INTERROGATING **POSTFEMINISM**

Console-ing Passions

Television and Cultural Power

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Introduction

FEMINIST POLITICS AND POSTFEMINIST CULTURE

Postfeminism broadly encompasses a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the "pastness" of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned, or celebrated. Crucially for us, postfeminism suggests a more complex relationship between culture, politics, and feminism than the more familiar framing concept of "backlash" allows. Feminist activism has long met with strategies of resistance, negotiation, and containment, processes that a model of backlash—with its implication of achievements won and then subsequently lost—cannot effectively incorporate within the linear chronology of social change on which it seems to be premised. What appears distinctive about contemporary postfeminist culture is precisely the extent to which a selectively defined feminism has been so overtly "taken into account," as Angela McRobbie has noted, albeit in order "to emphasize that it is no longer needed."[1]

The limits of the kind of gender equality enacted within contemporary popular media culture are profound: they are marked by the valorization of female achievement within traditionally male working environments and the celebration of surgical and other disciplinary techniques that "enable" (i.e.,

require) women to maintain a youthful appearance and attitude in later life.[2] As the essays in this collection demonstrate, such a limited vision of gender equality as both achieved and yet still unsatisfactory underlines the class, age, and racial exclusions that define postfeminism and its characteristic assumption that the themes, pleasures, values, and lifestyles with which it is associated are somehow universally shared and, perhaps more significant, universally accessible. If, as bell hooks writes, "feminism is for everybody," postfeminism is in many ways antithetical to the notion of an open society in which all members are valued in accordance with their distinct identities.[3] Postfeminist culture's centralization of an affluent elite certainly entails an emphatic individualism, but this formulation tends to confuse self-interest with individuality and elevates consumption as a strategy for healing those dissatisfactions that might alternatively be understood in terms of social ills and discontents. Indeed, as hooks and others note, the limited inclusion of certain women within privileged educational, professional, and other work contexts results as much from the demands of a consumer-led capitalism (for both new forms of labor and new forms of consumption) as from a thoroughgoing response to the demands of feminist activism.[4]

Postfeminist culture works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer. Thus, postfeminist culture emphasizes educational and professional opportunities for women and girls; freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting; and physical and particularly sexual empowerment. Assuming full economic freedom for women, postfeminist culture also (even insistently) enacts the possibility that women might *choose* to retreat from the public world of work. Postfeminist fictions frequently set aside both evident economic disparities and the fact that the majority of women approach paid labor as an economic necessity rather than a "choice." As this suggests, postfeminism is white and middle class by default, anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self. It is thus also a strategy by which other kinds of social difference are glossed over. The limits of this construction and the challenges it poses for feminist scholarship are questions we return to below.

Postfeminism does not always offer a logically coherent account of gender and power, but through structures of forceful articulation and synergistic reiteration across media forms it has emerged as a dominating discursive

system. It generates and draws strength, for instance, from a rhetorical field that produces buzzwords and slogans to express visions of energetic personal empowerment (the borrowed African American idiom "You go, girl!" the phrase "girl power," etc.). Meanwhile postfeminism draws on and sustains an invented social memory of feminist language as inevitably shrill, bellicose, and parsimonious. Thus, while feminism is constituted as an unwelcome, implicitly censorious presence, it is precisely *feminist* concerns that are silenced within postfeminist culture. Reference to "the F word" underscores the status of feminism as unspeakable within contemporary popular culture.[5]

The demand for content to fulfill diverse delivery systems continues to drive contemporary popular media, drawing in the process, as McRobbie suggests, on the talents of young women (and men) conversant with feminist critiques of representation. Recent books such as those by Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (2004) and Ariel Levy (2005) exemplify the emergence of popularized feminist scholarship. While Levy, a journalist, explores the formulaic female sexualities of a culture in which (most often young) women enthusiastically perform patriarchal stereotypes of sexual servility in the name of empowerment, Akass and McCabe, who are both academics, have produced an anthology that mixes fan-style appreciations of *Sex and the City* with feminist critique. Publications of this kind mark a new space of convergence between journalism, popular fiction, and academic analysis.[6] Despite the emergence of accessible accounts such as these, postfeminism nevertheless works to invalidate systemic critique. As McRobbie writes in her influential essay, reprinted here, "The new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique, to count as a modern sophisticated girl, or indeed this withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom."[7]

In line with this peculiarly silent visibility, postfeminism also perpetuates woman as pinup, the enduring linchpin of commercial beauty culture. In fact, it has offered new rationales for guilt-free consumerism, substantially reenergizing beauty culture (primarily for women but sometimes also for men through new archetypes such as the seemingly ubiquitous "metrosexual") and presiding over an aggressive mainstreaming of elaborate and expensive beauty treatments to the middle class. Nicely evocative of the positive embrace of consumer-led beauty culture and the new freedom to disassociate from the "burdens" of feminism is B. Ruby Rich's anecdote about body hair: "Passing by a shop that did waxing one day with my then-girlfriend,

we whimsically decided to go in and put an end, for no apparent reason, to a decade of ideological attachment."[8] Here is feminism "taken into account" in a somewhat different, though related, fashion to that identified by McRobbie; for Rich, this anecdote points to the complex intersection of feminist politics, appearance, and consumption and to the ways in which living with feminism and living as a feminist have changed over the last few decades.

If postfeminist popular culture celebrates female agency and women's powers of consumption, it also anxiously raises the possible consequences of female independence, crudely: emotional isolation for women (a preoccupation that neatly sidesteps questions of women's economic instability); and loss of power for men (again, a formulation premised on the somewhat tenuous assumption that all men previously occupied equally elevated positions of social and economic power). For us, postfeminism signals more than a simple evolutionary process whereby aspects of feminism have been incorporated into popular culture—and thereby naturalized as popular feminism. It also simultaneously involves an "othering" of feminism (even as women are more centralized), its construction as extreme, difficult, and unpleasurable. Kathleen Karlyn has shrewdly observed that one of the biggest challenges for feminism in the academy involves coming to grips with generational impasses at a time when "feminism itself seems most evident as a 'structuring absence' for middle class young women."[9] As teachers and researchers committed to producing feminist work in an antifeminist context (whether that of academic institutions, themselves increasingly led by a student-consumer model, or the wider political culture), we find postfeminist culture to be provocative in all the senses of that term: it is troubling and yet at the same time compelling.

It also seems important that we assert the material consequences of postfeminism in the academy. While McRobbie suggests that feminist work is now canonized within university curricula, we are more cautious in our optimism.[10] Indeed, we suggest that the very dynamics that McRobbie identifies in relation to popular culture, whereby feminism is knowable and can thus be set aside, have consequences within the academy too. In this context we might frame the 2005 scandal related to then Harvard University president Larry Summers's comments about female academics' facility for science.[11] The all too familiar misogyny of elite academic institutions can be contextualized by the gender inequities of the largest corporation in the United States, Wal-Mart; gendered inequities of pay, benefits, and basic respect for

female employees have been played out in the ongoing class action suit *Dukes v. Wal-Mart*. At the same time, the low-cost superstore draws on the rhetoric of family values in its advertisements, presenting consumption as an option for women with low incomes, not just the affluent woman we have identified as the most visible emblem of postfeminist culture. With Wal-Mart and other low-cost chains, we see the triangulation of invisible (and often offshore) female workers, highly visible female consumers, and female celebrities for whom such chains offer opportunities for ancillary profit via clothing lines, housewares, and other product streams. As Liza Featherstone writes in *The Nation*: "Through shoppers and 'associates' [i.e., employees] alike, Wal-Mart is making billions from female poverty."[12] Such dynamics, which extend gender inequities (often in the guise of opportunity and freedom), underline the necessity of a feminist critique that is cognizant of the economic context in which contemporary working lives and popular culture are experienced.

The distinction between feminist *politics* and a postfeminist *culture* that is broadly taken for granted serves as one starting point for this anthology, providing the title for this introduction. It should go without saying that feminism as a political force has certainly been expressed culturally and that there is clearly a politics at stake in postfeminism. Indeed, as we have suggested, postfeminist discourses rarely express the explicit view that feminist politics should be rejected; rather it is by virtue of feminism's success that it is seen to have been superseded. In this context, we argue that the transition to a postfeminist culture involves an evident erasure of feminist politics from the popular, even as aspects of feminism seem to be incorporated within that culture (and how feminism itself is understood within such formulations is not, of course, insignificant). As a result, postfeminist culture poses particular challenges to feminist media studies, a discipline often characterized by an interest in reading popular culture against the grain, seeking out those traces of feminism that might be available to female viewers and readers. This work is rendered more complex when we consider that contemporary popular culture is produced, in part at least, in response to feminism. That is, feminism forms an important part of contemporary culture, as Anna Feigenbaum shows here with respect to independent and industry-produced popular music. As such, it is no surprise to find evidence of feminism's presence within popular culture. To some extent, postfeminist culture throws into crisis our clear sense of what feminist media studies does when feminism is acknowledged and

academic approaches are mainstreamed. Our task, then, is to break through both the token approaches to feminism and the anti-intellectualism adopted by popular culture. We believe that postfeminism has become so installed as an epistemological framework that in many ways our culture has stopped asking the kinds of questions that it appears to "settle." This book attempts to (re)open those questions.

Postfeminism and the Ambivalence of "Post"-ing

Our contention is that postfeminism as a concept and a cultural phenomenon repays close interrogation; in the process, we wish to situate it alongside other "posts," including postmodernism and post-civil-rights discourse. All three posts involve an implicit understanding of history and historical change. Yet, as Bill Readings and Bennet Schaber suggest with respect to postmodernism, the posting of feminism means that feminism itself remains in the frame. They write: "We all have heard the word postmodernism. It is in the news. And yet it cannot be just the news, what is new, what is modern. It must be in some sense after the new, post, and yet must at the same time not yet have arrived, must have got caught in the post."[13] Readings and Schaber are specifically concerned with avoiding a modernist construction of history in which postmodernism emerges as simply "the most recent modernism"; for us the question of chronology, and of change, is pressing in a somewhat different manner since postfeminist culture speaks both to and against the very feminism within which we situate our scholarship.

Within this anthology, both Lisa Coulthard and Martin Roberts note a relationship between postfeminism and postmodernism, although they do not treat this relationship as the central theme of their essays. The preemptive irony that McRobbie pinpoints as a defining characteristic of postfeminist culture evidently chimes with the parodic play associated with postmodern aesthetics.[14] Like postmodernism, postfeminism involves a particular relationship to late capitalist culture and the forms of work, leisure, and, crucially, consumption that thrive within that culture. Indeed, much postfeminist rhetoric is of a piece with the exhortations of the 1990s "New Economy" and the displacement of democratic imperatives by free market ones identified by Thomas Frank as "market populism." As Frank observes, in this period the concept of the market itself was invoked as proof of social egalitarianism and opportunity: "Markets were serving all tastes; they were humiliating the pre-

tentious; they were permitting good art to triumph over bad; they were extinguishing discrimination; they were making everyone rich."[15] This "market populism that identif[ies] the will of the people with the deeds of the market" both supports and is supported by the individualist, acquisitive, and transformative values of postfeminism.

Postfeminism is also highly compatible with the hyperaestheticization of everyday life that Virginia Postrel sees as characteristic of early-twenty-first century culture. According to Postrel, "Today's aesthetic imperative represents not the return of a single standard of beauty, but the increased claims of pleasure and self-expression."[16] Such "aesthetic pluralism," as she calls it, "represents a major ideological shift," and it is important to consider postfeminism's taxonomizing functions in such demographically catalogued cultures.[17] With its frequent emphasis on luxury lifestyling and retail pleasures, postfeminism is thoroughly integrated with the economic discourses of aspirational, niche-market Western societies. The broad imposition of a politics of lifestyle, as Imelda Whelehan has noted, "leaves many victims in its wake—those who don't conform to its preferred images and those who are too poor to exercise 'control' over their lives through the 'liberation' of consumerism."[18] Postfeminism dovetails closely with a heightened social and economic emphasis on showplace domesticity, virtuoso parenting, and technologies mobilized in the name of family cohesion. It may very well be one of the ideological connectors between a contemporary sense of unfettered material entitlement and a moral discourse of virtuous familialism.

Post-civil-rights discourse similarly provides an important context for the anthology as it seeks to draw out the racialized marking of postfeminist culture. Kimberly Springer's essay explores the articulation of black women, in terms both new and familiar, within postfeminist media culture. Such analysis of gendered and racial types is staged within a developing media context, one in which, as Herman Gray writes, commodified "representations of American blackness circulate widely via mass media and popular culture, achieving in the process some measure of global visibility, influence, admiration, imitation, or scorn."[19] One of postfeminism's signature discursive formulations couches the celebration of female achievement (whether on the playing field, in the concert arena, or in the boardroom) within traditionalist ideological rubrics. For instance as Tara McPherson has observed in the context of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), the promo-

tion of black female stars as role models depends on a linkage between their physical prowess and their safe embodiment of acceptable images of blackness and femininity (images that, as McPherson shows, often highlight a contrast between the propriety of the "black lady" and a demonized "black street culture").[20] The commodification of ethnicity and a racially marked "urban" culture is also explored in this volume by Sarah Banet-Weiser in her analysis of girls, diversity, and the commercial strategies adopted by Nickelodeon, the children's cable television channel. Once again difference is commodified rather than politicized within mainstream culture; such cultural processes are predicated on an implicit chronology that firmly "posts" activisms centered on the consequences of racial inequities. Such political and cultural work is produced in this chronology as a phenomenon of the past whose traces shape the present.

While it has been argued that aspects of postfeminism appeared in popular media as far back as the early 1980s, it was during the 1990s that the term became concretized, both as a discursive phenomenon and as a buzzword of U.S. and U.K. journalism. Since the 1990s, popular culture in those countries has also been characterized by a dramatically heightened address to women consumers. The construction of women as both subjects and consumers, or perhaps as subjects only to the extent that we are able and willing to consume, is one of the contradictions at the core of postfeminist culture. Postfeminism is, we contend, inherently contradictory, characterized by a double discourse that works to construct feminism as a phenomenon of the past, traces of which can be found (and sometimes even valued) in the present; postfeminism suggests that it is the very success of feminism that produces its irrelevance for contemporary culture. In fact, the question is more complex than this since, as Sarah Projansky makes clear, postfeminist discourse deploys a variety of positions with respect to feminism, at times celebratory and at times laying blame for contemporary anxieties at the door of a past politics now felt to be misconceived.[21] What the many discursive postfeminisms identified by Projansky share is their relationship to the pastness of feminism, a feature commented on earlier; herein lies a suggestion that social change with respect to gender norms has been experienced, concretized even, through the passage of time.

Indeed, one of postfeminism's key functions is to negotiate the failure of contemporary institutions and the prospect of social death. Postfeminism fre-

13 Going on 30 **structures an operative contrast between Jenna's (Jennifer Garner) girlish enthusiasm and her rival's calculation.**

quently imagines femininity as a state of vitality in opposition to the symbolically deathly social and economic fields of contemporary Western cultures, and the highest-profile forms of postfeminist femininity are empowered to recharge a culture defined by exhaustion, uncertainty, and moral ambiguity. Thus, the postfeminist heroine is vital, youthful, and playful while her opposite number, the "bad" female professional, is repressive, deceptive, and deadly. In the romantic comedy *13 Going on 30* (2004), the distinctions drawn between Jenna and Lucy, who have known each other since childhood and are now editors at the same women's magazine, starkly illustrate this dynamic. When the magazine is challenged to reconceptualize itself (to undergo, in effect, a makeover), Jenna's youthful enthusiasm takes center stage. Making her presentation of a high school graduation concept for the magazine while wearing a bright pink ensemble and holding a pink balloon, she declares that she "wants to put life back into the magazine," underscoring the importance of remembering "what's good." By contrast, while her colleagues shudder and cringe, the manipulative and scheming Lucy envisions a "deadly serious" redesign concept she deems "fashion suicide," featuring gaunt, unhappy-looking women in dark clothing. Jenna's proposal narratively inverts but ideologically extends the film's broader focus on the retention of youth. Her concept showcases the ritual of high school graduation, symbolically de-aging the magazine's female subjects and reinforcing the film's plot, for Jenna

has, in fact, magically time traveled to the physical age of thirty though her psychology remains that of an adolescent. Near the close of the film, she will gratefully return to adolescence after having endured romantic, creative, and professional disappointment as an adult woman.

As this example suggests, many postfeminist texts combine a deep uncertainty about existing options for women with an idealized, essentialized femininity that symbolically evades or transcends institutional and social problem spots. In concert with this, as many of the essays in the volume show, postfeminism evidences a distinct preoccupation with the temporal. Women's lives are regularly conceived of as time starved; women themselves are overworked, rushed, harassed, subject to their "biological clocks," and so on to such a degree that female adulthood is defined as a state of chronic temporal crisis. *13 Going on 30* is only one of a number of media texts that specialize in time-shifting fantasies that conflate youthfulness and the past. In this context of beset contemporary femininity, it is perhaps unsurprising that so many of the contributors to this anthology draw examples from the broad categories of lifestyle programming and reality television, with several essays focusing on the significance of the makeover as a recurrent trope of postfeminist media.[22] With its particular capacity to articulate the ordinary, reality TV provides a rich nexus of the desire for transformation, the yearning to achieve perfection in one's physical self and/or domestic environment, and the need to avoid at all costs a politicized understanding of these dynamics.[23]

Moreover, the makeover, whether of body or lived environment, enacts, as Sadie Wearing demonstrates in this volume, a particular form of temporality in which youth is fetishized and change accelerated or even presented as instantaneous. This accelerated temporality is characteristic of postmodern culture more broadly, as is the presentation of consumption itself as both therapeutic and transformative. Like daytime talk shows, makeovers trade in the vulnerability and resilience of their participants, functioning as simultaneously exploitative, sentimental, and compelling. Thus, the makeover mobilizes familiar tropes. As Brenda R. Weber writes of ABC's *Extreme Makeover*, "The story it tells—one of suffering and transformation, of desperation and joy—is as old as narrative itself."[24] But it does so in a contemporary context that aligns female consumption with freedom in a fashion that is (perversely perhaps) informed by feminism, even as that feminism is firmly "posted." Similarly, as Kimberly Springer notes in this volume, while reality TV is more

than willing to make use of the "angry black woman" as a type, the question of why she might be angry remains unspoken. And, as Paul Gilroy writes with respect to the domestic makeover so central to British television schedules, "By exploring the process of changing private space and refining the ability to act there, these shows offer an implicit justification of the refusal to act elsewhere." In articulating rapid transformations, the makeover format works to suggest that "taste and lifestyle preference are much more important elements of identity than ethnicity, class, or regional ties could ever be."[25]

Postfeminism in all its guises posits the contemporary as surpassing feminism, leaving it behind. In doing so, it implicitly draws strength from the anxiety of aging at work in so many of its texts. Postfeminist representational culture is, of course, acutely age conscious; a variety of "chick" fictions from *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1998) to *Sex and the City* (1998–2004) and *13 Going on 30* have shown themselves to be exceedingly precise about the ages of their female protagonists. Meanwhile, the cult of youth is being technologically facilitated on a variety of fronts; myriad forms of reality TV, for example, dedicate themselves to staging rejuvenating transformations and the fantasy that aging can be managed away. The ambivalence about aging that strongly characterizes such fictions is also extended to feminism itself. As postfeminism has raised the premium on youthfulness, it has installed an image of feminism as "old" (and by extension moribund).

Interrogating Postfeminism speaks to an emerging body of work that names and analyzes postfeminism but remains unsure about its material, limits, and theoretical territory. The essays here engage with postfeminism as a concept and a political and cultural phenomenon, as well as offering specific analyses exploring postfeminism through a range of media and cultural practices. It is our contention that part of the significance of postfeminist culture lies in its pervasive presence not just in film, television, and popular literature but in advertising, magazines, music, and political discourse. We recognize that a comprehensive analysis of current postfeminist culture is beyond the scope of one volume. It would entail, for instance, an examination of a range of social behaviors and trends, including (among others) the explosive growth of the bridal industry, the emergence of "chick lit" as a staple form on best-seller lists,[26] the heightened importance of the day spa and the nail salon within service economies, the changing cultural status of cosmetic surgery, the dissolving line between sex worker and service worker when it comes to women in

the workplace, and the aggressive mainstreaming of pornography. Our goal is not to produce a sociology of postfeminism but to analyze as many of these media and cultural contexts—and the intersections between them—as possible.[27]

Throughout, the anthology is shaped in and by an awareness of the potential reach of postfeminism as a concept. We are also guided by a sense of the continuing importance of a strongly articulated feminist critique of popular culture and a reluctance to recertify the postfeminist canon simultaneously produced by journalism and (increasingly) academia, even as the essays presented here inevitably engage with that canon. The necessity of feminist critique, at a time when women face significant challenges to their economic well-being, hard-won reproductive rights, and even authority to speak, while popular culture blithely assumes that gender equality is a given, seems to us self-evident. Postfeminist assumptions concerning gender—which, as we have seen, broadly revolve around the cultural and economic freedom of Western women—are promulgated in a context in which women's actual social health is extremely problematic. If liberation is linked to consumption and aspiration, what of the pressing economic and social issues that have to do with the long-term poverty that results from women's lower pay, limited job opportunities, and child-care responsibilities?[28] We believe that postfeminism participates in the ideological and economic normalization of new patterns of exclusion and demographic propriety in the United States and the United Kingdom. Moreover, globalization is producing complicated new networks of exchange and reliance among women. Phenomena such as the "feminization of migration" present a vital opportunity to treat issues of class, nationality, and ethnicity.[29] In her work on fantasies of "downshifting" to idealized domesticity, Joanne Hollows indicates the importance of these issues in the British context.[30] Writing on retreatism within American popular culture, Diane Negra notes that similar fantasy work is undertaken by a set of romantic comedies and television dramas that centralize the protagonist's "unlearning" of feminism and her decision to leave an urban professional environment and/or return to an idealized hometown.[31] In this anthology, Suzanne Leonard explores the ramifications of class on gendered representation in the United States, taking up the figure of the "bored woman worker" in such films as *The Good Girl* (2002).

In the increasingly privatized context of the United States and the United

Kingdom, access to education, health care, and a living income during retirement are all linked to full-time employment. And, while few conservatives would openly argue that women should be denied the vote, many women may nonetheless feel disenfranchised by political discourse.[32] In this context, we argue that postfeminism increasingly operates as a rationale for the brutalities of the emergent "New Economies" of both the United States and the United Kingdom. Marita Sturken and other critics have observed how a post-9/11 climate has shifted the American image repertoire to emphasize "traditional working-class masculinity and wives holding down the home front."[33] In the new climate of fear and vulnerability that is ushering in a rollback of civil rights, both the state and exalted popular culture franchises offer fantasies of patriarchal protection. As Kathleen Karlyn has observed, neither "the one" of the *Matrix* cycle (1999, 2003) nor "the king" of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003) are presented with a trace of irony despite their overblown imagery of white male authority. Instead this is the terrain of a pervasive new humanism that "evades its own politics."[34] These blockbuster franchises are postfeminist in the most conservative sense. Of course, feminist activism continues in important areas of contemporary social policy that have to do with self-determination in relation to reproduction and women's physical health, just as feminist issues, including sexual and domestic violence, remain urgent sites of gender politics. Yet in arguing that barriers to equality are as much cultural as legislative we seek here to address the distinct issues posed by a postfeminist culture in which women are assumed to have achieved equality.

Postfeminist Predilections, Postfeminist Blind Spots

One of the goals of this anthology is to extend an intellectual "conversation" within Anglo-American feminist scholarship. Postfeminism is a pervasive phenomenon of both British and American popular culture, often marked by a high degree of discursive harmony evidenced in such "transit" texts as *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Sex and the City*, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, *Bergdorf Blondes*, and (as Martin Roberts analyzes in this volume) *What Not to Wear*. Indeed, many of the most prominent texts in female-centered genres (including the *Bridget Jones* print and film franchise, *Ally McBeal* [1997–2003], and the aforementioned *Sex and the City*) have been decidedly transatlantic, either originating in the United States and becoming hits in the United Kingdom or the re-

verse. The regularity of cross-cultural traffic of this sort is such that it suggests an interesting slant on the vaunted Anglo-American "special relationship" trumpeted by political conservatives in recent years.[35] While the emergence of a postfeminist canon (one alluded to in the examples cited above) has become increasingly evident, it is nonetheless the case that postfeminism means different things in these national and cultural contexts.[36] One of the goals of the collection is to explore the intersections between British and American configurations of popular feminism as postfeminism. In this way, we hope to address questions of cultural dissonance when an American "we" is presumed to be general—in other words, the inward-looking features of American cultural criticism (but also the assumption that the United States is itself a unified and undifferentiated cultural space). The international exportation of American popular culture requires broader understandings, and the temptation to generalize is not coincidental, as we will see. Yet there are national specificities to postfeminism, addressed here through the essays by Martin Roberts and Hannah Sanders in particular.

The essays presented here draw examples from a range of media—television, film, music, and print journalism—locating these texts within different critical and cultural contexts. We have been guided by what we regard as the necessity of looking beyond journalistic canons of postfeminist culture (which are reliant on high-profile television series such as *Sex and the City* or *Desperate Housewives* [2004–], for instance). There are at least two dimensions to this expanded perspective. On one hand, there is an awareness that postfeminism represents a cultural turn impacting a diversity of media products, including those targeted at male consumers, as Steven Cohan's analysis of the 2003 American cable hit *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* makes clear. Some of the most male-identified genres are highly readable in postfeminist terms, and some of the essays in this volume undertake the work of beginning to theorize postfeminist masculinity. Indeed, the shift from women's studies to gender studies and the proliferation of academic (and journalistic) analyses of masculinity are a characteristic trend of the 1990s and 2000s.[37] In June 2004, the cover of a supplement to the London *Times* asked, with little trace of irony, "Are Men the New Women?" (a claim founded, it seems, on increased levels of body and fashion awareness and—of course—consumption among men). Whether in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, British dramas such as *Life Begins* (2004), British reality shows such as *Wife Swap* (Channel 4, 2002–; ABC, 2004),

or "specials" such as *Britain's Worst Husbands* (ITV, 2004), straight white men are presented as in need of change. Straight masculinity is thus rendered comic—albeit temporarily and under certain circumstances—and straight women can be included in the joke, even as they are discussed in traditional sexist evaluative terms as "hot" by the queer guys or painted as just plain foolish for choosing such unattractive or inattentive male partners. Meanwhile, as Douglas Battema and Philip Sewell have argued in a discussion of the trend toward "masculinist" television programming, late 1990s and early 2000s popular culture frequently deployed ironic humor to allow "regressive, recidivist masculinity to emerge unscathed from ongoing cultural struggles."[38]

A second reason to resist an emergent postfeminist canon is the potential complicity of that canon with postfeminism's limited race and class vision; in this context, it is crucially important to test how postfeminism's emerging narrative protocols and tropes are and are not ascribed to women of color and working-class women. In this volume, Sadie Wearing and Martin Roberts demonstrate the sharply drawn class parameters of the fashion makeovers enacted in the British shows *10 Years Younger* (2004–5) and *What Not to Wear* (2002), while Suzanne Leonard highlights the sense of aimlessness and inertia several recent films link to women's participation in the service economy. Tracking the presence and absence of race discourses in both postfeminist representation and the scholarship on postfeminism remains a vital task.[39] Once again the emerging postfeminist canon alluded to in popular commentaries, and which forms the examples discussed in much scholarly writing, is exclusionary. In this volume, Kimberly Springer draws attention to the specificity of the "black chick flick," for instance, a cycle of romantic comedies focusing on African American women (*Waiting to Exhale* [1995], *Down in the Delta* [1998], *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* [2005]) that adopt distinct strategies in comparison to those retreatist rom-coms that have thus far attracted critical attention within feminist media studies (*Kate and Leopold* [2001], *French Kiss* [1994], *Someone Like You* [2001]).[40] Both the critical exclusion of texts directed specifically at African American women and the ways in which these films might work to nuance feminist accounts of contemporary popular culture are relevant here.

To this extent, our aim is that this anthology will point to the significance of postfeminism for those working in a range of other areas, particularly in relation to questions of race, sexuality, class, and age. While these concerns *are* present in current thinking, this anthology insists on the potential of a

diverse feminist politics (one that addresses class and race as emphatically as it does gender and generation) in response to a postfeminist culture exemplified by the figure of the white, middle-class, heterosexual woman. In short, we wish to ask: is it possible to bring into being a postfeminist critical practice that expands feminism as much as it critiques it? Accordingly, some of the essays in this volume point to the ways in which the feminist project has stalled but then abundantly demonstrate the continuing productivity of feminist scholarship through energetic engagements with new texts. In this volume, Anna Feigenbaum shows the importance of female music performance to feminist media studies while Sadie Wearing opens up the complexities that questions of age and aging pose for feminist scholarship on popular media culture. Elsewhere Charlotte Brunsdon's analysis of the 8:00 to 9:00 pm slot and lifestyle programming on British television demonstrates the importance of recognizing the pleasures of being addressed by mainstream culture and the necessity of understanding these processes within the context of power.[41] Feminist critique fundamentally emphasizes the operations of power, whether economic, social, ideological, or representational. Postfeminist culture, with its enhanced but particularized female visibility, in no way invalidates this task.

Conceptualizing and Contending with Postfeminism

This volume responds to and significantly extends a range of existing publications in the field of media and gender studies. Since the primary aim is to map and interrogate postfeminism and its impact on, and relationship to, contemporary popular culture, the volume updates and widens the definitions and debates forged in landmark publications such as Tania Modleski's *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Post-feminist" Era* and Sarah Projansky's *Watching Rape: Film and Television in a Post-feminist Culture*.[42] Yet to date surprisingly few publications have explored the subject in detail, and postfeminism's increasing ubiquity and political and cultural ambiguity mean that a good deal more concerted scholarly work in the field needs to be undertaken. At present, much of this work exists in the form of articles rather than books, a good deal of it published in journals such as *Feminist Media Studies* and *Genders*.[43] As we have noted, postfeminism can be situated in relation to other aspects of consumer capitalist culture. Thus, perspectives on it are importantly shaped by scholarly work that is conceptually pertinent while not

necessarily centralizing postfeminism per se. In particular, we would draw attention to scholarship that seeks to theorize questions of culture and power such as Naomi Klein's *No Logo*, Paul Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Thomas Frank's *One Market under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy*, and Herman Gray's *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation*.[44] In this volume, the essays by Angela McRobbie, Martin Roberts, and Sadie Wearing underline the value of interdisciplinary research in making sense of the disciplinary forces through which bodies are produced as gendered, classed, and aged.

As an edited collection, *Interrogating Postfeminism* is able to provide a more pluralistic account of postfeminism than a single-authored volume would be able to do. Many of the contributors explore the relationship between feminism and postfeminism (in terms of both the historical and political dimensions of this relationship). Thus, the volume expands the field of publications that have sought to map a trajectory of feminism and postfeminism and offer feminist critiques of contemporary gender politics, for example, Imelda Whelehan's *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to "Post-feminism"* and *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism*, Joanne Hollows's *Feminism, Femininity, and Popular Culture*, and more popularized accounts such as Christina Hoff Sommers's *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women* and Natasha Walters's *The New Feminism*.

Besides engaging with broader feminist debates, the essays in this volume also discuss specific film, television, and popular music texts. As such, the volume engages with, and may be situated within, the rich body of feminist film and television studies publications that focus on popular culture and the politics of representation. In recent years, a number of significant books have provided a context for this volume: Yvonne Tasker's *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*; Sharon Willis's *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Films*; Jacinda Read's *The New Avengers: Feminism, Femininity, and the Rape-Revenge Cycle*; Bonnie J. Dow's *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Woman's Movement since 1970*; Charlotte Brunsdon's *The Feminist, the Housewife, and the Soap Opera*; and most recently Susan Douglas's and Meredith Michaels's *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*. Moreover, in this volume the essays by Sarah Banet-Weiser, Anna Feigenbaum, Sarah Projansky, and Hannah E. Sanders all discuss the figure of the "girl" and "girl power" in relation to postfemi-

nism, updating and reinflecting works such as Angela McRobbie's *Feminism and Youth Culture* and Valerie Walkerdine's *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture*, which have identified female youth culture as an important site for feminist scholarship. As evidenced by Anita Harris's recent edited volume *All about the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity* and Mary Celeste Kearney's *Girls Make Media*, scholarly interest in girls and culture continues to generate important interventions.

Within popular media culture itself, some of the highest-profile postfeminist franchises have centralized girls and girlhood, fusing empowerment rhetoric with traditionalist identity paradigms (in cinema, *The Princess Diaries*, *What a Girl Wants*, and *Mean Girls*; in television, *Ally McBeal* and *Joan of Arcadia*; in music, Britney Spears and Avril Lavigne). Moreover the "girling" of femininity itself is evident in both the celebration of the young woman as a marker of postfeminist liberation and the continuing tendency to either explicitly term or simply treat women of a variety of ages as girls. To some extent, girlhood is imagined within postfeminist culture as being for everyone; that is, girlhood offers a fantasy of transcendence and evasion, a respite from other areas of experience. The fantasy character of girlhood in so many postfeminist fictions is suggested by its recurrent association with magic, including the enchantments of consumption.[45] In analyzing such representations, we need to take care, as Sarah Projansky reminds us, to distinguish actual girls and their culture from the use of the term to refer to young women. Thus, her essay in this volume seeks to map the different ways in which the girl is used as a representational sign within print journalism. In part, this process involves an acknowledgment of the difficulty of portraying adult women within postfeminist culture, a problem that clearly relates to the construction of feminism as unspeakable noted by various scholars, including Angela McRobbie and Charlotte Brunsdon. Further, it is important to avoid, or at least analyze, the simultaneous denigration and appropriation of girls' culture.

To some extent, a focus on the girl results not only from the pervasive representations of girlhood and girlishness but from the extent to which generational metaphors are so central to postfeminism. Both helpful and limiting, the generational construction of girls and young women as enjoying the freedoms secured by the activism of their mothers and grandmothers is a repeated trope of postfeminist culture. As this suggests, one of the central issues with which we are dealing here is the relationship between postfemi-

nism (as a popular idiom) and third-wave feminism as a more scholarly category. Both share a dissatisfaction with the feminism they seek to supplant or supplement. They also inscribe a chronology characterized by elision, the former of the continuing vitality of feminist activism, the latter, as Kimberly Springer notes elsewhere, of the history of black feminist movements.[46] While the academy has admitted some forms of difference in a pro forma way, other forms of difference seem more excluded than ever. A familiar tension within academic feminism—its tendency to be defined in narrow social terms—is, as we have seen, solidified in postfeminist culture's imagining of women's success as particularized in class and race terms. By contrast, queerness, which can be constituted in terms of both whiteness and consumerism, has served a mediated function within postfeminist culture (and, we might add, feminist scholarship).[47] Stripped of its original confrontational political agenda, queerness can be effectively co-opted through a rhetoric of choice such that sexual identity is primarily expressed through consumption practices. In this way, popular media (particularly television) tend to construct queerness as a lifestyle choice associated with affluent urban modes of consumption. Class, however, which raises the perilous specter of immobility and a (relative) inability to consume, remains a problem area associated with ill-disciplined bodies.

It is clear that postfeminism is deployed and understood diversely within scholarly work; terms such as *new sexism* and *retrosexism* have been used to describe postfeminism, which in turn needs to be carefully differentiated from third-wave feminism (the latter a self-identification rather than a tag provided by popular media). Definitive conceptualizations of postfeminism are as elusive as references to postfeminism are pervasive. Thus, in part the contradictory aspects of postfeminist discourse relate to its resolutely popular character; that is, the term has been generated and primarily deployed outside the academy, lacking the rigor we expect of scholarly work. To this extent, the questions facing feminist scholars have less to do with the usefulness of postfeminism as a concept (its incoherence might be seen as a limiting factor in this context) than with the strategies we might adopt in relation to its pervasive insistence on the bleakness and redundancy of feminism. As we might expect of a popular mode, postfeminism also constructs feminism as other, as extreme. It is the supposed difficulty of feminism, its rigidity and propensity to take things "too far," that a middle of the road, middle-class postfeminism rejects.[48]

In this context, it is also appropriate to consider the figure of the active or action heroine, an emblematic and problematic icon of female empowerment within postfeminist culture. As much as feminist criticism has had an ambivalent relationship with the figure of the active heroine, she continues to fascinate, as evidenced in such recent publications as Linda Mizejewski's *Hardboiled and High Heeled: The Woman Detective in Popular Culture*, Cynthia Lucia's *Framing Female Lawyers: Women on Trial in Film*, and Linda Ruth Williams's *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema*. The ubiquity of the action heroine more specifically (Lara Croft, Buffy the Vampire Slayer) as a reference point in various publications provides evidence that academics, critics, and students want to discuss this figure, in some instances in an attempt to reconcile politics and pleasure, which are perceived as in some way contradictory.[49] It is important to point to the potential for female spectatorial pleasure in relation to popular culture, as scholars in feminist media studies have done, and to engage with actual audiences, as Hannah E. Sanders does in this volume in her exploration of British teens as an audience for the American series *Charmed*. All the same, as writers such as Christine Holmlund, Sarah Projansky, and others make clear, there is much more to feminist analysis than the celebration of pleasure or consumption, however transgressive we may feel it to be.[50] In this volume, Lisa Coulthard's discussion of violence, action, and feminism through Tarantino's high-profile *Kill Bill* movies addresses these concerns. For Coulthard, the proliferation of feminist writing in relation to the action heroine or kick-ass girl is problematic to the extent that it evades an exploration of the meaning of violence, the feature that is for her most striking about these film texts. We might also note the tendency to explore action heroines with little reference to questions of race and ethnicity.[51] Just as black chick flicks are typically sidelined in writing on romantic comedy and the contemporary woman's picture, so it is rarely the action films that centralize women of color that have preoccupied feminist commentaries on the genre.[52] To some extent, it is the circular logic of the "mainstream" that is at issue here; those examples most often cited in critical and journalistic writing are selected as significant on the basis of factors such as widespread commercial appeal, top box-office performances, and so on. While this is both understandable and productive, we (also) live in a culture defined by niche markets, a postnetwork era in which film and television studies can ill afford to restrict its focus to canonical, high-profile texts.

We recognize that this collection cannot do justice to the full range of rep-

resentational trends and forms associated with postfeminism, and the question of "postfeminist masculinities" lies largely outside of our purview. It is worth observing, however, that postfeminist representation typically celebrates women's strength while lightly critiquing or gently ridiculing straight masculinity. It makes regular use of gay male identities, as Steven Cohan's discussion of authoritative queerness in lifestyle television in this volume establishes. Indeed, some of the most quintessentially postfeminist genres, such as the wedding film, rely on out (yet nonconfrontational) gay men. As Elizabeth Freeman points out, for instance, "representations of 'straight' weddings often focus on a gay participant whose presence in the ceremony and exclusion from its results seem to guarantee heterosexual marriage."[53] Yet it is important to note that postfeminism absolutely rejects lesbianism in all but its most guy-friendly forms, that is, divested of potentially feminist associations and invested with sexualized glamour. The simultaneous indulgence in and critique of voyeurism in the Showtime television series *The L Word* is perhaps indicative; lesbian lives are simultaneously fetishized and celebrated, mediated through a curious heterosexual gaze that is marked as both male and female.

We are not in the business of simply celebrating icons of postfeminist culture: the self as a project; kick-ass, working-out women as expressions of agency; or freedom as the freedom to shop or have cosmetic surgery. Our responsibility as feminist critics is to approach the popular with a skeptical eye, questioning whether identity politics inevitably generates a politics of the self, culminating in the "self as project" so characteristic of postfeminism. Equally, however, we are not engaged in interrogating or understanding postfeminist culture simply as a forerunner to rejecting it. The images and icons of postfeminism *are* compelling; the women and girls who (literally) buy into this visual and narrational repertoire are not simply dupes. As an idiom, postfeminism popularizes (as much as it caricatures) a feminism it simultaneously evokes and rejects. Thus, many of the essays in this collection aim to explore the address postfeminist culture makes to female spectators while acknowledging its limitations.

Within the broad field of media studies, critical commentary continues to pose questions about the meaning of popular texts in either-or terms. Thus, texts from *Buffy* to Britney are either progressive or regressive, liberating or containing. Underpinning this anthology is a reservation as to how far such a model can take us. Can it ever, we ask, reflect the complexity and ambiva-

lence of popular culture or postfeminism? Postfeminist culture is evidently postmodern in character, its self-reflexivity mobilizing the terms of its own critique. Postfeminist culture does not allow us to make straightforward distinctions between progressive and regressive texts. Nevertheless, it urgently requires us to develop new reading strategies to counteract the popularized feminism, figurations of female agency, and canny neutralization of traditional feminist critiques in its texts.

Feminism challenges us to critique relations of power, to imagine the world as other than it is, to conceive of different patterns of work, life, and leisure. Postfeminist culture enacts fantasies of regeneration and transformation that also speak to a desire for change. Clearly, however, it is unhelpful to mistake one for the other. The challenges facing feminist media critics of an earlier era centered on the need to make women visible, to denaturalize the construction of women's culture as inherently trivial or banal. The contemporary challenges that postfeminist culture poses for feminist media studies are rather different. Postfeminism displaces older forms of trivialization, generating a sense of newness, yet it also refreshes long familiar themes of gendered representation, demonstrating the ongoing urgency of speaking feminist critique.

Notes

1. McRobbie, "Post-feminism and Popular Culture," 254. McRobbie's seminal essay is reprinted in this volume.
2. In the United Kingdom, supermodel Claudia Schiffer ends a current television advertisement for an antiaging product with the telling phrase, uttered straight to camera in a blandly reassuring tone, "Let surgery wait." Cosmetic surgery is here invoked, in a quite taken for granted manner, as compulsory rather than optional, although consumers can postpone the inevitable, perhaps suggesting the unpalatable aspects of such invasive procedures. For a discussion of the plastic surgery industry and contemporary body politics, see Blum, *Flesh Wounds*.
3. hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody*.
4. Ibid., 50.
5. Ironic references to feminism as "the F word" are a familiar feature of popular media culture in the United Kingdom.
6. Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*; McCabe and Akass, *Reading "Sex and the City."* In the British context, it is also relevant to note the visibility of feminist scholars as public intellectuals with commentators such as Germaine Greer disseminating their ideas through print journalism and other media forms in addition to traditional publication techniques.

7. McRobbie, "Post-feminism and Popular Culture," 260.
8. Rich, *Chick Flicks*, 24.
9. Karlyn, "*Scream*, Popular Culture, and Feminism's Third Wave."
10. McRobbie, "Notes on Postfeminism and Popular Culture," 5.
11. An article by James Wolcott in *Vanity Fair* goes so far as to predict a looming new "battle of the sexes" in light of persistent gender inequities. He reads the Summers scandal as the explosion of "a protracted build up of exasperation over the persistent under-representation of women in positions of prominence and authority, and the mulish inability of powerful men to recognize the scope of the problem, or their tendency to rationalize it with voodoo genetics and Victorian-parlor sociology" ("Caution," 67).
12. Featherstone, "Wal-Mart Values."
13. Readings and Schaber, "Introduction," 6.
14. McRobbie, "Post-feminism and Popular Culture," 259.
15. Frank, *One Market under God*, 68.
16. Postrel, *The Substance of Style*, 10.
17. Ibid., 11.
18. Whelehan, *Overloaded*.
19. Gray, *Cultural Moves*, 4.
20. McPherson, "Who's Got Next?"
21. Projansky, *Watching Rape*, 67.
22. This is also in line with the amount of scholarly work relating to reality TV. Two recent collections stand out in this regard: Oullette and Murray, *Reality TV*; and Holmes and Jermyn, *Understanding Reality Television*.
23. For analyses of another category of postfeminist Anglo-American transit text, the nanny series (in which British child-raising experts train American families to deal with their recalcitrant children), see Kim, "Elevating Servants, Elevating American Families"; and Ouellette, "Nanny TV."
24. Weber, "Beauty, Desire, and Anxiety."
25. Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 119. Although Gilroy refers to British shows such as *Changing Rooms* and *Ground Force*, the evacuation of the potential for social change is also dramatically (even excessively) foregrounded in the ABC series *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, which mobilizes commerce and communities in the service of consumption.
26. On the emergence of chick lit, see Ferriss and Young, *Chick Lit*.
27. We also recognize that trends toward media conglomeration within global capitalism are generating new ancillary markets through a synergistic heightening of the relationship between film and television texts and related forms of consumer behavior. For a case study of one such synergy, see Levine, "Fractured Fairy Tales and Fragmented Markets."
28. In 2002, American women with full-time, year-round employment earned 76 percent of male income. On gender and aging, see the special issue of *Feminist Economics* 11:2 (July 2005).

29. For a discussion of the complex interdependencies between first-world women employers and their third-world women employees see Ehrenreich and Hochschild, *Global Woman*.
30. Joanne Hollows's discussion of the downshifting narrative in recent British popular culture addresses the compartmentalization of domesticity in feminist scholarship and feminist lives and asks probing questions about the fantasy of reclaimed (often rural) domesticity that has proved so saleable in print fiction, reality television, and the celebrity personae of domestic sensualists such as Nigella Lawson. See Hollows's "Can I Go Home Yet?"
31. Negra, "Girls Who Go Home."
32. One sign of the political estrangement of American women is to be found in the fact that 22 of the 45 million single women in the United States in 2000 did not cast a vote in the 2000 presidential election. See Loth, "Women Who Vote, and Those That Don't." The particular terms within which women can achieve political success are evident with respect to Condoleezza Rice in Kimberly Springer's essay in this volume. In a somewhat earlier British context, several of the representational tropes identified by Springer with respect to Rice featured in responses to Margaret Thatcher, who was styled as sexless on the one hand (the "iron lady") and as caught in illicit passion with then U.S. president Ronald Reagan on the other. Jacqueline Rose discusses Thatcher as an icon of fearful femininity in "Margaret Thatcher and Ruth Ellis."
33. Sturkin, "Masculinity, Courage and Sacrifice," 444.
34. Karlyn, "Feminism and Its Discontents."
35. Of course, some of these texts may present themselves as globally generic and be culturally protective at the same time. For instance, in the *Bridget Jones* novel and its sequel the British hero rescues Bridget after she has been victimized by the actions of a foreign male. In addition, culturally specific postfeminist franchises still flourish. One example is the series of novels *Five Go Mad in . . .* , which relies on British traditions of same-sex groups taking vacations together that would probably not be as clear and resonant to a reader without this cultural frame of reference.
36. The extent to which regional differences are also at issue is an aspect that we acknowledge but do not have the space to address here.
37. Tania Modleski's pathbreaking study *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Era* confronts directly the ways in which the centrality of "new" men and "new" masculinities in American culture are achieved at the expense of women.
38. Battema and Sewell, "Trading in Masculinity," 261.
39. Some of the scholarship on the celebrity talk show host and postfeminist icon Oprah Winfrey has begun to move in this direction. See in particular Illouz, *Oprah Winfrey and the Glamour of Misery*. Illouz offers a commentary on Winfrey's selective engagement with the problematics of race, noting, for instance, that she "consistently twists political categories and transforms them into ethical and spiritual ones" (24).
40. For a discussion of the retreatist strategies of a set of post-9/11 romantic come-

dies, see Negra, "Structural Integrity, Historical Reversion, and the Post-9/11 Chick Flick."

41. Brunsdon, "Lifestyling Britain."
42. For an exploratory discussion of the specifics of British postfeminism, see Ashby, "Postfeminism in the British Frame."
43. Lotz, "Postfeminist Television Criticism"; Brunsdon, "Post-Feminism and Shopping Films"; Kim, "Sex and the Single Girl"; Moseley and Read, "Having It Ally"; Negra "Quality Postfeminism?"
44. Klein, *No Logo*.
45. See Moseley, "Glamorous Witchcraft."
46. Springer, "Third Wave Black Feminism?" Springer writes, "In sum, as we learn more about women of color's feminist activism, the wave analogy becomes untenable" (1062).
47. On the mediating function of queerness and the figure of the gay best friend, see Dreisinger, "The Queen in Shining Armor."
48. Joanne Hollows has noted, for instance, the prohibitive connotations of feminism with respect to the construct of a luxurious domesticity as a guilty pleasure ("Can I Go Home Yet?").
49. See, for example, the edited volumes McCaughey and King, *Reel Knockouts*, and Inness, *Action Chicks*.
50. Holmlund, *Impossible Bodies*; Projansky, *Watching Rape*.
51. For an analysis that does foreground these questions, see Beltrán, "Mas Macha."
52. Although Pam Grier's 1970s films are widely referred to, for instance, little feminist scholarship engages these films in detail. For a recent analysis that takes on this task see Holmlund, "Wham! Bam! Pam!" See also DeVere Brody, "The Returns of Cleopatra Jones." In contemporary terms, while African-American performers such as Vivica A. Fox regularly star and support in action roles, these films are rarely centered within a feminist scholarship that devotes considerable energy to high-profile white action heroines such as those in the *Alien* and *Terminator* cycles or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.
53. Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*, 2.