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Spicing it up: Sexual entrepreneurs and the Sex Inspectors

Laura Harvey and Rosalind Gill

In Gill, R. & Scharff, C. (Eds.) (2011) *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* London: Palgrave

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the emergence of a new feminine subject who we call the 'sexual entrepreneur'. We will argue that the 'modernisation' of femininity over the last two decades in the wake of the 'sexual revolution' and women's movement, alongside the acceleration and intensification of neoliberalism and consumerism, has given rise to a new and contradictory subject position: the sexual entrepreneur. This 'new femininity' constitutes a hybrid of discourses of sexual freedom for women, intimately entangled with attempts to recuperate this to (male-dominated) consumer capitalism. This makes this figure difficult to read, and helps to account for the familiar polarisation between those feminists who appear hopeful and optimistic about the spaces that have opened up in recent years for female sexual self-expression and sexual pleasure in western societies, and those who interpret the same phenomena as merely old sexual stereotypes wrapped in a new, glossy postfeminist guise. Contextualising our argument in discussions about the 'mainstreaming of sex' (Attwood, 2009), we seek to develop notions of 'sexual subjectification' (Gill, 2003) and 'technologies of sexiness' (Radner, 1993; 1999) to explore the rise and proliferation of discourses of sexual entrepreneurship, and suggest a way of reading this that does not - or at least tries not to - fall back into the old binaries (eg. either unproblematic liberation or wholesale recuperation).

Evidence for the new sexual entrepreneur is widespread. She can be seen in magazine sex advice, in advertising, and across social networking sites. In this chapter, however, we seek to explore the contours of this subject through consideration of one of several 'sex makeover' shows, airing on British television: *The Sex Inspectors*. *The Sex Inspectors* draws on conventions from self-help, confessional and reality TV. Each episode takes a (heterosexual) couple, films them in the bedroom and uses two 'sexpert' presenters to intervene to makeover their 'dysfunctional' sex lives. The programme, in its third series at the time of writing, owes some of its success to its ability to blend explicitly 'sexy' content with legitimating discourses of self-help, self-improvement and sex education (cf Arthurs, 2004). Its fast-paced, involving, generic format also plays a part, and will be familiar to anyone who has watched *Supernanny* or other parenting makeover programmes, which have a similar show structure and also deploy the same visualisation strategies to capture moments of intimate life, complete with the use of night-vision cameras. Its popularity is due, too, in no small part, to the intertextual identity of Tracey Cox, its primary presenter, who is author of at least 15 self-help books and also a sex and relationship advisor on Glamour magazine, the UK's best-selling monthly glossy. In many ways Cox herself represents a 'new femininity', one of the new breed of 'celebrity agony aunts' (Boynton, 2009).

In what follows we first discuss the 'sexualisation of culture', then move on to elaborating our theoretical notions of sexual subjectification, technologies of sexiness and sexual entrepreneurship, and finally explore this new subjectivity through detailed discussion of *The Sex Inspectors*.

The 'sexualisation of culture'

Over the last decade the 'sexualisation of culture' has become a major focus of interest and concern. The phrase is used to capture the growing sense of western societies as saturated by sexual representations and discourses, and in which pornography has become increasingly influential and porous, transforming contemporary culture. It speaks to something more than the idea that 'sex has become the big story' (Plummer, 1995:4) but denotes a range of different things: 'a contemporary preoccupation with sexual values, practices and identities; the public shift to more permissive sexual attitudes; the proliferation of sexual texts; the emergence of new forms of sexual experience; the apparent breakdown of rules, categories and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay; [and the] fondness the scandals, controversies and panics around sex' (Attwood, 2006:77). Porn stars have emerged as bestselling authors and celebrities; a 'porno chic' aesthetic can be seen in music videos and advertising; and practices once associated with the sex industry e.g. lapdancing and pole dancing have become newly 'respectabilised', promoted as mainstream corporate entertainment or fitness activity.

Feminist arguments about this are polarised. While some contemporary (radical) feminist positions are reminiscent of the anti-porn positions taken by Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon in the 1980s (eg Jeffreys 2008) other ('Third Wave') positions build from the 'sex positive' feminism of the same period (Johnson, 2002; Juffer 1998). Moreover, another distinctive perspective is found among a growing number of writers who examine contemporary sexualisation as a distinctively postfeminist phenomenon linked to discourses of celebrity, choice and empowerment (Gill,2006;2008;2009; McRobbie, 2004;2009; Coleman, 2008; Ringrose, forthcoming; Ringrose, this volume; Pinto, 2009)

Popular (trade rather than academic) books are largely critical of 'sexualisation'. Pamela Paul's (2005) Pornified is a polemical treatise about the damage to psychological well-being, relationships and contemporary culture caused by the widespread availability of pornography. Another of the most well-known popular feminist critiques of sexualisation is Ariel Levy's (2005) searing attack on 'raunch culture' which, she argues, extends pornography into mainstream media. Levy asserts that the sexual objectification of women is being repackaged as empowerment, but contends that 'raunch culture is not essentially progressive, it is essentially commercial. Raunch culture isn't about opening our minds to the possibilities and mysteries of sexuality. It's about endlessly reiterating one particular -- and particularly saleable -- shorthand for sexiness' (2005 :29). The Lolita Effect (Durham, 2009) makes a similar argument in relation to children, indicting commercial culture for posing children (but particularly girls) 'as sexual objects of the adult gaze' - a set of concerns that resonate with reports such as the APA's (2007) Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, and the Australia Institute's (2006) report on Corporate Paedophilia, both of which received extensive media coverage and discussion.

More generally, it seems to us that the binary arguments of feminism's so-called 'sex wars' in the early 1980s have given way to a situation in which divergent positions should be located across multiple axes of difference, which may or may not map onto each other. Alongside the familiar 'anti-porn' versus 'pro-sex', we might situate people in relation to libertarianism versus authoritarianism, according to whether they focus on texts or on audiences, their disciplinary location in psychology or media studies, whether they research effects or meanings, their tendency to be 'media positive' or hostile to media -- and a whole range of other axes, all of which tend, nevertheless, to be polarised.

A new binary opposition that has emerged in the last decade among feminist scholars attempting to make sense of a western postfeminist landscape relates to whether the proliferation of representations of women as desirable and sexually agentic represents a real and positive change in depictions of female sexuality, or whether, by contrast, it is merely a postfeminist repackaging of feminist ideas in a way that renders them depoliticised and presses them into the service of patriarchal consumer capitalism. From one perspective, recent representations of women -- from the humorous 'sex bombs' of bra advertising to the stars of 'alt porn' sites (see Attwood, this volume) -- constitute a clear break with representations from the past in which women were passive and objectified, now showing them as active, desiring and 'taking charge' sexually in a way that clearly reflects feminism's aspirations for female sexual self-determination. As Attwood has argued 'a whole series of signifiers are linked to promote a new, liberated, contemporary sexuality for women; sex is stylish, a source of physical pleasure, a means of creating identity, a form of body work, self-expression, a quest for individual fulfilment'(2006:86). What's not to like, we might very well ask? But others see in precisely the same shift not a positive transformation towards a more feminist sexual future, but a turning backwards, a 'harking back' (Whelehan, 2000), a 'retro sexism' (Williamson, 2003) in which old, objectifying representations are simply wrapped up in a feisty, empowered sounding discourse. How can we move beyond this binary to a space that is less polarised and more productive for feminist debate and activism?

Sexual entrepreneurship

In this chapter, we want to attempt this through the notion of sexual entrepreneurship, which builds upon Foucault's ideas about technologies of selfhood, and also on the potential for feminist research of Deleuze's notion of 'becoming', identified by Coleman (2008; see also Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). Sexual entrepreneurship is the latest in a number of Foucaultian-influenced concepts used to capture gender-power-resistance. In Foucault's later work he moved away from his focus on 'techniques of domination', which, he argued, promoted a view of the subject as overly 'docile' and passive. Instead, towards the end of his life, he developed the notion of 'technologies of the self'. These

'permit individuals to effect, by their own means or with the help of others , a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves' (Foucault, 1988)

Of course, the transformations possible are not open or infinite, and are constrained by the availability of circulating discourses and the resistances that might -- intelligibly -- be made to/within these. Nevertheless, this later work opened up a space for theorising agency, as well as for considering the 'psychic life of power' (Butler, 1997), and there have been numerous productive feminist attempts to use this focus on technologies of selfhood -- amongst them the works of Butler (1990), de Lauretis (1987), Bordo (1993) and McRobbie(2009)

In relation to sexualisation, two notions have been developed from Foucault's work that help to establish the ground for the notion of sexual entrepreneurship. The idea of 'sexual subjectification' (Gill, 2003) draws on Foucault's later work to reject a view of modern power as overbearing domination, and to highlight instead the way in which power works in and through subjects. New knowledges and new visual regimes, Gill argues, literally helped to bring into being or materialise the new feisty, playful, desiring (heterosexual) subject of postfeminist advertising. This is not a matter of patriarchal conspiracy, but the outcome of a

variety of changes -- amongst them the significance of feminism and sexual liberation but also the intensified consumerism of fast capitalism -- which created space for a new hybrid subject who was both invited -- and incited (as we will show below) -- into being.

Hilary Radner's concept of a 'technology of sexiness' is also central to our notion of sexual entrepreneurship. Writing about the 'modernisation' of romance narratives in the 1990s, Hilary Radner argued that, whereas the classical romantic heroine offered 'virtue', innocence and goodness as the commodities she brought to the sexual/marriage market place, contemporary romances demand a 'technology of sexiness'. For Radner 'the task of the Single Girl is to embody heterosexuality through the disciplined use of make-up, clothing, exercise and cosmetic surgery, linking femininity, consumer culture and heterosexuality' (1999:15) In fact we would go further: in the postfeminist, post-*Cosmopolitan* west, heroines must no longer embody virginity but are required to be skilled in a variety of sexual behaviours and practices, and the performance of confident sexual agency is central to this technology of the self.

Through the notion of sexual entrepreneurship, we seek to build on these two ideas to capture the way in which a new mode of femininity organised around sexual entrepreneurialism is emerging. This modern, postfeminist subject, we contend, is incited to be compulsorily sexy and always 'up for it', and is interpellated through discourses in which sex is work that requires constant labour and reskilling (as well as a budget capable of stretching to a wardrobe full of sexy outfits and drawers stuffed with sex toys.) Beauty, desirability and sexual performance(s) constitute her ongoing projects and she is exhorted to lead a 'spiced up' sex life, whose limits -- not least heterosexuality and monogamy -- are tightly policed, even as they are effaced or disavowed through discourses of playfulness and experimentation.

To argue this is not to suggest a process of imposition, domination or false consciousness. Nor is it to deny the agency or creativity of those who may take up or choose to inhabit this 'new femininity'. Nor still is it to doubt the pleasures which that may involve. Indeed, what makes *The Sex Inspectors* a particularly good example of constructions of sexual entrepreneurship is both that the show is itself concerned with bringing into being this new feminine subject, and because in doing so it shows -- vividly -- the agency and dedication required, as well as sometimes pleasure too. To note the extent to which this subject has become a normative ideal, then, is resolutely not to deny agency, but is instead to open up a language in which subject-object, power-pleasure, discipline-agency are no longer counterposed as antithetical, binary opposites. In this sense, our aim is similar to Coleman's (2008) development of the Deleuzian notion of 'becoming' in which she seeks to open up 'feminist research to consider the ways in which bodies are not separate to images but rather are known, understood and experienced through images.' As Coleman notes, 'if feminist research take seriously this conception of bodies as becoming, its task is to account for how bodies become through their relations with images; what becomings of bodies do images limit or extend?' (2008:163)

In our analysis of *The Sex Inspectors* we explore the nature of sexual entrepreneurship -- the kind of bodies and subjectivities it brings into being. We highlight its premise upon binary sexual difference and the asymmetrical nature of the transformations it advocates. We also explore how it brings into being not simply different bodily practices and sexual performances, but also a 'makeover' sexual subjectivity for women. Finally, we discuss the limits of the 'spiced up' sexuality it promotes. By conducting a textual analysis we do not assume a homogeneous reading of the text. We are mindful of the potentially diverse

readings and patterns of consumption of television (Bragg and Buckingham, 2004; Morley, 1992) but consider that a feminist textual analysis provides important points of discussion about the changing construction of feminine sexual subjectivity.

‘The Sex Inspectors’: gendered sexual entrepreneurship

Aired on Channel 4 in 2004, 2005 and 2007, *The Sex Inspectors* combines the genres of sex self-help, confessional reality TV and makeover. Each episode takes a heterosexual couple in a long-term monogamous relationship, films them over the course of a week and offers tips for them to improve their sex lives. Participants are overwhelmingly, but not exclusively, white, none have visible disabilities and most are aged between their mid-twenties and 40. The producer, Daisy Goodwin, transferred the surveillance self-help format from her previous work on dating show ‘Would Like to Meet’ and home improvement show ‘How Clean is Your House’. She states the purpose of the show is to ‘encourage couples to stay together’ and has subsequently measured the show’s success based on the number of couples who are now married (Goodwin, 2004, online).

The sex and relationships self-help genre has grown into an ever-expanding market across both traditional and new media. Central in this market is the role of the ‘sexpert’. Drawing on Foucault and Gramsci, Melissa Tyler (2004) has explored the key role that the ‘expert’ plays in the production of ‘common sense’ discourses of sexuality. Tyler contends that experts engage in managerial discourses to incite a sexual subjectivity that requires constant performance appraisals and skills acquisition. Such ‘sexpertise’ is exemplary of a shift within the self help industry towards celebrity columnists and presenters who do not have the training or experience of qualified therapists, but rather have an interest in promoting their own books, websites and toys (Boynton, 2009).

‘The Sex Inspectors’ are two such sexperts, Tracey Cox and Michael Alvear. *The Sex Inspectors* consistently uses scientific and therapeutic discourses and legitimises the ‘facts’ given by its sexperts with statistics. For example,

“Six out of ten couples split up because their sex life goes wrong”

“95% of women want more kissing”

“47% of women worry about their figure during sex and want the lights off”

“75% of women rate foreplay as more important than intercourse”

(*The Sex Inspectors*, Channel 4, February 2007)

This authoritative- sounding discourse presents the show, and the advice given in the show, as a ‘common-sense’ and neutral approach by qualified experts, obscuring the very particular brand of performance-based ‘great sex’ produced and regulated throughout the series. It is underscored by the confident presence of the sexperts themselves. Tracey Cox is described on her website as “an international sex, body language and relationships expert” with an “academic background in psychology” (2009, www.traceycox.com). While in interviews with the press, she is quick to point out that she has never claimed to be a therapist (Wignall, 2008), the format of the show, which addresses emotional and physical problems, powerfully positions her as such in relation to the participants, often distressed by what they perceive to be sexual failure (Hall, 2005). She offers soothing advice which echoes familiar discourses of the body and individualised, commodity-based sexual empowerment from women’s magazines. Tracey Cox is a bestselling self-help author, who has sold over two million books, and features regularly on sex-self-help features on the television, radio and in women’s magazines. She is a brand herself, with her own range of lubricants and vibrators. She has not undertaken formal training in sex or relationships therapy, her degree was in Journalism and Psychology (Rudebeck, 2004; BBC, 2009); her career as sexpert was

launched from her time as Assistant Editor of Australian Cosmopolitan Magazine. Michael Alvear is described by the show as a 'gay agony uncle'. Also an author, but less prolific than Tracey, he has written two sex self-help books, one of which is a *Sex Inspectors* spin-off. The sexperts' power operates not only through implicit authority and expertise, but also through a combination of techniques including surveillance and confessions. We are exhorted to watch alongside- and through the eyes of - Cox and Alvear, who use thermal imaging and night vision cameras to peer into the most intimate moments of the participants lives. Participants are invited to confess by video diary their fears of sexual failure or their sexual frustrations, in a way which profoundly resonates with Foucault's claim that 'confession is at the heart of the procedures of the individualization of power' (1978:59) A sometimes sympathetic but nevertheless disciplinary gaze calls upon the couple, and by extension the viewer, to solve their problems through improved sexual performance, usually broken down into a specific repertoire of 'skills' to practice and perfect. In women's case, however, the changes involve not only new sexual techniques but frequently the remaking of sexual subjectivity. The sexual subject must transform herself, her attitude to her body, her comfort/discomfort with range of sexual practices in order to emerge, made over, as a 'sexual entrepreneur'.

His 'n' hers sexual entrepreneurship: technique, performance, subjectivity

The particular episode we draw upon here (season 3, episode 2) focuses on Sarah (28) and Nick (31), who have been married for ten years. He is presented as an extrovert, while she is labelled as 'insecure'. The programme introduces their relationship difficulties as a 'mismatch' between Nick's 'experience' and 'sexual confidence' and Sarah's sexual 'inhibition'. We see CCTV footage from their home in which Nick continually rates Sarah's sexual performance and puts her down, comparing her to the perfect sexual subject he wants her to be. In language that echoes mainstreamed narratives from pornography, he wishes that their weekly sex was more adventurous and laments that:

"She'll never sort of like, sit on top of me, you know, and really sort of, go for it like this and, you know, start really going for it, throwing her head back and stuff, like she's not got a care in the world, because, that would turn me on so much more" (February 2007).

Sarah is concerned about her perceived sexual failure, and wants to improve their sex life so that she doesn't lose him. She repeatedly mentions a dissatisfaction with her body – which means that she prefers to have sex with the lights off:

"I'm not happy with my body so I don't want Nick – I don't like Nick, looking at me, so much, 'cause I just feel uncomfortable in myself, that he, he wouldn't find me attractive" (February 2007).

Rather than address Sarah's concerns about her body image, repeating a familiar body-image mantra of women's lifestyle magazines, Tracey informs Sarah that "sex is about what's happening on the inside, not the outside" while nevertheless promptly instructing her that overhead lighting is unflattering, so she should always put the bedside lamp on the floor for maximum effect! This contradictory construction of feminine sexual subjectivity has been analysed elsewhere in women's magazines and constructs sexual entrepreneurship in a way that often reinforces more 'traditional' goals such as 'finding and keeping a man' (Gill, 2009). In *The Sex Inspectors* this occurs through the adoption of feminist discourses closely tied in with discourses of neoliberal individualism, in which emancipation is achieved through the effective and repeated production of an appropriately commodified sexual subjectivity. In their analysis of sexual discourses in *Cleo* and *Cosmo* women's magazines, Farvid and Braun (2006) note that female sexuality is often discursively produced in natural opposition to male sexuality. They show that while female sexuality was constructed as increasingly active and desiring, it requires acquisition of skills in order to prevent their male partner from

'straying' (Farvid and Braun, 2006: 295). Female sexuality, in this context, is constructed in what Potts (1998) has identified as 'Mars and Venus' accounting, particularly where a normalised 'male sexual drive' (Hollway, 1989) is presented as in conflict with female desire to maintain a romantic relationship. *The Sex Inspectors* reproduce this binary construction in their presentation of the naturalised differences in Nick and Sarah's relationship, in which Tracey diagnoses that Sarah would like more 'intimacy' and Nick would like more 'lust'. The entrepreneurialism required to navigate such 'natural' differences is presented as qualitatively different for men and women. As Tyler (2004) and Rogers (2005) have noted, mediated constructions of masculinity in lifestyle magazines present male sexuality as unproblematic, experienced and skilful, with efficiency as a marker of success. Men are advised on how to 'streamline' and make their sex more 'productive' (Tyler, 2004: 95-6) in order to be at their 'peak', whereas women's sexuality is constructed as primarily responsive to male sexuality, in which the acquisition of skills should never threaten the lead of the male partner (Gavey and McPhillips, 1999).

The sex advice given to Nick and Sarah on *The Sex Inspectors* reproduces this distinction. While there is much to be welcomed in a mainstream television show which advocates female-centred pleasure such as cunnilingus, the ways that such knowledges are produced by the show's experts reveals the gendered construction of the 'technicalities' of sex. Holding a large clock up, Michael instructs Nick that he should

“picture Sarah's vagina as a clock. This whole area is a hot zone, what you're looking for, is the nuclear zone. So, as your tongue goes across, what you're looking for is a moan[...]you can freeze it in your mind – three o'clock, so when you're looking at her vagina you're going – three o'clock sends her to the moon”
(February 2007)

Empowering women? Remaking sexual subjectivity

Like Nick, Sarah is instructed in the 'techniques' of fellatio, but is also instructed in the skilful performance of sex, where she must look and behave – indeed, better, become – the part of the confident, actively desiring sexual subject in order to prevent Nick from leaving her. Her entrepreneurialism is about much more than learning and practising skills; it requires the management of the self as an alluring, confident woman who always has another 'trick' to keep her partner enticed (Farvid and Braun, 2006: 302). This is presented, within the discourses of the show, as becoming more powerful.

On the one hand, Tracey criticises Nick's constant put-downs, and talks with Sarah about empowering herself to make decisions – she should do things for herself, not for Nick. Yet on the other the things Sarah should do 'for herself' turn out to be all about pleasing Nick so that he doesn't leave her. This is a postfeminist moment, in which activities which might in an earlier era have been explicitly presented in terms of 'pleasing your man' are discursively repackaged as all about 'pleasing yourself' (As Tracey puts it: “I want you to think to yourself, am I doing what Nick wants, or is it what Sarah wants”). It is difficult not to see in this a further, more pernicious twist of ideology at work – in which a continued preoccupation with fulfilling men's sexual desires now has to be thought of as authentically self-chosen and, what's more, as empowering.

More generally, the programme repeatedly tells both participants and viewers, it is not enough to enter into a long-term relationship, the relationship must be intimately governed as 'spiced up' through tireless work and skills acquisition in order to avoid slipping into that sexual no-man's land, 'the rut'. The brand of entrepreneurship produced through the visual sexualisation of *The Sex Inspectors* provides a very specific shopping list of activities to produce a normal sexual subjectivity, which is heterosexual, monogamous and bound up with western consumer culture. Such a shopping list reflects what Jackson and Scott (1997) term 'the Taylorisation of sex' as requiring classification and rational management. Faced with an

enormous pile of self-help books, both Sarah and Nick are invited, separately, to choose the activities that would make up their ideal sexual repertoire, including 'blindfolds, masturbating, oral sex, handcuffs, spanking, photographs, sex outdoors, dress up/roleplay, sex in the kitchen'. A selection of these activities are written on a flipchart, and Nick is amazed as Alvear writes 'YES' in big red letters next to each of the activities that Sarah would be willing to engage in, revealing a moment of discursive tension. Sarah seems to be getting pleasure from these revelations and fantasies, but perhaps we could also examine this in relation to the compulsory sexual agency the programme incites in which 'normal' feminine sexual subjectivity requires being 'up for it' or at least 'willing to try'. Within the terms of reference of the programme, is there really a choice for Sarah? To say 'no' would be to reveal her out of date, unmodernised (read: frigid, or at the very least 'inhibited') subjectivity, to position herself outside the show's framing, beyond their 'help', a sexual failure. It's worth noting too how perfectly this strategy, this psychosocial materialisation, complements the advice given in 'lad mags', much of which centres on how to get her to do things she doesn't want to eg let you photograph her in the buff, do anal, have a threesome, etc. (Gill, 2006; Boynton, 2009)

(The limits of)spicing it up

In this particular moment of sexualisation, references to pornography and sexual subcultures such as BDSM are made, but 'softened around the edges' to preserve the boundaries of taste around *The Sex Inspectors*, as strictly educational, strictly heterosexual and monogamous. Sarah and Nick are asked if they like spanking, handcuffs, and taking 'saucy' photographs of each other. It is interesting to see how these boundaries are policed throughout the series'. In two similar episodes from the first and third series, couples are advised to take a break from dressing up and using bondage accessories and toys to "encourage more loving sex" (Gary and Rea, December 2004). In both cases the female participants would regularly 'dress up' for sex, but had become uninterested in sex or no longer wanted to use toys or costumes. While we would argue that the show does address both female participants sexual desires and needs by advocating a change from their usual sexual behaviours, the way in which this change is constructed by *The Sex Inspectors* reveals the marked boundaries around 'spiced up' heterosexuality, and the resulting sexual exclusions. Cox explains exactly where the boundaries lie:

"We actually recommend dressing up, but what's not good is if you start using it every single time, 'cause then that can turn into what's called a fetish, meaning that you can't actually get aroused unless the person has that item of clothing on".

(Sally-Ann and Paul, February 2007)

The Sex Inspectors boundaries (experimentation is fine, but fetish is 'not good') are reflected in the kinds of products available to buy on Tracey Cox's website. In particular, the 'Supersex Beginners Soft Bondage Kit', complete with 'faux fur tie blindfold sash' and 'velvety soft cuffs' (2009, traceycox.com/products) illustrate this 'softened' version of sexual subculture as strictly experimentation within clearly defined limits. This presents the ideal feminine sexual entrepreneur as inhabiting a space on a precarious tightrope of sexuality; on one side looms 'sexual failure' and 'the rut' and on the other is a dark world of sexual addiction.

The very particular, policed limits of sexuality in *The Sex Inspectors* operate through a number of silent exclusions. Presenting long-term monogamous heterosexuality as the unquestioned 'goal' of sexual management, the show ignores sexualities and bodies that do not conform to this rigid model. There is no space for gay, lesbian or bisexual desire, and no space for bodies that do not fit the sexual binary of male or female. In addition, heterosexual desire outside of the show's narrow boundaries (whether that be being part of a fetish scene or enjoying sex outside of a long-term relationship) is excluded from the norms of 'great sex'

constructed in the language and visualisation of the show. The sexual entrepreneurialism of *The Sex Inspectors* is thus about keeping heterosexual monogamous relationships spiced up through an engagement with a repertoire of commodified acts.

By drawing attention to the contradictory nature of this new mode of feminine sexual entrepreneurialism, we do not aim to dismiss the advice of *The Sex Inspectors* as merely a brand of 'commodity feminism' (Goldman, 1992). The advice of *The Sex Inspectors* has a clear impact on Sarah's confidence. She starts to assert herself in the bedroom, practising her new skills in an almost theatrical production that requires preparation with lighting, costume and photography in a performance not just for Nick, but for us, the voyeur, the viewer. We watch as she choreographs their own form of soft-core, amateur pornography through night vision cameras. She takes control during sex. Outside the bedroom, she argues back when Nick shouts at her. However, Tracey's simplistic solution for Sarah (she must simply 'tip the seesaw back the other way' by taking control in the bedroom) is starkly highlighted towards the end of the episode, when Nick continues to put Sarah down despite her efforts to perform for him, interrupting sex to complain "I've gone right off this now" (February 2007).

The way that this new feminine subject is brought into being through discourses of self-improvement in *The Sex Inspectors* is complex, and cannot be explained by dismissing the show as a mediated tool of patriarchy. Tracey and Michael do not accept Nick's self-centred desire for a sexually performing, but passive wife. They insist that he takes time to listen to Sarah's needs and stop undermining her confidence through his persistent sexual performance appraisals. Michael, watching a clip of Nick interrupting sex, complains "he's asked for more effort and then slaps it down when he gets it!" (February 2007). However, it is clear that in the narrative of the sex makeover, the solution for Sarah is to continue to maintain the performance in the bedroom in order to preserve their relationship and avoid the ever-present threat of failure: sexual dysfunction. By positioning feminine sexual entrepreneurialism as a means to maintain the relationship, rather than a source of pleasure for Sarah, the discourses of self-management produce a feminine subject that is required to be 'up for it' as a response to male needs, in which her own pleasure is a secondary concern.

As a show which aims for bite-size solutions, there is never a deeper exploration of the psychological and social factors underlying the problems in Sarah and Nick's relationship. *The Sex Inspectors* do not explore whether Sarah might be better off without the constant grading, shouting and whining of Nick, presenting female sexual subjectivity as unintelligible without a male partner. Power is presented as something individualised, rather than bound up in the structures of society. Tracey's message, while initially calling upon Sarah (and viewers in a similar situation) to take back control, couches this as a simple choice in terms of sexual performance – get better grades. Sarah should become the porn-star performer that Nick has always wanted, but of course, internalising the policing gaze of the inspectors, and buying their products to help her along the way, she will be doing it for herself.

Conclusion

The new feminine sexual entrepreneur is made intelligible through discourses of sex produced by the mainstream self-help genre. While the 'sexualisation of culture' has undoubtedly facilitated access to information about sexual desires and problems, there is a complex relationship between such mediated knowledges, power and subjectivity. Although sexual entrepreneurship allows for a desiring, knowing female sexuality, it must be at once 'up for it' yet sensitive to male needs and fears, and 'spiced up' but maintaining the boundaries of heterosexual monogamy. Such a contradictory mode of femininity intimately entangles the struggles and gains of feminism and sexual liberation with the neoliberal incitement to constant self-improvement through hyper-consumption. The representation of such sexual self-improvement as a matter of 'choice' and 'empowerment' obscures the narrow, tightly policed boundaries that remain around feminine intelligibility, and the symbolic and material

violence that women can suffer if they do not 'perform'. Importantly, shifting our analysis away from binary characterisations of feminine sexual subjectivity is not to deny the power that operates through the discourses of sex self help. Nor is the exploration of such power a denial of the agency and pleasure felt in the taking up of sexual entrepreneurialism. Rather, as feminists we aim to critically explore the discursive constraints and resistances available to women as we work towards the production of inclusive and positive sexual representations.

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