

Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche Cattedra di Sociology

Daughters of Feminism

**To be (or not to be) a feminist of the post-everything
generation**

Relatore

Prof. Lorenzo De Sio

Candidata

Chiara Modugno

Matr. 074312

Anno accademico 2015-2016

Contents

Introduction: on why choosing postfeminism, and a structural outline	3
1. Chapter 1: The postfeminist triad: Girl Power, Chick Lit and Gender Maneuvering	6
1.1 Introducing postfeminism: ‘posting’, the axis, and the four tenets of postmodernity	6
1.2 Girl Power: a ‘nineties way’ of doing feminism	12
1.3 Chick Lit or ‘I don’t need feminism’	17
1.4 Gender Maneuvering, from pariahs to alternative femininities	22
2 Chapter 2: Postfeminism in ‘real life’: Femen, the <i>makeover show</i> and Riot Grrrl	27
2.1 “Our God Is a Woman!”: Femen and <i>sextremism</i>	27
2.2 The <i>ugly duckling</i> is turned into <i>The Swan</i> , or ‘the makeover takeover’	34
2.3 Revolution Girl Style Now! Riot Grrrls DIY ‘pink’ revolution	40
3 Chapter 3: Finding the perfect match: when theories meet phenomena	46
3.1 Girl Power and Femen, the unexpected power duo	47
3.2 Chick Lit and <i>The Swan</i> : the body mirrors the soul	53
3.3 Riot Grrrls’ Maneuvering of femininities	60
Conclusion: postfeminist fluidity, from politics to culture	67
Bibliography	72
Abstract (Italian)	78

Introduction: on why choosing postfeminism, and a structural outline

I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.

- Audre Lorde

It is really funny how even cool chicks are sort of like, 'Our moms covered that feminism thing and now we're living in a post-that world', when that just isn't true.

- Lena Dunham

Postfeminism. That word itself carries around an incredible baggage. It has been used and abused by the media, it is on the mouth of the most disparate individuals, it has become a cultural phenomenon, a consumerist culture, a policy-making topic; some people hate it, some love it, instead; some wonder whether it is a good or a bad word, if it is dangerous, or something to believe in when nobody else is watching. After going through the most plentiful and splendid literature on the topic, an epiphanic moment comes to reveal how what is certain about post-feminism, is that there is absolutely nothing to be certain about. This is the main reason behind choosing postfeminism as the protagonist of this dissertation, along with the belief of it being the most stimulating topic for a young woman, daughter and granddaughter of feminists from the previous 'waves', to confront with, trying to make sense of such a controversial new world through the eyes (and glasses) of a certified Millennial.

A crystallized definition of postfeminism is impossible to be provided, for the above-mentioned reasons: this specimen can take the most divergent forms, but still be called the same. The easiest and most unengaged way to describe it is as what feminism has or has not become from the 1980s onwards. A key to a better understanding lays in the meaning of the 'post' prefix. First of all, the 'posting' places postfeminism along with other 'posts', postmodernism above any other (Tasker & Negra, 2007): the latter will have a significant role throughout this essay, as a key to the interpretation of the various phenomena under scrutiny. Secondly, and as far as the pure concept of 'post' is concerned, its meaning is highly ambiguous: on the one hand, it suggests a rupture with *traditional* feminisms of the First and Second Wave; on the other hand, however, it still keeps the 'feminism', so to make the rupture incomplete, or not a rupture at all. Scholars and theories are divided between those two extremes; nonetheless, it is here and elsewhere believed the best way to acknowledge postfeminism to be as «a process of ongoing transformation and change» (Brooks, 1997, p. 1).

Another important note to be added, as far as acknowledging the basics of postfeminism, is the shift witnessed between “feminist *politics* and postfeminist *culture*” (Tasker & Negra, 2007), meaning the transfer of the performing of feminism from the political realm – first- and second-wavers crusades in the name of equal rights, from the right to vote, to divorce and abortion – to the cultural realm, where cultural production serves as a mean to challenge (as it does to reproduce) gender hierarchies of patriarchy. Such a shift was allowed, or caused, by the ‘taking into accountness’ of feminist claims into the political, and the consequent belief that ‘everything has been achieved’ (McRobbie, 2009).

Before moving on to the exposition of this essay’s structural organization, one more preamble has to be presented. It concerns the subjects of this analysis on postfeminism, and their demographic and geographic homogeneity. As a matter of fact, all theories and phenomena here under investigation are all confined to a prevalently white, Western arena. Such a restriction in the sample owns a twofold justification: the first and most practical one concerns the limitations in time and space this dissertation has to abide by; second of all comes the fact that, despite the proliferation of contemporary feminist movements all over the world, and postcolonial feminist critiques, the definition of *postfeminism* chosen in this essay makes it a structurally white and Western reality. In the words of Tasker and Negra,

[p]ostfeminist culture works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer. [...] Assuming full economic freedom for women, postfeminist culture also (even insistently) enacts the possibility that women might *choose* to retreat from the public world of work. Postfeminist fictions frequently set aside both evident economic disparities and the fact that the majority of women approach paid labor as an economic necessity rather than a “choice”. As this suggests, postfeminism is white and middle class by default, anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 2).

Some constitutive features of postfeminism, then, qualify it and confine it to a narrow social category. Those just described are the reasons behind addressing the Western world only, and excluding discourses and criticisms about class and race.

As anticipated, it is now time to engage in the description of the organizational structure according to which the present analysis develops. The essay is divided into three chapters, each divided in turn in four sections. The first chapter will deal with the theoretical. The introductory

paragraph will be dedicated to a general overview on postfeminism: the systematization of feminism into three Waves will be unfolded, with a brief description of the first two, followed by the presentation of postfeminism, its origins and ambiguous character. The subsequent analysis of the 'post' prefix, and the presenting of an axis going from 'pro-' to 'contra-' positions on postfeminism will retain a particularly significant relevance, insofar as they will later on be addressed for each and every theory investigated. The same will happen with the four *tenets* of postmodernity (neoliberalism, internalization, the media and individualization) that will function as a *leitmotiv* along this whole dissertation, and as particular lenses to employ in order to achieve a deeper understanding of each theory, in light of its embeddedness in postmodernity. After the introduction, three sections will follow presenting three main theories of postfeminism or, more accurately, three different branches all comprised under the umbrella of postfeminism, selected as for their representativeness of three completely different ideas on this topic. These three branches are: Girl Power, born in the 1990s after a Spice Girls' 'manifesto', based on the belief in empowerment and the need to adapt feminism to the postmodern world; Chick Lit, originally a literary fiction and television phenomena, whose starting point is considered to be Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones Diary*, that later became a way of life for a generation of young women rejecting feminism and focusing on their femininity; and, finally, Gender Maneuvering, firstly theorized by Mimi Schippers, to describe a phenomenon whereby gender dynamics are challenged and re-constructed through women's performing of alternative meaning-making in local environments. Their scrutiny, as well, will follow the structure of the introduction, going from a general presentation, to the justification of the 'post' prefix, their position on the pro/contra axis, and their relationship with the four tenets of postmodernity.

The second chapter will deal with contemporary or recent-time phenomena, considered to be relevant instances of postfeminism in 'real life': Femen, a controversial collective of female activists from Ukraine, whose actions have resonated all over the globe; the makeover show, a particular kind of reality show entirely focused on ordinary people and their desire to improve their lives with the help of a team of experts – particular attention will be devoted to one show in particular, *The Swan*, due to its extreme contents and shocking development; finally, Riot Grrrls, or Riot Grrrl subculture, a movement from 1990s American punk rock scene, that through the DIY credo, irreverent behaviour and revolutionary means, managed to 'take over', both in the music realm, and in the outside world.

Each of these ‘movements’¹ will be presented starting with their origins, possibly providing background to their emergence, and dealt with according to what are believed to be the fundamental aspects of their development (especially insofar as their relevance to postfeminism is concerned). Finally, the last chapter is dedicated to the investigation of all possible relationships between each one of the selected theories of postfeminism with the ‘real-life’ phenomena described in the second chapter. Girl Power will be matched with Femen, Chick Lit with the makeover show, and Gender Maneuvering with Riot Grrrl. Such an analysis will develop around the same structural organization as that of Chapter One, in an attempt to provide some organic backbone that would possibly be easier for the reader to follow.

1. The postfeminist triad: Girl Power, Chick Lit and Gender Maneuvering

1.1 Introducing postfeminism: ‘posting’, the axis, and the four tenets of postmodernity

What does it mean to be (or not to be) a feminist in the post-modern era? Astrid Henry made a fairly significant statement, entitling her book ‘Not My Mother’s Sister’ (Henry, 2004). The debate around the contemporary meaning of feminism, if it is still possible to talk about feminism at all, offers an incredible variety of (often conflicting) theories of what has been generally defined as post-feminism. The following chapter will supply the reader with some insight on post-feminist literature, attempting to provide some coherence making sense of this incredibly broad whole, with the aim of building backbone to the analysis of recent or present-day phenomena.

The complex and controversial history of feminism has been given a first systematisation, which was to last in the future, when Martha Weinman Lear talked about ‘second-wave’ feminism in her New York Times’ article, in 1968 (Lear, 1968). She used the term to emphasize a rupture in politics and ideals from the feminists of late 19th to early 20th centuries, whose battlefield mainly concerned the fight for power (including, and especially,

¹ Please note how, throughout the whole essay, the term ‘movement’ is not employed in its strictly scientific, or political, definition but loosely, to simply refer to a collectivity or group performing any kind of action resulting in some sort of ‘movement’, or change, in the status quo of modern society.

the right to vote). On the other hand, second-wave feminism, whose starting point is considered to be the 1960s (Farganis, 1994), broadened its scope and focused on such themes as family, sexuality and reproductive rights, as well as the strive for equal rights on the workplace, characterised by “collective, activist politics” (Genz & Brabon, 2009). Consequently, what had been generally defined as ‘postfeminism’ is a further fracture in the feminist discourse. Nevertheless, this so-called ‘third-wave’ – often used as a synonym for postfeminism, especially in the US, while it actually refers only to a specific branch of the aforementioned (Gill & Scharff, 2011) – is way more questionable than its two predecessors, insofar as the multiplicity of theorisations and viewpoints prevent a straightforward classification as a unitary movement. Some scholars identify this profusion and disconnectedness as itself a founding characteristic of new feminisms, which have lost the potential for bonding with each other to develop into a strong, powerful whole. Angela McRobbie calls this ‘disarticulation’:

cross-border solidarities, for example, between black and white feminist and anti-racist struggles, between single mothers and lesbians and gay men also living outside the fold of the nuclear family, are eroded, and [...] feminism’s ‘chains of equivalence’ are broken down. Disarticulation is a defining feature of the process of undoing. Feminism’s wider intersections with anti-racism, with gay and lesbian politics, are written out of the kind of history which surfaces even in serious journalism (McRobbie, 2009, p. 9).

Cyberfeminism, Girl Power feminism, Grrrl feminism, DIY feminism are only a few of the strands whose proliferation has been witnessed starting from the 1980s onwards.

In order to proceed further with a discussion on postfeminism, the first feature that must be made sense of is the ‘post’ part of the term. The prefix is certainly intended to «invoke a narrative of progression insisting on a time ‘after’ feminism» (Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 3); however, the true meaning of it is still unsettled. Some scholars have envisaged it as the symbol of a total rupture, others as just «part of a process of ongoing transformation» (ibid.). Although the affirmation of postfeminism as a phenomenon has been attributed to the late 20th century, the expression made its first appearance in 1919, as Nancy Cott notes, when a group of women:

had founded a new journal on the thinking ‘we’re interested in people now – not in men and women’. They declared that moral, social, economic, and political standards ‘should not have anything to do with sex’, promised to be ‘pro-woman

without being anti-man', and called their stance 'postfeminist' (Cott, 1987, p. 282).

As far as this first instance is concerned, the collective of radical journalists intended to proclaim the success of first-wave feminism, following, most of all, the achievement of universal suffrage, and mark the beginning of a new era, however in continuity with their predecessors. The next time postfeminism emerged, in the early 1980s, its essence had completely transformed.

This time, the cohesion of feminists as forming a unitary whole was far from established. As a matter of fact, scholars debating on the matter disposed themselves along an axis, which might be drawn from pro- to contra- postfeminist realities. A symbolic instance advocating for the former position is all those women who claim "feminism is no longer needed" (McRobbie, 2009). The belief at the core of such an assumption is that the revolutionary fire of first- and second-wave feminisms has now faded, and 'all has been achieved'. Rebecca Walker tries to provide an explanation to the established divide between postfeminist daughters and second-wave mothers, and the reason why the former are not able anymore to abide by the structured norms proposed by their mothers' feminism:

[their] way of ordering the world is especially difficult for a generation that had grown up transgender, bisexual, interracial, and knowing and loving people who are racist, sexist, and otherwise afflicted. We have trouble formulating and perpetuating theories that compartmentalize and divide according to race and gender and all of the other signifiers. For us the lines between Us and Them are often blurred, and as a result we find ourselves seeking to create identities that accommodate ambiguity and our multiple positionalities: including more than excluding, exploring more than defining, searching more than arriving (Walker, 1995, p. xxxiii).

As concerning theories at the opposite pole of the pro/contra axis, their stance is mainly concretized in the opposite direction: an attack of the 'mothers' directed towards their 'daughters', accused of 'misappropriation' of feminist ideals (Genz & Brabon, 2009) through such means as the media, neo-liberalism and individualism. These last means happen to own a much greater role in the postfeminist discourse, so much as to be considered keywords themselves. A brief analysis of their influence on postfeminism will surely allow one step further to be made vis-à-vis its reasoned interpretation. However, before proceeding any further, it is paramount to clarify the position of the present essay on the above-mentioned axis. As Gill, Scharff and McRobbie's analyses – among the others – suggest, the

answer is to be found half-way. The present statement will be clarified as the following discussion unfolds.

Rosalind Gill proposes a theory of ‘postfeminism as a sensibility’ (Gill, 2007), which well intertwines with Angela McRobbie’s concept of ‘double entanglement’ (McRobbie, 2009): a combination of the two will allow an accurate scrutiny of what is behind the first-impressions veil of postfeminism. What McRobbie intends as ‘double entanglement’ is a peculiar characteristic of new feminist realities whereby feminism is both taken into account and rejected: « postfeminism both 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 emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force» (ibid.. p. 12). This process involves both neo-conservative values (i.e. campaigns on chastity and the value of ‘true’ family as only represented by traditional marriage) and instances of liberalisation as far as women’s gained autonomy to choice (particularly in sexual relations). From this ‘taken into accountness’ directly follows the dismantling of feminism itself as a pro-active movement for change, sometimes accompanied by feelings of hate and repudiation (McRobbie, 2003). As Rosalind Gill proposes, a postfeminist sensibility is also reflected in the subjectification of women’s (body) representations:

[a]n emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a ‘makeover paradigm’; a resurgence of ideas of natural sexual difference; the marked ‘resexualization’ of women’s bodies; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference. These themes coexist with, and are structured by, stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to race and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability as well as gender (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 4).

Submitting a fair amount of literature on the subject from the past fifteen years, it is possible to establish the rise of postfeminism being codified principally through four different concepts. The first of them is historical in character: neoliberalism. The Western world witnessed a shift to post-Fordism and neoliberal forms of governance during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Neoliberalism is generally defined as a doctrine characterized by «deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision» (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). In order to comprehend its relation to postfeminism, it should be thought of as what Foucault would call a form of governmentality: neoliberalism, in fact, penetrates diverse realms of society, reaching well beyond the market itself. Some scholars (McRobbie 2009,

Gill and Scharff 2011, Duggan 2003) find that «increased individualism and autonomy often reinstate hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race, and class and breed new forms of power» (Butler, 2013, p. 41). Butler herself, referring to liberalism – in such a way as to straightforwardly recall McRobbie’s double entanglement – argues,

the shift to neoliberal forms of governance in the West nonetheless provides fertile ground for the development of discourses that emphasize consumer citizenship, personal responsibility, and individual empowerment. It is within this complex social, cultural, economic, and political environment that postfeminism emerges as a contemporary gender ideology. Propped up by the (imagined) success of the women’s movement, a sex-positive (and racially exclusive) feminist legacy, and the ever-expanding neoliberal celebrations of autonomy, individualism, and consumer choice, postfeminism surfaces as a more attractive alternative to previous forms of gender politics (ibid., p.41).

During the 1990s, a trend towards consumption and individual gratification, gave rise to a new women imaginary made of «empowered, assertive, pleasure-seeking, ‘have-it-all’ woman of sexual and financial agency» (Chen, 2013, p. 441).

Directly linked to neoliberalism, the second key concept to be mentioned is what scholars have defined as ‘individualization’ or ‘subjectivity’. It has been suggested (see McRobbie, 2009) that the rise of individualization as part of the postfeminist agenda is well explained by Giddens, Beck and Lash’s theory of ‘reflexive modernity’. The ‘second modernity’ forwarded by the three scholars is reflexive insofar as it responds to the consequences of ‘first modernity’ as the latter had done, in its turn, with feudalism (Beck, Bonss, & Lau, 2003). All the institutions forwarded by the welfare state during the first ‘phase’ of modernity – such as education – worked to transform the lives of individuals, emancipating them from direct dependence on the system, and allowing people, for example, to be able to independently earn a living. Those transformations affected women, as well, founding themselves disembedded from a gender-fixed society. Angela McRobbie points out, referring to second-modernity, that «Individuals must now choose the kind of life they want to live. Girls must have a life-plan. They must become more reflexive in regard to every aspect of their lives, from making the right choice in marriage, to taking responsibility for their own working lives [...]» (McRobbie, 2009, p. 19). She then adds that, as a consequence, choice paradoxically becomes a source of constraint – to ‘make the right choices’ (ibid.). Gill and Scharff refer to ‘subjectivity’ as to draw attention to «contemporary modes of power operating increasingly on and through the making and remaking of

subjectivities» (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 8). Postmodern-gained independence from social structures leads to insecurity inasmuch as identity has now to be drawn not from society, but from the self alone.

Two other factors are worth mentioning as backbone to the rise of new feminisms and especially of new femininities; they are strictly connected, considering one is the means to the achievement of the other. Angela McRobbie makes a significant statement about what she calls ‘internalization’ – of feminism into politics – maintaining: «women are currently being disempowered through the very discourses of empowerment they are being offered as substitutes for feminism» (McRobbie, 2009, p. 49). Contemporary Western governments have pursued the incorporation of different feminist claims into politics and policies, claiming their superiority, for example, in comparison with the rest of the world, in the name of such a new achieved ‘freedom’. A brand-new lexicon made of ‘choice’ and ‘empowerment’ sets the way for what McRobbie defines as *faux*-feminism, instrumentalised by Western governments as a symbol of what freedom means now. Such an ‘internalization’, however, brings about «vilification and negation conducted mostly at the cultural level, which makes feminism quite unpalatable to younger women (the words repulsive or disgusting are often used)» (ibid., p. 1). The means through which this cultural rebranding takes place is, of course, the media, the main site of sexual conduct codification and the last keyword under scrutiny during this general introduction to postfeminism. Once again, McRobbie gives a sharp answer to the question of the relation between media and postfeminism:

[f]eminism is taken into account, but only to be shown to be no longer necessary. Why? Because it now seems that there is no exploitation here [...]. She [the woman] seems to be doing it out of choice, and for her own enjoyment [...]. Objection is pre-empted with irony. In each of these cases a spectre of feminism is invoked so that it might be undone. For male viewers tradition is restored or as Beck puts it there is ‘constructed certitude’, while for the girls what is proposed is a movement beyond feminism, to a more comfortable zone where women are now free to chose for themselves (McRobbie, 2009, p. 17).

One way in which this process of double entanglement develops is by purposely ‘enacting sexism’, such as in Wonderbra advertisements, where the model/woman deliberately stares at her cleavage, so as to encourage the ‘male gaze’ – feminism belongs to the past, now women are free not to condemn their bodies like it happened with the ‘traditional way’. On the other hand, the media also offer the audience the recurrent image of the feminist as a “humourless and drab ‘bra-burner” (Genz & Brabon, 2009).

1.2 Girl Power: a 'nineties way' of doing feminism

Following the brief discourse on the rise of postfeminism and its general attributes, three branches of the latter will be the objects of subsequent, site-specific, analysis. The first to withstand further scrutiny is the phenomenon labelled under the name of 'Girl Power' – or third-wave feminism in its specific meaning – that made its first appearance in the 1990s, propagated by the pop-band Spice Girls. Geri, a member of the girl band, declared to *Smash Hits*:

[w]e decided we wanted to be more than a band. We wanted the whole philosophy of the Spice Girls to be like a cult – Girl Power. We haven't invented it – we've just tapped into how girls are feeling. It's like feminism, but you don't have to burn your bra. And the message is: you can do what you want – look the way you want – as long as you believe in yourself (Davies, 1999, p. 163).

Girl Power, contrarily to assertions of feminism no longer being needed, is clearly part of all those movements embracing postfeminism – on the pro- side of the axis – as a valid, proactive and necessary alternative to traditional second-wavers.

As the girl-band made clear in their own book/manifesto: «Feminism has become a dirty word. Girl Power is just a nineties way of saying it. We can give feminism a kick up the arse. Women can be so powerful when they show solidarity» (Spice Girls, 1997, p. 48). Girl Power is then, first of all, something distancing itself from 'second-wavers'; as a movement, it embodies a feminist-ish response to the ever-changing features of post modern, contemporary Western society – in particular, to a process of complexification of gender dynamics which renders traditional feminist claims inapplicable and outdated (Budgeon, 2011). A more up-to-date answer, then, is attained through women's re-appropriation of their own (formerly?) stereotyped femininity, along with girlishness and all the other attributes of the case, re-enacting them with a new meaning – one that is girl-approved. As Genz and Brabon describe it, in their illuminating chapter on Girl Power:

[r]eclaiming elements of femininity and girlishness in fashion and style, Girl Power discards the notions that feminism is necessarily anti-feminine and anti-popular and that femininity is always sexist and oppressive. Instead, Girlies are convinced that feminist and feminine characteristics can be blended in a new, improved mix (Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 77).

Third-wave feminist, then, have nothing to do with old-fashioned ‘bra-burners’, nor with their compulsory criticism of femininity altogether as a patriarchal construct for female oppression.

Gill has identified this phenomenon as a process going from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification (Gill, 2003), meaning girls and women of the contemporary world are ‘empowering’ – and this word is particularly meaningful when addressing the Third Wave – themselves to actually *be* the ones making the choices. Wearing pink and makeup can be feminist, and « [i]n holding tight to that which once symbolized their oppression, Girlies’ motivations are along the lines of gay men in Chelsea calling each other “queer” or black men and women using the term “nigga”» (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 137). Pop culture has especially allowed images being spread through all kinds of media of ‘empowered’ girls and women (Emma Watson and Beyoncé are paramount examples) being paradigmatic in the establishment of how doing it #likeagirl (Our Epic Battle #likeagirl, 2014) is now a synonym for success and affirmation.

Nevertheless, some caution is needed when it comes to discourses on ‘empowerment’. Enlightening, in this case, is a thought from Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz’s ‘Girl Power: Girls Reinventing Girlhood’:

[t]he complexity of girls’ empowerment lies in the fact that girls’ agency comes through a socially constructed girlhood whose formation is embedded in precisely what projects of empowerment must encourage girls to challenge: hidden standards – racialized, ableist, class-based and heterosexist – that are constitutive of Selfhood for girls (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009, p. 104).

What the authors underline here is something of the utmost relevance as far as any discussion on postfeminism is concerned – and that will be further addressed later on: third-wavers as postfeminists of the pro- side of the axis in general are rebuilding their identities and rhetoric inside the exact same logic they ought to fight against. Being sexy is not sexist if I choose to do so for myself; the line inevitably gets blurred, heading to some sort of chicken-egg dilemma where the *primum movens* is never going to be defined without a shadow of a doubt. Girls are choosing to be feminine, but are they? Structuralists would not agree, and ambiguity is right around the corner (Bordo, 1989). A second controversy in addressing the realm of women’s empowerment will be disclosed in the following paragraph.

Notwithstanding the ambiguity surrounding Girl Power’s field of action, something indispensable to take into consideration, as it always is when facing any sociological analysis, is context. It goes without saying context plays a major role in the development of any social phenomenon;

however, when it comes to the Third Wave of feminism, its bond with the cultural background especially is indissoluble (Budgeon, 2011). As was previously stated in the introductory paragraph quoting Rebecca Walker and Astrid Henry, the girls and women of today are socialized in an ultra-diverse, hybrid, globalized, hyper-connected environment, which is nothing like their mothers'. Girlies base their new credo on the rejection of the 'singular liberal-humanist subjectivity' (Reed, 1997) that moulded Second Wave's feminism, and are embedded in a world where crystalized identities of any kind are themselves continuously threatened. No single or fixed woman identity is to be found in contemporary societies – indeed, it is no more possible to speak of 'women's issues' altogether, but it is necessary «to consider that such issues are as diverse as the many women who inhabit our planet» (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003, p. 10). Therefore, if the Third Wave has to be truly representative of new women, it must take into account the multiplicity of feminine subjectivities and of feminist trends and presumably come to the conclusion that there exist no 'right way' of doing feminism (Budgeon, 2011). Even though «multiplicity is endorsed often at the expense of definitional consistency or reliability» (ibid., p. 282), Girl Power precisely embraces such belief and makes it its pillar: women are free to be what they want; along these lines, they are performing the new feminism.

The position of Girl Power on the pro/contra axis, its innovative push – what makes it 'post' – , and 'empowerment' and 'diversity' as its two main keywords have been clarified up to this point. Accordingly, it is now possible to move forward and dive into a further clarification, which is of the greatest interest to this essay. Four tenets at the core of the evolution of postfeminism were presented in the first, introductory, paragraph: neoliberalism, individualism, internalization and the media. The relationship of Girl Power with each of the aforementioned will be the object of the following, and last, section concerning this phenomenon. The interconnectedness is in this case so straightforward that sociologist Shelley Budgeon (2011) discloses the emergence of Girl Power as a reflection of four main political, economic and cultural features of (second/reflexive) modernisation in contemporary Western society, which correspond, as well, to the four postfeminist tenets previously investigated.

First of all, the achievement of a greater measure of gender equality, as far as education and occupational success are concerned, «mean that women are as likely, or perhaps even more likely, to identify with their *generation* than their *gender*» (Budgeon, 2011, p. 280). The strength of the third wave comes exactly from its facility to directly address contemporary feminine

subjectivities. Therefore, as previously mentioned, Girl Power considers ‘empowerment’ – namely, the accomplishment of some indefinite level of ‘equality’, especially when compared to the circumstances Second Wavers had to face – as a given starting point. What is here being called ‘internalization’ of feminist values into the mainstream is at the core of the ‘empowerment’ credo. As presented in the introductory paragraph, McRobbie calls this process ‘double entanglement’ (McRobbie, 2009), meaning that contemporary societies both take feminism into account (i.e. they *internalize* it) – by including, for example, feminist claims in the political realm (policy-making) or in media depictions of society – and reject it as its same consequence. Internalization at its extreme will be disclosed as a feature of the second postfeminist movement analysed in the present essay, second chapter. For the purpose of Girl Power, however, what must be underlined is internalization as a source of ‘empowerment’, not of rejection of feminism altogether. Since women currently hold power positions, they are now free to choose for themselves.

Secondly, it comes maybe the most important factor of all: media, and their renewed depictions of femininity. The controversial relationship between media and (post)feminism has been mentioned before; however, Girl Power is distinguished for its full embracement of all kinds of media representation. Zaslow gives the following definition to the rise of this movement in the introduction to her book:

[o]ver the past nearly twenty years, girl power has represented an expansive media culture that encourages girls and women to identify both as traditionally feminine objects *and* as powerful feminist agents. Girl power media culture has well-defined characteristics that are visible across media and have continued to be relevant over time (Zaslow, 2009, p. 2-3).

The author quotes all sorts of examples from present-day media culture: the Spice Girls in the music realm, ‘The Gilmore Girls’ from the world of television shows, and so on. Each and every one of those cases is a paradigm for the way media offer ‘empowered’ representations of women to the audience, advancing redefined images of femininity as a strength, not a weakness. More and more feminists from the pop-culture arena, as well, are making use of their celebrity to make statements on gender equality and, even more, remarkably, on the *power* of women and girls themselves. Emma Watson is probably among the most outstanding: being UN Women Goodwill Ambassador, she gave a memorable speech (Watson, 2014) launching the ‘HeForShe’ campaign which has spread all over the world through the Internet. The role of media does not come without drawbacks,

partly analysed beforehand: «[n]ot surprisingly, this sexualized, individualistic, external beauty-oriented consumerist attitude has provoked an outcry from earlier feminists for having an uncritical stance that seemingly celebrates patriarchal norms» (Bae, 2011, p. 28).

The third concept, that of neoliberalism, may be thought of as directly derived from the second. On the one hand, media have created a consumerist culture around feminism (ibid.), as well, making women desire a certain lifestyle along with all the features it brings about – therefore building an economy moulded around postfeminism. In the words of Anita Harris, seeing the youth – and girls especially – as the ‘new consumer citizens’, «girls have become the emblem of this consumer citizen via a problematic knitting together of feminist and neoliberal ideology about power and opportunities...» (Harris, 2004, p. 165). On the other hand, post-feminist branches and Girl Power in particular, are themselves daughters to neoliberalism in several respects. First of all, there is the taking into accountness of feminist claims as part and parcel of the neo-liberal agenda (McRobbie, 2009). Secondly, the rise of the service sector, a typically feminized one, replacing manual production and «the shift in the economy from that of production to consumption privileges the feminine through women’s and girls’ long-standing association with consumption (Gonick, 2006, p. 5).

Finally, firmly interconnected with neoliberalism is the concept of individualization. Self-reflection of the subjects generates high levels of insecurity, which in turn leads to a ‘destandardization of life courses’: late modern identities «have become more flexible, mobile and complex» (Budgeon, 2011, p. 280). As hitherto underlined, Girl Power is flexible in its definition: it embraces all kinds of redefined femininities and celebrates self-fulfilment and personal achievements. To conclude, third wavers’ Girl Power emerged carrying out rejection of what had been the tenets of ‘bra-burner’ feminism. The latter was, as a matter of fact, based primarily on what it meant to have been socialised as a ‘girl’ in the 1950s or 1960s. The world at that time «deprived them [the girls] of access to male things and enforced their participation in female things. This left them to assume, and thus promote, the notion that to be a “good girl” you had to master “boy things”. That girls should do this while rejecting femininity» (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004, p. 60).

1.3 Chick Lit or ‘I don’t need feminism’

The second postfeminist strand to undergo investigation along this new paragraph is something less identifiable as a movement *per se*, and more with a general trend diffused mostly among girls and young women of nowadays. It lacks a definite starting point in time and space and a proper nomenclature providing for a specific position in the postfeminist debate. For the sake of this essay, such an unclassified flow will come under the name of ‘Chick Lit’, but is found throughout the literature under the appellatives of ‘Reviving Ophelia’, ‘Bridget Jones’, ‘anti-feminism’ and many more. Some scholars include it under the umbrella of Third-Wave feminism (Genz & Brabon, 2009); however, Chick Lit will here be considered as something rather different, for the reasons later on explained. Probably following a more original path, its relationship with Girl Power and the like will be limited to Chick Lit representing its absolute radicalization: «fragile and vulnerable, Ophelia is shadow twin to the idealized empowered girl» (Gonick, 2006, p. 15). In the hope of remaining faithful to this phenomenon, various theories from different scholars will here be grouped under the same name, due to the inexistence of a unique doctrine to refer to – as it is often the case with postfeminisms –, by virtue of their unmistakably common features. The development of this paragraph will follow the same logic as the former.

The origin of the term ‘Chick Lit’ has to be found sometime along the 1990s: it is often traced back to Helen Fielding’s ‘Bridget Jones’s Diary’, which is believed to have set the stage for all subsequent productions. This genre represents a «female-oriented form of fiction and a highly successful and commercial literary phenomenon» (Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 84) representing for the first time the lives and battles of young – mainly British or American – women trying to find an equilibrium between career-making and (usually romantic) relationships (Ferriss & Young, 2008). Nonetheless, the relevance of this genre reaches far beyond movies and books: it has become what may be referred to as ‘subculture’, meaning an incredible number of young women and girls began identifying with their Chick Lit idols, mimicking their lifestyle and embracing their values. Although many of the wording of this wide pop-culture phenomenon clearly resonates with Girl Power – both realities are daughters to the same social developments, as will later on be explained –, the reason this essay takes them as two completely separate realities is the (different) way women internalized such developments.

The 'Chick Lit way' is well-illustrated, once again, by Angela McRobbie, and her 'double entanglement' theory, which she also defines as a complexification of backlash:

post-feminism positively 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 emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force. This was very apparent in the (UK) *Independent* newspaper column *Bridget Jones's Diary* [...]. The infectious girliness of Bridget Jones produces a generational logic which is distinctly post-feminist. Despite feminism, Bridget wants to pursue dreams of romance, find a suitable husband, get married and have children (McRobbie, 2009, p. 12).

The taking into account of feminism, which has been profusely disclosed in the previous paragraph on Girl Power, becomes the leitmotif for all Chick Lit followers to give its full achievement for granted, and move on as if it 'is no longer needed'. Girlies, on the other hand, considered it as backbone for their discourse on empowerment as their chance to make choices for themselves. While Girl Power was to be found on the pro- side of the axis, Chick Lit stands in the opposite direction; gender equality and all other feminist claims have already been achieved, so women should not be afraid of being feminine anymore: the fight is over.

Being so antithetic in respect to traditional feminism, and due to its constitutional ambiguity, Chick Lit has been the object of severe criticism, from the side of second-wavers especially. Whether it can definitely be stated that such a phenomenon has given voice to a new generation of women, historically having completely different values from those of their mothers, too much has and is being taken for granted and, most of all, feminism is dismantling itself (McRobbie, 2009) via (what should be) its own militants. Second modernity has brought about paramount change as far as women's social and sexual roles are concerned; such roles are continuously undergoing re-negotiation and found expression, in the explosive 1990s, in a pop cultural genre professing «a return to femininity, the primacy of romantic attachments, [...] a focus on female pleasure and pleasures, and the value of consumer culture and girlie goods, including designer clothes, expensive and impractical footwear, and trendy accessories» (Ferriss & Young, 2008, p. 4). This new, utterly mediatized female aesthetics disgracefully mirrors patriarchal dictates feminist 'mothers' and 'grandmothers' spent their lives fighting against: from their point of view, what has been achieved is nothing more than "the freedom to shop (and to cook)" (Tasker & Negra, 2005).

Moving forward, and looking for codified keywords to unravel the Chick Lit world, some obstacles are to be encountered, being this an extremely various and ever-changing phenomenon. Still, navigating through the literature on the subject matter, some recurring images can be detected. Perhaps the most reiterated is the concept of ‘anxiety’, pathologically affecting young women and girls of the latest generation. The reason why Chick Lit has also been investigated under the name of ‘Reviving Ophelia’, as well-clarified by Marnina Gonick in her original contribution (Gonick, 2006), derives from the character of Ophelia from Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’ owning a long history being employed as a symbol for the ‘crisis of girlhood’ in modern and contemporary cultural production. What causes Ophelia’s anxieties is, of course, postmodernism, «which disrupts the possibility of an authentic self by noting the sociohistorical contingency of subjectivity» (ibid., p. 12). The psychologist Mary Pipher, on whose revealing book Gonick based her own essay, states,

girls become fragmented, their selves split into mysterious contradictions. They are sensitive and tenderhearted, mean and competitive, superficial and idealistic. They are confident in the morning and overwhelmed with anxiety by nightfall. They rush through their days with wild energy and then collapse into lethargy. They try on new roles every week – this week the good student, the next week the delinquent and the next, the artist (Pipher, 1994, p. 20).

Girls’ ambiguity and self-struggling are two frequent characteristics of Chick Lit anti-heroines.

The oftentimes-voiced anxiety affecting the post-everything generation, affects several realms: from body shaming, to romance obsession and social status mania, being a girl carries out a heavy burden. Bridget Jones «is the product of modernity in that she has benefited from those institutions (education) which have loosened the ties of tradition and community for women, making it possible for them to be disembedded [...]» (McRobbie, 2009, p. 20). Neoliberalism especially has brought about excessive pondering on feminine subjectivities, with the consequence of causing stress and, usually, self-censorship. However, *Singletons* – this is the term used to name Chick Lit characters and all their real-life followers – are not afraid to show, and to embody, such anxiety and are generally portrayed as neurotic subjects worrying about marriage and ‘calorie counting’ (Genz & Brabon, 2009). Contrarily to postfeminists – and traditional feminists, of course –, striving to prevent structural violence of the patriarchal kind from affecting women’s lives, *Singletons* are embracing those infamous standards and do not see them as constraining in anyway.

As anticipated in the previous paragraph, it is now necessary to reconnect to the discourse on 'empowerment', which was keyword to the Girl Power reality, in order to disclose its second drawback. Introducing Chick Lit, it was mentioned how this concept would here rather be considered more in the shade of 'taking into accountness' – of feminism into mainstream politics, and so on – because of Chick Lit subculture's backbone idea of feminism no longer being needed. The drawback precisely lies in this: a strong belief in empowerment brought to its extreme leads women to believe that everything has already been achieved, meaning there is no more need to engage in any battle for gender equality and the like: «the 'taken into accountness' permits all the more thorough dismantling of feminist politics and the discrediting of the occasionally voiced need for its renewal» (McRobbie, 2009, p. 12). Thanks to the work of the media, as well, feminism is no longer appealing to young women; they rather settle for pathologically neurotic lives made of ritualized humiliation where female worthiness is measured through the male gaze (Tincknell, 2011). The same male gaze First and Second Wavers battled to erase.

It is now time to engage in the discussion on the relations between Chick Lit and the four concepts of internalization, the media, neoliberalism and individualization. As relating to the first of the aforementioned, it has already been underlined how 'modern Ophelias' exasperate the 'taking into accountness' of feminist claims into the mainstream, and thereby totally disconnect from the coral element of feminism as a union of women (McRobbie, 2009), conducting individualised lives burdened with anxiety. What is being dealt with here is an even further deviation from the Second Wave way than that of Girlies, moving away from their 'mothers', but still owning the empowerment discourse as a strength to keep fighting (their own way) against male hegemony. On the contrary, Singletons belong to what has been defined as 'The Bridget Jones Effect', defined by Stephanie Harzewski as «a syndrome, some journalists maintain, afflicting especially thirtysomething women who become consumed with "dating panic" and strategies for meeting Mr. Right» (Harzewski, 2011, p. 3).

The relation between Chick Lit and the media is a pretty straightforward one. Being born as a pop genre of novels, newspaper columns, music, movies and television, Chick Lit could not survive unmediatized: its own existence depends on the models and standards forwarded by the cultural realm. What connects the various products of this subculture is "the contemporary media's heightened address to women" (Ashby, 2005), an undoubtedly two-sided development. On the one hand, it finally gave space to girls and their world in an environment which was

previously lacking any adequate coverage; on the other hand, the output of all that media attention significantly affected the construction of contemporary femininities and moulded defining standards of girlhood the audience was often constrained by (Gonick, 2006). For example, talking about make-over TV programmes, Angela McRobbie says

the television programmes do not just open up the field of consumer culture to women, [...] they actively direct such women so that they learn to make the right choices. The transformative effect results in healthier subjectivities, cheerfulness, better 'self-esteem' and an improved quality of sexual relationship. [...] This make-over format is a new 'space of attention', a form of gender power which has the effect of offering to women a specific form of freedom and a particular idea of independence (McRobbie, 2009, p. 124).

Media coverage, then, hides sexism behind glossy covers and lipstick.

The link between Chick Lit and neoliberalism is almost as clear-cut. As a matter of fact, besides neoliberalism being the historical reason behind its origin, its rise as a popular genre produced and developed a new consumerist culture solely directed to women and their lifestyles. Ferriss and Young assert that the connection of Chick Lit and consumerism is undeniable, and add

[c]ertainly, chick flicks, like other commercial films, are enmeshed in a complex network created by mega corporations to reach a global consumer market. The same corporation may produce and distribute the film featured on the morning programs and late-night talk shows on the network it owns, and reviewed in the pages of the magazine it publishes. And chick flicks, in particular, often intersect with other chick media, such as magazines (Ferriss & Young, 2008, p. 13-14)

Of course Singletons' wide-reaching output production and marketing strategies have met with the harshest criticism from 'proper' feminists, whom are preoccupied women and girls are thereby becoming mere 'dupes of consumerism' (Genz & Brabon, 2009). Once again, Ferriss and Young pose the fundamental question: «[i]s chick lit "buying in" to a degrading and obsessive consumer culture»?; but to that, they add «or is it ultimately exposing the limitations of a consumerist worldview?» (Ferriss & Young, 2008, p. 11). The authors mention Sophie Kinsella's 'Shopaholic Trilogy' as an example of Chick Lit authors exposing the flows and risks of consumerism.

To conclude, plenty has been already said about Chick Lit focus on subjectivity, being it a source of the fundamental anxiety at the core of this phenomenon, as well. Singletons reach full completion of the process of individualization, given the end of women's belonging to 'chains of

equivalence' (McRobbie, 2009) or any form of transversal solidarity that used to bring all women together during the first and second Waves. The majority of Chick Lit followers sees this as a process of gained independence, allowed by the full achievement of all feminist claims, granting *carte blanche* as far as their entire existence is concerned – from career to marriage, from social relations to makeup and clothes. Nonetheless, it has already been clarified how such individualization rather brings about anxiety and, as a consequence, auto-censorship along with women embodying exactly the standards they ought to be fighting.

1.4 Gender Maneuvering, from pariahs to alternative femininities

In conclusion to this last chapter, the last phenomenon under scrutiny is possibly the most confusing – and the least addressed (up to this moment) by academic literature. It owns no defined attributes, nor it has a determined timeline-ish history to refer to. On the other hand, Gender Maneuvering is a rather new-born reality, developing, at the moment, at a local level, but also owning the potential – more than any other – to really change the rules of the game. Such a reality was intentionally chosen as the final one to be dealt with in this first chapter, for reasons of its incredibly powerful and revolutionary strength and its vital significance as far as the contemporary status quo of gender dynamics is concerned. The mainstream literature specifically focusing on this topic is limited to two authors: the first one, Mimi Schippers, was the first to unravel such an original theory, applied, in particular, to the music realm (Schippers, 2002); the second one, Nancy Finley, added up to her predecessor, applying Gender Maneuvering to the world of sports (Finley, 2010). However, other works on gender dynamics will provide backbone to the following analysis.

First of all, a definition of Gender Maneuvering is to be provided, so as to give the reader an initial idea of what this particular process is about. Afterwards, a discussion on gender hierarchies and all relevant keywords will be needed, to come to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and clarify the definitional elements which can be challenging on the beginning. Nancy Finley defines Gender maneuvering as

a collective effort to negotiate actively the meaning and rules of gender to redefine the hegemonic relationship between masculinity and femininity in the normative structure of a specific context. These strategies change familiar meanings of gender, violate rules of interaction, and shift positions so that the links between gender relations are damaged and transformed within that context.

When effective, they challenge localized gender relations and produce “alternative” gender relations (Finley, 2010, p. 362).

This definition gives an accurate portrait of each of the constitutional elements behind the concept under scrutiny, which will be the object of the following paragraphs. The existence of a ‘collective’ element, the concepts of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ as in the frame of ‘hegemony’, ‘gender relations’ and the production of their ‘alternative’ are all the fundamental backbone needed to master the knowledge of Gender Maneuvering.

Before proceeding with the keywords’ investigation, the position of this strand on the pro/contra axis and the reason behind its belonging to *post*-feminism need to be clarified. As regarding the axis, the assumption will be made of Gender Maneuvering occupying the *zero* position. Clarifying, this phenomenon does not fit in the ‘pro’ nor in the ‘contra’ pole; as will become evident while the following paragraphs unfold, Gender Maneuvering seeks the achievement of an *other* arena, one that is not structurally masculine, where to grow and to affirm itself. The assumption follows of such an original process being unsuitable to any position on the axis, rather than on the zero: a new starting point. Moving on, the logic behind Gender Maneuvering’s inclusion in the present dissertation on postfeminism resides in its enormous potential for change, as far as gender dynamics are concerned, along with the belief of it being a valid alternative to traditional feminism. It adapts to the socio-cultural background of the post-everything generation, but does not abandon the revolutionary push towards change and challenge that our ‘mothers’ have fought so hard to defend.

As anticipated, some background theory and definition of what are the keywords to this subject is indispensable. Such background will mainly be provided by various works by R. W. Connell, and will regard the constitutional elements present in Finley’s definition of Gender Maneuvering. Setting aside the biological (sex), the focus here will rather be on the socially constructed (gender) and all its shades. The first and paramount distinction to start with is that between masculinity and femininity. Connell defined gender as

a way in which social practice is ordered. In gender processes, the everyday conduct of life is organized in relation to a reproductive arena, defined by the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction. This arena includes sexual arousal and intercourse, childbirth and infant care, bodily sex difference and similarity. I call this a ‘reproductive arena’ not a ‘biological base’ to emphasize [...] that we are talking about a historical process involving the body, not a fixed set of biological determinants (Connell, 1995, p. 71).

Masculinity «consists of those behaviours, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine» (Itulua-Abumere, 2013, p. 42); the same is true, the other way around, for femininity. A first inference can be derived from this simple definition, one of the utmost importance: both these concepts exist both positively, as all characterizations of the said gender, but also negatively, as being ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ clearly implies not being the *other* one – their own existences are reciprocally dependent. Secondly, masculinity (as femininity) cannot be reduced to an individual experience; rather, it is an «identifiable set of practices that occur across space and over time and are taken up and enacted collectively by groups, communities, and societies» (Schippers, 2007, p. 86).

The relevance of the two concepts provided lays in their interaction and in their behaviour inside the system to which they belong. Such a system is a hierarchical one, made of relations of domination. Both femininity and masculinity possess various manifestations. To begin with, ‘hegemonic masculinity’ «can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women» (Connell, 1995, p. 77); it refers to the particular form of masculinity that dominates in a specific culture. From this concept, two more kinds of masculinity are to be derived: ‘complicit’ masculinity, referring to individuals aspiring to become an hegemonic male, and ‘subordinated’, namely someone who does not adhere to masculine standards – not every masculine practice is hegemonic (Connell includes gay men in this category). These threefold differentiation is fundamental insofar as «gender hegemony operates not just through the subordination of femininity to hegemonic masculinity, but also through the subordination and marginalization of other masculinities» (Schippers, 2007, p. 87).

Turning the focus on femininity, the same discourse is not applicable. Originally, the term ‘hegemonic femininity’ was actually coined as a counterpart to the male version, but soon scholars realized its inaccuracy and utilized ‘emphasized femininity’, instead, to better mirror the unbalanced power dynamics of the patriarchal system (Finley, 2010). ‘Emphasized femininity’, then, can be defined as all sets of features ensuring compliance with subordination to male hegemony, and to the accommodation of men desires (Connell, 2005). The relationship between

women and men, therefore, is “complementary and hierarchical”. Mimi Schippers gives some further explanation, saying

[h]egemonic masculinity can include physical strength, the ability to use interpersonal violence in the face of conflict, and authority. These characteristics guarantee men’s *legitimate* dominance over women only when they are symbolically paired with a complementary and inferior quality attached to femininity. To complement these characteristics in a way that subordinates femininity to masculinity, femininity includes physical vulnerability, an inability to use violence effectively, and compliance. [...] Thus, the significance of masculinity and femininity in gender hegemony is that they establish symbolic meanings for the relationship between women and men that provide the legitimating rationale for social relations ensuring the ascendancy and dominance of men (Schippers, 2007, p. 91).

As for masculinities, there exist multiple femininities, as well. Schippers calls ‘pariah femininities’ all the instances of women rejecting compliance to patriarchal standards and submission, and embodying, instead, the features considered exclusive to hegemonic masculinity. Possessing typically male attributes, such as physical strength, the sexual desire for other women, owning authority, turns women into the object of undesirability; such women are then stigmatized as ‘lesbians’, ‘sluts’, and so on.

Nevertheless, it is exactly in pariahs that the potential for change resides. What Schippers has observed in an alternative rock subculture, and Finley has witnessed in an original sportive community is the re-appropriation, by women and girls, of those same pariahs stigmatizing them – in order for the patriarchal system to reproduce itself – and their transformation into positive attributes with the aim and the result of threatening male hegemony. Pariahs, then, turn into ‘alternative femininities’, and the process leading to such a metamorphosis is, precisely, Gender Maneuvering. In the Preface to her book, Schippers states

[g]ender maneuvering is a specific kind of interaction. When one or more people manipulate their own gender performance or manipulate the meaning of their own or others’ gender performances in order to establish, disrupt, or change the relationship between and among masculinities and femininities, they are gender maneuvering (Schippers, 2002, p. xiii).

As to the subculture she analysed in her study, alternative hard rock, Schippers observed how men and women of the environment enacted this mechanism to turn a typically male-dominant and sexist rock culture into something different. The same is applicable to Finley’s research on Roller

Derby, a new sport created *by* women, *for* women, where stigmatized roles are subverted: it is women and girls being the athletes, and their fathers, brothers and boyfriends cheerleading their partners. The revolutionary element of the Rollers community stands in what Finley calls “feminizing the ‘sportsman’” (Finley, 2010), something that may not be as significant if performed inside a typically masculine sport, but which acquires an enormous disruptive potential when a specifically feminine sport is created.

To conclude this paragraph on Gender Maneuvering, a discussion on its relationship with internalization, the media, neoliberalism and individualization is necessary to allow a proper comparison with the two other phenomena under scrutiny. However, being Gender Maneuvering a reality which is based on development *outside* the gendered system governing contemporary society, and given its constitutive ‘local’ character, this last analysis will be more insidious. As far as internalization is concerned, the degree and status of its existence is not relevant to this discussion. The ‘taking into accountness’ is a feature of contemporary society and second modernity (McRobbie, 2009), but local realities performing Gender Maneuvering operate outside its influence, to continue pursuing a less gendered ideal of society. As to the media, Gender Maneuvering is certainly not addressed by media industries, both due to its embryonic stage of development, and to its essential anti-mainstream character. On the other hand, though, the cultural arena is probably the fittest to the redefining and moulding of gender relations in general, insofar as cultural representations of any kind are of the greatest importance to contemporary meaning-making.

Neoliberalism and Gender Maneuvering have a conflictual relationship. A phenomenon called ‘Gender Mainstreaming’ is currently being performed by major international institution (EU, UN) and national governments whereby policies on women are included on the political agenda (Ehemann, 2007). Gender Maneuvering seemingly performs the opposite: being a movement from below, it seeks to transform society through the proactive enactment of alternative femininities (and masculinities). To conclude, Gender Maneuvering’s relationship with individualization is also conflictual. Such a process utilizes both ‘intergender’ and above all ‘intragender’ dynamics to challenge hegemonic masculinity and challenges the mainstream behaviour of women themselves actually being the main enactors of pariahs and female stigmatization (Finley, 2010). Indeed, one of its main attributes, present in Finley’s definition provided at the beginning of this chapter, is exactly its performance as a ‘collective effort’ (ibid.).

2. Postfeminism in ‘real life’: Femen, the *makeover show* and Riot Grrrl

Before moving on to the next phase of analysis, a brief summary of the hitherto illustrated arguments could help making sense of what will come next. First of all, the introductory paragraph of the previous chapter presented postfeminism, trying to disclose its numerous facades and to make sense of the ambiguity behind it. Moreover, a brief overview of traditional feminisms and their timeline served the cause of enlightening its origins and development. Secondly, a paragraph on Girl Power, the first postfeminist strand chosen to be discussed during this essay, underlined ‘empowerment’ and ‘diversity’ as its main keywords and provided insight on its relation with the four tenets of second modernity, the common thread of this dissertation. The same was done for Chick Lit, having ‘taken into accountness’ and ‘anxiety’ as keywords, and Gender Maneuvering, with the multiple expressions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. The purpose of this second chapter will be the description of some recent or contemporary phenomena considered relevant insofar as the present essay’s vision of postfeminism is concerned. An additional contribution will consist of the attempt to frame each of the selected phenomena into one of the three categories, or strands, of postfeminism investigated in the previous chapter. Those phenomena are: Femen, the makeover show and Riot Grrrl. While on the other hand this chapter will focus exclusively on the descriptive side, discussions on criticisms and the phenomena’s relationship with the four tenets of internalization, the media, neoliberalism and individualization will be left out for the moment, to be later addressed in the last chapter.

2.1 “Our God Is a Woman!”: Femen and *sextremism*

The first, contemporary, movement under scrutiny in the following pages is Femen. As to the organizational structure, this paragraph’s main source will be the Femen Manifesto: besides a concise exposition of the movement’s geographical and socio-political origins and initial development, the remaining discussion will develop mostly following the points listed there, to be then integrated with appropriate examples from recent news reports of what are believed to be paradigmatic acts of protest.

To begin with, the Femen ‘manifesto’, available at Femen.org – their official website – states:

[i]n the beginning, there was the body, feeling of the woman’s body, feeling of joy because it is so light and free. Then there was injustice, so sharp that you feel

it with your body, it immobilizes the body, hinders its movements, and then you find yourself your body's hostage. And so you turn your body against this injustice, mobilizing every body's cell to struggle against the patriarchy and humiliation. You tell the world: Our God is a Woman!

Our Mission is Protest!

Our Weapon are bare breasts!

And so FEMEN is born and sextremism is set off².

The omnipresence of the image of the 'body' is evident from the start. That is what Femen use as a 'weapon' against patriarchy, whose destruction is their main goal.

The origin of the movement is to be traced back to 2008, when, as according to the semi-autobiographical book 'Femen', *action* begun (Ackerman, 2014). Before that, the environment surrounding the first three of the soon-to-be collective was that of Khmelnytskyi, a small town in western Ukraine. There a hidden movement developed of people reviving Soviet philosophy and opposing the current political wave, capitalism and oligarchy. The three girls, Sasha Shevchenko, Oxana Shachko and Anna Hutsol (O'Keefe) subsequently moved to Kiev, the capital, where they began their activism and started calling themselves 'Femen'. One year later, Inna Shevchenko joined the group: the new-born quartet has since been the "backbone of the group" (ibid.). The four pillars of Femen then found what was to be their trademark: the image of a topless woman wearing a crown made of flowers on her head. Femen are renown for using images from the Ukrainian traditional, cultural and political repertoire; by associating those images to their cause, they reframe their meaning in a subversive way. The major example is their own logo, the Cyrillic letter 'ф' – namely F –, standing both as the first letter of Femen's name in Cyrillic and, graphically, representing the image of female breasts due to its shape; furthermore, being painted in blue and yellow, it also ironizes on the Ukrainian flag (Khrebtan-Horhager & Kononenko, 2015).

In order to come up with a reasoned discussion about the movement, it seems appropriate to follow the points enumerated in Femen's Manifesto, attempting a critical analysis of each feature. First of all, under the voice 'Femen Ideology', the tenets of *Sextremism*, Atheism and Feminism are listed. The first concept is an innovative one, and therefore is worth some further in-depth investigation. This concept is *sextremism*, figuring both in

² Femen Collective, *About US*, Femen.org,

their ideological framework, and in the 'Femen Tactics' paragraph, as well, the Manifesto reads,

Sextremism is a fundamentally new form of women's feminist actionism developed by FEMEN.

Sextremism is female sexuality rebelling against patriarchy and embodied in the extremal [sic] political direct action events. Sexist style of the actions is a way to destruct the patriarchal understanding of what is the destination of female sexuality to the benefit of the great revolutionary mission. [...] Sextremism is a non-violent but highly aggressive form of provocation; it is an all-powerful demoralizing weapon undermining the foundations of the old political ethics and rotten patriarchal culture³.

Talking about Sextremism on the Huffington Post, Inna Shevchenko mentions how the objectification and control of the female body is the main instrument of women's oppression. She cites the beauty industries and genital mutilations as examples, and affirms that women's re-appropriation of their body through nudity is the most powerful weapon; such a "new interpretation" of feminism is what Femen call 'sextremism'⁴.

Moving forward along the Manifesto, Femen's goal of defying patriarchy altogether is specified, followed by all Femen's objectives. They include: the developing of a "global women's mob law over patriarchy"⁵, to challenge patriarchy to expose its evil nature, to undermine its main institutions, such as the church and dictatorship, to use female sexuality in opposition to male-dominated pornography, to fight the evil and defend justice and, finally, to «create the most influential and combat-effective women's union in the world»⁶. To pair with such a rich account, it seems appropriate to mention some of the protest actions forwarded by the collective and reported by different news sources. One of the most symbolically powerful act of protest is undoubtedly the 2012 attempted attack to the Russian Orthodox Church's leader Patriarch Kirill I. The protester, later identified as Yana Zhdanova, managed to irrupt against the religious convoy, just landed off of a plane, at the Kiev's airport⁷. The

³ Ibid (see pg. 22).

⁴ Inna, SHEVCHENKO, *Sextremism: The New Way for Feminism to Be!*, The Huffington Post, 9 April 2013.

^{5, 5} See 2

⁷ The Associated Press, *Ukraine: Protester Accosts Patriarch*, The New York Times, 26 July 2012.

woman had the words ‘Kill Kirill’ written in black on her naked back, a recognition mark carried in almost every Femen act of protest. When interviewed by the Independent, Anna Hutsol declared how that ambush was one of the two most successful exploits of the group⁸. The other one took place one year later, as the Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel were attending a trade Fair in Hanover. The Femen member tried to “push her way through to an amused-looking Mr Putin, but was blocked by aides”⁹. Once again, the woman had an obscene expression in Cyrillic written on her bare back. She was joined by two more women, stripped to the waist, as well; they were all shouting insults and slogans calling Putin a ‘dictator’. These two cases are deeply representative insofar as they embody almost every one of the aforementioned objectives: the fight against the institutions of the church and dictatorship, the use of sextremism as strategy, active provocation, and so on.

The following item in the Manifesto is Femen’s Requirements. Summarizing, the opening requirement is about the total eradication of dictatorships and all regimes creating inhumane living conditions for women – first on the list: Islamic states. Femen have pursued a huge battle against Islamism, with numerous protests all over the world. On the 3rd - 4th of April of 2013, members of the Ukrainian collective gathered in different cities all over Europe for what they called a ‘topless jihad’, to support the Tunisian activist Amina Tyler. The 19-years-old girl was prosecuted after posting online a naked picture where she had the words “My body belongs to me, and is not the source of anyone’s honor” written on her body¹⁰. The greatest demonstration took place in France – where the Femen headquarters reside –, where

three members of the group burned a black flag with the *shahada* (the testimony of faith in Islam) on it outside the Great Mosque of Paris [...]. In their statement, the Femen spoke of the ‘auto-da-fé of a Salafi flag’ and called for ‘a global war, the war of topless *jihad* throughout the world’. They were ready to ‘breastfeed revolution’ with their breasts, in the name of a ‘real Arab Spring’. And they concluded: ‘Long live topless *jihad*; tremble, you infidels! Our breasts are deadlier than your stones! (Ackerman, 2013).

⁸ Shaun, WALKER, *The New Suffragettes: Witness the Bare-Chested Defiance of Femen*, Independent, 28 May 2013.

⁹ Jeevan VASAGAR and Tom PARFITT, *Bemused Vladimir Putin and Angela Merkel Confronted By Topless Femen Protester in Hanover*, Telegraph, 8 April 2013.

¹⁰ Eline, GORDTS, *Amina Tyler, Topless Tunisian FEMEN Activist, Sparks Massive Controversy*, The Huffington Post, 26 March 2013.

The second requirement is the destruction of prostitution, recognizing the sex-industry as «the most large-scale and long-term genocide against women»¹¹. The last one is achieving the complete separation of the institutions of church and state and to put an end to religious interference in women's sexual, civic and reproductive choices.

From 2013 onwards, the movement that hitherto underwent stable growth and expansion (Femen groups were born in Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, Brazil and other countries) was weakened following a series of unfavourable events. The 'Free Amina' campaign itself provoked a storm of criticism, starting from a wave of Muslim pride campaigning with slogans like "Islam is my right", "Freedom of choice" and "Nudity does not liberate me and I do not need saving"; the problem was raised of "who can speak for Muslim women"¹²; Amina herself left the group saying she did not want her name "associated with an Islamophobic organization"¹³. In general, in that year, plenty of the stunts performed by Femen were utterly controversial – more than ever – at the least. Indeed, some of the actions staged by Femen during that span of time have been harshly criticized even by former supporters, due to their inappropriate or uninformed content. A few examples, besides the Amina case, were the episode of the naked protest inside Notre Dame, to celebrate the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, shouting slogans like "no more homophobe"¹⁴, and the October ambush to the National Front leader Marine Le Pen, where the activists were screaming "Marine repent!" and added on Twitter "[Marine] join us on the right path, that of feminism, not fascism"¹⁵. Gaila Ackerman, the writer behind Femen's book, explains

Apparently, Femen were ill-advised. How else can we explain their willingness to reach out to the woman who embodies everything they are fighting? The Pope is accused of being a fascist, while Marine Le Pen, whose xenophobia is her stock in trade, might still be 'savaged'? (Ackerman, 2013).

¹¹ See 2.

¹² Lila, ABU-LUGHOD, *Topless Protests Raise the Question: Who Can Speak for Muslim Women?*, The National, 30 November 2013.

¹³ HuffPost Maghreb, *Amina Sboui Quits FEMEN: 'I Do Not Want My Name To Be Associated With An Islamophobic Organization'*, The Huffington Post, 20 August 2013.

¹⁴ Christine, ROBERTS, *Naked Feminists 'Celebrate' Pope's Resignation in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris*, New York Daily News, 12 February 2013.

¹⁵ France 24, *Femen Activists Target Le Pen on Brittany Visit*, 27 October 2013.

The author also believes that Femen were not able to adapt to the complex Western society; such a lack of understanding, joined with the language gap and cultural differences, may have contributed to their inappropriate actions.

Another harsh stroke to the group came, in the same year, with the coming out of the documentary 'Ukraine Is Not a Brothel' by the Australian Kitty Green. The film reveals the hitherto unknown role of a man, Viktor Svyatski, behind the whole birth and development of the Femen movement¹⁶. Viktor, the 'mastermind' behind the feminist project, is portrayed as a puppet master, recruiting beautiful women only to the Femen cause, and harshly training them on how to enact their wide known 'topless protests'. Of course, the media exploded spreading the scandal all over the world; moreover, Inna and Victor themselves caused an even greater damage to the group. With an article on The Guardian called 'Femen Let Victor Svyatski Take Over Because We Did Not Know How To Fight It', Shevchenko admits to the man's appropriation of the movement – however not to his being its founder –, giving the justification of Femen not being able to resist it. She then adds that leaving Ukraine for France was her and Femen's total rupture with Svyatski and the beginning of a new deal «in which women decide and follow their own ideas, not someone else's demands»¹⁷. On the other hand, Svyatski released an interview claiming that his role as a 'tyrant' was actually a joint invention by the director and himself¹⁸. In reality, however, all those statements are not corresponding to the truth: Shevchenko actually left Ukraine out of fear for prosecution following a questionable act in Kiev¹⁹ and Svyatski remained close to the movement.

Last but not least, another set of circumstances caused the movement to tremble in such a fateful year. To begin with (and as anticipated), in August 2012 Inna Shevchenko was filmed while using a chainsaw to pull down a four-meter high wooden cross in the centre of Kiev. The act was meant to be a protest again the trial against the prosecution of the Pussy Riot punk band

¹⁶ Geoffrey, MACNAB, *The Man Who Made Femen: New Film Outs Victor Svyatski as the Mastermind Behind the Protest Group and its Breast-Baring Stunts*, Independent, 3 September 2013.

¹⁷ Inna, SHEVCHENKO, *Femen Let Victor Svyatski Take Over Because We Did Not Know How To Fight It*, The Guardian, 5 September 2013.

¹⁸ Der Spiegel, *Femen's Male Mastermind: 'I Am No Tyrant'*, 26 September 2013.

¹⁹ Dominique, MOSBERGEN, *Pussy Riot Trial: Topless FEMEN Activist Chainsaws Memorial Cross in Ukraine*, The Huffington Post, 17 August 2012.

in Russia following their desecrating performance inside a cathedral in Moscow. The destroyed cross, however, was erected in 2005 as a «memorial to the victims of Stalinist repression and the famine of the 1930s»²⁰. From that day on, Shevchenko received several death threats and besides, fearing judicial prosecution for that action, she decided to seek asylum in France, where she currently lives and where she established the Femen headquarters²¹. The other three founder members remained in Ukraine, but the situation was not meant to last. As a matter of fact, a few months after the 2013 assault to Russian President Putin in Hanover which was previously discussed, Victor Svyatski was «severely beaten by unknown assailants in Kiev, in the street» (Ackerman, 2013). Diverse attacks followed. On July, Anna Hutsol was brutally hit in a café in front of dozens of customers and her laptop, containing sensitive information, was stolen by the aggressor, who Femen believed to belong to Russian or Ukrainian secret services²². The same happened to three other members, including the founders Oksana and Sasha, a few days later (Ackerman, 2013). Three months later, Anna, Sasha and Victor were attacked by a group of ‘hooligans’ in Odessa: from that moment on, it was clear to the group that they were wanted outside of their own country. The excessive amount of pressure forced every member to move to another country: Anna and Victor moved to Switzerland, while Sasha and Oksana joined Imma in France.

In the following months, and years, FEMEN have disappeared from the news, and many wonder if their time has come. Many members are facing the consequences of some of their actions. Those living in the Lavoisier Moderne Parisienne, an abandoned theatre they occupied as squatters, functioning as their headquarters and recruitment and training centre, have been evicted – they also had to face a fire, in July, whose cause still remains unknown. Moreover, many activists have been fined for casualties caused during their protests – one of many: the damaging of a bronze bell in the Notre Dame cathedral in February 2013. Therefore, many wonder

[w]ill fines and prison sentences, or the threat of them, kill off the controversial protest movement, which, if nothing else, has done much (at least in Europe) to counter images of women as sex objects, or as weak and submissive? From almost the beginning of the movement, Femen members have been in and out of

²⁰ Times Live, *Topless woman cuts down Kiev Cross for Pussy Riot*, 17 August 2012.

²¹ BBC News, *Female Topless Protester Wins French Asylum*, 8 July 2013.

²² Tracey, VITCHERS, *FEMEN Leaders Brutally Beaten in Soviet-Style Crackdown*, Policy.Mic, 30 July 2013.

courtrooms and police stations for their protests, which have included daring physical attacks on the men – among them, Putin, former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, and the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill – whom they regard as enemies of women and of human rights in general²³.

Galia Ackerman gave her answer when interviewed by Europe1, saying how the internal divisions, the dear fines they are not able to pay and, above all, the impossibility for the movement to exist without the mass media apparatus, made her think how the end of Femen has finally arrived²⁴. Skimming through their blog, it is clear how Femen activism has not yet ended; however, it is evident, as well, that the impressive media attention the movement has received in the past has now switched to something else.

2.2 The *ugly duckling* is turned into *The Swan*, or ‘the makeover takeover’

The next phenomenon included in the present analysis of postfeminism and its diverse instances is the *makeover show*. Being its rise as an extremely popular TV genre a rather contemporary occurring, a brief explanation of the social, cultural and economic context of its development and of the reasons behind its success will be followed by an investigation on its fundamental keywords. Afterwards, an episode of *The Swan* will be scrutinized so as to better understand the makeover-mania and its distinctive features. The makeover show is a particular television show that focuses on the lives of ordinary people, and the ‘transformations’ they achieve with the help of a team of experts. As Tania Lewis mentions,

[t]he makeover represents a complex blend of television genres – combining conventions and concerns borrowed from lifestyle advice television and reality TV with a transformational ‘before and after’ narrative. Focusing primarily on ordinary people [...], everything from homes (*House Invaders*) and pets (*It's Me or the Dog*) to parental skills (*Supernanny*) and bodies (*How to Look Good Naked*) are put under the spotlight and transformed – with the guidance of various life experts – under the gaze of the watching public (Lewis, 2008, p. 447).

Hence, the makeover show is a rather broad genre; its vast entirety not being pertinent to this essay’s range of interest, the focus will be confined to just that particularly concerning women and their transformation. As a matter of

²³ Jeffrey, TAYLER, *Is Femen Dying?*, The Atlantic, 22 August 2014.

²⁴ Europe1, “*Les Femen Ont Été Prises à Leur Propre Piège*”, 8 July 2014.

fact, not all makeover shows production is a reflection of postfeminist, Chick Lit culture; it seems important to underline how makeover programmes can also involve men – addressing women shows only is due to the content of this dissertation and is not meant to disregard or ignore the existence of a male counterpart (however less widespread).

The advent of the makeover format is linked to a series of developments of contemporary society, which (once again) unsurprisingly correspond to the postmodern tenets so recurrent in this piece of work. Their relationship will be examined closely in the next chapter; for the moment, it will be enough to acknowledge factors such as «the growing intrusion of public and government into the lives of citizens» (ibid., p. 448), an ever-growing focus on subjectivity and self-monitoring (Tincknell, 2011), consumerist economies, technological changes in broadcasting (satellite television and, later, the internet) as a few examples. At the same time, the television industry itself witnessed some impressive changes during the 1980s: a deregulation of the market, along with a fragmented audience and the need to deal with growing competition led to the rise of «cheap, ‘unscripted’ television» (Lewis, 2008, p. 448) focused on the lives of ‘ordinary’ people and their relationship with themselves and the others. This was paralleled with an increasing interest, from the side of the audience, towards so-called ‘fly-on-the-wall’ perspective and reality-based programmes and talk shows; the camera began to turn more and more to the spectator itself. Those very same years also corresponded, as explained in the first chapter of this essay, to a fundamental turning point as far as feminist politics and the world of women in general are concerned.

The ‘personal’ makeover show, namely that having a single individual as its object, addresses for the most part the world of women – with a few exceptions, such as ‘Queer Eye for a Straight Guy’. The last three decades have witnessed a «‘feminization’ of mainstream television» leading to what has been defined as the ‘policing’ of femininity (Tincknell, 2011, p. 88). The means of perpetration of such a process is media, constantly feeding the female audience with the imaginary of a ‘ideal’ woman, that abiding to socially constructed (and patriarchal) standards (Gallagher & Pecot-Hebert, 2007). In such an environment, the makeover show is there to convince woman that changing the way they look, dress and behave is a direct way to empowerment and self-confidence; improving their appearance is «a means to the various ends of being more successful in their relationships, effective in their careers, respected in their communities, or prized for their femininity» (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006, p. 268). Clearly, as embedded in the present-day cult for empowerment,

contemporary commercial popular culture uses sexist imagery in an ironic way to deflect feminist critiques of this kind of imagery, so that the exploitation of one's body and sexuality is positioned as a matter of personal and individual choice and disconnected from feminist theories of power (ibid. p. 260).

Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, along with many others, rightly point to the media's more or less subtle vilification of women and their individual value.

As to the show's format, its whole development is built around a 'before-and-after' structure, showing the transformative process of 'ugly ducklings' into 'beautiful swans' (Gallagher & Pecot-Hebert, 2007) and how the low self-esteem of the 'victim' is boosted afterwards. First of all, an ordinary woman, often pathologically insecure of herself, is submitted to an awful ritual: the close-up (and exaggerated) examination of all her flaws in a highly uncomfortable setting. This way, the 'final result' will appear even more incredible to the spectator and to the woman herself, when she looks at herself in a mirror for the first time after her transformation, in what has been defined as the moment of 'reveal' (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006). In a second moment, once all the defects and imperfection have been detected, a team of more-or-less famous experts is presented, including «plastic surgeons, dentists who specialize in veneering teeth, lasik eye surgeons, stylists [...], hair restoration experts, make up artists, and an "after-care retreat" for patients to recover from their surgeries» (Gallagher & Pecot-Hebert, 2007, p. 71). All those experts, working as a team, will contribute to the realization of the woman's beauty dreams. A marked and recurrent rhetoric of 'pain' serves as a portrait of 'sacrifice', which is needed in order for the 'old self' to die and for the 'new self' to be born (Tincknell, 2011, p. 89). Finally, as anticipated, comes the dramatic mirror moment (or 'reveal'): the former ugly duckling has now become a 'beauty queen'; she goes back to her siblings and friends owning a new, confident, self, to start a new life as the empowered, self-confident and beautiful woman that she now is.

The structure and contents of individual makeover shows having just been clarified, it seems appropriate to move on to a discussion on the genre's fundamental concepts. Those keywords are summarized by Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert (2007) in five main points. The first one is 'self-concept', which theory comes from psychology, and, as illustrated by John W. Kinch, can be defined as

[t]hat organization of qualities that the individual attributes to himself. It should be understood that the word "qualities" is used in a broad sense to include both

attributes that the individual might express in terms of adjectives (ambitious, intelligent) and also the *roles* he sees himself in (father, doctor, etc.). [...] *The individual's conception of himself emerges from social interaction and, in turn, guides or influences the behaviour of that individual* (Kinch, 1963, p. 481).

From the 1980s onward, along with the makeover shows origin and development, women's self-concept underwent a transformation: on the one hand, the feminization of third-sector workforce and a general shift to empowerment led women to boost the perception they had of themselves; on the other hand, self-monitoring and anxiety as consequences of neoliberalism brought about a huge wave of insecurity, leading women to seek assurance in abiding to (patriarchal) standards imposed by the media (Gill & Scharff, *New Femininities. Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, 2011). Linked to this first concept are the following two: 'body image', meaning people's imagined appearance of their own body, and 'self-esteem', the value individuals assign themselves according to who they are (Figuroa, 2003). Once again, the contemporary media provide a narrowly defined image of the 'ideal' body or beauty and convince women that such flawlessness is achievable through surgeries or consumer products (Gallagher & Pecot-Hebert, 2007).

Two more concepts still need to be addressed, those of 'identity' and 'transformation'. That of identity is a rather complicated matter, one widely addressed in the field of sociology, and impossible to be grasped in its entirety in just a few lines. However, for the purpose of this analysis, identity can be shortly defined as the perception of «[w]ho we are and where we are placed in time and space» (Woodward, 1997, p. 12), including the belonging to particular social, political or ethnic group and being embedded in specific roles. Identities are not crystallized, but rather change along with societies; moreover, they are important factors in meaning-making, since they exist within a specific culture (ibid.) and therefore adjust to time and space. Lastly, 'transformation'; its definition is, of course, that pertinent to a discussion on makeover shows, namely, «[c]hanging the shape and appearance of one's outward self to reflect a socially constructed ideal of "attractiveness"» (Gallagher & Pecot-Hebert, 2007, p. 64). To the just described concepts listed by Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert, one more is to be added: that of 'normalization'. This is a keyword to female-oriented makeover shows especially, and can be explained as the mass media process of accustoming the audience to an imaginary made of painful surgeries, lifting, teeth whitening, and so on (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006). The public – in this case, an almost exclusively feminine one – consequently internalizes such information and builds a nexus between those practices

and the achievement of ‘ideal beauty’, along with social and career-related success.

A general overview of the origin, development and constitutional elements of the individual makeover television format has been provided in the preceding paragraphs. Moving on, in order to get a more in-depth understanding of the makeover show, two television shows belonging to such a genre will be directly addressed. However, before doing so, a distinction must be made between two particular types: makeover programmes involving surgeries and others just engaging in ‘lighter’ transformations – through clothes, makeup, physical exercise and life coaches. Having to choose which one to address in an in-depth analysis – covering the two would have been too large-scale and perhaps redundant – the first category was believed to be the most appropriate, being it an extreme representation of the makeover world. The selected show is *The Swan*, an American personal makeover show broadcasted by Fox and filmed in Marina del Rey, California. It was first released on April 2004 and, after the first season’s huge success, a second season was transmitted in the same year. However, the ratings started to drop, and the decision followed to cancel the show after just two seasons. The show’s title comes from “The Ugly Duckling” fairy tale, from which it borrowed the story rhetoric, as well: each episode featured two women deemed to be ‘ugly’ to undergo an extreme transformation – mostly based on plastic surgeries of all kind. At the end of each episode, one of the participants won the chance to take part to – and perhaps win – a beauty pageant during the show’s finale²⁵. This particular show, notwithstanding its short duration, was chosen to represent plastic-surgery based makeover shows because of its absolutely outrageous contents as an extreme example.

In order to acquire an even more exhaustive understanding of *The Swan* contents and dynamics, the description of the development of one episode from the show seemed necessary. The episode chosen is from the second season and features two women, Gina Davis and Lorrie Arias. However, the focus will be on Lorrie’s journey, being her a particularly significant contestant for reasons to be later explained. Like all other episodes, the first minutes are devoted to the presentation of the team of experts, which includes a therapist, a fitness trainer, a dentist, a life coach and various cosmetic surgeons. Afterwards, the whole team sits at a table and is shown the story of the two selected competitors. In this case, Lorrie’s story is

²⁵ Lauren, DUCA, *What It’s Really Like To Get Extreme Plastic Surgery, From a Former ‘Swan’ Contestant*, The Huffington Post, 27 October 2014.

particularly striking: her life was tormented by physical insecurity, to the point where she became obese, losing control over her body; after deciding to change her life, she lost an incredible amount of weight, but her body was left disfigured. Moreover, a couple of years after such a transformation, she lost her husband and soul mate to a liver disease. It is evident from the start how the producer's intention is for the audience to develop sympathy for the woman, so to emotionally participate to her journey. The camera, then, turns back to the team of experts, who are asked whether they could do anything to help such a sad case. That is the moment of the previously described, degrading, close-up examination of all the woman's flaws, shown on a screen where she stands powerless wearing only sloppy underwear. The cosmetic surgeons discuss her case, and mention she will be subjected to: full face lift, nose job, brow lift, upper lip lift and fat transfer, upper and lower eye lift, a full body lift, breast augmentation, tummy tuck and knees liposuction; the dentist lists bleaching, upper and lower gum recontouring, deep cleaning and veneers; the fitness trainer will be in charge of a 1200 calories diet to lose the last extra pounds; finally, she will be followed by a therapist and a life coach for the entire length of the transformation.

Moving to the following section of the episode, Lorrie's journey starts by visiting each one of the experts. One of the cosmetic surgeons, Dr. Haworth, mentions that Lorrie's will be the first three-stage surgical transformation, "One of the most dramatic physical transformations ever seen on *The Swan*". The woman is then shown to undergo the three stages of her surgical plan, including the emotional moment of her calling her kids before the operation and a rather crude account of surgical procedures: nothing is left implicit. Following the completion of all surgeries, Lorrie has a breakdown and almost leaves the program, but her kids convince her to stay. Therefore, she concludes her journey; the eagerly awaited moment of 'reveal' features an almost 'ceremonial' outlook: the host and all the experts are lined up in a elegant room, awaiting; after briefly commenting Lorrie's way to finally being a 'Swan' and showing once again the shooting on her life before the show, she finally makes her appearance. The dramatic 'mirror moment' shows the woman incredibly emotional reaction. Even though she then loses against the other contestant, she affirms to be happy to finally meet her family. When she does, her older son mentions how 'she does not look much like my mom'²⁶. Lorrie's episode has a special relevance insofar as the atrocious consequences it brought about in the woman's life. As a matter of fact, when interviewed by the *New York Post* in 2013, she

²⁶ Fox's *The Swan*, season 2: episode 2, 'Gina and Lorrie', November 2004.

admitted to be suffering from bipolar disorder, depression and agoraphobia and she blamed the show for her present condition. In particular, she condemns a lack of “follow-up treatment” to cope with the tremendous transformation she went through, and she declared: «I am a 300-pound mess of a person who is afraid to go outside»²⁷.

2.3 Revolution Girl Style Now! Riot Grrrls DIY ‘pink’ revolution

The third, and last, phenomenon to be part of the present analysis of contemporary phenomena possibly matching postfeminism in the three branches analysed in the first chapter, is the Riot Grrrl subculture. In order to grasp the reasoning behind choosing it as to successively be matched with theories on Gender Maneuvering, a condensed account of its origins and development will be followed by describing various instances where gender roles and hierarchies are being challenged and redefined. The examination on how such instances are representations of Gender Maneuvering will be left out and readdressed in the last chapter. Engaging in an analysis of Riot Grrrl would not be possible without introducing the (counter) culture of DIY, first. As a matter of fact, the Do It Yourself credo was the backbone around which Grrrl movements firstly developed around. DIY was first initiated by the European avant-garde artistic collective Situationist International (SI), founded by the celebre Marxist theorist and writer Guy Louis Debord. Its members showed dissatisfaction with the current dynamics of modern society and «revolted against the dominant discourses, images and ideas of capitalist consumer culture, known as the *Spectacle*, and sought to incite a revolution by employing cultural tactics that exposed contradiction and openly critiqued society» (Downes, 2007, p. 13). Mainstream cultural output was rejected, while alternative, counter-cultural products – such as posters, fanzines and graffiti – were employed as their new means of communication. SI revolution strived to fight against *symbolic violence* (Žižek, 2008), the reproduction of capitalism domination through cultural means of production, via a revolutionary ‘cultural subversion’ (Downes, 2007).

The origins of Riot Grrrl are usually traced back to the 1990s punk scene in the cities of Olympia, Washington, and Washington, D.C., where a collective of young women started gathering and the name ‘Riot Grrrl’ was

²⁷ Sean, DALY, *Rearview Mirror: The ‘Most Sadistic Reality Series of the Decade’ is Back*, The New York Post, 20 February 2013.

conceived by two members of the punk rock band *Bratmobile*, Allison Wolfe and Molly Neuman. The term was a mixture of a revolutionary drive, inspired by anti-racist riots in D.C., and the desire to address the complicated world of girls. The word ‘grrrl’, which sounds like a ‘growl’, was chosen to express the movement’s anger against the system (Schilt, 2003). Almost in the same moment, in Olympia, two members of the band *Bikini Kill*, singer and songwriter Kathleen Hanna and drummer Tobi Vail, came up with the slogan ‘Revolution Girl Style Now!’, which also became the title to their first work as a band. All songs included in the cassette carried feminist claims and were intrinsically subversive; one of such songs, “Feels Blind”, goes

As a woman I was taught to be hungry
Women are well acquainted with thirst
Yeah, we could eat just about anything
We’d even eat your hate up like love
We eat your hate like love²⁸ ...

Olympia played a fundamental role in the genesis and evolution of Riot Grrrl; the small town, in fact, was the perfect environment to host a female counter-revolution: its liberal college encouraged students to pursue the studies they preferred, and the city became crowded with artists, feminists and free-thinkers. Moreover, the music scene was supportive of independent labels, as well as really welcoming towards female bands and their music (Downes, 2007); the same could not be said of almost any other place in America.

Something important to consider, as well, is the means through which the Riot Grrrl sub-culture was able to spread to the whole country – and, subsequently, the whole world: the fanzines. Zines (short for fanzines) have been defined by Duncombe as «noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish and distribute by themselves» (Duncombe, 1997, p. 6). They were a huge part of (sub) cultural production in underground environments and those who produced them, so-called zinesters,

defining themselves against a society predicated on consumption, [they] privilege the ethic of DIY, do-it-yourself: make your own culture and stop consuming that which is made for you. Refusing to believe the pundits and politicians who assure us that the laws of the market are synonymous with the laws of nature, the zine community is busy creating a culture whose value isn’t

²⁸ Bikini Kill, *Revolution Girl Style Now! – Feels Blind*, 1991, Olympia, Washington.

calculated as profit and loss on ruled ledger pages, but is assembled in the margins, using criteria like control, connection, and authenticity (ibid., p. 8).

Their revolutionary potential was huge in the hands of a collective willing to create an only-for-women cultural (and political) safe space: zines became the medium of discussion on sensitive topics like rape and eating disorders (Schilt, 2003). Their circulation allowed the forming of an underground forum made by women and for women where they could both share their experiences and find solidarity, as well. The own existence and survival or zines' networks depended on a series of conditions: first of all, they were self-produced – as imposed by the DIY credo; second of all, copies were printed in a limited number, to resist capitalization; finally, they were sold for a minimum amount, given away as presents or even traded among girls (Kearney, 1997). Riot Grrrl zines' production declined when the popular magazine for teenagers 'Sassy' began publishing many of those zines' addresses, forcing zinesters to stop production due to the unbearable amount of requests (Schilt, 2003).

One of the earliest and major zines of Grrrl subculture was *Bikini Kill* (named after the band). Its first issue was published in 1991, and was mainly written by Kathleen Hanna and Tobi Vail. It was entitled by their slogan "Revolution Girl Style Now!" and contained a series of pieces whose topics went from pornography, to racism and humiliation. Moreover, a few lines were dedicated to an encouragement towards spreading the word among friends and also read «say you know how to play guitar, ask your girlfriend if she'd like to learn to play so that you could [play] together. If she wants to, help her learn in a supportive and non-threatening way. (Avoid calling her dumb or expecting her to learn super fast)»²⁹. Forming and strengthening bonds of solidarity among women was at the core of Grrrl credo, and of *Bikini Kill*'s way especially. The second issue published on the same year and written by Hanna had an even greater significance: it contained a version of the Riot Grrrl manifesto, specifically listing all the reasons why Riot Grrrl movement had to exist and spread. The article's reasons include

BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways [...].
BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo (sic.) [...].

²⁹ Kathleen, HANNA and Tobi, VAIL, *Revolution Girl Style Now*, *Bikini Kill* #1, 1991.

BECAUSE we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (boy) standards of what is or isn't [...].
BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak [...]³⁰.

Other points also addressed Grrrls' firm rejection of capitalism and will to take over the means of production to have their own voice, their encouraging and support to DIY musical production, the spreading of bonds among women and girls, and so on.

Besides fanzines and organized meetings, another crucial factor in Grrrl subculture was that of gigs, which «became crucial sonic sites for the production of catalytic moments that subverted the normative gender order and opened up possibilities for everyday cultural activism» (Downes, 2012, p. 216). Unlike traditional music concerts of any kind and genre, Riot Grrrl gigs owned completely different organization and contents. As a matter of fact, bands like Bikini Kill, Bratmobile and Huggy Bear did not just limit their performance to playing their music on a stage. Their aim was rather that of creating a safe environment where anyone could feel accepted and free to express herself; those spaces were also called QUAGS-friendly, the acronym standing for Queers of All Genders and Sexualities: that was Grrrls' "cultural resistance", established and defended by women, queers and feminists (Downes, 2007). The unfolding and content of gigs, as well, was nothing like any other: the wall that usually separates the audience from the performers was broken down, in order to create a connection among all participants. Girls attending those gigs were usually invited on stage to sing, dance or speak, their active participation being a further contribution to the performance. Everyone was encouraged to share their experiences, and taboo topics like rape, incest, body shaming or female desires were the most likely to be talked about (Strong, 2011). Moreover, grrrl musicians often disrupted 'geographical' norms, as well: they often left the stage to play on the floors or among the audience, with the same aim of jeopardizing traditional audience passivity (Downes, 2012). This was the most revolutionary feminist potential of Riot Grrrls subculture: the disruption of mainstream culture – and mainstream gender norms, along with it – in favour of reproducing alternative meanings about femininity and all its attributes.

So as to deepen the understanding of Riot Grrrl subculture to be grasped from this essay, the focus lens will be now directed towards one Grrrl band in particular, deemed to have played an especially fundamental

³⁰ Kathleen, HANNA, *Riot Grrrl Is...*, Bikini Kill #2, 1991.

role as far as the movement is concerned: Bikini Kill. As was previously mentioned, the environment around which the band developed was that of the city of Olympia, Washington. The soon-to-be leader and singer, Kathleen Hanna, moved there with her family and enrolled at Evergreen State College, a liberal college favouring artistic inclinations and free-thinking, where the two other girl members of the band were also studying. Kathleen began to propend towards political and feminist activism; she started attending Spoken Word meetings, where she would talk about extremely sensitive topics as rape and domestic violence. While interviewed for a documentary about herself, she said that the intuition of forming a band came when she spoke to her idol, writer Kathy Acker:

Acker asked me why writing was important to me, and I said, “Because I felt like I’d never been listened to and I had a lot to say”, and she said, “Then why are you doing spoken word? No one goes to spoken word shows! You should get in a band³¹.”

At that same time, the two students and friends Kathi Wilcox and Tobi Vail – at that time renowned in the environment due to her being the mind behind the famous ‘Jigsaw’ fanzine – were willing to form a band, and contacted Kathy to be their singer: Bikini Kill were born. However, to complete the band they needed a guitarist, but no female one was available, so they went for Vail’s friend Billy Karren.

Bikini Kill started playing gigs around Olympia, and the character of Kathleen emerged right away for her singularity: on stage, she acted exactly how people would expect a male musician to act, she was not afraid at all of appearing ‘masculine’, and she challenged male hegemony in the punk industry any way she could. She often wore a t-shirt with a up-to-chest naked and muscular man, which she declared was her way of «playing with the idea of gender. No one’s female and male, we all have so many different traits. [...] So it was like, this is my dude. This is the dude in me»³². However, on the other hand, she often wore really feminine clothes, as well; that is precisely what made her the perfect representation of Riot Grrrl punk counter-culture, made of provocation, freedom of expression and gender fluidity. Bikini Kill’s well-known song *Double Dare Ya* goes,

I got a proposition goes something like this:
Dare ya to do what you want

³¹ Sini, ANDERSON, *The Punk Singer*, 2013.

³² Jessica, GROSE, *Has Feminism Gotten Boring?*, Elle.com, 27 November 2013.

Dare ya to be who you will
Dare ya to cry, cry outloud
“You get so emotional baby”
Double dare ya...³³

The song is an anthem to Grrrl revolution, something Hanna embodied with every inch of her person. However, that did not come without criticism; as Hanna explained, «what everybody said, was that we couldn't play our instruments. And we said “And?”»³⁴. Bikini Kill's intention was not to become virtuous musicians, nor to become famous; their goal was to 'take over' the punk scene for feminism, and they did it.

One striking example of Bikini Kill gender revolution in the punk scene was the way they handled their gigs. As the singer and guitarist Corin Tucker voices in 'The Punk Singer', the punk environment at the time could get really violent, especially at gigs. Girls especially did not feel safe at concerts, and usually stayed at the back the whole time. Significantly, during a Bikini Kill concert, Hanna screamed she wanted “all girls to the front”, adding «all boys be cool, for once in your lives»³⁵. From then on, at the band's gigs it became usual to find posters saying “At this show we ask that girls/women stand near the front, by the stage. Please allow/encourage this to happen”. That was, among other things, what Grrrls meant by their famous slogan 'Revolution Girl Style Now!'. The music critic Ann Powers declared how 'all girls to the front' imperative had an incredible role in turning over male hegemony in the environment; as she explained, men were allowed to “be in the room” – referring to Bikini Kill's gigs –, but they could and will never *dominate* the room, as was the case with all the 'mushing', namely all the pushing and shoving which was part and parcel of attending punk gigs. Hanna loved to face and challenge the male audience, as it is showed in almost all the footage available of her singing with Bikini Kill. As she sang in *Rebel Girl*:

Rebel girl, you are the queen of my world
[...] That girl thinks she's the queen of the neighbourhood
I got news for you: she is!
They say she's a dyke but I know

³³ Bikini Kill, *Double Dare Ya*, 'Bikini Kill' album, October 1992.

³⁴ See 30.

³⁵ Ibid.

She is my best friend...³⁶

Hanna, Wilcox and Vail were all Rebel Girls, along with fellow activists and musicians of the Riot Grrrl scene. Bikini Kill broke up in 1997, after eight years together and a long history of revolution of gender hierarchies and empowering women through nonconventional means. However, as Tobi Veil declared in conclusion to 1999 interview for EMP, «Bikini Kill started something, but it isn't finished yet»³⁷.

3. Finding the perfect match: when theories meet phenomena

It is now time for the conclusive chapter of the present essay. Three branches of post-modern post-feminism have been the object of the first chapter: Girl Power, Chick Lit and Gender Maneuvering. Each one was chosen due to the belief of their being relevant and interesting topics to be discussed in order to capture the worldview of contemporary feminists in their various – and, sometimes, opposite – facets. Every paragraph was organized so as to firstly introduce the selected theory, followed by a discussion of what were believed to be the most fundamental keywords to their understanding; afterwards, room was left to consider each of the above-mentioned strands of postfeminism in their relation with four tenets – those essential to the analysis of every phenomenon embedded in post-modernism: internalization, the media, neoliberalism and individualisation. The second chapter, on the other hand, was dedicated to the description of three contemporary (or recent) phenomena, loosely related to each of the theory previously under scrutiny. Those phenomena were Femen, the makeover show (with an insight on *The Swan*) and Riot Grrrl (with an insight on Bikini Kill). The aim of the chapter was that of providing a clear picture on each of them, including their origins and the environment around which they were or are framed. As anticipated in the introduction, discourses on criticism and the movements' relationship with the four tenets were left out to be later addressed. Indeed, this third and last chapter will be devoted to the association of the chosen phenomena with theories from the first chapter, in every respect. An introduction will be provided, briefly recalling the theory and the phenomena which will be addressed in each paragraph. Structurally, a parallel will be attempted with Chapter One and its organization: following the introduction, the keywords will be analysed

³⁶ Bikini Kill, *Rebel Girl*, Pussy Whipped album, October 1993.

³⁷ Tobi, VAIL, *Riot Grrrl Retrospective Interview*, EMP, 1999.

in function of the phenomenon under scrutiny; subsequently, the focus will shift on the said phenomenon's relation with internalization, the media, neoliberalism and individualisation through the lenses of its matched postfeminist theory. Finally, some space will be left to criticism, which, if relevant, will be addressed specifically in each of the above topic areas.

3.1 Girl Power and Femen, the unexpected power duo

The first pairing to go through the process just described in the introduction are Girl Power feminism and Femen. Girl Power is a feminist movement born in the 1990s and named after Spice Girls' slogan. Its essence can be summarized as a highly-mediatised phenomenon based on young women's re-appropriation of femininity and their freedom to express themselves for what they really are (or what they want to be). Femen's origins are to be individuated a few years after, 2008 to be precise, in Khmelnytskyi, Ukraine. A small group of four women from an as much small town was able to reach almost every woman on heart with their message: sextremism against patriarchal rule. Their irreverent actions, along with a repertoire of controversial images and symbols, caught the attention of worldwide media and political institutions. Choosing Femen to be this essay's paradigm for Girl Power may not seem the most straightforward move; Spice Girls and the like would certainly have been more crystal-clear reproductions of Girlie feminism. However, the will to give space to something more extreme – and, it is here believed, more feminist and less feminist-*ish*, so to say – led to the search for a movement which owned, notwithstanding its ambiguity, a greater potential for change. Femen history matches this will; how it also matches Girl power will be the object of the following pages.

To begin with, always following the structure in Chapter One, a justification has to be provided as to both the reason why Femen is a *post*-feminist movement and its position on the pro- contra- axis, which will clearly match that of Girl Power. Girl Power feminism is part of the postfeminist era especially because it embodies an «implicit rejection of many tenets held by Second Wave feminists» (Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 76). Those elements include the rejection of femininity altogether, considered as a patriarchal construct, and any exposition of female sexuality paralleled by the encouraging of pursuing traditionally 'male things'. Girlies, on the other hand, founded their credo on the freedom to express themselves however they wanted, a freedom guaranteed by the achievement of women's empowerment. Therefore, as Zaslow explains,

[r]ooted in a neoliberal language of choice, girl power offers girls and women a sense that they can choose when to be girly and when to be powerful, when to be mother and when to be professional, when to be sexy for male pleasure and when to be sexy for their own pleasure. These states are both stable and liminal; one is always powerful as a girl, and yet this story about girlhood suggests that girls can play with power taking it on and off at will (Zaslow, 2009, p. 3).

Those statements have a crystal-clear resonance with Femen and their constitutional characteristics. Making of *sextremism* their distinctive feature, they argue that «the woman's sexual demarche is the key to her liberation»³⁸. They not only reclaim their femininity, but they turn it into a weapon against patriarchy. As far as the pro- contra- axis is concerned, it was established how Girl Power's embracement of postfeminism as a more appropriate and up-to-date alternative than traditional feminism positioned it on the pro-extremity. That holds for Femen, as well, who claim, in their Manifesto, how the “complete victory on patriarchy” is their major goal, and their body is their weapon³⁹.

As anticipated, this paragraph will deal with the identification of all possible links between what were presented as the keywords to Girl Power postfeminism, namely empowerment and diversity, and Femen's movement. ‘Empowerment’ can be defined as «an experience of autonomy accompanied by a sense of purpose» (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009, p. 57): neoliberalism, the feminization of the third sector, the consequent economic independence and focus on individualism have transformed the lives of women, which now feel more confident than their ‘mothers’ did insofar as their freedom of choice and expression is concerned. Empowerment is the starting point for Girl Power feminism: it is the element allowing Girlies to assume that they can and will achieve success in the same way as their male counterparts do, without the need to sacrifice their femininity and all its attributes (clothes, makeup, girly behaviour, sexuality...) (Genz & Brabon, 2009). Girl Power «refers to a popular feminist stance (common among girls and young women during the mid-late 1990s and early 2000s) that combines female independence and individualism with a confident display of femininity/sexuality» (ibid., p. 77). That is precisely what Femen's activism is about: their entire manifesto glorifies women's re-appropriation of their body, sexuality and nudity – and their turning into weapons; their trademark is an incredibly feminine image of a topless girl wearing a flower crown. Furthermore, the last thing that has

³⁸ Femen Collective, About US, Femen.org.

³⁹ Ibid.

been mentioned about empowerment in Girl Power is its ambiguous and dangerous intrinsic character: women claim their independence in all life choices, but they ultimately choose exactly what patriarchal dictates would predict. Similarly, «FEMEN actions are both beneficial and detrimental to feminism as they present the media with eroticized militant women while empowering such representations of women» (Gheno, 2015, p. 63).

Second of all it comes “diversity”, whose relevance to Girl Power is twofold. On the one hand, it is concretized as diversity in respect to Second Wavers. (Post)feminist Rebecca Walker embodies such a generational gap herself, being daughter to Second-Waver Alice Walker and, at the same time, being daughter to post-modernity, as well. She suggests how the shift from feminists to postfeminists is not just ideological, but also (and especially) a demographic one: interracialism, transgenderism, fluid sexuality are all realities that post-modern human beings cannot ignore anymore, and are part of *daughter’s* socialization. This means that «racial, sexual, and gender identities have become more complex and so, correspondingly, must feminism» (Henry, 2004, p. 159). On the other hand, and consequently, diversity concerns the multiplicity of subjectivities, identities and femininities making it impossible to identify with just one kind. Girl Power postfeminism, along these lines, does not settle for the representation of just one ‘typical’ woman: from this, it follows that there is no ‘right way’ of doing (post)feminism (Budgeon, 2011). The way in which Femen embodies ‘difference’ from Second Wave feminism has already been discussed. Everything, from their methods, to their behaviour and look, represents exactly what traditional feminism had fought against. Moreover, the second meaning of ‘diversity’ as multiplicity of feminisms is also at the core of Femen activism. As was portrayed during the second chapter, Femen’s range of actions extended from political issues, religion, and feminism per se. One instance in which the diversity described for Girl Power is not matching Femens is racial diversity: while Third Wavers made a significant step towards the inclusion of different races and ethnic groups in the feminist discourse, Femen have frequently been accused of being too ‘white’ or of embodying ‘white saviour-complex’⁴⁰.

The time has now come to discuss Femen’s relationship with the four tenets of postmodernity functioning as a kind of *fil rouge* throughout the whole analysis of the present essay and to investigate whether and to what extent it matches that of Girl Power, previously illustrated in the first

⁴⁰ Kat, STOEFFEL, *Why Is Everyone So Mad at Pretty, Topless Femen?*, The New York Magazine, 8 April 2013.

chapter. To begin with, there is *internalization* – here intended as the incorporation of feminist claims and beliefs witnessed by society and political institutions, in general, and by individual women, in particular. Internalization is widely discussed by Angela McRobbie, as a feature of what she calls ‘double entanglement’: feminism is initially ‘taken into account’, to be then rejected as ‘no longer needed’ (McRobbie, 2009). During the paragraph on Girl Power, it was also specified how it is here believed that *internalization* is not leading to a total rejection of feminism in Girl Power – something that happens, instead, with Chick Lit. On the other hand, internalization rather serves the purpose of boosting Girlie’s confidence in empowerment, which in turn is the starting point for a new, revitalized form of feminism, one completely different (some would say opposite) from the previous Waves, but which still keeps a drive for fight and does not forget the existence of a common enemy. Marine Gheno, talking about Femen’s methods, affirms,

FEMEN activists detach themselves from the historical heritage of feminist political struggles [...]. However, rejuvenating feminist practice appeals to younger activists who welcome dynamic and visible actions as well as the transnational scope of FEMEN methods rooted in contemporary modes of communication. FEMEN’s surfing on taboos, anti-political-correctness, and neoliberal tactics is elaborating ways to empower a generation of women (and men) who grew up in everyday anti-feminist discourse claiming equality has been achieved and sexism is no longer an issue (Gheno, 2015, p. 84).

This statement exactly summarizes how Girl Power reasoning of *internalization* matches Femen’s. On one side, the means, beliefs and behaviours of the Ukrainian (later worldwide) group of activists are undoubtedly untraditional –and un-like traditional feminists’; however, they still make of empowerment the backbone around which to build their own war against patriarchy.

Proceeding some further, the second tenet, object of the present paragraph is that on *media*. About Girl Power, it has been previously mentioned how its (controversial, indeed) relation with media is based on a full embracement of all their possible kinds of representations. This brings about benefits and drawbacks at the same time. As a matter of fact, on the one hand girls and women, for the first time, are able to be represented by the media as protagonists, heroines, strong and independent (see *Xena*, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, etc.). In other words, «feminism’s political aims and emancipatory intentions have become accessible through the popularization of rhetoric and images that code characters, pop music stars, and other

celebrities as strong and independent» (Zaslow, 2009, p. 159). However, the downward side of the coin exposes all kinds of media as responsible for voiding Girl Power of any feminist drive for change (Gonick, 2006), risking women's sexualized or hyper-feminine representations to become just empty representations of patriarchy – and not weapons to fight against it. The relationship between Femen and media is a widely discussed one, as well. To begin with, their own manifesto reads,

FEMEN movement stands to the principles of openness and commitment to media to ensure maximum coverage of its revolutionary and advocacy activities in mass media. The movement carries out aggressive awareness-raising and information campaign in the Internet and sees the World Web as an alternative broadcasting medium for its ideology. FEMEN is present in every important social network and internet community⁴¹.

The feminist activists' love for mass media has not always been reciprocated; rather, it has been a love/hate relationship. On the one hand, media were the means that allowed Femen to (physically and symbolically) leave Ukraine and reach almost the whole world; they are actually a *conditio sine qua non* for the very existence and survival of the movement (Ackerman, 2014). It was mentioned during the second chapter how the decline of media coverage was paralleled with a weakening of the movement itself. Most part of the criticism concerning Femen is indeed addressed to their controversial use of media, since «while successfully bringing women issues to the forefront of the mainstream media, their method is also criticized for embodying and reproducing Western standards of beauty [...]» (Ghenó, 2015, p. 62). It is then evident how the debate around the Femen/media binomial exactly mirrors Girl Power's.

The turn has now come of addressing the two strictly related concepts of *neoliberalism* and *individualization*. Neoliberalism has played, and still plays, a fundamental role in the moulding of Girl Power. Such a strand of postfeminism, launched by Spice Girls' slogan and merchandising, presents, along with its girl-power credo, a well-defined consumerist culture all Girlies abide by. This is a result of neoliberalism in many ways: girls 'emancipation' or empowerment, and their existence as 'individual' subjects, made them the object of a whole new consumerism, based on how those *new* girls should look, behave, do makeup and sex; indeed, they became exposed to ever increasing regulation from policy-makers and markets (Harris, 2004) – patriarchy, since this is a men's world. While

⁴¹ See 37.

talking about neoliberalism and Girl Power, it was also mentioned how the role of media helped creating a specific consumerist culture exclusively addressing girls (Bae, 2011). Once again, Femen seem to be a perfect living representation of what has just been described. First of all, they resolutely claim their independence as completely free-thinking-and-acting subjects; however, a huge part of the criticism addressed towards them exactly concerns their undeniable homogeneity as far as looks and aesthetics are concerned⁴². Secondly, as one can witness reading their official website «FEMEN sells t-shirts and mugs with its name on it as a brand and thus resembles a co-optation of feminism by neoliberalism instead of a subversive reversal of women's commodification» (Gheno, 2015, p. 83-84).

Turning to individualisation, during Chapter One's paragraph on Girl Power it was described how neoliberalism's focus on the individual leads women and girls to self-monitoring and high levels of anxiety and insecurity insofar as the choices they make are concerned; as a consequence, modern identities have undergone a process of complexification and fluidization (Budgeon, 2011). In the post-modern scenario, «power emerges from the choice-making of individuals rather than from structural supports or systemic change and the emphasis on personal responsibility leads to increasing attempts at self-improvement and self-monitoring» (Zaslow, 2009, p. 8). This glorification of individualism goes against discourses on femininity, and girls find themselves in complex and ambiguous positions as to what is their actual role in society (Harris, 2004). Individualisation's ambiguity is a constitutive element of Femen. The idea of individual empowerment is at the core of 'sextremism', Femen's strategy of action, whereby women regain possession of their own body and display them through nudity out of *personal choice*, to fight against patriarchy. Once again, the ambiguity behind the activists' *modus operandi* has been the cause behind their being a target of harsh criticism. As underlined by Marine Gheno,

[t]his contradiction associated with girl power media culture is comprised within the idea of sporting, enjoying and displaying a "sexy" body by choice, empowered by a neo-liberalist conception of freedom through individualization and consumption. FEMEN neo-liberal protest tactics tend to reproduce the power structure of women's commodification instead of critiquing it, they do not seem to challenge the status quo (Gheno, 2015, p. 79).

⁴² Charlotte, RAVEN, *Femen – the Beauty Fascist Fauminists*, Feminist Times, 1 November 2013.

Finally, as with individualisation in general, the question always arises whether ‘personal choice’ is truly the outcome of individual free-will or rather comes as a consequence of structural standards reproducing male hegemony.

3.2 Chick Lit and *The Swan*: the body mirrors the soul

The second couple to be dealt with in this chapter is that of Chick Lit postfeminism and the makeover show. Chick Lit is a controversial postfeminist strand, often paired up with Girl Power feminism – however, the present essay considers the two as separate branches, for the reasons previously listed during the first chapter. Its origins are to be traced back to 1990s and the publishing of Fielding’s ‘Bridget Jones’s Diary’, and its development caused a huge change in cultural production – especially in literature, television and the movie industry. This branch has at its core the belief of feminism being no longer needed, since ‘all has been achieved’; the same belief leaves women and their identities in a confusing status, and this often leads to perceived anxiety (Coppock, Haydon, & Richter, 2014). The Makeover show, on the other side, represents a mixture of different television genres where the camera turns its lenses to the lives of ordinary individuals being transformed (for the better?) thanks to the help of a series of experts (Lewis, 2008). Makeover shows being an incredibly vast whole, this analysis only focuses on programmes concerning the transformation of women, their bodies and lives. The relationship between such a controversial television genre and an as much controversial postfeminist strand will be the object of the following paragraph, along the same structural development as the previous one.

Chick Lit is, among the three strands selected in this essay, the movement having less in common with the Second Wave or traditional feminism in general – many would argue the two have nothing in common at all. The reasoning behind the ‘post’ prefix is in this case pretty straightforward: Chick Lit tries to provide a viable answer to the emotional, social and financial status of post-modern girls and women. Such an answer is not much appreciated by many, due to its controversial outcome. As Ommundsen mentions about Chick Lit,

[t]he more serious charge is that chick lit betrays the legacy of feminism, turning back the clock to reinstate woman as subject and object of sexual and commercial fantasies. [...] Postfeminism turns into anti-feminism as Bridget and her peers, however conscious of their debt to the struggle of the feminists of the

seventies, abandon the liberationist agenda to concentrate their energies on cellulite and sex (Ommundsen, 2008, p. 331).

Anyways, what has been just mentioned is just a partial account of what Chick Lit really represents. One also has to take into account the socio-economic context which, in this case, is that of neoliberalism, where new femininities are being constructed to respond to social change that are confident, independent and sexually active (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Chick Lit postfeminism has been positioned on the contra- end of the axis for the exact same reasons: in this case, the ‘taking into accountness’ has led to “feminism dismantling itself” (McRobbie, 2009); that is why some scholars actually talk about ‘anti-feminism’ (Whelehan, 2000). Just as Bridget Jones, all contestants of personal makeover television programmes are not afraid to show the world their inner desires, no matter how shallow they are: participants of *The Swan* are presented as ‘ugly’, unfortunate women that seek to transform their physical appearance with painful surgeries in order to be more successful, sexually desirable, and socially confident (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006). No room is left for a single spark of feminism where there is a direct nexus going from cosmetic surgery to self(?)-realization (Heyes, 2007).

It is now time to address Chick Lit’s two analysed keywords: anxiety and ‘taking into accountness’. Anxiety was the first to be mentioned during Chapter One, due to its unmistakable recurrence in all discourses on *Singletons* and their lives. As was previously explained, anxiety comes as one of the outcomes of post-modernity to pathologically affect young women especially, and their identity-making processes (Gonick, 2006). In particular, Chen gives an incredibly accurate account of the relationship between post-modernity and the rise of anxiety, by stating,

[t]his is a mentality that the neoliberal self-governance contributes to, whereby to be empowered, free and actively choosing becomes the normative ideal to which one must aspire through ceaseless self-care and perfection, and for which one must bear full responsibility and take risks. [...] Indeed, woman nowadays can ‘have it all’ – an often-heard hymn to the progress of modern day life – but this is often less a statement of fact than an enjoyment, an urge and imperative which women feel they must try to follow. The permissive, free-choice society brings with it a new obligation to be liberated and to enjoy this freedom; but it also produces anxiety, unhappiness and a new form of shackles that eventually undermine its claims (Chen, 2013, p. 448).

During the first chapter’s paragraph on Chick Lit, it was explained how the ambiguity and the misery are most of the times very evident in Chick Lit

cultural production and its anti-heroines (Bridget Jones, Rebecca Bloomwood, etc.). One could not imagine a more perfect match than *The Swan*'s 'ugly ducklings' as real-life embodiments of such anxiety-affected characters, and their transformation into 'beautiful swans' as the realization of those inner desires they are sure will eventually lead them to 'have it all'. The common denominator behind all contestants' stories is their being stuck living an unsatisfying life, and their being tormented by the thought that without a drastic physical change their lives would have remained meaningless. That is precisely the kind of anxiety described in Chick Lit novels or movies: the woman's fear of not finding the perfect man, of not being successful, of not being accepted in social contexts; the answer to such an anxiety is physical change: calorie-counting, diets, surgeries, makeup and clothes. However, as Jennifer Pozner, author of the revealing book 'Reality Bites Back', declared «those women were suffering from trauma that could not be fixed by a tummy tuck»⁴³.

The second Chick Lit keyword to be here analysed is 'taking into accountness', already mentioned in the introductory paragraphs. During Chapter One it was also underlined how such a keyword is here considered as the exasperation of the concept of 'empowerment', fundamental in the analysis of Girl Power. While empowerment had the drawback of possibly leading women to play the exact same rules of the game as imposed by patriarchy, with the illusion of doing so out of personal choice, 'taking into accountness' owns an even drastic drawback of its own. Once again, Angela McRobbie's concept of 'double entanglement' (McRobbie, 2009) is fundamental in unravelling the mechanisms behind Singletons' complete rejection of feminism – most of them even think of it as an unpalatable word to be associated with (ibid.). Since policy-makers, economy and the media have all 'included' some feminist instances in their agendas, the perception of feminism being unnecessary is widespread among young women, so they reject it altogether. The makeover show realm is of the outmost interest when it comes to 'taking into accountness' and the consequent rejection of any form of feminism. To begin with, it was already pointed out how makeover show's contestants are all living embodiments of Chick Lit's Singletons and their total embracement of discomfort caused by them not abiding to femininity standards imposed by patriarchy. Their desire to please the 'male gaze' is nothing but implicit. *The Swan*, as all other shows of the kind, performs what Foucault calls 'normalization' applied to the

⁴³ Rod, BASTANMEHR, *How the Most Bizarre and Offensive Reality TV Show of All Time Got Made*, VICE, 4 September 2016.

realm of body aesthetics, so that «cosmetic surgery, through its legitimation of a particular idealized feminine beauty, is perhaps the ultimate expression of an individual transformation and a kind of empowerment» (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006, p. 261). It can be argued, then, that ‘normalization’ does to makeover shows what ‘taking into accountness’ does with policy-making. As Cressida Heyes points out,

Extreme Makeover is a particularly obvious example of normalization as homogenization with regard to cosmetic surgery: every body appearing on the show must be measured for its deviation from a norm set by heterosexual desirability and youth read through a binary gender system. [...] Thus participants end up looking not only very different from their own first appearance, but also, as a population, more gender dichotomous: the makeover creates (more) feminine women and (more) masculine men (Heyes, 2007, p. 21).

It is now clear how makeover shows manifest an even double ‘taking into accountness’, of feminism into mainstream media and politics and, as a consequence, of cosmetic surgery and other insane aesthetic measures into the building of feminine identities.

As is hitherto consuetudinary, the following paragraph will concern the four postmodern tenets in their relation to makeover shows and all possible similarities with the same discourse towards Chick Lit already considered along the first chapter. Internalization is closely linked to the just mentioned discussion of ‘taking into accountness’. Singletons, or ‘modern Ophelias’, represent what the complete internalization of feminism is, and what are its consequences. Such consequences include a series of anxieties and preoccupations about physical appearance, weight-watching, being desirable to the ‘male gaze’, finding the ‘perfect man’, having success, and so on – all those elements have been embraced under the name of ‘Bridget Jones Effect’ (Harzewski, 2011). Internalization in makeover shows includes all the above-mentioned issues, and goes even further, by normalizing the belief of drastic cosmetic surgeries or other physical alterations to be necessary and directly linked to the attainment of satisfaction in all the listed, anxiety-related, categories and to put an end to such anxiety altogether (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006). In order for such a mechanism to be enacted, a particular kind of subject is needed – not everyone would deliberately choose to undergo that amount of pain, stress, psychological pressure and so on. The subject that will, is what Foucault would call a *docile body*, which he defines by stating «a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved. And that this docile body can only be achieved through strict regiment of disciplinary acts»

(Foucault, 1977, p. 136). *The Swan* offers a precise representation of docile bodies when, during the first minutes of each episodes, it presents contestants as ‘ugly ducklings’, displays all of their flaws, and describes them using a rhetoric of weakness, low self-esteem, uneasiness and social exclusion⁴⁴.

As was previously mentioned during the first chapter, media and Chick Lit are strongly intertwined. Chick Lit was born as a female-oriented print-fiction and television genre and then expanded to reach all other realms of women’s private and public life. Its two-sided interpretation has also been previously addressed: on the one hand, the point of view of women and their look on life was employed, for the first time, in order to create a cultural production entirely dedicated to women themselves. Chick Lit productions were finally appropriate representations of post-modern young-women, which could, in turn, see themselves as and emphasise with their favourite characters and their anxieties, obstacles and everyday problems. On the other hand, this genre has been highly criticized by feminists on the basis of it reproducing gender hierarchies and offering a model of woman which was both unrealistic and dangerous to feminism and women themselves, a «passive and disempowered image of womanhood that has simply been revamped for a postfeminist era» (Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 85). Whether the drawbacks outweigh the advantages is not simple to establish; what is undeniable is that media are offering the audience a precisely definite ideal of woman, always homogeneous – whether it is proposed in advertising, television or print media – insofar as the look, aesthetic features, sexual behaviour, and social (and career) expectations are concerned. Gill has summarized the consequences of such a shift including

[t]he notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualisation of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference (Gill, 2007, p. 149).

What Gill mentions here exactly mirrors the mechanism at the core of makeover shows and their huge success. Media representation of the ‘ideal’ woman are now so rooted as to cause discomfort and anxiety at the least to all those not abiding to such standards. *The Swan* series precisely showed a group of ‘unfortunate’ women, struggling with their conditions, turned into

⁴⁴ Fox’s *The Swan*, April – December 2004.

‘beautiful swans’ through surgeries and all other kinds of physical transformation. The rhetoric behind it, then, was that to feel good with yourself and with others, to achieve, to find a man, you had to look like the girls on the cover of glossy magazines. When Rachel Love-Fraser, winner of Season One, was asked if she had any regrets at all, she answered «no regrets at all, it was fantastic! I had the opportunity of a lifetime to become the person I always wanted to become». Arias Lorrie, the participant whose episode was described in Chapter Two due to the controversial case it created because of the dramatic consequences of the show on the woman’s physical and psychological health, declared that notwithstanding all that the show put her through, she would still do it again and, even worst, she would now undergo a series of new surgeries if she could⁴⁵.

When, during the first chapter, the relationship between Chick Lit and neoliberalism was assessed, two different elements were presented. On the one hand, as was mentioned several times during the present dissertation, neoliberalism is one of the major factors behind the ‘end’ of feminism and the rise of its ‘post-’ counterpart. Parallel to (and produced by) neoliberalism, a trend can be detected from 1990s onward «towards a celebration of conspicuous consumption and solipsistic individual gratification, embodied above all in the image of the empowered, assertive, pleasure-seeking, ‘have-it-all’ woman of sexual and financial agency» (Chen, 2013, p. 441). On the other hand, controversially, Chick Lit cultural production and the *Singletons* world it produced contribute heavily to the neoliberal agenda. As explained by Eva Chen,

‘[c]hoice’, ‘freedom’ and ‘agency’ are terms liberally appropriated in recent years by popular women’s cultural genres such as chick lit, chick-flicks, makeover TV programmes and beauty adverts, to advance an image of the new, empowered woman confidently embracing patriarchal heterosexuality and commodity culture. While these terms suggest a feminist legacy, they are used not to advance the feminist cause, but to celebrate a rhetoric of individual choice and freedom which often is measured in terms of commodity consumption (Chen, 2013, p. 440).

Therefore, *Singletons* have been turned into a consumerist category per se, and Chick Lit culture continuously suggest what clothes to wear, what makeup to buy, and so on. Such a portrait of neoliberalism in Chick Lit culture can also be easily mirrored to personal makeover shows. As Gill and Herdieckerhoff maintain, at the basis of the Chick Lit phenomenon is

⁴⁵ Lauren, DUCA; *What It’s Really Like to Get Extreme Plastic Surgery, From a Former ‘Swan’ Contestant*, The Huffington Post, 27 October 2014.

[a] preoccupation with the shape, size, and look of the body that borders on the obsessional. What is striking is not only that appearance is such a preoccupation, but that it is depicted as requiring endless self-surveillance, monitoring, dieting, purging, and work. [...] In this sense, the novels can be read as offering an insight into the disciplinary matrix of neo-liberal society, with its emphasis upon policing and remodelling the self (Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2006, p. 497).

Such preoccupation and disciplinary matrix is what fuels *The Swan* contestants' drive to pursue three months of severe surgical procedures to completely change their appearance. Makeover shows are founded on the same belief of success, pleasure and confidence being enabled by a certain consumerism, that suggested by experts, which in turn mirrors standards imposed by media (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006).

Finally, it comes individualization, which can be considered as a consequence of neoliberalism itself. Women empowerment, gained financial autonomy and all other factors which were previously discussed marked a significant shift from traditional feminism, characterized by solidarity and 'chains of equivalence', to individualized selves and a focus on self-monitoring and the personal (McRobbie, 2009). Neoliberalism, or late-capitalism, has caused a series of changes like «the gradual 'desacralization' of social life, the erosion of grand political narratives or certainties, and the rise of both individualism and consumerism» (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 8). Therefore, the construction of identity is no longer deriving from social structures; on the other hand, «some argue that we are seeing attempts to ground identity in the body, as individuals are left alone to establish and maintain values with which to live and make sense of their daily lives» (ibid.). It is precisely this extensive focus on the (feminine) self causing the anxiety described as one keyword to the Chick Lit strand of postfeminism and the desire to achieve the 'ideal' of woman advertised by all kinds of media. Such an aspiration is what pushes women to participate to (and obsessively watch) makeover shows: excessive self-monitoring leads to discomfort as soon as the realization comes of not abiding to beauty standards and «this requires people (predominantly women) to believe first that they or their life is lacking or flawed in some way, and second that it is amenable to reinvention or transformation by following the advice of relationship, design or lifestyle experts» (Gill, 2008, p. 441).

3.3 Riot Grrrls' Maneuvering of femininities

The content of this last section will be the comparison of two incredibly exceptional realities, so much peculiar as owners of the greater potential for change of all other phenomena analysed during the present essay. On the theoretical side, there is Gender Maneuvering, firstly formulated by Mimi Schippers, in relation to the alternative hard rock scene in particular, and then developed by Nancy Finley, as well, who applied it to the Roller Derby phenomenon. Gender Maneuvering is a revolutionary re-modelling of (crystallized) gender relations, referring to «individual action or patterns of action developed by a group that manipulate the relationship between masculinity and femininity in ways that impact the larger process of gender structuration» (Schippers, 2002, p. 37). That is a rather innovative concept, leaving room for the challenging, dismantling and re-building of gender dynamics of power through the collective construction of alternative ways to 'do' gender. Riot Grrrl subculture first originated in the 1990s punk rock scene in the cities of Olympia, Washington and Washington, DC. There, a group of strong-willed women started gathering and, with the aid of fanzines, started spreading the word calling for a 'Revolution Girl Style Now!', starting inside the prevalently male-oriented punk environment of the time. Such a Grrrls mobilization actually took over the punk scene, with a series of actions described during Chapter Two giving particular attention to one band in particular, Bikini Kill, an emblem of how performing (gender-norms) disruptive behaviour and enacting a feminist, subversive counterpart can actually be revolutionary to the surrounding environment's power hierarchies between femininities and masculinities. The following pages will be dedicated to defining how the history of Riot Grrrl harmonizes with Gender Maneuvering enactment.

When introducing Gender Maneuvering positioning on the pro/contra axis, the assumption was made of it being located on the *zero* position. That statement was justified by explaining how this postfeminist strand could not fit neither on the pro-, nor on the contra- extremes of the axis, for the simple reason of it not belonging to any 'mainstream' way of doing (post) feminism. As a matter of fact, Gender Maneuvering actually seeks an *other* arena where to establish new gender dynamics, unaltered by biased and patriarchal hierarchies that instead affect ordinary cultural arenas. On the one hand, this strand embodies some of the features of *postfeminism*, like girlie clothes, enhanced femininity, and so on. On the other hand, however, the use that it makes of such features is nothing like any other postfeminist branch. Rather, Gender Maneuvering has maintained several elements of

traditional feminisms, as well; one above any other, the collective element, solidarity among all girls and women joined together in a common battle. This characterization makes Gender Maneuvering a hybrid; but, at the same time, such a strand is not akin to any other of the past or present time. The same holds for Riot Grrrls. As a matter of fact, the first issue of the *Bikini Kill* fanzine published in 1991⁴⁶ presented in the second chapter exactly encouraged the building of ‘chains of equality’ (McRobbie, 2009) and solidarity among girls, as did the Grrrls manifesto published in issue #2 of the same fanzine⁴⁷. And, at the same time, elements such as the use of fanzines and the complete rejection of mass media as a means to communication – Kathleen Hanna actually called for a Bikini Kill total media blackout in 1993⁴⁸ – and the adherence to DIY culture made the Grrrls stage of action a nonconventional one. As far as Gender Maneuvering’s qualification as a *postfeminist* strand, the main reason was certainly its enormous potential for change – the greatest among all postfeminisms. Besides, as anticipated, notwithstanding its being connected with traditional feminism through the significance of solidarity and bonds between girls and women to fight male hegemony, this strand embodies some typical postfeminist elements, such as the above mentioned re-appropriation of femininity through girlish clothes and makeup. Watching the documentary *The Punk Singer* by Sini Anderson and reading or listening to interviews it becomes clear how Bikini Kill, and Kathleen Hanna in particular, were the living embodiments of the described mixture of traditional feminist drive for change through a common fight by girls and for girls with sassy girlishness and femininity⁴⁹.

It is now time to face a discussion of Gender Maneuvering keywords and their relationship with Riot Grrrl subculture. During the exposition on Gender Maneuvering in the first chapter, several keywords had to be analysed in order to achieve a full understanding of what Schippers’ concept was about. Different kinds of both masculinity and femininities were under scrutiny, trying to dismantle modern gender hierarchy into different pieces and provide an explanation to each one of them. In this paragraph, however, the discourse will only focus on femininities, which are the relevant concepts to be then paralleled with the Riot Grrrl movement. The three

⁴⁶ Kathleen, HANNA and Tobi, VAIL, *Revolution Girl Style Now*, Bikini Kill #1, 1991.

⁴⁷ Kathleen, Hanna, *Riot Grrrl Is...*, Bikini Kill #2, 1991.

⁴⁸ Katherine, BROOKS, *Punk Icon Kathleen Hanna Brings Riot Grrrl (sic.) Back To The Spotlight*, The Huffington Post, 29 November 2013.

⁴⁹ Sini, ANDERSON, *The Punk Singer*, 2013.

‘types’ of femininities that are worth recalling for the purpose of this paragraph are emphasized femininity, pariah femininities and alternative femininities. To begin with, the concept of emphasized femininity was born as the female counterpart to hegemonic masculinity, to indicate all those features innate in women that are compliant to patriarchy (Connell, 2005). Being perfectly complementary to hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity «is the type of femininity that is culturally extolled and is highly commercialized and legitimated. Heterosexuality is central within it, and thus it accommodates the interests and desires of men through emphasis on vulnerability, fragility acceptance of marriage, sexual receptivity, and motherhood» (Finley, 2010, p. 360-361). However, there are other forms of femininities which are probably less common, but still embodied in the contemporary world. Pariah femininities refer to all women refusing to abide to patriarchal standards of compliance to male hegemony and embody typically male attributes, instead. Being them so threatening to the hierarchical status quo, they are normally stigmatized; some examples of pariahs are ‘lesbian’, ‘bitch’, ‘slut’... (Schippers, 2007). Finally, and that is the most relevant keyword, there are alternative femininities. Such femininities are those actually challenging the gender hierarchy, «discursively valued traits and practices [...] that *do not* articulate a complementary relation of dominance and subordination between women and men» (ibid., p. 98).

The Riot Grrrl subculture has been chosen as the recent-time phenomena to be matched with Gender Maneuvering precisely because it is believed that bands belonging to such a movement, such as Bikini Kill, have been performing with their histories the defining of alternative femininities, both inside the punk rock scene and outside, as they echoed to reach girls all over the world. The punk rock environment, even though on the one side was the one owning the greatest potential for subversion and challenge to any kind of standard, was also famous for reproducing heterosexual, masculine dynamics; girls were allowed in, but they were expected to ghost, stay in the corner, and had to face a dangerous and violent environment, as well (Downes, 2012). However, «[d]espite the fact that punk and hardcore have provided a forum for such misogyny, rock’s, and especially punk’s, foregrounding of a potent combination of sex and anger opens a fertile space both for women’s feminist interventions and for the politicization of sexuality and female identity» (Gottlieb & Wald, 1994, p. 253). As Julia Downes explains,

[t]he gendered double standard of sexual activity was also found to operate in the punk communities [...]; punk girls had to negotiate their sexual activity in relation to being labelled a “slag” or a “drag”, whereas, the sexual exploits of punk men did not interfere with their punk status. Women had to carefully negotiate their identity within the limited positions available to them in punk subcultures: the tomboy or the sex object (Downes, 2012, p. 207).

In this context, Riot Grrrls chose to fight hegemonic masculinity through the redefining of their own identities. One symbolic instance in such a direction was the firm re-appropriation of the word ‘slut’. While the same attempt tried out by Girlies was not successful, in that it achieved some detachment of the word from its previous, gender-biased, meaning, but failed to provide a new, positive one (Attwood, 2007, p. 238), the following lines will possibly explain how Grrrls were more successful, in that they transformed *pariahs* into *alternative femininities*, performing what Schippers has coded as Gender Maneuvering. As a matter of fact, when Kathleen Hanna performed on stage, with the word ‘Slut’ painted in black on her tummy, wearing sensual clothes, dancing provocatively, showing off her body, she made «the viewer/audience member shamelessly aware of their gaze and their problematic complicity in the production of powerful dominant sexual categories imposed upon women’s bodies and sexualities» (Downes, 2016, p. 99); owning that pariah was not all: Riot Grrrl transformed it in their own, new, positive identity.

The time has now come for the last discussion on the four post-modern tenets of internalization, the media, neoliberalism and individualization. As anticipated during the first chapter for Gender Maneuvering, doing it will not be as straightforward as it was for the two other phenomena under scrutiny. As a matter of fact, being one of the main qualification of Gender Maneuvering – and, as a consequence, of Riot Grrrl –, the performance of redefinition of gender hierarchies *outside* of the existing arena of gender relations (Gender Maneuvering is not about making existing femininities *au pair* with hegemonic masculinities, it is rather about creating *new* femininities altogether), any connection with aspects of modern societies such as the four chosen for this analysis can be insidious to detect and, most of the times, conflictual. To begin with, the statement was made in Chapter One of internalization not being relevant to a discourse on Gender Maneuvering, because while the taking into accountness plays a fundamental role at the policy-making or societal level (as explained in previous paragraphs), it does not when it comes to really ‘local’ realities such as those where Gender Maneuvering is allowed to take place in the present time. As with Riot Grrrl, their operating prevalently in the punk

scene upholds such a claim – indeed, both Schippers and Finley in their analyses of maneuvering referred to similar contexts: alternative hard rock environment for the former, and the roller derby community for the latter. This does not mean that Riot Grrrls were not aware of feminist claims, or were not embedded in the same liquid modernity as everybody else. On the contrary, all members of Bikini Kill pursued their studies at Evergreen College in Olympia, renown for its liberal direction (Downes, 2007), and Kathleen Hanna herself was acquainted to feminism from a very young age, and she mentions Betty Friedan, feminist of the outmost relevance, considered one of the ‘mothers’ of the Second Wave, Kathy Acker, sex-positive feminist writer and activist, and *Mrs.* liberal/feminist magazine, founded by second-wave feminists Gloria Steinem and Dorothy Pittman Hughes, as paramount influencers in leading the way to funding Bikini Kill and Riot Grrrls in general⁵⁰. What made Riot Grrrls a different instance in the internalization discourse, however, is that feminist consciousness and living in second modernity had not contributed to that taking into accountness that McRobbie acknowledges as the ‘beginning of the end’ of feminism. On the other hand, and as was previously claimed, Grrrls kept the traditional element of a collective fight against patriarchy, however embedded in the post-modern environment.

Turning to media, when their position in respect to Gender Maneuvering was being analysed in the first chapter, it was mentioned how the relationship was conflictual at the least. In fact, a twofold observation was made in this respect: on the one hand media attention to Gender Maneuvering is rare if not non-existent – due to this strand being both extremely local in character and a not-so-widespread phenomenon; on the other hand, Gender Maneuvering itself is not craving for media attention: on the contrary, being it an anti-mainstream specimen, it is in its nature to reject all typically mass-means of communication. Contrarily,

[p]unk was generally characterized by its anti-status quo disposition, a pronounced do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos, and a desire for disalienation (resistance to the multiple forms of alienation in modern society). These three elements provided actors with tools for political interventions and actions. A significant avenue for DIY intervention was self-publishing, particularly with “zines” [...] (Dunn & Summer Farnsworth, 2012, p. 136).

⁵⁰ See: Bio., *Kathleen Hanna*, biography.com and Sini Anderson’s *The Punk Singer*, 2013.

Riot Grrrls ideas, then, circulated via fanzines, tiny magazines self-produced and distributed by creators themselves (Duncombe, 1997). Nonetheless, as has already been pointed out during Chapter Two's paragraph on Riot Grrrls, the moment came when 'popular' interest for those zines reached an unbearable level, and mainstream magazines began publishing zines' addresses, forcing the freezing of a production that was structurally supposed to be limited in number (Schilt, 2003). At the same time, Riot Grrrls were attracting ever-growing media attention, which was oftentimes providing the audience with a biased, uninformed negative framing of the whole movement. For that reason, Riot Grrrl called for a collective media blackout, encouraging all members of the community not be photographed by or to talk to anyone related to any popular media (Strong, 2011). In the words of Sheila Whiteley,

[a]s their blackout suggests, riot grrrls are profoundly aware of how easy it is for those in control of mainstream representational discourse to exploit and commodify marginalised cultures, and how difficult it is for young people today to resist the misrepresentation, co-option and containment of their particular scenes and forms of cultural expression (Kearney, 1997, p. 209).

It is now evident how Riot Grrrl relationship with media resonate with all that has been said for Gender maneuvering.

As far as neoliberalism is concerned, it was claimed during Chapter One how Gender Maneuvering seeks to operate outside its influence. As Marx would suggest, the structural system behind a certain society works toward reproducing the means for its own subsistence. This means that, if capitalism is the structural system, patriarchy is one of the means to its own surviving, for a number of reasons that go from women being 'diseconomic' as a workforce due to childcare, to consumerist economies founded on patriarchal standards on femininity, and so on. Riot Grrrls relation with capitalism was immediately made clear in their 1991 Manifesto, reading

BECAUSE we hate capitalism in all its forms
and see our main goal as sharing information
and staying alive, instead of making profits
of being cool according to traditional standards⁵¹

The movement actually remained faithful to its claims throughout its history. The first girl-only meetings held in Olympia, which eventually culminated with the birth of Riot Grrrls, focused on capitalism, as well as

⁵¹ See n. 46.

other themes like classism and sexism (Downes, 2012). More over, and of the greatest significance, was the fight to capitalism professed by DIY subculture, of which Riot Grrrls were part. Self-production, self-distribution, rejection of all mass media (accused of capitalizing the movement) and all lucrative activities – zines, for examples, were freely distributed or exchanged among girls in the community themselves – were all actions calling for a development outside of capitalism and the wish to form an *outside* space of networking for girls only.

Finally, the last tenet to be discussed in this chapter is individualization. Gender Maneuvering has already been described as a rather ‘collective’ phenomenon, based on the building of networks and common goals, on sharing and participating, rather than on individualism (Finley, 2010). Therefore, it is safe to say that the relationship between the two is a negative one: the greater the focus on the individual, the smaller the space gets to perform Gender Maneuvering. Nancy Finley, during her analysis of Gender Maneuvering in Roller Derby, underlines the importance of *intragender* dynamics, which are often underestimated; as she underlines,

[i]nteractions that construct these *intragender* dynamics can be used not only to sustain gender relations but also to challenge the relationships between masculinities and femininities (gender maneuvering). Importantly, women usually engineer the *intragender* dynamics in femininities that support or challenge *intergender* relations with masculinity (Finley, 2010, p. 363).

The author subsequently claims how studies have shown how often it is women themselves that are responsible in the stigmatization of pariahs; this proves the power of *intragender* relations to revolutionize gender dynamics from the inside. It is here believed that those *intragender* relationship are exactly what Riot Grrrls sought to build, through fanzines and girl-only meetings: they are what the ‘Revolution Girl Style Now!’ was about. As Schilt underlines, the main difference between Spice Girls and Riot Grrrls lays in the fact that the former never provided a way to practice what they advertised at their shows, or in their music videos, while the latter actually wanted to offer girls a practical way to do feminism, «by forming bands, making zines, or starting support groups» (Schilt, 2003, p. 14). Riot Grrrls history provides herself the reasoning behind affirming that the movement, as with Gender Maneuvering, is based on collectivity, solidarity, ‘chains of equivalence’, and not on individualism.

Conclusion: postfeminist fluidity, from politics to culture

The past sixty or more pages of this essay have been devoted to the attempt to build a reasoned portrait of postfeminism, in order to possibly make some amount of clarity as far as its origins, diverse contents, innovative aims and contrasting views are concerned. It goes without saying that this has been for sure a partial account, leaving out not only discourses on class, race, or non-Western realities, but also a huge other part of theories and phenomena that did not make it through the narrow selection this essay required. The aim was definitely not that of providing the reader with an exhaustive narrative on postfeminism as a whole – something practically impossible, given its characteristic ongoing transformation; the main purpose was rather an experimental attempt at analysing three of its branches under the same outline of topics, so that differences and similarities could be brought to the reader's attention, and their pairing with three contemporary or recent-time phenomena so to make familiarizing with the subject-matter a little less fuzzy. This was done following a recurrent structure, supposed to facilitate the reader throughout the pages; the same structure will be employed here to draw the final conclusion this work has brought about.

First of all, it comes 'posting', or the reasons behind the inclusion of each of the selected theories and phenomena inside a discourse on postfeminism. The three pairs that were chosen as the most representatives, all had different relationships with the ambiguous post- prefix. Starting with Girl Power and Femen, it has been underlined how their being *postfeminist* realities was pretty straightforward: Girlies, from Spice Girls onwards, embody what it means to be an 'empowered' young women in the postmodern world. Being a feminist had become a 'dirty word', as one member of the girl-band admitted (Spice Girls, 1997); there was the need to renovate, and there went Girl Power, a 'nineties way' of doing feminism. Power had been achieved, so women and girls all over the world were finally free to do whatever they wanted, including a re-appropriation of femininity that dangerously looked like a mirror image of what the male gaze would want. The main critique against Femen exactly concerns the fact that their hyper-emphasized femininity and 'sextremist' nudity could be dangerous to the same battle they claim to be fighting. What is at stake in this sort of game is the taking for granted of what first- and second-wavers achieved with years of fight against the patriarchal system. As far as Chick Lit and the makeover show are concerned, a justification to the post- prefix is almost pointless, since many scholars have (accurately) gone so far as to call them anti-feminist realities. What holds true for both is the belief that

‘feminism is no longer needed’ and ‘everything has been achieved’ already, therefore one has not to worry anymore about being judged on wearing provocative clothes, desiring a husband and being obsessed with the body and aesthetics in general. Finally, as with Gender Maneuvering and Riot Grrrl, ‘posting’ is slightly more complex. As a matter of fact, it was mentioned how some elements of traditional feminism were maintained, while some others were rejected. The drive for a collective fight of the (patriarchal) system and the use of a traditional feminist rhetoric are here paired with the means and aesthetics of postmodernity, in which all Grrrls were born within.

An imaginary axis was drawn, during the first pages of this essay, from pro-postfeminism advocates, to contra- ones. The three matches analysed were the most representative sample: each one of them occupied a different position along such axis. The Girl Power-Femen duo stood in the pro-extreme: postfeminism is the contemporary alternative to traditional feminism and should then be pursued as the ‘new way’ of doing it. Having empowerment as a starting point, girls and woman must be the masters of their own lives, and choose whatever it is they want to be. Chick Lit and the makeover show were to be found in the exact opposite position: their complete rejection of any kind of feminism, considered useless in the present time, made them defenders of the contra- school of thought. More interestingly, Gender Maneuvering and Riot Grrrls were placed on what was described as the *zero* position: their unconventional conduct and maneuvering toward an *other* dimension, outside patriarchal standards on gender, earned them such an unconventional site along the axis. What it is to be drawn from such a comparison, is a fundamental validation to the greatest axiom that was taken as given at the beginning of this discourse on postfeminism, namely, one of its elemental attributes being fluidity and variety. As a matter of fact, three strands that have been presented as part of the postfeminist whole, for the reasons that have been presented along the way, have proven to be diverse (if not opposite) even in the most fundamental attribute of all: their own view about postfeminism itself.

Such an inference about postfeminist disarticulation – as opposed to traditional feminism unity and coherence –, will also be proven right in the following lines on conclusive remarks about each and every pair and their relationship with internalization, the media, neoliberalism and individualization. As far as internalization, an enlightening concept drawn from Angela McRobbie’s *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2009), it was possible to detect its performing both in Girl Power and Chick Lit (and, of course, in their corresponding phenomena), even if in a different degree.

Girl Power, in fact, has at its core a strong faith in *empowerment*, or the attainment, for women, of the same power man have; from such an assumption, they build their self-confidence and their 'nineties way' of doing feminism, still keeping a spark of interest in discussing and redefining gender dynamics – even though, it was underlined, it seems they are more focused on being empowered, self-confident individuals, than in providing a valid way for young women to actually perform Girl Power in a *constructive* (and not passive) way; the exact same critique applies to Femen, whose activism has been accused of shallowness, lacking truly subversive contents. Chick Lit goes even further: here, internalization reaches the point where it dangerously convinces women that 'everything has been achieved' and, consequently, that 'feminism is no longer needed'. The makeover show is a shockingly accurate mirror to this particular persuasion: women fully embrace and exhibit features such as anxiety about their appearance, their social status, their romantic life, and so on, which are all nothing but the marks and scars of patriarchy on women's mind-sets, and are willing to suffer the most terrifying pains to the simple belief that changing their body will change their whole lives for the better. Nonetheless, the wish to include a positive, proactive beam of light in the darkness led to the addition of Gender Maneuvering, a rather experimental attempt, to this essay's analysis on postfeminism. During Chapter Three, it was explained how, notwithstanding postmodernity (whose influence led to the infamous Double Entanglement), local realities performing alternative gender dynamics, such as Riot Grrrls, are not affected by internalization, or, if they are, it does not stop them to keep wanting to change the status quo.

Then, it is the turn of media, owning such a paramount role in post-modern societies and their characterization. Both Girl Power and Chick Lit, Femen and the makeover show, are natural daughters to the development media have underwent up to this day. Girl Power was born as a feature of Spice Girls album's advertising/merchandising, and spread all over the world through cultural productions such as movies, TV shows, music, and so on; Femen admit themselves to make the greater possible use of all means of mass communication, and owe their notoriety to the media attention that boomed during their first years and propagated their name from a small-town in Ukraine to the entire world. Chick Lit was born as a media product itself: *Bridget Jones's Diary* column on The Independent later became an all-sided cultural phenomenon; books, TV shows, movies, all told the story of the 'postmodern woman' and her way through life. Women and girls throughout the world were fed with an imaginary on femininity and identity which was all but empowering. The consequent

development of insecurities and anxiety has led many to feel uncomfortable with their own lives. The makeover show is only one (televised) way of dealing with this psychological chaos. Once again, it is Gender Maneuvering taking the alternative path: every instance of this phenomenon that existed (or still exist) is first of all local at its core, not some mass media worldwide phenomenon. This is its greatest limit and strength at the same time: Riot Grrrl's media blackout or, in general, its DIY publicizing (based on fanzines and word-of-mouth advertising) helped in preserving their original essence, unaffected by the biases of the 'outside world'; on the other hand, however, it both prevented the phenomenon to really expand beyond the punk rock scene of the US, and allowed for some misinterpretation and uninformed bad advertising from the media themselves, as well.

Neoliberalism and individualization, here addressed together as the latter is a consequence to the former, have been proven to own a great role in the moulding of *postmodern postfeminism*. Neoliberalism's influence on Girl Power and Chick Lit is practically identical. Both those theories are daughters to it, for the reasons previously illustrated, including women's gained financial power, the boom of the third-sector, the internalization of feminist claims into mainstream policy-making, and so on. However, they also contributed to neoliberalism's reproduction themselves, especially because of the consumerist economy that was built around the 'new' (?) idea of femininity broadcasted by the two genres of cultural production. Individualization, though, is handled differently by each of the two strands. Girl Power's individualization stems, once again, from empowerment, and the self-confidence of being able to achieve anything by oneself (the same holds, of course, for Femen, as shown in their 'sextremism' tactic). Chick Lit's and the makeover show's individualization is rather different, and can be summarized in an obsessive emphasis on self-monitoring and self-surveillance, as far as appearance, in particular, is concerned. Gender Maneuvering's (and Riot Grrrl's) relation with both neoliberalism and individualization is a negative one. First of all, DIY subculture precisely strives to be an alternative counterpart to capitalism and the marketing of lives, by maintaining the self-made production, distribution and fruition of its cultural productions. Finally, both Gender Maneuvering and Riot Grrrls are founded on the rejection of individualism, and the construction of collective solidarity among girls and women (what Nancy Finley calls 'intragender dynamics') as the only true means toward the disruption of male-hegemonic gender power relations.

One final remark to be made in concluding this attempted analysis of postfeminism concerns its own definition. During the introduction, *postfeminism* was presented, among other things, in function of what has been described as a shift “from feminist *politics* to postfeminist *culture*” (Tasker & Negra, 2007), and was dealt with as such along this whole dissertation. An emphasis on cultural production is easily inferable throughout this whole work: this choice was made in the hope it will enlighten a correspondence with such a theoretical statement. It is now deemed fundamental to underline how both all theories and all contemporary phenomena under scrutiny along this essay were entirely belonging to the cultural realm. This is not coincidental, and will be confirmed by almost every other postfeminist branch one wishes to examine – with the one exception of *gender mainstreaming*, the incorporation of gender-sensitive topics inside the policy-making of especially international institutions (it could be claimed that such a phenomenon is not *postfeminist* at all, but this is not the place to do so). Concluding, it is here strongly believed that contemporary sites allowing for some serious, unembedded (and thus revolutionary) meaning-making – as far as the gender dynamics discussed so far, but also discourses on class, race and any other one concerning the claims of some ‘disadvantaged’ minority – all lie inside the territory of cultural production.

Bibliography

- Ackerman, G. (2014). A Movement of Free Women. In Femen, *Femen* (p. XIII). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ackerman, G. (2013). One Year Later: Afterward by Galia Ackerman. In Femen, *Femen* (p. 168-182). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ashby, J. (2005, Winter). Postfeminism in the British Frame. *Cinema Journal* , 44 (2), p. 127-132.
- Attwood, F. (2007). Sluts and Riot Grrrls: Female Identity and Sexual Agency. *Journal of Gender Studies* , 16 (3), p. 233-247.
- Budgeon, S. (2011). The Contradictions of Successful Femininity: Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities. In R. Gill, & C. Scharff, *New Femininities. Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* (p. 279-292). Houndmills, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Butler, J. (2013, Spring). For White Girls Only?: Postfeminism and the Politics of inclusion. *Feminist Formations* , p. 35-55.
- Baumgardner, J., & Richards, A. (2004). Feminism and Femininity: Or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Thong. In A. Harris, *All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity* (p. 59-67). New York, US: Routledge.
- Baumgardner, J., & Richards, A. (2000). *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Bae, M. S. (2011, Winter). Interrogating Girl Power: Girlhood, Popular Media, and Postfeminism. *Visual Arts Research* , 37 (2), p. 28.
- Banet-Weiser, S., & Portwood-Stacer, L. (2006). 'I Just Want to Be Me Again!'. *Feminist Theory* , 7 (2), p. 255-272.
- Beck, U., Bonss, W., & Lau, C. (2003). The Theory of Reflexive Modernization. *Theory, Culture & Society* , 1-33.
- Bordo, S. R. (1989). The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: a Feminist Appropriation of Foucault . In A. M. Jaggar, & S. R. Bordo, *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (p. 21-22). New Jersey, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Currie, D. H., Kelly, D. M., & Pomerantz, S. (2009). *Girl Power: Girls Reinventing Girlhood*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

- Chen, E. (2013). Neoliberalism and Popular Women's Culture: Rethinking Choice, Freedom and Agency. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* , 440-452.
- Connell, R. W. (2005, December). Hegemonic Masculinity. Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society* , 19 (6), p. 829-859.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coppock, V., Haydon, D., & Richter, I. (2014). Introduction: Locating 'Post-Feminism', Exploring the Myths. In V. Coppock, D. Haydon, & I. Richter, *The Illusions Of Post-Feminism: New Women, Old Myths* (p. 3-15). New York: Routledge.
- Cott, N. (1987). *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. New Haven, Connecticut, US: Yale University Press.
- Ehemann, S. (2007). *Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union*. Norderstedt, Germany: GRIN.
- Duncombe, S. (1997). *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. London: Verso.
- Dunn, K., & Summer Farnsworth, M. (2012). "We ARE the Revolution": Riot Grrrl Press, Girl Empowerment, and DIY Self-Publishing. *Women's Studies* , 41 (2), p. 136-157.
- Davies, J. (1999). 'It's Like Feminism, but You Don't Have to Burn Your Bra'. Girl power and the Spice Girls' breakthrough 1996-7. In A. Blake, *Living Through Pop* (p. 159-173). London, UK: Routledge.
- Dicker, R., & Piepmeier, A. (2003). Introduction. In R. Dicker, & A. (. Piepmeier, *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century* (p. 3-26). Lebanon: University Press of New England.
- Downes, J. (2016). 'We are turning cursive letters into knives': The Synthesis of the Written Word, Sound and Action in Riot Grrrl Cultural Resistance. In R. Carroll, & A. (. Hansen, *LITPOP: Writing and Popular Music* (p. 89-108). New York: Routledge.
- Downes, J. (2007). Riot Grrrl: The Legacy and Contemporary Landscape of DIY Feminist Cultural Activism. In N. Monem, *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now!* (p. 12-51). London: Black Dog Publishing.

- Downes, J. (2012, January). The Expansion of Punk Rock: Riot Grrrl Challenges to Gender Power Relations in British Indie Music Subcultures. *Women's Studies* , 41 (2), p. 204-237.
- Farganis, S. (1994). *Situating Feminism: From Thought to Action*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Ferriss, S., & Young, M. (2008). Introduction: Chick Flicks and Chick Culture. In S. Ferris, & M. (Young, *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies* (p. 1-26). New York: Routledge.
- Figuroa, C. (2003, Spring). Self-Esteem and Cosmetic Surgery: Is There a Relationship Between the Two? *Plastic Surgical Nursing* , 23 (1), p. 21-24.
- Finley, N. (2010). Skating Femininity: Gender Maneuvering in Women's Roller Derby. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* , 39 (4), p. 359-387.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (A. Sheridan, Trad.) London: Penguin.
- Gallagher, A. H., & Pecot-Hebert, L. (2007, 12 05). "You Need a Makeover!": The Social Construction of Female Body Image in "A Makeover Story", "What Not to Wear", and "Extreme Makeover". *Popular Communication* , 5 (1), p. 57-79.
- Genz, S., & Brabon, B. A. (2009). *Postfeminism. Cultural Texts and Theories* . Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gill, R. (2008). Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Postfeminist Times. *Subjectivity* , 25 (1), p. 432-445.
- Gill, R. (2003). From Sexual Sbjctification to Sexual Subjectification: the Resexualisation of Women's Bodies in the Media. *Feminist Media Studies* , 100-106.
- Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility. *European journal of Cultural Studies* , 10 (2), p. 147-166.
- Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of Sensitivity. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* , 147-166.
- Gill, R., & Herdieckerhoff, E. (2006). Rewriting The Romance. *Feminist Media Studies* , 6 (4), p. 487-504.
- Gill, R., & Scharff, C. (2011). *New Femininities. Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Houndmills, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Gheno, M. (2015, Summer). The FEMENist Connection: Ruptures and Agency in FEMEN France. *Multilingual Discourses* , 2 (1-2), p. 62-90.
- Gonick, M. (2006, Summer). Between "Girl Power" and "Reviving Ophelia": Constituting the Neoliberal Girl Subject. *NWSA Journal* , 18 (2), p. 1-23.
- Gottlieb, J., & Wald, G. (1994). Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution and Women in Independent Rock. In A. Ross, & T. (. Rose, *Microphone Fiends. Youth Music and Youth Culture* (p. 250-275). New York: Routledge.
- Itulua-Abumere, F. (2013, 05 05). Understanding Men and Masculinity in Modern Society. *Open Journal of Social Science Research* , 1 (2), p. 42-45.
- Harzewski, S. (2011). *Chick Lit and Postfeminism*. United States: University of Virginia Press.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Harris, A. (2004). Jamming Girl Culture: Young Women and Consumer Citizenship. In A. H. (edit.), *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Heyes, C. J. (2007, May). Cosmetic Surgery and the Televisual Makeover. *Feminist Media Studies* , p. 17-32.
- Henry, A. (2004). *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-wave Feminism*. Bloomington, US: Indiana University Press.
- Kearney, M. C. (1997). The Missing Links: Riot Grrrl - Feminism - Lesbian Culture. In S. W. (ed.), *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (p. 207-229). New York: Routledge.
- Kinch, J. W. (1963, January). A Formalized Theory of the Self-Concept. *American Journal of Sociology* , p. 481-486.
- Khrebtan-Horhager, J., & Kononenko, I. (2015, 05 08). Of Fighters and Frames: Femen's Corporeality Between the Old, the New, the Yellow and the Blue. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* , 44 (3), p. 224-251.
- Lewis, T. (2008, August). Changing Rooms, Biggest Losers and Backyard Blitzes: A History of Makeover Televisoin in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia. *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* , 22 (4), p. 447-458.

- Lear, M. W. (1968). The Second Feminist Wave. *The New York Times Magazine* .
- McRobbie, A. (2003). Mothers and Fathers, Who Needs Them? *Feminist Review* , 129-136.
- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The Aftermath of Feminism. Gender, Culture and Social Change*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Our Epic Battle #likeagirl*. (2014). Tratto da always.com: <http://always.com/en-us/about-us/our-epic-battle-like-a-girl>
- Ommundsen, W. (2008). From China with Love: Chick Lit and The New Crossover Fiction. In A. R. Lee, *China Fictions/English Language. Literary Essays in Diaspora, Memory, Story* (p. 327-347). New York: Rodopi.
- Pipher, M. (1994). *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Schilt, K. (2003). 'A Little Too Ironic': the Appropriation and Packaging of Riot Grrrl Politics by Mainstream Female Musicians. *Popular Music and Society* , 26 (1), p. 5-16.
- Schippers, M. (2007, 02 15). Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity and Gender Hegemony. *Theory and Society* , 36 (1), p. 85-102.
- Schippers, M. (2002). *Rockin' Out of the Box: Gender Maneuvering in Alternative Hard Rock*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Spice Girls. (1997). *Girl Power!* New Jersey: Carol Publishing Group.
- Strong, C. (2011). Grunge, Riot Grrrl and the Forgetting of Women in Popular Culture. *The Journal of Popular Culture* , 44 (2).
- Strong, C. (2011). Grunge, Riot Grrrl and the Forgetting of Women in Popular Culture. *The Journal of Popular Culture* , 44 (2), p. 398-416.
- Reed, J. (1997). Roseanne: A Killer Bitch for Generation X. In J. Drake, & L. (. Heywood, *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (p. 122-124). London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tasker, Y., & Negra, D. (2005, Winter). In Focus: Postfeminism and Contemporary Media Studies. *Cinema Journal* , 44 (2), p. 107.
- Tincknell, E. (2011). Scourging the Abject Body: Ten Years Younger and Fragemented Femininity Under Neoliberalism. In R. Gill, & C. Scharff, *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* (p. 83-95). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tincknell, E. (2011). Scourging the Abject Body: Ten Years Younger and Fragmented Femininity under Neoliberalism. In R. Gill, & C. Scharff, *New Femininities. Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* (p. 83-95). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, R. (1995). *To Be Real. Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*. London: Anchor Books.

Watson, E. (2014, September 20). Gender Equality is Your Issue Too. *HeForShe Campaign*. New York: United Nations.

Whelehan, I. (2000). *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism*. London: Women's Press.

Woodward, K. (1997). Concepts of Identity and Difference. In K. Woodward, *Identity and Difference* (p. 7-50). London: Sage Publications.

Zaslow, E. (2009). *Feminism, inc. Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Žižek, S. (2008). *Violence*. New York: Picador.

Abstract (in Italian)

Postfemminismo: una delle tante parole usate e abusate del nostro tempo. Se ne parla come di un fenomeno culturale, di una cultura consumista, di una condotta politica. Alcune lo celebrano, altre lo accusano delle più varie falle. Molte si chiedono se sia una parola buona o cattiva, o se si debba crederci solamente quando nessun altro ci osserva. La letteratura accademica al riguardo è la più varia. Dopo averla studiata con attenzione, si realizza come l'unica certezza possibile sul postfemminismo sia che non esista assolutamente nulla di cui essere certi. È questa la principale ragione alla base della scelta di tale argomento, unita alla convinzione che non si possa trovare fenomeno più appassionante che una giovane donna, figlia e nipote di femministe delle due, precedenti, 'ondate', possa affrontare. Sfogliando le pagine di questa tesi, quindi, il lettore vedrà svolgersi un'analisi del postfemminismo attraverso gli occhi di chi, nel postfemminismo, ci è nata.

Più che una domanda di ricerca precisa, questa tesi ha avuto uno scopo: quello di destrutturare il postfemminismo in alcune delle sue innumerevoli parti, per poi analizzarle una alla volta secondo uno schema preciso e ricorrente nella speranza di poter raggiungere una comprensione più profonda e unitaria di un fenomeno a dir poco disorganico. Una premessa importante riguarda la parzialità di questa ricerca: da un lato, per ovvie ragioni di spazio/tempo, solamente tre delle infinite teorie del postfemminismo sono state incluse nel discorso; dall'altro, in parte per la stessa ragione, in parte perché imposto dalla precisa definizione di postfemminismo adottata in questa tesi, il raggio geografico-sociale è stato limitato a realtà occidentali e socialmente omogenee (classe borghese, alto-borghese, ecc.). Infatti, come emergerà dalla lettura di questo documento, il postfemminismo è una realtà che si è sviluppata come il risultato di dinamiche ben precise: i vari cambiamenti apportati dal postmodernismo, quali il boom mediatico, l'hyper-capitalismo, il consumismo, la globalizzazione, l'*empowerment* del genere femminile in seguito all'espansione del settore terziario, dal neoliberalismo e l'enfasi sulla dimensione individuale che ne è conseguita. In poche parole, la socializzazione postfemminista richiede una serie di qualificazioni geografiche ed economico-sociali che hanno reso il femminismo 'post'. Di conseguenza, la discussione di realtà non occidentali, come le critiche del femminismo post-coloniale, e di dinamiche etniche o di classe, sono state lasciate fuori dalla presente analisi.

Una prima definizione approssimativa e disimpegnata di postfemminismo potrebbe qualificarlo come ogni cosa che il femminismo è o non è diventato, dagli anni Ottanta ad oggi. Tale definizione chiarisce ben poco: per fornire una definizione più specifica ed esaustiva di un fenomeno tanto complesso è necessario per prima cosa cercare di comprendere il significato del prefisso 'post'. Farlo non sarà facile, in quanto la letteratura a riguardo accoglie le più varie accezioni, che vanno dalla convinzione che il prefisso denoti una rottura netta con il femminismo 'tradizionale', a chi difende un certo grado di continuità tra le varie 'ondate', fino a chi esclude l'esistenza di una qualsivoglia rottura. La posizione assunta da questa tesi è intermedia, e vede il postfemminismo come un fenomeno in continua trasformazione. Impossibile, per ora, essere più precisi; nella speranza del chiarirsi progressivo delle caratteristiche distintive di questo fenomeno procedendo nella lettura, un'ultima nota deve essere aggiunta: con l'avvento del postfemminismo, infatti, si è assistito al tramutarsi della *politica* femminista in cultura *postfemminista*. Anche quest'affermazione potrà giustificarsi proseguendo nella lettura.

Il femminismo si compone, ad oggi, di tre *Ondate*. La prima, che si estende dalla fine del XIX ai primi decenni del XX secolo, è caratterizzata dalla lotta per il potere (il successo più importante: il diritto di voto). La seconda, il cui inizio è considerato essere nei primi anni Sessanta, ha sancito la lotta ai pari diritti negli ambiti più svariati: dal divorzio alla famiglia, dalla sessualità ai pari diritti sul lavoro. Di conseguenza, la terza Ondata ha sancito un ulteriore (drastico) cambiamento al significato e al contenuto del femminismo. La nascita del postfemminismo risale ai primi anni Ottanta. Come anticipato, non è stata ancora raggiunta una visione unitaria riguardo all'interpretazione del 'post'. Tuttavia, ciò che ha maggiormente segnato il suo avvento è stato un processo di 'disarticolazione': la solidarietà verticale e orizzontale, tra le diverse razze e i diversi 'generi', sancita dal semplice identificarsi nella categoria 'donna' è venuta meno, per lasciare il posto a un movimento frammentato, disgiunto, privo di scopi comuni e di comuni battaglie, fatto di tante, diverse, piccole o grandi realtà. Questo è il postfemminismo: impossibile descriverlo nel suo insieme. Le varie posizioni assunte nei confronti di una qualificazione del prefisso 'post' sono state già anticipate; a questa si aggiunge il disaccordo, tra i diversi autori, riguardo al valore del postfemminismo stesso. Durante questa analisi, si considererà un asse immaginario che unisce due estremi rappresentanti posizioni *pro*- e posizioni *contro*- il postfemminismo.

Un esame appropriato di questo fenomeno non può escludere il contesto intorno al quale il postfemminismo si è sviluppato. Tale contesto è quello

del postmodernismo, che sarà qui rappresentato da quattro delle sue più fondamentali caratteristiche: il neoliberalismo, i media, l'*internalizzazione* e l'individualismo. Il rapporto tra postfemminismo e neoliberalismo è già stato anticipato, e può essere sintetizzato affermando che i cambiamenti apportati da quest'ultimo nella società moderna hanno causato la 'disarticolazione' del femminismo; dall'altro lato, però, sarà presto chiaro al lettore come il postfemminismo stesso lavori in favore della riproduzione del neoliberalismo in ogni sua forma. Strettamente legata al neoliberalismo è l'enfasi sulla dimensione dell'individuale, dettata da quello che nel linguaggio femminista è chiamato 'empowerment', il presunto raggiungimento della parità di potere fra i generi, che consente quindi ad ogni donna di essere padrona delle proprie scelte e la sola artefice dell'andamento della propria vita. Questa convinzione ha causato, soprattutto all'interno del mondo femminile, un'esagerata auto-analisi della propria soggettività, unita alla continua riflessione sul definirsi e ridefinirsi della propria identità femminile. Passando ai media, è innegabile come il nuovo immaginario di identità femminile, completo dell'estetica, dei comportamenti e dei consumi *appropriati* per la donna contemporanea, sia passato e passi attraverso il loro filtro. La globalizzazione e digitalizzazione dei media hanno solo amplificato il raggio e l'intensità con cui questo immaginario influisce sulle vite delle donne di oggi. L'ultimo concetto è quello di 'internalizzazione', secondo il quale le richieste e gli ideali del femminismo tradizionale hanno subito un processo di assorbimento da parte delle istituzioni politiche ed economiche locali ed internazionali. A questo è conseguita la convinzione del totale 'completamento' del femminismo, e della sua derivante irrilevanza nella società contemporanea.

La prima teoria postfemminista ad essere esaminata è quella del Girl Power, nata negli anni Novanta da un 'manifesto' redatto dalla band Spice Girls per produrre un nuovo album. Il Girl Power si basa essenzialmente sull'empowerment, e professa la libertà di ogni ragazza (o donna) di fare ciò che vuole ed essere ciò che più le piace e si risolve nel riappropriarsi, da parte delle donne, della propria femminilità. Questa teoria è tra quelle che si collocano sull'estremo 'pro' postfemminismo dell'asse, ed il prefisso 'post', nel suo caso, è assegnato con una certa facilità: le *Girlies* si pongono in aperto contrasto con il femminismo tradizionale, e professano un 'nuovo' modo di essere femminista nell'epoca contemporanea. Il secondo ramo del postfemminismo è il Chick Lit, la cui origine è considerata la rubrica 'Il Diario Di Bridget Jones', di Helen Fielding. Nato come genere televisivo e letterario, il Chick Lit si è poi espanso per entrare a far parte della vita di una generazione di donne. Stufe di dover difendere la propria 'categoria'

sforzandosi di eccellere nelle ‘cose da uomini’ e di non mostrare la propria femminilità, le cosiddette *Singletons* partono dal presupposto del raggiungimento della parità tra i generi (e la conseguente inutilità del femminismo), per vivere la propria vita senza il timore di mostrare i propri desideri, le proprie ansie e le proprie paure, anche laddove fossero proprio i desideri, le ansie e le paure che la società patriarcale impone loro. L’ultima teoria postfemminista è il Gender Maneuvering, una pratica attraverso la quale un gruppo di individui (in questo caso, di donne), attraverso la costruzione di dinamiche ‘intra-generi’ riesce a rimodellare i significati delle identità di genere maschile e femminile in modo rivoluzionario e ‘paritario’.

All’esposizione di queste tre teorie segue il secondo capitolo, focalizzato, invece, sull’analisi di tre fenomeni contemporanei (o recenti) considerati particolarmente significativi in una discussione sul postfemminismo. Il primo fenomeno è quello delle Femen, un collettivo di attiviste nato in Ucraina (che si è poi espanso in tutto il mondo) che professa l’utilizzo del corpo femminile come arma principale contro il patriarcalismo. Gli atti di protesta del collettivo, spesso dissacranti e altamente controversi nei contenuti, sono stati (e sono tuttora) oggetto di aspre critiche. Il secondo fenomeno è quello dei programmi televisivi sul ‘makeover’, nei quali si assiste alla trasformazione di un uomo o (più spesso) di una donna ‘qualunque’ grazie all’aiuto di un team di esperti. Un esempio estremo è quello del programma americano *The Swan* (Il Cigno). Nel corso di ogni puntata, due donne vengono esaminate attentamente (e tutti i loro difetti evidenziati nel più squallido dei modi); in seguito, gli esperti decidono quante e quali trasformazioni fisiche le concorrenti debbano affrontare per trasformarsi, da ‘brutti anatroccoli’, in bellissimi ‘cigni’. L’ultimo fenomeno discusso è il movimento Riot Grrrl, nato ad Olympia, nello stato di Washington, negli anni Ottanta. Un gruppo di ragazze della scena punk rock della zona decide di voler rivoluzionare il proprio ambiente, fortemente sessista. Lo fa in modo del tutto anti-convenzionale, rifiutando ogni contatto con i media e diffondendosi attraverso il passaparola e la produzione di *zines*, piccole riviste auto-prodotte e auto-distribuite, che contenevano il loro messaggio: Revolution Girl Style Now!

La parte più importante di questo studio, tuttavia, riguarda il collegare ciascuna delle tre teorie del postfemminismo analizzate con uno dei fenomeni appena descritti e il rapporto di ogni coppia con il postmodernismo, codificato nei quattro elementi descritti in precedenza. Girl Power e Femen occupano entrambe una posizione a favore (pro-) del

postfemminismo, e sono considerate 'post' in quanto entrambe si fanno portavoce di un *nuovo* femminismo, che non ha nulla in comune con quello tradizionale. L'internalizzazione entra in contatto con questa coppia in quanto l'empowerment, loro punto di partenza, è proprio una delle derivazioni dell'assorbimento del femminismo da parte della società post-moderna. Per quanto riguarda i media, né le Girlies né tantomeno le Femen hanno mai nascosto la propria predilezione per i mezzi di comunicazione di massa, ai quali devono la propria fortuna. Il neoliberalismo è riflesso nella 'cultura consumista' creata dalla diffusione del Girl Power, e del suo ideale di bellezza ed estetica femminile, al quale aderiscono fermamente anche le Femen. Infine, una forte correlazione con l'individualismo traspare proprio dall'enfasi sull'empowerment, il libero arbitrio ed il potere personale di fare ed essere ciò che si desidera.

Il Chick Lit e il makeover show sono la coppia perfetta. Entrambi occupano una posizione contraria al postfemminismo (sono stati definiti 'antifemministi') ed il loro essere inclusi in un discorso sul 'post' femminismo è giustificato dal loro semplice non avere nulla in comune. L'internalizzazione, in questo caso, raggiunge il suo più estremo compimento: l'inclusione delle richieste femministe nel 'mainstream' politico-economico della società contemporanea non porta più a discorsi sull'empowerment, come nel caso del Girl Power, ma alla più ferma convinzione dell'inutilità del femminismo in qualsiasi sua forma. Il Chick Lit nasce come fenomeno mediatico, e così anche il makeover show: il loro rapporto con i media non ha bisogno di grandi spiegazioni. Per quanto riguarda il neoliberalismo, come per la precedente coppia si può affermare che non soltanto il Chick Lit ed il makeover show ne sono 'figli', ma che, allo stesso tempo, contribuiscono anche alla sua riproduzione, diffondendo ideali di femminilità che difendono i dettami patriarcali. L'individualismo, infine, è forse in questo caso l'elemento più rilevante: come accennato in precedenza, un'ossessione quasi psicotica per la propria soggettività ha portato il genere femminile a sviluppare una serie di ansie legate al proprio aspetto fisico ed alla propria situazione economica, sociale e sentimentale (così sono dipinte le *Singletons*, le anti-eroine del Chick Lit). Il partecipare, come concorrenti, ma anche come spettatori, a programmi come il makeover show è soltanto uno dei possibili sfoghi di questa caratteristica: cambiare il proprio aspetto fisico, anche se attraverso dolorosissimi interventi chirurgici, è visto come il modo più rapido per raggiungere non solo la sicurezza in se stessi, ma anche il successo in abito sociale, sentimentale e nella propria carriera lavorativa.

Una posizione completamente differente dalle precedenti è costituita dall'ultima coppia, quella formata dal Gender Maneuvering e dal movimento delle Riot Grrrls. Questo duo si differenzia per la sua essenza anticonvenzionale, che si riflette in ognuno dei campi analizzati. Infatti, la posizione occupata dalla coppia sull'asse che va da posizioni pro- a posizioni contro- il postfemminismo è la *posizione zero*. In breve, queste realtà cercano degli spazi alternativi, fuori dal 'mainstream', e quindi incontaminati da stereotipi o dinamiche di genere sessiste. Mantengono alcuni elementi del femminismo tradizionale, uno su tutti l'importanza della solidarietà collettiva nella lotta verso un obiettivo comune. Tuttavia, i mezzi utilizzati e l'ambiente di sottocultura che li caratterizzano li rendono parte integrante di quel 'post' che fa da protagonista in questa tesi. La relazione di Gender Maneuvering e delle Riot Grrrl con i quattro elementi del postmodernismo è sempre negativa. Essendo parte di una sottocultura non-convenzionale, alternativa e quasi sotterranea, rifiutano i media come mezzo di diffusione (prediligendo, invece, la diffusione per passaparola, o tramite mezzi auto-prodotti su cui si abbia pieno controllo). Anche il neoliberalismo è disprezzato, ed individuato tra i nemici di una rivoluzione nelle dinamiche di genere, così come l'individualismo, sostituito invece con una forte propensione al collettivo ed alla creazione di 'catene' di solidarietà come strumento di attacco e protezione.

Per concludere, dall'approfondimento di queste teorie e questi fenomeni del postfemminismo è emerso come il passaggio dalle *politiche* femministe alla *cultura* postfemminista sia effettivamente riscontrabile non solo in teoria, ma anche in pratica. Ognuno degli esempi riportati, infatti, ha potuto essere analizzato soltanto dal punto di vista della produzione culturale, l'unico vero teatro postmoderno aperto alla ridiscussione delle gerarchie di genere. Non ha più senso, infatti, soffermarsi su discorsi politici quando si affronta il postfemminismo, che di strettamente politico ha conservato ben poco⁵².

⁵² Un'eccezione è costituita da quello che viene comunemente chiamato 'gender mainstreaming', l'annessione di temi e richieste proprie del femminismo all'interno del policy-making di istituzioni locali, ma soprattutto internazionali (EU, ONU...). Ad ogni modo, tale movimento non potrebbe essere incluso sotto la definizione di 'postfemminismo', ma non è questo il luogo in cui discuterne.