The new edition of *Beauty and Misogyny* revisits and updates Sheila Jeffreys’ uncompromising critique of Western beauty practice and the industries and ideologies behind it. Jeffreys argues that beauty practices are not related to individual female choice or creative expression, but represent instead an important aspect of women’s oppression. As these practices have become increasingly brutal and pervasive, the need to scrutinize and dismantle them is, if anything, more urgent now than it was in 2005 when the first edition of the book was published.

The United Nations’ concept of ‘harmful traditional/cultural practices’ provides a useful lens for the author to advance her critique. She makes the case for including Western beauty practices within this definition, examining their role in damaging women’s health, creating sexual difference and enforcing female deference. First-wave feminists of the 1970s criticized pervasive beauty regimes such as dieting and depilation, but a later argument took hold that beauty practices were no longer oppressive now that women could ‘choose’ them. In recent years the reality of Western beauty practices has become much more bloody and severe, requiring the breaking of skin and the rearrangement or amputation of body parts.

*Beauty and Misogyny* seeks to make sense of why beauty practices have not only persisted but become more extreme. It examines the pervasive use of makeup, the misogyny of fashion and high-heeled shoes, and looks at the role of pornography in the creation of increasingly popular beauty practices such as breast implants, genital waxing, surgical alteration of the labia and other forms of self-mutilation. The book concludes by considering how a culture of resistance to these practices can be created.

This new and thoroughly updated edition will appeal to students and teachers of gender studies, cultural studies and feminist psychology, and to anyone with an interest in feminism, women and beauty, and women’s health.
Sheila Jeffreys is Professor in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne, where she teaches sexual politics and international feminist politics. Before coming to Melbourne in 1991, she was active in the Women’s Liberation Movement in the UK from 1973, campaigning against pornography and violence against women, and in lesbian feminist politics. In Australia she is involved in the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. She has written nine books on the history and politics of sexuality.
This series brings together current theory and research on women and psychology. Drawing on scholarship from a number of different areas of psychology, it bridges the gap between abstract research and the reality of women’s lives by integrating theory and practice, research and policy.

Each book addresses a ‘cutting edge’ issue of research, covering topics such as postnatal depression and eating disorders, and addressing a wide range of theories and methodologies.

The series provides accessible and concise accounts of key issues in the study of women and psychology, and clearly demonstrates the centrality of psychology debates within women’s studies or feminism.

Other titles in this series:

- **The Thin Woman**  
  *Helen Malson*
- **The Menstrual Cycle**  
  *Anne E. Walker*
- **Post-Natal Depression**  
  *Paula Nicolson*
- **Re-Thinking Abortion**  
  *Mary Boyle*
- **Woman and Aging**  
  *Linda R. Gannon*
- **Being Married, Doing Gender**  
  *Caroline Dryden*
- **Understanding Depression**  
  *Janet M. Stoppard*
- **Femininity and the Physically Active Woman**  
  *Precilla Y. L. Choi*
- **Gender, Language and Discourse**  
  *Anne Weatherall*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Science/Fiction of Sex</td>
<td>Annie Potts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Sex?</td>
<td>Nicola Gavey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s Relationship with Herself</td>
<td>Helen O’Grady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Talk</td>
<td>Susan A. Speer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Work</td>
<td>Sylvia K. Blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing the Monstrous Feminine</td>
<td>Jane M. Ussher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Capacity to Care</td>
<td>Wendy Hollway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctioning Pregnancy</td>
<td>Harriet Gross and Helen Pattison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting for Rape</td>
<td>Irina Anderson and Kathy Doherty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Single Woman</td>
<td>Jill Reynolds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Encounters</td>
<td>Lisa Baraitser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and Depression</td>
<td>Michelle N. Lafrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the Effects of Child Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>Sam Warner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gendered Unconscious</td>
<td>Louise Gyler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Knocks</td>
<td>Janice Haaken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence and Psychology</td>
<td>Paula Nicolson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Adolescence’, Pregnancy and Abortion</td>
<td>Catriona I. Macleod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Madness of Women</td>
<td>Jane M. Ussher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat Lives</td>
<td>Irmgard Tischner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing Victims</td>
<td>Rebecca Stringer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Psychological Development of Girls and Women</td>
<td>Sheila Greene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Note:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second edition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BEAUTY AND MISOGYNY

Harmful cultural practices in the West

Second edition

Sheila Jeffreys
Beauty and Misogyny is dedicated to my partner, Ann Rowett, with my love, and with respect for her lifelong, determined resistance to beauty practices.
CONTENTS

Acknowledgements x
Preface xi

Introduction 1

1 The ‘grip of culture on the body’: beauty practices as women’s agency or women’s subordination 5

2 Harmful cultural practices and Western culture 25

3 Transfemininity: ‘dressed’ men reveal the naked reality of male power 41

4 Pornochic: prostitution constructs beauty 61

5 Fashion and misogyny 81

6 Making up is hard to do 101

7 Men’s foot and shoe fetishism, and the disabling of women 119

8 Cutting up women: beauty practices as self-mutilation by proxy 139

Conclusion: a culture of resistance 159

References 167
Index 183
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the Australian Research Council for the large grant that enabled me to do the research for this book. I was able to employ two wonderful research assistants, Carole Moschetti and Jennifer Oriel, who not only collected and annotated materials but discussed them with me and made suggestions. I appreciated their enthusiasm for this project and their support in looking at the sometimes difficult materials that had to be analysed.

I would like to thank those friends who read and commented helpfully on the manuscript: Ann Rowett, Heather Benbow, Iva Deutchman. My students in Sexual Politics over the last few years have contributed very useful insights about the impact of beauty practices such as high-heeled shoes on their lives and I have enjoyed my discussions with them very much.
I argue in *Beauty and Misogyny* that beauty practices such as makeup and high heels are harmful to women, and that they are created from, and serve to maintain, women’s subordinate status. This argument is still extremely controversial a decade after it was first published. The ideas have not been taken up, or developed within mainstream feminism or the feminist academy. Nonetheless, this new edition of *Beauty and Misogyny* emerges into a changed political landscape. When I was writing the original manuscript in the early 2000s, there was little sign of a resurgent feminist movement. In fact the book was motivated by the contrast between the increasing barbarity of the beauty practices that women were expected to engage in and the lack of a feminist response. There was a remarkable absence of criticism of the harmful beauty practices that women are culturally required to carry out on their bodies: makeup, depilation, cosmetic surgery, high-heeled shoes, the wearing of degrading and constricting clothing. It was a time when there was little critique of pornography from feminist academics or activists, and little understanding of the connection between pornography and a burgeoning sex industry and the details of women’s everyday lives such as beauty practices, which this book examines. These were the dog days of what has been called ‘third wave’, or postfeminism, the promotion by some women who described themselves as feminists of the idea that women could be empowered by exercising personal choice and sexing themselves up. This time is perhaps best represented by a collection published in 2002 called *Jane Sexes It Up: True Confessions of Feminist Desire* (Johnson, 2002). That book, like many others of the period, attacked the more critical and less individualist feminists of the 1970s and 1980s as anti-sex and puritanical. Presently, however, a new wave of critical, radical feminism is developing online and on the ground that is starting to make these connections. There is vigorous, new feminist scholarship that challenges pornography, but high-heeled shoes are still not on the agenda of feminist debate.
In the 10 years since this book was published, the beauty practices I describe have not become less common, quite the reverse; and in some instances they have become more harmful and degrading. The removal of hair from female genitals, a practice that was in its infancy in the early twenty-first century, has become normalized or even de rigueur for young women. A 2010 study from the USA, for example, found that 60 per cent of women between 18 and 24 sometimes or always remove their pubic hair, and almost half of those between 25 and 29 do the same (Fetters, 2011). Fashions for women have become increasingly humiliating, with the promotion of the 'mini-bikini', which consists of a thong, and brutal ‘slut pumps’, which consist of barely there, transparent sandals with six inch heels.

The cosmetic surgery industry has greatly increased its profits and its scope with the burgeoning development of surgery for women who feel they must conceal the ageing process, and for men and women who ‘transgender’ and seek to emulate the body parts and appearance of the opposite sex. Women’s concerns with the serious harms that ageing does to their status in male-dominated societies, in which women are expected to respect beauty rules and be feasts for men’s eyes, have led to a very considerable increase in the size of the cosmetic surgery industry. In the UK in 2012, despite the economic recession, brow lifts rose by 17 per cent, face-lifts by 14 per cent and eyelid surgery by 13 per cent (Pietras, 2013). The latest promotional TV show on cosmetic surgery is called, tellingly, How Not to Get Old. These concerns have led, also, to some bizarrely dangerous practices. One such is the ‘vampire facial’, in which women, such as celebrity Kim Kardashian, pay to have vials of blood drawn from their arms and then injected into their faces, a procedure which ends up making them look as if they have been beaten up (Pietras, 2013). Vampire facials are promoted as a way to encourage collagen production and make the skin appear smoother. These practices, as this book argues, continue to emerge from and represent women’s subordination; they continue to harm women’s health and women’s opportunities for full human status (MacKinnon, 2006).

The writing of Beauty and Misogyny was inspired by my alarm at the increasingly excited sexual cult on the part of male fashion designers, photographers and pornographers that is focused on high heels. This form of sexual fetishism, with shoes so high that they make walking impossible, reached a peak in the decade after the book was published. In 2008, for instance, major fashion shows in Milan featured fetish shoes as the main attraction (Porter, 2008). At the Prada show two models fell and another had to retreat when her heels malfunctioned. At the Pucci show a model fell and cut her knee, and there were falls at DSquared and Gucci. At other shows such as Dolce & Gabbana and Versace, the Observer fashion writer comments, ‘the height of the heels often became the focus of the show itself’, and ‘extreme shoes have replaced bags as the driving force of fashion’ (Porter, 2008). Unfortunately, these shoes did not stay on the catwalks, but as the fashion industry increased the torturous nature of such ‘women’s’ shoes, high heels became de rigueur for women in public life, such as politicians and lawyers, toppling them from their dignity and undermining the respect in which they might expect to be held.
Women have increasingly made their mark in traditionally male domains such as politics in the last decade (Debaise, 2013), but they were required to show deference to men in their appearance, with high heels, makeup and restricting clothing, inappropriate to the seriousness of their office. Women entering the public world, Beauty and Misogyny argues, are required to self-objectify and enact harmful beauty practices on their bodies if they are to avoid rebuke. This issue is well characterized by legal scholar Deborah Rhodes in the book The Beauty Bias. The Injustice of Appearance in Life and Law (2010). She found that when she was elected chair of the American Bar Association’s Commission on Women in the Profession, she had to adopt beauty practices. As a woman who had never taken particular interest in harmful beauty practices, she was horrified to find that, ‘In many professional contexts, I am surrounded by colleagues tottering painfully on decorative footwear. Some of the nation’s most distinguished female leaders hobble about in what we described in high school as “killer shoes’” (Rhodes, 2010, p. 3). She was ‘struck by how often some of the nation’s most prominent and powerful women were stranded in cab lines and late for meetings because walking any distance was out of the question’. She was nonetheless forced to conform to some extent with the punishing requirements and felt she had to tolerate a makeover of her appearance to fit her new role. As her experience demonstrates, as women advance into more influential roles they are required to make obeisance to the male domination they could otherwise be seen to be defying, by conforming to humiliating and painful appearance rules.

In the last 10 years there has been an encouraging increase in the visibility of women in malestream party politics in the Western democracies. But this cause for celebration is considerably undermined by the fact that they are under pressure to wear shoes that inhibit their walking and can cause them to fall over. Their homage to men’s institutions is exacted through crippling footwear in particular. The promotion of footwear that cripples one half of the population and makes it difficult to walk, which I compare in this book with Chinese footbinding, has influenced even those women whose social status might have indicated they had no need to show their deference to male power. This has demonstrated the disturbing contradiction that exists between women gaining a modicum of equality with men in political life and the highly pornographized culture that some of their male colleagues and detractors participate in through online pornography and woman-hating forums. The first woman prime minister of Australia, Julia Gillard, who was subjected to a vicious campaign of online vilification which included cartoons of her naked body with a dildo attached, and a plethora of other degrading images and epithets such as ‘bitch’, also wore unsuitable, feminized footwear which caused undignified tumbles as she sought to go about her duties (Summers, 2013). Julia Gillard’s shoes were not particularly high heels, just the typical women’s shoes that make walking difficult, distort women’s gait, make it difficult to run or escape danger, and cause falls. She fell several times in public in 2012. On one occasion in Australia there was a security alert during a formal occasion and Gillard was shepherded out of the building somewhat precipitately by bodyguards. She toppled, having to be held up on either side by men, and her shoe fell off and had to be
recovered (Shears, 2012). The resulting press coverage of the woman prime minister having to be supported by men doubtless delighted her enemies, but was not a good look for girls and young women who might aspire to such a role. On another occasion, whilst laying a wreath at Gandhi’s grave in India, the heel of one shoe got stuck in turf and caused her to tumble to the ground (Kwek, 2012). The occupation of authoritative roles by women is considerably undermined when they must display deferential subordination in appearance.

Unfortunately, the practice of requiring women in public life to demonstrate their second-class status by wearing shoes that cripple their movement is alive and well in popular television dramas. The woman prime minister in the Danish television series Borgen wears very high heels even when portrayed as tidying her home. This series has been popular with women precisely because it shows that women can wield authority, but the price is women’s pain. The show was popular with politicians in Scotland and the female deputy first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, welcomed the Borgen star to her country in early 2013. Sturgeon commented, ‘There are bits of the Borgen world that I definitely recognise. I certainly know how it feels to get through a tough day in parliament in a pair of high heels’ (heraldscotland, 2013). The expectation that women in public life should be so fettered and in pain is unquestioned here as it generally is in public commentary. The practice of placing women who occupy positions of authority in shackles is common to television shows and is exemplified in the persons of both of the women who have played the female boss of the police unit in the UK series New Tricks. In both shows the camera gratuitously lingers on the lower limbs and high heels of the female lead characters, suggesting that the shoes serve to satisfy the fetishistic excitement of male viewers, as well as to undermine the authority of the apparently powerful women.

**Feminism and neo-liberalism**

The complete absence of feminist criticism of such practices as the wearing of high heels in the last two decades is the result of the domination of feminist online spaces and academic feminism by a variety of liberal feminism which exempted the personal sphere of life from political analysis. At the time that Beauty and Misogyny was written, and to a large extent still today, despite the emergence of a radical feminist challenge, the main form of feminism online and in the academy was one which was created by and suited to the economic conditions of neo-liberalism. In neo-liberal economic times, citizens were told that their life chances were entirely their own responsibility and that they could achieve nirvana by being active, choice-bearing consumers. Meanwhile, welfare states were downsized and states rolled back their responsibilities to their citizens as they let the market have free rein. The feminism that was produced by these conditions has been called ‘third wave’ or ‘postfeminism’. This form of feminism was inspired by poststructuralist politics and queer theory, and was a light and fluffy, superstructural feminism that concentrated on endorsing and enthuising about the relegation of women to the role of shoppers.
and consumers who received the opium of celebrity culture and the entertainment industry, tempered with an admixture of pornochic. It was a feminism which said that women had achieved their goals of equal opportunity and could now concentrate on exercising their ‘choice’ and agency, and could be empowered by following the precise requirements of the very profitable and influential industries of pornography and fashion. Women were understood to be individuals, with little or nothing in common. They were infantilized with the creation of the idea of ‘girl power’, the foolishness of which is easily understood by comparing it with the idea of ‘boy power’, since men are not called boys and liberation movements that men are involved in are not infantilized in this way. In this period, movements of liberation in general were represented as passed and the idea that structures of oppression might exist was derided even within the ranks of those who called themselves feminists.

Some of the stigmata of the sex industry that, this book argues, have been represented in fashionable clothing and beauty practices in recent decades, such as ‘slut’ pumps, leather and studs and semi-naked fashions, were deliberately adopted by third-wave feminists or postfeminists as intrinsic to women’s resistance. Postfeminists proclaim that feminism should focus upon girls and women expressing their agency and empowerment through sexing up their self-presentation and being active sexual agents. Feminist critics have described it as being recognizable ‘through, for example, “edgy” clothing that combines frilly, pretty femininity with a “masculine” style and garments that suggest a more porn-inspired raunch’ (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 144). In postfeminist times women are seen as powerful because they can exercise choice as consumers; women and girls are positioned as ‘powerful citizens where shopping for girlie products such as clothes and shoes assumes status as an expression of empowered choice’ (ibid., p. 145). This shaping of feminism is very different from the earlier forms of feminism as radical, critical and transformative, which are disavowed in the new model. Postfeminism offers a form of pseudo-liberation in which women compete for men’s attention and the hope of upward mobility with the height of their shoes, rather than working collectively to improve women’s status.

Postfeminism took on an activist face with the phenomenon of ‘slutwalks’. In 2011 the first slutwalk was held in Toronto after a police officer told students at York University that to avoid rape women should not dress like ‘sluts’ (Valenti, 2011). These slutwalks, which subsequently took place in several countries, were ostensibly protests against the sexism demonstrated by blaming rape on women’s provocative appearance. The walks drew thousands of mostly young women who were fed up with violence against women and wanted to show their rage. But many of the women wore clothing associated with the sex industry, in the form of fishnet tights, very short shorts and ripped clothing, and marchers had ‘slut’ scrawled across their bodies or carried signs reading ‘Slut Pride’ (Valenti, 2011). This self-presentation and the term ‘slut’ itself led to forceful criticisms of the slutwalks from feminists involved in challenging pornography and violence against women, such as Gail Dines of Stop Porn Culture, and author of Pornland (2010), who argued that those who planned and promoted slutwalks were co-opted by male supremacist values.
‘Slut’ was an insult that could not be stripped of its male supremacist values of woman-hating, and its deliberate adoption to describe women denoted not feminism but its opposite. Wearing the clothing and insults of the sex industry gained considerable publicity from a male-dominated media which was always happy to show pictures of women half-dressed and wearing ‘sexy’ clothing, but it was not revolutionary. Gail Dines and Wendy Murphy commented in the *Guardian*:

> While the organisers of the SlutWalk might think that proudly calling themselves ‘sluts’ is a way to empower women, they are in fact making life harder for girls who are trying to navigate their way through the tricky terrain of adolescence… Women should be fighting for liberation from culturally imposed myths about their sexuality that encourage gendered violence.  

(Dines and Murphy, 2011, 9 May)

The slutwalk phenomenon should, perhaps, be seen as a good example of what in the last decade has been termed ‘sexualization’ by feminist activists, academics and concerned policymakers.

**Sexualization**

There has been a resurgence of feminist activism which takes a very different perspective from that of the slutwalk postfeminists (Tankard Reist and Bray, 2011). This feminism is intensely critical of pornography and the sex industry and uses the term ‘sexualization’ to describe what was called by anti-pornography feminists of a previous era ‘objectification’, meaning the treatment of women as sex objects for men to toy with for their pleasure. It has concentrated on the years in childhood in which girls are trained into the practices and behaviours of their subordinate status. These women are critical of ‘feminists’ who deliberately sex themselves up, as postfeminists have done, and choose to be sex objects. *Beauty and Misogyny* argues that the origins of many of the more extreme beauty practices described here, such as depilation of the genitals, genital surgeries such as labiaplasty, as well as some of the more commonplace ones such as high-heeled shoes and the wearing of lipstick, lie in the sex industry. This part of the book’s argument could fit into the field of inquiry which is now most usually called sexualization. Both academics and activists have targeted sexualization as a serious social harm, and they argue that the influence of the pornography industry in particular has caused girl children to be subjected to practices of sexualization in which they wear forms of adornment more usually expected of adult women. These practices place them in the sphere of men’s sexual interest, with the result that they are prematurely ‘sexualized’. I have much sympathy with this argument, but some aspects of it worry me. The singling out of the sexualization of children as an area of concern implies that such sexualization is perfectly acceptable if applied to adult women. Objectification is a more useful term, because it applies equally to women and girls.
The concern with sexualization has led to a considerable number of influential reports and recommendations for action in the last decade, all of which have been concerned with girl children. There was no consideration of the fact that adult women might be adversely affected through pornographic beauty practices and fashion, as *Beauty and Misogyny* suggests. Nonetheless, recognition of the effects of the sex industry and its allies upon children was a welcome first step. The first to give meaning to the term sexualization and to articulate the feminist concerns about the problem was the 2007 report by the American Psychological Association entitled *Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* (APA, 2007). This was a response to an increasing concern on the part of health professionals about the harmful effects on girls of what they named ‘sexualization’, in particular harm to self-esteem and the links with eating disorders and other forms of self-harm. They explain that there are ‘several components’ to sexualization which ‘set it apart from healthy sexuality’. ‘Sexualization’ occurs when

a person’s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics; a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy; a person is sexually objectified – that is, made into a thing for others’ sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person.

(APA, 2007)

It is quite hard to imagine how ‘sexuality’ could be appropriately ‘imposed’ upon a person, since imposition is a practice of force. This phrase suggests the main flaw in the report, the creation of an arbitrary distinction between girls, who should not be sexualized, and women, who are fair game.

There followed government inquiries and reports in Australia (Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts, 2008) and in the UK. The UK Labour government commissioned a report which took a specifically feminist approach, following that of the APA (Papadopoulos, 2010), and this was immediately followed by a different report commissioned by the new Conservative-dominated coalition government, which abandoned the feminist approach for one focusing on the family (Bailey, 2011). This degree of interest from lawmakers suggests the impact that concern over sexualization has had in the last decade. In late 2013 several reports commissioned by the Children’s Commissioner for England relating to this issue were published (Horvath et al., 2013; Coy et al., 2013; Beckett et al., 2013). These reports addressed the prevalence of pornography in constructing the attitudes of young people to sexuality, the way in which sex for young people is constructed around the male sexual imperative and women’s requirement to consent, and gang-associated sexual violence and exploitation of girls. At the same time the yearly survey of the attitudes of schoolgirls in the UK by the Guide Association, which now operates under the name Girlguiding, demonstrated the high levels of sexual harassment and resulting lack of self-esteem that they suffered (Girlguiding, 2013).
The combined weight of these UK reports is to demonstrate the extremely hostile environment in which young women live day-to-day. The Girlguiding report puts it thus: ‘girls and young women experience shocking levels of everyday sexism and discrimination at school, on the street, and in their interactions online and with the media’ (Girlguiding, 2013, p. 6). The sexual harassment of girls aged 11 to 21 years old starts at school and continues on the street with six out of ten girls having had ‘comments shouted at them about their appearance at school’, and 62 per cent having been ‘shouted or whistled at in the street about their appearance’. Of the girls aged 13 and over, 70 per cent had further experiences of sexual harassment at school or college including ‘sexual jokes or taunts (51%), seeing images of girls or women that made them uncomfortable (39%), seeing rude or obscene graffiti about girls and women (33%), and unwanted sexual attention (28%) and touching (28%)’ and faced similar abuse online through being sent pornographic photos, or having embarrassing photos of themselves sent to others. When asked about sexism, 75 per cent of the girls felt that it was ‘so widespread in our society today that it affects most areas of their lives’. The girls surveyed were less positive than in previous years about the way they looked. By the time the girls reached secondary school 90 per cent were changing their appearance to meet accepted beauty standards with the majority (77 per cent) of 11- to 16-year-olds saying they shaved or waxed their legs, 64 per cent saying they wore makeup to school, while 40 per cent shaved or waxed their bikini line or wore a padded bra, with only 9 per cent taking none of these actions (Girlguiding, 2013, p. 16). Almost one in four of those aged 16–18 said that they were ‘not very, or not at all, happy’ (24 per cent), which is significantly higher than the proportion saying this in the previous year (14 per cent).

These recent reports on sexualization throw into question the ability of girls and young women to express agency in the adoption of beauty practices. When this book was first written the majority of feminist academic work on beauty practices emphasized women’s capacity to knowingly choose them, but this has changed too. There is now much more critical and nuanced work on the ability of girls and young women to choose, which may make the critique of choice in this book easier to understand and digest. The 2013 report for the Children’s Commissioner for England on the issue of how ‘young people in England understand consent’, for instance, reveals a most alarming landscape of coercion in which school-age girls are pressured into allowing their bodies to be used for sex and sexting. In the research, which used interviews and focus groups, young people said that sexting was ‘part of young people’s lives and is neither shocking nor surprising to them’ (Coy et al., 2013, p. 47). The researchers found pornography use to be so ubiquitous that, ‘the term “Internet” was used by young people as a euphemism for pornography’. The pornography, the authors consider, has a considerable effect on what the boys do to and require sexually from girls – it is sex education, even though ‘the dynamics of the sex of pornography mirror those of sexual abuse more generally’ (Coy et al., 2013, p. 44). The authors argue against the idea that sexualized popular culture is only problematic for children and young people, and call for more criticism of the
way in which ‘being a young woman/man is influenced by sexualized popular culture’ (Coy et al., 2013, p. 45).

When Beauty and Misogyny was written, cosmetics companies were already using manipulative techniques to market their products to young children, as we shall see later in this volume. Such promotion has become more egregious in the present with the promotion of cosmetic surgery to children. In January 2014 a campaign of opposition led to the removal of ‘plastic surgery apps’ available to girl children to download, from iTunes and Google Play. As Laura Bates comments in the Guardian, the apps ‘suggested to little girls that their bodies might not be good enough, that being thin was all that mattered, and that being fat would make you unhappy and disgusting’ (Bates, 2014).

Some academics have been fiercely critical of feminist concern about sexualization, seeing it as constituting a ‘moral panic’, i.e. a confected, puritanical concern about behaviour that is really nothing to worry about, and as a way to regulate the sexuality of young women. Robbie Duschinsky, for instance, takes this view. He argues that a ‘significant strand of feminist media narratives on sexualization have addressed young women as minors, threatened by contamination, and have proposed measures to regulate and nurture female sexuality and desire’ (Duschinsky, 2013, p. 137). Such approaches have nothing whatever to say about the coercive and abusive contexts in which young women seek to explore sexuality. They mostly come from cultural studies academics whose concern is with media and representations rather than everyday conditions of life for girls.

Anti-violence and anti-pornography feminists, however, take a very different approach. Coy and Garner, for instance, argue that sexualization is ‘a conducive context’ for violence against women (2012, p. 285). They argue that such an approach avoids ‘posing direct causal links, yet situates sexualized popular culture within a structural analysis of power’ (ibid., p. 289). They suggest that the controversy taking place amongst feminist academics over sexualization echoes the so-called feminist ‘sex wars’ of the 1980s, in which anti-violence and anti-pornography feminists were challenged by free-speech feminists. The free-speech lobby attacked the anti-pornography feminists as ‘anti-sex’ and referred to themselves as ‘pro-sex’, as if sex were itself some kind of divine good, unaffected by social influences and in need of protection from criticism. The divide between those feminists who argue that sex and sexual practice are constructed to regulate and maintain the subordination of women (Jeffreys, 1990), and those who see sex as beyond reproach, is a very divisive fault line which has in the past defeated feminist attempts at social transformation. It is not clear how successful the defence of the male supremacist model of sex will be in the current wave of feminism.

The aspect of sexualization addressed in this book encompasses cultural requirements that women’s clothing and appearance should conform to the way women are portrayed in pornography and other forms of prostitution. The term ‘sexualization’ is problematic because the phenomenon it is used to describe is not so much about ‘sex’, which could potentially refer to mutually pleasurable activities.
engaged in on the basis of equality, but the packaging of women and their body parts as sexual playthings to meet men’s sexual fantasies. Sexualization is a misleading term when the problem is more accurately identified as objectification or pornographication, terms which identify harmful treatment of both children or adult women through the reduction of both to less than full human status and their consignment to the function of sexual servants for their social superiors, members of the male sex class.

**The genderizing of children**

Third-wave feminists or postfeminists, who are influenced by queer theory and tend to emphasize the delights of ‘playing’ with gender (see Jeffreys, 2014), do not criticize the function of gender differences in creating and maintaining women’s subordination. The more critical feminism now emerging, however, is concerned with the brutal genderizing that has been taking place over the last decade, in which hyperfemininity and hypermasculinity have not only been promoted in popular culture as ways in which adult women and men should behave, but have been extended to very young children. The concern about the sexualization of children has been accompanied by sharp criticism of the way in which extremes of gendered behaviour are being prescribed for them. Whereas second-wave feminists in the 1970s had some success in countering what was called sex role stereotyping in children’s school readers, for instance, in recent decades the practice of creating extreme sex stereotypes for children has come back with a vengeance. It takes the form of beauty pageants for girl children, and the extreme gendering of children’s toys. It is evident in the constricted range of colours acceptable in clothes for boys and girls. Pink has become all-encompassing in clothes and toys for young girl children. Though women and girls are supposed to regard the colour pink positively, there is evidence that powerful forces of male domination, such as the prison system, are aware that it is a colour which represents powerlessness and can be used for the purposes of humiliation. In 2013, legislation was introduced in Queensland, Australia, to enable a more effective response to bikie gangs involved in organized crime. Those charged under the new laws are required to wear a pink prison uniform, with the understanding that this will disempower them and constitute a condign punishment (Lee and Spooner, 2014). The clear implication is that pink is a colour associated with humiliation, but women and girls are expected to wear it in ignorance of its political implications of powerlessness. The genderizing of children, understood here as the harmful practice of inflicting extreme sex-role stereotypes in behaviour and appearance upon children, has reached the point where children are having gender carved onto their bodies through puberty-delaying hormones, cross-sex hormones and surgery in response to their display of gender atypical behaviour.

This practice of transgendering children is the epitome of the social construction of extreme sex (gender) stereotypes. The practices that are identified as indicating that children should be trans- or regendered mostly consist of clothing
preferences, and this offers good support for the argument in this volume as to the importance of differentiated clothing practices in identifying the hierarchy of sex classes under male dominance (Jeffreys, 2012, 2014). Variations from this hierarchy are responded to by the medical profession with brutality because they endanger the edifice of male dominance and female subordination. Little girls who object to party dresses are identified by their mothers as really being little boys, since girls would naturally like them. In one case the mother of a ‘transgender’ child explains that she realized her daughter was a boy when the child cut up her party dress on her first birthday with scissors (Pepper, 2012). When Beauty and Misogyny was first published, this particularly obscene and extreme practice of child abuse had not become a fashionable staple of reality TV shows, YouTube videos and popular advice columns and books. In the last decade, however, adult male-bodied transgender activists have campaigned to normalize and facilitate the transgendering of children. They have done this as a way to shore up their own position as the unfortunate recipients of a wandering essential ‘gender’, positing that if children can be ‘transgender’ then the condition must be innate. This diverts attention from the sexual interest that the majority of men who transgender have in simulating the appearance and behaviour stereotypes applied to women under male domination (Jeffreys, 2012, 2014). Beauty and Misogyny criticizes the creation of sex stereotypes as a harmful cultural practice. The imposition of increasingly narrow stereotypes through the transgendering of children and adults has made the overturning of the idea that the behaviours of femininity and masculinity are natural, even if mysteriously located in persons of the biological sex not usually associated with them, even more necessary in the present.

Resurgence of feminism

Though the imposition of sex stereotypes has become more intense in many ways, some things have changed for the better in the last decade. There has been a genuinely new development since the book was first published – a resurgence of radical feminism in which women throughout the English-speaking world have declared war on pornography and the prostitution of women, and fought against pornographication, the process by which the woman-hating values of pornography penetrate more and more areas of life from the music industry to baby clothes. It seems clear that the critical feminism swept out of the way in the 1980s by the so-called ‘sex wars’, is coming back. The new edition of Beauty and Misogyny emerges into a context in which the pornographication of women’s appearance has reached such an extreme form that it has created its own antithesis in the form of renewed and feisty feminist resistance.

In the USA and the UK there is a renewed feminist activism against pornography. In the USA this takes the form of Stop Porn Culture and is represented by Gail Dines’ book Pornland (Dines, 2010). In the UK the feminist campaigning organization Object targets pornography, lads’ mags and strip clubs (Long, 2012). These campaigns challenge the sex industry and its impact on women’s lives, but do not