Increasingly, in modern industrialised urban societies, a neoliberal postfeminist discourse, made popular by the media, has become commonplace. Contrary to stereotypical representations of women as passive, as sexually objectified and primarily associated with the domestic sphere, strong, active and autonomous representations of women currently abound in mainstream media, which suggest that sexism, along with feminism, have become passé. Indeed, in some instances, a reversal of power relations is implied, in which women seem to rule the world.

Far from having disappeared, from a feminist critical discourse perspective, issues concerning gender, ideology and power have become notably more complex and subtle in contemporary media. Rather perniciously, a postfeminist discourse, in fact, has engendered a culture of ‘post-critique’ in which it has become harder to launch any social critique of gender relations.

Against this climate of critical inertia, the task of enabling critical consciousness is ever more crucial and urgent for critical feminist educators. To this end, the paper provides an analysis of how groups of undergraduate students reading a module on Media Discourse initiate and discuss critical issues about postfeminist gender representations on an online forum. The study shows how students identify and unpack discourse strategies utilised by the media; problematize notions of consumption-based empowerment; and, importantly, how the students themselves exercise critical self-reflexivity about their own attitudes and practices.

The study shows how, through online peer talk, a mutual and collective shaping of critical consciousness is possible as a counter-discourse in a time that postfeminism seeks to challenge and silence the articulation of social critique.

Keywords: social critique, postfeminism, feminist critical discourse analysis.