Triple Threats:
Young Female Detectives and the Crimes of Postfeminism

Andrea Braithwaite
Department of Art History and Communication Studies
McGill University

January 2010

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of PhD.

A girl, a teenager, and a private detective – I'm a triple threat!

-Veronica Mars

Acknowledgements

Heaps of thanks to Carrie Rentschler for her unwavering enthusiasm and provocative questions. With her supervision and assistance, working on this dissertation was both challenging and really, really enjoyable.

Much love to Richard Hink for more late nights, early phone calls, and delicious meals than I can remember. I am lucky to have such a colleague and best friend.

Robert duToit has been a source of more than just technical support. He is also a thoughtful sounding board, personal cheerleader, flower-bringer, and coffee-refresher. For that, and so much more, love and thanks.

Thanks as well to animal companions past and present – Isis, Tibi, and Alice – for making sprawling on the couch look so appealing.

This project was made possible in part by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant. Its completion was facilitated by a Beaverbrook Dissertation Completion grant awarded through Media@McGill.

Most importantly, a profound debt of gratitude for Don and Karen Braithwaite, for their years (and years and years) of encouragement and support.

Abstract

Triple Threats: Young Female Detectives and the Crimes of Postfeminism examines the increasingly visible character of the amateur female sleuth in popular culture. I argue that, while a postfeminist media and political environment conditions this "chick dick's" existence, the chick dick also "talks back" to postfeminism, specifically to the postfeminist insistence that feminism has been successful and is no longer relevant or necessary. The chick dick thus "speaks feminism" in an environment that makes such a voice difficult to hear.

I focus primarily on the aspects of these popular narratives that engage with the postfeminist notion that women and men are social equals. I demonstrate how the rhetoric of "choice" is used to depoliticize the conditions in which young women live, work, and study, individualizing their problems into matters of personal choice rather than political consequence. I examine how both social space and investigative technologies are gendered through concepts of risk and authority, and how such gendering works to uphold a patriarchal power dynamic that makes women vulnerable to a spectrum of sexualized violence. I deconstruct the concept of a "crisis in masculinity" to show how this trope legitimizes the exercise of an aggressive and violent masculinity on the bodies of female and feminized "others."

These popular narratives also illustrate the labour involved in embodying a postfeminist or "chick" femininity, affectively recounting how these female characters feel about the regimes of self-care and self-management they undertake daily, and how they respond to a "new traditionalist" model of womanhood that requires monogamy, marriage, and motherhood for female worth. I contextualize these stories within the cultural and industrial productive contexts to argue that the chick dick's feminist and proto-feminist undertones make her an unsuitable subject for mainstream, blockbuster filmmaking.

Résumé

« La triple menace : jeunes inspectrices et les crimes de le postféminisme » examine la caractère plus en plus visible de l'inspectrice amateur dans la culture populaire. Considérant que le milieu du média et la politique dans le postféminisme conditionne l'existence de la « chick dick », elle réplique au postféminisme, plus particulièrement à l'insistance postféministe que le féminisme est un succès et qu'il n'est pas encore pertinent ou nécessaire. La « chick dick » parle ainsi le féminisme dans un milieu qui fait une telle voix difficile à entendre.

Je focalise sur les aspects de ces récits populaires que s'engagent avec la notion postféministe que les femmes et les hommes sont égales. Je démontre comment la rhétorique du « choix » est utilisée pour dépolitiser la condition de la vie, du travail et d'étude pour les femmes. Ces conditions individualisent leurs problèmes comme des affaires du choix personnel au lieu des conséquences politiques. J'examine comment l'espace sociale et aussi les technologies d'investigation sont basées sur le genre par les concepts du risque et l'autorité. Ça soutient une dynamique patriarcale du pouvoir qui fait les femmes vulnérables à plusieurs formes de la violence sexuelle. Je déconstruis l'idée d'une « crise de la masculinité » pour montrer comment ce trope justifier l'exercice d'une masculinité agressif et violent sur les corps des « autres »--femmes et féminisés.

Ces récits populaires illustrent aussi le travail d'incarner une féminité « chick » ou postféministe. Ils racontent affectivement comment ces femmes se sentent des régimes quotidiens de soin et d'administration de soi-même. En plus, les récits nous disent comment ces femmes répondent à un modèle de la vie de femme « nouveau traditionaliste » qui requise la monogamie, la mariage et la maternité pour valoriser les femmes. Je situe cette histoire dans le contexte de leur production culturelle et industrielle et je conclus que les currents féministes et proto-féministes de la « chick dick » la faisant un sujet inapte pour la cinétographie blockbuster.

Table of Contents

Chapter One

Just a Girl? Detecting Feminism and Investigating Choice

I don't do that patronizing, sexist chick shit.

-Lula

Emerging from the seedy bar into the night, the detective surveys the empty and silent street. The informant was a bust, the guy knew nothing. Another useless lead. The detective sighs, stops abruptly to stare into the car at the curb. The windows are dark, tinted, and the detective leans in closely, one hand rummaging quietly in a jacket pocket. Studying her reflection, she fluffs up her hair and pulls out a tube of lipstick. She flashes a dazzling smile at the empty interior, smoothes down the front of her miniskirt, and strides on three-inch heels into the night, toward the bright lights of the 24-hour convenience store and its ample selection of chocolate bars.

Meet the most recent figure to tackle this "unsuitable job for a woman": the chick dick. She is not a nosy spinster like Jessica Fletcher, a curious teen like Nancy Drew, or even a trained professional like V.I. Warshawski. The chick dick is a hybrid character, as spunky and shopping-obsessed as her chick lit counterparts, yet pursuing clues and criminals instead of a committed relationship. The "chick" text

– a cheeky, self-aware romance narrative aimed at affluent twenty- and thirty-something women – is proving to be one of the most adaptable and marketable forms of the past two decades. Its largely neurotic take on work, sex, and self-improvement has been lauded for capturing women's struggles to negotiate contemporary battles of the sexes from boardrooms to bedrooms (see Marsh 2002; Donadio 2006). Women detectives are similarly visible and valuable popular culture commodities, appearing as cops, FBI agents, coroners, and forensic scientists across media. This representational surge brings into focus social anxieties about how crime and criminality (re)produce gender, and in particular the potential for subversion when tropes of authority and deviance intersect with those of sex and sexuality.

For the chick dick, the streets are still mean but the shoes are different. This amateur female sleuth has grown remarkably in popularity since the 1994 publication of Janet Evanovich's bestselling *One for the Money*; her serial exploits line bookstore shelves, and with *Veronica Mars*' brief stint on television (UPN/CW 2004-2007) she was once again available in prime-time. As Lauren Henderson and Stella Duffy explain, these are "neofeminist women, half Philip Marlowe, half femme-fatale, who make their own rules, who think it's entirely possible to save the world while wearing a drop-dead dress and four-inch heels" (2006, no page numbers). She is not a professional private eye; she is young, urban, single and childless, and solves the crimes that implicate herself, her friends, and her family. The body of texts that emerges from these loose criteria displays consistent, pressing, and political concerns. Chicks who solve crimes repeatedly engage with

the gendered power dynamics made visible and problematic through the intersection of chick and crime narrative demands, especially the sexualization of romance and of violence. Unlicensed and untrained, the chick dick's slapdash investigations constrain and are constrained by her day job and her love life; these collisions of public and private spheres raise questions about contemporary conditions in which young women live, work, date, and study – that is, about postfeminism.

Like her chick cousins, the chick dick works within and is often bound by what cultural critics have dubbed a postfeminist environment. One of the key forces at play in contemporary representations of femininity and feminism, postfeminism suggests that feminism has successfully lobbied for female freedom and equality. Women, so postfeminism asserts, are finally "empowered" – financially independent, free to showcase their sexuality, and to participate in the previously male-dominated public sphere with impunity. Through the figure of the assertive, attractive young white female professional, postfeminism reiterates that women have never had it so good (and, importantly, that obstacles to their happiness are personal problems resulting from individual inadequacies)[1]. Feminism is presented as a *fait accompli*, and the chick as a potent signal of its demise. As Mary Hawkesworth notes, however, these "accounts of death serve as allegorical signs for something else, a means of identifying a perceived danger in need of elimination, a way for a community to define itself through those it symbolically chooses to kill.

[1] Texts such as *Sex and the City* (HBO 1998-2004) and *Ally McBeal* (Fox 1997-2002) are paradigmatic examples. See Akass and McCabe (2004) and Moseley and Read (2002), respectively.

The premature burial of feminism, then, stands in need of further examination" (2004, 963).

Chick dick stories are valuable starting points for reading the social powers at play in the reports of the death of feminism. Their investigations reveal a range of victims and suspects –other women, jealous husbands, former flames, powerful businessmen – that come to stand for contemporary social relations predicated upon familiar forms of patriarchal power. As these investigations continue, the chick dick implicates both patriarchy and postfeminism in the "premature burial of feminism," revealing a social field still in need of feminist inquiry and critique.

I closely read a range of chick dick texts in this project, paying attention to how this character mobilizes discourses about young women and feminism against the backdrop of postfeminist claims about female capacity. I contend that chick dick texts offer their audience a discourse on female identity, sexuality, and subjectivity that differs from the ones most often found in contemporaneous genre fiction and television targeted at women. Specifically, I suggest that we can see these narratives as "speaking feminism" in a context that insists such a perspective is no longer relevant. Chick dick narratives deliberately engage with the idea that systemic limits on women's agency have been lifted, and in many cases refute the implication that sexual objectification and sexualized violence are individual rather than social problems. By identifying where and how these denials circulate, I aim to intervene in this process of post-ing feminism, to call attention to the ways in which this process is being publicly countered, and to emphasize the fundamental need for such rebuttals.

Defining Postfeminism

As a set of popular perceptions of women and of women's relationships to feminism, postfeminism is a crucial interpretive grid for understanding the chick dick's uses of and incursions into romance and crime narratives. Postfeminism posits feminism as a common cultural reference, a widely accepted set of ideas and ideals about gender relations. Its driving sentiment "draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force" (McRobbie 2004b, 255).

Postfeminism is a way of talking to and about women that shifts "women" away from the centre of debates, in favour of a depoliticized and idealized "woman." While cognizant of the risk of collapsing divergent and nuanced material concerns into a simplistic notion of "women's issues" (and so reproducing some of the chick dick narratives' own generalizations about race and class), I see a crucial need to identify postfeminism as anti-feminist, and at times even misogynist, particularly as its invocation of the neo-liberal individual precludes sustained attention to the conditions that continue to constrain women *qua* women. This dissertation participates in and expands the discussions about feminism in the postfeminist frame; it is a critical examination of a selected set of texts that are "talking back" to postfeminism, in order to argue that postfeminist claims made on behalf of "women" undermine the ongoing goals of feminism.

In characterizing postfeminism as a sensibility, Rosalind Gill (2007a) identifies how it circulates through multiple levels of cultural production. This

approach is helpful for distinguishing my use of the term postfeminism from third wave feminism[2]. While both are seen as antidotes to or breaks from second wave feminism, they differ in their sense of why such a shift is important (see Gillis and Munford 2004; Henry 2004). What I am most concerned with here is postfeminism as a popular set of strategies for making meaning, in contrast to third wave feminism's self-defined status as a political movement and/or identity position. This is not to dismiss or ignore the debates instigated by third wave feminism, but rather to demarcate my focus on how ideas about women and feminism are mediated and circulated; as Sarah Projansky points out, "the way postfeminist discourse defines feminism is now part of what feminism *is*" (2001, 14). Gill's concept of a postfeminist sensibility, while certainly not the only or the definitive approach[3], is most productive for my project, as she suggests "postfeminist media culture should be our critical object . . . [in order] to examine what is distinctive about contemporary articulations of gender in the media" (2007a, 148). Popular culture provides sites and spaces for interrogating these distinctive narrative, rhetorical, and visual devices.

The chick dick is entangled in postfeminist strategies of representation and interpretation. Confronting issues like sexual desire, body image, workplace inequities, and conspicuous consumption, while simultaneously investigating violent

[2] Postfeminism is contested as a form of feminist theory. Ann Brooks (1997) sees postfeminism as an evolution of feminism within academia, while Tania Modleski (1991), for instance, argues that the appropriation of feminist theory in the guise of "progressive" postfeminism results in conservative and anti-feminist forms of analysis.

[3] See Sarah Gamble (1999) for a succinct review of the varied approaches to postfeminism.

(often sexual) crimes, the chick dick both dramatizes a postfeminist sensibility and challenges its popular implications that we are *post-* (or past the need for) feminism. Narratives of detection, these texts present women's lived experiences *as* crime stories, suggesting that the contemporary cultural context in which women are systemically devalued on the basis of their sex results in an unacceptable risk of (literal and symbolic) sexualized violence. Chick dicks use their self-appointed role as investigator to speak both from within and about postfeminism, aptly characterizing it as an environment that exhaustively encourages, commodifies, sexualizes, and vilifies female agency.

The synchronous incitement to and belittlement of female agency is one of the most complex features of postfeminist discourse, as it relies upon a narrow appropriation of feminism as "empowerment," while disavowing feminist criticisms of deeper social strictures. The chick dick's use of romance and crime conventions affords her the opportunity (and the tools) to reveal the workings of gender and sexual oppression in a political climate which claims that structural inequalities between men and women have been eliminated, that the sexualization and objectification of women is now merely the ironic manifestation of "boys being boys."

The chick dick is a compelling resource for thinking and talking about such aspects of postfeminism. Her investigations trouble the relationship between contemporary discourses on female identity and everyday experiences of power. Detection becomes a form of feminist inquiry and praxis, the means by which these sleuths draw attention to women's treatment in public and private spheres, identify

spaces in which women are most vulnerable, and demonstrate the contradictory challenges women face in juggling social expectations about their friendships, families, and sexual desires. Chick dick narratives present a standpoint from which postfeminist proclamations about femininity, freedom, and feminism can be critically examined.

In this chapter I ask: how and why do these characters go from chicks to dicks? Does their hybrid lineage offer a particular discursive mobility? Which gender anxieties does the chick dick uncover as she crosses the terrain of crime? What counts as "empowerment"? How is it granted, and how are alternative forms envisioned or denied? Are subversive gender performances possible in a postfeminist environment? In attending to these questions of gender and genre, I tease out sexualized violence and the commodification of "choice" as core themes through which the chick dick examines rather than just exists within postfeminism.

After introducing the chick dicks central to this study, I discuss the ways in which these characters are figured as chicks, identifying what this sobriquet connotes and how it is implicated in postfeminist claims-making about women and about feminism's irrelevance. My brief overview of other female detectives[4] establishes a sense of how popular culture tends to represent investigative women, and I look closely at the founding moments of sexualized violence through which these protagonists come to see themselves as detectives. I explore the commodification of choice through tropes of female empowerment and being

[4] This will by no means be comprehensive. For more detailed surveys and analyses of female detectives in fiction, film, and television see Mizejewski (2004), Munt (1994), and Walton and Jones (1999).

girly, in order to demonstrate that the postfeminist chick is significantly constrained, contained, and choiceless. I show how the hypersexualization of the female body and feminine subject partakes in this same problematic rhetoric and iconography of choice. Chick dick narratives, while displaying many of these same strategies, deploy them in such a way as to become sites of debate; they trouble postfeminist uses of female and feminine by employing gender as a weapon, making it both the subject and object of their investigations.

Chicks and Chick Dicks

The chick dick started to climb the bestsellers lists in 1994, when the publication of Janet Evanovich's *One for the Money* introduced Stephanie Plum, now one of the most well-known of these sleuths. In her mid-twenties and living in Trenton, New Jersey, Steph had just been laid off from her job as a discount lingerie buyer, was subsisting on peanut-butter sandwiches, and slowly selling off her furniture in order to make ends meet. Desperate, she stopped by her cousin Vinnie's bail bonds office to find receptionist work. She ended up in bond enforcement, tracking down people who had missed their bail hearing. This sounded remarkably simple to Steph, yet as the series has progressed (now up to fifteen novels), a pattern has emerged: in the process of bringing bail jumpers back to the courts, Steph inevitably discovers a larger, more puzzling crime that she curiously and doggedly solves. Unlike bounty hunting, these investigations are unpaid (and usually result in at least one car exploding). Her work life is

complicated by two men: her on-again, off-again boyfriend and local cop Joe Morelli, and her enigmatic, darkly handsome fellow bounty-hunter Ranger.

Sparkle Hayter's Robin Hudson lives and works in New York. Starting with *What's a Girl Gotta Do?* (1994) television journalist Robin is constantly trying to move out of her network's tabloidesque Special Reports department and back to Crime and Justice, after a prolonged belch during an interview with the President led quickly to a demotion. Her efforts to advance are continually hampered by her sexist boss Jerry Spurdle, a "man who believed a woman was only a vehicle for the transport of her breasts," and by the dead bodies that spring up around her (*What's A Girl Gotta Do?* 51). In addition to the lingering effects of her acrimonious divorce, Robin's wary forays into dating are stalled by the convolutions of her professional and personal fascination with crime, particularly as her scrapbook of bizarre murder cases starts to fill up with tales of her own.

Lauren Henderson's London installation artist and part-time aerobics instructor Sam Jones has a similar problem: everywhere she turns she stumbles across a mysterious death. Preferring to spend her social time drinking, dancing, and doing any recreational drugs she can get her hands on, Sam – not Samantha, as that "sounds much too like the kind of person who has herself photographed wearing a fishnet thong, a thick gloss of body oil and a bright smile" (*Black Rubber Dress*, 11) – finds that she cannot escape the deadly events of her past, or her former lover, homicide detective Hawkins.

On television, teenaged Veronica Mars works part-time for her private eye father. She is often asked to solve problems for her peers – lost dogs, missing

parents, sexual blackmail – in addition to her own ongoing investigation into who roofied and raped her at a house party. Torn between her first love Duncan Kane and his best friend Logan Echolls, two of the wealthiest boys at school, her personal life is not only public knowledge but also bound up in the rigid hierarchies of her small town's violent race and class conflicts. Her social visibility is complicated and exacerbated by her father's job, as he oscillates between ousted and reinstated Sheriff.

Steph, Robin, Sam, and Veronica are just a few of popular culture's chick dicks. Their increasing numbers, particularly in fiction, are facilitated in part by the phenomenal boom of chick lit, mass-market fiction aimed at twenty- and thirty-something women. A lucrative revision of the romance novel, "the older genre's sassy, up-to-date daughter," chick lit's configuration of girlfriends, guy problems, and Gucci as universally familiar – and female – concerns is proving itself a malleable and marketable form (Jernigan 2004, 68).

Confirmed as a commercial success by Helen Fielding's best-selling *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996)[5], the chick lit formula has given publishing houses a way to revive the flagging romance genre[6]. Like the romance novel, chick lit occupies a contested position in feminist literary criticism. While emergent commentary dances around labeling the genre as postfeminist, these critiques clearly indicate that there is a postfeminist sensibility at play; analyses of their representations of career

[5] Imelda Whelehan's *The Feminist Bestseller* (2005) is a detailed and nuanced account of the lineage and rise of chick lit. Her *Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones's Diary* (2002) offers a detailed analysis of *Bridget Jones's Diary*.
[6] Harlequin, for instance, now offers a line of such stories under their Red Dress Ink label (see Marsh 2002).

demands and personal relationships draw attention to contradictory cultural standards of femininity and female achievement (see Kiernan 2006; Mabry 2006; Wells 2006). These concerns coalesce around the chick heroine, a figure that ostensibly offers readers a greater degree of social and psychological realism than traditional romance fiction. Yet this swath of stories shares a remarkably consistent construction of "chick" as an appropriate female identity: chicks are invariably white, middle- to upper-middle class, urban, and educated. That variations are labeled "sistah lit" and "mommy lit" indicate the narrowness, and especially the racial and class specificity, of "chick" as an aspirational ideal (see Butler and Desai 2008; Guerrero 2006; Hewett 2006).

This character type is reflected and reinforced in "Must-She TV" like *Sex and the City* (HBO 1998-2004) and *Ally McBeal* (Fox 1997-2002), series with storylines that revolve around the pressures and choices contemporary women face at work, with their friends, and at the mall. In popular culture and criticism, "chick" seems to stand for a particular combination of gleeful consumption, perennial singledom, and political ambivalence. The chick is a marked shift from previous representations of women both in fiction and on television: she is more neurotic than the 1980s' powersuited professional and sexual dynamo, and less strident about her gendered experiences than the late 1960s and 1970s' consciousness-raising women (see Douglas 1994; Whelehan 2005). *New York Times* columnist James Wolcott's early description of the chick as a "postfeminist in a party dress" indicates this cultural crux: the chick is a product and producer of postfeminism (1994, 54).

A "constructed point of identification for women," the chick provides a visual and narrative language for talking about and talking *as* women (R. Gill 2006, 489). While the chick brings the challenge of "having it all" (family, friends, and a career) into popular debate, she also limits the expressions and discussions of what counts as female, feminine, and as legitimate women's issues. Such foreclosures provoke my consideration of the chick's conditions of possibility, the set of cultural circumstances that enable the circulation of specific discourses around gender, and the lived experiences governed by these discourses.

Discourses are intimately bound up with the exercise of power (Foucault 1980, 93). Postfeminist discourses produce "practices of subjection," which promote a particular female subject and feminine identity that reiterate existing power structures (Sawicki 1998, 97). Postfeminist images prescribe certain technologies of the self, practices that "permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness" (Foucault 1982/1994b, 146). Similar injunctions circulate within postfeminist discourse – that a particular kind of outfit will make a woman more desirable, that a certain level of professional determination will yield success, that the right partner will validate self-worth (I discuss these and other self-management regimes in more detail in Chapter Four). Such practices routinely involve making choices, between pairs of shoes, kinds of employment, types of men.

The "constituitive powers of discourse" presume a subject produced through and capable of choice, but confines this ability to a limited range of options or possibilities – certain styles and careers are not just "better" choices, but the only ones (McNay 1992, 5). Postfeminism's power is articulated through this circumscription of possibilities. Explaining its "government of individualization," the naturalization of certain subjectivities at the expense of others through continual recourse to a limited and limiting set of representations, sheds light on how postfeminism promotes the chick as an ideal (Foucault 1982/1994a, 330).

The chick dick's increasing visibility contributes to how the chick identity and its attendant gendered power relations are both normalized and contested. The stories' trope of investigation is crucial in this respect. Chick dicks are not professional or licensed detectives, and so their investigations have no set or sanctioned place within existing structures of law and order. Their work is not bounded by institutional patterns, rules, or parameters – as amateur sleuths they tend to make it up as they go along. These women are motivated by their own experiences of contemporary gendered power dynamics, crystallized in scenes of sexualized violence at the start of each series. Such founding moments are the impetus for the chick dick's first foray into investigation. These moments become contextualized within larger sites of gendered oppression (which form the thematic basis for each subsequent chapter), and in recognizing this, chick dicks generate a resistant stance that persists throughout each character's serial exploits.

Investigation provides these protagonists with a critical standpoint from which they are subject to, and feel capable of acting against, vicious gender

inequalities. Via their location within – and often as the centre of – a narrative of detection, these inequalities are understood and treated as potentially criminal. When approaching mediated displays of sex and gender, Elspeth Probyn suggests that "we can begin to locate feminist speaking positions within a tactical use of images as points of view" (1993, 92). Following this, I argue that the chick dick's investigative standpoint calls for the scrutiny of postfeminist power relations and feminine identities, and that these representations are one of the bases upon which women are still seen as subordinate.

Ancestry

The chick dick is not the first female sleuth to encounter resistance on the basis of her sex, or to act as a cipher for social anxieties around sex and gender. In taking on the role of investigator, the chick dick extends the lineage of women detectives, both amateur and professional, that insists upon women's ability to inhabit what is typically a position of male power and authority (see Ebert 1992; Littler 1991). While fictional women have been detecting almost as long as men, Birgitta Berglund notes that early female detectives "had to contend with . . . the fact that a woman could not be a hero; she had to be a heroine, which is a very different thing. A heroine may be allowed a great deal of love and romance, but she is allowed very little scope for action" (2000, 139). One way of situating women in a world of action and danger was to embed investigative prowess within the non-threatening – and non-sexual – figure of the nosy spinster. Characters like Miss Marple and Jessica Fletcher "can get away with murder – or at least the detection

of murder – without threatening male authority" because the combination of their age and their sex means they are already seen as marginal and harmless figures (Berglund 2000, 145). However, from within their seemingly innocuous social position nosy spinsters frequently make incisive observations about women's agency. They can offer "several pretty severe proto-feminist statements that would be much more provocative coming from the lips of a more powerful or sexually attractive woman" (Berglund 2000, 145). Simultaneously an effective and an easily dismissed container of feminist messages, the nosy spinster establishes a pattern that pervades female detective texts: the elements that ostensibly mitigate women's incursions into a stereotypically male prerogative often sharpen the edge of their social critique.

Nancy Drew, a character routinely if sometimes mistakenly hailed as a powerful feminist figure, also follows this design. For many, Nancy was the epitome of the equality to which young women sensed they were entitled, and women who grew up reading *The Hidden Staircase* (Keene 1930) and *The Secret of the Old Clock* (Keene 1930) often cite her as an inspiration for their own achievements in male-dominated spheres (Nash 2006, 40). As Ilana Nash describes,

> Nancy dodges all projections, domestic and otherwise. At no point is her behaviour successfully constrained by others' definitions of her sex or her age. A frequent device pits Nancy against an unpleasant adult who makes the grave error of mistaking her for a normal girl – with all the assumptions of triviality and expectations of deference

> that adults project onto that identity. When such conflicts occur the experienced Drew reader knows, with immense pleasure, what will happen next: Nancy will draw herself up to the full height of her dignity and reveal, coolly and articulately, that her interlocutor has grossly underestimated her. (2006, 47)

As an amateur girl sleuth Nancy Drew confronts and confounds many of the same barriers of social expectations as the nosy spinster. Yet this does not necessarily make Nancy Drew a *feminist* figure. Nash explains how Nancy Drew undermines or ignores feminism's core convictions, which presage how the trope of individualism informs postfeminist representations of women. Nancy is figured as an exceptional individual, particularly through juxtaposition with other (flawed) female characters like the pudgy and emotional Bess or uncouth and tomboyish Georgie (O'Reilly 2009). These implicit comparisons elevate Nancy above other women and away from any recognition of "systemic problem[s] that affect women collectively . . . Nancy reflects her creators' beliefs that women could be *agents* – an idea compatible, but not synonymous, with modern feminism" (Nash 2006, 42) While the lack of any feminine foibles means Nancy is "just specific enough to be recognizable, but not so specific as to discourage a girl from projecting herself into the character," it also divests Nancy of the opportunity to express any sort of solidarity with other women (Nash 2006, 39). Like the tireless Superwoman of the 1980s who deftly balances a high-pressure career, multiple young children, and an enriching social life (Whelehan 2005, 141-55), Nancy Drew presents an ideal of female exceptionalism with tenuous and suspect connections to feminist goals.

However, the 1980s also saw an explosion of the vocally feminist private investigator. Characters like Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski and Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone moved quickly up bestseller lists; on television, series such as *Cagney & Lacey* (CBS 1982-1988), *Moonlighting* (ABC 1985-1989), and *Remington Steele* (NCB 1982-1987) dominated prime time, popularizing female detectives and, crucially, weaving the problems they face *as* women into their storylines (D'Acci 1994; Mizejewski 2004; Walton and Jones 1999). Emboldened by their professionalization, these women occupy a licensed, if not always socially sanctioned, position from which to investigate femininity and feminism. Like Nancy Drew, these women had a profound effect on their audience. Danae Clark speaks of female fans' "fierce identification" with cops Chris Cagney and Mary Beth Lacey (1990, 118), arguing that the series "goes beyond a mere identification with certain stereotypes or roles and engages its female viewers in a process of locating and (re)articulating women's positioning within social practices" (1990, 133).

This process cuts across media. Maureen Reddy, for instance, sees the investigative strategies of detectives like Warshawksi and Millhone as a way of "teach[ing] their readers how to read as women, either by focusing on the female detective's thought processes or by taking the reader through a form of consciousness raising" (1990, 176; see also Reddy 1998). Coming on the heels of second-wave feminism, many of these texts explicitly presented feminism "as the only frame of reference adequate to understanding and critiquing both the particular crime and the larger social issue" (Reddy 1990, 175).

What these professional investigators share – and pass along to the chick dicks that follow in their sensibly-shod footsteps – is a sense of social justice rooted in the drive for gender equality, its lack dramatized by the woman detective's immediate disadvantage based solely on sex. As Laura Holt reminds us via voiceover at the start of each *Remington Steele* episode, "I studied and apprenticed, and put my name on an office. But absolutely nobody knocked down my door. A female private investigator seemed so feminine. So I invented a superior. A decidedly masculine superior. Suddenly, there were cases around the block. It was working like a charm."[7]

Maintaining that women's roles in crime stories can extend beyond hapless victim or scheming seductress, these nosy spinsters, curious teens, and professional investigators have helped to make the woman detective a widely accessible repository of images about female agency. They have also established a broad set of representational strategies and political concerns that stymie attempts to easily categorize these characters on the basis of any straightforward relation to feminism. Rather than suggest a simple or linear trajectory from proto- to postfeminist (and by doing so imply the possibility of a properly feminist detective), thinking of the contemporary chick dick's debt to those that have sleuthed before emphasizes how popularly circulating expectations of both gender and genre are shaped by past and present cultural encounters.

[7] This "decidedly masculine superior" dominated the series even after it ended. The 2005 release of Season One on DVD has Pierce Brosnan on the cover, with a sticker affixed in the bottom corner that reads "Also starring Stephanie Zimbalist."

The chick dick's generic locations provoke rather than preclude a discursive approach and interpretation. A crucial feature of her cultural work is a politicization of the conditions that govern genre and gender conventions, and I read chick dick narratives as political *because* they are embedded in postfeminist discourse. The chick dick is an important figure for making sense of and interrogating postfeminism, as she questions its easy recourse to female freedom and individualism – or, when all else fails, the mall – as the solution to what are actually systemic social inequalities.

This is not to say that the chick dick is a uniformly and consistently subversive figure, or that each text in which she appears is a bastion of progressive politics. As I identify in the forthcoming discussion of each series' founding moment of violence, these stories make frequent concessions in traversing popular culture's representational straits. Complicit with the presentation of "chick" as a position of individual white privilege, chick dick narratives mobilize certain imagery at the expense of others. While undeniably problematic, I do not see this as automatically negating the critical statements these characters attempt to make about women in the postfeminist frame. Like their cultural context, chick dick stories are fraught with complex identity politics, and the way they trade in some stereotypes while exploiting others points to the narrowness of representational strategies available within contemporary popular culture.

Founding moments

At the beginning of each series, Steph, Robin, Sam, and Veronica are all thrust unceremoniously into sexually violent situations to which they insist upon finding their own solutions. This founding moment acts as a kind of feminist "starting point," establishing gendered dynamics of sexual and social power that persist throughout the texts, and galvanizing the women into investigative action. In *One for the Money* Steph is stalked by local boxer Benito Ramirez. Steph learns that Ramirez has a documented history of vicious sexual abuse against neighbourhood prostitutes, and she witnesses this firsthand when he leaves an unconscious woman battered and bloody, raped with a broken beer bottle, on her fire escape. He jerks off on her apartment door, and leaves messages on her answering machine of women whimpering and moaning in pain: "Her words were barely audible, thick with tears and trembling with the effort of speech. 'It was g-g-good,' she said. Her voice broke. "Oh God help me, I'm hurt. I'm hurt something awful'" (166). He stalks her on the street and when she repeatedly refuses his advances, tells her:

> "Be more interesting to tell you about the champ. How he gonna teach you some respect. How he gonna punish you so you learn not to refuse him." He stepped closer, and the heat coming off his body made the air feel cool by comparison. "Think maybe I'll make you bleed before I fuck you. You like that? You want to get cut, bitch?" (225)

He then hits her, splitting her lip and bruising her cheek. Rather than go to the police, who are fully aware of Ramirez's violent behaviour yet unable to make any charges stick, Steph searches for ways to protect herself. She reluctantly buys a small handgun and takes lessons, drawing upon what she has learned when Ramirez's agent shows up at her apartment determined to kill her in order to protect his star client. Even after taking a bullet in the buttocks while trying to escape, she manages to return fire and kill him.

The story's visceral depictions of sexual assault are made more palatable by being anchored in the image of the racialized predator. Described as a "hulking mountain of muscle . . . [with] hooded, close-set eyes," Ramirez is unequivocally menacing (45). This characterization, including Ramirez' stereotypical "ghetto" vernacular and the blatantly sexual overtones of his behaviour toward women, (re)produces popular and longstanding notions of the powerful, animalistic black rapist (see Collins 2004; hooks 2004). That Stephanie's assault, and those of the other women in the novel, are scripted along these familiar lines suggests an uncomfortable compromise, that only so many cultural assumptions about women's vulnerability and sexual violence can be challenged at once, at least in order for a text to become popular.

Like Steph, Sam's snooping in *Dead White Female* (1995) almost gets her killed in order to secure someone's sexual secrets. Convinced her friend's death at a party is more than an accident, Sam uncovers a tangled web of adultery, obsession, and child molestation among the city's cultural elites. Her investigations slowly implicate her new boyfriend Nat, who has killed two people that could expose the

shame buried in his past. She confronts him with the realization that he has actually been bedding her for information to appease the older brother who sexually abused him:

> "You didn't kill Walter because Clifford told you to," I said slowly. "And you didn't hit Lee because Clifford said so, either. You killed them because they knew something about you that you didn't want known."
>
> I looked up at him.
>
> "So are you going to kill me too?" I said, my voice hard. "I know what Clifford did to you when you were young, just like they did. Are you going to kill me for it?"
>
> I watched the soft expression fade out of his face. Not all at once, but gradually, like an eclipse. For a moment his face was wiped clean as a slate. Then his fingers tightened on my shoulders and his eyes were blazing with anger.
>
> …
>
> I fumbled around on the table with my left hand and grabbed the picture that Walter had sent me, shoving it at him. It meant nothing to me but it obviously did to him. His face blanched with pain.
>
> "You *bitch* – "
>
> He raised his hand to hit me, his face inches from mine. (261-2)

Sam must then defend herself as he chases and corners her in her own apartment. He ends up dead, his neck snapped after she shoves him off the ladder of her loft bed. She ends up safe yet shaken, and with a record of killing in self-defense that follows her in subsequent novels.

Robin Hudson finds herself both the investigator and the investigated when a private detective trying to blackmail her about her sexual history winds up dead in a hotel room (*What's A Girl Gotta Do?*). She discovers she was not his only target; her ex-husband Burke's new fiancée Amy is determined to kill Robin to keep secret the private eye's knowledge that Amy's unborn child does not belong to Burke. The private eye's list of victims, other prominent female television journalists like Robin and Amy, makes clear that women's public worth is determined by their sexual behaviour and appearance. As Amy explains to Robin, "I have no choice'" (259). In this situation, Robin's violent antagonist needs to be female; the story's overarching censure of a media culture fascinated by and continually policing female sexuality is balanced and bolstered by the familiar postfeminist trope of women pitted against each other, equal competitors for the public's – and men's – affections.

The first season of *Veronica Mars* is driven by similar themes, teasing out parallel storylines of abuse: the brutal death of Veronica's best friend Lily, and Veronica being drugged and raped at a house party. Veronica's rape is presented as a moment of revelation and change. The current Sheriff (not her father) refuses to investigate or press charges, asking "Is there anyone in particular you'd like me to arrest, or should I just round up the sons of the most important families in town?"

("Pilot"). She is determined to find out, starts working part-time for her private-eye father, and hardens herself against social ostracization. Veronica's rumination that "It doesn't matter, I'm not that girl anymore," is reinforced by the sharp changes in her appearance; flashback sequences show a wispy white-clad Veronica with long, softly falling blonde hair moving tentatively through the crush of teenagers at the house party, in sharp contrast to the short-haired Veronica that strides aggressively through the school's hallways in jeans, t-shirts, and hefty boots ("Pilot").

Chick dick narratives' founding moments of sexualized violence foreground these women's personal and political stakes in crime and investigation. Targeted for their sex and sexuality, they retaliate by revealing the systemic social structures that make such violence possible and permissable. This is underscored by how these founding moments linger in the chick dicks' consciousness, recurring throughout the series in ways that suggest such moments haunt and inform the protagonists' investigative work. At times this haunting is literal: Benito Ramirez is released from jail and continues to terrorize Steph in *High Five* (1999), and even after his death his community benefactors pursue her in retribution (*Hard Eight*, 2002). The memory of her first – and deadly – use of a firearm, and the havoc it wreaked when she fired it wildly from within her purse appears in her self-effacing explanations of her discomfort with guns (Chapter Two takes a closer look at chick dicks' uncertain relationships with weaponry). Veronica's rape structures the program's first two seasons. Initially explained at the end of season one as unremembered but consensual sex with her ex-boyfriend Duncan Kane, by the end of the second season we learn that Veronica actually was raped, by her insecure and emasculated

classmate Cassidy 'Beaver' Casablancas (a plot twist I analyze in Chapter Three). Her clearly justified fears of sexual exploitation not only gird her emotional armour but guide her dogged determination to expose how similar power dynamics beset her peers, whether at the hands of boyfriends ("M.A.D."), teachers ("Mars vs. Mars"), or family members ("The Girl Next Door").

Sam is the most vocal about the impact of Nat's attack and death on her personal and investigative projects. He is referenced in each subsequent novel, as a touchstone for her behaviour in sexual relationships as well as a creative impetus for her art. As she tells a close friend:

> "After everything happened with Nat, I started working hell-for-leather to distract myself, and now I feel like my energy's run out."
>
> "It's been a while." Janey looked concerned. Nat's wasn't a name I mentioned very often.
>
> "A couple of years. Sometimes it feels like a couple of weeks . . . If it hadn't been for him I'd never have been making mobiles."
>
> …
>
> "That's why you haven't been seeing anyone, isn't it? You've gone all morbid. You've been thinking about him."
>
> "How could I help it, Janey?" I said simply, abandoning my defences. "For the past few months I've been in my studio, working non-stop, living like a hermit … and sometimes it seems to me that

> making the mobiles is just a way of balancing out what happened with Nat. How could I not think about him?" (*Freeze My Margarita*, 9-10)

Only when she is kidnapped, beaten, chained in a dark basement for days, and nearly raped that Sam finds other (sexualized) trauma to work out through her art, shifting from mobiles to

> "Giant motorized cockroaches. Whizzing all over the floor. You go into this darkened room and there are these giant motorized cockroaches making that clickety cockroach-on-the-move noise . . . only they react to the heat in your body so they never actually bump into you. When they get within a foot of you they turn at a right angle. But you don't know that till you work it out." (*Chained*, 316)

The enduring effects of these founding moments stress that sexualized crimes are not singular or isolated events that vanish when solved. Rather, they provoke recognitions that frame the chick dicks' subsequent actions, fostering a stance based on firsthand knowledge of the conditions that enable and encourage men's sexualized violence against women. The crime genre is crucial in this regard. Its "profound investment in dynamics of power inevitably incorporates discourses of gender and sexuality," an existing emphasis on sex and secrets that chick dick narratives use as a cipher for larger patterns of social power (Plain 2001, 8).

Feminism is an unspoken assumption in these founding moments, a lens through which these attacks come to be seen not just as crimes but as violations. This is one way in which chick dick stories can be identified as sites of struggle over

articulating feminist claims in a political environment that makes it increasingly difficult to do so. Self-identifying as a feminist often opens the chick dick up to criticism and ridicule. For example, in *The Last Manly Man* (1998) Robin's participation in a feminist convention provokes physical attacks on both herself and the other women attendees. Yet chick dicks' acknowledgement of feminism is a starting point for asserting its continued relevance, particularly as it becomes the framework through which these characters try to protect and defend themselves and others from situations understood as exploitative. Chick dicks' intuition that victimization extends beyond their individual circumstances is a hallmark of their investigative practice, for their determined detection is both a cognizant and a felt response undertaken in the striking absence of other options. As the ineptitude of Steph's local police force suggests, and the Sheriff's remarks to Veronica make clear, the available apparatus of law and order does not see these instances of sexualized violence as worth investigating. For chick dicks, detecting is less a choice than a necessary response to the environments in which young women operate daily.

Choosing Femininities

Angela McRobbie (2004a) refers to this environment as a new gender regime, and points to how these kinds of gendered inequalities are discursively displaced into the rhetoric of poorly made individual choices. Marked by lip service to women's freedom and equality, Elspeth Probyn notes that postfeminist discourse "provide[s] a *public* language to talk about me and other similar women – it may even provide women with words to talk about themselves. And it is precisely this

aspect, this function of discourses that has to be dealt with" (1990, 154-5, emphasis in original). I introduce here (and revisit in Chapter Four) a critical consideration of how this public language frames female freedom within a depoliticized framework of individualism and choice. Women are hailed as individuals not only capable of but required to make choices, identified by what they *can* do rather than through injunctions against what they cannot – a "female subject of capacity" (McRobbie 2007, 726).

The chick exemplifies this particular kind of postfeminist female subject. Linda Mizejewski aptly characterizes a chick as "the savvy woman who no longer needs political commitment, who enjoys feminine consumerist choices, and whose preoccupations are likely to involve romance, careers choices, and hair gels" (2005, 122). A female subject of capacity insofar as her capacity is figured primarily as an ability to consume, the chick's sense of equality is popularly equated with the ability to pick relationships and careers as if selecting from an array of fabulous footwear or pretty party dresses. In this context, inequities – of opportunity, mobility, security – are presented as personal obstacles, requiring or even a result of individual choices dissociated from any sort of social constraint.

Recurring across contemporary women-centred and women-targeted texts, this notion of choice is "postfeminist thought's most powerful framing device: Patriarchy is gone and has been replaced by choice" (Dow 1996, 95). Part of what critics describe as a "lifestyle culture," wherein individual success can be easily evaluated by quickly perusing one's choice of accoutrements – wardrobe, car, condo, partner – postfeminism transposes this into what Bonnie Dow (1996) calls lifestyle

feminism (see also Philips 2000). In this media-friendly version of feminism, lifestyle stands in for politics: "Feminist politics become feminist identity. Feminist identity, in turn, is defined by appearance, by job, by martial status and by personality, not by political belief or political practice" (Dow 1996, 209). Flaunting the freedom to choose is what marks a woman as "empowered," not the choices themselves.

Despite its veneer of personal freedom, choice is significantly socially constrained. Chick narratives' female subject of capacity is produced through and capable of choice, provided she chooses from a (limited) range of appropriate and acceptable options. "Choice is surely, within lifestyle culture, a modality of constraint. The individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices" (McRobbie 2004b, 261). When the injunction to "have it all" inevitably fails, it is the self and not the system of social governance and expectations that comes under scrutiny: "the quality of being able to choose something over something else is also displaced from where it ought to be. Rather than in the hands of the woman choosing, choice in some situations is represented as already having been made, always and already chosen" (Probyn 1993, 285). The ideal "chick" is a pre-determined and ultimately choiceless female subject.

Choice structures chick narratives through the thematic trope of shopping: for shoes, for men, for careers. This consumptive logic effectively elides the ways in which, like pricey Manolo Blahniks, not all choices are available to all women. Choice recurs as a commercial and commercialized articulation of agency, denoting consumer options, not political ones (see Faludi 1991, 71; Philips 2000). Shopping

becomes a means of representing female selfhood and esteem, a name-dropping display of appropriate female and feminine identities[8]. For some, this configuration of choice can work to women's advantage. Stephanie Genz promotes this as "fashion feminism," presuming a "sexual micro-politics whereby women exert their consumer agency to achieve empowerment by using their bodies as political tools within the parameters of a capitalist economy" (2006, 345). Shopping, for Genz, empowers women because it allows them to confront the "feminine commodity and make it available for other significations" (2006, 346).

The notion that commodities can be so easily re-signified implicitly upholds the narrow construction of the ideal chick, as it ignores how feminine identity intersects with other axes such as age, race, or class. The opportunity and ability to resignify commodities is predicated on disposable time and income that are by no means equitably distributed. By conflating consumer identity with political identity, empowerment becomes a purely economic position, further entrenching social divisions and occluding a critical awareness of how capitalism's deep structural inequities perpetuate patriarchal systems of domination and exploitation (see also Mann 1994).

Fashion feminism assumes that new meanings can circulate independently, unfettered by existing significations, and that the circuit of commodification will not just reappropriate them, an expectation unwarranted by even recent history.

---

[8] This premise is the basis for Sophie Kinsella's best-selling *Shopaholic* series: *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2001), *Shopaholic Takes Manhattan* (2002), *Shopaholic Ties the Knot* (2003), *Shopaholic and Sister* (2005), and *Shopaholic and Baby* (2007). In 2009, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (dir. P.J. Hogan) was released in theatres, to largely lukewarm reviews.

Ariel Levy's (2007) description of 'raunch culture' is illustrative, as she sketches out the ways in which second-wave feminism's political principles about women's rights to take pleasure in their own bodies and sexualities are commodified to fit within a single, narrow conception of sexual expression in which female sexuality services male desire. Women are encouraged to actively partake in and make themselves available for such sexual exploitation, since choosing this form of bodily display is couched in terms of empowerment and liberal sexuality. For Levy, "raunch culture is not essentially progressive, it is essentially commercial" (2007, 29).

Instead of indicating the ways in which consumer capitalism systemically reinforces gender- and class-based power dynamics, the rhetoric of choice relocates responsibility onto the individual woman – women no longer struggle with social and structural inequalities, they simply make the wrong choices. The ability to make *a* choice becomes a synecdoche for *any* choice, resulting in an updated version of Nancy Drew's exceptional exploits in which "female achievement [is] predicated not on feminism, but on 'female individualism'" (McRobbie 2004b 258). This discourages women from considering their circumstances as the result of social conditions that systemically disadvantage women *qua* women, emphasizing individual culpability instead. As with Levy's raunch culture, feminism itself is often presented as the cause[9] – that its successful lobby for female freedom has not only

[9] Levy charges that "the emergence of a woman-backed trash culture *is* a rebellion against their [i.e. second-wave feminists'] values of feminism, egalitarianism, and antimaterialism . . . it is actually also a repercussion of the very forces they put in motion – they are the ones who started this" (2007, 44-5). She proceeds to conflate second-wave feminism with anti-pornography activism, a polemical move and deliberate historical revision Astrid Henry (2004) argues is typical of many third-wave feminist writers.

afforded but burdened women with choice. Susan Faludi refers to this postfeminist strategy as "backlash," an "attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women. This counterassault is largely insidious: in a kind of pop-culture version of the Big Lie, it stands the truth boldly on its head and proclaims that the very steps that have elevated women's position have actually led to their downfall" (1991, xviii). Blaming feminism for encouraging women to "have it all," or to participate in the "pornification" of their sexuality, precludes an analysis of the wider social structures that skew the balance between career and family, the myriad ways women's bodies are objectified and commodified for pleasure, as well as the continuing need for and relevance of feminist activism on these and multiple other fronts.

This is not to say that the available meanings about and for women are inexorably static and uniformly oppressive. Commodity culture is indeed a site of struggle, and while the "terms and conditions of visibility for young women, are defined primarily by the commercial domain" they are not exclusively determined by it (McRobbie 2007, 733). As I show shortly, the chick dick's deployment of an "aware femininity" explores this tension between intention and reception, changing clothes as a way of changing femininities in an attempt to corral and control their work environment.

A range of wardrobe choices has become synonymous with the notion that multiple gender identities can be created and carried out. As Amanda Lotz explains, this "'playing' with gender constructions, or raising the performative or mutable nature of gender and sexuality" is a hallmark of postfeminist media

products (2001, 116). Texts like *Sex and the City* typify this playful approach. In the episode "Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl" uptight and conservative Charlotte is at first reluctant to be photographed as man, until a dapper suit and a bigger sock make her feel assertive. This link between clothing and gendered identities is taken to even more fantastic ends in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB 1997-2003) episode "Halloween" when an evil spell transforms Buffy and her friends into (the gendered attributes of) their costumes: emasculated Xander becomes a forceful solider trained to kill, insecure Willow finds self-confidence dressed as a dominatrix, and heroine Buffy is reduced to a simpering princess. When the spell is finally broken everyone returns to their former selves, imbued with the knowledge gained from their costume identities.

Chick dick narratives also depict gender roles as performative. Historically and stereotypically the detective has been male; chick dicks are aware that they inhabit a highly gendered position, and they often approach detecting as something they 'put on':

> "Play the role," Lula said. "That's what we do. We pick a role and we play it. What role do you want to play?"
>
> "I want to be smart, and I want to be brave."
>
> "Go for it," Lula said. (*Ten Big Ones*, 218)

Many feminist literary critics point to this tendency, and argue that by occupying a male position the female detective is a woman in drag – the implications of which I discuss in Chapter Two (see Klein 1995; Littler 1991; Munt 1994; Walton and Jones 1999). Significantly, chick dicks approach being women – or chicks – in this

same fashion. Just as they create outfits intended to convey a tough, no-nonsense image of the detective, they also carefully select clothes to reflect the feminine façade they need for any given situation. Most interesting is when these two objectives or roles overlap.

For example, in *Dead White Female*, Sam dresses to meet someone she is convinced holds a clue to the real circumstances of her friend's death:

> I put on my black satin jeans and pulled over them a big black polo-neck sweater. I pinned my hair up in clumps on top of my head and made my face up carefully: pale powder, liquid black eyeliner, red lipstick. Then I filled up all the holes in my ears with little silver hoops and loaded my fingers with silver rings. I looked in the mirror. It was the effect I had wanted. I didn't look like I'd take any shit from anyone. (207-8)

She pays the same close attention to her appearance and its effects in other situations, deliberately tailoring her look in order to "pass" in different contexts. Heading out to the unveiling of her latest art installation at the local theatre, she exuberantly trades in her work clothes for something else:

> Finally I settled on my new vinyl hipsters, a tight little T-shirt with "Barbie is a Slut" scrawled over the bosom area, and a chenille cardigan, piling my hair up with a lot of blue diamante hairclips. Then I went down to the bathroom and painted on some fudge-coloured lipstick. I was ready to face the world. Whether it was

ready for me was a different matter altogether (*Freeze My Margarita*, 207).

Sam's felt need to be prepared to 'face the world' (a turn of phrase that recurs on page 323), emphasizes the extent to which her outfits are constructed in recognition of what certain clothing choices mean. Her alternations between the steelworking artist and the vivacious, sexual bohemian are conveyed through clothing: careful and restrained make-up versus an array of flashy hairpins, head-to-toe black versus low-slung pants and a cropped t-shirt. For Sam, the cultural coding of women's appearances implies not only multiple femininities, but also strictly corresponding contexts in which they can be performed, a knowledge she, like other chick dicks, uses to her advantage.

Judith Butler suggests that such calculated and mimetic repetitions of stereotypically gendered traits – e.g. male authority and female frippery – can critique or intervene in the concept of stable sexed identities: "Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (1990, 136, emphasis in original). Postfeminist media culture's performance of gendered identities raises an unsettling tension, for if gender is a form of play then the categories of sex and gender are inherently changeable: "it is precisely the *repetition* of that play that establishes as well the *instability* of the very category that it constitutes" (Butler 1993b, 311, emphasis in original).

In Evanovich's *Four to Score*, for instance, Steph meets Sally Sweet and his roommate Sugar, both drag queens. Over the course of the novel Steph wards off numerous threats, such as Sugar's seemingly passive jealousy, and increasingly violent attacks by a mysterious woman in red. Steph and Morelli's search for this lady in red is one dead end after another, for Sugar's drag is so flawless that his performance fools everyone:

> Sugar was wearing a blood-red satin dress that fit him like his own skin. It was short and tight and so smooth in front I thought he must have been surgically altered. His makeup was flawless. His lips were full and pouty, painted in high gloss to match the dress. He wore the Marilyn wig, and on my best day I never looked that good. I slid a sideways glance at Morelli, and he obviously was caught in the same dumbstruck fascination that I was experiencing. I shifted my attention back to Sugar and the realization suddenly hit me.
>
> "The woman in the bar was Sugar," I whispered to Morelli. "It was a different blond wig, but I'm sure it was Sugar."
>
> "Are you kidding me? He was right in front of you, and you didn't recognize him?"
>
> "It happened so fast, and the room was dark and crowded. And besides, look at him! He's beautiful!" (*Four to Score*, 214-5)

This play with the figure of the femme fatale relies on an amalgamation of gender signifiers, a femme rather than a female[10]. Gender identity becomes the confounding crux of the story, or, as Morelli remarks: "Christ, for a minute there I didn't know whether I wanted to punch him in the face or ask him for a date" (215).

Chick dick narratives attempt to exploit this anxiety, part of their work in revealing how constructions of gender condition a variety of violent and oppressive social relations. When enabled by and framed within patterns of consumption, however, the potentially subversive performance of gender identities run the risk of being appropriated by the logic of consumer capitalism. Recognizing how the play of postfeminist gendered identities is anchored in consumer culture is of paramount importance for unpacking chick politics, for when gendered identities are expressed through – and even as – commodities their significations can be more easily determined, regulated, and enforced. Yet this discursive construction of gender is neither totalizing nor seamless, for while meanings are produced and reproduced through circulation, so are their undertones of gender trouble. That chicks are discursively constructed through the championing of choice also means there are points from which to interrogate this position: "discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (Foucault 1978, 101). The chick dick's excessive display of some of the options associated with "chick" as a

[10] This use of sex and gender identity also literalizes the trope of transgender-as-transgressive, a theme often read as emphasizing the boundaries of the gendered social order. See Chapter Two, pages 51-3 (including footnotes 1 and 2), where I elaborate upon these configurations.

gendered and commodified identity disrupts postfeminism's facile recourse to choice by exposing some of its possible, lived experiences.

Understanding that an incitement to consume undergirds the postfeminist rhetoric of empowerment also opens up ways of approaching the political economy of particular female identities, such as hyperfemininity or "girly." Articulating empowerment through imagery of Girl Power or "power feminism" (Wolf 1993), is, as Ellen Riordan (2001) insists, a strategic marketing ploy, an appropriation of second-wave feminism's insistence on female freedom, autonomy, and sexuality into consumable products. Empowered attitudes are conveyed through modes of dress and comportment, ostensibly reflecting a woman's control over her body and her choices. As Riordan argues, however, this emphasis on female consumption simply shifts the act of constructing the desirable female body for the male gaze to women themselves (2001, 291). Being girly is now one of a small handful of available options, an image and expression of femaleness signified through hyperfeminine clothing and accessories.

By scripting gender identities as an extension or expression of female choice and power, and in particular by promoting hyperfemininity as an empowering choice, the postfeminist endorsement of this particular femininity glosses over potential problems of a giggly and girlish feminine ideal. Via the rhetoric of consumption and choice, girly is positioned not as a throwback to pre-feminist politics but as an extension of and reward for feminism's own struggles (Baumgardner and Richards 2004). Suggesting that feminism has succeeded

because such options are available, the postfeminist emphasis on girliness contributes to the perception of feminism as finished and irrelevant.

Girly further sidelines feminism by infantilizing it through what Melissa Deem terms "juvenalizing discourses of feminism" (2003, 616). When female authority and achievement are most popularly represented by young female characters like Ally McBeal and Bridget Jones, which provide "images of grown single women as frazzled, self-absorbed girls," their pop culture circulation often renders these issues idiosyncratic, amusing, and harmless (Bellafante 1998, 55). Yet fastening such notions about women's capacities and concerns to the chick ideal also means that the independent and successful woman is "made safe by being represented as fundamentally still a girl (Tasker and Negra 2005, 109).

The chick dick's own enactment of girly – the deliberate ways in which this character dons an overtly feminine demeanour – offers an understanding of the problems that arise from uncritically embracing girlishness as empowering. When performing girly, the chick dick not only disrupts a conflation between sex and gender identity, but also focuses on the implications of this form of femininity. The chick dick's use of girly emphasizes not the intention (choosing hyperfemininity to assert their empowerment) but rather its reception. This shift in attention contests the notion of female freedom that underpins the rhetoric of choice, and refutes the implication that women's choices are made freely, in the absence of social pressures or expectations of appropriate femininity. As Sam remarks, "I had the theory that the smarter I looked, the more appropriately I would behave" (*The Strawberry Tattoo*, 180). Her acknowledgement of the

strength with which norms of conduct for women are tied to certain images of female and femininity parallels the behaviour-inducing costumes in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s "Halloween" episode, yet this is no sinister magic spell but a pervasive cultural sensibility.

As Sam's comment suggests, the chick dick is aware of how femininities are perceived, and enact them precisely *because* of this. Her performances not only demonstrate but draw attention to the misogyny underneath contemporary representations of women. For instance, when Sam attends a prestigious party celebrating the installation of her large steel sculpture in a local bank's atrium, she is treated like a no more than a party favour:

> "You welded it together?" Georgios look at me disbelievingly; or not so much at me as what was signified by my little black dress and high heels. "You yourself?"
>
> I tried not to roll my eyes too obviously. "It's easy once you get the hang of it."
>
> "A girl of many parts, our Sam," Duggie added, not helping matters much; it made everyone, not just Georgios, stare at my parts. David Stronge patted my shoulder in a way that he doubtless told himself was avuncular.
>
> "I dropped by a couple of times to see Samantha at work," he said over my head. "Very impressive it was too. Nice to see a young woman doing that kind of thing without losing her

femininity, eh? Though you'd never have known she was female when you saw her all bundled up in her dungarees, I can tell you!"

I had finished my champagne and was finding it hard not to shove my glass into David Stronge's face and ask him if that counted as a feminine gesture. I never, *ever* wore dungarees. (*Black Rubber Dress*, 13)

The perceived message of her dress reverberates throughout the evening; she meets corporate finance banker Sebastian at this event, and after a few dates learns that he was dared by his friends to bed her, with a bottle of champagne as his reward. For them, Sam's dress signified that she was "easy."

Amidst such reminders that women are approached, judged, and treated based on their sexual appearance, the chick dick tactically deploys an "aware" femininity. Designed to elicit specific responses, this aware femininity is not carried out to express an individual sense of fluidity within gendered identities, but rather the opposite – that femininities have limited and limiting significations which reiterate women's subordinate role in the dominant gender order. As transvestite Sally Sweet quickly discovers, adorning oneself with stereotypical signs of femininity provokes men's sense of entitlement to gaze at and comment upon the female body. He punches Steph's boyfriend Joe Morelli in the face after Joe makes a snide comment about the shape of Sally's breasts: "'That's what happens when you have breasts,' [Steph] shouted. 'People insult them. Get used to it'" (*Four to Score*, 67). Later, confused by the seemingly endless products and rituals required

to create and maintain an idealized image of female beauty, Sally dispiritedly and cogently remarks, "this woman stuff is complicated" (*Four to Score*, 85).

Chick dick narratives' use of investigation plays a central role in unpacking the politics of gender performance within postfeminism. The chick dick compounds the trope that the female detective is simply a woman in drag, for her most effective sleuthing is accomplished not by assuming the private eye's air of authority, but by adopting an overtly feminine demeanor. While resonating with feminist criticisms of self-management and self-care regimes (detailed in Chapter Four), this strategy also reinforces existing norms of female beauty, most notably the desirability of young, sexualized women. By donning and dangling a sexualized girlish innocence to entrap male suspects, the chick dick often – and effectively – acts as a detective by playing a "girl."

For example, in a short skirt, tiny top, and bouncing blonde ponytail Veronica feigns car trouble, an essay deadline, and a college co-ed bi-curiosity to determine if a client's fiancé is faithful ("Green Eyed Monster"). In "The Wrath of Con," she poses as an inexperienced gamer in knee-high socks, a short kilt and black bob wig to infiltrate the local video-game bar; puts on reading glasses, a high-collared shirt and three-quarter length skirt to appear as an eager academic just checking out the local college; giggles as a ditzy blonde in a sultry red dress and curled tresses to lure a trust-fund scam artist – quickly switching her feminine comportment as the situation warrants.

Similarly, when Ranger asks for Steph's help, he is not looking for her skills at tracking down bail jumpers (or FTAs). Rather, he relies on the apparently

commonsense notion that men are susceptible and entitled to women's "empowered" sexuality:

> "I need to get an FTA out of a building, and I haven't got what it takes," Ranger said.
>
> "And just exactly what is it that you're lacking?"
>
> "Smooth white skin barely hidden behind a short skirt and tight sweater."
>
> . . .
>
> Fifteen minutes later I was dressed in four-inch FMPs (short for 'fuck-me pumps,' because when you walked around in them you looked like Whorehouse Wonder Bitch). I shimmied into a low-cut black knot dress that was bought with the intent of losing five pounds, gunked up my eyes with a lot of black mascara and beefed up my cleavage by shoving Nerf balls into my bra.
>
> Ranger was parked on Roebling, half a block from the funeral home. He didn't turn when I pulled to the curb, but I saw his eyes on me in the rearview mirror.
>
> He was smiling when I slid in beside him. "Nice dress you're almost wearing. You ever think about changing professions?"
>
> "Constantly. I'm thinking about it now." (*Four to Score*, 39-40)

Excess emphasizes the artifice of this femininity. Steph's characterization of her Nerfed-up image as "Whorehouse Wonder Bitch," Sam's little black dress as

more than just little and black but also rubber, and Robin being described as a "vodka-swilling red-haired succubus" (*Nice Girls Finish Last*, 52) are typical displays of the chick dick's lack of subtlety when "putting on" femininity. Familiar images of femininity and their seemingly concomitant sexuality are played deliberately for their already-known effects.

The chick dick's hyperfeminine performance uses the promise of this identity against itself, to disrupt the easy assumption of femininities as freely chosen, to emphasize what they preclude rather than what they make possible. "Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization" (Butler 1990, 138). While chick dicks' versions of this charade, like many other postfeminist performances, suggest that there is no simple trajectory between female and feminine, they also draw attention to the prevalent and problematic meanings of this femininity in contemporary culture – that Sam's rubber dress means she is easy, that Steph's cleavage signifies sexual availability, that women's bodies are public and purchasable property.

A recuperative logic is at work when gender is performed within the parameters of consumer culture, when hyperfemininity is commodified and marketed as a choice, and when the ability to make this choice becomes aligned with politically slippery senses of 'empowerment.' This is not to say that the chick dick's gender performances are more authentic or empowered than those found elsewhere. Chick dicks struggle with the ways in which the public language of postfeminist discourse is not an adequate resource for articulating a gendered sense

of self: in one of her inner monologues Robin notes, "I'm a girl, a woman, whatever" (*Revenge of the Cootie Girls*, 14). The strategic and aware deployment of hyperfemininity emphasizes its artifice, and links it to a new gender order that keeps women in their place by suggesting that they chose this place themselves. That Steph's appearance as Whorehouse Wonder Bitch leads to her being slammed into a wall in order to be "taught a lesson" is not surprising, either for Evanovich fans accustomed to such scenes, or for the similarity to daily instances in which female victims of sexualized violence are told they were "asking for it" because of their provocative clothing (*Four to Score*, 45). As Butler notes, "as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (1990, 139).

Scenes of the Crimes

The chick dick's particular use of femininity is thus both a familiar configuration of "chick" and a tense inhabitation of this gendered identity that raises uneasy questions about how postfeminist discourses of femininity construct positions of vulnerability for women. In the chapters that follow, I identify and tease out other such contradictory movements, to illustrate and support my contention that the chick dick character and her stories provide a vantage point into and an ultimately – if not thoroughly – critical examination of postfeminism's complex gender politics.

In Chapter Two I build upon the weight assigned to the trope of feminist investigation by examining the spaces and strategies of this work. The intricate and

detailed urban geography of each series, seen as these heroines travel through their cities, actively structure daily experiences of being young and female in the "man's world" of detection and of public space. Female figures produced by the physical and social environments in which they investigate crimes, chick dicks are "made" in the process of being subject to male cat-calls and come-ons, and the physical threats and violence that hover in public and private spaces. By locating chick dicks in social space, these narratives ground an investigative feminist epistemology in the sites of detection and sexual danger the chick dick moves through and works within. Chick dick texts also confront the conventional associations of gadgets and weapons with male authority and masculine power. The chick dick's encounters with the tools and technologies of detection envision alternate ways of and enacting authority, as she instead relies upon weapons of opportunity. These creative appropriations critique the interplay between cultural and generic norms that rely upon a notion of male dominance for gender intelligibility.

Chapter Three extends this theme around the masculinization of crime and violence. In this chapter I argue that chick dick stories' concern with power as a gendered and dynamic system stems from a recognition and critique of patriarchy, and that what enables these narratives to function as politicized instances within postfeminism is precisely their attention to popular representations of male domination and masculinity. These texts depict and disparage a "wounded masculinity," wherein wounds legitimate male acts of sexualized aggression. Chick dick narratives probe the notion that masculinity is in crisis due (in part) to feminism's social and political gains. I suggest that in the context of postfeminism's

ardent individualism, recent emphases on men as victims (including in chick dick texts) help elide a critical consideration of the material circumstances that increase women's vulnerability to sexual and sexualized violence.

My fourth chapter takes an in-depth look at the labour desirable femininity requires. I show how these texts use confession to work through the postfeminist and neoliberal incitement to self-care and self-management, as chick characters continually struggle over the tension between expectations of female comportment and the gendered exhortation to "be your own woman," that is, to act according to one's own desires. Based on suspicions the chick dick voices about women's unequal place in heterosexual institutions of monogamy, marriage, and the family, I argue that these narratives build upon and resist certain postfeminist scripts of the feminine good life, and situate such reservations within the increasing cultural weight of the "new traditionalism."

To conclude, I investigate the spaces in which the chick dick does not appear, and offer explanations for her absence. In contrast to the book industry's ability to profit from niche markets like chick lit, I use ABC's short-lived series *Honey West* (1965-1966) to talk about why the chick dick is still a commercially troublesome television figure, as evidenced by the success as well as the cancellation of *Veronica Mars*. Despite their production in distinctly different cultural, generic, and industrial contexts, the similar fate of these two programs trenchantly identifies the challenges the chick dick poses to circulating discourses of femininity and feminism. The chick dick has yet to become a film phenomenon, and the kind of investigative chicks that currently appear in blockbuster movies are governed by

mainstream film's strict discursive conventions for representing authoritative women in action – they are inevitably "girlied," made maternal, or softened by true love. By means of historical over- and re-view, this final chapter reiterates how postfeminism conditions the chick dick's existence, in part through the media industries in which she does not appear. From such a vantage point, the chick dick thus appears as a character capable of broadening and revising the popular use of generic resources to reiterate conventional gender roles, and of contributing a more explicitly politicized and feminist set of claims within an increasingly postfeminist cultural environment.

Chapter Two

Chick Dicks in the City: Geographies and Technologies of Investigation

How do you walk out the door and be a good person without getting the shit kicked out of you?

-Robin Hudson

When asked why she is tracking down the Hearst campus rapist, Veronica quips "Violence against women? It's a hobby" ("President Evil"). Behind this retort, however, lies a strong sense of anger at a gender order that endangers women. Veronica does not just find lost dogs and school mascots; she also investigates young women's sexual exploitation across multiple spaces: at home by their lovers, at school by their teachers, and at parties by their peers. As Kristen Kidder argues,

> To Veronica, "normal" may mean living in a world where young women can live without fear of verbal or physical abuse, where they are free to grow into competent, capable adults. To the residents of Neptune (and to some extent the rest of society) that same designation may represent a world where women are tethered, happily, to the constraints of their gender. (2006, 133)

Outrage at women's vulnerability in the "safe" spaces of their communities also motivates Steph. When her grandmother is kidnapped from the visiting room

of the local funeral parlour by serial molester Kenny Mancuso, she tells us: "How about cool reasoning? Nope. I didn't have any of that available. How about cunning? Sorry, low on cunning. How about anger. Did I have any anger? Fucking A. I had so much anger my skin could hardly contain it. Anger for Grandma, anger for all the women Mancuso'd abused" (*Two for the Dough*, 301). This kind of rage is difficult to publicly articulate, as postfeminist political and popular culture insists women have achieved equality and are no longer victims of systemic social misogyny. The trajectory of chick dicks' anger begins with their resentment of figurative and literal boundaries of feminine comportment, which, when crossed, often open women up to sexualized violence. These texts provide much-needed spaces to identify and criticize where, how, and with what effects these limits are produced.

In dramatizing the postfeminist anxiety of "having it all," chick dick narratives invoke what Linda Mizejewski describes as the plight of the female detective: being the "wrong body in the expected place" (2004, 12). Like characterizations of female detectives as women in drag (see Chapter One), this description points to the detective's historically male and masculine embodiment[1]. The "wrong body" trope receives its most ardent and politicized articulation in narratives of transsexuality, emphasizing a felt and lived disjuncture between

[1] Such a description extends to other similarly transgressive female figures. Kenneth Paradis, for instance, argues that the femme fatale violates the hardboiled detective's sense of gender – and therefore social – order via her "masculine" traits of autonomy and agency: "She is a kind of transsexual, in other words: outwardly a powerfully attractive feminine woman, inwardly, deceptively, a man and an antagonist" (2007, 5).

biological sex and an "opposite" gender identity[2]. A similar sense of disconnect can be seen in the chick dick's previously discussed strategies of "aware femininity," as expressing that gender and sex are not the same thing.

Yet the perception that the chick dick is the wrong body is vocalized by those *around* the chick dick, not the sleuth herself. For the chick dick (and arguably for other female detectives beyond the purview of this study), the crux is the *expected place*. While this character is adept at embodying a variety of socially acceptable femininities, she is not always welcome in the multiple spaces and places of investigation. Criminals do not take Steph seriously, despite her handcuffs, stun gun, and arrest warrant. Even Steph's mother does not see her daughter's work as legitimate, reiterating at least once per novel that Steph find more appropriate employment in a safer – that is, less "public" – work environment such as a bank or an office. After passing the private investigator's licensing exam at the end of the series, Veronica still faces other people's incredulity. In the episode "I Know What You'll Do Next Summer," she is sitting behind the desk in the offices of Mars Investigations, tracking down a lead over the phone, when her first official (if pro-bono) client enters. Stunned at the revelation that *she* is Detective Mars, he says: "You? But you're just a girl!"

[2] Trans studies are significantly more complex than this, and individual authors have different responses to the use of the phrase "wrong body." See Heyes (2001) for a brief overview of narratives of embodiment that challenge this imagery. See also Stone (1994/2006) for a problematization of the "wrong body" as descriptive category in trans studies. For my purposes, however, I am referring to the popularity of the "wrong body" trope for configuring and expressing a gap between sex and gender.

As I noted in Chapter One, chick dicks are engaged with and encouraged by the vantage point investigation gives them: a position of relative power to identify and even challenge the social structures that tacitly encourage exploitation of and violence against femininities. The chick dick's sense that from where she sits, she is *not* the "wrong body in the expected place," but perhaps a necessary one, thus inflects these representations of "having it all" to include not just romantic partners and fulfilling careers, but also the ability to move through social spaces without fear of physical reprisal. The chick dick's postfeminist anxiety is personal, professional, *and* spatial.

As Kidder insinuates, norms of feminine behaviour in *Veronica Mars* are shaped in part by the social and spatial specificities of Neptune. Veronica, Steph, Robin, and Sam inhabit distinctly different built environments, yet they encounter suspiciously similar situations. Chick dick texts offer us not only a felt but a lived sense of where discourses of wrong bodiedness and vulnerability are located. Contextualizing such experiences within particular places, these narratives demonstrate how spaces facilitate the exploitation of women, and enable anger to be expressed as agency and resistance.

Chick dicks move through multiple spaces during their investigations – homes, streets, schools, offices, gyms, shopping centres – and in doing so, they learn how these spaces are gendered through the rhetoric of fear and risk. The construction of fearful or dangerous places relies on patriarchal perceptions of women's bodies, and functions as a form of management of disruptive or disorderly gender identities. In this chapter, I investigate the spatialization of postfeminist

gender politics by looking at what kinds of social relations are produced in what places in chick dick texts. What do the spaces of detection look like? How do they produce the chick dick and her knowledges? How does the chick dick in return construct or effect spatial change – do notions of safety and fear shift in relation to the spaces she uses for investigative purposes?

To explore how chick dicks narrate their experiences of social spaces, I also attend to the tools they draw upon as they move through their environments, and the knowledge they produce. Rather than reiterating familiar geographies of fear, in which certain types of places are coded as dangerous for women, these texts' emphasis on agency and action disarticulates resistance from fear, to produce geographies of sexualized violence instead. These geographies of sexualized violence often implicate postfeminism, as their mappings of the myriad ways and places women are vulnerable stand in stark contrast to postfeminist discourses of freedom, equality, and mobility.

Mapping Gendered Spaces

Chick dick narratives shift away from the commonplace dichotomy of public versus private to emphasize gender *in* space, and what it means to be a gendered body in contemporary spaces. Feminist critics across disciplines have historicized and deconstructed the ideology of separate spheres, demonstrating in the process that this binary is actually a hierarchy; separating the social world into public and private spaces is an attempt to literally keep women in their place. Yet as a means of describing a mode of social organization and division, public and private

are "used as normative, evaluative terms, naming and invoking ideals that are *not* always observed" (Warner 2002, 28). These idealized concepts are more complex and fraught than their simple opposition suggests.

This is another way in which the wrong body trope is limited in its capacity to capture tensions around chick dicks' use of social space. Not only does the chick dick disregard the lingering stigma of a woman in a man's role, her experiences also make clear that revealing the spurious division between public and private space is not her primary concern. These boundaries are crossed so frequently in these stories that they become negligible as frames of reference for thinking about the chick dick's cultural work. For example, one of the hallmarks of Evanovich's Stephanie Plum series is the repeated violation of Steph's small one-bedroom apartment. Local mafia, jilted bookies, escaped convicts, and even her co-workers break in at whim, despite her elaborate technological and home-made security and deterrent systems. Steph's apartment is not seen as domestic space; rather it becomes another location for fighting crime. Such instances highlight the disjuncture between spaces identified as dangerous to women, and the places in which sexualized violence against women most often occurs. While media accounts frequently – and hysterically – depict the world outside the home as an obstacle course of petty criminals and voracious sexual predators (see Glassner 1999; Gordon and Riger 1989; Macek 2006), this discourse of fear reinforces the separation of spheres, by emphasizing how certain public spaces will punish women for daring to be there.

Largely absent from such spatial injunctions is the culpability of the imagined assailant(s). Women's mobility in and through public spaces is figured as

a matter of personal choice; they bear the brunt of responsibility for making the 'wrong' decision of being where they shouldn't, or of not conducting themselves properly in such places. Constructing spaces as fearful or dangerous, then, includes implicit directives of self-management, indirect forms of control over women's movements and behaviour (see Hall 2004). From this perspective, it is women themselves, not patriarchy, that endangers women. A rhetoric of fear manages women into spaces already delineated as appropriate, maintaining the gendered division between public and private spaces through a discourse of social order and control concerned not with crime but with gender. In this way, the "attachment of fear to public places, and the precautions which women take as a result, constitute 'spatial expressions of patriarchy'" (Valentine 1989, 389)

Chick dick narratives depict spaces differently. Instead of geographies of fear – descriptions of the dangers that await women should they venture into particular places – chick dicks' investigations map out a terrain in which sexualized violence occurs not in certain spaces to women, but rather to women in multiple spaces. These geographies of sexualized violence – including experiences of intimidation, harassment, and assault – suggest women are at risk because of unequal gender relations. By conventionalizing the porous boundaries between public and private, such as how Steph's apartment is a site of personal and professional conflict, these stories go beyond reiterating the fallacy of the safe domestic sphere to identify how a dynamic of exploitation and assault plays out across all spaces.

In doing so, these narratives can be seen as (geographically diverse) instances of what Deborah Parsons calls "female urban vision . . . a gender-related city consciousness" which foregrounds contemporary women's expressions of space (2000, 6-7). Parsons argues that "too often the politics of gender difference are concerned with the comparative experience of the male and female subject *in* the city, and overlook their relative formulations *of* the city" (2000, 7). By attending to how chick dicks articulate their own senses of space, we see discourses of knowledge and agency that confront prevailing or popular wisdom of feminine comportment (7). These stories' geographies of violence trace broad swaths of the chick dicks' communities, challenging fear-based discourses of women's choices of where to go and how to act. They also situate responsibility in the social structures and cultural conditions that are expressed through experiences of space – suggesting, as Henri Lefebvre has observed, that "(social) space is a (social) product" (1991, 27; see also Massey 1994; Rose 1993).

Space is constructed, used, and experienced socially, and femininities gather certain meanings in certain kinds of spaces. Feminist critics have long recognized the ways in which the organization and regulation of space are preoccupied with women's presence, as well as the role popular culture plays in mediating these anxieties. Women's appearance and behaviour in public space are not solely contemporary concerns. Concepts of appropriate and inappropriate areas for female movement can be found in multiple socio-historical moments (Domosh 2001; Parsons 2000; Walkowitz 1992; Wilson 1992). Gender roles have also been invoked to make emergent sites like the suburbs familiar and appealing (Beuka

2004), and, conversely, to demonize cities as cesspools of moral degeneracy (Macek 2006). Gender anxieties cut across built environments, not as a reflection of a particular place's inherent suitability for the sexes, but as a way of categorizing and explaining space that reflects wider negotiations of the gender order and social relations (Pain1997, 2000).

Consumption plays a key role in explaining and legitimating women's presences in particular places. Social historians pinpoint the connection between the increasing commercialization of public space and women's public visibility there, arguing, as Mona Domosh does, that a "distinct set of anxieties . . . developed in reaction to the emergence of mass consumer culture," resulting in what she terms a "moral geography . . . configured around the first consumer-oriented leisure spaces" (2001, 574). Historically, literary and journalistic depictions of gendered or sexualized transgression, as critics like Domosh and Elizabeth Wilson (1992, 2001) suggest, have struggled to distinguish between forms of consumption, between females shopping and shopping for females. As women increasingly ventured out in public, anxieties about socially upstanding women being publicly – and therefore sexually – available rose as well: "The prostitute was a 'public woman', but the problem in nineteenth-century urban life was whether every woman in the new, disordered world of the city, the public sphere of pavements, cafés and theatres, was not a public woman and thus a prostitute" (Wilson 2001, 74). The act of shopping, then, separated women in public from "public women," in the process becoming coterminous with femininity on display in ways that

continue to resonate in contemporary constructions of femininity, particularly the chick (Brunsdon 1997; Bruzzi and Gibson 2004; Smith 2008).

Yet consumption is not a simple hallmark of femininity. As Wilson astutely notes, "The contemporary urban woman is both consumer and consumed . . . she remains an object of consumption at the same time as she becomes an actor" (1992, 139). Wilson reads literary representations of urban space in order to display late 19th century discourses of women, women's bodies, and social disorder; similarly, my reading of chick dick texts aims to make visible the power struggles buried within representations of femininity in social spaces. The use of consumer choices to construct and convey identity, and the incorporation and depoliticization of feminist rhetoric into the commodity of "girl power" are themselves spatially significant. Discourses about the female body and about consumption intersect to produce material effects that are enacted in women's experiences in social space.

As they appear in chick dick texts, these effects and their expressions can be seen as indications – and indictments – of what many feminist critics refer to as rape culture. I am not suggesting that as descriptors postfeminism and rape culture are interchangeable, but I *am* suggesting that certain aspects of postfeminism propagate rape culture, and that some of these aspects can be seen in chick dicks' experiences of social spaces. Rape culture is

> a culture in which sexual violence is a normalized phenomenon, in which male-dominant environments (such as sports, war, and the military) encourage and sometimes depend on violence against women, in which the male gaze and women as objects-to-be-

> looked-at contribute to a culture that accepts rape, and in which rape is one experience along a continuum of sexual violence that women confront on a daily basis. (Projansky 2001, 9)

As I noted in Chapter One, a central facet of postfeminism is the fetishization and commodification of women's bodies – the constitution of "women as objects-to-be-looked-at." The normalization of an objectifying and sexualizing gaze contributes to an environment in which women continue to be associated with consumption and display, encouraging a spectrum of everyday behaviour that sees women primarily in terms of their available sexuality. As Carol Brooks Gardner's study of gender and public harassment outlines, women face male entitlement daily: "In the words of one of a group of young white men I observed shouting at a passing woman, men have the right to 'put a price tag' on women they do not know" (1995, 187; see also Stanko 1990).

Chick dicks are not immune to strangers' sexual evaluations. For instance, when Robin pops briefly into a bar, searching for one of her friends, she is hit on instead:

> "I have a clue for you right here," he said, putting his hand on his crotch . . . "A woman doesn't generally go into a bar alone unless she's looking for something" . . .
>
> "Yeah, a seltzer and a seat alone," I said, walking away to a booth . . . Amazing. It's the nineties, and a woman still can't walk into a pub to quaff a refreshment without it being seen by some

dinosaur as a blatant attempt to get laid. (*Revenge of the Cootie Girls*, 154)

They experience these and other such situations not because they are detectives, but because they are women in a culture that uses sexually loaded gestures to reiterate their subordinate status: "public harassment is a feature of a heterosexually romanticized public order, recapitulating traditional presumptions about gender relations" (Gardner 1995, 111).

Yet chick dicks' detective work is an important feature of their use of space. Often the reason for being in "dangerous spaces," investigation reveals the gendered aspects of social spaces and the forms of violence that cut across them. "Detecting, as a practice of knowing, is a *political ordering of reality*" (Ebert 1992, 16, emphasis in original). Looking closely at these practices of knowing – what chick dicks know, what they come to know, and how they use their knowledge – highlights the spatial and political incursions of their sleuthing strategies. Investigating becomes a form of resistance, a way to produce and exercise divergent perspectives on the spatialization of gender roles and power relations. "Because the [detective] genre is so crucially concerned with perception, this allows for a degree of reflective interrogation as to the mechanisms of scrutiny," an opportunity capitalized upon here as I look at how the chick dick investigates the production of knowledge, and how her knowledge becomes inscribed as a gendered expression of power within spaces often already coded as masculine or off-limits (Munt 1994, 198).

In Evanovich's novels, the impoverished area around Trenton's Stark Street is one such space. Thanks to her earlier work as a prostitute, Steph's sidekick Lula

has lived knowledge of this neighbourhood and the territorialities of its criminal networks, which helps Steph move through Stark Street more easily. Elizabeth Wilson (2001) suggests that the prostitute is the most viable embodiment of the female flâneur – the flâneuse. With this deliberately provocative assertion, Wilson draws attention to the layers of gendered and spatial meaning aggregated around the flâneur and around female sexuality, the latter of which has been and continues to be subject to concerted surveillance and spatial regulation, to the advantage of patriarchal economies of sex and sexuality (Hubbard 2004).

A central figure through which historical processes of urbanization, consumption, and modernity are narrated, the flâneur is regularly presented as a paradigm for perceiving and experiencing urban space, emphasizing freedom of movement and visual mastery. While the flâneur and flânerie appear in French and English writing in the early 1800s (Brand 1991; Tester 1994), accounts by late 19th century poet Charles Baudelaire and 20th century critic Walter Benjamin have received the most scholarly attention. Both Baudelaire and Benjamin focus on the flâneur's "active and analytical gaze" as a form of knowledge-seeking, a way of reading people and places while sauntering through the city (Werner 2004, 10). For Baudelaire, this was a central facet of artistic creativity, and as David Frisby argues, Benjamin is also preoccupied with flânerie as a form of production:

> a form of looking, observing (of people, social types, social contexts and constellations), a form of reading the city and its population (its spatial images, its architecture, its human configurations) . . . The flâneur may therefore not merely be an observer or even a

> decipherer, the flâneur can also be a producer. (quoted in Werner 2004, 22)

This concept of the generative gaze carries over into wider discussions about moving through social space. In his canonical "Walking in the City," Michel de Certeau (1984) argues that we give spaces meaning by the way we move through them. He lauds the optical knowledge gained from such movements as more strategic than those offered by the bird's-eye or panoptic viewpoint, so that "the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counter-balance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power" (1984, 95). Yet de Certeau's pedestrian possibilities presuppose an unlimited mobility, and do not acknowledge the multiple material conditions that constrain movement across physical and social space. Feminist critics have pinpointed the flâneur's inherent masculinism, for it is

> the *flâneur* as a man of pleasure, but more, as a man who takes visual possession of the city, who has emerged in feminist debate as the embodiment of the "male gaze." He represents men's visual and voyeuristic mastery over women. According to this view, the *flâneur*'s freedom to wander at will through the city is an exclusively masculine freedom, which means that the concept of the *flâneur* is essentially and inescapably gendered. (Wilson 2001, 79)

Today, the term is used in increasingly broad and metaphorical ways: "Once an idle observer of the Parisian *demi-monde*, for contemporary theory he is an increasingly expansive figure who represents a variety of 'wanderings,' in terms of ambulation, nationality, gender, race, class, and sexuality" (Parsons 2000, 4). Most

relevant here is the flâneur's recurrence as a figurative shorthand in critical literature on detective fiction (Benjamin 1978; Frisby 1994; Werner 2001). Characterizing the detective as a flâneur presumes a level of spatial mobility and freedom as the foundation for movements that provide the detective with the visual knowledge he needs. The flâneur's contentious use as an epistemological framework for urban space is thus based upon particular and gendered spatial capacities, yet this foments the problem I have already noted, of certain kinds of women moving through certain kinds of spaces (see also Wilson 2001).

Wilson also reminds us of the potentially liberating possibilities that urban space has held for women, for as cities and employment opportunities grew, "urban life created a space in which some women could experiment with new roles" (1992, 65). For chicks, freedom in the city is largely enabled by and articulated through consumption. They can move through various spaces in pursuit of or because of material goods – shoes, clothing, meals, martinis – and in this way they echo early explanations of the flâneur that focused on the burgeoning delights of consumer culture.[3] Caroline Smith reads a critical impulse in chick lit texts' depiction of consumerism, arguing that "these texts question the 'consume and achieve' promise . . . in doing so challenge the consumer industry to which they are closely linked" (2008, 5-6). As I noted in Chapter One, chick dicks' costuming and performance help carry them through different investigative situations, a tactic indebted to chick

[3] See Susan Buck-Morss (1986). An entire section of Kim Akass and Janet McCabe's *Reading Sex and the City* (2004) alludes to this connection. Entitled "Flânerie, Sex and the City and Touring Around Manhattan," its pieces recount critics' experiences on the *Sex and the City* bus tours, which are designed to replicate for fans the paths of consumerism through New York City.

lit's characteristic glee in strategizing the right outfit for every effect. Aligning investigative goals with the urge to shop – acting as bait or infiltrating a party, for example – holds the potential for resistant kinds of movement. The combination of consumption and detection thus provides chick dicks with a sense of agency and entitlement in social space.

Rhonda Pollero's *Knock-Off* (2008), the first in a promised series of mystery stories, makes this connection explicit. Heroine Finley Anderson Tanner prides herself on her keen eye for fashion bargains, a skill deliberately correlated to her success at uncovering how what appears to be a car accident is actually one in a string of murders designed to eliminate jurors in a medical malpractice case. In jail after attempting to recover evidence from a closed auto-repair shop (and being bitten on the bum by the junkyard dog), Finley realizes the importance of her investigations, not just for her career but for herself:

> Pacing in the six-feet-by-three-feet cage, I felt a surge of something new. Something unrelated to the fact that I was in police custody and dressed like the Pillsbury Dough Girl. In the past, this kind of adversity would send me straight to an all-day spa to bury my embarrassed head in a facial wrap. Maybe flashing my ass to Charlie had put things in perspective. I was getting close to thirty and what did I have? Credit-card debt.
>
> But now, for the first time ever, I had a Cause, with a capital C. I would crack the Evans case, keep my job, and restore my dignity.

> Problem was, I didn't have a clue how to go about doing those things.
>
> But wait! I was smart, resourceful, and more determined than Boo-Boo when he'd sunk his gnarly teeth into my flesh to see this through. I was done with doubts, regardless of who thought I was or wasn't capable. Screw Dane, screw Liam, and anyone else who got in my way . . .
>
> It dawned on me that I wanted something else, too. Something I couldn't get on eBay or in any store. I wanted to find the killer. Okay, I hadn't gone completely off the deep end. I still wanted the rest of the parts for my Rolex, but unmasking the murderer had been temporarily moved to the top of my To-Do list. Not only would it vindicate me in the eyes of Vain Dane, it would be one hell of an accomplishment. My accomplishment. (199-200; 236)

Yet, as Deborah Parsons warns, "it is important not to overestimate the role of the cosmopolitan or the wanderer as metaphors of emancipation" (2000, 14). Phil Hubbard (2004) similarly cautions against interpretations of the flâneur that shrug off its gendered historical, cultural, and interpretive associations. He argues that in the current neoliberal climate, the city is once again "where *men* display their activities of exchange and consumption for others to look at in public space . . . Contemporary flânerie, central to the playful forms of consumption played out in the gentrified city, accordingly marginalizes those women who challenge men's

mastery of public space" (2004, 681, emphasis added). Chicks dicks may at times appear to have mastered social spaces, but other experiences demonstrate that their mobility is surveilled and contained within material circumstances of gender.

While postfeminist imagery tells us that women and men are now social equals, concurrent popular discourses encourage women to restrict their movement through and behaviours in certain types of public spaces, otherwise they risk being assaulted. Men and women are not spatial equals. This difference is a matter of unequal power: "When some women, often voluntarily, take the longer route around a park, change to another side of the street or stay home at night, it is a question of power in space (or lack of it)" (Koskela 1997, 315). Injunctions to spatial self-monitoring produce and reproduce particular kinds of femininities: appropriate femininities of women who display the expected sense of fear, and the troublesome femininities of women who display boldness instead. The characterization of certain attitudes as "bold" reveals how femininities are produced in physical environments; deviations from expected behaviour can mark women as disorderly across a variety of spaces.[4]

Chick dicks are depicted as disorderly figures based on their presence and behaviour in particular social spaces. The texts achieve this by scripting their heroines' spatial movements as confident, despite – or even because of – everyday experiences of (often sexualized) violence. This is not to deny that chick dicks feel

[4] Self-management directives and accusations of "disorderliness" are found in private as well as public space. Television sitcoms in particular use anxieties about unruly female behaviour as a source of narrative tension and comedy. *I Love Lucy*'s Lucy Ricardo (CBS, 1951-1957) and *Roseanne*'s Roseanne Connor (ABC, 1988-1997) are two of the most widely cited examples (see Mellencamp 1986; Rabinovitz 1999; Rowe 1995).

fear in the course of their investigations, but to highlight how these stories narrate fear as a direct result of physical intimidation rather than ambient feelings of risk. As Steph ruminates,

> It had been a really weird day. Not that I haven't had weird days before. Weird days were getting to feel normal. The disturbing part about *this* weird day was that there'd been steadily escalating indicators of personal danger. I'd done my best to stay sane, to keep my fear in check, but the fear was actually riding very close to the surface. I'd been involved in some scary situations in the past. This was the first time a contract to kill me had been put into motion. (*Ten Big Ones*, 148).

Such instances are typical of chick dicks' actions and movements. Rather than reiterating a discourse of anxious self-management, these representations foreground a sense of agency and self-assurance, even in the face of fear. For example, when Sam is kidnapped and chained in a basement, with no idea why or by whom, she creates ways to keep her spirits high:

> I started belting out Depeche Mode albums. The sound of my own voice singing always cheered me up, even though it rarely had that effect on anyone else. I yodelled happily, if not always with total accuracy, every so often punctuating the latest offering with a few coyote-like howls. All my energy was going into putting out the lyrics with as much force as I could. I refused to let myself think

about what would happen if my voice gave out, or I came to the end of my repertoire and still no one had shown up. (*Chained*, 91-2)

Chick dicks' repeated experiences of assault do not deter them from investigating, or prompt them to curtail their subsequent behaviour – Sam is nearly raped before she escapes from both the shackles and the basement, yet doggedly tracks down her captors by the end of the novel. Steph is just as determined, often to her boyfriend Joe's chagrin: "Most women try to avoid murderers and rapists. I have a girlfriend who goes out trying to find them" (*Ten Big Ones*, 101). As Hille Koskela suggests, "Their everyday spatial practices can be seen as practices of resistance. By daring to go out – by their very presence in urban sphere [sic] – women produce space that is more available for other women. Spatial confidence is a manifestation of power" (1997, 316).

Armed and Accessorized

This manifestation of power is visibly different from that popularized by postfeminist imagery. As I explained in Chapter One, postfeminist female empowerment is marketed through the rhetoric of consumer choice and buying power. While this notion of shopping-as-agency often comes to stand-in for political choice and power (Brunsdon 1997; Dow 1996), and postfeminist media culture's tendency to express female equality through unfettered financial freedom is a primary way of suggesting that both sexes are on more equal footing. For chick dicks, consumer and investigatory power combine in their creative use of accessories-as-weapons, and vice-versa.

The detective has largely been a male position and masculine prerogative, and the technologies detectives draw upon in the course of their investigations are gendered as well. A "masculine cultural world," technology is socially and culturally constructed as a male domain (Wajcman 1991, 138), and like space, gender and technology are co-produced and co-producing processes (Faulkner 2001; Landstrom 2007; Wacjman 2000). In crime narratives tools typically signify the authority of the investigator's position, contributing to the enactment of gender *within* social spaces. Chick dick narratives wrestle with how offensive and defensive weapons affect maneuverability within gender roles, and how they legitimize movement within space.

Tools grant authority and legitimize agency, a conflation between man and device evidenced by the iconic nature of Sherlock Holmes' pipe, Starsky and Hutch's Gran Torino, and perhaps most famously James Bond and his gadgets. A "site where the signifier and signified of potency coincide," Bond's mastery of tools and technologies seems effortless (Roof 2005, 83).[5] Such is the discursive field upon which the chick dick transgresses, both narratively and performatively. Tropes of femininity or girliness help convey her suspicions about how necessary these tools are for the task. This is not to say that chick dick narratives lack violent or phallic iconography, but rather that their use of such imagery highlights "the fragility of

[5] The string of actors that have played Bond in film – where the gadgets far exceed their role in Ian Fleming's original novels – reiterate the importance of such skills. Six actors have played the role of James Bond in the "official" or franchise (i.e. EON Productions) films. Five other actors have also been Bond, in non-EON film, television, and radio adaptations. This interchangeability suggests that technological prowess, more than individual appearance and acting ability, buttresses Bond's investigations.

representational ruses which depend for their cultural currency on the unrelenting subordination of women" (Bold 2003, 171).

Honey West, television's first single female investigator (*Honey West* ABC, 1965-1966), made extensive use of gadgets to publicly signify her status as both private eye and "private eyeful." An important precursor for the chick dick, Honey's use of gadgets – "signifier[s] of a being whose existence equals authority" – helped establish a pattern for encroaching upon a space and set of tools culturally connected to dominant masculinity (Roof 2005, 78). As Julie D'Acci argues, Honey's concurrence with James Bond is a key framework for situating the emergent female sleuth, and for seeing the series as a cipher for shifting social attitudes toward sex and sexuality in the 1960s, particularly the "cultural scramble to shore up the cult of masculinity (or more precisely, its 'fantasy') in '50s and '60s suburban America" (1997, 88).

D'Acci's emphasis on post-war shifts in the gender order as a means to think about *Honey West* and its rapid demise does more than reiterate the traditional conflation of detective and maleness, for as she implies, these shifts have a spatial dimension. Built environments impact perceptions of gender order, and many cultural critics have identified how post-war traditionalism was "tied to the suburban migration and fueled by the boom in postwar housing and the rebirth of the pastoral imaginary that it facilitated" (Beuka 2004, 151; see also Friedan 1963; Spigel 1992). Honey was operating within a gender order that attempted to reclaim physical action and authority for men, after women had proved themselves just as technologically and physically adept during wartime.

Honey West also attempted to capitalize on the rapid popularization of spy narratives. Relying heavily upon intertextual associations to establish congruency with other 1960s spy figures, the series emphasized Honey's "Bond-like skills and accoutrements" by outfitting her with a flashy car, stylish wardrobe, and a seemingly endless and creative string of tools and weapons (D'Acci 1997, 81). Honey's gadgets ran the gamut: compacts and necklaces doubled as voice-transmitters, pens sprayed stun-gas, earrings contained tear-gas, and her garter transformed into a gas mask.[6] A type of double-coding is at play here, as these gadgets place her firmly in the lineage of texts like *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* (NBC 1964-1968) and James Bond (she was often referred to as Jane Bond), while they also try to mitigate her incursion into this "man's world" by concealing her weapons in the relatively safe iconography of female accessories. In these ways "Honey's swinging-detective ancestry reverberated with associations of the 'cool set' American sexuality of her playboy brothers" (D'Acci 1997, 82).

A rise in consumerism was central to the playboy sexuality of the 1960s. The swinging heterosexuality Honey aped was, particularly for men, tied to patterns of technological consumption. Consumer culture culled the sexual revolution for some of its most potent symbols, harnessing sexuality to sell a vast array of products, and directly targeting men. A preeminent example of the burgeoning sex-based consumer culture of the 1960s, *Playboy* magazine promoted better living not just through sexy parties but through conspicuous consumption – of clothing, food

[6] Like other television heroes of the 1960s, Honey also came in action-figure form, and her accessory sets emphasized the centrality of both tools and accessories to her investigative work.

and drink, gadgets, and accessories for the swinging bachelor pad. The postwar rise in consumerism attempted to align consumption with privileged forms of male heterosexuality through the "construction of a masculinity secure in its consumerism" (Osgerby 2001, 139). Faced with the historically feminizing overtones of consumer culture, Playboy culture re-cast consumption around masculinity and "male cool."[7]

A "large part of *Playboy*'s rationale was to 'colonize' the traditionally 'feminine' spaces of commodity consumption on behalf of men," and tools and gadgets were central to this process (Osgerby 2001, 129). Preoccupations like cooking, fashion, and interior design were masculinized by drawing a link between male virility and an ability to master their required accessories, "cast as a manly enterprise by being presented as an undertaking that, like any other masculine pastime, demanded the possession and mastery of a battery of tools" (Osgerby 2001, 130).[8] In this era of cultural (re-)negotiation, tools were presented as a means for men to conquer domestic space, a way to legitimize men's presence in a sphere gendered as feminine.

The masculine meanings of tools also worked in reverse. For instance, while Honey West's plethora of gadgets echoed those of her male counterparts, their

---

[7] Michael Mann's hit series *Miami Vice* (NBC 1984-1989) firmly embedded fashionable male consumption in the television crime drama. See Scott Benjamin King for a discussion of how Sonny Crockett's "status as a clothes hanger" worked alongside the program's treatment of masculinity, labour, and feminization to create an image of the "heroic male subject – a myth – in crisis" (1990, 283, 293).

[8] Not coincidentally, multiple James Bond stories were serialized in the magazine throughout the sixties, reiterating and reinforcing an ideal masculinity predicated on a combination of style, sexuality and technological savvy.

disguise in objects like jewelry and garter belts reassured the audience that despite her unladylike job Honey was indeed a typical woman, evidenced by her great pleasure in accessorizing. The textual negotiations and popular reception of *Honey West* demonstrate the ways in which 1960s network television grappled with the changes effected by second-wave feminism, and the cultural currency of the crime genre for framing such changes. While many female fans found *Honey West* inspirational (D'Acci 1997, 86), the series was quickly cancelled: "It was, in 1965, and has remained so ever since, extraordinarily difficult to portray the new (hetero) sexual single woman on mainstream network prime time" (D'Acci 1997, 89).

Similar negotiations are visible today. Martin Willis suggests that the increasing number of female protagonists in typically male spaces of crime and action narratives, and their connection to "girl power," has aggravated the conflation between gadgets and phallic power (2003, 156). Tools become one of the elements in the struggle over – and within – literal, mediated, and discursive spaces of crime and detection. Just as postwar suburbanization and its concomitant valourization of female domesticity were embedded within economic restructurings designed to assuage male primacy, contemporary urban gentrification, as Phil Hubbard argues, is linked both to re-assertions of traditional gender roles and to male-friendly consumerism, encouraging "the re-inscription of patriarchal relations in the urban landscape" (2004, 666). The streets may look different, but for chick dicks they are still mean.

Like Honey West, contemporary chick dicks' tools are often accessories. For instance, as she gets drawn further into potentially violent situations, Robin

arms herself with whatever is available. She carries a book entitled *So You Have Lupus* in order to preclude unwanted interactions with men on the street. If it fails as a deterrent, her giant shoulder bag also includes cheap perfume laced with cayenne pepper, a faster than average telescopic umbrella, a hot glue gun with a steam and a spray setting (she later upgrades to a version with steam, spray, *and* splatter), and a battery-operated Epilady because, as Robin says, she "realized after one use [it] was a better offensive weapon than a feminine aid" (*What's a Girl Gotta Do?* 22). Such objects are effective precisely because of their seeming innocuousness as typical consumer products – few people (with the probable exception of other women) would expect an Epilady's foremost function to be an offensive one. These tools stand in stark contrast to the sophisticated gadgetry of contemporary crime solvers, and that is precisely their appeal: "In an environment where information equals power and where surveillance controls the distribution of that power, to appear low-tech is to be ignored and therefore to gain some degree of freedom" (Willis 2003, 162).

These accessory weapons work much like the chick dick's other main tactic: weapons of opportunity. Grasping at almost anything to ward off her usually male attacker, the chick dick makes do with what is at hand. Sam has used a vase, a wooden cutting board, and even a stone, while Veronica has stabbed a rapist with a unicorn figurine. In one instance Robin, fearing someone is stalking her, slips into a bodega:

> I glanced out the window but couldn't see the tall man. Maybe I wasn't being followed, I reasoned. But in the event I was, a can of coffee in a plastic bag could be a weapon.
>
> Burke, after surveying my umbrella, my poison ivy, and my spray cologne spiked with cayenne pepper, once asked me if there was anything that couldn't be a weapon if it fell into my hands. The only thing I could think of was Jell-O.
>
> 'To you, the world is just full of weapons, isn't it?' he said.
>
> Yep, and the world is full of reasons to use them, I thought now, as I left the store, prepared in my heart to bludgeon a man to death with a coffee can if necessary. (*What's a Girl Gotta Do?* 200)

Such weapons work with the crime genre and postfeminism in provocative ways. The attitude these gadgets embody, particularly those that double as accessories, reference the trope of "girl power" – a postfeminist marketing gambit that has graced t-shirts and promoted pop bands over the past two decades. This heavily stylized sense of equality contrasts sharply with the seemingly unremitting instances of sexualized violence chick dicks encounter, a contradiction that calls the postfeminist rhetoric of female equality and empowerment into question.

By transforming whatever is available into weapons, these narratives also comment on safety and space, as the everyday-ness of these objects becomes another means of mapping sexualized violence. Weapons of opportunity emphasize the environmental contexts of assault – what is on-hand is determined by where the chick dick is – and so indicate the range of spaces in which violence against women

occurs. It is precisely this aspect of detective stories that urban geographers such as David Schmid (1995) and Philip Howell (1998) find compelling. The hermeneutic of investigation can be an instructive vehicle for political statements about power relations *in* space, and so detective fiction can "provide radical geographers with imaginative methodological models of how the various spaces of a city are connected through acts of violence, and how these connections indicate the spatializations of power within the city" (Schmid 1995, 243).

Mean Streets

The main chick dicks in this study live and work in diverse built environments. Investigative journalist Robin is the only one who lives in a large urban centre – New York City. Steph is a self-described "Jersey Girl" from Trenton, and spends the bulk of her time in one of its suburbs, referred to by its inhabitants as The Burg. Veronica and Sam, meanwhile, reside in smaller cities: Veronica's Neptune is a seaside town with clearly drawn class and racial divides, while Sam's Camden is undergoing gentrification as its formerly thriving heavy industries are giving way to upscale commercial and residential districts. Each character's movements in and through these varied sites, however, reveal startling similarities in the publicization of women and women's bodies that makes them vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault regardless of physical place.

Robin's impressions of NYC paint an image of the city as a set of familiar and eclectic neighbourhoods. Her sense of home and security is most apparent in *Revenge of the Cootie Girls*, as the novel's mystery requires Robin to re-enact her

first visit to New York. On a graduation trip with a girlfriend, Robin's initial impression was not of a fearful, dangerous city, as she had been warned by family and friends:

> … the voice of Aunt Mo in the back of my head, before I came to New York the first time, saying "Don't go to New York! It's full of atheists and perverts just waiting for a lamb to stumble into the slaughterhouse." She was so sure I'd be set upon by white slavers and pornographers and people who would hide drugs in my suitcase to be smuggled back to their nefarious contacts in northern Minnesota. For two months before the trip, she sent me clippings from newspapers about bad things happening to women in New York. (42)

Rather, New York appears to her as a space of possibility and potential, prompting her to leave her high-school boyfriend behind and make a life for herself in the city (*Revenge of the Cootie Girls*, 61).

Steph's experiences in some ways fulfill the life Robin deliberately left behind. Living in the same suburban enclave in which she was raised, and dating the man with whom she first had sex in high school, Steph relies upon a sense of social and spatial familiarity in her investigations. The Burg is a tightly knit community dominated by Italian families, small businesses, and anachronistic gender roles. Like the repeated violations of Steph's apartment, the Burg's gluttonous gossip network suggests that privacy is an abstract ideal. In the Burg

everyone knows everything about everyone else: "No secrets in the Burg" (*High Five*, 41).

In *Veronica Mars*, social spaces are clearly delineated by dramatic economic divisions, and this tension motivates many of the series' storylines. A small Southern California seaside town, Neptune residents' social status can easily be determined by their zip code, an economic hierarchy reproduced in the city's layout and in the arrangement of student bodies in the cafeteria at lunchtime. Spaces are easily demarcated by race and class; there is a sharp division in the first two seasons between the rhetoric of threat attached to the spaces controlled by the PCHers – the Latino bike gang that patrols and protects Neptune's poorer fringes – and that of the safety literally afforded to Neptune's upper echelon. These tensions reach a critical pitch in the second season, as Neptune's mayor Woody Goodman wants to re-draw Neptune's borders along the city's class divide, in an effort to make the town safer.

Like Veronica, Sam's small town has sharp economic and architectural divisions: parts of Camden are rapidly gentrifying, while its industrial sectors languish. The town's market spaces and tourist areas are thriving, as are the bar and rave cultures Sam frequents late at night. Sam lives elsewhere, however, occupying the floor of a former warehouse that she has transformed into an apartment and artist's studio. Her immediate neighbourhood is quiet and desolate, and while her employment both as an artist and as an occasional aerobics instructor takes her throughout the city,

> [t]he street where I live isn't the kind of places that raises your spirits when you turn into it. No-one else lives here but me; all the other buildings are warehouses with filthy cobwebbed windows and peeling paints. Mine was a warehouse too before I moved in and made it into a studio. It still looks as unprepossessing as its neighbours, but I never have trouble finding a parking space at night. (*Dead White Female*, 47)

Despite the misgivings of numerous friends, acquaintances, and cabbies, however, Sam's neighbourhood has never been unsafe. Her most dangerous encounter there was in her home at the hands of her lover, belying the familiar fear-mongering imagery of stranger-rapists lurking in every dark alley.

Chick dicks inhabit a broad range of urban, suburban, and rural spaces, debunking the popular impression of the metropolis as the primary site of crime and of fear.[9] Each of these locations has its own map of safe and unsafe spaces, and so these stories lend themselves to the sort of analysis Rachel Pain terms the situatedness of fear, an approach that recognizes and "attempts to wed ideas around social identity and social exclusion with the identity of particular places" (2000, 379). A specific social and built environment expresses and enacts socially specific gender norms – appropriate femininities vary across different spaces. For instance, Steph explains the particularities of her hometown's femininity:

[9] Sheryl J. Anderson's Molly Forrester novels and Kate White's Bailey Weggins books are set in in Manhattan, while Nancy Bartholomew's stripper-sleuth Sierra Lavotini works in less urbane Panama City, Florida. Sarah Strohmeyer's hairdresser heroine Bubbles Yablonsky lives in the small mining town of Lehigh, Pennsylvania, and Nancy Bush's detective Jane Kelly relocated to the quaint town of Lake Chinook in Oregon.

> If you're a little girl in the burg you spend your time combing out Barbie's hair. Barbie sets the standard. Big gunky black eyelashes, electric-blue eye shadow, pointy outthrust breasts, and a lot of platinum-blond phony-looking hair. This is what we all aspire to. Barbie even teaches us how to dress. Tight glittery dresses, skimpy shorts, an occasional feather boa, and, of course, spike heels with everything. Not that Barbie doesn't have more to offer, but little girls in the burg know better than to get sucked in by yuppie Barbie. They don't buy into any of that tasteful sportswear, professional business suit stuff. Little girls in the burg go for the glamour. (*Two for the Dough*, 149)

Such an ideal contrasts with the femininities Sam encounters, such as her friend Jane, who is generally clad in "floating scarves and necklaces and layers of embroidered clothing" (*Too Many Blondes*, 218). Yet underneath these variations in appropriate and expected identities, chick dicks' investigations consistently reveal how space is used to manage femininities, predominantly through aligning female gender performance with rhetorics of fear. The "social relations operating in particular spaces and places are more integral to fear of crime than the physical character of particular environments" (Pain 2000, 370). It is not the seaside town, sprawling metropolis, or sleepy suburb that is dangerous, but the social relations *within* those spaces. As Valentine (1989) argues, women's fear in particular spaces is actually a fear of men.

Promoting particular places as safe, and correlating spatial danger to patterns of behaviour and appearance, are ways of socially constructing space in a manner that reinforces sex role norms and unequal gender relations. Women who transgress these social and spatial boundaries are often punished. For instance, when Steph attempts to convince wife-beater Andy Bender to reschedule his court date, he refuses, throws food at her, and comes after her with a knife. His neighbours sit and watch, amused:

> Bender and I were doing a dance around the car. He'd move, then I'd move, then he'd move, then I'd move. Meanwhile I was trying to get the pepper spray out of my pocket. Trouble was, my pants were tight, the spray was shoved to the bottom of my pocket, and my hands were sweating and shaking.
>
> There was a guy sitting on the Oldsmobile's hood. "Andy," he called, "why're you going after this girl with a knife?"
>
> "She ruined my lunch. I was just sitting down to eat my pizza, and she came and ruined it all."
>
> "I can see that," the guy on the Oldsmobile said. "She got pizza all over her. Looks like she rolled in it."
>
> There was a second guy sitting on the Olds. "Kinky," he said.
>
> "How about one of you guys giving me a hand here," I said. "Get him to drop the knife. Call the police. Do something!"

"Hey, Andy," one of the men said, "she wants you to drop the knife."

"I'm gonna gut her like a fish," Bender said. "I'm gonna filet her like a trout. No bitch just walks in and ruins *my* lunch."

The two guys on the Olds were smiling. "Andy needs some anger management courses," one of them said.

The T-shirt salesman was next to me. "Yeah, and he don't know much about fishing, either. That ain't no filet knife."

I finally pried the pepper spray loose from my pocket. I shook it and aimed it at Bender.

The three men mobilized into action, slamming the trunks shut, putting distance between us. (*Hard Eight*, 55-6)

The bystanders' lack of action is not a tacit endorsement of Bender's verbal and physical violence, but a deliberate one – Steph explicitly asks for their help and they choose to do nothing. That they scatter at the sight of pepper spray suggests that weapons resonate with a particular impression of force or authority; Steph does not manage to bring Bender in, as he is not sufficiently cowed by her choice of weapon. While she may have been more effective had she chosen a gun, the fact that she brandishes pepper spray instead raises questions about chick dick's relation with guns and with physical violence.

Fighting Crime in Four-Inch Heels

Crime narratives' endemic violence, and the ways in which protagonists are expected to demonstrate their suitability for the job through an aggressive physicality, are central tensions in chick dick stories. Alison Littler argues the genre's propensity for violence demands that the female sleuth behave in a congruent fashion, that the "outside influence in the text is, conveniently, the demands of the job of the private eye; she has to behave in that way to get the information she needs for the case on which she is working" (1991, 128). Honey West, for instance, is both comfortable with and adept at using a gun, one of the most typical icons of the private eye's authority. Her signature piece is a demure .38 revolver, which she keeps holstered in her black leather ankle boots. In the course of the series this gun is rarely fired; while marking Honey's role as investigator its small size makes it primarily tokenistic. The visibility of this incursion into the unfeminine realm of weaponry and violence is both exacerbated and mitigated by Honey's other skills – she most often defends herself and captures criminal through martial arts so carefully choreographed as to appear like dancing. As D'Acci points out, the popular discourse around *Honey West* tried to ensure that her actions in the context of crime-solving would be seen as properly lady-like despite their implicit violence (1997, 84).

Yet firearms are largely absent from contemporary chick dicks' arsenals, if not the narratives. While in most crime stories the gun is "so often represented and so typically the expression of violence that its irreality as a symbolic marker almost goes unnoticed," chick dicks are keenly aware of their presence and critical of their

meaning (Hepburn 2005, 16). As Robin notes: "Jesus, there were guns everywhere. Well, this answered one of Life's big questions: Is the whole world nuts, or is it just me?" (*Nice Girls Finish Last*, 9). The plethora of homemade and alternative weapons in chick dick texts indicates that these sleuths do not have a problem with arming themselves, but rather they have a problem with *guns*.

The chick dick is surrounded by firearms – her friends, her adversaries, and often her boyfriends carry them, creating a simmeringly violent environment, "the masculine context of criminal spaces" (White 2001, 106). The ways in which "violence and sexuality are both projected on to technology" underpins the chick dick's antipathy toward weapons; Steph keeps hers, unloaded, in a cookie jar in her kitchen and is loathe to use it at the firing range (Leach 2003, 254). Even when her home is invaded by serial rapist and murderer Benito Ramirez in *High Five*, she cannot bring herself to shoot in self-defense. Much of Steph's reluctance to use the handgun in any situation stems from her experience in *One for the Money*, in which Ramirez's agent Jimmy Alpha is intent on killing her. After taking the first bullet in the ass and watching as Alpha aims his gun directly at her face, she manages to fire back, though forgets in the process to take her gun out of her purse. The memory of killing someone haunts her, and she is not sure how she feels: "Pride seemed out of place. Sorrow didn't quite fit. There was definitely regret" (*One for the Money*, 285).

While their working and living conditions frequently instill a strong sense of caution and self-protection, a chick dick's first instinct is rarely to reach for a gun. Exploring the increasing visibility of female gun cultures in the United States,

journalist Caitlin Kelly argues that women's ability to arm – and so "empower" – themselves has been a fortunate by-product of feminism (2004, 20). This rhetoric pervades the anecdotes Kelly has collected; as one woman explains: "Women are empowering themselves politically, economically, sexually. This is part of the same process" (2004, 247). The gleeful sense of freedom, power, and mobility seemingly all women experience when firing a gun is attributed to the social gains feminism has made, as a logical extension of female equality and agency.

> I liked the novel feeling of power this gave me – and briefly imagined a life where I kept a sleek, familiar 9mm near me, a life in which I might never fear rape, robbery, mugging. One in which I could walk and drive and travel freely, confident, if necessary, that I could match menace with menace . . . With this loud, lethal reply to random viciousness in my hands, I finally felt fearless. (Kelly 2004, 10)

The chick dick's aversion to guns (Sam, for instance, has deliberately never wielded one) suggests a different interpretation of women's capacity for resistance in their struggle for safety and security. Chick dicks are clearly cognizant of the dangers they face as women. Yet they use their role as investigators not as a platform for the utility of firearms, but to interrogate the social structures that enable sexualized violence and gender-based domination, the conditions that have women wondering if they should reach for a gun in the first place. By juxtaposing the appropriate chick femininity with the dangers this femininity opens up, these

narratives re-situate postfeminist professions of women's freedom and agency within debates about physical mobility, security, and bodily integrity.

The tension between aggressive and properly feminine behaviour recurs in chick dicks' struggles with the gendered nature of violence. Popular modes of sex differentiation, crime and violence demarcate the men from the boys, and the women from the men (Messerschmidt 1993). Weapons and violence are the chick dick's last resort, and even when she is in immediate danger they are not always ingrained reactions:

> I knew this man. For most of my teenage years he had been my surrogate father figure. Unable to turn around, as if seeing him in the flesh would make it too real, I watched in the glass doors as Jon Tallboy advanced towards me from behind. The wire between his hands was reaching out towards me, his lips drawn back from his teeth in a grimace of concentration.
>
> He didn't speak. Crazily, I was waiting for it. It seemed impossible that he would kill me without saying a word of apology or explanation. More fool me. My hesitation nearly got me strangled. I was frozen, unable to believe that he would actually go through with it in utter silence. He had the wire almost over my head before my survival instincts snapped into action, and then it was nearly too late . . .
>
> In fighting him off I had been fuelled only by the most basic instincts of simple self-protection, and they had ebbed at once . . . I

felt as vulnerable as if I were missing a layer of skin. (Henderson *The Strawberry Tattoo*, 278, 282)

Scenes such as this depict the chick dick's conflicted relationship with violence. Sam's sense of vulnerability in the aftermath of her attack suggests a wary knowledge that physical violence is an inevitability, a necessary strategy for self-preservation in a gender system that continues to encourage male dominance and control.

Steph is always uncomfortable with the use of violence that her job demands. For example, in *Ten Big Ones* she and her co-workers Lula and Connie kidnap Anton Ward, a minor player in the local gang, to find out why a professional hit man has been hired to kill Steph. Even though he is tightly trussed and unable to retaliate, none of the women dole out a beating, and barely take a swing. Steph tries: "I made a fist, and told myself I was going to hit him. But I didn't hit him. My fist stopped just short of his face, and my knuckles sort of bumped against his forehead" (237). While willing to fight back when attacked, Steph, Lula, and Connie cannot bring themselves to instigate violence. Desperate to learn why her life is in danger, Steph even suggests: "Maybe we should turn him loose. Then we could chase him around the house and get into the moment" (238).

A chick's inability or reluctance to inflict violence upon someone else is generally played for comic effect. For instance, in *Revenge of the Cootie Girls* Robin is held at gunpoint, on Halloween, by a strange woman named Mrs. Chiesa, whose husband was cheating on her with Julie Goomey, one of Robin's childhood friends. Julie had abducted the woman's elderly mother and then vanished; Robin

and Mrs. Chiesa have both discovered Granny at the same time, safely asleep in a hotel room. Chiesa is determined to kill Robin, and orders her into the hotel elevator at gunpoint, handcuffed to Granny sleeping in her wheelchair. Robin's hair becomes hopelessly entangled in the elaborate facial piercings of the young man standing behind her, and uses this as her opportunity to escape:

> I turned quickly onto the pavement, without thinking, and headed east, toward First Avenue. The earring guy was half piggybacked on me, screaming. The wheelchair was picking up momentum. I leaned forward, and Earring Boy leaned with me. I put my feet on the bar at the back of the chair, throwing my weight and that of the boy forward to give us thrust and keep us from falling over backwards. Granny's unconscious head swung back and forth, from side to side. . . .
>
> At the corner of First, I leaned to the right, after announcing my attentions to the kid stuck to the back of my head, who was now fully piggybacked. Granny's wheelchair took the turn on one wheel. We had made it to 20th Street when the chair hit a rock and we all tipped over.
>
> "Yai yai yai," screamed the earring kid as we collapsed in a heap. I tried to get us both up, but it wasn't possible with my hands cuffed to the now empty wheelchair. (188)

Such slapstick could be read as a reflexion on the incongruity of a woman trying to do a man's job;[10] it can also persuasively be seen, alongside the chick dick's other troublings of the gender order, as a pointed comment on the ways in which women are allowed to be physical in space – like Honey West's neatly choreographed fight scenes, this bodily humour mitigates the appearance of women committing acts of violence, suggesting that such actions are inappropriate or un-feminine.[11]

The antics of Steph's accomplice Lula make such an interpretation unavoidable. While she is always armed (a habit started in her former life as a 'ho, she is quick to remind everyone), she is woefully untrained generally ends up firing at everything but her target. With her gun rendered useless, she literally uses her body to stop escaping (male) criminals, most often by sitting on them. "I'm working on perfecting my technique,'" she tells Steph. "'You know how the Rock has all them wrestling moves like the *People's Elbow* and the *Rock Bottom*? I'm gonna call mine the *Lula Bootie Bomb*'" (*Ten Big Ones*, 198).

Each Evanovich novel reiterates Lula's proud zaftig figure and unrepentant deviation from standards of appropriately feminine appearance: "Lula is a couple inches shorter and a lot of pounds heavier than me. She buys her clothes in the petite department and then shoehorns herself into them. This wouldn't work for most people, but it seems right for Lula. Lula shoehorns herself into *life*" (*Hard*

[10] Or even, as some have argued, on the ability of female investigators to actually *do* this job. Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen see Stephanie's "obvious bumbling . . . [as an] ironic comment on mainstream women's detective fiction, and especially on the professional efficiency that the heroines of this fiction take such pride in" (2001, 125).

[11] Not surprisingly, Steph and Robin frequently compare themselves to Lucy Ricardo, whose own slapstick encouraged a reading of her as "unruly" (see Mellencamp 1986; Rowe 1995).

Eight, 19, emphasis in original). Lula's disorderly female body becomes her most effective weapon, distancing the work of detection from its generic moorings in violent weapons by demonstrating at least once in each novel that criminal containment can be accomplished without them.

Another key aspect of chick dick's spatial security is that a sense of control over one's immediate environment includes the ability to arrive and leave at will. Vehicles for the detective's mobility, cars convey autonomy and self-determination, yet some chick dicks do not own a car and rely on public transportation or cabs to move around, while others own unreliable lemons. For Veronica it is a weatherbeaten Chrysler LeBaron convertible, "not a sports car; she's not into speed and power for its own sake" (Watt-Evans 2006, 162). The gearshift in Sam's old Ford Escort van often gives out, yet it is the only vehicle within her budget that is large enough to transport her art projects. Steph, in particular, has comically bad luck, inadvertently blowing up at least one car per novel and, to her chagrin, endlessly returning to borrow her family's lumbering yet indestructible baby blue 1953 Buick Roadmaster.

Ranger frequently offers Steph a replacement car loaded with hi-tech devices (and sexual innuendo regarding the kinds of favours she can gratefully provide in return), which she promptly destroys. This familiar element of the Evanovich formula reminds the reader that Steph's ability and resourcefulness do not inhere in a powerful car. Repeatedly exploring – and exploding – automotive mastery as a necessary detective skill, the variety, interchangeability, and very often

absence of vehicles reveals them to be, as Lawrence Watt-Evan remarks, more like costumes, a key element in the chick dick's gendered performances (2006, 168).

Whether they are cabs or convertibles, cars are most prosaically a means of movement, and their role in the texts indicates not the chick's investigative prowess but her frustrations with and fantasies about freedom. Even Honey, who drives a sleek Shelby Cobra convertible, finds her car a form of constraint: it is often a source of tension between her and her boyfriend Sam, as the car's visibility enables him to easily track and confront her about her movements around town. For those chick dicks who own one, cars can at times be a liability, immediately indicating their location. In season three of *Veronica Mars*, as Veronica starts to close in on the identity of the Hearst College rapist, someone (presumably her prey) slips a roofie into her drink as she eats in the campus cafeteria. Stumbling back to her car in the parking lot, she is attacked as she fumbles for her keys before passing out on the pavement. Her car in this instance makes her more vulnerable to ambush.

Zones such as parking lots are often the target of local safety initiatives, and arguments about them as spaces of risk – that they are often empty and poorly lit at night – are used to justify the installation of surveillance cameras. A powerful mode of perception, surveillance technology is generically employed to make threats to the social order visible and thus containable. This technology is used extensively in contemporary crime dramas, as "occasions for audiences to engage with displays of power presented as technological mastery . . . hi-tech gadgetry [function] as instruments of discovery and discipline" (Gever 2005, 448). *Veronica Mars* engages with this signification, as Veronica makes extensive use of the kinds

of gadgets typically found in the investigator's arsenal, in ways that clearly situate her within current social and televisual milieu. Veronica never goes anywhere without her cellphone, and often has her laptop stashed in her shoulder bag. Yet such devices do not distinguish Veronica as tech-savvy, but rather blend seamlessly into the series' cultural context: "Technology is a constant presence in the show, just as it is a presence in teen's lives today" (Tropp 2005, 124; see also Katz 2005, 83-4).

As with other operations of power, however, the rhetoric of spatial risk and surveillance produces opportunities for creative resistance at the same time as it attempts to close them down. Lefebvre explains that "the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power; yet that, as such it escapes in part from those who would make use of it" (Lefebvre 1991, 26). What distinguishes Veronica from most of her teen TV contemporaries are the uses to which she puts these devices.[12] Many of the tools she uses, like bugs and tracking devices, are borrowed from her father's private eye stash. Some are created – turning an mp3 player into a camera, for instance. Others are even less specialized, like photoshopping images or creating incriminating websites. This kind of technology "makes human eyes, ears, and limbs more powerful by leaving an impression of . . . ubiquity" (Hepburn 2005, 16).

Veronica's tools are effective not in and of themselves – most of her peers also have a cellphone and a laptop – but because of her imaginative facility with the

[12] Sydney Bristow in *Alias* (ABC, 2001-2006) is an exception. As a double agent, working for both the CIA and SD-6, however Syd's facility with elaborate technological devices is a job requirement, in contrast to Veronica's creative use of otherwise typical teen technologies like mp3 players, cellphones, etcetera.

digital technologies she has on hand, and the uses to which they are put. Veronica adapts the technology at her disposal to service goals that are deliberately and specifically emancipatory. The "feminist praxis we comprehend increasingly references technological rhetorics," and in *Veronica Mars* this rhetoric of technological surveillance and control is invoked to help other young women fight back against a typically male disciplinary and demeaning gaze – a friend being blackmailed with a sex video by her boyfriend, for example, and a peer being silenced about her impregnation by her teacher (Garrison 2001, 151; "M.A.D."; "Mars vs Mars").

These vulnerabilities and violations occur across a range of places and spaces, mapping areas not popularly identified as risky in a way that positions sexualized violence against women as a distinguishing feature of contemporary social life – a rape culture. Chick dicks' travels through social space thus produce an understanding of the multiple sites in which women are subject to and resistant of sexualized and sexualizing social norms.

Narrative treatments of social space, like those found in chick dick stories, are an avenue for understanding the interplay between the social and the spatial, as "everyday stories tell us what one can do in it and make out of it. They are treatments of space" (de Certeau 1984, 122). These representations of detecting incorporate rather than ignore gendered spatial constraint, attending to the implications of de Certeau's assertion that "spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life" (1984, 96).

Tools are central to this task of narrating and mapping chick dicks' experiences of social space. The kinds of weapons and uses to which they are put construct geographies of sexualized violence rather than of fear, which extend past poorly lit parking lots to implicate the presence of patriarchy, not of individual assailants, as the basis for both women's vulnerability and resistance. Just as these tools and weapons indicate how gender hierarchies permeate social space, they also encourage forms of movement that attempt to break through such boundaries. In discussing the chick dick's creative appropriation of tools, I alluded briefly to the ways in which the technologies of detection are gendered as masculine. Chapter Three furthers this theme, unpacking the connections between masculinism, violence, and the much-touted "crisis in masculinity" to demonstrate that a feminist critique of contemporary masculinities is central to understanding and deconstructing postfeminism.

Chapter Three

Boys Will Be Boys: Male Violence, Victimization, and the Crisis in Masculinity

Lately I've been spending a lot of time rolling around on the ground with men who think a stiffy represents personal growth.

-Stephanie Plum

Located between two generic discourses, the chick dick manipulates disparate representations of gender roles and sex differences. As much feminist scholarship points out, crime and romance are strongly gendered genres, each with its own conventionalized expression of sex roles[1]. Crime stories, particularly the hardboiled and noir traditions, have tended to depict women as (highly sexualized) victims or threats, both of which are put in their place by the end of the narrative – silenced, most often, by sexual violence or death (Hollinger 1996; Place 1980). Chick texts, meanwhile, rely upon an independent female protagonist negotiating what are depicted as the contrary demands of personal and professional relationships. Crime and chick texts are both seen as vehicles for exploring gender and sexual difference; Imelda Whelehan's characterization of chick lit as an "anxious

[1] See, for instance, Modleski (1982) and Radway (1984) on romance; Krutnik (1991) and Plain (2001) on crime fiction.

genre" certainly has affinities with the near-paranoid expressions of threatening female sexuality found in the hardboiled and noir detective genres (2005, 188).

In the hardboiled and noir traditions, the femme fatale often embodies the fears generated by inter-war shifts in women's economic and social status. These narratives "focus so strongly on the investigation of their female characters, [that] their failure to resolve the issue of female sexual difference in any satisfying way calls attention to the instability in regard to women's social positioning that characterized the period of the 1940s" (Hollinger 1996, 257). Fast-forward to the 1990s and a similar anxiety plagues chick lit: a concern about what women's changing roles mean for women, and for their platonic, professional, and romantic relationships with men. The possibility or even the necessity for the heroine to "have it all" is frequently met with ambivalence, for "crippled by the burden of choice – most particularly the freedom to remain single – [the chick lit heroine] suffers indefinable lassitude at the prospect of career advancement. She assumes the successes of feminism without feeling the need to acknowledge the source of these freedoms; in fact, feminism lurks in the background like a guilty conscience" (Whelehan 2005, 176).

These socially situated anxieties point to multiple avenues for exploring the interconnections between detection, masculinity, and feminism in chick dick narratives. Teresa Ebert suggests that there is a sense of crisis at the heart of all detective stories: "Detective fictions are narratives of crisis in patriarchy . . . [in which] the crimes reproduce fundamental contradictions in patriarchy that jeopardize its hegemony and undermines its production of the necessary gendered

subjects" (1992, 6). Crime stories' popularity is on one level deeply connected to their ability to articulate and allay fears about cultural change, especially changes in the prevailing gender regime.

Other commentators interpret thematic consistencies and shifts within the crime genre as indications not of a crisis in patriarchy, but in masculinity. Neal King (1999) sees in the popularity of violent, action-packed cop films a struggle over the shifting terms of power and privilege. For white male heterosexuality, the "threat" of civil rights, feminism, and economic instabilities coalesce into a sense of what King terms "losing ground": "Straight white men can feel just this lack of potency, a bitterness toward a world that has betrayed them and called them oppressor while moving into their occupational turf, challenging their public authority, and abandoning them at home" (1999, 8).

Popular commentary like Robert Bly's *Iron John* (1990), Susan Bordo's *The Male Body* (1999), and Susan Faludi's *Stiffed* (1999) make similar points – that traditional or hegemonic masculinity is increasingly unattainable, as the material and social conditions through which masculinity is produced undergo significant changes. A "particular version or model of masculinity that operates on the terrain of common sense and conventional morality that defines 'what it means to be a man,'" dominant or hegemonic masculinity is purportedly being undermined and undervalued in what numerous articles characterize as a 'crisis of masculinity' (Hanke 1998, 190).

Representations of men are a key, and often overlooked, means for post-ing feminism. Depictions of masculinity in a postfeminist media environment work to

"re-stabilis[e] gender relations against the disruptive threat posed by feminism" by dramatizing how the disorderly effects of female agency have provoked this "crisis" in masculinity (McRobbie 2007, 721). Yet crisis does not necessarily indicate a decline in the structures and effects of white male privilege; representations of masculinity in crisis often renegotiate rather than relinquish male power. Popular slippage between the two, and the exscription of women in the process, is one reason why Tania Modleski calls for us to "consider the extent to which male power is actually consolidated through cycles of crisis and resolution, whereby men ultimately deal with the threat of female power by incorporating it" (1991, 7).

This chapter focuses on cultural and generic configurations of maleness within chick dick narratives, identifying how their representations of men and masculinities form a basis for the character's critical work in exposing the problems of postfeminist assurances about female agency. My critical consideration of masculinities in a project that investigates stories about women and about feminism is determined in part by the attention these masculinities call to themselves – within these texts, and through the connections these texts draw to wider cultural discourses. As Robyn Wiegman points out, "the very emergence of masculinity as an entity to be interrogated and understood finds its raison d'être in the popular acknowledgement and open representational display of masculinity as a domain seemingly beside itself: that is, internally contested, historically discontinuous, and popularly a mess" (2002, 32).

Chick dick texts reproduce images of masculinity in crisis, participating in its rhetoric of vulnerability and victimization. In doing so, these stories draw

sustained attention to the spaces and places in which masculinities are made vulnerable, problematizing cultural constructions of masculinities in ways that have the potential to implicate patriarchy in cycles of victimization and violence. Yet this cultural critique is not fully fleshed out. While these texts identify multiple social sites – schools, the military, the family, and hierarchical business environments – as conducive to or constituitive of masculinism, masculinities themselves are narrated in such a way as to preclude broader analysis.

I approach masculinity not as a monolithic or static category, but as sets of social practices through which gender can be accomplished. That is, there is no single masculinity but multiple masculinities that are produced and reproduced through actions in social settings and in relation to other social actors and structures: "Masculinity is defined as a configuration of practice organized in relation to the structure of gender relations" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 843). As such, masculinities are historical and changeable. In this project I look specifically at *representations* of masculinities, understanding them as deployable concepts that display and dramatize contemporary gender relations. Characters who lash out at women have their behaviour contextualized by the sexual abuse they suffered as children, while ultra-violent males are exaggerated sadists, so caricatured as to be beyond explanation – their violence and aggression seem to be explanation enough.

Others, like the complicit masculinities of male characters who mask their insecurities behind a hyper- and harassing heterosexuality, are justified largely in terms of individual psychology: they are actually sensitive males compensating for

their personal anxieties about masculine performance. All three configurations can be "understood as the effects of specific regimes of visibility," that is, by the prominent notion of crisis that continually calls attention to contemporary masculinities and struggles over their cultural meanings (Hanke 1998, 189). The first two types of aggression dominate chick dick texts' constructions of violence, making it difficult to recognize either the sites or the spectrum of sexualized violence in these stories, as well as to understand how aggression is an enactment, not a determinant, of masculinities.

The detective story, "a key ideological apparatus for the representation and reproduction of male gender," is fraught with anxieties about doing gender, and in particular, about doing masculinity (Ebert 1992, 10). Chick dick texts' images of men suggest that these stories are preoccupied not only with contemporary constructions of femininity but with masculinity as well. Challenging the detective's historically male and masculine embodiment, chick dick narratives highlight how crime stories' understandings of violence and victimization legitimate and are legitimated by popular discourses of what it means to be a man.

Taking as my point of departure Ebert's critical interpretation of detective fiction as a story of the crisis and reproduction of gendered subjects, this chapter looks at prominent forms of gender crisis in chick dick narratives. Specifically, I explore how these stories tap into the popular sentiment of a "crisis in masculinity." While their sustained attention to this trope offers starting points for critiquing contemporary operations of patriarchy, chick dick narratives shy away from direct critique in favour of individualized explanations for male behaviour, a problematic

set of solutions that indicates the complexity of representations of gender and power in postfeminist media culture.

The chick dick's investigative stance draws attention to how established and emergent male masculinities[2] find and negotiate their cultural currency through the crime genre. Subtly re-inscribing the male body within masculinity by embedding masculinity in tropes of violence, chick dick stories examine how a sense of crisis justifies the exercise of a sexualized and violent authority, as well as how such representations can obviate larger critiques of patriarchy. In these, as in other popular narratives, the "rhetoric of crisis performs the cultural work of centering attention on dominant masculinity" (Robinson 2000, 11). Relentlessly emphasizing male victimization, a central facet for presenting masculinity in crisis, chick dick texts tentatively situate this crisis *within* patriarchal institutions, organizations, and social formations, suggesting that the contexts in which male domination is reproduced create conditions in which aggression against women and feminized "others" is a legitimate response to women's perceived incursions against male privilege.

In this chapter I ask: How does the chick dick intervene in the familiar conflation between masculinity and authority? How is crime – as a genre and as a 'masculine' act – implicated in devaluations of women and of feminism? What roles do violence and victimization play in doing and undoing gender within them? What

[2] As Judith Halberstam (1998) makes clear, masculinity is not bound to a male body, just a social construction affixed most normatively to the male body. While bearing in mind that the "masculinity produced by, for, and within women" is one of the multiple masculinities available, this chapter focuses specifically on articulations of male masculinity (Halberstam 1998, 15).

does the preponderance of conflicted or wounded males achieve in the frameworks of chick dick texts? How is the notion of a crisis in masculinity an adaptive strategy of patriarchy? Why is male crisis a central feature of stories ostensibly dedicated to the concerns of their female protagonists? As such, what role do chick dick texts play in larger feminist critiques of postfeminism's lack of serious treatment of male violence?

To work through these questions, I look at these texts' representations of male crisis in order to identify how they sometimes perpetuate and at other times intervene in the popular discourse of a crisis in masculinity. The plethora of storylines that revolve around masculinities, or depend upon a particular iteration of maleness for their resolution, at moments push past a simplistic rendering of crisis. Men are depicted as conflicted and wounded, but also hypermasculine and militarized, a set of sentiments and tendencies often situated within social and institutional contexts, and with the potential to implicate these patriarchal structures in male vulnerability and aggression. I then focus on some of the specific representational strategies that support these masculinities, to examine how chick dick narratives negotiate the crime genre's familiar forms of masculine embodiment. The chick dick's reservations about postfeminism are thus expressed not only through confrontational and challenging representations of women's femininity, but through the initially critical eye she casts on masculinity as well.

Being A Man

As chronicled by critics and commentators (and, arguably, satirized in Chuck Palahniuk's 1997 *Fight Club*), masculinity – specifically, maleness as dominant and domineering – is seen as under threat and so in crisis. As Tim Edwards observes, this crisis has dual dimensions: a (rather nebulously) verifiable decline in white men's positions of power within social institutions, and a feeling of powerlessness these men experience in relation to "work, education, the family, sexuality, health, crime, and representation" (2006, 8). Filling roles like provider, lover, and protector has traditionally been a means of achieving culturally favoured forms of masculinity – that is, white, straight, and middle-class (see Bly 1990; Bordo 1999; Ehrenreich1984; Faludi 1999).

Broader socio-economic shifts effect changes not only in the means by which males can "achieve" masculinity, but the contours of masculine identities themselves. In Chapter Two I pointed to the rise of the playboy figure as consumer culture directly targeted men, re-coding commodities and consumerism as manly pursuits. Susan Faludi (1999) refers to this as an ornamental culture, denoting the increasingly consumerist bent to masculinities, and to how we identify with and differentiate between them (see also Edwards 1997). Sam's boyfriend Hugo illustrates the malleability of male identities offered by ornamental culture. A consummate shopper, he deliberately engineers and embodies a variety of male personas through clothing, accessories, and mannerisms – he even has different cigarettes for private and public consumption (*Chained*, 38). Yet as Faludi explains, the "internal qualities once said to embody manhood – surefootedness,

inner strength, confidence of purpose – are merchandised to men to enhance their manliness. What passes for the essence of masculinity is being extracted and bottled – and sold back to men. Literally, in the case of Viagra" (1999, 35).

Ornamental culture gains much of its strength from transposing tropes of traditional masculinities – like virility – into commodities. Michael Kimmel describes how these traits come together in the image of the self-made man, a deeply rooted American ideology of personal and professional achievement predicated upon publicly "proving" manhood (2006, 19). While the resources and the audience may have changed, the mythology still retains a powerful hold. Sparkle Hayter's *The Last Manly Man* takes masculinity as its focal point, as heroine and television journalist Robin is producing an investigative report on men:

> I suggested a series on the Man of the Future, looking at how far men had come and where they might evolve to in the future. In this context, I was sure, I could pinpoint exactly what it was that made a man a man, beyond anatomy, through all times and all fashions. I would pinpoint that mysterious quality good men have that makes them so attractive, despite how annoying they sometimes are. Whenever I try to give this mysterious thing a name – call it courage, strength, whatever – I think of a bunch of women with the same quality. This thing is something I find only in men, and not in all men. (8)

One of the men Robin interviews is Gill Morton, an archetypal self-made man who grew a small cleaning products company into a multinational enterprise.

Morton, she discovers, deeply resents women's social, political, and economic advances, and is determined to turn back the clock:

> The plan, he told me, was to devise some chemical that could be secreted into air fresheners, cleaning products, grooming products, and ventilation systems, a chemical that would return women to contented submission and make men stronger and more aggressive. Morton then planned to cut his prices to get those products into even more households around the world and get women hooked on the chemical, cleaning, and resurgent male domination. (221)

This chemical, named Adam 1, is first targeted at a high-profile feminist conference taking place in downtown New York. Hayter's characteristic flippant tone only partially masks *The Last Manly Man*'s larger point – that women, and particularly feminism, are easy scapegoats for this crisis in masculinity.

By the end of the novel, Robin has "saved the world from the past, saved the world from returning in the future to a time of docile, contented women and overly aggressive men" (252). Caught up in the crime, she never finished her Man of the Future report, and when packing up her research material she pauses for a moment on a late-1950s advertisement for Morton's company:

> A dejected-looking man, wearing a short-sleeved plaid shirt and high-waisted trousers with a perfect crease, was eavesdropping on a circle of boys. Underneath was the caption: "When the other boys ask 'What does your dad do?' how does *your* boy answer them?" Then, in smaller type, "So your job isn't what it should be, maybe

you had to leave school early, maybe the war interfered. Don't let these things stop you. Start a dynamic new career and be your boy's hero. Be a Morton Man!"

. . .

The man in the ad, and all the men he represented, made me so sad. How could he know that in just a few years, chances were his boy would either be off fighting in Vietnam or wearing his hair long "like a girl" and protesting the war. The son might look at him not as a hero but as an Establishment toady who compromised his values for the sake of a dollar. The man couldn't know that in another decade, his wife might be burning her bra and exploring her own sexuality and raising her consciousness. The future he'd been promised by the Morton Company, which was also Gill's vision, had been betrayed. (*The Last Manly Man*, 253-4)

Unlike Morton, Robin can see the confluence of social and historical factors that have impacted gender roles and undermined traditional male privilege, and that the feminist movement is only part of the process. Even with such a perspective, however, she still clings to the notion of a nebulous male essence, still wonders "What is that mysterious thing good men have that makes me overlook all sorts of annoying shit, and will they have more of it in the future as they evolve?" (*The Last Manly Man*, 257). Such slippages between men and masculinity indicate the difficulty in distinguishing between normative constructions and embodied experiences of gender, a tension that recurs across chick dick texts.

As *The Last Manly Man*'s tale of the Morton Company suggests, "American white men bought the promise of self-made masculinity, but its foundation has all but eroded. Instead of questioning those ideals, they fall back upon those same traditional notions of manhood – physical strength, self-control, power – that defined their fathers' and their grandfathers' eras, as if the solution to this problem were simply 'more' masculinity" (Kimmel 2006, 218). Crucially, many of the constituent elements Kimmel identifies revolve around forms of influence. Arthur Brittan suggests that what is actually at stake in discussions about masculinity in crisis is not the veracity of data about male position and privilege, but rather the masculinism underpinning this sense of entitlement – there is not a crisis of masculinity so much as there is a crisis of *legitimation* for a gender regime predicated on patterns of domination, exploitation, and oppression, that is, patriarchy (1989, 184). Patriarchy's hierarchical dynamic plays out within masculinities, which range from dominant to subordinate based on sexuality, class, race, and nationality (see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Jeffords 2004).

Masculinities are relational concepts, mobilizing notions of sex difference to distinguish between masculinities and femininities, and within masculinities as well. Understanding that masculinities are articulated alongside and against other masculinities then "makes it easier to recognize the hard compulsions under which gender configurations are formed" (Connell 2005, 76). Representing normative standards and not necessarily the primary practices of men, idealized masculinities occupy "the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable" (Connell 2005, 76). Dominant masculinities are continually

negotiated, adjusting to address and counter changes in the gender order; multiple and even seemingly contradictory paradigms of masculinity co-exist at the same cultural moment, different aspects of the same struggle over what it means and is to be a man.

R.W. Connell refers to these as complicit masculinities – forms that participate in and benefit from patriarchy, yet are not exemplars of dominant or hegemonic masculinity: "Masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy, are complicit in this sense" (2005, 79).[3] This chapter focuses on complicit masculinities, on how positions of straight, white middle-class male privilege are constructed and contested. Dynamics of masculine sensitivity and aggression in particular mobilize and motivate chick dick narratives, as these texts grapple with gradations of the "nice guy," and come face to face with men whose attitude toward women is explicitly marked as deviant. Yet while the social and cultural institutions that contribute to such constructions are often indicated, male characters' individual psychology tends to trump other forces as an explanation for "monstrous" male behaviour, a discursive turn that can deflect sustained critique. It is difficult to achieve a deeper understanding of how the rhetoric of masculinity in crisis contributes to the continued subordination and exploitation of women, as this

[3] Robert Hanke (1990, 1998) uses a similar schema that draws explicitly on Connell's work, and substitutes "conservative" for "complicit." While both critics emphasize masculinities' socially and historically contingent articulations and interrelations, I prefer Connell's term "complicit" as it immediately denotes the investment these masculinities have in maintaining patriarchy.

avenue of critique is submerged in representations of individual anxieties, inadequacies, and pathologies.

It is because of the difficulty such depictions pose to forwarding a feminist critique of sexualized violence that these kinds of complicit masculinities demand sustained critical attention. As Connell notes, complicit masculinities actively, if subtly, participate in and benefit from the reproduction of oppressive gender relations, as by "patriarchal dividend" he means the "advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (2005, 79). A man does not need to be a paragon of stereotypical masculinity to have a stake in, or feel the effects of, patriarchy. Unpacking how masculinities interact with femininities and with other masculinities exposes the less obvious but no less compelling exertions of authority and domination that characterize contemporary gender relations.

Complicit masculinities tend to hold at least a few key hallmarks of male privilege, be it class, race, or sexuality, which means that the sites of their construction can easily go unattended. Mia Consalvo notes this type of elision in the first wave of media coverage after the Columbine high school shooting in 1999, which "emphasized certain factors and ignored others, and so functioned to let systems such as hegemonic masculinity and school culture mostly off the hook" (2003, 28). She points to how the boys' race, class, and relatively subordinate position within their high school's social hierarchy were largely unremarked upon. Media representation of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris simply painted these young men as monstrous, even beyond masculinity. Consalvo's critical attention, as she herself argues (41), is illustrative of the kind of work that needs to be undertaken in

order to fully problematize masculinities, and particularly the anxieties that inhere in their construction and enactment. The plethora of male characters that appear in supporting as well as antagonistic roles in chick dick stories are similarly privileged, a position often gestured towards as the texts script such men via images of masculine crisis. Judith Gardiner argues that "anxiety about men's imperiled masculinity indicates how tied masculinity is to the assumption of privilege and how uneasy has become the justification for that privilege" (2002, 23). Prying apart the interconnections between privilege, crisis, and violence is one of this chapter's central objectives.

A persuasive portion of feminist scholarship regarding popular representations of this crisis focus on how the male body becomes the site through which anxieties about masculinity are expressed (Bordo 1999; Jeffords 1989, 1994; Tasker 1993b). As Sally Robinson notes, "there is something irresistible about the logic whereby white male angst gets represented in bodily terms" (2000, 6). Much of this work emerged to address the action heroes that dominated 1980s cinema, films like *Rambo: First Blood* (Kotcheff 1982), *The Terminator* (Cameron 1984), or *Die Hard* (McTiernan 1988), in which the hero's repeated bodily violations – beaten, tortured, burned, shot – are central narrative obstacles, as well as "a set of aestheticized images to be lovingly dwelt on" (Tasker 1993a, 230).

These images of victimization, as Robinson argues, come to stand for the multiple other forms of victimization that beset the middle-class straight white male, a sense of "losing ground" that is articulated instead through visceral physical abuse heaped upon the male body. To read gendered social and economic anxieties

through "representations of wounded white male bodies signal[s] a crisis elsewhere, and one that is simultaneously caused and managed by narratives of crisis and the wounded bodies displayed within those narratives" (Robinson 2000, 9). Such scholarship importantly identifies some of the contours of this crisis: marketing the male body as a sexual and erotic object or commodity, and its attendant homosocial anxieties (Fuchs 1993; Jeffords 1989, 1994, Ross 1986; Neale 1993); the conflation between job and masculine performance (Faludi 1999; S.B. King 1990); power and powerlessness via self- and bodily-control (Jeffords 1994; Krutnik 1991; Tasker 1993a, 1993b); heterosexual and familial authority (Jeffords 1994; Tasker 1993b). This work also emphasizes the strategies through which the declaration of a crisis in masculinity takes victimized form, simultaneously blaming and ignoring women and feminism, a key thread in this chapter.

Taking my cue from the normative construction of men and their masculinities in chick dick stories, I will show how masculine crisis and male victimization are constructed and criticized in texts with a female protagonist. The most prominent strategy in these narratives is an emphasis on men's *emotional* wounds in addition to, as the outcome of, or in lieu of physical ones. Chick dick narratives invoke a sense of crisis, assigning familiar tropes of autonomy, emotional reticence, physical violence, and lascivious heterosexuality to male characters who then struggle and falter under the weight of such expectations. Such representations circulate within the discourse of the 1990s' "sensitive man," and come under the chick dick's scrutiny, as her investigations suggest that "the 'possibilities' opened up by the 'gender trouble' of the crisis of masculinity includes the possibility of

salvaging the disturbing traditions from which the '90s man seemed to diverge" (Malin 2005, 10; see also Torres 1993). Critiquing the sexualized and violent exercise of male power and privilege on women's bodies, these texts engage with the popular sentiment that feminism destabilizes gendered identities, that feminism is responsible for throwing what it means to "be a man" into disarray.

The chick dick is surrounded by men grappling with their gender, their insecurities thrown into sharp relief by their contrast to the chick dick's sense of empowerment and entitlement. Even a successful and macho career as a homicide detective cannot assuage the confidence of Sam's on-again, off-again lover Hawkins – drawn by both his kinetic physical attraction to Sam and the domestic security of his avowedly feminist girlfriend-turned-fiancée Daphne, he frequently bores Sam with indulgent tirades about his emotional confusion and conflicting desires. The ever-caustic Sam has little patience for these sorts of displays; at a friend's staff party she watches a host of wealthy investment bankers drunkenly waving their limp penises at the guests and ruminates, "I expect a social theorist would have read their behaviour as a powerful statement about the invisibility of the male member in modern society, a daring attempt to confront its reality. For some reason the word 'pathetic' sprung more easily to my lips" (*Black Rubber Dress*, 257).

This scene is emblematic of chick dick texts' propensity to sketch out and then sidestep a critique of masculinity's construction. Sam knows how the men's behaviour can be understood within a broader social context, yet chooses to construe it as a "pathetic" display of individual impotence and anxieties. Shifting

the discussion from the political to the personal, Henderson also shifts the site of these anxieties away from myriad and contradictory cultural norms, a pattern that recurs across these narratives. As a result, these texts are often preoccupied not with masculinities so much as they are with men – a slippery conflation between masculinity and the male body that provokes just as it obscures direct critiques of contemporary gender dynamics.

Bonnie Dow argues that one of the most insidious representations of masculinity is that of "postfeminist masculinity;" instead of being wounded or threatened by shifting gender norms, the postfeminist male has internalized feminist rhetoric so adroitly that he is fully secure in his own revised role (2006, 125-6). Postfeminist discourse, being "less about what young women ought not to do, and more about what they can do," means that even its men see social equality to be so wide-ranging that "any need for the feminist critiques of . . . hegemonic masculinities" has expired (McRobbie 2007, 721).

As part of her cultural work, the chick dick lays bare some of the types of and interactions between masculinities within patriarchy. The stories' sustained attention to narrative and representational intimations of victimization intervenes in the binary between male aggressor and female target, preliminary identifications of how men's victimization via masculine ideals and patriarchal structures perpetuates cycles of violence. The crisis of masculinity is exposed as a strategy that diverts attention from more pointed critiques of patriarchy, and even reinforces forms of masculine dominance; these stories' insistent coupling of wounded masculinities

with aggressive ones reveals the complementary pairing of such gendered archetypes in maintaining patterns of male social domination and hierarchy.

The notion of a crisis in masculinity is thus disingenuous; as Connell observes, masculinity is only part of the gender order, meaning that masculinities and femininities shift in relation to and not independent of each other. Crisis tendencies impact gender as a *system*, disrupting and transforming the social practices within (Connell 2005, 84). As such, the theoretical or even the empirical basis for asserting that there is indeed a crisis in masculinity is less significant than how the popular circulation of such sentiment frames representations of gender and power, situates male privilege as a focal point, and seems to preclude the need to position patriarchy itself as problematic.

Robinson reminds us that "[w]hile it is true that 'crisis' might signify a trembling of the edifice of white and male power, it is also true that there is much symbolic power to be reaped from occupying the social and discursive position of subject-in-crisis" (2000, 9). Such a discursive position extends rather than relinquishes privilege. While crisis "marks" heterosexual white middle-class masculinity for critical deconstruction, it also broadens the ways in which masculinity can call attention to itself; the popular circulation of diverse kinds of masculinities not only suggests that gender can be constructed in multiple ways, but can also "act to shore up [male] privilege . . . as men, no longer able to escape the mark of gender, seek to appropriate its full range for themselves" (Gardiner 2002, 23).

As such, male characters "depict a conflicted masculinity that both embraces and puts aside a variety of masculine stereotypes" (Malin 2005, 8). They are central to the ongoing construction and circulation of a sense of crisis in masculinity. Framing crisis through emotional vulnerabilities, the 'sensitive man' figure appears as an antidote to traditional maleness. Importantly, however, such characters' inner conflicts and struggles about what it now means to be a man are not represented as possible means for transforming the gender order; rather, "these new deployments of masculinity worked to reproduce conventionalized masculine values and anxieties, but in the subtly different form of the new, sensitive male" (Malin 2005, 59; see also Torres 1993). Much like how postfeminism superficially rather than substantively acknowledges its debt to feminism in its representation of femininities, "crisis" is used to legitimate rather than challenge established masculinities in the face of social and cultural changes. Both discourses imply a shift in the gender order, yet work to re-stabilize gender roles into a familiar and traditional hierarchy. As chick dick texts imply, conflicted masculinities do not necessarily translate into progressive behaviours; the presence of emotional "baggage" – a kind of wounded masculinity – more often appears as a harbinger and explanation of male violence against women.

Wounds and Wounding

A cultural conflation between gender, sexuality, and violence pervades the crime genre. As "part of a system of domination, but . . . at the same time a measure of its imperfection," violence forms the backdrop against which the chick

dick operates. Even in stories that revolve around female protagonists, the tenuous nature of hegemonic masculinity is constantly featured (Connell 2005, 84). Crises in masculinity propel some of the chick dicks' storylines, which demonstrate the embeddedness of such anxieties within the crime genre. The endings of Lauren Henderson's *Dead White Female* and of the major narrative arc of *Veronica Mars*'s second season highlight how the chick dick's gendering is still often refracted through narratives of victimized masculinity – both Sam and Veronica find themselves positioned as threats because of their knowledge of devastating secrets.

In tracing the circumstance of her friend and mentor's death, Sam learns that Nat – the enigmatic, tightly coiled man she's been dating – has killed not once but twice to hide the very thing Sam has stumbled across: that as a child he was sexually abused by his older brother. Veronica, similarly, figures out that her schoolmate Cassidy (a.k.a. Beaver) is behind the school bus crash that killed six of their peers, two of whom were considering going public with the revelation that Neptune's mayor molested them when they played on his Little League softball team. Nat and Cassidy are desperate to keep their hurt at the hands of father figures secret; as both stories illustrate, each character's abuse has had damaging effects on their ability to conform to norms of stolid autonomy and eager heterosexuality. Nat frequently cries out in his sleep and clings to Sam for comfort, while Cassidy is only able to perform sexually when he is able to wield power over his partner. He is unable to maintain an erection with his girlfriend Mac (and retaliates by stealing her clothes and abandoning her), yet was capable of raping an unconscious Veronica at a party the year before.

Both Cassidy and Nat turn to violence when they discover that someone knows about their pasts. Cassidy lures Veronica to the top of the Neptune Grand hotel on graduation night and trains first a taser and then a gun on her ("Not Pictured"). Wielding these traditional symbols of potency in a desperate attempt to reclaim a sense of male sexuality and power he feels has been taken from him, he directs their violence at the person who represents the potential public display of his spoiled manhood, and who, as a female, represents that which he is so afraid he has become – a failure of masculinity, (socially and culturally) impotent.

Like Cassidy, Nat lashes out at women. In addition to killing Sam's friend Lee, he stalks and corners Sam in her own apartment. Thinking he has trapped her in her own bed – a loft, on a ladder high above the rest of her apartment – Nat moves in for the kill, only to find himself adrift as Sam "jerked out the pins which moored the ladder to the platform, the pins which [she] has just loosened, and kicked the ladder away into space with all the strength in [her] body" (*Dead White Female*, 264). Neither Sam nor Veronica resort to the confrontational, weaponized violence so often expected of the investigator in such life-or-death scenarios. Even when Veronica manages to get her hands on Cassidy's gun she cannot maintain a steady hand or her desire to pull the trigger. Denied an explosive ending, Cassidy passively lets himself fall off the building to his death. Veronica thus intervenes in Cassidy's attempts at masculinization: by not participating in or perpetuating the violence of the encounter by using the gun herself, and by taking away the tool he needs to become a certain kind of man – the kind that reacts to loss of privilege through violence against women.

Nat and Cassidy's desperate attempts to regain a hold on a masculine ideal through violence, and the threat the chick dick poses to revealing their secrets, dramatize a shift in the gendered power dynamics of crime narratives in terms of what constitutes a viable female character. Nat and Cassidy see themselves, and not women, as victims, and this becomes a way of contextualizing their own acts of violence. As stories of male victimization, these two instances reiterate a familiar, yet not false, explanation: that sexually victimized boys will victimize others. Their deaths confirm the permanence with which these traumatic childhood abuses mark Nat and Cassidy as victims; both literally fall from the top. The roots of their victimization become embedded within the investigative motif, a behavioural explanation that is final part of the puzzle as the chick dick discovers not just who is behind the crimes, but why.

Despite being the denouement, residual emotional wounds are of secondary narrative importance. Cassidy, for instance, is a largely peripheral character in the series' first two seasons. As the second season progresses, the series is more concerned with uncovering the multiple potential spaces of sexualized abuse and violence through the broad range of people suspected of engineering the bus crash that killed six students and their teacher – a discharged soldier from the war in Iraq, a gay male teen forced into a Christian sexuality-reassignment camp by his parents, a sports hero spurned by the teacher. This swath of patriarchal institutions each provide a plausible rationale, and presage the final revelation that a prominent political figure – Neptune's mayor in *Veronica Mars* and a well-connected banker in *Dead White Female* – has been molesting young boys.

Informed by this knowledge, Sam and Veronica enact multiple forms of resistance: they resist becoming these characters' next victims of sexualized assault, they resist the generic pattern that tries to insist upon females playing the limited roles of femme fatale or victim, and they resist complicity with wider power dynamics of abuse and silence by dragging the private toll of sexualized violence within social organizations – the family, the Little League baseball team – into public view.

Sexual vulnerability, particularly in the crime genre, is a victimizing, feminizing role or position. Connell observes that such symbolic feminization works to subordinate certain kinds of masculinities, that feminization is a central strategy in the organization and policing of maleness (2005, 79). As Nat and Cassidy demonstrate, this sense of subordination is often responded to with an excessive display of violence. Contrived to deny and disavow feminization, representations of excess "can produce problems which emerge on the surface of 'masculine' texts . . . these texts yield a realm of masculine excess that demonstrates their fragile position" (Joyrich 1990, 166). As "masculine" texts (their generic lineage, for instance, and their concern with the contours of hegemonic maleness), chick dick's narrative surfaces are populated by fragile or wounded masculinities like Nat and Cassidy's that expose and contest the ideologies that structure this excess.

"The Beast Thing"

Their portrayal of hypermasculinity reiterates that masculinity is a multifaceted rather than monolithic set of visible social practices. Chick dick

narratives also mobilize this imagery of excess to identify and critique some of the spaces where aggressive masculinities are produced. The crime narrative is useful vehicle for this work, providing a culturally familiar template within which such masculinities are enacted. A "*resource* for 'doing gender,'" acts and narratives of crime dramatize perceived differences between men and women, and between men and boys (Messerschmidt 1993, 84, emphasis in original). These differences are often articulated through representations of an almost animalistic aggression, intimating a "real" or authentic masculinity for which aggression is a natural response to threat.

Take, for instance, Henderson's description of Nat as he chases Sam through her apartment: "His face was feral, the skin drawn tight as a drum over the sharp bones. His lips pulled back from his teeth, baring them in a lupine snarl. What big teeth you have, Mr Wolf. He looked as if he would sink them into my throat and tear it out without a second thought. His eyes glittered bright and feverish" (*Dead White Female*, 263). Or, as Lula explains to Steph in Evanovich's *Lean Mean Thirteen*, "'In all my years of being a 'ho, I learned blood is better than sex if you want to get a man stirred up for action. You let a man watch someone getting his face mashed in, and you got a horny guy. It's the beast thing'" (224).

Chick dick texts propagate this perception of animalistic masculinity and male sexuality as innately aggressive – the "beast thing." Rather than understanding male aggression as enacting codes of particular masculinities, these stories instead offer gradations of violent masculinities, suggesting "violence can be an accepted trait of certain masculinities, but only if exercised in certain ways" (Consalvo 2003,

33). Some forms of violence are excusable (or at least unremarkable), while others are narrated as deviant – an expression of natural instinct that exceeds social norms, beyond the "beast thing" to just "beast." Such scripting is achieved in part through the victims of this aggression: violence against a sympathetic female figure immediately casts the aggressor outside of these boundaries, as seen in Nat's attack on Sam, and Evanovich's descriptions of Benito Ramirez's serial sexual assaults described in Chapter One (see also Meyers 1997). By intimating that violence is an inherent part of maleness and not a facet in the construction of masculinities, these narratives pathologize its more extreme manifestations as male instinct gone awry.

Martha McCaughey (2008) refers to this as the "caveman mystique," where male aggression is popularly legitimized by reference to evolutionary claims about prehistoric manhood. A "partial, political discourse that authorizes certain prevalent masculine behaviours and a problematic acceptance of these behaviours," this caveman ethos not only posits men as naturally combative, but promotes this as a way for men to recapture their masculinity as other "traditional" means wane (McCaughey 2008, 17; see also Faludi 1999, 37). Popular appeals to aggression as a by-product of an innate manly essence take many forms – a "boys will be boys" rationale justifies things like sexual harassment, binge drinking, hazing, and unsafe sexual practices (see, e.g., Kimmel 2008). "Men's behaviour is reified in a concept of masculinity that then, in a circular argument, becomes the explanation (and the excuse) for the behaviour," a truth effect reinforced by the recent attention the popular press has given to evolutionary explanations for sex differences (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 840; McCaughey 2008).

One of the ways chick dick texts pathologize male aggression is through the trope of militarization. Warrior rhetoric and imagery, what Susan Jeffords calls the discourse of warfare, is particularly concerned with how the gendering of victimization intersects with "anxieties surrounding the maintenance and continuation of dominance structures" (1989, 186; see also Enloe 2000; Faludi 2007; Modleski 1999, 61-75; Oliver 2007). Hierarchical male enclaves are a constant presence in chick dick stories: the paramilitary animal-rights organizations in Henderson's *Chained* and Hayter's *The Last Manly Man*, the Italian mafia in Evanovich's Burg, the Irish mob and motorcycle gang that vie for control of Neptune's drug trade in *Veronica Mars*, the cutthroat culture of high-stakes investment banking in Henderson's *Black Rubber Dress*, *Veronica Mars*'s Hearst College fraternities, and Robin's male-dominated field of investigative journalism – in which a mob of journalists is referred to as a "gang bang" (*What's a Girl Gotta Do?* 63).

These narratives at first seem to demonstrate how such spaces inculcate a need to perform and compete, breeding masculine aggression that encourages and legitimates the brutalization of women. Yet characters like Eddie Abruzzi in Evanovich's *Hard Eight* and Mercer Hayes from *Veronica Mars*'s third season display an exaggerated and narcissistic misogyny, spectacularized instances of aggression and violence. While each series emphasizes the men's fascination with the military, opening up avenues for critiquing institutionalized forms of dominance and control, this fetish is quickly hyperbolized. Such a tactic encourages a reading of Abruzzi and Mercer's excesses as the result of individual – and

damaged – psychologies, scripting them as sociopaths rather than reflections upon the conditions and contexts in which their sense of masculinity is constructed.

In *Hard Eight*, Stephanie finds herself inadvertently caught up in war games with local loan shark and war games enthusiast Eddie Abruzzi, who is looking to even the score for the death of boxer Benito Ramirez, in whom he had invested a significant amount of money. As a favour to a family friend, Steph is trying to find Evelyn Soder and her daughter Annie, who are on the run from Evelyn's abusive husband Steven. Abruzzi owns Steven's bar, and he makes finding Evelyn and Annie a matter of military strategy and opposing sides:

> Abruzzi stared at me for a moment. "Fate is a funny thing, isn't it? Here you are back in my life. And you're, once again, on the wrong side. It will be interesting to see how this campaign unfolds."
>
> "Campaign?"
>
> "I'm a student of military history. And, this is to some extent a war." He made a small hand gesture. "Maybe not a war. More of a skirmish, I think. Whatever we call it, it's a contest, of sorts. Because I'm feeling generous today, I'll give you an option. You can walk away from Evelyn and this house, and I'll let you go. You'll have bought amnesty. If you continue to participate, I'll consider you to be enemy troops. And the war game will begin."
>
> Oh boy. This guy is a total fruitcake. I held my hands up in a stop gesture. "I'm not playing war games. I'm just a friend of the

family, checking on things for Evelyn. We're going now. And I think you should do the same." (48-9)

Abruzzi's fantasies of strategic control over those within his purview extends beyond Steven's business venture to his wife and child. As Evelyn explains when Steph finally finds her,

"When Steven lost the bar to Abruzzi, Abruzzi came over to the house with his men and he *did* something to me."

I felt myself instinctively suck in some air. "I'm sorry," I said.

"It was his way of making us afraid. He's like a cat with a mouse. He likes to play before he kills. And he likes to dominate women."

"You should have gone to the police."

"He would have killed me before I got to testify. Or worse, he might have done something to Annie. The legal system moves too slow with a man like Abruzzi. . . .

It was just Abruzzi's way of asserting his power. He's always doing things like that. He calls the people around him his *troops*. And they have to treat him like the Godfather or Napoleon or some big general." (306-7)

Women like Evelyn and Steph, who refuse to cede their bodies or actions to Abruzzi's will, thus infringe upon the hierarchy atop which he has placed himself, and he retaliates to this challenge with brutal violence, including torturing Steph for information.

That Evelyn and Steph are uninvolved and blameless women immediately denotes that Abruzzi's meticulously planned mental, physical, and sexual abuse is "bad" male violence. The unspeakability of his actions – Evelyn can only say that he "*did* something" to her – only serves to heighten this deviant positioning, and the shame experienced by the victim. As I noted in Chapter One, these stories make the chick dick's experiences of sexual assault visible and visceral, particularly Steph's abuse at the hands of Ramirez in *One For The Money*, in order to explain why these protagonists become detectives. For readers who may be new to the series when reading *Hard Eight*, Evanovich briefly sketches out Ramirez's proclivities: "He was criminally insane and flat-out evil, taking pleasure and finding strength through other people's pain" (46). Thus when Abruzzi says "I understood [Ramirez]. We enjoyed many of the same pursuits,'" even the unfamiliar audience is poised for Abruzzi to behave vilely (46). Yet the violence he inflicts is unrepresentable, a strategy of omission that encourages readers to imagine the worst, to see both Abruzzi and his actions as monstrous, exceeding even military codes of masculinity.

Veronica Mars uses a similar strategy to sidestep direct commentary on how the military's largely male caste system engenders a sense of misogynistic entitlement. One of the dominant storylines in its third season concerns a series of rapes on Neptune's Hearst College campus. Each victim is drugged, raped, and has her head shaved. The rapist is charismatic campus radio DJ Mercer Hayes, and aided by his accomplice Moe Slater, who is a Resident Advisor and drives one of the carts in the campus' SafeRide program. The two met during a voluntary first

year sociology experiment, in which one group of students acts as military jailors, while another as prisoners of war.[4] As Moe told Veronica and her friends at the start of the school year when they considered participating, "It's intense . . . life-changing." The dynamic of violent oppressor and meek oppressed characterizes their friendship, as Mercer enlists Moe in his scheme to drug and rape young women.

For Mercer, rape is a means for him to take – without resistance – what he feels is rightfully his. As he tells the woman he presumes will be his latest unconscious victim (but is actually Veronica lying in wait):

> It's unfortunate that when you wake up all you'll know is that your hair is gone – because it's gonna be good. I'd wager your best ever. It's a me thing, I'm sorry to say. I have no patience. I mean, if I'd met you in a bar or at a party, I would have had you back here and on your back in an hour. But that's an hour of my life I would never have back. An hour of listening to you talk about unicorns, and your high-school boyfriend, and how you hate the taste of beer. I'm just taking what you would have happily given; that's hardly a crime. ("Spit & Eggs")

Mercer's need to establish and maintain his position of control manifests in multiple ways – he forcibly dominates Moe, not only through vicious language but

[4] This references the prison experiment carried out at Stanford University by Philip Zimbardo in 1971. Initially designed to run for two weeks, Zimbardo ended the experiment after only six days because of how quickly the volunteer student "guards" became brutal and sadistic, and the "inmates" highly stressed and/or depressed. See Zimbardo's *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (2007) for his detailed discussion of this experiment.

through physical violence as well. He uses drugs to render women's bodies inert and pliable, and marks them as victims by shaving their heads, keeping their hair like a trophy of battle. When he finds Veronica alert and conscious in his bed, his initial surprise gives way to a vindictive sense of glee; even after she escapes his room to the presumed safety of Moe's, he orders Moe to give her more drugs, determined to exact his revenge on the woman who has intervened in his perception of himself as unassailable.

Unlike with Abruzzi, we are given few signs that Mercer is the Hearst College rapist; by covering his tracks and creating alibis, he manages to evade even Veronica's initial accusations. The aggrandizing bravado he displays in the speech cited above helps to quickly re-orient the viewer's impression of him as vicious and narcissistic, a shift reinforced when he tunes the bedside radio to a taped version of his own radio show. That his victims are a string of perky and open-faced young college students (including Veronica's friend Parker), and his latest a freshman fond of unicorns, leave little room for doubt that Mercer is "bad." These representations work in concert to create an almost caricatured campus rapist. The line between acceptable and unacceptable male violence is further emphasized when Veronica's ex-boyfriend Logan deliberately lands himself in jail alongside Mercer: the scene closes with a close-up on Logan's slowly clenching fist, intimating an expression of male violence that is laudable as retaliation.

The tendency in chick dick texts to narrate masculine aggression through hyperbole and exaggeration, as improper expressions of natural male instincts, creates a template of male violence that makes other iterations of domination and

control more difficult to recognize as violence. Alongside such monstrous or deviant behaviour, everyday instances of sexism and sexual harassment appear almost innocuous, and are similarly individualized and pathologized as little more than anxious expressions of masculinity by insecure males.

Male Insecurities

While Ramirez, Abruzzi, and Mercer seek out and take pleasure in violence, characters like Nat and Cassidy seem to feel they have no other means to vent their frustration at "losing ground." Characters such as Robin's boss Jerry Spurdle and Cassidy's older brother Dick Casablancas further complicate the trajectory of masculine crisis and sexualized violence. Neither resorts to physical violence, rather they rely on a clichéd macho sexism to assert their masculinity. Their insistent proclamations of heterosexual appetite and prowess are usually played for comic relief in which a veneer of powerful male sexuality is juxtaposed with their relative impotence in other aspects of their lives. Their harassment of women is revealed as merely a blustery façade. Yet the end results are narratively similar: a spectrum of sexualized violence exerted upon female and feminized bodies. This lack of structural differentiation is problematic: while it highlights how masculinities exist in hierarchical relationships to each other, it can also simplify sexualized violence into an act pre-determined by the sex of its instigator – the animalistic caveman that lurks inside every male – rather than contextualized by gendered experiences of power, domination and privilege.

In Hayter's series, Jerry Spurdle faces the limits of his masculinity daily: both on the job (as the network's female reporters and news anchors begin to bring in higher ratings and better stories) and in his personal life (as the women in his immediate social circle do not fall for his swaggering chauvinism). A largely ineffective boss, his directives are followed because of his position within the newsroom hierarchy, not because he has earned the respect of his mostly female underlings. As Robin says, "Spurdle was my boss in the Special Reports unit. I 'belonged' to Jerry Spurdle, as he liked to remind me" (*What's A Girl Gotta Do?* 10-11). He compensates for his lack of traditional male success by wielding what little control he has available: "'You look like you put on a little weight, Robin,' Jerry said, walking around me to size me up. 'You know that's a sin in television.' One of Jerry's favourite old-style sexist ways to cut a woman down to size was to criticize her physical appearance" (*Nice Girls Finish Last*, 31).

His attempts to employ the heterosexual machismo that ostensibly accompanies his professional success also fail miserably:

> "I'm well hung," he said to the skeptical brunet. "Oh, I apologize. I suffer from a mild case of Tourette's syndrome. Do you know that disease? It makes me tell the truth all the time."
>
> He thought he was so funny. The woman just stared at him.
>
> "Just a mild case. I'm a producer. I could get you a job in TV. Nine inches. Oh, there I go again."
>
> Yes, all Jerry's best lines sounded like they'd been picked up from liars in locker rooms. (*What's a Girl Gotta Do?* 15)

Veronica's peer Dick exhibits similar tendencies. Dick is Neptune High's self-proclaimed Lothario, and later a member of the Pi Sigma Sigma frat which falls under suspicion of harbouring the Hearst College rapist.[5] The frat runs a "points" system for its members, in which sexual scoring is determined not just by the number of sexual conquests but by the *types* (e.g. blonde versus brunette, junior versus senior, sassy versus compliant) of women bedded. Dick's prowess, according to him, is legendary. The son of Neptune's wealthiest – and most fraudulent – real estate investment banker Richard 'Big Dick' Casablancas, his family's money (and thus its political influence) is Dick's primary guarantor of status and achievement; despite his dismal grades he is admitted to Hearst College after his mother makes a significant donation to the school.

Dick's exaggerated fascination with his own sense of sexual power – he even takes Polaroid shots of his penis and tosses them from his apartment balcony down on to the rest of Neptune – is, as we learn in the third season, a front behind which hides a scared and vulnerable male ego. His machismo masks his insecurities, including his inability to forge a lasting or meaningful connection with someone else. For example, Dick is still smarting from learning that Logan had sex with Madison Sinclair, Dick's only girlfriend.[6]

Like Spurdle, Dick's propensity for sexual harassment, and the sense of insecurity that generates this behaviour, is played for laughs. Not acknowledged as

---

[5] Dick defends his fraternity brothers' innocence to Veronica, saying "Why rape the cow when you're swimming in free milk?" Offensive bravado notwithstanding, the Pi Sigs are eventually exonerated.

[6] This relationship appeared to have little to do with sex: Madison rebuffed physical contact, and Dick frequently and loudly complained about doing nothing but listening to her tiresome chatter.

sexualized violence the way, for instance, *Veronica Mars* attends to cyberstalking, blackmail, and intimidation as legitimate forms of sexual harassment (Braithwaite 2008), this type of behaviour is shrugged off because it is rooted in the characters' sense of inadequate masculinity. The implicit excuse that men harass women as a way to hide their insecurities, which investigators like Veronica and Robin are able to recognize, problematically ignores the power dynamics still at work, particularly for women less "empowered." This approach "presents public incursions as marks of men's failure when they are, quite clearly, marks of men's domination and effective power over women" (Gardner 1995, 180).

Instead of appearing as a signpost for male violence and supremacy, despite its throwback hypersexism, Dick and Spurdle's behaviour seems to pose danger only to themselves and their success in or satisfaction with personal and professional relationships. As Robin explains, Spurdle "has this little problem relating to women, you see. It's a very common problem. When he's sober and comes face to face with a woman in a social setting, he tends to become focused on her breasts and can't look her in the eye. If she moves from side to side, his head moves from side to side too, like a dog watching a tennis ball" (*What's A Girl Gotta Do?* 16). Spurdle and Dick consistently display an unwillingness to treat women as anything other than (desirable or undesirable) sexual objects, a tendency numerous feminist critics have identified as a factor in multiple forms of sexualized violence (see Dobash and Dobash 1998; Gardner 1995; Stanko 1990). Portraying sexual harassment as the mark of an individual male's "failed" masculinity manages to uphold the monstrous

or deviant as the template for "actual" male violence, overshadowing how everyday instances of masculinism foster an environment of fear, exploitation, and control.

Dick's mood darkens by the end of the series, as he comes to understand more of the gendering of power, his complicity in these patterns, and their violent repercussions. When his on-the-lam father returns to face fraud charges, Dick's anguish about his brother Cassidy killing a busful of fellow students and later himself comes to the fore, shattering his cavalier frat-boy persona:

> I walk by the spot he splattered on every day . . . You ever think he's dead because of us, or that he killed those people because of us? . . . We used to have contests to see which one of us could make him cry. I can barely live with myself sometimes, and it's so much easier when you're not around! ("I Know What You'll Do Next Summer")

Dick sees himself as culpable; so eager to fulfill his father's macho mandate as a teenager, relentlessly humiliating his younger brother, Dick now feels accountable for these deaths. This guilt is never assuaged, as *Veronica Mars* did not return for a fourth season. What we are left with, then, is a portrait potentially more grim than that of Spurdle, but with more psychological than social explanation, we can only begin to see how the construction of a masculinity predicated on power over others – sexual, emotional, financial – can damage the men it is supposed to support.

Absent Traumas and the Mystery of Men

Tropes of victimization are central to how these experiences are elided, and to the explanations chick dick narratives offer for male and masculine behaviour.

Trauma is formative or generative of the masculinities that populate these texts, creating a sense of struggle over the feminized terms of victimization that typically characterize crime stories. For the men in these tales, victimization is diversely shaped, yet whether it is physical and sexual abuse or waning spheres of masculine influence, these varieties coalesce to create an underlying sense of the male being unduly rooted from the centre of social and cultural control.

Masculine victimization often remains a structuring absence in these texts. Unlike women's founding moments of sexual violence described in Chapter One – the graphic instances of assault and rape which prompt the female protagonists to assume the mantle of investigator – the men's are barely visible, glimpsed through allusions and insinuations. Chick dicks uncover multiple forms of gender hierarchy and sexual coercion in the process of their investigations: militarism, economic entitlement, and fatherly privilege are exposed as key factors in shaping both normative masculinities and male characters' struggles with these ideals. Moving past multiple red herrings to find systems of gender compulsion and constraint, these narratives then falter and fall back on explanations that are by contrast facile; the excessive and the monstrous, the "failed" hyper-heteromasculinity, and an individual pathology are often the final answers.

This absent presence at first may not seem surprising, as the detective story has tended to be more concerned with female than male vicissitudes and vulnerabilities. Yet these texts participate in the rhetoric of a crisis – and even restoration – of masculinity, which, as I noted earlier, has often been conveyed through heaping abuse on male bodies. The body becomes a site of struggle over

masculinity and its meanings, "motifs which are mapped onto both narrative structure and the body of the male hero" through fetishized displays of violence and vulnerability (Tasker 1993b, 128). Chick dick texts afford few occasions for such voyeurism, as they offer little overt or sustained abuse of the male body. Even Logan's attack on Mercer, in retaliation for attempting to rape Veronica, happens off-screen. Unlike the role typically accorded to women in crime narratives, the spectacle of the wounded male lies not in mechanisms of victimization so much as in its effects – that is, in how they feel and act as a result.

While chick dicks' experiences of violence and disenfranchisement are, as I explained in Chapter One, returned to again and again – a kind of "talking cure" that continues throughout these serial narratives (see Ellis 2000; Shattuc 1997; White 1992). Individual male characters' experiences are not as repetitively exposed and worked over, they just *are*. Without a clear sense of events or circumstances, the systemic ways in which men are also made vulnerable under patriarchy is difficult to address. When dragged into public view by the chick dick, they instead become instances of comic relief (like Spurdle) or denouement (like Cassidy), uncomplicated answers to complex questions. The concept of trauma thus fails to fully politicize the conditions in which violent masculinities are produced and reproduced. By scripting these formative experiences as absent presences, just out of the range of representation, the roles gender hierarchy and male authority play in fostering men's and women's physical and emotional vulnerability are glossed over, and footholds for cultural critique of male violence are eroded as well.

This unrepresentability of male victimization effectively – and affectively – scripts masculinity as a central mystery in these texts, echoing Robin's rationale for her Man of the Future documentary: "that mysterious thing good men have" (*The Last Manly Man*, 257; Robin's report never actually airs, another structuring absence in the novel). While a seemingly productive shift away from the often misogynist focus on female subjectivity and sexuality that typifies crime stories, this emphasis accords men and masculinity a narrative symbolic power in addition to the forms of male physical and political control that chick dick texts decry at other points. This is not to deny or minimize the traumatic nature of sexual violence that some of these male characters experience, but rather to point to how little distinction is drawn between those experiences and ones of men's "losing ground" as a spectrum of literal and figurative assaults on the male all lead to similarly aggressive male behaviour.

Such representations are at odds with the proto-feminist movements chick dick texts make in revealing the secrets of violent masculinities and positing them as problematic, for both women and men. They are also identified as performative: Dick as macho frat boy, Spurdle as Lothario, and Hugo as pastel cigarette smoking metrosexual are all enactments of particular social ideals of masculinity and male power. Yet these moments of performativity do not just exist alongside but also on top of another kind of masculinity. That is, they are depicted as performances in relation to a more authentic, though not necessarily dominant or aggressive, masculine core. An implicit notion of an inherent male essence underlies the texts' depiction and use of a crisis in masculinity; this crisis is presented less as an

opportunity to expose the operations of patriarchy and more as an indictment of individual males' inabilities to live up to a still-existent masculine ideal.

While chick dick texts thus open up depictions of masculinity to commentary and critique, the ways in which masculinity – and not patriarchy – most often leads to sexualized violence closes off other avenues of critical discussion. Representational strategies that individualize the conditions and constructions of masculinities can, as these texts demonstrate, slide quickly and easily from the political to the personal – a now-familiar postfeminist tactic that shields the social from sustained analysis. This approach, however, does provide ways to critique postfeminism, particularly how postfeminist representations of men and masculinity can contribute to the marginalization of women and of feminism. The gendered trope of victimization is invoked to contextualize and spectacularize a "new" form of masculinity, while actually being different excuses for or reiterations of existing gender differences and their attendant power dynamics.

Victimization thus retains a sense of being a 'feminine' or feminizing experience in these texts. This is reinforced through the affinity implied by both chick dicks and wounded males experiencing moments of abuse that come to define their character. While it creates the chick dick's capacity to recognize or uncover power imbalances, it is represented more recuperatively for the male characters – it marks them as somehow different from other men and provokes or justifies a tendency to revert to traditional masculine traits of violence and aggression. These tendencies, and the dynamics they engender, are part of the basis of the next

chapter's exploration of intimate and sexual relationships, as Chapter Four investigates how stories of violence and betrayal coincide with postfeminist romance narratives.

Chapter Four

The Feminine Good Life: Self-Labour and Life Scripts*

Okay, so sometimes I wasn't the world's greatest bounty hunter. I wasn't a fabulous cook. I didn't have a boyfriend, much less a husband. And I wasn't a big financial success. I could live with all those failings as long as I knew that once in a while I looked really hot.

-Stephanie Plum

In Chapter Three I outlined the ways in which chick dick narratives offer only stunted criticisms of contemporary masculinities. I argued that by depicting violence and aggression most often as the individual failures of men and male sexual pathologies, these texts neatly avoid the opportunity to promote a feminist critique of masculinities and patriarchal entitlement. Chick dick stories also individualize and personalize power dynamics in their representations of heterosexual relationships, yet with different effect. The narratives create a sense of shared experiences that suggests struggles over sex roles within romantic relationships are universally relatable, and that sexual inequality characterizes heterosexual partnerships. While their representations of sexualized violence and masculinities shy away from a structural critique, these texts' depictions of sexual relations offer

* Portions of this chapter originally appeared in "'That girl of yours – she's pretty hardboiled, huh?': Detecting Feminism in Veronica Mars" in *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, ed. Ross and Stein, 132-49 (2008).

more critical purchase on the disciplinary and self-surveillance strategies that help construct postfeminist femininity and sexual identity.

Chick dicks constantly work on themselves in order to be suitably feminine subjects. In many postfeminist romance narratives, such as chick flicks, "complicated questions of work and sexuality are so often 'wished away,'" (Negra 2009, 8; see also Negra 2008). Yet when the issues that arise at the intersection of labour and sexuality cannot be "wished away," women's sexuality takes on a particular critical impetus. In chick dick texts sexual identity and sexual practice become sites for emphasizing the multiple dimensions of women's sexual inequality: heterosexuality and feminine subjectivity are troubled, as are the social strategies that make women visible (or invisible) as sexual subjects. In Chapter One I identified sex as a locus of sexual inequality by drawing attention to these texts' founding moments of sexualized violence. The additional examples of sexual experiences and practices I investigate in this chapter extend my analysis of how chick dick narratives talk about and talk back to postfeminist forms of female freedom.

Chick dicks narrate the ways in which they are lovers and/or girlfriends. Their stories of (hetero)sexuality also extend beyond their own involvements in romantic and sexual relationships to encompass those of friends, colleagues, and even strangers. These include the physically and/or emotionally exploitative and abusive relationships that motivate some of the stories' central crimes. Along with chick dicks' own experiences of sexualized violence, women's abusive relationships act as lessons about the sexual inequalities they face in intimate partnerships. As a

result, chick dicks are often ambivalent about their own relationships, reluctant to commit to long-term ones, or are suspicious of their partner's motives. Framed by their confessional tone, the texts foreground the work these women engage in to be both sexually desiring and desired subjects, their attempts to enjoy or resist normative heterosexual expectations, and their struggles to make choices in their intimate lives.

Through this work, chick dicks confront the regulatory gender norms that shape what Judith Butler refers to as "heterosexual hegemony" (1993a, 15). A system of gender and power relations that regulates sexed identities along the normative axis of heterosexuality, heterosexual hegemony promotes particular gendered practices that render other identities culturally invisible or unintelligible. In postfeminist texts, this heterosexual imperative is embodied by the white, girlish, working professional woman who is middle to upper middle class, attractive, and actively (hetero)sexual. A privileged category of "woman," her success is presented as "women's success" and her choices are presented as all women's choices. Yet these claims to her universality ignore the structural obstacles less privileged women face by construing success – or failure – as a result of individual paths women freely chose.

This pervasive rhetoric of female freedom and choice also obscures the ways in which scripts of postfeminist heterosexuality relegate women to traditional sex roles in which we are powerful only insofar as we are sexually desirable. Contemporary consumer culture often invites young women to "emulate the assertive and hedonistic styles of sexuality associated with young men" (McRobbie

2007, 732). Actively desiring sex stands in for sexual equality, and so sexual attractiveness equates with power. Following this logic, consumerist regimes of bodily improvement and beautification are marked – and marketed – as expressions of empowerment. Yet as Butler reminds us, "the account of agency conditioned by those very regimes of discourse/power cannot be conflated with voluntarism or individualism, much less with consumerism, and in no way presupposes a choosing subject" (1993a, 15).

In this chapter, I unpack the tangled meanings of choice and autonomy within the postfeminist discourses of sex found in chick dick texts. The active and desiring - that is, "empowered" – female subject so prominently displayed in postfeminist media like *Sex and the City* or *Girls Gone Wild* (Francis 1998) disturbingly echoes the sexually exploitative and objectifying imagery made familiar by mainstream soft-core pornography (see Caputi 1999; R. Gill 2003; Levy 2005; McNair 1996, 2002).[1] Chick dick texts circulate alongside these representations, and in order to investigate how the sexualization of women's power and vulnerability intersects with the sense of autonomy necessary for choices to actually be chosen, I look at how chick dicks interpret and respond to the discourses of sex they encounter. Gill suggests "[w]e urgently need to complicate our understanding of choice and agency if we are to develop a meaningful feminist critique of neoliberal, postfeminist consumer culture" (2007b, 72). I examine how chick dick narratives construe choice as a step toward this more complex understanding of the

[1] The explosion of strip-cardio and poledancing exercise regimens also feeds into this. Generally marketed as a way for women to tap into their innate femininity, this type of exercise emphasizes the "sexually performative female body" as a form of self-care (Negra 2009, 123; see also Whitehead and Kurz 2009).

ways in which sexual inequalities continue to colour women's agency and the social constraints they face.

Grasping how power generates multiple forms of sexual inequality means attending to the activities that condition sexual identity as well as sexual practices. I look first at the confessional textual address that promotes particular paradigms for female self-understanding and self-management, approaching chick dicks' stories of self-care as stories about sex. I emphasize the role confessional intimacy plays in a larger array of gendered labour, such as the work women are exhorted to undertake in order to be recognizably straight females who are sexually desirable and, therefore, "empowered." Chick dicks' self-care and self-surveillance practices are even encouraged by forms of public shaming that punish deviations from an ideal femininity. These women's anxieties about sex thus stem from the same sexual inequalities that lead to sexualized violence: the male perception of women as primarily and most usefully sex objects.

I also look at chick dicks' intimate partnerships, situating them as sources of affective knowledge about heterosexual romance as a trajectory of monogamy, marriage, and motherhood. While this script retains a privileged position in chick dick texts, the heroines still balk at following that path. They resist family-values paradigms of womanhood by happily having multiple sexual partners, hesitating to commit to long-term relationships with men, and expressing their uncertainty about having children and the burdens of child-rearing. Chick dicks' relationship experiences question how the dominant pattern of heterosexual coupledom becomes a standard for evaluating feminine worth, continuing the cultural work I

chronicle in previous chapters in which these characters challenge the activities and spaces deemed appropriate for women.

In identifying where and how chick dicks are – and endeavour to be – choosing and sexual subjects, I pay close attention to what the texts present as ordinary and relatable qualms about sex and self. What kinds of work are required for women to present themselves as active sexual subjects? What narrative spaces and strategies attend to this work, and how? What does romance look and feel like in these texts? Where do chick dick's personal stories offer moments of political critique? Chick dicks' hesitant approach to relationships has less to do with their potential partners than with the numerous cultural demands they must negotiate in order to be "suitable" for monogamy. By investigating these narratives' representations of self-labour and feminine life scripts, I demonstrate how chick dicks' simultaneous attachment to and suspicions about romance create avenues for complicating and politicizing the notion of sexual choice.

Working the Third Shift

Ambivalence is a central part of chick dicks' cultural work around women's roles in contemporary romance. In her writing on women's culture, Lauren Berlant (2008) argues that this typical combination of confidence and complaint is capable of expressing broader reservations about the status of women that have particular political relevance, even if they are not articulated through a political lens. She terms this quality of women's culture "juxtapolitical," to indicate how such texts are "open towards politics but [are] abundantly on the outside of it" (2008, 267). While

many feminist critiques of popular culture simply note where feminist politics could be articulated but aren't (see also Brunsdon 2005; Stabile 1995), Berlant instead identifies those textual places where women's ambivalence is expressed around issues important to feminist politics. This strategy is crucial for critiquing contemporary and postfeminist texts, particularly as their emotional mobility and affective potential resides in "a general sense of recognition of someone's *situation*," a strategy that, importantly, makes shared or similar experiences visible (Berlant 2008, 173, emphasis in original). As I show throughout this chapter, chick dicks share in incidents of public shaming and failed relationships, and they respond to each through adopting similar strategies of self-care and self-surveillance. By tracking the types of sex and relationship situations that recur across chick dick texts, we can start to see these situations and their responses to them as vehicles for making feminist claims about such experiences, to "generate an affective and intimate public sphere that seeks to harness the power of emotion to change what is structural in the world" (Berlant 2008, 12).

Like many other chick texts, chick dick narratives express discomfort with prevailing norms of female sexuality, particularly within heterosexual romance and relationships. In confessing their conflicting desires for sexual encounters, for monogamy, and for personal autonomy, these protagonists display a simultaneous attachment to and apprehension about postfeminist popular culture's normative gender and sex roles for women. When situated alongside recurring instances of sexualized violence and exploitation, chick dicks' reservations about intimate and sexual relationships assume a particularly critical edge. As I argue in earlier chapters,

chick dicks' investigations of sexualized violence are a form of cultural work that reveals the extent to which sexual inequalities endanger women. Their work within sexual relationships continues to critique the ways in which female freedom is simply assumed to exist.

This work is carried out in part by the texts' confessional mode of address. I am interested here in how chick dick texts use a confessional tone to present experiences of sexual desirability and self-work as manifestations of sexual inequalities. Foucault describes confession as "all those procedures by which the subject is incited to produce a discourse of truth about his sexuality which is capable of having effects on the subject himself" (1980, 215-6). Yet these effects – of unburdening, of "freedom" – are in themselves manifestations of the confessional's power dynamic in which one always confesses *to* an authority. They are not, as Jo Gill reminds us, "the free expression of the self but an effect of an ordered regime by which the self begins to conceive of itself as individual, responsible, culpable and thereby confessional" (2005, 4).

Foucault suggests the "obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us" (Foucault 1978, 60). Yet confession does not automatically result in a more disciplined or compliant subject, and the use of a confessional tone does not always map directly on to a confessional text. The heroines of chick texts may continually confess their anxieties about sex and selves, but such inadequacies are not secret; as Foucault contends, confessional discourses create more, not less, of a preoccupation with sex (1978). Confession in chick dick

texts instead feels like a form of sexual labour, a mode of self-surveillance through which the heroine identifies her feminine failings in order to work upon them.

Micki McGee (2005) sees this self-surveillance as integral to what she terms the "belaboured self." Analyzing the extensive and pervasive injunctions to self-development and self-improvement in contemporary culture, McGee notes how these discourses "conjure the image of endless insufficiency" and promote continual self-labour as an (ultimately ineffective) antidote (2005, 17; see also Miller 2008). While the discourses themselves tend to isolate social anxieties as individual and personal problems, the concept of the belaboured self provides an "opportunity to revisit our concept of the self and its making, not in psychological terms but as features of political and economic forces" (McGee 2005, 16). I see femininities and their day-to-day performances as work, akin to the cultural work of chick dicks' investigations. In the process I, along with chick dicks, analyze the tangible, material rewards and punishments doled out in response. We, in turn, pay particular attention to the mobilization of self-labour away from its otherwise depoliticized and individualistic forms.

This is not to deny the performative aspect of contemporary femininities, but to consider such performances from within a broader cultural framework that scripts gendered identities as products of constant self-care and self-labour. Approaching the postfeminist feminine subject through the lens of labour reveals the material resources of and rewards for putting on particular kinds of femininity: the bodily, economic, and intimate investments that result in the appearance of normalized, culturally intelligible feminine subjects. Performativity and

performance are everyday practices in self-presentation, enabled by other daily labours that help produce the properly feminine self.

Naomi Wolf refers to this endless and repetitive performance of appropriate femininity as the "Third Shift," riffing on the recognition of women's domestic duties as unpaid labour to position beautification and self-policing rituals as similar forms of female work (1991, 25). Chick dick texts provide detailed dramatizations of what this labour is like, and, often, the contexts in which choices for self-presentation are made. As Steph notes before leaving her apartment one day, "I laced up my sneakers, ran a brush through my hair, and applied lip gloss. The natural look. Acceptable in Jersey only if you've had your boobs enhanced to the point where no one looked beyond them" (*Eleven on Top*, 59). In describing the social stigma attached to the natural or unlaboured look in her hometown, Steph also alludes to the expectation that women must always appear sexual to others, even strangers, whether it be alluring make-up or ample breasts. Like cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing, being beautiful is work women do both because they are and in order to be women.

The heroines' experiences offer affective representations of what disciplinary regimes of self-care and self-surveillance can *feel* like, emotionally as well as physically. While "the recognition of the labour inherent in the making of selves in itself offers political possibilities," these possibilities are not always immediately evident or even seen as political (McGee 2005, 24). This is due in part to the way that self-care regimes like dieting, exercise, clothing, and beautification rituals are marketed to women as empowered, individualizing acts, yet reinforce a narrow ideal

of femininity and the sexually desirable female body. Rosalind Gill remarks that the recourse to individual choice in accounting for women's experiences with self-labour "avoids all the important and difficult questions about the relationship between the psychic and the social or cultural – how is it, for example, that socially constructed ideals of beauty or sexiness are internalized and made our own? That is, really, truly, deeply our own, felt not as external impositions but as authentically ours" (2007b, 76).

Agency and autonomy are slippery analytical objects in this context, and chick dick texts do not provide straightforward tools for fully grasping them. Rather, these stories depict the belaboured female self as she navigates discourses of sexuality and sexiness through strategies of concession and resistance. They also open spaces for an affective knowledge of how sexual agency is experienced. The conventionality of the confessional tone in these and other chick or women's culture texts not only reinforces its association with feminine subjectivity, but is a means of establishing or signifying femininity as well. If "femininity is a genre with deep affinities to the genres associated with femininity," in chick dick texts, this femininity appears anxious, beset by stringent expectations of sexy appearance and sexual behaviour – a situation of self-surveillance and self-care (Berlant 2008, 3).

Below its veneer of individual empowerment and esteem, the labour involved in this "Third Shift" is another permutation of heterosexual hegemony's sexual inequalities. This work produces what Butler calls a coherent gender, "whereby what a person feels, how a person acts, and how a person expresses herself sexually is the articulation and consummation of a gender. It's a particular causality

and identity that gets established as a gender coherence which is linked to compulsory heterosexuality. It's not any gender, or all gender, it's that specific kind of coherent gender" (quoted in Osborne and Segal 1994, 36-7). Within postfeminist culture this gender coherence includes a presentation of the feminine self as an eagerly sexual self, in appearance as well as behaviour (see R. Gill 2003). Yet the strategies chick dicks undertake to embody this sexual identity, and the public response they receive in the process, do not always feel pleasurable or welcome.

The texts' confessional tone foregrounds how chick dicks experience the world in gendered and sexualized bodies. These bodies are also clearly marked as average. In *Too Many Blondes*, Sam takes a close look at herself:

> I checked out my nude body in the mirror, reasonably pleased by what I saw. I was OK for twenty-six, even if I'd never have the musculature I wanted in my upper arms without working out six days a week.
>
> Still, everything was under control, particularly my natural tendency to an hourglass shape . . . as long as I was a size twelve I was happy – there's only so much you can do with the raw material. (24-5)

Steph, meanwhile, describes herself as: "five feet, seven inches. My hair is brown and shoulder length and naturally curly. My eyes are blue. My teeth are mostly straight. My manicure was pretty good three days ago, and my shape is okay" (*Fearless Fourteen*, 2). Despite, or perhaps because of, their ordinary female bodies,

these women engage in multiple forms of self-labour to monitor and engineer their desirability. Chick dicks' relationships with and in these bodies are dominated by self-surveillance, as they internalize and negotiate broader expectations of the properly sexual female body.

Such evaluations spur self-management techniques, the kind of sustained work Foucault describes as "not just a preoccupation but a whole set of occupations" (1986, 50). These evaluations are not solely internal, because being female opens these women up to public policing as well. For instance, jarred by nasty comments in *Hard Eight*, Steph decides to go for a run:

> I needed to psych myself up for this exercise stuff. I was going to get really into it this time. I was going to run. I was going to sweat. I was going to look great. I was going to *feel* great. Maybe I'd actually *take up* running . . . After a quarter mile I remembered why I never did this. I *hated* it. I hated running. I hated sweating. I hated the big, ugly running shoes I was wearing.
>
> I pushed through to the half-mile mark where I had to stop, thank God, for a stitch in my side. I looked down at the fat roll. It was still there.
>
> I made it to a mile and collapsed onto a bench. The bench looked out over the lake where people were rowing around in boats. A family of ducks floated close to the shore. Across the lake, I could see the parking lot and a concession stand. There was water at the concession stand. There was no water by my bench. Hell, who was

I kidding? I didn't want water, anyway. I wanted a Coke. And a box of Cracker Jacks.

I was looking out at the ducks, thinking there were times in history when fat rolls were considered sexy, and wasn't it too bad I didn't live during one of those times. (*Hard Eight*, 128-9)

This is not the only time Steph has experimented with exercise. In *Three to Get Deadly* she also attempts to take up jogging:

Damned if I was going to let a couple loser men get the better of me. Muscle tone wouldn't help a lot when it came to pepper spray, but it'd give me an edge on attitude. Mentally alert, physically fit would be my new motto . . . I bent at the waist to catch my breath when we pulled up at my building's back door. I was happy with the run. Even happier to have it behind me. (194-5)

In the first example Steph exercises to try and fit into her jeans and external expectations of female beauty, emphasized by her longing to live in an age when *her* body type was considered desirable. In the latter she is motivated primarily by a desire to succeed at her job, improving her physical performance in order to be a better bounty hunter. Both require the same work, establishing a parallel between investigative labour and self-labour which suggests that maintaining a desirable appearance is integral to the chick's daily routine, as vital to her material comforts and as much of a drudgery as work itself. This is reiterated by the seriality of Steph's tortured relationship with running, as nearly every Evanovich novel includes an instance of Steph dragging herself out "with the same amount of enthusiasm I

could muster for self-immolation . . . It never even occurred to me I might enjoy it" (*Two for the Dough*, 36).

Steph often approaches running as a penance for eating large meals, a way to deal with her guilt at indulging her hearty appetite. Her hunger causes her pleasure as well as anxiety, and at one point she even vomits mid-run, after pushing past her endurance level: "Look on the bright side, I thought. At least I didn't have to worry about breakfast going straight to my thighs" (*High Five*, 134). Chick dicks are often shown as having healthy, even voracious appetites. Veronica regularly sits down with her father for full, hearty meals, snacks on hamburgers and french fries, and eats half a carton of ice cream while studying. Sam, meanwhile, will dive into an entire pizza late at night:

> Faced with the large, extravagantly reeking white pizza box – why on *earth* had I ordered extra garlic? – the appropriate gesture for someone suffering tortures of the soul would have been to cast it aside, disgusted with her animal appetites. Naturally, I ripped open the lid and polished off the pizza with lightning speed, hardly bothering to chew before I swallowed. (*Too Many Blondes*, 229)

Yet such hunger threatens the appropriately sexual female body by provoking fears of weight gain and, by implication, undesirability. As Sam is told when she visits a co-worker for tea and gravitates immediately to the cookies, such an appetite is unseemly in a woman:

> "Those I bought fresh. Shortbread and ginger cake – why are you making that revolting snuffling noise?"

"I get uncontrollably excited at the mention of shortbread," I explained. "Now I must have some at once or I'll go into spasm."

"I must say, you quite tempt me to withhold the tin… And by the way, don't you know how fattening shortbread is, young woman?" (*Freeze My Margarita*, 150)

Underscoring the amount of work normative (hetero)femininity requires from even the "average" female, these repeated moments of guilt, self-criticism, and public shame evoke a sense of chick dicks as self-policing. They continually evaluate and adjust their behaviour, "a steady screening of representations: examining them, monitoring them, sorting them out. More than an exercise done at regular intervals, it is a constant attitude that one must take toward oneself" (Foucault 1986, 62-3). Even seemingly self-satisfied Sam performs this type of labour:

I looked down at my bare thighs and after a while started squeezing my cellulite, which was so revolting that it quite distracted me . . . I heaved myself out of bed. If I had a hot date on Friday I needed to hit the gym in a big way, and certainly depilate afterwards. And my toenail polish was more chipped than the outside wall of the warehouse next door. (*Black Rubber Dress*, 64)

In shaping chick dicks' struggles with the gap between social standards and self-image, the confessional tone acts as an "epistemological technology of the self," a means by which these characters come to understand, and even enact, what they can do to fit more snugly into their jeans and their gender (Foucault 1997/2007, 189).

The conventions of white middle-class femininity frame this work, as normative standards of sexualized female appearance to which chick dicks must hew in order to be visibly and viably feminine.

Chick dicks' work environments reinforce the need for self-monitoring, for regardless of job description these women's appearances are perceived as indications of their abilities and capacities. This is particularly true for Robin: as a television news reporter, being sexually attractive is more critical to her career success than delivering accurate, insightful newscasts. She remarks that "a TV persona is like a whalebone corset – take it off and everything goes flying" (*The Last Manly Man*, 70). Robin's corset analogy is more than just a metaphor for constraint, as she discovers when her boss promotes her to producer: "Not being on the air anymore meant I could eat as much as I wanted and not worry about my weight. (The weird thing is, when I was on the air and worried about my weight, I was actually a little heavier.)" (*Revenge of the Cootie Girls*, 104).

Even Sam, whose work as a metal-welding installation artist generally keeps her out of the public eye, is expected to maintain a certain standard of sex appeal. When working on the set for a local theatre's run of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, she routinely encounters such expectations from the cast and crew: "'I'm rather disappointed,' he said. 'I thought when you pulled that thing off your head, all your hair was going to cascade down like something out of *Flashdance*, but you've got it pinned up instead . . . at this moment you're more Gina Gershon in *Bound* . . . Normally I'd have said Jennifer Tilly. But those leather jeans are very butch" (*Freeze My Margarita*, 46). Sam's nontraditional or "masculine" trade skills

trigger concern about her femininity, and as the reference to *Flashdance* (Lyne 1983) demonstrates, her desirability. When she attends a black-tie function in a more gender-appropriate dress, she is publicly congratulated on retaining her femininity: "'Nice to see a young woman doing that kind of thing without losing her femininity, eh? Though you'd never have known she was female when you saw her all bundled up in her dungarees, I can tell you!'" (*Black Rubber Dress*, 13).

Making Sex Shameful

Public commentary on female sexuality is not limited to the laudatory. As I noted in Chapter Two, sexual inequality manifests in the chick dick's uses and experiences of public space. Strategies for policing female behaviour are also apparent in chick dicks' experiences of public shaming when they attempt to express their sexuality. Gender coherence is learned and re-learned in these instances, and the emotional price for missteps and false starts is exacted. Chick dick narratives often highlight the heroines' uneasy relationships with their bodies by relating early and embarrassing events that suggest a contradictory set of expectations for female sexuality. Robin, for example, is still attempting to overcome her childhood nickname 'Red Knobby':

> This is the deal. I was ten, and had suddenly become interested in boys, but did not know how to get their attention. In my reading and my perusal of art books, I got the idea that what boys liked best was the female form, so I invited a half dozen of the neighbourhood boys into my garage one day.

There, I reclined, *Odalisque*-like, under a dusty blanket, facing a semicircle of skeptical boys. I hesitated only a moment, and flung back the blanket.

And there I was, completely naked, expecting adoration and admiration for my daring exposure, when one of them, a boy unfortunately nicknamed Stinky Starko, stared laughing and said, 'Knobby knees! She's got red hair and knobby knees!'

Mortification spread up my alabaster skin like a fire as the boys began jeering 'Knobby! Knobby knees,' and then ran away from me, like I was poison.

It was a damning commentary on my early sexual presence, and did a real number on my body image. For several years I was known as Red Knobby, and every time I heard that name I felt exposed, frightened, and pissed off, in that order.

It set my self-esteem back a decade, my Red Knobby years . . . Even as an adult, whenever I heard the word knobby, I would smell creosote and timber and feel a flash of humiliation . . . I think of [those boys] when I'm working out my hostility in the employee gym and am starting to feel the burn. (*What's a Girl Gotta Do?* 110-1)

Robin is haunted by this failed foray: her early internalization of the necessity to present oneself as an image for male desire continues to motivate her exercise regime years later. This incident also opens her up to blackmail in the novel; that

she is supposed to be ashamed of how she was not a sexually desirable ten year old speaks to the increasing sexualization of young women as well as to how women's desirability is rarely evaluated on their own terms but rather by the criteria of (male) others. While Robin's refusal to pay to keep her "Red Knobby" story under wraps is a refusal to be coerced into feeling shame about her sexuality, this assertion is complicated by how the memory still acts as a psychological impetus to "feel the burn" at the gym.

Steph's early sexual encounters are similarly coloured by discourses of young female sexuality that simultaneously encourage and belittle such activity. They also introduce the tensions around autonomy and vulnerability that shape her relationship with Joe Morelli, as I discuss shortly. As children, Morelli invited Steph into the garage to learn a new game:

> "What's the name of this game?" I'd asked Joseph Morelli.
>
> "Choo-choo," he'd said, down on his hand and knees, crawling between my legs, his head trapped under my short pink skirt. "You're the tunnel, and I'm the train."
>
> I suppose this tells something about my personality. That I'm not especially good at taking advice. Or that I was born with an overload of curiosity. Or maybe it's about rebellion or boredom or fate. At any rate, it was a one-shot deal and darn disappointing, since I'd only gotten to be the tunnel, and I'd really wanted to be the train. (*One for the Money*, 2)

Her desire for sexual equality and reciprocity – wanting to be the train – remained out of reach in high school as well, when she was just as intrigued, and disappointed, by sex. Morelli, whose reputation as a ladies' man preceded him, wandered into the bakery where Steph worked part-time after school: "He bought a chocolate-chip cannoli, told me he'd joined the navy, and charmed the pants off me four minutes after closing, on the floor of Tasty Pastry, behind the case filled with chocolate éclairs" (*One for the Money*, 3). Morelli vanished afterwards, not to sea but to scrawl details of sex with Steph on the men's room wall in the local sub shop (*One for the Money*, 25).

This dynamic of coercion and shaming is reminiscent of the "purity test" in *Veronica Mars*, another example of situations in which women are both expected to be sexually available and punished for it. The youngest of the chick dicks in this study, Veronica, and her peers, seem to face more forms of public retribution. In "Like a Virgin," each Neptune High student receives a "purity test" via email, a quiz that assesses sexual promiscuity. With questions like "Have you ever done it in a car? Have you ever had a fling while on vacation? Do you lie to protect your reputation?" the quiz assigns a purity rating that labels female sexual activity beyond an invisible threshold as "slutty." Any student's test results can be purchased online, and the school halls quickly become the site of angry confrontations and devastating breakups. Despite not having taken the test, Meg, one of Veronica's casual acquaintances, has a score of forty-eight. Meg's boyfriend, with whom she has been sexually chaste, indignantly deserts her, and Meg's public life – her involvement in a

variety of academic and extracurricular activities – is plagued by her peers' viciously personal harassment.

Similarly, in "Mars vs. Mars" Veronica's favourite teacher Mr. Rooks is accused of impregnating Carrie Bishop, one of his students. Like Meg, Carrie is belittled by her peers (a group of girls taunt her one lunch hour with an a capella rendition of The Police's "Don't Stand So Close to Me"). In "M.A.D.," when fellow student Carmen tries to break up with her boyfriend Tad, he refuses and threatens to put a sexually suggestive video he made of her on the Internet. Feeling trapped between a forced sexual relationship with Tad or sexual harassment from other students as a "slut," Carmen begs Veronica for help. Tad sends the video out to the entire school anyway, and Carmen is greeted the next morning by cat-calls and lewd come-ons, intended both as a degradation and as an expectation that since she was once sexually available she is always sexually available. The third-season episode "Poughkeepsie, Tramps and Thieves" demonstrates how this presumption targets any sexually active woman. Fellow student Max hires Veronica to track down the woman Chelsea he met at a comic book convention, only to discover that she is actually a prostitute hired by his friends to help him feel more confident around women.[2] Convinced that their connection was real, Max insists Veronica finds her. To Veronica's surprise, and Max's delight, Chelsea is actually Wendy, and she is just as happy to see Max again.

[2] Max's friends used a website to hire Chelsea. One of the options the site offers is to specify the "type of experience." For example, clients can choose between a "girlfriend experience" and a "porn star experience," an illustration of both the conventionality and the performativity of (hetero)sexual experiences. Veronica is not amused, asking "Is there a reality experience, where she reminds the guy she's only there because he's paying her?"

Max settles Wendy's debts with her madam, and the two try to make a fresh start. While Wendy can leave her past behind, others cannot: Max's friends attempt to hire her as a stripper for their party, and even Max sees her as "tainted." Her previous sexual activity means Max's friends see her as nothing but a sex toy, and Max's own discomfort reveals his inability to understand why Wendy is *not* ashamed of being a prostitute. As she tells him in her goodbye letter, "You didn't know what I was then and now you do, and it shows in the way you look at me" ("Poughkeepsie, Tramps and Thieves"). Not quite the "phallic girl" who is always up for sex (McRobbie 2007), yet marked as highly sexual because of her sex work, Wendy illustrates how women are expected to be sexual: in specific ways and with certain people. None of her sexual choices are respected, and since she does not fit into a category Max comprehends, there is no real place for her as his girlfriend.

In *Veronica Mars* publicizing a woman's private sexual practices most often results in ridicule. The flashbacks that let the viewer piece together the circumstances of Veronica's rape show a drugged Veronica beset by drunken boys, and the word "slut" scribbled across her car in the morning, which identifies and blames Veronica for the sexual violence she has suffered. This reputation follows her throughout high-school, and recurs in the series finale, "The Bitch is Back." When her boyfriend Piz is concerned about how the two of them will manage a summer apart, Veronica shares her fantasy about their reunion. Neither knows that Piz and Wallace's dorm room is being surveilled by an underground fraternity, which is monitoring Wallace as a pledge. The video of Veronica and Piz's sexual activities begins to circulate across campus via email, and Veronica finds herself the

target of humiliating cat-calls and slurs wherever she goes. For Wendy, Carmen, and Veronica, their sexual choices always seem to be used against them. As I note throughout the previous two chapters, this presumed male entitlement to the female body is not just a hallmark of sexual inequality but often a precursor to more physical forms of sexualized violence, a context that validates chick dicks' hesitations and suspicions about sexual relationships.

Rich Fantasies

Chick dicks' experiences dramatize how fraught a sense of sexual autonomy is for young women. While public use of and response to female sexuality escapes their control, their private fantasies provide a space for imagining a more comfortable relationship with their sexual desires. These texts are full of fantasies in which chick dicks' own sexual satisfaction is paramount, and male – not female – bodies are the focus of desire. Steph, for instance, frequently daydreams about a variety of men while she soaps herself in the shower: "I dragged myself out of bed and into the bathroom and stood under the shower for awhile. I thought about Mel Gibson and Joe Morelli and tried to decide who had the best butt. Then I thought about Mike Richter, the goalie for the Rangers, because he was no slouch either" (*Three to Get Deadly*, 36).

Like Steph, Sam lusts heartily and unrepentantly. When visiting a friend in a countryside small-town, she is immediately smitten by a local young man:

> Alan's face, in the flickering light of the candle, was nothing but bone structure: the hollows under his cheekbones, the deep sockets

> of his eyes, so darkly shadowed he looked like a hero from a silent film. He reached for the bottle of wine and took a long swig. I lost myself in watching him; the scarf, student-style, was wrapped several times around his neck, so I couldn't see his white throat, but as he set the bottle down again and wiped the droplets of red wine from his mouth his full, beautifully shaped lips were so erotic I had to clench my hands to stop myself reaching over the table and licking them clean. (*Pretty Boy*, 135)

Such reveries are presented without apology, suggesting that female sexual (rather than romantic) desire is both natural and normal.

Robin similarly uses the men she sees as fodder for her own fantasies: "When I meet an interesting man, I automatically wonder what it would be like to have sex with him. Men are not only sex objects, but they are sex objects also" (*What's A Girl Gotta Do?* 70). Her distinction between "only sex objects" and "sex objects also" demonstrates an awareness of feminist critiques of sexual objectification, while still emphasizing *her* need for pleasure in a sexual relationship. Robin's fantasies foreground her own turn-ons and make her gratification the primary objective: "He was pretty cute, this Special Agent Jeff Walter, Tibetan-brother cute. Very upright, clean-cut. Looked like Dudley Do-Right, the kind of guy you just want to get real dirty with, the kind of guy you want to corrupt a little. That's a great aphrodisiac, a man who will compromise his morals to sleep with you" (*Revenge of the Cootie Girls*, 195-6). For Robin, the appeal of this scenario derives from challenging what she imagines is this man's self-image, an inversion of

the multiple assaults on her own self-image she experiences daily. Although she does not act on this impulse, her desire to turn the tables suggests that her own experiences of objectification leave her feeling powerless and even vengeful.

Sex – the promise of it, the desire for it – is also a means for regulating and experiencing other bodily practices. When sex is not an option, food always is. Steph in particular frequently turns to food for pleasure:

> At two o'clock I was no closer to sleep. Damn Morelli. I rolled out of bed and padded barefoot into the kitchen. I went through the cupboards and fridge, but I couldn't find exactly the right thing to satisfy my hunger. Morelli was what I wanted, of course, but if I couldn't have Morelli, what I wanted was an Oreo. *Lots* of Oreos. I should have thought to get Oreos when I was at the store. (*High Five*, 221-2)

This trope of food-as-sex-substitute can also be reversed: in *Eleven on Top*, Steph swears off desserts and finds herself ravenous for sex instead. Her hunger wears out her boyfriend Joe Morelli, and, struggling to retain control over her cravings, she ends up eyeing her sultry co-worker Ranger:

> It was midafternoon when Ranger returned to my cubby. I was pacing, unable to focus on anything beyond my need for a cupcake.
>
> "Babe," Ranger said. "You're looking a little strung out. Is there anything I should know?"
>
> "I'm in sugar withdrawal. I've given up dessert, and it's all I can think about." That had been true five minutes ago. Now that

> Ranger was standing in front of me I was thinking a cupcake wasn't what I actually wanted.
>
> …
>
> "The thing is, I have all these excess hormones. They used to be jelly-doughnut hormones, but somehow they got switched over to sex-drive hormones. Not that sex-drive hormones are bad, it's just that my life is so complicated right now." (*Eleven on Top*, 261, 266)

In trying to explain her predicament to Ranger, Steph alludes to the real crux of her problem: her life is complicated not because she wants to have sex, but because she wants to have sex with more than one man. Robin feels a similar sense of shame: "Now I had one sometime boyfriend, Mike, and a few occasional boyfriends, including Eric, my postdivorce transitional man. Sometimes I felt guilty, because some women have no men and here I was, making a pig of myself with several" (*Revenge of the Cootie Girls*, 71). Worried that her appetite is excessive, that she is "making a pig" of herself by sleeping with multiple men, Robin articulates one of the largely unspoken dictates of postfeminist female sexuality: that the "right" kind of actively desiring female subject who thoroughly enjoys sex, enjoys it regularly with the same man.[3]

[3] Gill and Herdieckerhoff argue that this trope simply rewrites the sexual innocence of Harlequin romance heroines: "whatever their degree of sexual experience, heroines are frequently 're-virginised' in the narrative when it comes to the encounter with their hero. With him, they return to what we might characterize as an emotionally virginal state, which wipes away previous 'sullying' experiences by making them enjoy sex fully for the very first time" (2006, 494).

This injunction is often at odds with chick dicks' struggles to establish and retain a sense of control over sexual activities. Sam and Robin in particular derive pleasure from engineering casual sexual relationships to suit their needs and desires. For Sam, this is often associated with inverting the familiar heterosexual dynamic in which men take charge of the encounter:

> His skin was as smooth as a child's, stretched like pale satin over his long muscles, only the lightest of down on his thighs, and as I stroked them I had the sense of caressing a sculpture, veined like marble. I wouldn't let him move; I took what I wanted and pressed back his hands when he tried to pull me up to kiss me, feeling drunk on the sense of power this conferred and on his beauty, and when he cried out, his hands clutching the edge of the sofa, their knuckles white with the pressure, and then released, it was as if I had won a victory. (*Black Rubber Dress*, 216)

Robin, meanwhile, enjoys experimenting with places and personas, and acting out her fantasies:

> Checking myself in the mirror, I had to ask myself: Would a Power Woman like Janet Reno, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Golda Meir, or even Solange Stevenson let a man she really didn't know that well feel her up in a deserted corner of the primitive peoples gallery in the Museum of Natural History? Or pretend to be a newlywed in the Oak Room of the Plaza Hotel and let a stranger buy her champagne before they went up to his room? Or put on a white plastic

> micromini naughty nurse dress, seamed hose, and stilettos, and go out to a cheap motel in New Jersey to watch porn movies with an actor and hump like monkeys? For example. . . . But shit, I'm a red-blooded American woman and the moon was just about full in the sky, which turns me into a she-wolf with her nose in the wind, trying to pick up the scent of a like-minded male. (*The Last Manly Man*, 81-2)

Yet, as she acknowledges, some of her favourite sexual adventures could easily invite social scrutiny, as they not only take place with different men at different times but also outside the bounds of a monogamous relationship. Steph, who has been involved with both Morelli and Ranger since the beginning of Evanovich's series, also wrestles with the sense that she is doing something wrong. At times she feels this social stigma so strongly that it manifests as a fear comparable to that of violence: "There was a contract on my head, and I was weirdly involved with two men. I didn't know which was more frightening" (*Ten Big Ones*, 185).

Chick dicks often work to see their sexual and intimate relationships in terms that are not laced with violence. This is difficult in a culture that typically figures relationships as a "battle of the sexes" and has a range of aggressive descriptors for heterosexual intercourse. In *Four to Score*, Steph actively tries to negate this type of imagery, and momentarily stumbles searching for terms with which she is comfortable:

> "So lay this marriage gig on me," Sally said. "I always thought Morelli was just nailing you."

"We're not married. And he's not *nailing* me."

"Yeah right."

"Okay, so he used to be nailing me. Well, actually, he only nailed me for a very short time. And it wasn't nailing. Nailing sounds like body piercing. What we had was…uh, consensual sex." (*Four to Score*, 261)

Casual language is not the only way women are reminded that intimate relationships can be dangerous. Robin, fascinated by crimes of passion, scours newspapers for examples and amasses them in a scrapbook: "I was always more interested in stories about people who killed people they were supposed to love" (*Revenge of the Cootie Girls*, 168). This homemade reminder, like her arsenal of homemade weapons detailed in Chapter Two, indicates both her awareness of and anxiety about the sexual dangers women face, colouring her experience of heterosexual relationships. While not solely romance narratives, when these stories' investigative plotlines detour through their heroines' sexual lives they underscore the women's investments in and suspicions about monogamous sexual relationships. Chick dicks grapple with what Berlant characterizes as amnesia, a deliberate forgetfulness about danger: "When people enter into love's contract with the promise of recognition and reciprocity, they hope memory will be reshaped by it, minimizing out the evidence of failure, violence, ambivalence, and social hierarchy that would otherwise make love a most anxious desire for an end to anxiety" (2008, 179).

Monogamy and Mis-wanting

Early work on romance narratives emphasizes how such stories create an imaginative space in which these fears are confronted and set aside (Modleski 1982; Radway 1984). While chick texts are marketed as "new" kinds of romances[4], updated to reflect the lives of contemporary women, they continue their predecessors' sense of struggle with the terms of intimate relationships (see Whelehan 2005). Janice Radway also identifies a strain she called the "failed romance," a form which "fails to convince the reader that the traditional sexual arrangements are benign" (1984, 133). Chick dick texts contain multiple elements of the failed romance, for amnesia is hard to maintain when the heroines are regularly confronted with evidence of the disappointing, exploitative, even violent outcomes of heterosexual partnerships. Chick dicks are always acutely aware of potential dangers in their search for satisfying sexual encounters and commitments, providing "discussions of the affective and emotional work of intimacy [that] tend to take the shape of debates about the costs of and desires for heteronormative convention" (Berlant 2008, 171).

These debates focus on the seemingly linear trajectory from monogamy through marriage and culminating in children – what Diane Negra refers to as "life-stage paradigms" (2009, 47). By making this script a source of narrative conflict, chick dick texts contest that this is the only viable form of female happiness, and offer affective acknowledgement of the emotional, mental, and

[4] Harlequin, for instance, publishes its chick lit as an entirely different line – Red Dress Inc., deliberately designed to distance these novels from the perceived stigma of the parent company in order to attract a more urban and upscale market (Marsh 2002).

financial factors that feed into their decisions. Chick dick texts do not offer alternative visions of intimate relationships. They illustrate instead the trouble chick dicks have fitting comfortably into existing paradigms, and the pressures they feel from family, friends, and partners to fall in line.[5]

Sexual monogamy is a recurring cause for concern, as Steph's constant dilemma of lusting after both Ranger and Morelli demonstrates. Her desire for Ranger is one of the primary reasons she has not committed to Morelli: "In fact, there isn't a lot *not* to like about Morelli. So the hesitancy I have to commit is confusing. I suppose it has something to do with the fact that I'm horribly attracted to Ranger. Not that I would ever commit to Ranger. Ranger is an accident waiting to happen. Still, the heat is there" (*Twelve Sharp*, 81). While Morelli is a romantic fixture in Steph's life, his status is indeterminate. In one of the series' most recent installments, *Fearless Fourteen*, Steph still refers to Morelli as her on-again, off-again boyfriend, a continually deferred monogamy that marks Evanovich's novels.

This refrain differentiates chick dick stories from their chick lit cohorts, in which the turn to monogamy is often the narrative climax. Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff argue that chick texts' typical move from many sexual partners to just one implies that

---

[5] Offering criticisms of love is, as Laura Kipnis argues, extremely difficult:

> There's no way of being against love precisely because we moderns are constituted as beings yearning to be filled, craving connection, needing to adore and be adored, because love is vital plasma and everything else in the world just tap water . . . Modern love may be a company town – it may even come with company housing (also known as "domesticity") – but are we such social marionettes that we automatically buy all usual stories, no questions asked? (2003, 3-4)

> sexual liberation (here represented by the notion of pursuing sexual pleasure through more than one partner) is not what women really want. Not only does such freedom not speak to women's true desires, but also it is often presented as mere posturing or performance – something that women in a postfeminist world are required to enact, even though it is not what they want. (2006, 494)

Chick dicks' aversions to monogamy invert the trend Gill and Herdieckerhoff identify. For them, sexual and intimate commitment feels like posturing. Robin describes her attitude: "Men, I love 'em, but on a full-time basis they cramp my style. Cautious nonmonogamy suits me better, but it's a lot harder than it looks. In order to pull it off, you have to have a fear of commitment slightly greater than your desire for emotional security" (*Revenge of the Cootie Girls*, 71).

Trust is a core stumbling block for chick dicks, as they witness first- and second-hand the often violent fallout of relationships in the course of their investigative work. Even when they enter a committed relationship, such fears remain. In *Veronica Mars*'s third season, Veronica starts to doubt her boyfriend Logan when it seems like he is avoiding making plans with her in order to spend time with other women. She plants a GPS tracking device in his cellphone and even considers hiding one in his car. When she uses the GPS to follow him after he missed a date, he snaps that her surveillance makes him feel like a criminal, and says: "Look, I gotta run, so to save you the trouble I'm surfing in Mexico with Dick and Mercer this weekend. I'll fax you the coordinates so you don't incur any more cell-tracking charges, and I'll keep a journal of my bad thoughts in case you want to

stick my face in a cage of rats when I get back" ("Wichita Linebacker"). He changes his mind about Mexico, however, and instead visits Veronica at the library. She apologizes, telling him: "I'm sorry, Logan. I spent my formative years watching people while they lied to and cheated on and betrayed each other, so the trust thing… it doesn't come naturally, but I'm trying to act unnaturally, I swear" ("Wichita Linebacker").

As the bread-and-butter of her father's private investigation work, Veronica has seen enough cases of adultery to believe that intimacy leads to hurt rather than happiness. Like Robin's crimes of passion scrapbook, Mars Investigations' files on cheating partners remind Veronica that relationships are emotionally dangerous.[6] Steph's employment means she routinely encounters men who have skipped bail on charges of sexual and spousal abuse, including rape (Steven Wegan in *To The Nines*), stabbing a pregnant wife (Anton Ward in *Ten Big Ones*), and running over, beating, raping, and then lighting a wife on fire (Morris Munson in *Hot Six*). Maintaining an emotional distance through "cautious nonmonogamy" is a way to pre-empt not only the violation of betrayal but the potential for physical violence as well.

This is not to suggest that chick dicks are resolutely non-monogamous. Each in this study has attempted or is working at a relationship, and these romantic

[6] This leads Veronica to see deceit and betrayal in all relationships. For instance, in "Of Vice and Men," Wallace's dorm supervisor Moe asks Veronica to help track down Sully, one of the dorm's residents. Sully's girlfriend Meryl has come to visit yet Sully is not there. Veronica is convinced that Sully is off cheating, while Meryl adamantly insists that her boyfriend would not do that. They eventually find Sully at the police station – he had been surfing, suffered a severe concussion, and was being held there until the Sheriff could figure out his identity.

sub-plots emphasize how autonomy is central to chick dicks' comfort with commitment. In *Pretty Boy*, currently the last book in Henderson's Sam Jones series, Sam's boyfriend Hugo asks her to move in with him. Unnerved by this, she seduces and sleeps with someone else. Yet when Hugo makes it clear that her cheating is not as important to him as her emotional fidelity, she is unable to comply:

> I knew what Hugo had wanted me to say, and I knew that he would take me back if I did. He wanted to hear that I was prepared, if not to move in with him, then at least to put our relationship on a more serious footing. The thought of what that meant – where that eventually led – sent cold shivers down my spine. Alan had meant nothing more to me than a brief fling, but he symbolized much more than that. If I did what Hugo wanted, I wouldn't be free any more. I felt claustrophobic just thinking about it. It wouldn't be fair to Hugo. Even though I had behaved appallingly to him, I couldn't guarantee that it would never happen again. Despite the fact that I was overwhelmed with guilt whenever I thought about it. . . .
>
> What he was asking of me was something I had spent my whole life rejecting. And he knew all this already. In our last fight about this, I had asked him to cut me some slack, and he told me that he had been doing that for the last two years, and it was time for me to meet him halfway.

I understood everything he was saying. I just couldn't do it.

(279)

Sam's need for autonomy – as defined on her terms – outweighs her feelings for Hugo, and the novel closes with Sam single again. Other chick dick texts address autonomy from a different angle. As I noted earlier, in pitting jobs against romance many chick texts employ a type of "wishing away" in order to avoid addressing how the gendered dynamics of intimate relationships intersect with women's work lives. As part of this wishing away, Negra identifies a narrative trope of "'miswanting' in which the heroine comes to realize that her professional aspirations are misplaced" (2009, 95). Resolution typically takes the form of the chick abandoning work altogether, or cultivating "adjusted ambition," meaning the heroine "retain[s her] role in the workforce but [is] psychologically distanced from ambition, and the central significance of work for [her] is diminished" (Negra 2009, 96). These narrative strategies suggest that women's attention to their employment interferes with their devotion to (and therefore the success of) their relationships; as with sexual liberation, the underlying implication is that feminism has fashioned a freedom to choose that does not accurately reflect what women really want.

Disagreements between chick dicks and their partners challenge this trope of "miswanting." Hot on the heels of the Hearst College rapist in *Veronica Mars*'s third season, Veronica finds herself arguing with Logan about her dedication to the case:

Logan: We need to have a talk, a serious one.

Veronica: Yeah, I got that from your messages. That-it's why I haven't called. I haven't had time to have a talk.

Logan: Well, then I'll make it quick. I want you to stay away from the rape case. Okay? Just let it go. And it's clear the rapist knows who you are. . . Just stop digging around. Okay? No more looking into the serial rapes. No more putting your nose where it doesn't belong.

Veronica: My nose kind of belongs wherever I decide to put it.

Logan: I'm worried about you. Okay? I want you to stop now. I'm not kidding.

Veronica: Kind of a one-eighty, isn't it? Can we rewind a week? Cue it up to the part where you were asking me to exonerate your Mexican vacation buddy, Mercer.

Logan: That was before you were attacked. Why can't you for once just leave things alone?

Veronica: Okay, now you're starting to piss me off.

Logan: Frankly, Veronica, so what? You're not invincible, and you're not always right! ("Lord of the PIs")

After Logan storms out, he hires a bodyguard for Veronica. Unaware of this at first, she begins to worry that the Hearst campus rapist is after her. When she realizes what is going on, she immediately confronts Logan:

Veronica: I have spent the last few days being terrified that I had some whacked-out rapist following me!

Logan: Look, I had the same fear.

Veronica: So you pay someone to tail me?

Logan: No, so I asked you to stop putting yourself in danger, and you told me to piss off. Then I hired someone to protect you.

Veronica: You had no right to do that.

Logan: Look, that's probably true...okay? It's just I don't care.

Veronica: You don't care?

Logan: Look, I don't give a rat's ass if it's right or fair. I don't care if you're angry. I care that you're safe.

Veronica: That's all sweet and great, but it doesn't really work that way. It's not like this is all some new facet of my personality. You know who I am! You know what I do.

Logan: And?

Veronica: And it isn't gonna change. And if you can't accept that, this isn't gonna work.

Logan: You know who I am. And you're constantly expecting me to change. And even right now, as you're thinking, "Crap, he's got a point," you still think you're ultimately right. I love you, Veronica. I love you. But, do you love me?

Veronica: Yeah.

Logan: Well then, can we try to go a little easier on each other?

Veronica: Yeah, I think that's a good idea.

Logan: So, are we okay?

Veronica: Yeah. We're okay. ("Lord of the PIs")

Yet Veronica and Logan are not okay. Logan's attempts to manage her behaviour, both directly and indirectly, prompt her to put some emotional distance between them; she starts to avoid him and ignore his phone calls. She refuses to cede her professional aspirations for the sake of their relationship, challenging the notion that women's most valued commitment is to their partner, and Logan eventually breaks up with her.

Steph's on-again, off-again boyfriend Joe Morelli is even more forthright about his disapproval:

> "Christ, I'm getting an ulcer. You've got me drinking bottles of Maalox. I hate this. I hate going through the day wondering what harebrained scheme you're involved in, wondering who's shooting at you."
>
> "That's so hypocritical. You're a cop."
>
> "I *never* get shot at. The only time I have to worry about getting shot is when I'm with you."
>
> "So what are you saying?"
>
> "I'm saying you're going to have to choose between me or the job."
>
> "Well, guess what, I'm not spending the rest of my life with someone who gives me ultimatums." (*Seven Up*, 301-2)

While they eventually start dating again, Steph's job continues to be a source of stress in their relationship. From Morelli's vantage point, Steph simply needs to

realize she is miswanting: "'I don't get it,' Morelli said. 'Other women are happy to stay home. My sister stays home. My brothers' wives stay home. My mother stays home. My grandmother stays home'" (*Ten Big Ones*, 102). For Steph it is a question of support:

> "It's going to be ugly," Morelli said. "You're going to be on a rant about women's equality and personal freedom. And I'm going to be waving my arms and yelling, between I'm an Italian cop, and that's what we do when women are irrational."
>
> "It's not about women's equality and personal freedom. This isn't political. It's personal. I want you to support my career choice."
>
> "You don't have a career," Morelli said. "You have a suicide mission. Most women try to avoid murderers and rapists. I have a girlfriend who goes out trying to find them." (*Ten Big Ones*, 101)

Such vignettes exemplify a postfeminist mentality: because women have already secured access to the workplace, Steph's complaint cannot be articulated as a matter of freedom or equality. This deliberate distancing from politics illustrates how the juxtapolitical functions in these texts. The novel sketches out a scene of struggle and identifies its potentially political dimensions, before quickly backing off to rewrite this tension as specific to Morelli and Steph's relationship. The conflict, and not its content, becomes the affective situation. This strategy sidelines an understanding of how Steph's situation is rooted in larger cultural anxieties about gender and sex roles. Like Veronica's fights with Logan, discord is couched in terms of the caring and concerned boyfriend. As individual storylines, such arguments seem like typical

relationship hurdles, moments in which the lovers try to sort out the differences that exist between them.

As sets of stories, however, the ways in which these issues recur are also reminders of the place investigative work holds in chick dicks' lives. In contrast to dominant chick texts' representations of the work/life balance act, in which the heroine frequently gives up or scales back her professional ambitions (see Negra 2008, 2009), chick dicks defiantly hold on to their work. They refuse to cede the implication that their boyfriends are better suited to the task of defending women, even when those boyfriends have greater resources to draw upon – Logan's wealth can buy protection, and as a cop Morelli has an entire police force behind him[7].

Seen in isolation, this friction between chick dicks and their partners appears as an individualized narrative obstacle. Their arguments with partners incorporate familiar postfeminist tropes about how women's work jeopardizes relationship stability, a sentiment seemingly validated by the dissolution of Veronica's relationship with Logan and Morelli's ultimatum to Steph that she must choose between the job and him. Yet the fact that chick dicks insist on working is not easily divorced from the kind of work they do. As I argue in Chapters One and Two, these characters' investments in investigation are more than monetary. This broader context provides spaces to politicize the chick dicks' debates about women's work. Driven by personal experiences and feminist-oriented outrage, sleuthing is a non-negotiable element of their relationships. Through founding moments of

[7] Sheryl J. Anderson's series also follows this pattern. Heroine Molly Forrester is dating NYPD homicide detective Kyle Edwards, who constantly tries to dissuade her from her own investigations.

sexualized violence, the texts situate their jobs as responses to larger sexual inequalities that relegate women to a limited set of socially acceptable roles and functions.

This is reinforced by how Morelli's problems with Steph's work as a bounty hunter pertain in part to her suitability as a wife. Marriage is seen here as monogamy's inevitable byproduct, the next life-stage, and, according to the sexual codes of their neighbourhood, the "right" thing to do: "When you grow up in the Burg there are several mantras little girls learn at an early age. One of them is that men don't buy goods they can get for free" (*High Five*, 17). Yet, like Veronica's exposure to cheating spouses through working with her father, Steph's prior experience has soured her on marriage. Mere months into her marriage, she caught her now ex-husband Dickie Orr having sex with another woman:

> I had the shortest marriage in the history of the Burg. I'd barely finished unpacking my wedding presents when I caught the jerk on the dining room table with my arch-enemy, Joyce Barnhardt. Looking at it in retrospect I can't imagine why I married Orr in the first place. I suppose I was in love with the idea of being in love.
>
> There are certain expectations of girls from the Burg. You grow up, you get married, you have children, you spread out some in the beam, and you learn how to set a buffet for forty. My *dream* was that I would get irradiated like Spiderman and be able to fly like Superman. My *expectation* had been that I'd marry. I did the best I

could to live up to the expectation, but it didn't work out. (*Hard Eight*, 27-8, emphasis in original)

Steph now recognizes the ways in which her choice to get married was influenced by a culture that determines feminine worth through family values. While admitting that she made these expectations her own, she is now less certain that marriage is the right choice for herself and Morelli.

Robin's failed marriage followed a different trajectory. For ex-husband Burke, Robin represented too much of a deviation from the marriage ideal for him to stay:

> "When we lived together in that big apartment in your funky neighbourhood, I never knew what the next day would bring, and it was exciting in a way." He averted his eyes. "But I can't live with you. You wear me out. I want a peaceful home life, a normal wife, and…and children, a house in the burbs, once in a while, maybe, a home-cooked meal. That's not such a radical concept outside New York." (*What's a Girl Gotta Do?* 133)

Yet even creating the perfect marriage is no guarantee of security or happiness, as Steph's sister Valerie discovers. Held up as "Saint Valerie" from childhood to remind Steph of the way a woman's life is supposed to progress, Valerie finds a financially successful husband and has two angelic children. Halfway through the series, however, Valerie and her children return to the family home, after her husband transferred all their money to an offshore bank account and ran away with the 18 year old babysitter. After spending years living up to the ideal,

Valerie cannot comprehend what has happened: "I thought we had a good marriage. I made nice meals. And I kept the house nice. I went to the gym so I'd be attractive. I even got my hair cut like Meg Ryan. I don't understand what went wrong" (*Seven Up*, 81).

As Berlant notes, "The modern love plot requires that, if you are a woman, you must at least *entertain* believing in love's capacity both to rescue you from your life and to give you a new one, a fantasy that romantic love's narratives constantly invest with beauty and utopian power" (2008, 171). Chick dicks' experiences demonstrate that maintaining a sense of amnesia amidst multiple examples of love's disintegration requires more work than they can often manage. The postfeminist love plot frequently falls back on what Elspeth Probyn calls the new traditionalism, "discourses [which] actively represent women as re-positioned in the home, as they re-articulate different forms of family" (1993, 281). This "retreatism" (Negra 2008; 2009) promotes marriage and family as a way out of the abyss of professional ambition that threatens intimate relationships, a strategy for wishing away gendered work tensions and finding the authentic feminine self.

Sam unequivocally rejects this path. She feels the familial and maternal as stifling obligations. Waiting for her friend Tom to finish teaching for the day drives this home:

> A muffled roar rose from the building, suddenly amplified tenfold as the doors burst open and the first children, laden down with fluorescent rucksacks and bundled up in winter coats, hove into view. Every single one of the mothers groaned in unison. It was an

> extraordinary noise, half sigh, half clearly audible whimper, an admission of total exhaustion. I guessed that this was the only moment that they really let themselves feel, in sympathetic company, the full horror of the responsibility they had so foolishly undertaken. (*Pretty Boy*, 72)

Rather than touching mother-child reunions, these scenes appear to Sam as coloured by an unrepresentable, unspeakable regret. That her most vehement rejection of domesticity occurs in the same novel as her break-up with Hugo emphasizes the difficulty of imagining intimate, sexual partnerships outside of the normative stages of monogamy, marriage, and reproduction.

Other chick dicks are more conflicted about having children. Their interior debates, while skeptical about family, also feed into to the notion that female heterosexuality is inseparable from reproduction. At the start of Evanovich's series Steph is indifferent to children. She generally only encounters her friend Mary Lou's three noisy offspring: "I thought kids were okay from a distance, but I wasn't all that excited about the way they smelled up close. I suppose when they belong to you it makes a difference" (*Three to Get Deadly*, 108-9). As her relationship with Morelli continues, and her sister Valerie becomes pregnant and remarries, Steph begins to think about children more often, if not with greater anticipation. By *Fearless Fourteen*, Steph is "not ready" instead of "not wanting," a choice that reiterates the centrality of the family to paradigms of female life-stages.

For Robin, the choice to have children, and the potential to politicize the "new traditionalism," is written out, as she is infertile. Her lack of options frustrates

her: "I'm not sure I want to be a mother, I'm not sure I'd make a good one, and I'm not sure what kind of world I'd leave to a kid. But I wish to hell I had the choice, that's all" (*What's a Girl Gotta Do?* 88). As part of the reason why her marriage fell apart, her infertility also means that she is single and childless by circumstance rather than choice. In this way, author Hayter avoids the complexity created in a protagonist like Sam, who veers off-script with her outright rejection of monogamy, marriage, and family. As chick dicks' deliberations about partners and children demonstrate, the notion of family still exerts enormous influence over how our culture imagines "women," even (or especially) in texts that push the boundaries of female representability in other ways.

In chick dick texts, sex is never as simple as it seems. It becomes a site through which sexual inequalities and normative demands of femininity are made visible and visceral. Our cultural preoccupation with female sexuality encourages multiple forms of policing and surveillance, and licenses "the expression of contempt for issues of women's emotional and social health, particularly in contexts where a woman's 'life script' appears aberrant" (Negra 2009, 42). Beset by contradictory injunctions of self-care and sexual freedom, chicks in postfeminist media are constrained by the very circumstances marketed to them as empowering. Chick dick texts imply that these situations are shared. The narratives' confessional address creates structures of feeling around intimate issues of self- and relationship-management, spaces in which emotions bear the burden of response in scenes often dissociated from any explicitly political potential.

Yet as Berlant reminds us, "[l]onging can be a political measure phrased in the idiom of the ordinary" (2008, 268). The incredible popularity of chick narratives in postfeminist popular culture suggests that there is something profoundly resonant about the typical chick's self-doubt and sexual or romantic longings. While such stories may not be political, the lessons we can learn from them can be. In narrating their experiences of and desires for sexual – not just sexualized – bodies, and intimate encounters or partnerships in which autonomy and security are possible, chick dicks draw inadvertent attention to the prevalence and toll of sexual inequalities. Chick dicks' tales of body work, betrayal, and violence "thrive in *proximity* to the political," and their attempts to negotiate sex and self on their own terms illustrate how women's choices are scrutinized so closely that they can stop feeling chosen at all (Berlant 2008, x).

Chapter Five

The Case of the Missing Chick Dick: Media Forms and Future Research

If I had to name the single most influential person in my life it would have to be Wonder Woman. Not only did Wonder Woman spill over her Wondercups but she also kicked serious ass.

-Stephanie Plum

Postfeminist popular culture is politically messy. In approaching postfeminism as a set of cultural discourses about sex and gender roles, I have been situating the chick dick as one of many voices in dialogue about what constitutes the feminine good life. As the previous chapters demonstrate, the chick dick is typically the voice of trouble, offering critical perspectives on postfeminist precepts of femininity and freedom that emphasize the disjuncture between such proclamations and women's lived experiences. These perspectives are often feminist or proto-feminist in nature, a standpoint that opens the chick dick up to ridicule and resentment for drawing attention to how postfeminism makes women "feel bad" – about their bodies, their beliefs, and even about being women.

When Robin and her aunt are held hostage by one of Robin's more ardent and unstable fans, the two use their confinement to air deep-rooted grievances. Aunt Maureen lectures Robin:

> You could have prevented this a long time ago, by making different choices with your life . . . If you'd married Chuck Turner and stayed in Minnesota, instead of running off to New York and going into television, I daresay we wouldn't be sitting here dressed like minions of the devil and being held hostage by a crazy person . . . Your mother and father thought you could do anything. Your father thought you could be the first woman president of the Unites States and your mother… your mother thinks you're an English princess. She thinks you should be a queen. I felt they were feeding you false expectations of what a woman could expect in this world. I felt you'd be happier if you'd submit your will to God and accept your fate, accept your place as a woman. Look at you. You're not happy now. (*Nice Girls Finish Last*, 216-7)

Aunt Maureen articulates how chick dicks can be seen an example of what Sara Ahmed (2007) terms the feminist killjoy. Chapter Four's discussion of chick dick's ambivalence toward monogamy and motherhood demonstrates how this figure can generate negative feelings in others as a result of her oppositional stance toward things presumed to be "good" for women: "The feminist after all might kill joy precisely because she refuses to share an orientation toward certain things as being good, because she does not find the objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising" (Ahmed 2007, 127). In this final chapter I look at the production contexts within postfeminist media culture in order to identify the media forms in which the chick dick thrives and those from which she is largely absent. Both

contexts suggest that there are places where feminist trouble can and cannot be made.

By pinpointing where chick dicks appear and disappear, we not only gain a greater understanding of how this particular character operates, we also, and importantly, can get a better handle on the kinds of complaints postfeminist media culture permits and precludes. I search for spaces in which this figure does not appear to clarify the traits that make the chick dick so troubling, in order to situate her as an illustration of postfeminism's role in regulating contemporary gendered power relations. This is a necessary step in order to confirm and critique postfeminism's political messiness. Chick dicks demand attention, for their investigations offer crucial insights into what needs to be made "better" in women and men's lives. As Ahmed argues,

> It is the very exposure of these unhappy effects that is affirmative, which gives us an alternative set of imaginings of what might count as a good or at least better life . . . If anything, the experience of being outside the very ideals that are presumed to enable a good life still gets us somewhere. It is the resources we develop in sharing such experiences that might form the basis of alternative models of happiness. (2007, 135)

Berlant suggests something similar about the function of the female complaint. Not just an emotional outburst, the complaint offers "a reanimation of the scene of yet unlived better survival" (2008, 271). As a voice of trouble, chick dicks articulate what needs to change – their complaints and their unhappiness are moments of

political potential. Building upon the chick dick's troubles tracked through the previous chapters, this chapter traces how such complaints circulate and where they become stalled. In particular, I investigate chick dicks' struggle to establish a foothold on prime-time television, and the dearth of such amateur female sleuths in mainstream film. These absences reveal just as much about the character's cultural work as a close reading of the texts themselves, for they illustrate the difficulty in forwarding feminist – or even proto-feminist – sentiments in a postfeminist environment.

Industrial Conditions of (Im)possibility

Contemporary trends in popular fiction provide a fertile ground for chick dick novels. Mystery and romance novels comprise a significant proportion of book sales in North America (Greco et al 2007, 36),[1] and a cursory glance at the titles that line bookstore shelves indicates the variety of ways publishing houses are experimenting with these genres. Integrating elements as diverse as the supernatural (Julie Kenner's Kate Connor series, including *Carpe Demon* and *Demons Are Forever*), desserts (Joanne Fluke's *Cream Puff Murder* and *Chocolate Chip Cookie Murder*, to name a few), and Lilian Jackson Braun's extensive series about Koko the crime-solving cat, both mystery and romance fiction are increasingly porous – and profitable. *New York Times Book Review* crime columnist Marilyn Stasio relates how one editor counseled aspiring romance writers to simply "retool their unsold

[1] Janet Evanovich's Stephanie Plum series serves as the first example for Greco et al's (2007) explanation of the popularity of mass-market romance and mystery paperbacks.

novels as mysteries," broadening the books' potential marketability (2005, 14).

Critics and commentators are now starting to identify the ways in which the chick lit publishing phenomenon creates representational spaces for a broad range of women's voices (see Butler and Desai 2008; Donadio 2006; Ferriss and Young 2005; Jernigan 2004). The chick dick is also treading on ground cleared by previous generations of female sleuths such as Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski, Kathy Reichs' Temperance Brennan, and Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone, who have established strong footholds in crime fiction. The *New York Times Book Review* proclaimed chick dick lit a subgenre in 2005, albeit without any consensus on its name: "Call the resulting subgenre the chick-lit mystery or the babe book or whatever you will, but you can't miss its gaudy manifestations" (Stasio 2005, 14). The publication of Lynn Harris' *Death by Chick Lit* in 2007 marks the success of this hybrid – a highly reflexive parody, *Death by Chick Lit* demonstrates how the conventions of the chick dick's investigations are now familiar and popular enough to generate fond mockery. *Death by Chick Lit* also lampoons the volume and variety of chick lit, as all of the heroine's casual acquaintances but her have a book in press.[2] Among sleuthing cats and soccer-mom demon-hunters, the chick dick does not seem out of place.

She is, however, more scarce on television. Crime programming has been a staple of North American television since its inception, and currently dominates the prime time network and cable landscape, led by ratings powerhouses like the *C.S.I.:*

[2] Conveniently, this failure is what saves protagonist Lola Somerville from death, a fate that seems to befall all the other women who call Lola to squeal about their newfound writerly careers.

Crime Scene Investigation franchise, multiple *Law & Order* series, and now Reichs' own *Bones*. From the late 1960s' fascination with spies (*The Girl From U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Avengers*), the 1970s' cagey crimefighters (*Police Woman* and *Charlie's Angels*), the buddy-cop series of the 1980s (*Moonlighting*, *Remington Steele*, *Cagney & Lacey*), 1990s' ensemble cop dramas (*NYPD Blue* and *Homicide: Life on the Street*), and the current cultural fascination with forensic and/or scientific sleuthing (*C.S.I.*, *Numb3rs*, *Bones*), television has rarely lacked crime drama. Women have played key roles across these trends – Emma Peale and April Dancer, Maddie Hayes and Laura Holt, Suzanne 'Pepper' Anderson and the Angels, detectives Diane Russell and Kay Howard, Catherine Willows and 'Bones' Brennan.

Yet these female investigators have always been, and still continue to be, supervised or authorized in some way, by (often male) partners, bosses, boyfriends, or fathers – like Sydney Bristow in *Alias* (ABC 2001-2006). Their sleuthing is legitimated by their career, or, in the case of teen sleuths like Buffy Summers or *Smallville*'s (CW 2001-present) Chloe Sullivan, explained by supernatural or otherworldly forces. This tendency to mitigate youthful female investigative skills by scripting such characters as exceptional or extraordinary now extends to older women, whose work is often guided by some nebulous 'higher' purpose, as in *Ghost Whisperer* (CBS 2005-present), *Medium* (CBS 2005-present), and *Saving Grace* (TNT 2007-present). Recent trends, then, suggest that the spectre of independent female detection is still somehow televisually unrepresentable.

ABC's Honey West was the first female television detective to learn this

lesson. The eponymous series ran for 30 episodes before its cancellation, and showcased the investigative skills of its leggy blonde heroine who inherited her father's detective agency and was determined to keep it running. Aided by her pet ocelot Bruce, and occasionally by her lacklustre boyfriend Sam or her would-be paramour Chris (a local cop), Honey solved cases of stolen dresses, dead stuntwomen, and endangered heiresses. From Honey's career autonomy to her boyfriend's marginal involvement (Sam most often appeared to dissuade rather than assist her), "innuendos were floated that this female protagonist might control her own desires as well as the narrative, and might wield power in the public sphere along with cars and weapons" (D'Acci 1997, 82).

Yet as Julie D'Acci (1997) notes, the series' quick demise suggests that even with the cultural shifts accompanying the sexual revolution, Honey's social and sexual freedoms were still too much for the network to handle. Despite the series' attempts at domestication – Honey's typically feminine appearance, her stalwart boyfriend, and live-in chaperone Aunt Meg – Honey was still at the centre of, and often instigated, the action. Honey's largely unfettered professional and private affairs, while resonant with the "new woman" gaining prominence through contemporaneous texts like Helen Gurley Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962), proved a little too ambitious for prime-time television in the 1960s.

D'Acci suggests that "[i]n mainstream U.S. television culture, when representing women (who have been socially defined as primarily *relational*), it has been almost impossible to find the right mix when fashioning independent

'autonomous' protagonists" (1997, 89).[3] The cultural compulsion to define women via their relationships to others generated tension in *Veronica Mars* as well. Like chick lit, teen TV has quickly become a lucrative genre, a "strategic alliance" of soap opera, melodrama, and comedy (Davis and Dickinson 2004, 7; see also Ross and Stein 2008). Narratives in which "teen characters insistently focus on analyzing and expressing their feelings about one another," teen television is typically preoccupied with interpersonal dramas (M. Hills 2004, 57-8). While *Veronica Mars* features mostly teenaged characters, its first two seasons' narrative arcs are primarily concerned with uncovering killers rather than generating or resolving romantic relationships.

This approach seemed to please both critics and fans (see Abernethy 2004). Between the series' second and third season, however, its home channel UPN merged with the WB to become The CW, and the series' tone shifted significantly in its final year. The CW imported much of the WB's hallmark teen programming (including *The Gilmore Girls, One Tree Hill, 7th Heaven, Smallville,* and *Supernatural*), and moved toward defining its audience exclusively as 18-34 year-old women (Dana 2008). Amidst these changes, *Veronica Mars*' season-long murder-mystery structure disappeared, replaced by single-episode cases and conflicts centered on Veronica's interpersonal relationships.

This final season showcases Veronica and her friends adjusting to college

[3] *Charlie's Angels*' resounding success a decade later (ABC 1976-1981) illustrates the impact of relationality when scripting such protagonists: each Angel's skills complements the others', and the team itself is overseen by Charles Townsend, whose power is so enigmatic and absolute that he never needs to show his face.

life, and in the first nine episodes Veronica tracks down the Heart College rapist Mercer Hayes, as discussed in Chapter Three. In the process, Veronica repeatedly butts heads with the members of Lilith House, Hearst's active feminist group. This dynamic demonstrates the dearth of ways contemporary popular culture imagines feminists and feminism, and clearly marks Veronica as pro-woman rather than "feminist." We are introduced to Lilith House in the season's first episode, when the group's Take Back The Night rally during Orientation Week morphs into a call to shut down the College's fraternities. The protest is led by Fern Delgado, whose depiction as a loud, outspoken and brazenly political woman immediately constructs her as a "feminazi." Her "hippie" Latina name prompts associations between her opinions and second-wave feminism, a political position that is "othered" through these episodes not only by pitting Lilith House against protagonist Veronica, but also by Fern's visible facial piercings (including a ring through her septum), her tattoos, and her status as a woman of colour amidst Neptune and Hearst College's largely white population.

Fern is supported in her crusade against Heart's fraternity houses by Nish Sweeney, editor of the campus paper *The Hearst Free Press*. Like Fern, Nish is convinced that the Hearst rapist belongs to one of the fraternities, and recruits Veronica to go undercover as a new sorority pledge to learn more. While Veronica discovers a "point system" for aspiring frat boys – a board in the basement covered with pictures of the women the pledges have had sex with during Rush Week, with each woman scored according to looks, social status, and level of inebriation – she starts to doubt that the fraternities are hiding the rapist. Her suspicions are

confirmed after Lilith House member Claire Nordhouse reports being raped. Veronica follows the clues only to find out that Claire faked her rape in order to implicate the Pi Sig house, which she holds responsible for her friend Patrice's attempted suicide after Patrice was humiliated at one of their parties.

The image of feminism and of feminist activists that emerges out of this storyline participates in and propagates the caricature of "victim feminism" popularized by writers like Katie Roiphe (1994), Christina Hoff-Summers (1995), Naomi Wolf (1993), and Camille Paglia (1994). A narrow, media-friendly interpretation and denunciation of feminist rhetoric, victim feminism is, in Wolf's characterization, " when a woman seeks power through an identity of powerlessness. This feminism takes our reflexes of powerlessness and transposes them into a mirror-image set of 'feminist' conventions" (1993, 147).[4] Because victim feminism is "bad for women," so the argument goes, feminism thus makes women unhappy. By scripting Lilith House's members as strident activists out for revenge, Veronica's successful investigation into the Hearst campus rapes is distanced from both feminist ideology and from any recognition of the need for collective action against sexual violence.

As I note in previous chapters, much of Veronica's – and the chick dick's –

[4] Out of the writers mentioned, Wolf's description is the least hyperbolic. Roiphe, for instance, argues that

> Now, if you're a woman, there's another role readily available: that of the sensitive female, pinched, leered at, assaulted daily by sexual advances, encroached upon, kept down, bruised by harsh reality. Among other things, feminism has given us this. A new stock plot, a new identity spinning not around love, not marriage, not communes, not materialism this time, but passivity and victimhood. (1993, 172)

cultural work is feminist or proto-feminist in nature. Yet as *Veronica Mars*'s third season illustrates, voicing such concerns *as* feminist runs the risk of aligning the chick dick with what seem to be the only images of feminists popularly available: angry, bitter, and conventionally unattractive. As Bonnie Dow reminds us, "television producers work within a medium with established aesthetic conventions, narrative patterns, and expectations. Those constraints are important factors affecting the messages television sends about women and feminism" (1996, xxi). Our current notions of what feminists look like, and, importantly, what "empowered women" look like, made any explicit connection between Veronica and feminism problematic, particularly for a new television network trying to assert itself.

Chick dicks such as Veronica, who rail constantly against the sexual and social exploitation of women, tread dangerously close to a standpoint popular culture has effectively vilified. Like Honey West before her, Veronica's active, assertive independence is part of her appeal as well as part of her problem. The series seemed to struggle with the CW's demands for a show with broad audience ratings that was congruent with the network's teen branding. Emphasizing Veronica's intimate relationships while maintaining the sleuth's hallmark cynicism about heterosexual romance (established in the pilot episode when she remarked, "The people you love let you down"), proved challenging, and many of the series' existing fans were disappointed by its third season (see Kavanagh 2008). While the program's change in home networks no doubt impacted its visibility and its ratings, the character's lack of televisual lineage may also have been more liability than

novelty. Imagining a young, outspoken, and autonomous female detective – a chick dick – still seems to be difficult on network television.

This problem is exacerbated in film. While *Veronica Mars*'s third season encountered difficulties trying to balance the protagonist's reservations about intimacy with television's tendency to depict women as primarily relational, such a strategy seems unthinkable in mainstream film. Linda Mizejewski suggests this is a central reason for the lack of autonomous female detectives in the movies: "this is the quality of the woman investigator – her deep skepticism about men's relationships with women – that has made her so valuable in print, so scary on film" (2004, 172). The 1991 film adaptation of Sara Paretsky's novels, *V.I. Warshawski* (Kanew), exemplifies the tensions that continue to characterize action-chick protagonists. Manina Jones charges that the film "systematically reassimilat[es] the figure of the feminist detective into a collection of conservative cultural norms," and that the drastic revisions to Paretsky's protagonist indicate institutional anxieties "about detection as a figure for women's agency in general" (1999, 24).

For instance, the film deliberately domesticates its heroine. The "implicit imperative of transforming the professional detective into a wife and mother" manifests in a convoluted retelling of Paretsky's first two novels (Jones 1999, 27). V.I.'s cousin is rewritten into an unrelated hunk hanging out at her local watering hole, and V.I. somehow ends up with custody of his daughter Kat after he is killed in a mysterious explosion. Kat and V.I. go after Kat's absentee mother, whose major crime appears to be remarrying (and then killing her second husband). Kat's presence helps rehabilitate V.I.'s errant boyfriend Murray, who is a platonic

colleague in the book series, and the movie ends with the three creating a cozy family life, in direct contrast to how the novels "offer alternatives to the nuclear family and often document the defects of its patriarchal structure" (Jones 1999, 27).

These striking changes to Paretsky's original storylines echo the narrative trope of "miswanting" in chick flicks that I discuss in Chapter Four. They also demonstrate how industrial investments exert pressure on the kinds of ways women are envisioned. In addition to this domestication – exscripting women's professional lives to situate them in the home – films frequently sexualize investigative females, resulting in what Marc O'Day (2004) calls contemporary "action babe cinema." Films like *Tomb Raider* (West 2001), *Charlie's Angels* (McG 2000), and *Kill Bill* (Tarantino 2003) extend the iconography and narrative possibilities opened up by 1980s and 1990s' action heroines like Ellen Ripley, Clarice Starling, or Sarah Connor. A "response of some kind to feminism," earlier female action figures were often, as many critics pointed out, sexualized in order to offset their threateningly powerful presence: "images of women seem to need to compensate for the figure of the active heroine by emphasizing her sexuality, her availability within traditional feminine terms" (Tasker 1993, 15 & 19; see also E. Hills 1999; Holmlund 1994; Inness 2004; McCaughey and King 2001; Read 2000; Williams 2004).

These "action bodies," as Mizejewski calls them, continue to be a site for working out how to both represent and deal with women and power (2004, 141). As I note throughout the previous chapters, the female body bears a significant burden of postfeminism's ideal feminine subjectivity. Its appearance is meant to reflect self-care (in terms of dieting and exercise as narrated in Chapter Four) and

self-identity (via the clothing and hairstyles, for instance, that I discussed in Chapter One), qualities cleverly divorced from their cultural context by the consumerist rhetoric of individualism and empowerment. Current action babe cinema perpetuates these discourses, reiterating "the ideological givens of patriarchal consumer culture – yes, beautiful, well-qualified women are sometimes best placed to succeed in a competitive, individualist, appearance-obsessed meritocracy – to produce potent fantasies of female empowerment" (O'Day 2004, 216). In doing so, such blockbuster films further entrench the ways in which women – or, more precisely, chicks – are seen as powerful predominantly because of their sexuality.

As a result, Mizejewski suggests, "Picturing the *body* of the female investigator has always been the crux of this character's problem" (2004, 165). This problem extends past the more lighthearted or comedic fare of a film like *Charlie's Angels* to typify female investigators in dramas as well. For example, Tasker (1998) points to how the recurring trope of the female cop going undercover as a prostitute manages to sexualize protagonists, while implicitly generating anxiety about the power of female sexuality. This narrative device "functions both to comment on and reaffirm the extent to which women's work involves sexual display and/or sexual performance" (Tasker 1998, 93).

While it seemed plausible to argue, in the mid-1990s, that the "action film is a form which puts into question the terms of the gendered representation of power," the recent wave of action babe films makes such a stance more difficult today (Tasker 1993, 31). The spectacle of female action bodies is reinforced by their "extra-textual eroticization," as such films' stars frequently grace the covers of

magazines like *FHM* and *Maxim*, while their stringent diet and exercise regimes are detailed for women in publications like *Cosmo* and *Shape* (O'Day 2004, 206; see also Robbins 2006). The kind of chick dick I investigate here has a hard time voicing her dissent within this cultural machinery. As I show throughout this dissertation, the chick dick sees the sexualization of women, and the exploitation of women's sexuality, as a problem. Such politics are hard to popularize in a filmmaking milieu that archly suggests it has already acknowledged these feminist critiques. Mizejewski characterizes this attitude as "We *know* better now, so it's OK to put women investigators back into bikinis and halter tops" – irony marshaled to deflect critique (2004, 165-6).

"Ironic incorporation" is one of the tactics that makes postfeminism so politically messy (R. Gill 2003). Feminism and anti-feminism become entangled as this tactic references feminist critiques of sexual objectification, and then dismisses them as an issue already settled; "a spectre of feminism is invoked so that it might be undone" (McRobbie 2004b, 259). When Rosalind Gill decides *not* to find irony amusing, she notes that "we are left with a fast-growing area of media content . . . that is chillingly misogynist, inviting men to evaluate women only as sexual objects" (2007b, 160). Yet doing so, we risk ridicule as humourless feminists that cannot take a joke. As I noted earlier, contemporary media culture has stereotyped and vilified the feminist so thoroughly that such a position is not just unpopular but almost uninhabitable in mass-market media texts. Chick dick texts reflect this difficulty.

To Be Continued…

I began this project eager to share my discovery of an otherwise unrecognized feminist figure. As I progressed, however, I realized that these are not straightforwardly feminist texts, and that charting the ways in which this character is not feminist would merely reproduce an already well-worn framework, what Charlotte Brunsdon terms the "Ur feminist article" (2005, 112). Instead, I chose to use this set of texts to interrogate postfeminism, while keeping an eye open for the spaces that emerge for feminist and proto-feminist voices to be heard. Recognizing that chick dick texts are not straightforwardly feminist texts also recognizes postfeminism's complexity; chick dicks' complaints – and complacencies – about the feminine good life illustrate why we need to intervene in postfeminist discourses about what women want.

These discourses, like the texts themselves, are often silent about many of the (less marketable) conditions in which women live. Chick dick texts grapple with issues of gender identity and performance (Chapter One), social space and sexual safety (Chapter Two), masculinities and sexualized violence (Chapter Three), romance, relationships, and the new traditionalism (Chapter Four). They are less vocal, however, about how factors such as race and class colour the heroines' experiences. The chick dicks in this study are uniformly white, a position that remains unmarked insofar as the texts' racial anxieties target other characters. In some instances, a supporting character's race helps normalize the chick dick, offsetting her otherwise troublesome qualities by juxtaposing them against those of her more "excessive" counterpart. This is clearly the case in the Evanovich series.

Steph's sidekick Lula is unabashedly proud of her big body and her sexual appetites; these potentially positive traits are "othered" by Lula's blackness, against which Steph's insecurities appear normal (O'Reilly 2009).

Evanovich's novels repeatedly caricature and criminalize ethnic others: sexist Arabs in *Hot Six*, prudish Indians in *To The Nines*, and the previously discussed animalistic black male sexuality, via the recurring figure of psychopathic boxer Ramirez (see Chapter Three). Interestingly, the only black character that appears in Henderson's Sam Jones books is also a male suspected of murder – Derek, one of Sam's co-workers at a local co-op gym. The novel attempts to highlight the cultural prevalence of such stereotyping, for while the gym's group of employees is certain Derek is innocent, they know that deeply rooted racism will impact his case:

> "It's never that hard to convince some white people that black men can't control their urges, Sam. They'll say it was a quarrel and he snapped" . . .
>
> It was easy to imagine some prosecution lawyer putting Derek in the witness box and trying to wind him up, letting the jury see how tall he was, how strong, and then reading out Linda's height and weight. And skin colour. (*Too Many Blondes*, 84)

While this nod to systemic racism seems laudable, it rings hollow in the larger context of the book series, as Derek is the only non-white character to appear across Henderson's seven books.

Veronica Mars' treatment of Neptune's racial and class tension is more thorough-going, and the two are consistently linked, a strategy for which the series

was lauded (Abernethy 2004). Zip codes divide the rich from the poor, an axis that also maps the town's white and Latino population. Race and class prejudices simmer throughout the series, generating both individual episodes and season-long storylines. Veronica's own downward shift in social status is emphasized, as she and her father continually struggle to make ends meet. Steph and Sam are in similar circumstances, often selling off their furniture and eating nothing but peanut butter sandwiches between paycheques. Robin is an exception in this regard; more closely aligned with the typical chick lit protagonist in terms of professional success, her career in television journalism affords her more financial freedom and, consequently, less reflection about her privileged circumstances.

Delving more deeply into chick narratives also necessitates a closer examination of neoliberalism. Briefly, neoliberalism is "both a political discourse about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance" (Larner 2000, 6). Chick texts' often apolitical emphasis on individual empowerment through (consumer) choice situates them squarely within this broader political economic current, yet they are rarely analyzed from this perspective (see Butler and Desai 2008; R. Gill 2007b; Gill and Scharff, forthcoming; McRobbie 2008; Vavrus 2002). As Pamela Butler and Jigna Desai accurately charge, "[c]ritical readings of chick lit are typically limited to a framework that understands the genre as a sign or symptom of 'postfeminism' in the U.S. This analytical frame generates readings of the genre that reflect and reenact the limitations of hegemonic U.S. feminist thought" (2008, 2).

Like postfeminism, neoliberalism is politically messy, and, as I have been

suggesting about postfeminism, "[o]nly by theorizing neoliberalism as a multi-vocal and contradictory phenomenon can we make visible the contestations and struggles that we are currently engaged in" (Larner 2000, 21). More sustained attention to chick texts as both produced by and productive of neoliberalism will open up ways to see how, when they circulate globally, these texts deal with social differences beyond femininity. That such issues have been given short shrift in this project should not be read as indifference. I draw attention to them here to indicate how postfeminist texts generate multiple avenues for criticism, and to identify additional trajectories for future research. This project's primary aim is to contribute to feminist dialogues that are now hitting their stride around critical and political interventions into postfeminist discourses that posit feminism as finished, now merely a lifestyle. By unpacking gendered configurations of social and sexual power, personal and professional exploitation, and sexualized violence, I challenge the images of female freedom and choice currently in circulation.

Near the end of *Veronica Mars*' final season, Veronica quipped to a skeptical (male) client, "A girl, a teenager, a private detective – I'm a triple threat" ("I Know What You'll Do Next Summer"). That such a combination continues to be perceived as threatening, and, more importantly, that Veronica recognizes the trouble she represents, is a clear indication of the still-limited popular perceptions of what counts as "female." In *Pretty Boy*, the latest installment in Henderson's series of novels, Sam remarks: "I had always loathed the concept of post-feminism, but sometimes, reluctantly, I had to admit its existence" (152). Yet by channeling our antipathy into a thoughtful, critical engagement with its existence,

postfeminism becomes visible and even changeable – to the extent that skills rather than gender may come to define the troublesome detective. With this in mind, I modify Raymond Chandler's famous description of the detective's heroism: "If there were enough like her, the world would be a safe place for women to live in, without becoming too dull to be worth living in. Such is my faith."

Works Cited

Abernethy, Michael. 2004. Veronica Mars. *PopMatters*, October 4. http://www.popmatters.com/tv/reviews/v/veronica-mars-2004.shtml (accessed 30 June 2009).

Ahmed, Sara. 2007. Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness. *New Formations* 63: 121-37.

Akass, Kim and Janet McCabe, eds. 2004. *Reading Sex and the City*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Alias. 2001-2006. ABC.

Ally McBeal. 1997-2002. Fox.

Anderson, Sheryl J. 2005. *Killer Heels.* New York: St. Martin's Minotaur.

Anderson, Sheryl J. 2006. *Killer Cocktail.* New York: St. Martin's Minotaur.

Anderson, Sheryl J. 2007. *Killer Deal.* New York: St. Martin's Minotaur.

Anderson, Sheryl J. 2008. *Killer Riff.* New York: St. Martin's Minotaur.

The Avengers. 1961-1969. ITV.

Bartholomew, Nancy. 1999. *The Miracle Strip.* New York: St. Martin's.

Baumgardner, Jennifer and Amy Richards. 2004. Feminism and Femininity: Or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Thong. In *All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity,* ed. A. Harris, 59-67. London: Routledge.

Bellafante, Ginia. 1998. Feminism: It's All About Me! *Time* 151 (25): 54-60.

Benjamin, Walter. 1978. *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. Peter Demetz. New York: Schocken Books.

Berglund, Birgitta. 2000. Desires and Devices: On Women Detectives in Fiction. In *The Art of Detective Fiction,* ed. W. Chernick, M. Swales and R. Vilain, 138-52. London: MacMillan Press.

Berlant, Lauren. 2008. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Bertens, Hans and Theo D'haen. 2001. *Contemporary American Crime Fiction*. New York: Palgrave.

Beuka, Robert. 2004. *SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Bly, Robert. 1990. *Iron John: A Book About Men*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Bold, Christine. 2003. "Under The Very Skirts Of Britannia": Re-Reading Women In The James Bond Novels. In *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader*, ed. Christoph Lindner, 169-83. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bones. 2005-Present. Fox.

Bordo, Susan. 1999. *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Braithwaite, Andrea. 2008. "That girl of yours – she's pretty hardboiled, huh?": Detecting Feminism in *Veronica Mars*. In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, 132-49. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Brand, Dana. 1991. *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American* Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Braun, Lilian Jackson. 1998. *The Cat who Tailed a Thief*. New York: Penguin.

Bridget Jones' Diary. 2001. Dir. Sharon Maguire.

Brittan, Arthur. 1989. *Masculinity and Power*. Oxford; New York: Basil Blackwell.

Brooks, Ann. 1997. *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms.* New York: Routledge.

Brooks Gardner, Carol. 1995. *Passing By: Gender and Public Harassment*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Brunsdon, Charlotte. 1997. *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes*. London and New York: Routledge.

Brunsdon, Charlotte. 2005. Feminism, Postfeminism, Martha, Martha, and Nigella. *Cinema Journal* 44 (2): 110-16.

Bruzzi, Stella and Pamela Church Gibson. 2004. "Fashion Is The Fifth Character": Fashion, Costume And Character In *Sex And The City*. In *Reading Sex and the City*, ed. Kim Akass and Janet McCabe, 115-29. London: I.B. Tauris.

Buck-Morss, Susan. 1986. The *Flaneur*, The Sandwichman and The Whore: The Politics of Loitering. *New German Critique*. 39: 99-140.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer. 1997-2003. WB.

Bush, Nancy. 2006. *Candy Apple Red.* New York: Kensington.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1993a. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York & London: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1993b. Imitation and Gender Insubordination. In *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove et al, 307-20. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Pamela and Jigna Desai. 2008. Manolos, Marriage, and Mantras: Chick-Lit Criticism and Transnational Feminism. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 8(2): 1-31.

Cagney & Lacey. 1982-1988.CBS.

Caputi, Jane. 1999. The Pornography Of Everyday Life. In *Mediated Women: Representations in Popular Culture*, ed. M. Myers, 57-79. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Chandler, Raymond. 1944. The Simple Art of Murder. *Atlantic Monthly*. December: 53-9.

Charlie's Angels. 1976-1981. ABC.

Charlie's Angels. 2000. Dir. McG.

Clark, Danae. 1990. *Cagney & Lacey*: Feminist Strategies of Detection. In *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular*, ed. M. E. Brown, 117-33. London: Sage Publications.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2004. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism.* New York: Routledge.

Confessions of a Shopaholic. 2009. Dir. P. J. Hogan.

Connell, R.W. 2005. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Connell, R.W. and James Messerschmidt. 2005. Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society* 19(6): 829-59.

Consalvo, Mia. 2003. The Monsters Next Door: Media Constructions of Boys and Masculinity. *Feminist Media Studies* 3(1): 27-45.

C.S.I.: Crime Scene Investigation. 2000-Present. CBS.

D'Acci, Julie. 1994. *Defininining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney & Lacey.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

D'Acci, Julie. 1997. Nobody's Woman? *Honey West* and the New Sexuality. In *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin, 72-93. New York: Routledge.

Dana, Rebecca. 2008. It's No Gossip, Ratings Slip Threatens CW Network. *The Wall Street Journal,* May 16, http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB121089546043097065.html (accessed 14 June 2009).

Davis, Glyn and Kay Dickinson. 2004. Introduction. In *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity*, ed. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson, 1-13. London: BFI.

de Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Deem, Melissa. 2003. Disrupting The Nuptials At The Town Hall Debate: Feminism And The Politics Of Cultural Memory In The USA. *Cultural Studies* 17(5): 615-47.

Die Hard. 1988. Dir. John McTiernan.

Dobash, Emerson and Russell Dobash. 1998. Eds. *Rethinking Violence Against Women.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Domosh, Mona. 2001. The "Women Of New York": A Fashionable Moral Geography. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 19: 573-92.

Donadio, Rachel. 2006. The Chick-Lit Pandemic. *New York Times Book Review,* March 19: 3.

Dow, Bonnie. 1996. *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Dow, Bonnie. 2006. The Traffic in Men and the *Fatal Attraction* of Postfeminist Masculinity. *Women's Studies in Communication* 29(1): 113-31.

Ebert, Teresa. 1992. Detecting the Phallus: Authority, Ideology, and the Production of Patriarchal Agents in Detective Fiction. *Rethinking Marxism* 5(3): 6-28.

Edwards, Tim. 1997. *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society*. London: Cassell.

Edwards, Tim. 2006. *Cultures of Masculinity*. London and New York: Routledge.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. 1984. *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Ellis, John. 2000. *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Enloe, Cynthia. 2000. *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Evanovich, Janet. 1994. *One For the Money*. New York: HarperCollins.

Evanovich, Janet. 1996. *Two For the Dough*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Evanovich, Janet. 1997. *Three to Get Deadly*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 1998. *Four to Score*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 1999. *High Five*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 2000. *Hot Six*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 2001. *Seven Up*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 2002. *Hard Eight*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 2003. *To The Nines*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 2004. *Ten Big Ones*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 2005. *Eleven On Top*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 2006. *Twelve Sharp*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 2007. *Lean Mean Thirteen*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 2008. *Fearless Fourteen*. New York: St. Martin's.

Evanovich, Janet. 2009. *Finger Lickin' Fifteen*. New York: St. Martin's.

Faludi, Susan. 1991. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. New York: Doubleday.

Faludi, Susan. 1999. *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*. New York: William Morrow.

Faludi, Susan. 2007. *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Faulkner, Wendy. 2001. The Technology Question in Feminism: A View From Feminist Technology Studies. *Women's Studies International Forum* 24(1): 79-95.

Felski, Rita. 1989. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ferriss, Suzanne and Mallory Young, eds. 2006. *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*. New York: Routledge.

Flashdance. 1983. Dir. Adrian Lyne.

Fluke, Joanne. 2006. *Chocolate Chip Cookie Murder*. New York: Kensington.

Fluke, Joanne. 2009. *Cream Puff Murder*. New York: Kensington.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon et al. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, Michel. 1982/1994a. The Subject and Power. In *Michel Foucault: Power*, ed. J. D. Faubion, 326-48. New York: The New Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1982/1994b. Technologies of the Self. In *The Essential Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, 145-73. New York and London: The New Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1986. *The Care of the Self.* Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, Michel. 1997/2007. *The Politics of Truth*. Ed. Sylvere Lotringer. Trans. Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

Friedan, Betty. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Norton.

Frisby, David. 1994. The *Flâneur* And Social Theory. In *The Flâneur*. Ed. Keith Tester, 81-110. London and New York: Routledge.

Fuchs, Cynthia. 1993. The Buddy Politic. In *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, 194-212. London and New York: Routledge.

Gamble, Sarah. 1999. Postfeminism. In *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Postfeminism,* ed. S. Gamble. New York: Routledge.

Gardiner, Judith Kegan. 2002. Introduction. In *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions*, ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner, 1-30. New York: Columbia University Press.

Gardner, Carol Brooks. 1995. *Passing By: Gender and Public Harassment*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Garrison, Ednie Kaeh. 2000. U.S. Feminism – Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologics of the Third Wave. *Feminist Studies* 26(1): 141-70.

Genz, Stephanie. 2006. Third Way/ve: The Politics of Postfeminism. *Feminist Theory*. 7(3): 333-53.

Gever, Martha. 2005. The Spectacle Of Crime, Digitized: *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* And Social Anatomy. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 8(4): 445-63.

Ghost Whisperer. 2005-Present. CBS.

Gill, Jo. 2005. Introduction. In *Modern Confessional Writing: New Critical Essays*, ed. Jo Gill, 1-10. New York and London: Routledge.

Gill, Rosalind. 2003. From Sexual Objectification to Sexual Subjectification: The Resexualization of Women's Bodies in the Media. *Feminist Media Studies* 3(1): 100-6.

Gill, Rosalind. 2007a. Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10(2): 147-66.

Gill, Rosalind. 2007b. Critical Respect: The Difficulties and Dilemmas of Agency and "Choice" for Feminism. *European Journal of Women's Studies*. 14(1): 69-80.

Gill, Rosalind and Elena Herdieckerhoff. 2006. Rewriting the Romance: New Femininities in Chick Lit? *Feminist Media Studies* 6(4): 487-504.

Gill, Rosalind and Christina Scharff. Forthcoming. *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Identity.* New York: Palgrave.

Gillis, Stacy and Rebecca Munford. 2004. Genealogies and Generations: the Politics and Praxis of Third Wave Feminism. *Women's History Review* 13(2): 165-82.

Gilmore Girls. 2000-2007. WB.

The Girl From U.N.C.L.E. 1966-1967. NBC.

Girls Gone Wild. 1998. Dir. Joe Francis.

Glassner, Barry. 1999. *The Culture of Fear*. New York: Basic Books.

Gordon, Margaret and Stephanie Riger. 1989. *The Female Fear*. New York: Free Press.

Greco, Albert N., Clara E. Rodriguez and Robert M. Wharton. 2007. *The Culture and Commerce of Publishing in the 21st Century*. Stanford: Stanford Business Books.

Guerrero, Lisa A. 2006. "Sistahs Are Doin' It for Themselves": Chick Lit in Black and White. In *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. S. Ferriss and M. Young, 87-102. New York: Routledge.

Gurley Brown, Helen. 1962/2004. *Sex and the Single Girl*. Lyndhurst, NJ: Barnes & Noble.

Halberstam, Judith. 1998. *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Hall, Rachel. 2004. It Can Happen to You: Rape Prevention in the Age of Risk Management. *Hypatia* 19(3): 1-19.

Hanke, Robert. 1990. Hegemonic Masculinity in *thirtysomething*. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7(3): 231-48.

Hanke, Robert. 1998. Theorizing Masculinity With/in the Media. *Communication Theory* 8(2): 183-201.

Harris, Lynn. 2007. *Death By Chick Lit*. New York: Berkley Books.

Hartley, John. 1997. The Sexualization Of Suburbia: The Diffusion Of Knowledge In The Postmodern Public Sphere. In *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone, 180-216. London; New York: Routledge.

Hawkesworth, Mary. 2004. The Semiotics of Premature Burial: Feminism in a Postfeminist Age. *Signs* 29(4): 961-84.

Hayter, Sparkle. 1994. *What's a Girl Gotta Do?* New York: Penguin.

Hayter, Sparkle. 1996. *Nice Girls Finish Last*. New York: Penguin.

Hayter, Sparkle. 1997. *Revenge of the Cootie Girls.* New York: Penguin.

Hayter, Sparkle. 1998. *The Last Manly Man*. New York: Penguin.

Hayter, Sparkle. 2000. *The Chelsea Girl Murders*. New York: Penguin.

Henderson, Lauren. 1995. *Dead White Female*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Henderson, Lauren. 1996. *Too Many Blondes*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Henderson, Lauren. 1997. *Black Rubber Dress*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Henderson, Lauren. 1998. *Freeze My Margarita*. London: Hutchinson.

Henderson, Lauren. 1999. *The Strawberry Tattoo*. London: Hutchinson.

Henderson, Lauren. 2000. *Chained*. New York: Random House.

Henderson, Lauren. 2001. *Pretty Boy*. London: Hutchinson.

Henderson, Lauren and Stella Duffy. 2006. *Tart City*. Available from http://tartcity.com.

Henry, Astrid. 2004. *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hepburn, Alan. 2005. *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Hewett, Heather. 2006. You Are Not Alone: The Personal, The Political, and the 'New' Mommy Lit. In *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. S. Ferriss and M. Young, 119-140. New York: Routledge.

Heyes, Cressida J. 2001. Reading Transgender, Rethinking Women's Studies. *NWSA Journal* 12(2): 170-80.

Heyes, Cressida J. 2006. Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers. *Hypatia* 21(2): 126-49.

Hills, Elizabeth. 1999. From "Figurative Males" to Action Heroines: Further Thoughts on Active Women in the Cinema. *Screen* 40(1): 38-50.

Hills, Matt. 2004. *Dawson's Creek*: "Quality Teen TV" and "Mainstream Cult"? In *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity*, ed. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson, 54-67. London: BFI.

Hoff Summers, Christina. 1994. *Whole Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Hollinger, Karen. 1996. *Film Noir*, Voice-over, and the Femme Fatale. In *Film Noir Reader*, ed. Alain Siler and James Ursini, 243-59. New York: Limelight Editions.

Holmlund, Christine. 1994. A Decade of Deadly Dolls: Hollywood and the Woman Killer. In *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation*, ed. Helen Birch, 127-51. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Homicide: Life on the Street. 1993-1999. NBC.

Honey West. 1965-1966. ABC.

hooks, bell. 2004. *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. New York and London: Routledge.

Howell, Philip. 1998. Crime and the City Solution: Crime Fiction, Urban Knowledge, and Radical Geography. *Antipode* 30(4): 357-78.

Hubbard, Phil. 2003. Fear And Loathing At The Multiplex: Everyday Anxiety In The Post-Industrial City. *Capital & Class* 80: 51-75.

Hubbard, Phil. 2004. Revenge and Injustice in the Neoliberal City: Uncovering Masculinist Agendas" *Antipode* 36(4): 665-86.

I Love Lucy. 1951-1957. CBS.

Inness, Sherrie, ed. 2004. *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Jeffords, Susan. 1989. *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.

Jeffords, Susan. 1994. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Jeffords, Susan. 2004. *Breakdown*: White Masculinity, Class, And US Action-Adventure Films. In *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. Yvonne Tasker, 219-34. London and New York: Routledge.

Jernigan, Jessica. 2004. Slingbacks and Arrows: Chick Lit Comes Of Age. *Bitch* 25 (Summer): 68-75.

Jones, Manina. 1999. Shot/Reverse Shot: Dis-solving the Feminist Detective Story in Kanew's Film *V.I. Warshawski*. In *Diversity and Detective Fiction*, ed. Kathleen Klein, 22-37. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press.

Joyrich, Lynne. 1990. Critical and Textual Hypermasculinity. In *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellancamp, 156-172. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Katz, Sherri Jean. 2005. *Degrassi* Then and Now: Teens, Authenticity and the Media. In *Growing Up Degrassi: Television, Identity and Youth Cultures*, ed. Michele Byers, 77-95. Toronto: Sumach Press.

Kavanagh, Robin. 2008. DVD Review: *Veronica Mars* Season Three. *Blogcritics*, July 2, http://blogcritics.org/video/article/dvd-review-veronica-mars-season-three/ (accessed 30 June 2009).

Kelly, Caitlin. 2004. *Blown Away: American Women and Guns*. New York: Pocket Books.

Keene, Carolyn. 1930. *The Hidden Staircase.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Keene, Carolyn. 1930. *The Secret of the Old Clock.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kenner, Julie. 2005. *Carpe Demon*. New York: Penguin.

Kenner, Julie. 2007. *Demons Are Forever*. New York: Penguin.

Kidder, Kristen. 2006. The New Normal. In *Neptune Noir: Unauthorized Investigations into Veronica Mars*, ed. Rob Thomas, 124-33. Dallas: Benbella Books.

Kiernan, Anna. 2006. No Satisfaction: *Sex and the City, Run Catch Kiss*, and the Conflict of Desires in Chick Lit's New Heroines. In *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. S. Ferriss and M. Young, 207-18. New York: Routledge.

Kill Bill. 2003. Dir. Quintin Tarantino.

Kimmel, Michael. 2006. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. 2nd ed. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kimmel, Michael. 2008. *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*. New York: HarperCollins.

King, Neal. 1999. *Heroes in Hard Times: Cop Action Movies in the U.S.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

King, Scott Benjamin. 1990. Sonny's Virtues: The Gender Negotiations of *Miami Vice*. *Screen* 31(3): 281-95.

Kinsella, Sophie. 2001. *Confessions of a Shopaholic.* New York: Bantam.

Kinsella, Sophie. 2002. *Shopaholic Takes Manhattan.* New York: Bantam.

Kinsella, Sophie. 2003. *Shopaholic Ties the Knot.* New York: Bantam.

Kinsella, Sophie. 2005. *Shopaholic and Sister.* New York: Bantam.

Kinsella, Sophie. 2007. *Shopaholic and Baby.* New York: Bantam.

Kipnis, Laura. 2003. *Against Love: A Polemic*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Koskela, Hille. 1997. "Bold Walk and Breakings": Women's Spatial Confidence Versus Fear of Violence. *Gender, Place and Culture* 4(3): 301-19.

Krutnik, Frank. 1991. *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*. London: Routledge.

Landstrom, Catharina. 2007. Queering Feminist Technology Studies. *Feminist Theory* 8(1): 7-26.

Larner, Wendy. 2000. Neo-liberalism: Policy, Ideology, Governmentality. *Studies in Political Economy* 63: 5-26.

Law & Order. 1990-Present. NBC.

Leach, Jim. 2003. "The World Has Changed": Bond In The 1990s – And Beyond? In *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader*, ed. Christoph Lindner, 248-58. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell.

Levy, Ariel. 2005. *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. New York: Free Press.

Littler, Alison. 1991. Marele Day's "Cold Hard Bitch": The Masculinist Imperatives of the Private-Eye Genre. *Journal of Narrative Technique* 21(1): 121-35.

Livingstone, Sonia and Peter Lunt. 1994. *Talk on Television: Audience Participation and Public Debate*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lotz, Amanda D. 2001. Postfeminist Television Criticism: Rehabilitating Critical Terms and Identifying Postfeminist Attributes. *Feminist Media Studies* 1(1):105-21.

Mabry, A. Rochelle. 2006. About a Girl: Female Subjectivity and Sexuality in Contemporary "Chick" Culture. In *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. S. Ferriss and M. Young, 191-206. New York: Routledge.

Macek, Steve. 2006. *Urban Nightmares: The Media, the Right, and the Moral Panic Over the City*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.

Malin, Brenton. 2005. *American Masculinity Under Clinton: Popular Media and the Nineties "Crisis of Masculinity"*. New York: Peter Lang.

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. 1964-1968. NBC.

Mann, Patricia S. 1994. *Micro-Politics: Agency in a Postfeminist Era.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Marsh, Katherine. 2002. Fabio Gets His Walking Papers. *The Washington Monthly* 34(1/2): 39-44.

Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

McCaughey, Martha and Neal King, eds. 2001. *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

McCaughey, Martha. 2008. *The Caveman Mystique: Pop-Darwinism and the Debates Over Sex, Violence, and Science*. New York and London: Routledge.

McGee, Micki. 2005. *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

McNair, Brian. 1996. *Mediated Sex: Pornography and Postmodern Culture.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

McNair, Brian. 2002. *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media, and the Democratization of Desire*. London: Routledge.

McNay, Lois. 1992. *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self.* Boston: Northeastern University Press.

McRobbie, Angela. 2004a. Notes on Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime. In *All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity*, ed. Anita Harris, 3-14. London: Routledge.

McRobbie, Angela. 2004b. Post-feminism and Popular Culture. *Feminist Media Studies* 4(3): 255-64.

McRobbie, Angela. 2007. Top Girls? Young Women and the Postfeminist Sexual Contract. *Cultural Studies* 21(4-5): 718-37.

McRobbie, Angela. 2008. Young Women and Consumer Culture: An Intervention. *Cultural Studies* 22(5): 531-50.

Medium. 2005-Present. CBS.

Mellencamp, Patricia. 1986. Situation Comedy, Feminism, and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy. In *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski, 80-95. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Messerschmidt, James. 1993. *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and Reconceptualization of Theory*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.

Meyers, Marian. 1997. *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Miami Vice. 1984-1989. NBC.

Miller, Toby. 2008. *Makeover Nation: The United States of Reinvention.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Mizejewski, Linda. 2004. *Hardboiled and High Heeled: The Woman Detective in Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Mizejewski, Linda. 2005. Dressed to Kill: Postfeminist Noir. *Cinema Journal* 44(2): 121-7.

Modleski, Tania. 1982. *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*. Hamden, CT: Archon.

Modleski, Tania. 1991. *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminis" Age*. London; New York: Routledge.

Moonlighting. 1985-1989. ABC.

Moorti, Sujata. 1998. Cathartic Confessions or Emancipatory Texts? Rape Narratives on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. *Social Text* 57: 83-102.

Moseley, Rachel and Jacinda Read. 2002. "Having it *Ally*": Popular Television (Post-) Feminism. *Feminist Media Studies* 2(2): 231-49.

Munt, Sally, 1994. *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel*. London and New York: Routledge.

Nash, Ilana. 2006. *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Neale, Steve. 1993. Masculinity as Spectacle. In *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, 9-20. London and New York: Routledge.

Negra, Diane. 2008. Structural Integrity, Historical Reversion, and the Post-9/11 Chick Flick. *Feminist Media Studies* 8(1): 51-68.

Negra, Diane. 2009. *What A Girl Wants? Fantasizing a Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Numb3rs. 2005-Present. CBS.

NYPD Blue. 1993-2005. ABC.

O'Day, Marc. 2004. Beauty in Motion: Gender, Spectacle and Action Babe Cinema. In *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. Yvonne Tasker, 201-18. London and New York: Routledge.

O'Reilly, Julie D. 2009. The Legacy of George and Bess: Sidekicks as Normalizing Agents for the Girl Sleuth. *Clues* 27(1): 61-2.

Oliver, Kelly. 2007. *Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex, and the Media*. New York: Columbia University Press.

One Tree Hill. 2003-Present. CW.

Osborne, Peter and Lynne Segal. 1994. Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler. *Radical Philosophy* 67: 32-9.

Osgerby, Bill. 2001. *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-style in Modern America*. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Paglia, Camille. 1994. *Vamps and Tramps: New Essays*. New York: Vintage Books.

Pain, Rachel. 1997. Social Geographies Of Women's Fear Of Crime. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 22: 231-44.

Pain, Rachel. 2000. Place, Social Relations And The Fear Of Crime: A Review. *Progress in Human Geography* 24(3): 365-87.

Palahniuk, Chuck. 1997. *Fight Club*. New York: Henry Holt.

Paradis, Kenneth. 2007. *Sex, Paranoia, and Modern Masculinity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Parsons, Deborah L. 2000. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Peck, Janice. 2008. *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neoliberal Era*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Philips, Deborah. 2000. Shopping for Men: The Single Woman Narrative. *Women: A Cultural Review* 11(3): 238-51.

Place, Janey. 1980. Women in *Film Noir*. In *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, 35-54. London: BFI.

Plain, Gill. 2001. *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality, and the Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Police Woman. 1974-1978. NBC.

Pollero, Ronda. 2007. *Knock Off.* New York: Kensington.

Probyn, Elspeth. 1990. New Traditionalism And Post-Feminism: TV Does The Home. *Screen* 31(2): 147-59.

Probyn, Elspeth. 1993. Choosing Choice: Images of Sexuality and "Choiceoisie" in Popular Culture. In *Negotiating at the Margins: The Gendered Discourses of Power and Resistance*, ed. S. Fisher and K. Davis, 278-94. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Projansky, Sarah. 2001. *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Rabinovitz, Lauren. 1999. Ms.-Representation: The Politics of Feminist Sitcoms. In *Television and American Culture: Feminist Critical Essays*, ed. Mary Beth Haralovich and Lauren Rabinovitz, 144-67. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Radway, Janice. 1984. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Rambo: First Blood. 1982. Dir. Ted Kotcheff.

Read, Jacinda. 2000. *The New Avengers: Feminism, Femininity and the Rape-Revenge Cycle*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Reddy, Maureen T. 1988. *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel*. New York: Continuum.

Reddy, Maureen T. 1990. The Feminist Counter-Tradition in Crime: Cross, Grafton, Paretsky, and Wilson. In *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Contemporary Literary Theory*, edited by R. G. Walker and J. M. Frazer, 174-87. Illinois: Western Illinois University Press.

Remington Steele. 1982-1987. NBC.

Riordan, Ellen. 2001. Commodified Agents and Empowered Girls: Consuming and Producing Feminism. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 25(3): 279-97.

Robbins, Sarah. 2006. My Real-life Strategies for Staying Fit. *Shape* August: 50-1.

Robinson, Sally. 2000. *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Roiphe, Katie. 1993. *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Roof, Judith. 2005. Living the James Bond Lifestyle. In *Ian Fleming and James Bond: The Cultural Politics of 007*, ed. Edward P. Comentale, Stephen Watt, and Skip Willman, 71-86. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Rose, Gillian. 1993. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Rose, Nikolas. 1999. *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. London and New York: Free Association Books.

Roseanne. 1988-1997. ABC.

Ross, Andrew. 1986. Masculinity and *Miami Vice*: Selling In. *Oxford Literary Review* 8(1/2): 143-54.

Ross, Sharon Marie and Louisa Ellen Stein, eds. 2008. *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Rowe, Kathleen. 1995. *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Sawicki, Jana. 1998. Feminism, Foucault and "Subjects" of Power and Freedom. In *The Later Foucault: Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Jeremy Moss, 93-107. London: Sage.

Saving Grace. 2007-Present. TNT.

Schmid, David. 1995. Imagining Safe Urban Space: The Contribution Of Detective Fiction To Radical Geography. *Antipode* 27(3): 180-206.

Seventh Heaven. 1996-2007. CW.

Sex and the City. 1998-2004. HBO.

Shattuc, Jane. 1997. *The Talking Cure: TV Talk Shows and Women*. New York: Routledge.

Smallville. 2001-Present. CW.

Smith, Caroline J. 2008. *Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit*. New York; London: Routledge.

Spigel, Lynn. 1992. *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stabile, Carol A. 1995. Resistance, Recuperation, and Reflexivity: The Limits of a Paradigm. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. 12: 403-22.

Stanko, Elizabeth. 1990. *Everyday Violence: How Women and Men Experience Sexual and Physical Danger*. London: Pandora.

Stasio, Marilyn. 2005. A Girl's Guide to Killing. *New York Times Book Review*, August 21: 14-5.

Stone, Sandy. 1994/2006. The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto. In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, 221-35. New York and London: Routledge.

Strohmeyer, Sarah. 2001. *Bubbles Unbound.* New York: Pengiun.

Supernatural. 2005-Present. CW.

Tasker, Yvonne. 1998. *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge.

Tasker, Yvonne. 1993a. Dumb Movies For Dumb People: Masculinity, the Body, and the Voice in Contemporary Action Cinema. In *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, 230-44. London and New York: Routledge.

Tasker, Yvonne. 1993b. *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*. London; New York: Routledge.

Tasker, Yvonne and Diane Negra. 2005. In Focus: Postfeminism and Contemporary Media Studies. *Cinema Journal* 44(2): 107-10.

The Terminator. 1984. Dir. James Cameron.

Tester, Keith. 1994. Ed. *The Flâneur*. New York; London: Routledge.

Tomb Raider. 2001. Dir. Simon West.

Torres, Sasha. 1993. Melodrama, Masculinity, and the Family: *thirtysomething* as Therapy. In *Male Trouble*, ed. Constance Penley and Sharon Willis, 283-304. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Tropp, Laura. 2005. *The Next Generation* Goes Digital: Technology, the Medium and the Message. In *Growing Up Degrassi: Television, Identity and Youth Cultures*, ed. Michele Byers, 113-126. Toronto: Sumach Press.

V.I. Warshawski. 1991. Dir. Jeff Kanew.

Valentine, Gill. 1989. The Geography Of Women's Fear. *Area* 21(4): 385-90.

Vavrus, Mary Douglas. 2002. *Postfeminist News: Political Women in Media Culture*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Veronica Mars. 2004-2007. UPN/CW.

Wajcman, Judy. 1991. *Feminism Confronts Technology*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Wajcman, Judy. 2000. Reflections on Gender and Technology Studies: In What State is the Art? *Social Studies of Science* 30(3): 447-64.

Walkowitz, Judith R. 1992. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Walton, Priscilla L. and Manina Jones. 1999. *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hardboiled Tradition.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Warner, Michael. 2005. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books.

Watt-Evans, Lawrence. 2006. I'm in Love with My Car. In *Neptune Noir: Unauthorized Investigations into Veronica Mars*, ed. Rob Thomas, 160-9. Dallas: Benbella Books.

Wells, Juliette. 2006. Mothers of Chick Lit? Women Writers, Readers, and Literary History. In *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. S. Ferriss and M. Young, 47-70. New York: Routledge.

Werner, James V. 2001. The Detective Gaze: Edgar A. Poe, The Flâneur, And The Physiognomy Of Crime. *American Transcendental Quarterly* 15(1): 5-21,

Werner, James V. 2004. *American Flâneur: The Cosmic Physiognomy of Edgar Allan Poe*. New York; London: Routledge.

Whelehan, Imelda. 2002. *Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones's Diary*. London: Continuum.

Whelehan, Imelda. 2005. *The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

White, Kate. 2003. *If Looks Could Kill.* Boston: Grand Central.

White, Mimi. 1992. *Tele-advising: Therapeutic Discourse in American Television*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

White, Susan. 2001. T(he)-men's Room: Masculinity and Space in Anthony Mann's *T-Men*. In *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*, ed. Peter Lehman, 95-114. New York: Routledge.

Whitehead, Kally and Tim Kurz. 2009. "Empowerment" and the Pole: A Discursive Investigation of the Reinvention of Pole Dancing as a Recreational Activity. *Feminism and Psychology*. 19(2): 224-44.

Wiegman, Robyn. 2002. Unmaking: Men and Masculinity in Feminist Theory. In *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions*, ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner, 31-59. New York: Columbia University Press.

Williams, Linda Ruth. 2004. Ready for Action: *G.I. Jane*, Demi Moore's Body, and the Female Combat Movie. In *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. Yvonne Tasker, 169-85. London and New York: Routledge.

Willis, Martin. 2003. Hard-wear: The Millennium, Technology, and Brosnan's Bond. In *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader*, ed. Christoph Lindner, 151-68. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Wilson, Elizabeth. 1992. *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wilson, Elizabeth. 2001. *The Contradictions of Culture: Cities, Culture, Women*. London: Sage.

Wolcott, James. 1994. Hear Me Purr: Maureen Down And The Rise Of Postfeminist Chick Lit. *New Yorker,* May 20: 54-9.

Wolf, Naomi. 1991. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. New York: William Morrow.

Wolf, Naomi. 1993. *Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Zimbardo, Philip. 2007. *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. New York: Random House.