
Work

by Naomi Wolf

Since men have used women's "beauty" as a form of currency in circulation among men, ideas about "beauty" have evolved since the Industrial Revolution side by side with ideas about money, so that the two are virtual parallels in our consumer economy. A woman looks like a million dollars, she's a first-class beauty, her face is her fortune. In the bourgeois marriage markets of the last century, women learned to understand their own beauty as part of this economy.

By the time the women's movement had made inroads into the labor market, both women and men were accustomed to having beauty evaluated as wealth. Both were prepared for the striking development that followed: As women demanded access to power, the power structure used the beauty myth materially to undermine women's advancement.

A transformer plugs into a machine at one end, and an energy source at the other, to change an unusable current into one compatible with the machine. The beauty myth was institutionalized in the past two decades as a transformer between women and

public life. It links women's energy into the machine of power while altering the machine as little as possible to accommodate them; at the same time, like the transformer, it weakens women's energy at its point of origin. It does that to ensure that the machine actually scans women's input in a code that suits the power structure.

With the decay of the Feminine Mystique, women swelled the work force. The percentage of women in the United States with jobs rose from 31.8 percent after World War II to 53.4 percent in 1984; of those aged twenty-five to fifty-four, two thirds hold jobs. In Sweden, 77 percent of women hold jobs, as do 55 percent of French women. By 1986, 63 percent of British women did paid work. As Western women entered the modern work force, the value system of the marriage market was taken over intact by the labor economy, to be used against their claims to access. The enthusiasm with which the job market assigned financial value to qualifications from the marriage market proves that the use of the beauty myth is political and not sexual: The job market refined the beauty myth as a way to legitimize employment discrimination against women.

When women breached the power structure in the 1980s, the two economies finally merged. Beauty was no longer just a symbolic form of currency; it literally *became* money. The informal currency system of the marriage market, formalized in the workplace, was enshrined in the law. Where women escaped from the sale of their sexuality in a marriage market to which they had been confined by economic dependence, their new bid for economic independence was met with a nearly identical barter system. And the higher women climbed during this period up the rungs of professional hierarchies, the harder the beauty myth has worked to undermine each step.

There has never been such a potentially destabilizing immigrant group asking for a fair chance to compete for access to power. Consider what threatens the power structure in the stereotypes of other newcomers. Jews are feared for their educational tradition and (for those from Western Europe) haut bourgeois memories. Asians in the United States and Great Britain, Algerians in France, and Turks in Germany are feared for their Third World patterns of grueling work at low pay. And the Af-

ican-American underclass in the United States is feared for the explosive fusion of minority consciousness and rage. In women's easy familiarity with the dominant culture, in the bourgeois expectations of those who are middle class, in their Third World work habits, and in their potential to fuse the anger and loyalties of a galvanized underclass, the power structure correctly identifies a Frankenstein composite of its worst minority terrors. Beauty discrimination has become necessary, not from the perception that women will not be good enough, but that they will be, as they have been, twice as good.

And the old-boy network faces in this immigrant group a monster on a scale far greater than those it made out of other ethnic minorities, because women are not a minority. At 52.4 percent of the population, women are the majority.

This explains the fierce nature of the beauty backlash. This clarifies why its development has become totalitarian so fast. The pressure on the power elite can be understood by any minority ruler of an agitated majority that is beginning to appreciate its own considerable strength. In a meritocracy worth its name, the gathering gravity of events would soon and forever alter not only who the power holders are, but what power itself might look like and to what new goals it might be dedicated.

Employers did not simply develop the beauty backlash because they wanted office decoration. It evolved out of fear. That fear, from the point of view of the power structure, is firmly grounded. The beauty backlash is indeed absolutely necessary for the power structure's survival.

Women work hard—twice as hard as men.

All over the world, and for longer than records have been kept, that has been true. Historian Rosalind Miles points out that in prehistoric societies, "the labours of early women were exacting, incessant, varied and hard. If a catalogue of primitive labour were made, women would be found doing five things where men did one." In modern tribal societies, she adds, "working unceasingly during the daylight hours, women regularly produce as much as eighty per cent of the tribe's total food intake, on a daily basis . . . male members were and are doing only one-fifth of the work necessary for the group to survive, while the other four-fifths is carried out entirely by women." In seventeenth-century En-

gland the Duchess of Newcastle wrote that women "labour like beasts." Before the Industrial Revolution, "no work was too hard, no labour too strenuous, to exclude them." During nineteenth-century exploitation of the factory system, "women were universally worked harder . . . and paid less" than men, "employers everywhere agreeing that women were 'more easily induced to undergo severe bodily fatigue than men.'" Today the "primitive" five to one ratio of women's work to men's has declined to a "civilized" two to one. That ratio is fixed and international. According to the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs: "While women represent 50 percent of the world population, they perform nearly two-thirds of all working hours, receive only one-tenth of the world income and own less than 1 percent of world property." The "Report of the World Conference for the United Nations Decade for Women" agrees: When housework is accounted for, "women around the world end up working twice as many hours as men."

Women work harder than men whether they are Eastern or Western, housewives or jobholders. A Pakistani woman spends sixty-three hours a week on domestic work alone, while a Western housewife, despite her modern appliances, works just six hours less. "Housework's modern status," writes Ann Oakley, "is non-work." A recent study shows that if housework done by married women were paid, family income would rise by 60 percent. Housework totals forty billion hours of France's labor power. Women's volunteer work in the United States amounts to \$18 billion a year. The economics of industrialized countries would collapse if women didn't do the work they do for free: According to economist Marilyn Waring, throughout the West it generates between 25 and 40 percent of the gross national product.

What about the New Woman, with her responsible full-time job? Economist Nancy Barrett says that "there is no evidence of sweeping changes in the division of labor within households coincident with women's increasing labor force participation." Or: Though a woman does full-time paid work, she still does all or nearly all the unpaid work that she used to. In the United States, partners of employed women give them less help than do partners of housewives: Husbands of full-time homemakers help out for an hour and fifteen minutes a day, while husbands of women with

full-time jobs help less than half as long—thirty-six minutes. Ninety percent of wives and 85 percent of husbands in the United States say the woman does “all or most” of the household chores. Professional women in the United States fare little better: Sociologist Arlie Hochschild found that the women in two-career couples came home to do 75 percent of household work. Married American men do only 10 percent more domestic work than they did twenty years ago. The work week of American women is twenty-one hours longer than that of men; economist Heidi Hartmann demonstrates that “men actually demand eight hours more service per week than they contribute.” In Italy, 85 percent of mothers with children and full-time paid jobs are married to men who share no work in the home at all. The average European woman with a paid job has 33 percent less leisure than her husband. In Kenya, given unequal agricultural resources, women’s harvests equaled men’s; given equal resources, they produced bigger harvests more efficiently.

Chase Manhattan Bank estimated that American women worked each week for 99.6 hours. In the West, where paid labor centers on a forty-hour week, the unavoidable fact to confront the power structure is that women newcomers came from a group used to working more than twice as hard and long as men. And not only for less pay; for none.

Until the 1960s, the convention of referring to unpaid work at home as “not real work” helped to confound women’s knowledge of their hardworking labor tradition. Such a tactic was useless once women began to do work that men recognize as male—that is, as labor worthy of its hire.

Over the past generation in the West, many of these hard workers also acquired an equal education. In the 1950s, only 20 percent of college undergraduates in the United States were women (of which only a third finished their degrees), compared with 54 percent today. By 1986, two fifths of full-time undergraduates in the United Kingdom were women. What is a nominally meritocratic system faced with, as women knock at its doors?

If interwoven in a resilient network spanning the generations, women’s hard work would disproportionately multiply female excellence. The backlash was provoked because even when they were weighted with the “second shift” of domestic work, women

still battered inroads into the power structure; and it was provoked because if newly raised female self-esteem were to bring this long-deferred deficit payment for the “second shift” to come due at last, its costs to employers and to the government would be staggeringly high.

In the United States between 1960 and 1990, the number of women lawyers and judges rose from 7,500 to 180,000; women doctors, from 15,672 to 108,200; women engineers, from 7,404 to 174,000. In the past fifteen years the number of women in local elected office tripled, to 18,000. Today in the United States, women fill 50 percent of entry-level management positions, 25 percent of middle management, comprise half the graduating accountants, one third of the M.B.A.s, half of graduating lawyers and a fourth of doctors, and half the officers and managers in the fifty largest commercial banks. Sixty percent of women officers in *Fortune’s* survey of top companies average \$117,000 a year. Even with two shifts, at this rate, they would still challenge the status quo. *Someone had to come up with a third shift fast.*

The likelihood of backlash in some severe form was underestimated because the American mind-set celebrates winning and avoids noticing the corollary, that winners win only what losers lose. Economist Marilyn Waring concedes that “men won’t easily give up a system in which half the world’s population works for next to nothing” and recognizes that “precisely because that half works for so little, it may have no energy left to fight for anything else.” Patricia Ireland of the National Organization for Women agrees: A real meritocracy means for men “more competition at work and more housework at home.” What the aspirational message ignores is the reaction of that half of the ruling elite who hold jobs that belong by right of merit to women and who, if women were to move freely up the ladder, would inevitably lose them.

The awesome potential of this immigrant group must be thwarted, or the traditional power elite will be at a disadvantage: A white male child of the upper class is by definition someone who does not have to do two jobs or three at once, who does not feel the craving for education that comes with a heritage of illiteracy as old as written history, and who is not angry about being left out.

With what can the power structure defend itself against this

onslaught? First, it can try to reinforce the Second Shift. Sixty-eight percent of women with children under eighteen are in the American work force, up from 28 percent in 1960. In the United Kingdom, 51 percent of mothers of dependent children work for pay. Forty-five percent of working women in the United States are single, divorced, widowed, or separated and are the sole economic support of their children. The failures of American and even European state-funded child care act as an effective drag on the momentum of this immigrant group. But those women who can afford to have been hiring poorer women to do their domestic work and take over their child care. So, the tactic of obstruction from lack of child care became inadequate to hold back the class of women from whom the power structure had the most to fear. What it needed was a replacement shackle, a new material burden that would drain surplus energy and lower confidence, an ideology that would produce the women workers it needs, but only in the mold in which it wants them.

Throughout the West, women's employment was stimulated by the widespread erosion of the industrial base and the shift to information and service technologies. Declining postwar birthrates and the resulting shortage of skilled labor means that women are welcome to the labor pool: as expendable, nonunionized, low-paid pink-collar-ghetto drudges. Economist Marvin Harris described women as a "literate and docile" labor pool, and "therefore desirable candidates for the information- and people-processing jobs thrown up by modern service industries." The qualities that best serve employers in such a labor pool's workers are: low self-esteem, a tolerance for dull repetitive tasks, lack of ambition, high conformity, more respect for men (who manage them) than women (who work beside them), and little sense of control over their lives. At a higher level, women middle managers are acceptable as long as they are male-identified and don't force too hard up against the glass ceiling; and token women at the top, in whom the female tradition has been entirely extinguished, are useful. The beauty myth is the last, best training technique to create such a work force. It does all these things to women during work hours, and then adds a Third Shift to their leisure time.

Superwoman, unaware of its full implications, had to add se-

rious "beauty" labor to her *professional* agenda. Her new assignment grew ever more rigorous: the amounts of money, skill, and craft she must invest were to fall no lower than the amounts previously expected—before women breached the power structure—only from professional beauties in the display professions. Women took on all at once the roles of professional housewife, professional careerist, and professional beauty.

The Professional Beauty Qualification

Before women entered the work force in large numbers, there was a clearly defined class of those explicitly paid for their "beauty": workers in the display professions—fashion mannequins, actresses, dancers, and higher-paid sex workers such as escorts. Until women's emancipation, professional beauties were usually anonymous, low in status, unrespectable. The stronger that women grow, the more prestige, fame, and money is accorded to the display professions: They are held higher and higher above the heads of rising women, for them to emulate.

What is happening today is that all the professions into which women are making strides are being rapidly reclassified—*so far as the women in them are concerned*—as display professions. "Beauty" is being categorized, in professions and trades further and further afield from the original display professions, as a version of what United States sex discrimination law calls a BFOQ (a bona fide occupational qualification) and Britain calls a GOQ (a genuine occupational qualification), such as femaleness for a wet nurse or maleness for a sperm donor.

Sex equality statutes single out the BFOQ or GOQ as an *exceptional* instance in which sex discrimination in hiring is fair because the job itself demands a specific gender; as a conscious exception to the rule of equal opportunity law, it is extremely narrowly defined. What is happening now is that a parody of the BFOQ—what I'll call more specifically the PBQ, or professional beauty qualification—is being extremely *widely* institutionalized as a condition for women's hiring and promotion. By taking over in bad faith the good-faith language of the BFOQ, those who

manipulate the professional beauty qualification can defend it as being nondiscriminatory with the disclaimer that it is a necessary requirement if the job is to be properly done. Since the ever-expanding PBQ has so far been applied overwhelmingly to women in the workplace and not to men, using it to hire and promote (and harass and fire) is in fact sex discrimination and should be seen as a violation of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in the United States and the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act in Great Britain. But three new vital lies in the ideology of "beauty" have grown during this period to camouflage the fact that the actual function of the PBQ in the workplace is to provide a risk-free, litigation-free way to discriminate against women.

Those three vital lies are: (1) "Beauty" had to be defined as a legitimate and necessary qualification for a woman's rise in power. (2) The discriminatory purpose of vital lie number one had to be masked (especially in the United States, with its responsiveness to the rhetoric of equal access) by fitting it firmly within the American dream: "Beauty" can be earned by any woman through hard work and enterprise. Those two vital lies worked in tandem to let the use of the PBQ by employers masquerade as a valid test of the woman's merit and extension of her professional duties. (3) The working woman was told she had to think about "beauty" in a way that undermined, step for step, the way she had begun to think as a result of the successes of the women's movement. This last vital lie applied to individual women's lives the central rule of the myth: For every feminist action there is an equal and opposite beauty myth reaction. In the 1980s it was evident that as women became more important, beauty too became more important. The closer women come to power, the more physical self-consciousness and sacrifice are asked of them. "Beauty" becomes the condition for a woman to take the next step. You are now too rich. Therefore, you cannot be too thin.

The fixation on "beauty" of the 1980s was a direct consequence of, and a one-to-one check and balance upon, the entry of women into powerful positions. The triumphs of "beauty" ideologies in the eighties came about as a result of real fear, on the part of the central institutions of our society, about what might

happen if free women made free progress in free bodies through a system that calls itself a meritocracy. To return to the metaphor of the transformer, it is the fear that the force of an unmediated current of female energy *on a female wavelength* would break down the delicate imbalance of the system.

The transformer's middle link is the aspirational ideology of the women's magazines. In providing a dream language of meritocracy ("get the body you deserve"; "a gorgeous figure doesn't come without effort"), entrepreneurial spirit ("make the most of your natural assets"), absolute personal liability for body size and aging ("you *can* totally reshape your body"; "your facial lines are now within your control"), and even open admissions ("at last you too can know the secret beautiful women have kept for years"), they keep women consuming their advertisers' products in pursuit of the total personal transformation in status that the consumer society offers men in the form of money. On one hand, the aspirational promise of women's magazines that they can do it all on their own is appealing to women who until recently were told they could do nothing on their own. On the other, as sociologist Ruth Sidel points out, the American Dream ultimately protects the status quo: "It discourages those at the bottom from developing a viable political and economic analysis of the American system [substitute: the beauty myth], instead promoting a blame-the-victim mentality . . . a belief that if only the individual worked harder, tried harder, he [she] would 'make it.'" But the myth of entrepreneurial beauty, of woman against nature, hurts women in the same way as the original model hurts men—by leaving out the words "all else being equal."

The transfer is complete—and, coincidentally, harmful—when through this dream, women's minds are persuaded to trim their desires and self-esteem neatly into the discriminatory requirements of the workplace, while putting the blame for the system's failures on themselves alone.

Women accepted the professional beauty qualification more quietly than other labor pools have reacted to unreasonable, ricocheting, unnegotiated employer demands. The PBQ taps reserves of guilt that have not had time to drain: For the more fortunate professional women, this can be guilt about wielding power, or about "selfish" pleasure in commitment to creative work; for the

great majority who are the underpaid sole or joint supporters of children, it can be guilt about being unable to provide more, the wish to make every last effort for their families. The PBQ channels residual fears: For the middle-class woman recently valued for her willingness to conform to isolation in the home, life in the street and the office has uncharted anxieties, subjecting her as it does to public scrutiny that her mother and grandmother avoided at all costs. Working-class women have long known about brutal exploitation in the workplace that "beauty" might deflect. Women of all classes know that achievement is considered ugly and punished accordingly, and few women of any class have been used to controlling much money of their own.

Accustomed to viewing beauty as wealth, women were open to accepting a direct financial reward system that replaced the indirect reward system of the marriage market. The equation of beauty with money was not examined closely, and the power placebo of beauty was redefined to promise women the sort of power that money, in fact, gives men. Using a logic similar to that with which housewives in the 1970s added up the market value of their housework, women saw that the "meritocratic" system was too imbalanced for an isolated woman to challenge it. One part of women's psyche may have been anxious to be recognized for the work, the talent, and the money already required of them in assembling their image. And another part may have been aware that, given the dull, unglamorous nature of most women's work, the PBQ injects a dose of creativity, pleasure, and pride into the job that is usually missing from the job itself.

By the 1980s beauty had come to play in women's status-seeking the same role as money plays in that of men: a defensive proof to aggressive competitors of womanhood or manhood. Since both value systems are reductive, neither reward is ever enough, and each quickly loses any relationship to real-life values. Throughout the decade, as money's ability to buy time for comfort and leisure was abandoned in the stratospheric pursuit of wealth for wealth's sake, the competition for "beauty" saw a parallel inflation: The material pleasures once presented as its goals—sex, love, intimacy, self-expression—were lost in a desperate struggle within a sealed economy, becoming distant and quaint memories.

The Background of the PBQ

Where did the PBQ begin? It evolved, like the beauty myth itself, alongside women's emancipation, and radiates outward to accompany women's professional enfranchisement. It spreads, with women's professionalization, out of American and Western European cities into smaller towns; from the First World to the Third World; and West to East. With the Iron Curtain drawn back, we are due to see an acceleration of its effects in the Eastern bloc countries. Its epicenter is Manhattan, where many of the women who have risen highest in the professional hierarchies are concentrated.

It started in the 1960s as large numbers of educated middle-class young women began to work in cities, living alone, between graduation and marriage. A commercial sexualized mystique of the airline stewardess, the model, and the executive secretary was promoted simultaneously. The young working woman was blocked into a stereotype that used beauty to undermine both the seriousness of the work that she was doing and the implications of her new independence. Helen Gurley Brown's 1962 best seller, *Sex and the Single Girl*, was a survival map for negotiating this independence. But its title became a catchphrase in which the first term canceled out the second. The working single girl had to be seen as "sexy" so that her work, and her singleness, would not look like what they really were: serious, dangerous, and seismic. If the working girl was sexy, her sexiness had to make her work look ridiculous, because soon the girls were going to become women.

In June 1966 the National Organization for Women was founded in America, and that same year its members demonstrated against the firing of stewardesses at the age of thirty-two and upon marriage. In 1967 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission began to hold hearings on sex discrimination. New York women invaded the Plaza Hotel's all-male Oak Room in February 1969. In 1970, *Time* and *Newsweek* were charged with sex discrimination, and twelve TWA stewardesses filed a multi-million-dollar action against the airline. Consciousness-raising

groups began to form. Women who had been politicized as students entered the job market, determined to make women's issues, rather than antiwar and free speech issues, their priority.

Away from the ferment, but well informed by it, law was quietly being made. In 1971, a judge sentenced a woman to lose three pounds a week or go to prison. In 1972, "beauty" was ruled to be something that could legally gain or lose women their jobs: The New York State Human Rights Appeals Board determined, in *St. Cross v. Playboy Club of New York*, that in one highly visible profession, a woman's "beauty" was a bona fide qualification for employment.

Margarita St. Cross was a Playboy Club waitress fired "because she had lost her Bunny Image." The club's employment standards ranked waitresses on the following scale:

1. A flawless beauty (face, figure, and grooming)
2. An exceptionally beautiful girl
3. Marginal (is aging or has developed a correctable appearance problem)
4. Has lost Bunny Image (either through aging or an uncorrectable appearance problem)

St. Cross's male counterparts who did the same work in the same place were "not subjected to appraisals of any kind."

Margarita St. Cross asked the board to decide that she was still beautiful enough to keep her job, having reached, she said, a "physiological transition from that youthful fresh, pretty look to the womanly look, mature." Hefner's spokesmen told the board that she was not. The board reached its decision through taking Hefner's word over St. Cross's—by assuming that the employer is by definition more credible about a woman's beauty than is the woman herself: that that evaluation was "well within the competence" of the Playboy Club to decide.

They did not give weight to St. Cross's expertise about what constitutes "Bunny Image." In ordinary employment disputes, the employer tries to prove that the employee deserved to be fired, while the employee tries to prove that he or she deserves to keep the job. When "beauty" is the BFOQ, though, a woman can

say she's doing her job, her employer can say she isn't, and, with this ruling, the employer automatically wins.

The Appeals Board identified in its ruling a concept that it called "standards of near perfection." In a court of law, to talk about something imaginary as if it is real *makes it real*. Since 1971, the law has recognized that a standard of perfection against which a woman's body is to be judged may exist in the workplace, and that if she falls short of it, she may be fired. A "standard of perfection" for the male body has never been legally determined in the same way. While defined as materially existing, the female standard itself has never been defined. This case lay the foundations of the legal maze into which the PBQ would evolve: A woman can be fired for not looking right, but looking right remains open to interpretation.

Gloria Steinem has said, "All women are Bunnies." The St. Cross case was to resonate as an allegory of the future: Though "beauty" is arguably necessary for a Bunny to do a good job, that *concept* of female employment was adapted generally as the archetype for all women on the job. The truth of Steinem's comment deepened throughout the next two decades, wherever women tried to get and hold on to paid work.

In 1971 a prototype of *Ms.* magazine appeared. In 1972 the Equal Employment Opportunity Act was passed in the United States; Title IX outlawed sex discrimination in education. By 1972, 20 percent of management positions in America were held by women. In 1975, Catherine McDermott had to sue the Xerox Corporation because they withdrew a job offer on the grounds of her weight. The seventies saw women streaming into the professions in a way that could no longer be dismissed as intermittent or casual or secondary to their primary role as wives and mothers. In 1978 in the United States, one sixth of the master of business administration candidates and one fourth of graduating accountants were women. National Airlines fired stewardess Ingrid Fee because she was "too fat"—four pounds over the line. In 1977 Rosalynn Carter and two former first ladies spoke at the Houston convention of NOW. In 1979 the National Women's Business Enterprise Policy was created to support women's businesses; that very year a federal judge ruled that employers had the right to set appearance standards. By the new decade, United States govern-

ment policy decreed that the working woman must be taken seriously, and the law decreed that her appearance must be taken seriously. The political function of the beauty myth is evident in the timing of these case laws. It was not until women crowded the public realm that laws proliferated about appearance in the workplace.

What must this creature, the serious professional woman, look like?

Television journalism vividly proposed its answer. The avuncular male anchor was joined by a much younger female newscaster with a professional prettiness level.

That double image—the older man, lined and distinguished, seated beside a nubile, heavily made-up female junior—became the paradigm for the relationship between men and women in the workplace. Its allegorical prettiness, intended at first to sweeten the unpleasant fact of a woman assuming public authority, took on a life of its own, until professional beauties were hired to be made over into TV journalists. By the 1980s, the agents who headhunted anchors kept their test tapes under categories such as “Male Anchors: 40 to 50,” with no corresponding category for women, and ranked women anchors’ physical appearance above their delivery skills or their experience.

The message of the news team, not hard to read, is that a powerful man is an individual, whether that individuality is expressed in asymmetrical features, lines, gray hair, hairpieces, baldness, bulbousness, tubbiness, facial tics, or a wattled neck; and that his maturity is part of his power. If a single standard were applied equally to men as to women in TV journalism, most of the men would be unemployed. But the women beside them need youth and beauty to enter the same soundstage. Youth and beauty, covered in solid makeup, present the anchorwoman as generic—an “anchorclone,” in the industry’s slang. What is generic is replaceable. With youth and beauty, then, the working woman is visible, but insecure, made to feel her qualities are not unique. But, without them, she is invisible—she falls, literally, “out of the picture.”

The situation of women in television simultaneously symbolizes and reinforces the professional beauty qualification in

general: Seniority does not mean prestige but erasure—of TV anchors over forty, 97 percent, claims anchorwoman Christine Craft, are male and “the other 3% are fortyish women who don’t look their age.” Older anchorwomen go through “a real nightmare,” she wrote, because soon they won’t be “pretty enough to do the news anymore.” Or if an anchorwoman is “beautiful,” she is “constantly harassed as the kind of person who had gotten her job solely because of her looks.”

The message was finalized: The most emblematic working women in the West could be visible if they were “beautiful,” even if they were bad at their work; they could be good at their work and “beautiful” and therefore visible, but get no credit for merit; or they could be good and “unbeautiful” and therefore invisible, so their merit did them no good. In the last resort, they could be as good and as beautiful as you please—for too long; upon which, aging, they disappeared. This situation now extends throughout the workforce.

That double standard of appearance for men and women communicated itself every morning and every night to the nations of working women, whenever they tried to plug in to the events of “their” world. Their window on historical developments was framed by their own dilemma. To find out what is going on in the world always involves the reminder to women that *this* is going on in the world.

In 1983, working women received a decisive ruling on how firmly the PBQ was established, and how far it could legally go. The thirty-six-year-old Craft filed suit against her ex-employers, Metromedia Inc., at Kansas City on the charge of sex discrimination. She had been dismissed on the grounds that, as Christine Craft quotes her employer, she was “too old, too unattractive, and not deferential to men.”

Her dismissal followed months of PBQ demands made on her time and on her purse in breach of her contract, and offensive to her sense of self. She was subjected to fittings and makeovers by the hour and presented with a day-by-day chart of clothing that she would not have chosen herself and for which she was then asked to pay. None of her male colleagues had to do those things. Testimony from other anchorwomen showed that they had felt

forced to quit due to Metromedia's "fanatical obsession" with their appearance.

Other women were assigned to cover the trial. Craft was humiliated by her colleagues on camera. One suggested she was a lesbian; Diane Sawyer (who, six years later, when she won a six-figure salary, would have her appearance evaluated on *Time's* cover with the headline IS SHE WORTH IT?) asked Craft on a national news broadcast if she really was "'unique among women' in [her] lack of appearance skills." Her employers had counted on going unchallenged because of the reaction such discrimination commonly instills in the victim of it: a shame that guarantees silence. But "Metromedia," she wrote defiantly, "was wrong if they thought a woman would never admit to having been told she was ugly."

Her account proves how this discrimination seeps in where others cannot reach, poisoning the private well from which self-esteem is drawn: "Though I may have dismissed intellectually the statement that I was too unattractive, nonetheless in the core of my psyche I felt that something about my face was difficult, if not monstrous, to behold. It's hard to be even mildly flirtatious when you're troubled by such a crippling point of view." An employer can't prove an employee incompetent simply by announcing that she is. But because "beauty" lives so deep in the psyche, where sexuality mingles with self-esteem, and since it has been usefully defined as something that is continually bestowed from the outside and can always be taken away, to tell a woman she is ugly can make her feel ugly, act ugly, and, as far as her experience is concerned, *be* ugly, in the place where feeling beautiful keeps her whole.

No woman is so beautiful—by definition—that she can be confident of surviving a new judicial process that submits the victim to an ordeal familiar to women from other trials: looking her up and down to see how what happened to her is her own fault. Since there is nothing "objective" about beauty, the power elite can, whenever necessary, form a consensus to strip "beauty" away. To do that to a woman publicly from a witness stand is to invite all eyes to confirm her ugliness, which then becomes the reality that all can see. This process of legal coercion ensures that a degrading public spectacle can be enacted at her expense

against any woman in any profession if she charges discrimination by beauty.

The moral of the Christine Craft trial was that she lost: Though two juries found for her, a male judge overturned their rulings. She seems to have been blacklisted in her profession as a result of her legal fight. Has her example affected other women in her profession? "There are thousands of Christine Crafts," one woman reporter told me. "We keep silent. Who can survive a blacklist?"

Defenders of Judge Stevens's ruling justified it on the grounds that it was not sex discrimination but market logic. If an anchor-person doesn't bring in the audiences, he or she has not done a good job. The nugget hidden here as it was applied to women—bring in audiences, sales, clients, or students *with her "beauty"*—has become the legacy of the Craft case for working women everywhere.

The outcome of the trial was one of those markers in the 1980s that a woman may have witnessed, and felt as a tightening around the neck, and knew she had to keep still about. When she read the summation, she knew that she had to distance herself from her knowledge of how much she was Christine Craft. She might have reacted by starting a new diet, or buying expensive new clothes, or scheduling an eyelift. Consciously or not, though, she probably reacted; the profession of "image consultant" grew eightfold over the decade. Women and work and "beauty" outside the sex professions fused on the day Craft lost her case, and a wider cycle of diseases was initiated. It will not, the woman might have told herself, happen to me.

The Law Upholds the Beauty Backlash

It could and did continue to happen to working women as the law bolstered employers with a series of Byzantine rulings that ensured that the PBQ grew ever more resilient as a tool of discrimination. The law developed a tangle of inconsistencies in which women were paralyzed: While one ruling, *Miller v. Bank of America*, confused sexual attraction with sexual harassment and held

that the law has no part to play in employment disputes that centered on it ("attractiveness," the court decided, being a "natural sex phenomenon" which "plays at least a subtle part in most personnel decisions," and, as such, the court shouldn't delve into "such matters"), the court in another case, *Barnes v. Costle*, concluded that if a woman's unique physical characteristics—red hair, say, or large breasts—were the reasons given by her employer for sexual harassment, then her personal appearance was the issue and not her gender, in which case she could not expect protection under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. With these rulings a woman's beauty became at once her job and her fault.

United States law developed to protect the interests of the power structure by setting up a legal maze in which the beauty myth blocks each path so that no woman can "look right" and win. St. Cross lost her job because she was too "old" and too "ugly"; Craft lost hers because she was too "old," too "ugly," "unfeminine," and didn't dress right. This means, a woman might think, that the law will treat her fairly in employment disputes if only she does her part, looks pretty, and dresses femininely.

She would be dangerously wrong, though. Let's look at an American working woman standing in front of her wardrobe, and imagine the disembodied voice of legal counsel advising her on each choice as she takes it out on its hanger.

"Feminine, then," she asks, "in reaction to the Craft decision?"

"You'd be asking for it. In 1986, Mechelle Vinson filed a sex discrimination case in the District of Columbia against her employer, the Meritor Savings Bank, on the grounds that her boss had sexually harassed her, subjecting her to fondling, exposure, and rape. Vinson was young and 'beautiful' and carefully dressed. The district court ruled that her appearance counted against her: Testimony about her 'provocative' dress could be heard to decide whether her harassment was 'welcome.'"

"Did she dress provocatively?"

"As her counsel put it in exasperation, 'Mechelle Vinson wore clothes.' Her beauty in her clothes was admitted as evidence to prove that she welcomed rape from her employer."

"Well, feminine, but not too feminine, then."

"Careful: In *Hopkins v. Price-Waterhouse*, Ms. Hopkins was denied a partnership because she needed to learn to 'walk more femininely, talk more femininely, dress more femininely,' and 'wear makeup.'"

"Maybe she didn't deserve a partnership?"

"She brought in the most business of any employee."

"Hmm. Well, maybe a little more feminine."

"Not so fast. Policewoman Nancy Fahdl was fired because she looked 'too much like a lady.'"

"All right, less feminine. I've wiped off my blusher."

"You can lose your job if you don't wear makeup. See *Tamini v. Howard Johnson Company, Inc.*"

"How about this, then, sort of . . . womanly?"

"Sorry. You can lose your job if you dress like a woman. In *Andre v. Bendix Corporation*, it was ruled 'inappropriate for a supervisor' of women to dress like 'a woman.'"

"What am I supposed to do? Wear a sack?"

"Well, the women in *Buren v. City of East Chicago* had to 'dress to cover themselves from neck to toe' because the men at work were 'kind of nasty.'"

"Won't a dress code get me out of this?"

"Don't bet on it. In *Diaz v. Coleman*, a dress code of short skirts was set by an employer who allegedly sexually harassed his female employees because they complied with it."

It would be funny if it weren't true. And when we see that British law has evolved a legal no-win situation very close to this one, a pattern begins to emerge.

We can save the British woman the baffling guided tour through her wardrobe: It's the same situation, if not worse. The GOQ is defined as permitting "sex discrimination" when the job requires, among other things, "physical form or authenticity—for example, a model or an actor." But since 1977, *M. Schmidt v. Austicks Bookshops, Ltd.* has been broadly interpreted to make it legal for her to be hired or fired generally on the basis of physical appearance. Miss Schmidt lost her job and the case because she wore trousers to her work in a bookstore. The Employment Appeal Tribunal dismissed her case, which was based on the fact that the dress code was more restrictive for women than men, by

ruling not only that an employer is "entitled to a large measure of discretion in controlling the image of his establishment," but also that the whole issue is insignificant: They ruled that telling a woman how to dress was no more than trivial. In *Jeremiah v. Ministry of Defense*, employers avoided hiring women for higher-paid work on the grounds that it was dirty and would ruin their looks. Lord Denning in his ruling mused: "A woman's hair is her crowning glory. . . . She does not like it disturbed, especially when she has just had a 'hair-do.'" The employers' counsel asserted that compelling women to ruin their hairdos at a higher rate of pay would lead to industrial unrest.

Dan Air was challenged in 1987 for hiring only pretty young women as air crews; they defended their discrimination on the basis of customer preference for pretty young women. (Two years later, the publisher of *USA Today*, in an editorial using the same logic, would call for a return to the days when stewardesses were hired pretty and young and fired upon maturing.)

In *Maureen Murphy and Eileen Davidson v. Stakis Leisure, Ltd.*, we can see the wave of the future. Waitresses objected to a change in "image" that put them in a "more revealing" uniform and forced them to wear makeup and nail polish. One waitress described the costumes as "straight out of *The Story of O*," consisting of a miniskirt and a plunging cleavage over an external corset or basque so tight that the women bled from it under their arms. One of the litigating women was pregnant when she was forced to wear it. Management admitted that the change was imposed on the women as a sexual draw for male customers. Waiters had no such requirements made of them. (Incidentally, the waitresses' obligation to appear in a state of undress in front of the opposite sex violates *Sisley v. Britannia Security Systems*, which ruled that the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act could be used to "preserve decency or privacy" from the opposite sex while "being in a state of undress.") The women's counsel got nowhere pointing out that makeup, revealing costumes, and nail polish sexualize the dress code in a way that *cannot* be parallel for men. This case too was dismissed as *de minimis*—too trivial to consider. The women lost the case but kept their jobs—for six weeks. They have both been fired; they have filed a complaint charging unfair dismissal.

So if you refuse to wear a sexually exploitive costume to work

in Great Britain, you can lose your job. But in *Snowball v. Gardner Merchant, Ltd.*, and *Wileman v. Minilec Engineering, Ltd.*, a woman's perceived sexuality was ruled relevant in minimizing the harm done to her by sexual harassment. In the latter case, Miss Wileman was awarded the derisory sum of fifty pounds (seventy-five dollars) for four and a half years' harassment on the grounds that her feelings couldn't have been much injured since she wore "scanty and provocative clothing" to work: "If a girl on the shop floor goes around wearing provocative clothes and flaunting herself, it is not unlikely," the tribunal ruled, that she will get harassed. The tribunal accepted men's testimony that defined Miss Wileman's clothes as sexually inciting. Miss Wileman's plaintive echoing of Mechelle Vinson's lawyer when she protested that her clothes were definitely *not* "scanty and provocative" was ignored in the ruling.

With these rulings in place, social permission was granted for the trickle-down effect of the PBQ. It spread to receptionists and art gallery and auction house workers; women in advertising, merchandising, design, and real estate; the recording and film industries; to women in journalism and publishing.

Then to the service industries: prestige waitresses, bartenders, hostesses, catering staff. These are the beauty-intensive jobs that provide a base for the ambitions of the rural, local, and regional beauties who flow into the nation's urban centers and whose sights are set on "making it" in the display professions—ideally to become one of the 450 full-time American fashion models who constitute the elite corps deployed in a way that keeps 150 million American women in line. (The model fantasy is probably the most widespread contemporary dream shared by young women from all backgrounds.)

Then the PBQ was applied to any job that brings women in contact with the public. A woman manager I know of in one of the British John Lewis Partnership stores, who gave her job "my all," was called in by her supervisor to hear that he was very happy with her work, but that "she needed some improvement from the neck up." He wanted her to wear what she called "a mask" of makeup, and to bleach and tease her hair. "It made me feel," she said to a friend, "like all the work I did didn't matter as much as what I'd look like standing around on the floor dressed

up like a bimbo. It made me feel that there was no point in my doing my job well." The men, she added, had to do nothing comparable.

Then it was applied to any job in which a woman faces one other man: A fifty-four-year-old American woman, quoted in *The Sexuality of Organization*, said her boss replaced her one day without warning. "He had told her that he 'wanted to look at a younger woman' so his 'spirits could be lifted.' She said that 'her age . . . had never bothered her before he mentioned it to her.'" Now the PBQ has spread to any job in which a woman does not work in complete isolation.

Unfortunately for them, working women do not have access to legal advice when they get dressed in the morning. But they intuit that this maze exists. Is it any surprise that, two decades into the legal evolution of the professional beauty qualification, working women are tense to the point of insanity about their appearance? Their neuroses don't arise out of the unbalanced female mind, but are sane reactions to a deliberately manipulated catch-22 in the workplace. Legally, women *don't* have a thing to wear.

Sociologists have described the effect on women of what such laws legalize. Sociologist Deborah L. Sheppard, in *The Sexuality of Organization*, describes her discovery that "the informal rules and guidelines about the appropriateness of appearance keep shifting, which helps explain the continuous appearance of books and magazines which tell women how to look and behave at work." Organizational sociologists haven't addressed the notion that they keep shifting *because they're set up to keep shifting*. "Women," Sheppard continues, "perceive themselves and other women to be confronting constantly the dualistic experience of being 'feminine' and 'businesslike' at the same time, while they do not perceive men experiencing the same contradiction." "Businesslike yet feminine" is a favorite description of clothing sold in mail-order catalogs aimed at working women, and this elusive dualism is what triggered the strong response in the United States to a series of ads for a lingerie manufacturer that showed businesswear blowing open to reveal a lace-clad nakedness. But the words "businesslike" and "feminine," as we saw, are each used to manipulate the other as well as the woman caught in the middle.

"Women," concludes Sheppard, "perceive themselves as being constantly vulnerable to unpredictable violations of the balance. . . . The area of appearance seems to be one where women feel they can most easily exert some control over how they will be responded to." But "they also perceive themselves as generally needing to take responsibility for having triggered such violations."

Women blame themselves for triggering "violations." What violations are these? A *Redbook* survey found that 88 percent of their respondents had experienced sexual harassment on the job. In the United Kingdom, 86 percent of managers and 66 percent of employees had encountered it. The British civil service found that 70 percent of its respondents had experienced it. Seventeen percent of Swedish women union members had been harassed, a figure which suggests 300,000 Swedish women harassed nationwide. Women who have been harassed, it is found, feel guilty because they fear that they "possibly provoked the comments by dressing inappropriately." Other research shows that victims of sexual harassment are rarely in a position to tell the harasser to stop.

So women dress to be businesslike yet feminine—walk the moving line, and inevitably fail: From two thirds to almost nine tenths of them experience harassment that they blame on themselves and their poor control of their appearance. Can women say, by way of their appearance at work, what they mean? No. According to *The Sexuality of Organization*, five studies have found that "a woman's . . . behaviour is noticed and labelled sexual even if it is not intended as such." Women's friendly actions are often interpreted as sexual, especially when the "nonverbal cues are ambiguous or women wear revealing clothing." As we saw, women's and men's definitions of "revealing" differ. Women's feelings of loss of control, as they try to "speak through their clothes," make sense.

The PBQ and the legal verdict that a woman's clothing invites sexual harassment both depend on women not wearing uniforms in the same workplaces where men do wear them. In 1977, when women were still new in the professions, John Molloy wrote a best-seller, *The Woman's Dress for Success Book*. Molloy had done thorough research and found that without recognizable profes-

sional wear, women had trouble eliciting respect and authority. A year after his test group adopted a "uniform," the general attitude of the women's bosses toward them had "improved dramatically," and twice as many women were recommended for promotion. In the control group there was no change. Molloy tested the "uniform" extensively, and found that a skirted suit was "the success suit"; he recommended categorically that professional women adopt it. "Without a uniform," he said, "there is no equality of image." Evidently committed to women's advances, Molloy urged women to wear the uniform in solidarity with one another; he quotes a pledge signed by corporate women that states: "I am doing this so that women may have as effective a work uniform as men and therefore be better able to compete on an equal footing."

Molloy warned what might happen if women were to adopt professional dress: "The entire fashion industry is going to be alarmed at the prospect. . . . They will see it as a threat to their domination over women. And they will be right. If women adopt the uniform, and if they ignore the absurd, profit-motivated pronouncements of the fashion industry when they select [it], they will no longer be malleable." He went on to predict the strategies to which the industry might resort to undermine the adoption of a professional uniform for women.

Eventually, *The New York Times Magazine* ran a piece declaring that Molloy's strategy was passé, and that women were so confident now that they could abandon the suit and express their "femininity" once more. Many media for which the fashion industry provided a sizable portion of their ad budget quickly followed suit. Beauty, thinness, couture, and taste had to constitute a woman's authority now that the professional uniform could not do it for her. Sadly for her, though, the evidence, according to Molloy, is that dressing for business success and dressing to be sexually appealing are practically mutually exclusive because a woman's perceived sexuality can "blot out" all other characteristics. Professional women today are expected to emulate fashion models. But in Molloy's study of one hundred male and female professionals, ninety-four chose the professionally dressed woman over the fashion model as exemplifying professional competence.

The 1980s decried Molloy's movement on the grounds that it

forced women to dress like men—though the proposed image, with its high-heeled pumps, stockings, palette of colors, makeup, and jewelry, was masculine only insofar as it established for women something recognizable as professional dress. But the fashion industry trammelled the experiment in creating businesswear for women, and they lost the instant professional status and moderate sexual camouflage that the male uniform provides. The shift in fashion ensured that the fashion industry would not suffer, while it also ensured that women would have simultaneously to work harder to be "beautiful" and work harder to be taken seriously.

Beauty provokes harassment, the law says, but it looks through men's eyes when deciding what provokes it. A woman employer may find a well-cut European herringbone twill, wantonly draped over a tautly muscled masculine flank, madly provocative, especially since it suggests male power and status, which our culture eroticizes. But the law is unlikely to see good Savile Row tailoring her way if she tells its possessor he must service her sexually or lose his job.

If, at work, women were under no more pressure to be decorative than are their well-groomed male peers in lawyer's pinstripe or banker's gabardine, the pleasure of the workplace might narrow; but so would a well-tilled field of discrimination. Since women's appearance is used to justify their sexual harassment as well as their dismissal, the statements made by women's clothing are continually, willfully misread. Since women's working clothes—high heels, stockings, makeup, jewelry, not to mention hair, breasts, legs, and hips—have already been appropriated as pornographic accessories, a judge can look at any younger woman and believe he is seeing a harassable trollop, just as he can look at any older woman and believe he is seeing a dismissable hag.

Emulating the male uniform is tough on women. Their urge to make traditionally masculine space less gray, sexless, and witless is an appealing wish. But their contribution did not relax the rules. Men failed to respond with whimsy, costume, or color of their own. The consequence of men wearing uniforms where women do not has simply meant that women take on the *full* penalties as well as the pleasures of physical charm in the work-

place, and can legally be punished or promoted, insulted or even raped accordingly.

Women dare not yet relinquish the "advantage" this inequality in dress bestows. People put on uniforms voluntarily only when they have faith in the fair rewards of the system. They will understandably be unwilling to give up the protection of their "beauty" until they can be sure the reward system is in good working order; the professions will be unwilling to give up the controlling function of the professional beauty qualification until they are certain that women are so demoralized by it that they will pose no real threat to the way things are done. It's an uneasy truce, each side playing for time; however, when playing for time under the beauty myth, women lose.

What about the common perception that women use their "beauty" to get ahead? In fact, sociologist Barbara A. Gutek shows that there is little evidence that women even occasionally use their sexuality to get some organizational reward. It is men, she found, who use their sexuality to get ahead: "A sizeable minority of men," she found, "say they dress in a seductive manner at work," versus 1 woman in 800 who said she had used sexuality for advancement. In another study, 35 percent of men versus only 15 percent of women say that they use their appearance for rewards in the workplace.

Complicity in display does exist, of course. Does that mean the women are to blame for it? I have heard Ivy League administrators, judges discussing women attorneys, scholarship panelists, and other men employed to believe in and enforce concepts of fairness speak complacently about the uses of "feminine wiles"—a euphemism for beauty deployed to the woman's advantage. Powerful men characterize them with grudging admiration, as if "beauty's" power were an irresistible force that stunned and immobilized distinguished men, to turn them into putty in the charmer's hand. This attitude makes sure that women will have to keep using the things they sometimes use to try to get the things they seldom get.

The conventions of this gallantry are veils over the inscription in stone: It is the powerful who dictate the terms; adults, play-wrestling a child, enjoy letting the child feel it has won.

This point, where beauty forms the bridge between women

and institutions, is what women are taught to seize upon, and is then used as proof that women themselves are finally to blame. But to make herself grasp at this straw, a woman has to suppress what she knows: that the powerful ask for women to display themselves in this way. When power toys with beauty, the request for display behavior has been choreographed before the woman has had the chance to enter the room where she will be evaluated.

This request for display behavior is unspoken. It is subtle enough so that the woman cannot point to it, credibly, as an example of harassment (to be credible about being harassed, in any case, a woman must look harassable, which destroys her credibility). It usually leaves the toyed-with "beauty" no choice, short of a withdrawal so obvious as to give certain offense, but to play along. She may have to will her body to relax and not stiffen at an untoward compliment, or simply have to sit up straighter, letting her body be seen more clearly, or brush the hair from her eyes in a way that she knows flatters her face. Whatever it is she has to do, she knows it without being told, from the expression and body language of the powerful man in whose eyes her future lies.

When a brilliant critic and a beautiful woman (that's my order of priorities, not necessarily those of the men who teach her) puts on black suede spike heels and a ruby mouth before asking an influential professor to be her thesis advisor, is she a slut? Or is she doing her duty to herself, in a clear-eyed appraisal of a hostile or indifferent milieu, by taking care to nourish her real gift under the protection of her incidental one? Does her hand shape the lipstick into a cupid's bow in a gesture of free will?

She doesn't have to do it.

That is the response the beauty myth would like a woman to have, because then the Other Woman is the enemy. Does she in fact have to do it?

The aspiring woman does not have to do it if she has a choice. She will have a choice when a plethora of faculties in her field, headed by women and endowed by generations of female magnates and robber baronesses, open their gates to her; when multinational corporations led by women clamor for the skills of young female graduates; when there are *other* universities, with bronze busts of the heroines of half a millennium's classical learning;

when there are *other* research-funding boards maintained by the deep coffers provided by the revenues of female inventors, where half the chairs are held by women scientists. She'll have a choice when her application is evaluated blind.

Women will have the choice never to stoop, and will deserve the full censure for stooping, to consider what the demands on their "beauty" of a board of power might be, the minute they know they can count on their fair share: that 52 percent of the seats of the highest achievement are open to them. They will deserve the blame that they now get anyway only when they know that the best dream of their one life will not be forcibly compressed into an inverted pyramid, slammed up against a glass ceiling, shunted off into a stifling pink-collar ghetto, shoved back dead down a dead-end street.

The Social Consequence of the PBQ

The professional beauty qualification works smoothly to put back into employment relations the grounds for exploitation that recent equal opportunity laws have threatened. It gives employers what they need *economically* in a female work force by affecting women *psychologically* on several levels.

The PBQ reinforces the double standard. Women have always been paid less than men for equal work, and the PBQ gives that double standard a new rationale where the old rationale is illegal.

Men's and women's bodies are compared in a way that symbolizes to both the comparison between men's and women's careers. Aren't men, too, expected to maintain a professional appearance? Certainly: They must conform to a standard that is well groomed, often uniformly clothed, and appropriate to their context. But to pretend that since men have appearance standards it means that the genders are treated equally is to ignore the fact that in hiring and promotion, men's and women's appearances are judged differently; and that the beauty myth reaches far beyond dress codes into a different realm. Male anchors, according to TV employer guidelines cited by law theorist Suzanne Levitt, are supposed to remember their "professional image" while female

anchors are cautioned to remember "professional elegance." The double standard for appearance is a constant reminder that men are worth more and need not try as hard.

"Wherever records have survived of the pay of working people," writes Rosalind Miles, "women are shown either to receive less than men, or to get nothing at all." That is still true: In 1984 in the United States, women working year-round at full-time jobs still earned an average of only \$14,780—64 percent of the \$23,220 that men working full-time earned. Estimates of what they now earn range from 54 to 66 cents to the male dollar. Taking the highest figure, it is still a difference that has narrowed only 10 cents over the past twenty years. In the United Kingdom, women earn 65.7 percent of the gross weekly earnings of men. The pay difference in the United States is maintained within the same job throughout the social structure: On the average, male lawyers aged 25–34 earn \$27,563, but female lawyers the same age, \$20,573; retail salesmen earn \$13,002 to retail saleswomen's \$7,479; male bus drivers make \$15,611 and female bus drivers, \$9,903; female hairdressers earn \$7,603 less than male hairdressers. A barrage of imagery that makes women feel they are worth less than men, or worth only what they look like, helps keep this state of affairs going strong.

This proves again that the myth is political and not sexual: Money does the work of history more efficiently than sex. Low female self-esteem may have a sexual value to some individual men, but it has a financial value to all of society. Women's poor physical self-image today is far less a result of sexual competition than of the needs of the marketplace.

Many economists agree that women do not expect promotion and higher wages because they have been conditioned by their work experience not to expect improvements in work status: Women, writes Sidel, "are often unsure of their intrinsic worth in the marketplace." In the 1984–85 Yale University strike by the 85-percent-female clerical workers union, a basic issue, according to one organizer, was to get women to ask themselves, "What are we worth?" The biggest obstacle was "a basic lack of confidence." The beauty myth generates low self-esteem for women and high profits for corporations as a result.

Beauty ideology teaches women they have little control and

few options. Images of woman in the beauty myth are reductive and stereotyped. At any moment there are a limited number of recognizable "beautiful" faces. Through such limited perceptions of women, women come to see their options as limited: Women in the United States are clustered in 20 of 420 occupations listed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Seventy-five percent of American women are still employed in traditional "women's jobs," most of which are ill paid. Arlie Hochschild found that women are concentrated "in jobs that stress their physical attractiveness."

With few roles in which to see themselves and be seen, fully two thirds of American women work in service or retail jobs or in local bureaucracies, jobs with low wages and little opportunity for advancement. The few roles imagined for women are cheaply compensated: Secretaries, 99 percent of whom are female, earn an average salary of \$13,000; preschool teachers, 97 percent female, \$14,000; bank tellers, 94 percent female, \$10,500; food service workers, 75 percent female, \$8,200.

Women *do* earn more from selling their bodies than their skills. "In this context," writes legal scholar Catharine A. MacKinnon, "it is instructive to ask: What is woman's best economic option?" She cites evidence that, in contrast to the salaries of the "respectable" women described above, the average streetwalker in Manhattan nets between \$500 and \$1,000 a week. Another of her studies shows that the one difference between the prostitutes in the sample group and other women from similar backgrounds is that the former earn twice as much; A third shows that fashion modeling and prostitution are the only professions in which women consistently earn more than men. One woman in four earns less than \$10,000 a year even though working full-time; in 1989, Miss America earned \$150,000, a \$42,000 scholarship, and a \$30,000 car.

How can a woman believe in merit in a reality like this? A job market that rewards her indirectly as if she were selling her body is simply perpetuating the traditional main employment options for women—compulsory marriage or prostitution—more politely and for half the pay. The pay-to-effort ratio at the top of the display professions, of which women are kept well-informed ("it's really gruelling under those hot lights"), is a caricature of the real relation of women's work to their pay. The gross high pay of pro-

fessional beauties is a false gloss over women's actual economic situation. Hyping fantasies of discovery in the overpaid display professions, the dominant culture helps employers avoid organized resistance to the repetitiveness and low pay of real women's real work. With the aspirational link of the women's magazines in between, women learn unworthiness. The sense of professional *entitlement* a worker acquires from expecting a fair reward for a job well done thus remains conveniently distant from the expectations of working women.

Employers admit that "one way of weeding out women applicants for a job is to readvertise it at a higher salary." "When it comes to defining our worth financially," one study concludes, "we have severe doubts about ourselves." In studies of body self-perception, women regularly overestimate their body size; in a study of economic self-perception, they regularly underestimate their business expenses. The point is that the two misperceptions are causally related. By valuing women's skills at artificially low levels and tying their physical value into the workplace, the market protects its pool of cheap female labor.

The professional insecurity this situation generates cuts across the biological caste system that the PBQ sets up: It is found in "beautiful" women, since often no amount of professional success can convince them that they themselves, and not their "beauty," have earned them their positions; and it's found in "ugly" women, who learn to devalue themselves.

Pinups in the workplace are metaphors for the larger issue of how Iron Maiden imagery is used to keep women down on the job. At the Shoemaker Mine in the United States, when women coal miners joined the work force, graffiti appeared that targeted for ridicule individual women's breasts and genitals; a woman with small breasts, for instance, was called "inverted nipples." Faced with such scrutiny, reports legal scholar Rosemarie Tong, "the female miners found it increasingly difficult to maintain their self-respect, and their personal and professional lives began to deteriorate." Nevertheless, a ruling by an American court, *Rabidue v. Osceola Refining Co.* (1986), upheld the right of male workers to display pornography in the workplace, no matter how offensive to women workers, on the grounds that the landscape is steeped in this sort of imagery anyway.

In Great Britain, the National Council for Civil Liberties recognizes that pinups constitute sexual harassment, as they "directly undermine an individual woman's view of herself and her ability to do her job." When unions formed discussion groups about the subject of pinups, forty-seven of the fifty-four groups ranked pinups as examples of sexual harassment that disturbed women. The Society of Civil and Public Servants ranks sexually evaluating looks, as well as pinups, as sexual harassment. Women interviewed said that when pinups are on the walls, they feel that "direct comparisons are being made." Pinups are used directly to undermine women: In *Strathclyde Regional Council v. Porcelli*, Mrs. Porcelli testified that her harassers often "commented on my physical appearance in comparison with that of the nude female depicted." But neither the American nor the British judicial system shows insight into the fact that this kind of harassment is intended to make women in the workplace feel physically worthless, especially in comparison with the men. It is *intended* to reinstate the inequalities that women's entry into that workplace took away. In fostering in women the feeling of ugliness—or, if their "beauty" is the target, of exposure and foolishness—it should not have to *lead* to another injury, as the law now defines it, in order to be understood as discriminatory; it *is* already an injury.

The PBQ keeps women materially and psychologically poor. It drains money from the very women who would pose the greatest threat were they to learn the sense of entitlement bestowed by economic security: Through the PBQ, even richer women are kept away from the masculine experience of wealth. Its double standard actually makes such women poorer than their male peers, by cutting a greater swathe in the income of a female executive than in that of a male and that is part of its purpose. "Women are punished for their looks, whereas men can go far in just a grey flannel suit," complains, ironically, a former beauty editor of *Vogue*, who estimates that her maintenance expenses will be about \$8,000 annually. Urban professional women are devoting up to a third of their income to "beauty maintenance," and considering it a necessary investment. Their employment contracts are even earmarking a portion of their salary for high-fashion clothing and costly beauty treatments. *New York Woman* describes a typical ambitious career woman, a thirty-two-year-old who

spends "nearly a quarter of her \$60,000 income . . . on self-preservation." Another "willingly spends more than \$20,000 a year" on workouts with a "cult trainer." The few women who are finally earning as much as men are forced, through the PBQ, to pay *themselves* significantly less than their male peers take home. It has engineered do-it-yourself income discrimination.

When used against newly wealthy women, the PBQ helps to enforce and rationalize discrimination at the highest levels. A 1987 U.S. Chamber of Commerce report found that corporate women, vice presidents and above, earn 42 percent less than male peers. Men in the twenty highest-paid professions make significantly more than women peers, says Ruth Sidel. This discrepancy is protected by the way the PBQ leeches money and leisure *and confidence* from this rising class, thus allowing corporations to draw on women's expertise at the higher-paid levels, while defending the structures of male-dominated organizations from a potential onslaught of women who have stopped thinking poor.

It tires women out. As the century draws to an end, working women are exhausted; bone-tired in a way their male colleagues may not be able to imagine. A recent series of surveys summarized in the women's press "all point to one thing: modern women are worn out." Seventy percent of senior women executives in the United States cite tiredness as their main problem; almost half of American eighteen- to thirty-five-year-olds feel "tired most of the time"; 41 percent of the one thousand Danish women questioned responded that they "felt tired at present." In Great Britain, 95 percent of working women put "feeling unusually tired" at the head of a list of their problems. It is this exhaustion that may call a halt to women's future collective advancement, and that is the point of it. A weariness intensified by the rigors of the PBQ, sustained by its perpetual hunger, and renewed on its endless electronic treadmill, the PBQ may ultimately manage what direct discrimination cannot achieve. Professional, high-achieving women have, because of it, just enough energy, concentration, and time to do their work very well, but too little for the kind of social activism or freewheeling thought that would allow them to question and change the structure itself. If the rigors intensify to bring women to the physical breaking point, they may begin to long just to go back home.

Already in the United States, there are murmurs among worn-out career women of nostalgia for life before the mechanized stairs that lead nowhere.

All labor systems that depend on coercing a work force into accepting bad conditions and unfair compensation have recognized the effectiveness of keeping that work force exhausted to keep it from making trouble.

It inverts the male career span. The PBQ teaches women visually that they must yield power at the same pace at which men gain it. Of women over sixty-five, the fastest-growing segment of the United States population, one in five lives in poverty. A third of people living alone in the United States are old women, of whom half have less than \$1,000 in savings. If you are a woman, writes one economist, "you have a 60 percent shot at being poor in old age." The average American old woman's income was 58 percent of that of old men. In Great Britain, lone old women outnumber lone old men by four to one; and of those, over twice as many as old men need income support. The average West German retiring woman gets only half the full pension. Of retiring American women, only 20 percent have private pensions. Worldwide, just 6 percent of wage-earning women will receive a pension by the year 2000. If it is scary to be an old woman in our culture, it is not just because you lose your complexion. Women cling to the PBQ because what it threatens is true: A young woman may indeed do better economically by investing her sexuality while it is at an optimum exchange rate than she does by working hard for a lifetime.

"Beauties" reach the peak of the possibilities open to them in early youth; so do women in the economy. The PBQ reproduces within the economy the inverted life-span of the "beauty": Despite twenty years of the second wave of the women's movement, women's careers still are not peaking in middle and later life alongside those of men. Though business began recruiting women in the early 1970s, long enough ago to give them time for significant career advancement, only 1 to 2 percent of American upper management is female. Though half the law school graduates are women, and 30 percent of associates in private firms are female, only 5 percent of partners are women. At the top universities in the United States and Canada, the number of women full

professors is also about 5 percent. The glass ceiling works to the advantage of the traditional elite, and its good working order is reinforced by the beauty myth.

One reaction to this is that older American women who have made advances within every profession are being forced to see the signs of age (the adjunct of male advancement) as a "need" for plastic surgery. They recognize this "need" as a professional, rather than a personal, obligation. While male peers have evidence of a generation above theirs of old, successful men who look their age, contemporary women have few such role models.

This employment demand for cosmetic surgery brings women into an alternative work reality based on ideas about the uses of human beings as workers, ideas that have not applied to men since the abolition of slavery, before which a slave owner had the right to inflict physical mutilation on his workforce. The surgical economy is no slave economy, of course; but in its increasing demand for permanent, painful, and risky alteration of the body, it constitutes—as have tattooing, branding, and scarification in other times and places—a category that falls somewhere between a slave economy and a free market. The slave owner could cut off the foot of the slave who resisted control; the employer, with this development, can, in effect, cut off parts of a woman's face. In a free market, the worker's *labor* is sold to the employer; her *body* is her own.

Cosmetic surgery and the ideology of self-improvement may have made women's hope for legal recourse to justice obsolete. We can better understand how insidious this development is if we try to imagine a racial discrimination suit brought in the face of a powerful technology that processes, with great pain, nonwhite people to look more white. A black employee can now charge, sympathetically, that he doesn't *want* to look more white, and should not have to look more white in order to keep his job. We have not yet begun the push toward civil rights for women that will entitle a woman to say that she'd rather look like herself than some "beautiful" young stranger. Though the PBQ ranks women in a similar biological caste system, female identity is not yet recognized to be remotely as legitimate as racial identity (faintly though that is recognized). It is inconceivable to the dominant culture that it should respect as a political allegiance, as deep as

any ethnic or racial pride, a woman's determination to show her loyalty—in the face of a beauty myth as powerful as myths about white supremacy—to her age, her shape, her self, her life.

It keeps women isolated. Collective female solidarity in the workplace would force the power structure to tackle the expensive concessions that many economists now believe are necessary if women are to have truly equal opportunity: day care, flextime, job security after childbirth, and parental leave. It might also change the focus of work and the very structure of organization. The unionization of women clerical and sales workers would force Western economies into a serious recognition of what the female work force contributes: 50 percent of working women in the United Kingdom are not unionized, according to the Equal Opportunities Commission. In the United States, 86 percent are not unionized. Many economists believe that the future for unions is female—and that they are the solution to “the feminization of poverty” of the past twenty years. “The fact that unionized women workers earn, on average, 30 percent more than nonunionized women workers speaks for itself,” writes one. “Collectively women workers do better.” Clerical workers, a third of female wage labor, and sales and service workers, over a quarter, have been some of the hardest groups to unionize. Solidarity is hardest to find when women learn to see each other as beauties first. The myth urges women to believe that it's every woman for herself.

It uses her body to convey her economic role. When a woman says, “This will never be fair even if I play by their rules,” she gains insight into the real workings of the myth. No amount of labor will ever be adequately compensated; she will never, hard though she may try, really “make it”; her birth is not the birth of a beauty aristocrat, that mythic species. It *isn't* fair. That's why it exists.

Women's labor for beauty, and the evaluation of women as beauties rather than as workers, issue women each day with metaphors of the real economic injustices that apply to them in the workplace: selective benefits; favoritism in promotion; no job security; a pension plan that pays out a fraction of the capital the worker has put in; a shaky shares portfolio managed by unscrupulous advisers who stand to profit from the investor's losses;

false promises and worthless contracts from management; a policy of first hired, first fired; no union, rigorous union-busting, and plenty of scab labor ready to be called in.

In a behavioral experiment Catharine MacKinnon cites, one group of chickens was fed every time they pecked; another, every second time; and the third, at random. When the food was cut off, the first group stopped trying at once, then the second group soon stopped. The third group, she writes, “*never stopped trying.*”

Women, as beauty and work reward them and punish them, never come to expect consistency—but can be counted upon to keep on trying. Beauty work and the professional beauty qualification in the workplace act together to teach women that, as far as they are concerned, justice does not apply. That unfairness is presented to a woman as changeless, eternal, appropriate, and arising out of herself, as much a part of her as her height, her hair color, her gender, and the shape of her face.