

Women/Media/Leisure: Consuming Sex in the 21st Century
The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University
24 March 2007

Keynote Lecture

Phallic Girls and Post-feminist Sexualities: New Technologies of Young Womanhood

Professor Angela McRobbie, Goldsmiths College, University of London

This lecture will provide a critical analysis of the intersection of forces which produce categories of young womanhood which are defined in terms of sexual freedom, consumer culture, and wage earning capacity. These processes take shape in the figuration of specific modes of new femininity, including:

- a) The 'phallic girl': the 'glamour model', the girl who is 'up for it', the girl who emulates masculine modes of sexual appetite and seemingly can now do so without punishment because she is young, is able to earn her own living, and because she is 'worth it'.
- b) The young woman in 'post-feminist masquerade': a more restrained, fashion and beauty dominated figuration of new femininity, also made possible through educational qualifications and access to labour markets and defined by magazines like *Grazia*.
- c) The global girl: a particular production of global marketing based on a new rendition of post-colonial pleasing, and compliant femininity. This mode is critical to the growth of new consumer cultures in developing countries and to the emerging role of young women in the new international division of labour.
- d) The 'working girl': a phrase whose multiple meanings cover the whole range of economic and symbolic activities now attributed to young women, whose importance in the global economy also gives rise to unprecedented attempts to restrain, manage and control this presence so as to defuse the likelihood of a re-invented or re-imagined women's movement.

Panel One: Sexualisation and the Body

Pole Position: Migrant British Women Producing 'Selves' through Lap Dancing Work'

Esther Bott, Nottingham University

This paper explores the motivations and experiences of British women working as lap dancers in the tourist resorts of Southern Tenerife. It uses Skeggs' theoretical framework of 'becoming respectable' (1997) alongside other debates on 'identity management' in order to begin mapping the ways in which the women produce themselves, negotiate gender and class, and seek forms of respectability, reputability and honour through their work. Drawing on original empirical data, the paper discusses how strong disassociations with various Others are formed, and how and why important binaries, particularly distinctions between lap dancing and prostitution and lap dancing and other 'degraded' forms of work and lifestyle are drawn in the dancers' own stories of self.

My Make-Up is my Mask": Jordan and the Masquerade
Hatty Oliver, Goldsmiths College, University of London

British glamour model Jordan is the poster girl for the sexualisation of culture amassing an £8 million fortune by ruthlessly exploiting her sexuality. Her success has often been read in conservative terms but I will use Joan Riviere's theory of the masquerade to present a more transgressive reading.

The Jordan phenomenon incorporates not just the hypersexual model but also her alter ego Katie Price. While Jordan is manifestly fake and 'unnatural', the subject of very public plastic surgery, Katie is "natural", the woman behind the mask, the prediscursive author of the construction. If Jordan calls our attention to the impossibility of the female body and the cultural work it is forced to undertake, then the Jordan/Katie dichotomy goes one step further and questions the very possibility of a genuine female identity.

While both Jordan and Katie are performances, one a pastiche of female sexuality and the other a pantomime of domestic bliss. There is no 'real' woman behind the curtain pulling the strings; here femininity is dissimulation and encapsulates Riviere's "conception of womanliness as mask". In embodying so precisely the alienation at the heart of the symbolic representation of womanhood, Jordan and Katie help to destabilise it.

Reality Television, Morality and the Mediation of Intimacy

Dr Helen Wood, University of Manchester

A particular range of contemporary reality television programmes produce transformative performances of the self through a focus upon intimacy and relationships. This paper will explore what we call 'forensic formats' which are premised upon a 'closing in' on inspections of selfhood through televisual techniques which produce 'parts' of bodies as a type of metonymic morality.

Our audience research with reality television viewers of different backgrounds questions how more traditional modes of instruction in femininity reverberate against what is often contemporarily framed as governmentality. This paper will look at the ways the women in our study negotiate their relationship to the televised 'selves' through bringing to bear their different resources. Our methodology draws out the ways in which the textual dynamics elicit moral reactions in formations of pleasure. In this sense the mediation of intimacy becomes framed around questions of morality and its relationship to the 'real'.

Lunch

Panel Two: Consuming Sex

Page Three and the Public Sphere

Dr Rebecca Loncraine, Oxford University and Author

The Sun has been the bestselling daily paper in Britain since 1978. Its topless pinup page, known as Page Three, first appeared in 1970 and it soon became the paper's mascot. The Page Three girl is the figurehead for The Sun, symbolizing its irreverence, and, some would say, its misogyny. Page Three has its origins in the 1960s permissive society; it emerged out of wider debates about what was acceptable to show in public. By printing photographs of topless women, The Sun provoked questions about the nature of the freedom of the press. The journalists and editors at the Sun carefully shaped its Page Three to test the limits of public tolerance and to generate free publicity. In this paper I will talk about the history of Page Three in terms of:

- The problems of developing an argument against having such images in the media.
- The naked male body and female sexuality as the real public taboo
- The argument that the sexualisation of the public sphere constitutes a democratisation of desire.

“bitches” and “ho’s”: Women, Art and Music

Decima Francis MBE

Decima Francis is founder and director of SASS, The From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation (FBMF), Peace on the Streets, and the Calling the Shots anti gun crime initiative. FBMF, SASS's most successful project was set up in 1997 and provides a service to young black men who are failing in education, involved in high risk behaviour and are in danger of educational or social exclusion. She was the first and youngest black woman Director at the Royal National Theatre. In June 2005, she was awarded an MBE for her work for the black community in Southwark. She is a Board member on the Commission of Intergation & Cohesion

Introducing Amora - The Academy of Sex and Relationships

Dr Sarah Brewer, Director of Exhibits, Amora

Amora, the Academy of Sex and Relationships, opens in Piccadilly Circus in March. The result of three years' preparation, and £4.7 million in financing, Amora is a visitor experience dedicated to love, sex and relationships, aiming to celebrate human sexuality in an entertaining and accessible way, and provide health education within a format that is easy and fun to assimilate. Its vision is to build a Kinsey-type institute in Europe, with a high-profile advisory board of sex therapists, relationship counsellors, medical doctors, psychologists, sex writers and research academics.

Panel Three: Selling Sex in Museums

Love for sale, an exhibition about prostitution in Amsterdam

Annemarie de Wildt, Conservator and Curator, Amsterdams Historisch Museum

Amsterdam has become famous for its scantily clad women sitting in windows. After twenty years of debate, brothels were finally legalized in the city in 2000. Prostitution is recognized as a form of employment, but labour rights remains a grey area and many prostitutes still conceal their profession.

In 2002 the Amsterdam Historical Museum organized an exhibition on 400 years of prostitution in the city. Over the centuries the policy of the city authorities towards prostitution moved back and forth between tolerance and persecution. Making an exhibition about this subject was no easy task. How could we be thought-provoking and not just provocative? How could we display a topic that has always tried to remain hidden? How could we present the different stories of the people involved: the prostitutes, the clients, the pimps and brothel owners, the city authorities and the citizens of Amsterdam? My paper will also pay attention to the reactions of the museum visitors.

Prostitution, What's Going On? An exhibition at The Women's Library

Antonia Byatt and Gail Cameron, London Metropolitan University

The current exhibition at the Women's Library celebrates the centenary of the campaigner Josephine Butler's death with an exhibition exploring the issues around prostitution. Audience reactions reflect conflicting opinions about how to present and address this difficult subject and how the selling of sex should be treated in our society. Antonia Byatt, Director and Gail Cameron, Curator will explain the process of putting together the display and reflect on its reception.