

**Essential reading for all students and academics seeking a thorough and wide-ranging understanding of postfeminism**

This text comprehensively surveys and critically positions the main issues, theories and contemporary debates surrounding postfeminism. It covers the term's underpinnings and critical contexts, its different meanings, as well as popular media representations. New for this edition is an extended critical history of postfeminism that engages with a new postfeminist vocabulary associated with post-recession politics and culture, and close analysis of the impact of a recessionary postfeminist stance. Adopting an inclusive and interdisciplinary approach, the text situates postfeminism in relation to earlier feminisms and addresses its manifestations in popular culture, academia, politics and brand culture. It brings to light various meanings of postfeminism and highlights distinct postfeminist patterns, while opening up the category for future investigation.

#### Key Features

User-friendly format allows students and lecturers to explore the diverse postfeminist landscape as well as examine specific versions of it

An original and rigorous critical approach to the topic that advances a contextualised understanding of postfeminism

Detailed analysis in chapters on the Backlash, New Traditionalism and Austerity Nostalgia, New Feminism, Girl Power and Chick-lit, Do-Me Feminism and Raunch Culture, (Neo)liberal Sexism, Postmodern Feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Queer Feminism, Men and Feminism, Cyberfeminism, Third Wave Feminism, Sexual Micro-/Macro-Politics, Celebrity Brand Culture

Includes topical case studies on (amongst others) *Game of Thrones*, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, Lady Gaga, *Girls*, Nicki Minaj, Slut Walk and FEMEN

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Postfeminism

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Benjamin A. Brabon

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# Postfeminism

## Cultural Texts and Theories



**Stéphanie Genz and  
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and accentuated femininity and innovative in her active heroine status (see Tasker 2004).

#### RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

- Balsamo, Anne. *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996.
- Gillis, Stacy. 'The (Post)Feminist Politics of Cyberpunk'. *Gothic Studies* 9.2 (2007): 7–19.
- Halberstam, Judith. 'Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine'. *Feminist Review* 17.3 (1991): 439–60.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York and London: Routledge, 1991.

## 11

### *Third-Wave Feminism*

#### OVERVIEW

In this chapter, we examine the notion of 'third-wave feminism' that emerged in the 1990s and has often been described by its advocates in antithesis to postfeminism. According to third-wave feminists, postfeminism can be understood in terms of a conservative/patriarchal discourse that seeks to criticise and undermine second-wave feminism. By contrast, third-wave feminism defines itself as a budding political movement with strong affiliations to second-wave feminist theory and activism – the conflict between third wavers and post-feminists often being exemplified by the supposed dichotomy between the politically informed Riot Grrrls and the mainstream, fashionable Spice Girls. Third-wave feminism speaks to a generation of younger feminists – born in the 1960s and 1970s – who see their work founded on second-wave principles, yet distinguished by a number of political and cultural differences. Third-wave feminists embrace contradiction and diversity as inherent components of late-millennium women's (and men's) lives and they envision a new model of feminist thinking and practice that goes 'beyond black or white' and situates itself within popular culture in an effort to bridge the gap between consumption and critique (Siegel 2007: 142). We suggest that the adoption of a binary logic to conceptualise the relationship between third-wave feminism and postfeminism is misleading in many cases as it does not account for the slippage between the two terms and often rests on an overly simplistic view of postfeminism as defeatism. We analyse the rifts and overlaps between the third wave and postfeminism through an examination of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

## THIRD-WAVE FEMINISM

The mid-1990s saw a number of, largely non-academic, publications by a younger generation of women who were keen to debate the meanings and relevance of feminism for their late twentieth-century lives. Anthologies and edited collections such as *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* (1995), *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (1995) and *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (2000) provide personal accounts of feminist awakenings and are meant as guides to feminism for a mainstream audience. These writings announced the advent and set the tone for a new, 'third wave' of feminism, marked by a desire to renew feminist commitment as well as distinguish itself from its second-wave precursor. As Barbara Findlen (1995), a former editor of *Ms.* magazine, writes about the young feminist contributors to *Listen Up*, '[w]e're here, and we have a lot to say about our ideas and hopes and struggles and our place within feminism. We haven't had many opportunities to tell our stories, but more of us are finding our voices and the tools to make them heard' (xvi). The term 'third wave' was popularised by Rebecca Walker in a 1995 article, 'Becoming the Third Wave', in which she encouraged young women to join their (second-wave) mothers and embrace feminism (Walker 1995b) – previous usages include a 1987 essay in which Deborah Rosenfelt and Judith Stacey reflect on the ebbs and flows of feminism throughout the 1970s and 1980s, proposing that 'what some are calling a third wave of feminism [is] already taking shape' (359). An underlying concern of many of these studies outlining the third wave is to establish and demarcate its parameters as well as characterise its proponents. For Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (2000), for example, the third wave consists of 'women who were reared in the wake of the women's liberation movement of the seventies' (15) while, for Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (1997), it is the generation 'whose birth dates fall between 1963 and 1974' (4). A less precise delineation is favoured by Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier (2003) who maintain that 'we want to render problematic an easy understanding of what the third wave is' (5).

By adopting the 'wave' metaphor, the third wave clearly situates itself within what Deborah Siegel (1997) calls 'the oceanography of feminist movement' – a chronology that comprises the surge of feminist activism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – commonly referred to as the 'first wave' of feminism that culminated around the campaign for women's suffrage in the 1920s – and the 'second wave' resurgence of feminist organising in the 1960s (52). As Gillis, Howie and Munford note in their introduction to *Third Wave Feminism* (2004), '[t]o speak about a "third wave" of feminism . . . is to name a moment in feminist theory and practice' (1). The very invocation of 'third

wave feminism' and the mobilisation of the adjective 'third' indicate a desire to establish a link with previous feminist waves and ensure a continuation of feminist principles and ideas. The self-declared third wavers Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (2004) emphasise that 'to us the second and third waves of feminism are neither incompatible nor opposed' (3). In Deborah Siegel's (1997) eyes, one should think of the third wave as 'overlapping both temporally and spatially with the waves that preceded it' – 'just as the same water reforms itself into ever new waves, so the second wave circulates in the third, reproducing itself through a cyclical movement' (60–1). Mimicking the nomenclature of its predecessors, third-wave feminism acknowledges that it stands on the shoulders of other, earlier feminist movements and in this sense acts as a stance of resistance to popular pronouncements of a moratorium on feminism and feminists.

While the third wave is inextricably linked to the second, it is also defined in large part by how it differs from it. Gillis and Munford (2003) state categorically that 'we are no longer in a second wave of feminism' and now need to delineate 'a feminism which could no longer, in any way, be identified as "victim feminism"', a feminism that does not 'hurt itself with . . . simplistic stereotyping and ideological policing' (2, 4). The third wavers' orientation to feminism is different because, among other reasons, they have grown up with it. Baumgardner and Richards (2000), for instance, propose that 'for anyone born after the early 1960s, the presence of feminism in our lives is taken for granted. For our generation, feminism is like fluoride . . . it's simply in the water' (17). Third-wave writers and activists insist that feminism cannot be based on 'anachronistic insularity' and separatism but has to adopt a 'politics of ambiguity' that embraces tolerance, diversity and difference (Gillis and Munford 2003: 2; Siegel 2007: 140). As Baumgardner and Richards (2000) explain, 'most young women don't get together to talk about "Feminism" with a capital F. We don't use terms like "the politics of housework" or "the gender gap" as much as we simply describe our lives and our expectations' (48). The third wave is keen to 'make things "messier"' by using second-wave critique as a central definitional thread while emphasising ways that 'desires and pleasures subject to critique can be used to rethink and enliven activist work' (Heywood and Drake 2004: 7). According to the third wave's agenda, 'there is no one right way to be: no role, no model' – instead 'contradiction . . . marks the desires and strategies of third wave feminists' who 'have trouble formulating and perpetuating theories that compartmentalize and divide according to race and gender and all the other signifiers' (Reed 1997: 124; Heywood and Drake 2004: 2; Walker 1995a: xxxiii). The third-wave subject is always in process and accommodating multiple positionalities, 'including more than excluding, exploring more than defining, searching

more than arriving' (Walker 1995a: xxxiii). Third-wave feminism thus seeks to make room for 'the differences and conflicts *between* people as well as *within* them' and 'to figure out how to use [these] differences dynamically' (Reed 1997: 124; emphasis in original).

Third-wave feminism is clearly informed by postmodern theorising as well as a multiculturalist sensibility, arguing for the political possibilities that the postmodern present makes available. The third wave functions as a 'political ideology currently under construction', welcoming pluralism and describing itself as a post-identity movement that engages with the postmodern challenge to a unified subjectivity (Pender 2004: 165). As Rebecca Walker suggests in an interview entitled 'Feminism Only Seems to Be Fading: It's Changing', 'the next phase in feminism's evolution will entail a politics of ambiguity, not identity' (qtd in Siegel 1997b: 53-4). Third-wave feminism addresses the subject's experience of having fragmented and conflicting selves that do not constitute a seamless and coherent whole. In this way, 'with no utopic vision of the perfectly egalitarian society or the fully realized individual', third-wave feminists 'work with the fragmentation of existing identities and institutions', creating a new theoretical/political space that 'complicates female identity rather than defining it' (Reed 1997: 124). Simultaneously, the third wave is committed to political action, asserting that 'breaking free of identity politics has not resulted in political apathy' but rather has provided 'an awareness of the complexity and ambiguity of the world we have inherited' (Senna 1995: 20). In effect, third-wave theory and practice consider anti-essentialism and political engagement as indispensably allied. The movement sees itself as 'a political stance and a critical practice', thriving on the contradictions that ensue from postmodernism's questioning of the identity category (Siegel 1997b: 54, 59).

Further to being a theoretically informed movement, the third wave also locates itself within popular culture and understands a critical engagement with the latter as the key to political struggle. This is in marked contrast to second-wave feminism that, for the most part, took a 'hard line', anti-media approach, favouring separatism over the 'spin game' (Whelehan 2005: 138). As Heywood and Drake (2004) put it, 'we're pop-culture babies; we want some pleasure with our critical analysis' (51). They highlight that 'it is this edge, where critique and participation meet, that third wave activists must work to further contentious public dialogue' (52). The third wave thus contests a politics of purity that separates political activism from cultural production, 'ask[ing] us . . . to re-imagine the disparate spaces constructed as "inside" and "outside" the academy . . . as mutually informing and intersecting spheres of theory and practice' (Siegel 1997b: 70). Many third wavers critically engage with popular cultural forms – television, music, computer games, film and fiction – and position these within a broader interrogation of what 'feminism'

means in a late twentieth- and twenty-first-century context. They concentrate on the proliferation of media images of strong female characters to interpret consumer culture as a place of empowerment and differentiate themselves from second-wave feminists who had been critical of the misogyny of the popular realm. One of the most prominent and public icons of the third wave is Courtney Love, lead singer of the Riot Grrrl band Hole and wife of the late Kurt Cobain. For Heywood and Drake (2004), Love personifies the third wave and its politics of ambiguity:

She combines the individualism, combativeness, and star power that are the legacy of second wave gains in opportunities for women . . . with second wave critiques of the cult of beauty and male dominance. . . . Glamorous and grunge, girl and boy, mothering and selfish, put together and taken apart, beautiful and ugly, strong and weak, responsible and rebellious, Love bridges the irreconcilability of individuality and femininity within dominant culture, combining the cultural critique of an earlier generation of feminists with the backlash against it by the next generation of women. (4-5)

While the third wave's bond with its second-wave forerunner is marked by continuity and change – illustrating the third wave's 'central drama' of 'wanting to belong but being inherently different' (Siegel 2007: 140) – its relationship with postfeminism is far less ambiguous. Many third wavers understand their position as an act of strategic defiance and a response to the cultural dominance of postfeminism. From its initiation, the third wave has resolutely defined itself against postfeminism: in fact, third-wave pioneers Rebecca Walker and Shannon Liss were keen to establish an ideological and political split between the two, pronouncing '[w]e are not postfeminist feminists. We are the third wave!' (qtd in Siegel 2004: 128). Heywood and Drake also emphasise that, within the context of the third wave, "postfeminist" characterizes a group of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticize feminists of the second wave' – among these 'young' feminists are included Katie Roiphe and Rene Denfeld who reject notions of 'victim feminism' (1). The effect of these announcements is both to link third-wave feminists to their second-wave mothers as well as distinguish them from their alienated postfeminist sisters who supposedly discard older feminists' strategies. Second and third waves of feminism are thus united in their condemnation of an exceedingly popular and retrograde postfeminism that is seen to be in line with the economic, political and cultural forces governing the market and mainstream media.

A pertinent example of this rift is the often-cited distinction between popular Girl Power discourse and the underground Riot Grrrl movement (see

Chapter 4). Some critics insist that the Riot Grrrl's 'angry rebellion' against the patriarchal structures of the music scene is in opposition to the media-friendly 'absurdity' of Girl Power that amounts to 'a very persuasive and pervasive form of hegemonic patriarchal power' (Gillis and Munford 2004: 174; Ashleigh Harris 2004: 94). While Girl Power (promoted by the Spice Girls) is at best no more than 'a bit of promotional fun', the Riot Grrrls can be placed within feminism's radical and activist history, taking 'cultural production and sexual politics as key sites of struggle' (Coward 1999: 122; Heywood and Drake 1997a: 4). Ultimately, these critics claim, third-wave feminism should be acknowledged as an emerging political ideology and 'forms of feminist activism' while postfeminism 'shuts down ongoing efforts to work toward change on the level of both theory and practice' (Heywood and Drake 2004: 7; Sanders 2004: 52).

As we have suggested already in Chapter 4, this rhetoric of antagonism is sometimes misleading as it does not account for the overlap between the third wave and postfeminism, nor does it allow for a politicised reading of the latter. We have argued throughout for a more nuanced and productive interpretation of the prefix 'post' and its relations to feminism, whereby the compound 'postfeminism' is understood as a junction between a number of often competing discourses and interests. This expanded understanding goes beyond a limited interpretation of postfeminism as anti-feminist backlash and encourages an active rethinking that captures the multiplicity and complexity of twenty-first-century feminisms. There are, of course, a number of important differences between postfeminism and the third wave, significantly at the level of foundation and political alignment; yet, there are also a range of similarities as the third wave and postfeminism both posit a challenge to second-wave feminism's anti-popular and anti-feminine agenda. Sarah Banet-Weiser (2007) maintains that postfeminism is 'a different political dynamic than third wave feminism', with the latter defining itself more overtly as a kind of feminist politics that extends the historical trajectory of previous feminist waves to assess contemporary consumer culture (206). Postfeminism, on the other hand, does not exist as a budding political movement and its origins are much more impure, emerging from within mainstream culture, rather than underground subculture – in Tasker's and Negra's eyes, postfeminism can be seen as a 'popular idiom' while third-wave feminism is 'a more scholarly category' and 'self-identification' (19). Moreover, unlike the third wave, postfeminism is not motivated by a desire for continuity and a need to prove its feminist credentials – what Diane Elam (1997) terms the 'Dutiful Daughter Complex' or Baumgardner and Richards (2000) describe as a 'scrambling to be better feminists and frantically letting these women [second-wave feminists] know how much we look up to them' (85).

However, this unwillingness or rather indifference to position itself in the generational wave narrative need not imply that postfeminism is apolitical and anti-feminist. On the contrary, in the following chapter, we will analyse the notions of a postfeminist politics and/or a political postfeminism that – while not identical to other, particularly feminist, strategies of resistance – adopt a more flexible model of agency that is doubly coded in political terms and combines backlash and innovation, complicity and critique. We also need to remind ourselves that there is a potential overlap between third-wave feminism and postfeminism that should not be interpreted, as some critics propose, as a 'dangerous and deceptive slippage' but rather an unavoidable consequence of contradiction-prone contemporary Western societies and cultures (Munford 2004: 150). In effect, the third wave is the target of similar objections that have been raised in connection with postfeminism, mainly related to its resolutely popular and consumerist dimensions. Discussing Courtney Love's 'postmodern feminism', Gillis and Munford (2004), for example, question whether the politics of girl culture can be reconciled with her 'bad girl philosophy' (173). While Love clearly confounds the dichotomisation of 'Madonna and Whore', her reliance on brand culture and her embrace of feminine paraphernalia – exemplified by Love's provocative statement that 'we like our dark Nars lipstick and La Perla panties, but we hate sexism, even if we do fuck your husbands/boyfriends' – propel a debate as to 'what extent . . . this commodification neutralise[s] feminist politics' (173). The third wave and postfeminism thus occupy a common ground between consumption and critique, engaging with feminine/sexual and individual forms of agency. Both third-wave feminism and postfeminism have drawn on popular culture to interrogate and explore twenty-first-century configurations of female empowerment and re-examine the meanings of feminism in the present context as a politics of contradiction and ambivalence. While it could be argued that the first generation of third wavers is now approaching middle age, the term continues to be employed by twenty-first-century young activists to signal their 'newness'. As Catherine Redfern and Kristin Aune confirm in *Reclaiming the F Word* (2010), 'the very fact that the term "third wave" exists adds weight to the argument that there are a growing number of active feminists. We've watched this new feminism grow and have been involved with it over the last decade and know this is not a "flash in the pan"' (10).

#### CASE STUDY: *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* (1997–2003)

In their introduction to the edited collection *Fighting the Forces* (2002), Rhonda Wilcox and David Lavery note that 'good television' – in opposition to 'bad television' that is simply 'predictable, commercial, exploitative' – is

characterised by its ability to resist the pressures of social and artistic expectations and the conventions of the business, 'even while it partakes in [these forces] as part of its nature' (xvii). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is identified as such a case of 'good television', confounding not only the laws of the horror genre but also offering a new kind of female protagonist who disrupts any clear set of distinctions between 'passivity, femininity and women on the one hand and activity, masculinity and men on the other' (Tasker 1993: 77). Joss Whedon, the creator of the series, has often been quoted as saying that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was explicitly conceived as a reworking of horror films in which 'bubbleheaded blondes wandered into dark alleys and got murdered by some creature' (qtd in Fudge 1999: 1). As he notes, 'the idea of Buffy was to . . . create someone who was a hero where she had always been a victim. That element of surprise, that element of genre busting is very much at the heart of . . . the series' (qtd in Thompson 2004: 4). Whedon is determined to 'take that character and expect more from her', deconstructing the label of blonde (i.e. dumb) femininity and linking it with notions of power and strength (qtd in Lippert 1997: 25). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* enacts in its title the foundational myth and the premise of the entire series, centring on an ex-cheerleading, demon-hunting heroine who tries to combine being a girl with her vampire-slaying mission. From its US premiere in 1997 to its primetime finale in 2003, the series followed the fortunes of Buffy Summers (Sarah Michelle Gellar) as she struggled through the 'hell' that is high school, a freshman year at U.C. Sunnydale, and the ongoing challenge of balancing the demands of family, friends and relationships, and her work as the 'Slayer' whose duty is to fight all evil (Pender 2004: 165). The 'joke' of the cheerleading demon hunter is not a 'one-line throwaway gag' but encapsulates Buffy's ongoing battle with her composite character as the 'Chosen One' – who, as the voiceover to the show's opening credits relates, 'alone will stand against the vampires, the demons and the forces of darkness' – and as a sixteen-year-old teenager who wants to do 'girlie stuff' (Pender 2002: 42).

Blending elements of action, drama, comedy, romance, horror and, occasionally, musical, the series has been lauded as a reinterpretation of established cinematic and generic concepts and identities. With her long blonde hair and thin, petite frame, Buffy is visibly coded by the conventional signifiers of attractive, helpless and (to some extent) unintelligent femininity. The show foils both viewers' and characters' expectations by portraying this cute cheerleader not as a victim but a 'supremely confident kicker of evil butt' (qtd in Krimmer and Raval 2002: 157). According to Whedon, Buffy is intended both to be a feminist role model and to subvert the non-feminine image of the 'ironclad hero – "I am woman, hear me *constantly* roar"' (qtd in Harts 88). Buffy has been celebrated as a 'radical reimagining of what a girl (and

a woman) can do and be' and a 'prototypical girly feminist activist' (qtd in Pender 2004: 165). In particular, Buffy has been embraced as 'the new poster girl for third wave feminist popular culture', continuing the second wave's fight against misogynist violence – variously represented as types of monsters and demons – and articulating new 'modes of oppositional praxis, of resistant femininity and, in its final season, of collective feminist activism that are unparalleled in mainstream television' (Pender 2004: 164). The climax of Season 7 is specifically noteworthy as it sees Buffy – with the help of the 'Scooby gang', her friends Willow (Alyson Hannigan) and Xander (Nicholas Brendon) – redistribute her Slayer power and 'change[s] the rule' that was made by 'a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago' and prescribes that 'in every generation, one Slayer is born' ('Chosen'). Buffy's Slayer strength is magically diffused and displaced on to 'every girl who could have the power', so that 'from now on, every girl in the world who might be a Slayer, will be a Slayer'. In transferring power from the privileged, white Californian teenager to a heterogeneous group of women, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be said to address the 'issue of cultural diversity that has been at the forefront of third wave feminist theorising' (Pender 2004: 170). Buffy's final description of herself as unbaked 'cookie dough' has also been highlighted by critics as exemplifying the third wave's politics of ambiguity, its deliberate indeterminacy and 'inability to be categorized' ('Chosen'; Gilmore 2001: 218). Despite the end of the series in 2003, *Buffy* has had an active afterlife, giving rise to an online journal (*Slayage*), several conferences and anthologies devoted to the burgeoning field of 'Buffy Studies'.

Other commentators have been more sceptical about the series (and its conclusion) and Buffy's suitability as a feminist role model. They draw attention to the show's 'mixed messages about feminism and femininity', upholding a dualistic rationale that defines 'Buffy's form and Buffy's content' as 'distinct and incompatible categories' (Fudge 1999: 1; Pender 2002: 43). For example, Anne Millard Daughtery (2002) condemns the Slayer's feminine exterior on the grounds that 'for all the efforts taken to negate the traditional male gaze, Buffy's physical attractiveness is, in itself, objectifying' (151). Buffy's 'Girl Power' is seen as 'a diluted imitation of female empowerment' that promotes 'style over substance' and ultimately lacks a political agenda (Fudge 1999: 3). She is censured for being a 'hard candy-coated feminist heroine for the girl-power era' whose 'pastel veneer' and 'over-the-top girliness in the end compromise her feminist potential'. This polarised viewpoint defines action heroines by their adoption or refusal of femininity and is forced to conclude that 'Buffy cannot be a feminist because she has a cleavage' (Pender 2002: 43). Following this line of argument, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has been discussed as a contemporary version of the 1970s 'pseudo-tough', 'wanna be' action

heroines exemplified by Wonder Woman and Charlie's Angels. As Sherrie Inness (1999) explains, femininity was used in this context as a way to allay the heroine's toughness and tone down and compensate for her assertiveness and display of strength. Contrastingly, we have argued that such an attempt to create a dichotomy between feminism and femininity – and, in a similar manner, postfeminism and the third wave, girl and grrrl – is disadvantageous for a number of reasons, leading not only to a reification of masculine power/feminine weakness but also negating the transgressive potential of the action-adventure heroine who occupies an empowered and heroic position. We contend that Buffy's feminine and feminist, girl and grrrl components should not be separated and we interpret her as a liminal contemporary character who transcends binary formulations and subverts gender frameworks that underlie the concepts of masculine activity and feminine passivity. It is in this gap between dualities that the postfeminist possibilities are revealed for more complex and diverse understandings of modern-day womanhood, feminism and femininity.

#### RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

- Genz, Stéphanie. *Postfemininities in Popular Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 152–69.
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## 12

### *Micro/Macro-Politics and Enterprise Culture*

#### OVERVIEW

In this chapter, we advance the notion of a politicised postfeminism and/or a postfeminist politics, problematising in this way critical perceptions of postfeminism as a depoliticised and anti-feminist backlash. This not only implies a reconsideration of postfeminism but also involves a rethinking of the political sphere and the concept of the individual. We suggest that postfeminism is doubly coded in political terms and is part of a neoliberal political economy that relies on the image of an 'enterprising self' characterised by initiative, ambition and personal responsibility (Rose 1992). The modern-day 'enterprise culture' invites individuals to forge their identity as part of what Anthony Giddens (2008 [1991]) refers to as 'the reflexive project of the self' (9) – that is, in late modernity individuals increasingly reflect upon and negotiate a range of diverse lifestyle choices in constructing a self-identity. Following Patricia Mann (1994), we argue that the vocabulary of political actions has to be expanded and we examine the notion of postfeminist 'micro-politics' that takes into account the multiple agency positions of individuals today (160). Micro-politics differs from previous models of oppositional politics (including second-wave feminist politics) in the sense that it privileges the individual and the micro-level of everyday practices. Postfeminist micro-politics is situated between two political frameworks, incorporating both emancipatory themes and ones more explicitly concerned with individual choices (Budgeon 2001). We will discuss micro-politics by referring to postfeminist sexual agents who use their body as a commodity to achieve autonomy and agency. This stance is illustrated by the American designer/writer/women's rights activist