming postponement of marriage, and the postponement of having children. These young women also engage with the kinds of feminist issues that are the subject of this book, directly and indirectly. They are both inside and outside of them. And it is as though the forces which propel them to find a way of moving from, let us say, Korea, or Taiwan or Albania or Indonesia to London, and in so doing avoid or put on hold, some of the expectations and constraints otherwise imposed on them, produces an openness to debates about power and sexuality, gender and desire. Lastly I should emphasise that despite the many references to films and television, magazines and popular culture, this book is fundamentally sociological. It is concerned to dissect the management of social change and the forms of gender power which operate within an illusion of positivity and progress while locking young women into 'new-old' dependences and anxieties.

1

POST-FEMINISM AND POPULAR CULTURE: BRIDGET JONES AND THE NEW GENDER REGIME

Introduction: complexification of backlash?

This chapter presents a series of possible conceptual frames for engaging with what, in this book, I refer to as post-feminism. Broadly I envisage this as a process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s are actively and relentlessly undermined. (What exactly is meant by the words 'feminist gains' is examined throughout the book.) I propose that through an array of machinations, elements of contemporary popular culture are persistently effective in regard to this undoing of feminism, while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism. I then propose that this undoing, which can be perceived in the broad cultural field, is compounded, unexpectedly perhaps, in those sociological theories, including the work of Giddens and Beck, which address themselves to aspects of gender and social change, but as though feminist thought and years of women's struggles had no role to play in these transformations (and this is returned to in Chapter 2 and briefly in Chapter 3). It is also suggested in the pages that follow, that by means of the tropes of freedom and choice which are now inextricably connected with the category of young women, feminism is decisively aged and made to seem redundant. Feminism is cast into the shadows, where at best it can expect to have some afterlife, where it might be regarded ambivalently by those young women who must, in more public venues, stake a distance from it, for the sake of social and sexual recognition. I propose here a complexification of the backlash thesis (which, again, will be examined in more detail in the chapter that follows).

Fausti refers to a concerted, conservative response to challenge the achievements of feminism (Fausti 1992). Her work is important because, like that of Stacey and others, it charts anti-feminist interventions that are coterminous with feminism more or less as it happens (Stacey 1985/1986).

My argument is rather different, which is that post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force. This was very apparent in the (UK) *Independent* newspaper column *Bridget Jones's Diary*,¹ then in the fantastically successful book and the films which followed. The infectious girlishness of Bridget Jones produces a generational logic which is distinctly post-feminist. Despite feminism, Bridget wants to pursue dreams of romance, find a suitable husband, get married and have children. What she fears most is ending up as a 'spinster'. Bridget is a girl who is 'once again' reassuringly feminine. She is not particularly career-minded, even though she knows she should be. She makes schoolgirl errors in her publishing house, not knowing that the literary critic F. R. Leavis is long dead. She delivers an incoherent speech at a book launch, her head seems to be full of frivolous thoughts, though she is clever and witty in her own feminine way. But most of all she is desperate to find the right man. The film celebrates a kind of scatterbrain and endearing femininity, as though it is something that has been lost. Thank goodness, the film seems to be saying, that old-fashioned femininity can be retrieved. Post-feminism in this context seems to mean gently chiding the feminist past, while also retrieving and reinstating some palatable elements, in this case sexual freedom, the right to drink, smoke, have fun in the city, and be economically independent.²

Broadly I am arguing that for feminism to be 'taken into account' it has to be understood as having already passed away. The pushing away which underpins the passing away is very much the subject of this book. This is a movement detectable across popular culture, a site where 'power ... is remade at various junctures within everyday life, (constituting) our tenuous sense of common sense' (Butler, Laclau and Zizek 2000: 14). Some fleeting comments in Judith Butler's short book *Antigone's Claim* suggest to me that post-feminism can be explored through what I would describe as a 'double entanglement' (Butler 2000a). This comprises the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life (for example George Bush supporting the campaign to encourage chastity among young people, and in March 2004 declaring that civilisation itself depends on traditional marriage), with processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations (for example gay couples now able to adopt, foster or have their own children by whatever means, and in the UK at least, full rights to civil partnerships). It also encompasses the existence of feminism as at some level transformed into a form of Gramscian common sense, while also fiercely repudiated, indeed almost hated (McRobbie 2003). The 'taken into accountness' permits all the more thorough dismantling of feminist politics and the discrediting of the occasionally voiced need for its renewal.

Feminism dismantling itself

The impact of this double entanglement which is manifest in popular and political culture, coincides however, with feminism in the academy finding it necessary to dismantle itself. For the sake of periodisation we could say that 1990 marks a turning point, the moment of definitive self-critique in feminist theory. At this time the representational claims of second wave feminism come to be fully interrogated by post-colonialist feminists like Spivak, Trinh and Mohanty among others, and by feminist theorists like Butler and Haraway who inaugurate the radical de-naturalising of the post-feminist body (Mohanty 1988, Spivak 1988, Trinh 1989, Butler 1990, Haraway 1991). Under the prevailing influence of Foucault, there is a shift away from feminist interest in centralised power blocks, eg the State, patriarchy, law, to more dispersed sites, events and instances of power conceptualised as flows and specific convergences and consolidations of talk, discourse, attentions. The body and also the subject come to represent a focal point for feminist interest, nowhere more so than in the work of Butler. The concept of subjectivity and the means by which cultural forms and interpellations (or dominant social processes) call women into being, produce them as subjects while ostensibly merely describing them as such, inevitably means that it is a problematic 'she', rather than an unproblematic 'we', which is indicative of a turn to what we might describe as the new feminist politics of the body (Butler 1990, 1993). In feminist cultural studies the early 1990s also marks a moment of feminist reflexivity. In her article 'Pedagogies of the Feminine' Brunsdon queried the (hitherto assumed) use value to feminist media scholarship of the binary opposition between femininity and feminism, or as she put it, the extent to which the 'housewife' or 'ordinary woman' was conceived of as the assumed subject of attention for feminism (Brunsdon 1991). Looking back we can see how heavily utilised this dualism was, and also how particular it was to gender arrangements for largely white and relatively affluent (i.e. housewifely) heterosexual women. While at the time both categories had a kind of transparency, by the late 1980s these came under scrutiny. Not only was there a homogenising force on both sides of the equation, but it also became apparent that this binary permitted a certain kind of useful, feminist, self-definition to emerge, particularly in media and cultural studies where there was an interest in the intersections of media with everyday life, through conceptualisations of the audience. In this case the audience was understood to comprise housewives who would be studied empathetically by feminists. The concept of the housewife in effect facilitated a certain mode of feminist inquiry, but we were at the time inattentive to the partial and exclusive nature of this couplet.

The year 1990 also marked the moment at which the concept of popular feminism found expression. Andrea Stuart considered the wider circulation of feminist values across the landscape of popular culture, in particular magazines

where quite suddenly issues which had been central to the formation of the women's movement like domestic violence, equal pay, and workplace harassment, were now addressed to a vast readership (Stuart 1990). The wider dissemination of feminist issues was also a key concern in my own writing at this time, in particular the intersection of these new representations with the daily lives of young women who, as subjects (called into being) of this now popular feminism, might then be expected to embody more emboldened (though also of course failed) identities. This gave rise to the idea of feminist success. It suggested that forms of popular mass media like magazines were in fact more open to change than had previously been thought, and this in turn gave rise to a brief tide of optimism. What could have an impact inside the academy in terms of the feminist curriculum could also have some impact beyond the academy, indeed in the commercial world. Of course no sooner is the word success written than it is queried. How could this be gauged? What might be the criteria for judging degrees of feminist success?

Female success

Admittedly there is some extravagance in my claim for feminist success. It might be more accurate to remark on the keen interest across the quality and popular media, (themselves wishing to increase their female readers and audiences) in ideas of female success. As feminist values are indeed taken on board within a range of institutions, including law, education, to an extent medicine, likewise employment and the media, high profile or newsworthy achievements of women and girls in these sectors shows the institutions to be modern and abreast with social change. This is the context then within which feminism is acknowledged and this is what I mean by feminism taken into account.⁷ The kind of feminism which is taken into account in this context is liberal, equal opportunities feminism, where elsewhere what is invoked more negatively is the radical feminism concerned with social criticism rather than with progress or improvement in the position of women in an otherwise more or less unaltered social order. But across the boundaries of different forms of feminism, the idea of feminist success has, so far, only been described sporadically (for accounts of girls' achievement in education see Arnot et al 1999 and also Harris 2004). Within media and cultural studies both Brunsdon and myself have each considered how with feminism as part of the academic curriculum, (ie canonised), then it is not surprising that it might also be countered, that is feminism must face up to the consequences of its own claims to representation and power, and not be so surprised when young women students decline the invitation to identify as a 'we' with their feminist teachers and scholars (Brunsdon 1991, McRobbie 1999a). This interface between the feminist academy and the student body has also been

discussed in US feminist journals, particularly in regard to the decline of women's studies, and this is a subject I return to in the concluding chapter of this book. Back in the early 1990s (and following Butler) I saw this sense of contestation on the part of young women, and what I would call their distance from feminism as one of potential, where a lively dialogue about how feminism might develop would commence (Butler 1992, McRobbie 1994). Indeed it appeared to be in the very nature of feminism that it gave rise to dis-identification as a kind requirement for its existence. But it seems now, that this space of distance from feminism and those utterances of forceful non-identity with feminism have consolidated into something closer to repudiation rather than ambivalence, and it is this vehemently denunciatory stance which is manifest across the field of popular gender debate. This is the cultural space of post-feminism.

In this context it requires both imagination and hopefulness to argue that the active, sustained and repetitive repudiation or repression of feminism also marks its (still fearful) presence or even longevity (as afterlife). What I mean by this is that there are different kinds of repudiation and different investments in such a stance. The more gentle denunciations of feminism co-exist however with the shrill championing of young women as a metaphor for social change on the pages of the right wing press in the UK, in particular the *Daily Mail*.³ This anti-feminist endorsement of female individualisation is embodied in the figure of the ambitious 'TV blonde' (McRobbie 1999b). These so-called 'A1' girls are glamorous high-achievers destined for Oxford or Cambridge and are usually pictured clutching A-level examination certificates. We might say these are ideal girls, subjects *par excellence*, and also subjects of excellence. Nor are these notions of female success exclusive to the changing representations of young women in the countries of the affluent West (Spivak 1999). Young women are a good investment, they can be trusted with micro-credit, they are the privileged subjects of social change. But the terms of these great expectations on the part of governments are that young women must do without more autonomous feminist politics. What is consistent is the displacement of feminism as a political movement. It is this displacement which is reflected in Butler's sorrowful account of Antigone's life after death. Her shadowy, lonely existence, suggests a modality of feminist effectivity as spectral; she has to be cast out, indeed entombed, for social organisation to once again become intelligible (Butler 2000a).

Unpopular feminism

The media has become the key site for defining codes of sexual conduct. It casts judgement and establishes the rules of play. Across these many

channels of communication feminism is routinely disparaged. Why is feminism so hated? Why do young women recoil in horror at the very idea of the feminist? To count as a girl today appears to require this kind of ritualistic denunciation, which in turn suggests that one strategy in the disempowering of feminism includes it being historicised and generationalised and thus easily rendered out of date. It would be far too simplistic to trace a pattern in media from popular feminism (or 'prime-time' feminism including TV programmes like *LA Law*) in the early 1990s, to niche feminism (BBC Radio 4, *Woman's Hour*, and the Women's Page of the *Guardian newspaper*), in the mid-1990s, and then to overtly unpopular feminism (from 2000 onwards), as though these charted a chronological 'great moving right show', as Stuart Hall once put it in another context (Hall 1989).

We would need a more developed conceptual schema to account for the simultaneous feminisation of popular media with this accumulation of ambivalent, fearful responses. We would certainly need to signal the seeming enfranchisement of women in the West, of all ages as audiences, active consumers of media and the many products it promotes, and by virtue of education, earning power and consumer identity, a sizeable block of target market. We would also need to be able to theorise female achievement predicated not on feminism, but on 'female individualism', on success which seems to based on the invitation to young women by various governments that they might now consider themselves free to compete in education and in work as privileged subjects of the new meritocracy. Is this then the New Deal for New Labour's modern young women; female individualisation and the new meritocracy at the expense of feminist politics?

There are various sites within popular culture where this work of undoing feminism with some subtlety becomes visible (see also Bransdon 1991). The Wonderbra advertisement showing the model Eva Herzogova looking down admiringly at her cleavage, enhanced by the lacy pyrotechnics of the Wonderbra, was through the mid-1990s positioned in major high street locations in the UK on full size billboards. The composition of the image had such a textbook sexist ad dimension (the 'male gaze' is invited and encouraged by the gaze of the model herself to look towards her breasts) that one could be forgiven for supposing some ironic familiarity with both cultural studies and with feminist critiques of advertising (Williamson 1978). It was, in a sense, taking feminism into account by showing it to be a thing of the past, by provocatively 'enacting sexism' while at the same time playing with those debates in film theory about women as the object of the gaze (Mulvey 1975/1989) and with female desire (Coward 1984, De Lauretis 1988). The picture is in *noirish* black and white and refers explicitly through its captions (from 'Hello Boys' to 'Or Are You Just Pleased To See Me?') to Hollywood and the famous lines of the actress Mae West. Here is an advertisement which plays back to its

viewers well known aspects of feminist media studies, film theory and semiotics. Indeed, it almost offers (albeit crudely) the viewer or passing driver Laura Mulvey's theory of women as object of the gaze, projected as cityscape within the frame of the billboard. Also mobilised in this advertisement is the familiarity of the term political correctness, the efficacy of which resides in its warranting and unleashing such energetic reactions against the seemingly tyrannical regime of feminist puritanism. Everyone and especially young people can give a sigh of relief. Thank goodness, the image seems to suggest, it is permissible, once again, to enjoy looking at the bodies of beautiful women. At the same time, the advertisement also hopes to provoke feminist condemnation as a means of generating publicity. Thus generational differences are also produced, the younger female viewer, along with her male counterparts, educated in irony and visually literate, is not made angry by such a repertoire. She appreciates its layers of meaning, she gets the joke.

When in a TV advertisement (1998/9) supermodel Claudia Schiffer takes off her clothes as she descends a flight of stairs in a luxury mansion on her way out of the door towards her new Citroen car, a similar rhetoric is at work. This advert appears to suggest that yes, this is a self-consciously sexist ad. Feminist critiques of it are deliberately evoked. Feminism is taken into account, but only to be shown to be no longer necessary. Why? Because it now seems that there is no exploitation here, there is nothing remotely naive about this tease. She seems to be doing it out of choice, and for her own enjoyment. The image works on the basis of its audience knowing Claudia Schiffer to be one of the world's most famous and highly paid supermodels. Once again the shadow of disapproval is evoked (the strip tease as site of female exploitation) only instantly to be dismissed as belonging to the past, to a time when feminists used to object to such imagery. To make such an objection nowadays would run the risk of ridicule. Objection is pre-empted with irony. In each of these cases a spectre of feminism is invoked so that it might be undone. For male viewers tradition is restored or as Beck puts it there is 'constructed certainty', while for the girls what is proposed is a movement beyond feminism, to a more comfortable zone where women are now free to choose for themselves (Beck 1992).

Feminism undone?

If we turn attention to some of the participatory dynamics in leisure and everyday life which see young women endorse (or else refuse to condemn) the ironic normalisation of pornography, where they indicate their approval of and desire to be pin-up girls for the centrefolds of the soft porn so-called 'ads' mags, where it is not at all unusual to pass young women in the street wearing T-shirts bearing phrases such as 'Porn Queen' or 'Pay To Touch' across the breasts,

where in the UK at least young women quite happily attend lap-dancing clubs (perhaps as a test of their sophistication and 'cool'), and where *Cosmopolitan* magazine considers how empowering it is for young women to 'flash' their breasts in public, we are witness to a hyper-culture of commercial sexuality, one aspect of which is the repudiation of a feminism which is invoked only to be summarily dismissed (see also Gill 2003, 2006). As a mark of a post-feminist identity, young women journalists refuse to condemn the enormous growth of lap-dancing clubs. They know of the existence of the feminist critiques and debates (or at least this is my claim) through their education, since as Shelley Budgeon describes in her study, most girls these days are 'gender aware' (Budgeon 2001). Thus the new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique in order to count as a modern sophisticated girl. Indeed this withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom. There is quietude and complicity in the manners of generationally specific notions of cool, and more precisely, an uncritical relation to dominant commercially produced sexual representations which actively invoke hostility to assumed feminist positions from the past, in order to endorse a new regime of sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and pleasure.

Female individualisation

By using the term female individualisation I am drawing on the concept of individualisation which is discussed at length by sociologists including Giddens (1991), Beck (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) as well as Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2001). This work is to be distinguished from the more directly Foucauldian version found in the work of Nikolas Rose (1999a, 1999b). Although there is some shared ground between these authors, insofar as they all reflect on the expectations that individuals now avidly self-monitor and that there appears to be greater capacity on the part of individuals to plan 'a life of one's own', there are also divergences. Beck and Giddens are less concerned with the way in which power works in this new friendly guise as personal advisor, and instead emphasise the enlargement of freedom and choice, while in contrast Rose sees these modes of self government as marking out the shaping of being', and thus the 'inculcation of a form of life' (Rose 1999a). Bauman bewails the sheer unviability of naked individualisation as the resources of sociality (and welfare) are stripped away, leaving the individual to self-blame when success eludes him or her. (It is also possible to draw a political line between these authors, with Bauman and Rose to the left, and Giddens and Beck 'beyond left and right'.) My emphasis here is on the work of Giddens and Beck, for the very reason that it appears to speak directly to the post-feminist generation. In their writing there are only distant echoes

(if that) of the feminist struggles that were required to produce the new-found freedoms of young women in the West. There is no trace whatsoever of the battles fought, of the power struggles embarked upon, or of the enduring inequities which still mark out the relations between men and women. All of this is airbrushed out of existence on the basis that, as they claim, 'emancipatory politics' has given way instead to life politics (or in Beck's terms the sub-politics of single interest groups). Both Giddens and Beck provide a sociological account of the dynamics of social change understood as 'reflexive modernisation'. The earlier period of modernisation (first modernity) created a welfare state and a set of institutions (e.g. education) which allowed people in the second modernity to become more independent and able, for example, to earn their own living. Young women are, as a result, now dis-embedded from communities where gender roles were fixed. And, as the old structures of social class fade away, and lose their grip in the context of late or second modernity, individuals are increasingly called upon to invent their own structures. They must do this internally and individualistically, so that self-monitoring practices (the diary, the life-plan, the career pathway) replace reliance on set ways and structured pathways. Self-help guides, personal advisors, lifestyle coaches and gurus and all sorts of self-improvement TV programmes provide the cultural means by which individualisation operates as a social process. As the overwhelming force of structure fades, so also, it is claimed, does the capacity for agency increase.⁷

Individuals must now choose the kind of life they want to live. Girls must have a life-plan. They must become more reflexive in regard to every aspect of their lives, from making the right choice in marriage, to taking responsibility for their own working lives and not being dependent on a job for life or on the stable and reliable operations of a large scale bureaucracy, which in the past would have allocated its employees specific, and possibly unchanging, roles. Beck and Giddens each place a different inflection in their accounts of reflexive modernisation, but overall these arguments appear to fit directly with the kinds of scenarios and dilemmas facing the young women characters in the narratives of contemporary popular culture. There is an evasion in this writing of social and sexual divides, and of the continuing prejudice and discrimination experienced by black and Asian women. Beck and Giddens are quite inattentive to the regulative dimensions of the popular discourses of personal choice and self improvement. Choice is surely, within lifestyle culture, a modality of constraint. The individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices. By these means new lines and demarcations are drawn between those subjects who are judged responsive to the regime of personal responsibility, and those who fail miserably. Neither Giddens nor Beck mount a substantial critique of these power relations which work so effectively at the level of embodiment. They have no grasp that these are productive of new realms of injury and injustice.

The film *Bridget Jones's Diary* (a world-wide success) draws together many of these sociological themes. In her early 30s, living and working in London, Bridget is a free agent, single and childless and able to enjoy herself in pubs, bars and restaurants. She is the product of modernity in that she has benefited from those institutions (education) which have loosened the ties of tradition and community for women, making it possible for them to be dis-embedded and to re-locate to the city to earn an independent living without shame or danger. However this also gives rise to new anxieties. There is the fear of loneliness, the stigma of remaining single and the risks and uncertainties of not finding the right partner to be a father to children. In the film, the opening sequence shows Bridget in her pyjamas worrying about being alone and on the shelf. The soundtrack is *All By Myself* by Jamie McNeal and the audience laughs along with her in this moment self-doubt. We immediately know that what she is thinking is 'what will it be like if I never find the right man, if I never get married?' Bridget portrays the whole spectrum of attributes associated with the self-monitoring subject, she confides in her friends, she keeps a diary, she endlessly reflects on her fluctuating weight, noting her calorie intake, she plans, plots and has projects. She is also deeply uncertain as to what the future holds for her. Despite the choices she has, there are also any number of risks of which she is regularly reminded. The risk that she might let the right man slip from under her nose, so she must always be on the lookout, prioritising this over success in the workplace. The risk that not catching a man at the right time might mean she misses the chance of having children (her biological clock is ticking). There is also the risk that, without a partner she will be isolated, marginalised from the world of happy couples.

With the burden of self-management so apparent, Bridget fantasises about very traditional forms of happiness and fulfilment. Flirting with her boss during office hours, Bridget imagines herself in a white wedding dress surrounded by bridesmaids, and the audience laughs loudly because they, like Bridget, know that this is not how young women these days are meant to think. Feminism has intervened to constrain these kinds of conventional desires. But it is surely a relief to escape this censorious politics and freely enjoy that which has been disapproved of, and this is what the film not only allows but absolutely encourages and enjoys. Feminism was anti-marriage and this can now to be shown to be a great mistake. Feminism is invoked, in order to be relegated to the past. But this is not simply a return to the past, there are, of course, quite dramatic differences between the various female characters of current popular culture from *Bridget Jones* to the girls in *Sex and the City* and to *Ally McBeal*, and those found in girls' and women's magazines from a pre-feminist era.

These new young women are confident enough to declare their anxieties about possible failure in regard to finding a husband, they avoid any aggressive or overtly traditional men, and they brazenly enjoy their sexuality, without fear of the sexual double standard. In addition they are more than capable of earning their own living, and the degree of suffering or shame they anticipate in the absence of finding a husband is countered by sexual self-confidence.

With such light entertainment as this, suffused with irony and dedicated to re-inventing highly successful women's genres of film and TV, an argument about feminism being so repudiated might seem heavy handed. Indeed *Bridget Jones's Diary* is exemplary as a women's genre film, re-invented to bring back romance in a specifically post-feminist context. Neither it, nor *Ally McBeal* nor *Sex and the City* are rabid anti-feminist tracts, instead they have taken feminism into account and implicitly or explicitly ask the question, 'what now?' There is a strong sense in all three that young women somehow want to reclaim their femininity, without stating exactly why it has been taken away from them. These young women want to be girlish and enjoy all sorts of traditional feminine pleasures without apology, although again, quite why they might feel they have to apologise is left hanging in the air. But it seems we the audience, like they the characters, are meant to know the answer to this question because it is so obvious. Feminism, it seems, robbed women of their most treasured pleasures, i.e. romance, gossip and obsessive concerns about how to catch a husband, indeed as I write this I am reminded of being right back there in the land of *Jackie* magazine, where I myself implicitly scolded readers for falling into these traps, especially the fantasies of romance and marriage (McRobbie 1977/2000b). It is as though this is the vengeance of the younger generation who had to put up with being chided by feminist teachers and academics at university for wanting the wrong things. (This well-educated female demographic is factored into the *Bridget Jones's Diary* narrative, littered as it is with references to Germaine Greer, Jane Austen, Salman Rushdie, post-modernism and literary theory.) The post-feminist moment of *Bridget Jones's Diary* also coincides with the new popularity once again, massively promoted by consumer culture, of weddings, including gay and lesbian weddings and all the paraphernalia that goes with them. The cultural references and the humour in this particular 'rom-com' are up-to-the moment. Girls now get so drunk they tumble out of taxis, they have sex when they feel like it, without always being prepared with the best underwear and so on. But, as we know, relations of power are indeed made and re-made within texts of enjoyment and rituals of relaxation and abandonment. These young women's genres are vital to the construction of a new gender regime, based on the double entanglement which I have described. They endorse wholeheartedly what Rose calls 'this ethic of freedom', and young women have come to the fore as the pre-eminent subjects of this new ethic. These

popular texts normalise post-feminist gender anxieties so as to re-regulate young women by means of the language of personal choice. Despite all of this planning and diary keeping even 'well regulated liberty' can backfire (the source of comic effect), and this in turn gives rise to demarcated pathologies (leaving it to late to have a baby, failing to find a good catch, etc.) which carefully define the parameters of what constitutes livable lives for young women without the occasion of re-invented feminism.

BrIDGET JONES'S DIARY celebrates the return of romance in a soft rather than hard post-feminist framing. Bridget is endearingly plump and reminiscent of any number of literary predecessors, but most obviously Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennett. She is self-mocking, self-disparaging, and her witty observations of the social life around her create a warmth and an audience who is almost immediately on her side, as she negotiates the codes of contemporary sexual relationships. Although she constantly defines herself as a failure, and even plays dumb, messing up the chances that come her way to shine at work, and saying the wrong thing in public places, she is also aware of every wrong step she takes, scolding herself along the way. Much of the comic effect evolves around her daily attempts to become the sort of woman who she thinks will be the kind of woman men want to marry, hence the crucial romantic moment in the film is when Mark Darcy says he likes her just the way she is. There is of course poignancy here, since who does not want to be liked for just who one is, whoever that may be? *BrIDGET JONES'S DIARY* speaks then to female desire, and in a wholly commercialised way, to the desire for some kind of gender justice, or fairness, in the world of sex and relationships. Here too the ghost of feminism is hovering, Bridget deserves to get what she wants. The audience is wholly on her side. She ought to be able to find the right man, for the reason that she has negotiated that tricky path which requires being independent, earning her own living, standing up for herself against demeaning comments, remaining funny and good humoured throughout, without being angry or too critical of men, without foregoing her femininity, her desires for love and motherhood, her sense of humour and her appealing vulnerability.

Notes

- 1 *BrIDGET JONES'S DIARY* appeared first as a newspaper column in the UK newspaper *the Independent* in 1996, its author Helen Fielding then published the diaries as a book, and the film, *BrIDGET JONES'S DIARY* directed by Sharon McGuire, opened in 2001. The sequel *BrIDGET JONES: THE EDGE OF REASON* directed by Beehron Kidron opened in November 2004.
- 2 There are several moments in the film where 'feminist issues', i.e. workplace harassment, sex discrimination and equal pay, are invoked only to be swiftly abandoned as Bridget self-consciously sleeps with the boss, and then later takes a job which requires her to be obviously sexy.

3 The newspaper the *Daily Mail* has the highest volume of female readers in the UK. Its post-feminist stance is unambiguous, it frequently commissions recanting feminist journalists and writers to blame feminism for women's contemporary complaints, e.g. the famous novelist Fay Weldon wrote a piece called 'I Look What We Have Done' (23 November 2003: 12–13) arguing that all feminists created was 'a new generation of women for whom sex is utterly joyless and hollow.' See also the following chapter.