When the Miss World contest was held in Bangalore in 1996 hosted by the ABCL group, the city erupted in protests. Women's groups objected to the anti-woman nature of such contests, which they felt degraded and objectified women's bodies; fundamentalist groups felt this was against Indian culture and Indian womanhood, and Left groups felt that the Karnataka State government was selling out to commercial interests. The liberals (and the organizers of the contest) were of the opinion that it was a 'free choice' that women were making by participating in these contests. The crux of the matter, though, was not the event in itself, but the social anxiety surrounding female sexuality - particularly what was understood to be the Western expression of female sexuality. If a woman enters a beauty pageant or aspires to be in the glamour industry, is she letting herself be made into a sexual object? After all, in the current economic framework, the glamour industry rests on creating and perpetuating a certain image of female sexuality and construction of desire.

This chapter examines questions that arise when gender, labour and sexuality converge, as in the glamour industry, and tries to pinpoint the source of discomfort and social uneasiness associated with this aspect. In particular, the chapter opens up the issue of objectification for the women themselves to comment on and respond to - women who are primarily implicated as the 'sexual objects' in this objectification as models or beauty pageant participants. It also looks at the social impact

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1 See Oza, 2001
2 The swimsuit round of the pageant was ultimately shifted to the Seychelles islands to avoid further conflict.
of this alleged objectification, the silence around issues of sexual harassment and the 'casting couch', and the compelling rhetoric of "free choice".

I. OBJECTIFICATION AND COMMODIFICATION

Media, Consumption and Women's Bodies

One of the common concerns about globalization and new communication technologies is the objectification of women, and the use of women's bodies to advertise products, newspapers, and so on, in several ways. Within scholarship on these issues, there emerges a problem of clearly defining what constitutes 'pornography'. Although the debates on pornography as such fall outside the scope of this study, it is relevant to examine the term 'pornographic genre', used by various academics to encapsulate the range of ways in which media objectifies women's bodies, such as photos in daily tabloid newspapers, men's magazines, issues of sports magazines (such as the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue) or ads which commonly use a 'pornographic style' in depiction of women's bodies, facial expression and other signifiers of sexuality and/or submission.

Jane Pilcher (1998) elaborates on the historical origin of "Page Three" (photographs of women in states of undress on page 3 of a tabloid, which became a regular and popular feature) and makes links between debates on censorship and studies of women's response to "Page Three". She outlines four "vocabularies" in which society responded to these issues: vocabulary of individualism (where it is constructed as an example of freedom of expression), little concern (harmless fun for men), feminist vocabulary (degrading, objectifying and leading to sexual violence), and a moralist vocabulary ('wrong', moral affront to traditional values). She points out how such a genre has been normalized and how newspapers...
use objectification of women's bodies for daily, casual and cheap pleasure, as a distraction from the news. She says, "In many ways Page Three exemplifies arguments about the pervasiveness and pernicious influence of the pornographic genre. It is freely available to all, at a relatively low price and is made 'respectable' by its host, a national daily newspaper."

Pilcher also documents a short lived movement in England, against the Page Three phenomenon, started by a woman Claire Short in 1988; she introduced the "Indecent Displays (Newspapers) Bill" to legislate against it, which failed eventually. However, Short received over 5000 letters from women who mostly encouraged and applauded her attempt, and raised the question of whether women really have a choice about being confronted with Page Three in workplaces or public transport? The speeches made in Parliament in opposition to Short's bill basically raised the following issues - questions of censorship, questions of the 'freedom of choice' of those who read Page Three and the models who pose for it, issues of public nudity elsewhere, and the denial of any linkage between sexual violence and such publications. Of these the claim of individuals right to self determination and free choice has become an increasingly acceptable 'vocabulary of motive' in the past decades. The difficulty with this is that by using the vocabulary of individualism, especially the freedom of choice of models to appear nude, other women are denied the consequences of such choices for women as a whole, and for how they are represented in society.

Bridger, Kay and Pinnick (1996) also explore the roots of a flourishing pornographic genre in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union (where images of nudes are commonplace in public places, prostitution flourishes and call girl agencies advertise freely) and find that it is justified and normalized as backlash against the moral, psychological
controls of the former Soviet system. This creates an environment or a type of labour market, they find, in which sexual exploitation and abuse can flourish, not only within the sex industry but also the broader world of employment. In fact they point out that women are already so “othered” (as special, different, capable of the miracle of birth) that to objectify them further (as sex objects) is only a small space further. Women do not object to this, in fact they participate voluntarily in this objectification as “the liberalization of moral attitudes following a period of relative Puritanism may find women as well as men enjoying what they see as newly won personal freedom.” (Bridger et al, 1996)

**Sexual Objectification to Subjectification**

It is this ‘newly won personal freedom’ which is the core of the new sexual agency (sexual subjectification, rather than sexual objectification) that is advertised and celebrated as a characteristic of the modern woman. Before examining this however, it is possible to make a slight distinction between objectification and commodification. Objectification refers to the ability to break down a body into its parts making the body less human, or equivalent to that of an inanimate object (in thought), while commodification refers to the imputed monetary value given to the body and its parts, or putting up the body and its parts for commercial use. Both terms imply the exploitation of the human body.

Although anthropology tends to assume that there is a natural human desire to ‘protect personal boundaries and guard bodily integrity’ (Sharp, 2000), exploitation of the human body (through objectification and commodification) has historically existed across cultures and epochs in various forms – slavery, oppressive labour practices, even the female form as a “gift” through the marriage contract (Mauss, 1924). In the contemporary context, research on objectification and commodification has revolved around biotechnologies – organ transplantation,
reproductive technologies, cosmetic and transsexual surgeries, paid surrogacy (bodies for rent), patenting of human genetic material and so on (Sharp, 2000; Wilkinson, 2003).

Sexual objectification refers to the representation of women as a sexual object, without consideration to her human aspect. It is by definition a value-loaded term and implies something that is degrading, disrespectful and exploitative. R.Gill (2003) in her essay “From sexual objectification to sexual subjectification: the resexualisation of women’s bodies in the media” states:

A generation ago, women were struggling and fighting not to be portrayed in this objectified manner, not to be reduced to the size of their breasts, not to be consumed only as a sexual object, and yet today young women are actually paying good money to present themselves in this way.

Gill proposes that representations today no longer depict women as passive but as knowing, active and desiring sexual subjects. There is a construction of a new femininity at large which is characterized by sexual confidence and autonomy. As a result, women believe that they may access greater power if they sexualize themselves, that by doing so they are pleasing themselves and exercising their own choice in the matter. Sexual objectification is therefore presented not as something done to women by men, but done themselves out of free choice.

**Sexuality at the Workplace**

There is a difference in the exercise of sexual subjectivity in everyday life, and the institutionalized use of female sexuality as a dominant characteristic in a profession. The glamour industry is one of those implicated in the ‘pornographic genre’ that was described earlier, although in India this genre is still in its early stages. In modelling, on the ramp or for print and TV commercials, performance in television,
films, music videos and the associated broad entertainment industry, there is a range of ways in which sexuality is employed, both overt and covert.

Less overt ways include strategies employed by say, the automobile industry, which has institutionalized the way in which female bodies are used to market their products. Young girls are paid attractive remuneration to stand next to cars or motorbikes, in the guise of being salesgirls or attendants, at the annual Auto Expo in Delhi. The better looking the attendants, or the more scantily clad, the greater is the crowd attracted to the stall. While bigger automobile manufacturers hire upcoming models from modelling agencies to stand at their stalls for attracting customers, other automobile companies hire young college women in general. This is deemed a fairly reasonable and respectable way for young college girls to earn some pocket money. The money offered differs according to the client, and sometimes according to the attire the women are willing to wear. In fact, money earned is directly proportional to the amount of clothes they are willing to shed – each year newspaper reports reveal ‘rate cards’ showing that the money paid to women who are willing to wear short skirts, or tight clothes is higher. Paradoxically, along with this, there is a heightened presence of security, police force, and women police officers to round up ‘eve-teasers’ as it is understood that this is bound to happen, it is one of the by products of the marketing strategies employed by the industry.

In print and television ads also, the extent of sexuality involved is usually determined by the script, as well as the sexual stereotypes associated

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3 In the India International Trade Fair, women attendants were placed in three groups A, B and C according to appearances and willingness to wear certain types of clothes. Women in grade A commanded higher rates upto Rs.1000 per day, and wore Western outfits. Those willing to wear short skirts got a higher pay. Women in grade B were paid Rs. 600-750; women in grade C, called the “saree suit type” received much less, as low as Rs. 150 per day. (Hindustan Times, 23 November 2004)
with well entrenched gender roles – such as a good mother or good wife or daughter in law. Within fashion shows, various factors contribute to the level of sexuality that is required to be exhibited or curtailed. Where is the fashion show to be held: in a city or town? Is it to be held in a pub, five star hotel, make shift tent, or college auditorium? What is the audience? Is it a show for people well versed in fashion, or for college students, or general public? What kind of clothes are on show – wedding trousseaus, Western casual wear, lingerie, or swimwear? Is it a show to promote tourism, or culture, or a show that promotes a sponsor?

Thus, a fashion show with a big designer during fashion week in metros like Delhi or Mumbai will be seen as less objectifying (in the gaze of the audience, although the gaze of the media covering it could be more so) than a fashion show for the purpose of entertainment in a smaller city like Ludhiana. Amongst cities too, a show in Aizawl will be designed differently from the show at Ludhiana; in Ludhiana, restraint will be exercised in choreographing the show and the choice of outfits to minimize any untoward events (partly based on stereotypes of the sexually aggressive virile Punjabi male), whereas the clothes chosen for Aizawl (where young people are more influenced by Western culture) may be less conservative. Choreographers, designers and sponsors are usually sensitive to the cultural expectations surrounding a fashion show in any area, and operate accordingly. Monica, a former Miss India finalist who has been working in the industry for the last five years and who has been part of different shows says:

I have worked... in Chandigarh, Patiala, Ludhiana, Amritsar, everywhere. I can't tell you how many times we go to Chandigarh! The crowd (there) is actually not ready enough to see the kind of shows we do in Delhi! ... so when we go there, we do simpler shows. Shows which are like, more covered, because the audience there can't take it. You know, they'll make... unnecessarily they'll create noises and they'll shout ... do something... so we don't give them any chance. Our choreographers are very intelligent in that!
In the course of their everyday work — in shoots, marketing certain products, there are moments which are more closely related to expression of female sexuality and constructing desire. Shaheen talks about how this profession is more 'intimate' than any other:

Modelling, making some ads, or the movies... the proximity and the kind of work is very... it's intimate work, you know? The work space is intimate because you are dealing with clothes, you are standing there half-naked while the designer drapes and drapes. There are twenty other people but you are still in a personal space, it's like doing a movie. You know you do a kissing scene or you do a love making scene there are 52 technicians, but you are still in personal spaces, you know they are intimate spaces. So, I think that is why these professions have that slightly dubious quality... and they are slightly dubious, because where else in the world do you get 15 men to watch you when you are changing or while you are getting in and out of a tub 100 times trying to do some shampoo ad or while you are sighing and breathing and your arms and legs are being shown till up here because it's a waxing ad or a cream ad. So it's a peculiar profession.

Other, more sexual moments include wearing revealing clothes in certain shows, fashion shoots which may not necessarily have revealing clothes but require 'suggestive poses', or the swimwear photographs made for the CV or the portfolio of the model. A 'bikini shot' is often popularly believed to be mandatory in the CV of an aspiring model, although more established models say this is not so. Mayuri talks about how she was misled into posing in a bikini, something she regrets till now, and the outcome of which she had to suffer. She says:

I shot in a bikini because the photographer told me I had to. He said — "bikini to folio mein hota hi hait" ("There is always a bikini shot in a model's folio") Later I felt, and my colleagues also told me, that I should not have done it. It's not so important for Delhi. If I distribute bikini shots to coordinators, then offers for only that kind of work will come to me. Which is what happened. I did not know anything at the time, so I did it... and started getting all rubbish offers. But I didn't distribute those pictures after that. Bikini shots are important for foreign models, but here in India we are conservative so it is not so important for us...
Besides the odd bikini shot (which is more important for a beauty pageant), the women feel that in India there is far less demand for revealing outfits to be worn on the ramp. Recently a new genre of work has emerged, that of swimsuit calendars, which involves the models being photographed in exotic locations in swimsuits. These calendars are not publicly available and positioned as 'exclusive' (and therefore upper class) for limited circulation amongst a selected clientele. Channel V, Kingfisher (a brand promoted by the United Breweries group) as well as various fashion photographers send out their own swimsuit calendars to their clientele.

On the ramp however, there is enough negotiating space with choreographers and designers for models to express their discomfort with wearing any outfit that they are awkward about. Choreographers and designers are reasonably sensitive to these constraints and feelings and often accommodate such requests. Those who are willing to wear certain more daring clothes in India are at an advantage because they are in a position to charge more for wearing such outfits. Nancy is one of the women who does the occasional swimwear show. She says:

See, in India there is hardly any show where you have to show too much skin. When it is a bikini, that is a different thing because it is a bikini show. But supposing it is a transparent top it hasn't happened to me as yet but if it happens, then I won't wear it. I am not comfortable with it. Otherwise I don't mind wearing short skirts, half pants or even bikini tops. I don't mind, it shouldn't be transparent that's it.

Shoots I have done, bikini shoots. But not shows as there are hardly any lingerie or bikini shows happening here. I have done a bikini show once though for an Italian designer. It depends on whether it is a decent brand.

But the client or choreographer has to be clear on this from the time they get the booking from us. Supposing we get the booking well in advance, they have to tell
us if it is a bikini show or a show where there is one round of bikinis or one round of lingerie. It has to be clear from the beginning because there is the question of money - when there is a bikini or a lingerie show, the money increases. If it is a full lingerie show, they normally pay double of what you get for a normal show.

Nancy makes a distinction between a show and a shoot – often a show which is in front of a live audience (and therefore more objectifying/‘sexual’ as an experience for the women on the ramp) is cause for concern because of the element of crowd control and potential unruly behaviour from members of the audience. A shoot on the other hand is a controlled situation, in a more personal space where the model would feel safer and more in control. Many models, therefore, will agree to wear more revealing outfits in shoots, rather than shows.

This kind of shoot requires the models to be more communicative about sexuality and be more open about its nuances and practical details of how to pose or stand to look most ‘sexy’ or desirable. A lexicon of ‘suggestive poses’ are commonly used by the women in the industry – such as standing with the feet open a certain distance, or keeping the mouth/ lips open a little more than usual, or arching the body in a certain way, tilting the face at an angle against certain lights, or how to pose in front of a blower. As a result, most feel that a comfortable relationship with the photographer is very important for these shoots to work out well, as well as getting over inhibitions regarding articulating and talking about sexuality. Tanvi, who was one of the winners on the Get Gorgeous show and went on to become a model with Elite modelling agency, talks about this relationship and the ‘performance’ that this kind of posing entails:

For certain clothes, certain designers demand that kind of a thing (sexy look). See it is very important to be open, frank in talking straight about it. Because at the end of the day if the photo doesn't come out well, the blame comes to you.
Obviously the model didn't pose well so it didn't come out well! There has to be a ... there should be no gap between a model and a photographer, you know. You need to communicate what you actually want, what is the feeling, what the designer requires from the shoot. And here the photographer has to communicate (fully) with the model. So I don't think there is any harm in it. They should be free enough to talk about it and be able to (communicate).

There are some photographers with whom you are more comfortable than others, those with who you can communicate... I have this one particular photographer who I am quite open with. That is the person who shot my first folio. And I would like... if somebody wants to do a shoot, I say ya why don't you get this person to do it! The kind of rapport I share with him, I don't share with every photographer. Which is (both) bad and good - good that I am open with him, bad that I have inhibitions with other photographers.

Other than the actual clothes, the effects used in any show - such as the often used blower in fashion shoots, where a false wind causes hair to blow or clothes to billow glamorously and adds fluidity to a shot or strong lights that can make an opaque garment transparent - are also sometimes cause for concern, because they can 'sexualize' a seemingly innocuous moment. Vinita recalls one such incident:

It was this show where I was to wear something from a designer, some material like chiffon. I had to wear it and go onto the blower... I held my bit down (puts her hand in front of her lap to illustrate) but when I went and the blower was on, it blew up too much and showed my back. For two days that's all that people were talking about. It bothers you but only for a day. After that, it's over.

This sort of obvious sexuality at the workplace can be difficult for women from conservative backgrounds to get accustomed to. Shaheen points out some practical problems to getting over these inhibitions:

A lot of girls come from conservative backgrounds and some come from middle class, morally heavy backgrounds or small towns where the exposure is just simply - not that they are any different from you and me - but just that they have not had that kind of an exposure. They don't know swimming for example, they've never swum. Now, if you come from a small town where it's a cold town
like maybe Shimla or something you may not even ever need to be in swimsuit your whole life because there is no need. But suddenly you come to a city and somebody will say that we need you in a swimsuit and you are like 'what!? And you may have a beautiful face and may be nice looking and good skin, but suddenly you may have a bit of a puppy fat or stretch marks because you used to be plump when you were a kid. I grew up in the West, and was used to wearing a bikini on the beach. It's normal for me, but I worked with a lot of girls who had serious trouble. It is not because they don't have beautiful bodies or they are not beautiful or they don't have fabulous skin, it's just that they have come from spaces where they didn't need to. So there is a battle in their heads.

Many of them have to consciously work at getting over their inhibitions. Mayuri for example has enrolled in classes that will teach her to swim and do the South American dance form salsa, as they will make her lose her inhibitions, get more comfortable with her body, the salsa in particular helping her to be more 'sexy'.

Earlier generations feel that it is much easier for the current generation of models to emulate ‘sexiness’ as the media today has made such sexual images/postures/dances a part of popular culture – making it all the more ‘natural’ to copy this ‘manufactured sexuality’. Tanvi, however, separates the private person off the camera (invariably a good girl) from the professional model who poses (indecently, as a bad girl would) in front of the camera, thereby showing the tension that exists between the two personas separated by the eye of the camera, or ‘the Gaze’:

It's not bad to pose in that kind of (way). But OFF the camera, and off all this (the media) if you see that girl in a salwar suit, you will never say that she is that (sexual) person... It's ok. If the work requires it, it's ok. It's like playacting. But I don't think so anybody would make a show of it (after the shot is over).

**Women's Experiences and Responses to Objectification**

It is difficult to refute that the female form is used indiscriminately in a sexual way to market goods and services in the new economies; the
frequent and varied depiction of female bodies and sexuality in the media makes this evident. How do women implicated in this, the models themselves, experience this objectification? So far, it is a term and condition which has been imposed on them, positioning them as unwitting victims or regrettable allies of a macroeconomic framework, leaving their voices unheard on the issue. We now look at the women's own responses and perceptions of this alleged objectification and sexualisation of their bodies.

Who's Watching? The Nuances of the Gaze

Women in the industry respond to these allegations with some amount of pragmatism and defensiveness. One way of rationalizing it is to extrapolate the objectification of womankind at large – almost all of them feel that the world sees all women and girls as sex objects. They are no exception, and face no unique disadvantage in this regard. Pragati says:

Whether you are in salwar kameez or whatever it does not matter, men look at you badly anyway. So how does it matter... even if you are a model on a ramp, or girl on the street, they still see you cheaply. So it’s all the same really, I feel.

Another stream of responses talks about the changing 'gaze' that objectifies not only women, but also men. Advertisements of underwear or deodorants in which men are disrobed or bare-chested or shown to be explicitly objects of desire are given as examples, or Bollywood actors who bare their chest and are known to be catering to a bisexual (still male) gaze. This is part of the overall 'sexualisation' that is evident around us. Shaheen talks about this aspect:

I think everything has become sexual today, more than our time. The clothes we wear, the way we dance, those moves were not there earlier.

Some take refuge in the stereotypical classist notion that they are not objectified by society at large, but only by certain sections of society (men from poorer sections of Indian society, or men in small towns and
hamlets) – which objectifies all women anyway, especially young women. The fashion channel FTV, for example, is seen as the culprit in encouraging such objectification of models in particular. Tina, from her upper class perspective says:

FTV does go beyond its limits. It’s obvious, this ‘midnight hot’ and all these shows, who they are for. I mean paanwalas (roadside cigarette vendors) are watching it! You can tell, look at some of the ads that come on during that time, I think even Gutka (a type of local chewing tobacco) ads are shown then! It does harm the image of models, they are seen as easy.

Monica adds:

You know the section we are talking about, for them not only models, even their... daughters’ friends, who are young, they are also sex objects for them. It’s not only about models, its all about young women. Young good looking women, that’s all.

Shaheen feels that people outside cities are more removed from the reality of women wearing certain kinds of clothes in real life, and hence tend to objectify women who wear revealing clothes more. For people in cities where this is more normalized the women are less likely to be seen as sexual objects. She says:

For the boy in small town Roorkee who is sitting and watching an item number on television, it’s the same thing for him if she is in Bombay or Timbuktu. But for the guy in Bombay he can sit next to her the next day in a restaurant. So it’s unreal for rest of India and smaller places... Although the exposure is there, the boy from Roorkee can’t relate to it equally, as he doesn’t see it around him.

The experience of objectification is therefore tempered by nuances of the ‘gaze’, such as the audience (class and race) and the context (cultural attitudes to the body and sexuality). The generally objectifying gaze towards women in India (especially, the respondent’s feel, amongst the ‘masses’) is a cultural constraint that they feel they have to accommodate if they wish to pursue this field in India. The women see their
objectification as an anomaly (an 'Indian problem'). By believing that this gaze will differ (be less derogatory) in an international context or for specific 'classes', they are able to rationalize the objectification.

The Context of 'Free Choice'

Respondents often defend their participation in controversial assignments (in which there is an overt expression of sexuality) by saying that it is a matter where they had "no choice" or one in which they exercised "free choice" as every individual has the right to. This broad range reflects the nuances of 'choice' and 'consent' and the realities of women's working lives, where many parameters are indeed considered and weighed against larger goals and desires to arrive at complicated (free and unfree) 'choices'.

For example, the reason for wearing bikinis for a beauty contest (the visible manifestation of being objectified) is often given as the 'lack of free choice'. Monica, a former Miss India finalist says,

You know there are certain things that I am not comfortable with personally, so I just go ahead and tell (choreographers). I can't wear it, so if you don't mind, give it to someone else. Otherwise people know that I don't do lingerie shows and all. Because I am not comfortable with it.

M: But in the swimsuit round you had to wear in....?
In Miss India, yes. That time I definitely wore it. No, because everybody was wearing... it was a pageant, a pageant more than anything else! I am not doing it for fun! It's just an exam. No choice. I think I had to. For that I had to... make myself understand that Ok I am wearing this and going. But it's ok, we will see after doing it.

Women absolve themselves of the cultural consequences of their action with this explanation, yet at the same time, are aware of the tensions surrounding it. In particular, they are aware and discerning of the gaze
and intent for the disrobing. Even though wearing a swimsuit to show the body (submit it to scrutiny as part of the competition) is an almost statutory requirement in contests, tensions exist most in the swimsuit round, as the producers of the model hunt reality television show Get Gorgeous were to find out. The producer says:

We had the most difficult time with the girls in the swimwear round. Contestants were not informed beforehand about this and it came as a surprise for them. They went ballistic, and reacted really violently. They were like: What is this, how can you expect us to wear this...!!”. “This is not a sarong, it’s like a handkerchief” or “I promised my dad I wouldn’t come on TV in a bikini”. Ultimately we had to leave it to them – but we told them, you’ll lose points, it will reflect in your marking. Still, only two girls came on stage without the sarong we had provided with the swimwear, others wore a skirt or trousers under the bikini top. All of them had a problem, but those who had been modelling for a while got over it sooner.

This seems to be a point of liminality or a rite of passage - this emerging in swimwear, when the reform is complete and an inner reform takes place along with the external. The tension is more related to the entanglement of the self with the family, rather than an expression of personal inhibitions; the problem is related to what the parents will say. Again, traditional parent-child relations come in the way of what the self wants, and has to be rationalized by being portrayed as a choice-less career act or a sacrifice that had to be done for the greater goal, or in some cases, just ironed over and brushed under the carpet so as not to disturb the cultural child-parent status quo. Kavya, for instance, says:

First time I wore bikini with small sarong for the contest it was funny but it was ok. I did not really feel anything, but I remember I could only think, “What will my mother and father say?!” I was quite concerned. But then I told my mother, and I showed her the picture - It was not looking bad or anything - She was not so happy... But I told her not to tell my father. I did not show it to him and she did not tell him either.

Samaira, one of the winners of the model hunt says,
I was wearing a bikini for the first time in GG... I thought about it... Many girls didn't wear - they were from conservative families and I understand it, if someone didn't really want to be a model, so why should they do it and upset their parents when modelling doesn't really mean so much to them. I thought about it, and felt that the panel in front of me - Hemant Trivedi, Ambica Pillai etc. were really top class - and they were not seeing me from a cheap point of view. So I went ahead with it. When I came back I told my mum and she was OK. I didn't tell my dad as such but he didn't mention it. So it just kind of passed.

The choice is a considered one, judged against the level of ambition and other parameters that are valuable to them. It would seem from these accounts that the space where one might imagine the least agency exists, where women appear to be most objectified and victimised – is where agency is indeed being exercised.

Admitting this agency, or playing it up is however guarded against. In this regard, “free choice” appears to be more a reference to a context - of a democracy, a free world, a free market, a natural extension of modern notions of privacy, individuality and choice and part of the construction of the 'new Indian woman' – rather than a statement of exercising complete agency and control over a decision. To the contrary, such an uninhibited and voluntary expression of agency is to be underplayed to avoid aspersions being cast on their 'character'.

For example, Mayuri, who was misled by a photographer into doing some bikini shots for her portfolio (see above), has an ambiguous tone while talking of the bikini shot. It is clear that she put in considerable effort into it, found it to be quite an exciting experience, and was particularly upset because of the cheap responses to it.

I had brought the bikini with me, when I came from Assam. You know Guwahati, you get goods from abroad. My cousin sister had got some bikinis. And I bought it from her when I came.
I had never worn a bikini before. So I was very nervous, almost crying after that. But I think that picture of mine is very nice, the expression on the face was also very nice. It's sad that it was taken wrongly... I think I got my Thailand assignment because of that...

Mayuri knew her foray into the profession would involve her wearing a bikini because she went to quite some trouble to procure one. Yet she still dramatizes the trauma of the moment because it would be immodest to make her agency in this too apparent.

**A Question of Safety**

Both the experience and the decision to undertake a particular assignment that may involve objectification is partially determined by considerations of safety - actual physical safety as well as safety of their projected and self image. Actual physical safety is the primary concern, as Nancy's distinction between a show and shoot above demonstrate. The experience of revealing in front of a live audience is felt to be more objectifying and more difficult to handle, as opposed to appearing in a photograph or television in revealing clothes or in a sexualized manner.

In the latter case, the protection afforded by this third element between the onlooker and the observed - the wall of the TV screen, a billboard or the pages of a magazine - is like a 'one way mirror'. Women feel protected or remain ignorant about whether they are being 'objectified' or not as long as they cannot see the gaze. As long as there is no interaction between the onlooker and the observed, the experience of objectification is distant and unseen, and therefore unreal. This is different from the experience of walking down a ramp, where one can make eye contact

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4 A one way mirror (in which one side of the glass is a mirror and the other side is a glass window) is commonly seen in detective serials where police and witness watch suspects through a one way glass for the during identification of a suspect; the police and witness can see the suspects through the glass, but the suspects cannot see them back. They sees only themselves himself as his side of the glass is a false mirror.
with the audience, or compering a live show where one must interact with the audience, or even as a hostess or attendant in an auto exposition exhibition space which involves contact with the audience. The director of Elite talks about this aspect which is on their mind when they contract out models for an event like the auto expo:

If someone came to me and said I want a hostess for an event or other reasons, no. But auto expo we do make an exception. As long as whoever has that stall has enough security around the stall that can ensure protection for the girls we are fine with it. We go and check it out. We ask all sorts of questions before we send anyone for any kind of assignment. Whether it's a show, whether it's a shoot, whether it's auto expo.

**More Objectified than Others**

The perception within the industry itself is that some women are more objectified than others, or that some types of work are more prone to objectification than others, giving rise to an internally stratified 'class system' based on the degree of objectification of women. Unanimously, the 'item girls' of Bollywood films, Hindi remix music videos or in regional Punjabi music videos, are the bottom of the pile. Shahid, a male model I interviewed in Bombay, who had played the male lead opposite a young woman in a steamy music video, says disparagingly of his female colleague:

These 'kaanta laga' type of remix item girls, don't get any good work after this... after that they are only good for Gutka ads.

Women in raunchy music videos or women who take on advertisements for products stereotypically associated with the 'lower classes' such as Gutka are seen to be more objectified. Also in this category are fashion models whose work is restricted to shows in smaller towns and entertainment based shows. Women who do these assignments are

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5 The name of a remixed Hindi film song that is seen to have started the trend of raunchy music videos to remixed versions of old popular Hindi film songs.
pushed into a bracket of 'cheap' models. Noelle, for example, says:

I'll never do a show in Chandigarh. I don't get a kick out of it and I am not desperate for money, so I will not go to Ludhiana and Jalandar to do a show... I can't handle that kind of environment. My coordinators call me, saying there is this thing you know, Hero Honda, they pay you double your rate you come and launch. You have to walk around the car and hold it and touch it...! I'm like, are you nuts!!

Respondents feel that it is important to consider the long term impact of taking up any such assignment. Often it is the agency that does this consideration for many of its models, and decides for them. Their own interest is also that they would not want the agency to be associated with any "lower level work". The director of Elite modelling agency says:

Music videos I say no to unless it's too striking... I'd probably say yes to a Jagjit Singh music video, or a Lucky Ali music video... or a Lata, Asha. But most remixes I say no to. Because...I mean, they could do a lot for you, but they could also go against you. I don't want to take that risk. And in terms of a girl who I'm promoting... if I see her as a girl for a face product... I don't want to ruin her chances by putting her into a sleazy music video. So a lot of girls will come and fight and say, we want to do this, and you say, no you can't do it... they all want to see themselves on TV so its such a big attraction. With boys I wouldn't be so fussy about it but with girls I would. Item numbers I am not opposed to... there are some girls who will get into movies in a lead role with the girl next door look, there are others who are fashion models who don't have that look. So an item number for them... it's becoming an industry in itself this whole item number thing...so where it's not going to harm someone to do an item number, and that girl is willing to do an item number ... (nods)

M: What about other kinds of fashion shows, more event-like shows in Ludhiana, Jullundhar, and so on?
We do them. Ya... with a known choreographer, there's no reason for us not to. So we do a lot of these circuit shows, we do a lot of corporate shows...

M: What about auto expos...?
Ya. Auto expo is the only exhibition kind of thing that we make an exception to...
because it's of a different class. So we do give models for stalls.

Aesthetics and Class
What are the other factors that influence how much a model is willing to 'disrobe' or allow herself to become a sexual object? Like auto expos that in the quote above are associated with a different 'class', women in the industry make phenomenological distinctions between 'classy' and 'vulgar'. An important concern appears to be aesthetics and the association with a 'class' product or brand, which can be a matter of prestige.

Vinita was one of the lucky few who got to be the Kamasutra girl at the beginning of her career. Here she talks about how she decided to agree to do the assignment offered to her:

When the KS ad came it did not hit me because I had no clue about the importance of the brand as I had just come to India and joined modelling. I did not know who all the people involved were, that they were big shots. When I told my two elder sisters, they told me, do you realize that it's one of the biggest and most prestigious ads there is? But I had no clue what it was all about... I didn't know what KS was... for me it was like ok, someone has offered me an ad.

Finally when I had to sit down and tell my mother about the offer... I couldn't say anything, by then I was a big question mark, whether to do it or not, depending on whether its a good thing for me to do or not? Then we all sat down, my sisters and I with my mom, and they said, we think she should do it. Pooja Bedi was the first one who did it, and this is very big ad - you don't have to think about it, just grab it! So it was a family decision for me to do it, not just mine.

Vinita takes away some of the taboo element from the project by making it public and sharing her offer with her family members and seeking their opinion.
Mary says:

Internationally it's a big deal to be in a Pirelli calendar, not only for the money you make, but also for the kind of attention you're getting. Kingfisher is a take off on that, a very bad wannabe Pirelli. But the Kingfisher calendar, I think it's the cheapest thing on earth... No money, no standards, nothing whatsoever.

In Mary's comment above, she mentions the Pirelli calendar – a swimsuit calendar for a brand of tyres known for its aesthetic photographs, for a Western male audience – as a prestigious project. Yet its Indian offshoot, she disregards as being 'cheap'. Again, not only is a distinction being made in aesthetics but also in the gaze – Kingfisher being for an Indian male audience is immediately suspect, as opposed to a Pirelli for the Western context.

Thus, we can see that the women in the industry are operating under the assumption of a South Asian male sexuality that is disrespectful and uncontrolled, almost bestial, whereas a Western male sexuality is perceived to be more respectful, controlled, and civilized. There are also underlying assumptions of class, that lower class men (like the rickshaw drivers or the consumers of Gutka that some women mention above) have a more bestial sexuality than men in the upper class. These racist and classist myths around male sexuality frame their experience of objectification.

The intent of a particular project is also in question when such a decision is made –is the purpose of exposure artistic or titillation? Shaheen says:

You won't see top models like Heidi Klum or Linda Evangelista or ... going topless on these shows. But they will do Victoria’s Secret or Swimsuit calendars – Pirelli calendar is aesthetic. Or Sports Illustrated. Because these are prestigious. There is a quality and standard associated with them. It's like I would take my top off for a scene in a Mani Ratnam film because he is not doing it for any other reason. Even a nude picture can be art if shot or done
aesthetically. So it's a matter of aesthetics. And knowing that the set up is professional and established - they know who they are working with, sometimes some very big names.

Evidently, the credentials of the photographer, the team or the client also matter. Anurita says defensively:

We do have our own senses - we are not just mannequins that someone can do whatever on us they want to do. If you have a good body tomorrow some Tom, Dick and Harry will come and tell me to do a nude, I will not do it. But yes, if some very good photographer comes to me and tells me to do a nude, I will definitely do it.

Geographical location, intent and the brand positioning of the assignment therefore have an important role in the decision of the woman to take up the assignment. Many of the models are clear that while they would be happy to do bikini shows or lingerie shoots abroad, they draw a line when it comes to the same work in India. Vinita says:

Wearing sheer clothes and all is alright to a certain extent. Abroad women walk around topless backstage - it's in their culture. Here no way. See, you can't suddenly do something that's against your culture. You don't want to show ... because it's the way people look at you. You know if you go out with things showing on the ramp, photographers will take a picture of you and put it on the front page so that they can sell their newspaper more! We don't want that.

Roopali also says she tries not to do any controversial shoots while in India, citing again cultural inappropriateness as the reason. Here she talks about how culture influences their work in different locations, and how she discerns intent behind a request to wear more revealing clothes:

Well, in India I try to be a little particular about it because I have done bikini shoots otherwise, in Singapore and everywhere else. But over here I feel I don't want to push it to the extreme because it culturally doesn't fit in this country I feel. showing too much skin. We are not like the Muslim counties but not like the West also... You know like in the Middle-East countries, I did a show in Muscat and we were asked to wear skin coloured overalls because you can't
show skin at all in that country. We had a long skirt which had a slit here (indicating) till the knee. But we had to have black coloured pants to wear underneath it. See that is just the culture of a particular place and I completely understand it why it is happening.

But, yeah, if am shooting and if I have to have a particular look or play a certain character - where I feel that it's not being done to ... just show you as a hot sex-symbol or something like that then I do it...

Q: Can you successfully make out what the intention is behind a request for you to do something like that?

R: Well, that is the catch to it! Because sometimes when you do something you feel it is going to turn out (a certain way). But it might not... I can take a call on it there and then whether or not to do it, but sometimes when you do it with the other intention, it turns out to be something else. You can't be really sure for sure because at the end of the day it's the technical team which also matters a lot, photographer, lighting and everything you know and it makes a hell of a difference in the picture.

There are other examples of this also – it happens often in our profession that things don’t turn out the way it is told or how you understand it... For example, another model in Elite went for a shoot in Malaysia, the brief had mentioned that there would be “shorts” in the shoot... but when she got there, she found that what they had referred to as “shorts” were REALLY short shorts!! Like bikini shorts/pants, with really high side slits...then what to do? You’re stuck."

Intention therefore is difficult to ascertain, and the ambiguities within the process add to this. Even the agency like Elite that seals the deal, prepares a contract, and sends its model to another country to do an assignment after doing the requisite paperwork could not protect its model from the misinterpreted ‘shorts’. The inherent distance in the profession between the process and the product (especially in shoots, where it is difficult for a model to know exactly where the camera is focusing or which part of her body is being zoomed into and so on, and
the way the end product turns out is out of her control) means that for many models, it is only by learning from their 'mistakes' that they can somewhat discern intent of others.

By choosing more aesthetic or prestigious projects, the aim of the model is also to communicate her own intent – that of wanting to contribute to an artistic endeavour, or part of a political or social message but not be used for exploitative purposes or to voluntarily be seen as a sexual object. Anurita in fact learnt of the impact that this cultural 'meaning' of modelling in a bikini in India can have the hard way, and how people can misread the model's intent in doing a certain kind of work. She recalls:

I thought I was being a proper professional ... But I learnt that if you do a lingerie shoot in India, people will only call you for those kind of things, which is really sick ... Because I am not a lingerie or bikini model or something, I can shoot well in sarees also! But once you do that kind of work, people think you know you are fit for that kind of work only which is wrong. Because it is all in the mind. After that they only call me for condom ads, there is nothing bad about condom ads as such but I am only getting calls from that kind of assignments!

Objectification however is difficult to avoid (largely because of the competitive nature of the industry and the general standards of available work) and hard to resist, if only for the good money that it offers (perceived to be the worst reason to do such an assignment). Even for the lowly item girls, women in the industry feel that the kind of money offered for it is difficult to resist. Shaheen says:

I think they are doing it for the money. I can understand that. I wouldn't blame a girl who agrees to do a song if she is getting paid 10 lakhs or something. Yes I would blame the man who is making her do it. There is a whole lot you can do with that money, and that too for three days of your life. It makes good business sense to do it.

Many of the new age media-savvy item girls demonstrate an aggressive
new response to the objectification. They exhibit a new kind of bravado—brazen, non apologetic, almost post feminist sexual posturing. This works both for and against them—it enables them to address issues head on, and helps create a public space for themselves, but at the same time it makes them vulnerable to other kinds of abusive situations, and to becoming a laughing matter.

Objectification has also become more normalized over time, with the current generation feeling that it is the normal 'test through fire' that new aspirants have to go through before being allowed to prove any other talent. Beyond the defense of the circumstances under which they are more willing to be objectified, women also feel that expressing their sexuality through this creative outlet gives them more confidence, and for those pictures that come out the way they had thought, they feel a sense of pride. This comes out in Mayuri's mixed response to the bikini shots she was conned into. At certain points in the process, there are rare moments in which the intent, gaze, the model's own subjectivity, and the creative enterprise come together to create a feeling of freedom, sensuality and empowerment. This is a paradox, and best represented by the response of most of the women that yes, they would like to do an 'item number' but in Samaira's words:

Like Sushmita Sen ... not like Negar Khan. I want to be admired and respected, not lusted after.

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6 Item girls amongst those at the bottom of the pile within the industry are performers like Rakhi Sawant or Deepal Shaw, made famous by not only their raunchy remix music videos but also their vocal presence in the media in general. Often appearing as guests on talk shows defending their decision to do such work, and poking holes in the double standards of the entertainment industry, their voices have found a platform and public space. At the same time, Rakhi Sawant faced a situation in the recent past in which she was forcibly kissed by a male pop singer at his birthday party, which was caught on camera. She filed a case against the singer, and went to the National Commission for Women to ask for support in her fight for an apology from the singer who she alleged had 'outraged her modesty'. The singer went on to make a music video parodying the entire episode. Deepal Shaw too had to contend with stalkers who would send her obscene messages and calls. She filed for protection from the courts and had to have her telephone numbers changed.
Within the item girls too, a distinction is made between those who exhibit 'class' and inspire 'admiration' (like Sushmita Sen in the example above) rather than those that only invite lust (the example of Negar Khan is used above). This kind of an 'item number' is the dream job of many of the girls – they want to be desired, they want to appear 'sexy', express their sexuality, yet within the limits of physical safety and the safety of an aesthetic gaze that will respect them and look beyond their physicality.

**What Objectification Does to Women**

What does this kind of 'institutional objectification' do to women? The impact of the sexual objectification that is one of their occupational hazards spills over into their everyday lives and affects the women in different ways. Monica echoes most of the women interviewed when she says:

Suddenly the model tag comes on you and suddenly, people feel you are easy, cheap. Some of the men feel it. They can't believe that you must be having some values and principles after being a model.

Shaheen from the first generation feels this has always been there, even in her time. She says:

There are outsiders who say to me that 'modelling mein aap kitne paise banate ho?' ("So, how much exactly do you make in modelling?") Or if I was wearing something and they see it and say it's lovely, and I say I just bought it for myself. And they will say, WHAT? You know they couldn't imagine you could make this kind of amount of money without sleeping around. In their heads you were sleeping around. So I think there is always that tag that is attached to you.

This unfortunate tag is only the tip of the iceberg. Shaheen talks about the more serious impacts of this objectification – that on the emotional well being of the women, including the fear of not being deemed marriageable, loneliness and depression:
These professions are vulnerable professions, acting and modelling... You are exposing a lot more than a regular girl, in terms of your body or your views. Your skin is more, your sexuality is more...ummm...apparent, and as a result, you are partly viewed as an object. I will not say completely... because you are indeed flaunting face, skin, hair, whatever it is, your physical attribute. So you are vulnerable in this space. It is easy to get men to date you, it's far easier to get out for dinner and lunches, it's easier to sleep around because we travel so much. So you have to be very careful that you keep yourself in a good position. After this when the girls want to settle down, there's nobody to marry! Men don't want to marry them... they are happy to date them and take them out and look good with them in their arms - but don't want to get married to them. And they are beautiful women and you are wondering... plain Jane next door has got a lover in the next building, and the doorman will die for her - but this glamorous chic has nobody! So you do pay a price for it...

Another emotional consequence is the dependence on physical appearance as a source of confidence, in other words, the internalizing of objectification of the self. The anxieties surrounding the body and issues of weight loss have already been recounted in the previous chapter. As the looks fade, or even if they don't, the insecurities surrounding how one is looking may get amplified into an obsession. The stress of looking good all the time can also be overwhelming, and is something they have to consciously struggle against.

Shaheen feels:

This is not specific to India, it's something that happens to many women in the profession worldwide. You lose your sense of confidence, or your sense of confidence depends entirely on how you look... if you have a pimple you can't go out for dinner! And that's absurd! Real people go out for dinner no matter what's wrong. They don't even think about it. It's not the be all and end all of your day. Whereas here... you tend to get so microscopic on these things. "I didn't wash my hair I can't go out". It is a funny thing - they become focused because that is their world.

Finally this kind of institutional objectification leads to a complex
relationship between the woman and people around her – especially her family, relatives and male partners (boyfriends, husbands, live-in partners), and a strained relationship with the outside world in which she has to negotiate prejudices and minimize risks to her reputation.

Harpreet says:

Getting married in India when you are a model is a mammoth job. Like no man wants to get serious with a model, no man wants to be legitimate. Most models have broken marriages. I have seen it amongst my peers. Nobody is happy. You leave modelling in case someone does marry you because he or the family will not tolerate it. Or they will keep cribbing till you compromise. Or you go to a phirangi (foreigner). They understand better, they don’t have a problem if you are posing in a bikini. They don’t think like that. They don’t think you are a flirt because you are modelling. In my case, my boyfriend has given me a commitment after me being a model but he has set some standards for me.... I can’t shoot in a bikini ... (he says) you can’t marry me if you shoot in a bikini. Very few men would do that. It is always that you go by their desire. But otherwise he is really understanding. At least he is committed and I like that. And I think that by just not shooting in a bikini if I can balance my career with my love life I think it is totally worth it.

Vinita, for example, who was once the Kamasutra girl, talks about having problems with her boyfriend over doing a particular ad campaign:

I recently did this print ad for Bed (a lounge bar in Mumbai) and the line was “Would you go to BED with me?” Quite smart. And I have got from my own boyfriend. (disbelievingly and slightly hurt about it) “I don’t think its right for you to do the ad”. And I said, why not? You also work... he works in the film industry. And he said, “I can’t see my wife to be...” “I can’t see my girlfriend do that...” But, I said, what is wrong in that? You have known it from the beginning till now? What has changed now? I’m not going to be in bed with everybody just because it’s written over there! This is what I do. I am wearing very respectable clothes, very covered clothes, there is no skin showing anywhere, there is nothing. There is just the line. So you take it the way you want, or you don’t take it at all. It’s upto you. I am comfortable with what I’m doing, and that’s it. Period. How the rest want to take it...because if you leave it to the whole world to decide for you, no? The next thing I know I’ll be jumping off the building,
Finally these impacts are still less immediate than the everyday impact of being seen as a sex object both in the workplace and in society at large—that is, the danger to their physical and mental well being, both at the work place and outside the workplace (in society at large), that of sexual harassment. Robert Goldman (1992) talks about the 'diverse forms of terror experienced by women who objectify themselves':

There is the mundane psychic terror associated with not receiving 'looks' of admiration – i.e. of not having others validate one's appearance. A similar sense of terror involves the fear of 'losing one's looks' – the quite reasonable fear that ageing will deplete one's value and social power. A related source of anxiety involves fears about 'losing control' over body weight and appearance... And there is the very real physical terror which may accompany presentation of the self as an object of desire – the fear of rape and violence by misogynous males.

The next section focuses on this aspect of the undercurrents of 'sexual terror' (incidentally also a term also used by some of the respondents) that become part of their lives.

**Sexual Harassment at the Workplace/ Living in Sexual Terror**

At the time when I was conducting the ethnographic interviews, the issue of the 'casting couch' phenomenon (when sexual favours are asked for/given at the stage of casting for a film, in exchange for a role) was very much in the public eye because of a sting operation conducted by a TV channel on a prominent television actor and a film actor. As a result, there was a general wariness about any aspect of my interview that touched upon the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace in the context of the glamour industry. I was immediately taken to be searching for information on the casting couch, and the responses were defensive and harsh, often signalling closure of any discussion on the topic, and sometimes closure of the interview itself. Only in a few instances did
informants give specific instances of sexual harassment experienced by them, although most of them admitted in passing that they had heard of incidences from their friends and colleagues, but it had never happened to them.

To understand the nature of sexual tensions that existed in the industry and the extent of demands made by people in power in order to give them work, instead I had to depend on other methods of assessing replies, by 'reading meaning' into what they alluded to, or what they did not say, or what they assumed I was already aware of. Pragati for example refused to cooperate at a certain point, when I asked her what her worst experience in the industry had been so far. She said:

Worst experience – I don’t know, I don’t want to say. (M: there has not been any, or you don’t want to say it?) I don’t want to say it, and also I don’t remember the bad experiences. Somehow it has gone from my memory.

Roopali suddenly changed her tone and lowered her voice while discussing this issue, making it evident that talking about sexual harassment at the workplace in general was taboo, not just in relation to the fashion industry:

I don’t think that there is any, you know like if you are talking about sexual harassment or casting couch kind of thing. I mean, yes, it is definitely happening, but I feel that it’s up to a person how do they handle it. If we are talking about sexual harassment in the modelling industry or wherever, I feel that it is everywhere. Like even when I was in Singapore Airlines I used to hear stories... I was working for Taj before that for a month as a management trainee, and there also... (voice changes to serious hush, bit worried that she has said too much) I shouldn’t be naming it, I’m sure you’re not going to... It’s ok right? (Yes, I assure her, indicating it is confidential.) OK then, (voice changes back to normal, and she is back in a more formal mode; it is clear that she is not going to say anything more.) So I mean it is everywhere. People do try to take short cuts and that’s why it happens.
Monica dissipates the tension of the question of sexual harassment by changing the focus from herself and her colleagues to all young women in India:

M: Is the industry safe for young women?
K: See... there are too many answers to this question. I feel that... you have to look after yourself. Industry I don't want to blame. This is not about this fraternity. It's about all working women in India. Is it safe for them? They should know it. Nobody else.
M: Do you think models are exploited in any way?
K: I think the answer is the same. It's not all about models. It's about all Indian women...young women.

Kavya says:

What is safe...? Normal roadside people are more harmful than industry people - they can rape you anywhere. Compare to that the industry is quite clean. Ya at some point of time models are exploited, when they are new or young. But this happens I think in every industry... Otherwise of course it is up to you, you cannot let other people exploit you. You only have to see.

In another part of the interview, Pragati had said:

Women in this industry have to be open, free and frank, because this is how the industry is. Their being open is part of their profession, but how they control it and what they do with themselves depends on their nature... It is necessary to be open with your body, to talk openly because the job is like that. But whether you sleep with someone or go around with someone, or control your own self, or manage yourself - that depends on what kind of a person you are. Here everyone says everything to your face. There is no hypocrisy in these matters.

Harpreet is among the many who echo this viewpoint:

Is the industry safe? Yes I think it is. See everything is very clear cut. It depends on you. Nobody is forcing you. They tell you to your face, ok if you sleep with me, or if you do going around with me, I will give you work. If you say no, they will not bother you after that, and they will not give you work also. Everything is very open here, to your face. Nothing is hidden. It's up to you.
'Nothing is hidden' to those within the profession, but to the outside world it is hidden, furtive, taboo, with the onus of safety being placed entirely on the individual who is more willing than others to take the 'short cut to success'. Or who has no control over their own sexuality. Harpreet’s comment also shows that while the ultimate ‘choice’ to refuse such an offer is with the women, the impact is inevitably that she will not get work from that source any more, thereby effectively derailing or hampering any progress in her career.

Harpreeet briefly mentions however, an experience that she encounters:

My worst experience was when I was offered money for my "services"... once directly, otherwise hints of course have been dropped at many times. Usually I just ignore or indicate no, but I was quite shocked and upset. I didn't tell my boyfriend the details, just told him that "someone's trying to act over-smart" and left it at that. But I think these things happen anywhere... my cousin is a doctor and she has stories to tell also! I think it is how you handle it...if you agree to go for dinner with a client or something... so obviously they might think the next step is natural and you are agreeing for it... anyway. These things happen in all professions.

Kavya points out:

Women have the 'eye', and can understand immediately if someone is looking at them in the wrong way. And then they keep a distance, because they can understand him, so that no such situation arises. If they feel he will ask for sex they have to keep distance.

I think you have to be straight with everybody. And keep an attitude that no one will misbehave with you. Like if someone tells you "oh it's a give and take relationship" repeatedly in that way, you can say up front "What do you mean by 'give and take'? I give you my services to show your clothes, and take money from you for that work. It is work, and that is the give and take. To my mind there is nothing else.

Kavita feels that often women in the industry invite trouble by going
around presenting themselves as available. She says:

I think it is only girls who encourage them to talk all that, I mean I have seen new girls these days, just 16-17, they get out of the school, they want to get their portfolios clicked, and suddenly you see them shooting in bikini and all. Then they say, we went to see a client and the client was talking bullshit to us. Now, if you present a picture to a client, in which you are wearing a bikini, what is the client going to think? A client will definitely not think that you are a very decent girl. You know if you can shoot in a bikini in front of 10 people in a studio, definitely you know a client can go and talk to any extent stuff like that. And you know when I go for meetings, I am always very decently dressed. But I have also seen all these new girls going for client meetings wearing deep-neck tops and short skirts. Then when the client ends up talking some bullshit to them, they come back crying. I think how you manage, that is very important.

Niharika points out that there is a difference between ramp modelling and other elements of the glamour industry. She says:

Modelling is not such a shady business actually, fortunately. When the stakes are higher it gets shadier. When you are talking about a job for Rs. 5,000 or 15,000 you are not willing to sleep with someone for work! But where the stakes are a crore probably, or getting into movies, then these things happen a lot more.

Higher stakes include something as valuable as the Miss India pageant. Ruhi, who has been modelling for six years, and is from Ghaziabad, was one of the few who shared their experiences of the casting couch:

I went for Miss India in 1999. I was totally fresh, and really excited about it, ok - MISS INDIA! I think every girl who wants to get into modelling sees that as the best platform to check yourself, to actually be in a limelight and start up your work as a model. And I went for Miss India and that time one man PG the main organizer used to select the models. I was a little surprised as I saw only one guy in a room where he individually called the girls in, interviewed them and got them to do a walk in a bikini or a swimsuit, whatever they were comfortable in.

So, he said your body is good, you've got height, and I love your complexion, and...he was like be ready for it, you are IN. He said that, and then...I was in the
seven girls who they said were shortlisted from Delhi. But...out of seven only five girls got the **written** letters for the final event in Mumbai.

He had said, this time by one percent if you are not in, you can come next year, and I’ll make sure that are in. I thought ok, maybe this time they had a lot of competition, maybe I need to groom myself, prepare a little more, so I went again the following year, with more experience.

When I saw him again he said, yeah, I remember you, you were there last year also. So he got to know that ok I want to get IN, I WANT to get in kind of thing. So he said, I know, you’re great. So what do you think about compromise? And I was like What do you mean? He was like, no in this line if you want to be on top, you have to somehow compromise if you want to be on top.

I said I don’t think so. I think if you have the skills, the qualities, you can, without compromising also. He said ok, fine. So I got a very weird expression from his face... I knew right then that I would not be selected. I said thank you very much.

But he shortlisted me – he thought I’m going to come back again after thinking it over. He called me up next day. I went...

(M: He called you up...?)

Yeah, I mean, THEY called me up, the organizers. Next day, because they shortlist out of. I don’t know, 200-300 girls, they call couple of them again, to shortlist out of them. So, he made me stand with all the other girls, and see the heights, and things like that, and then he said Ruhi, I’m very sorry...

Again, all the conversation happened alone with him - in the room, you know. Only recently it’s like this that 5 people are sitting and seeing the girls and selecting the girls. So he held my hand and said, So what do you think? I said, nothing! You have to tell me that I’m in or not. And he said, I’m really sorry but the thing is that we’re looking for an international point of view, we want girls who are minimum height of 5-9, or above 5-8, and you are 5-7 something, and I’m really sorry, and I was like... I knew it. I told him on the face, I knew it. He was like, no no no, you’re getting me wrong. That was just a crap he was giving me actually..... I was really disappointed. Even CJ was there in 2000, she was
Miss India 2000, and she is hardly 5-6, ok - I know her. In fact, I know a number of girls who were shorter than me that got through. You know how.

Swati was another who shared her experience in detail. In her words,

I think as far as Bollywood goes, there is a lot of demand from people of.... 'You know. (lower tone - even though we are the only two in her house - evidently referring to the demand for sexual favours) But ramp is very safe (tone rises) - I never had a problem anytime. Most of the choreographers are gays! Print also... I've had a problem, once. Like I had to go for a magazine cover. And this magazine owner offered me... you know... to give him special favours. Well I had just slapped him and came back. But ya. It happened.

(M: Was it direct?)

Ummm... ya it was direct. It was... this was before Gladrags. And there's a very very famous fashion magazine in Delhi. I got a call from this guy's office. He wanted to meet me and see my pictures. So he called me to the Meridien hotel. I said alright. I specified that I would meet him in the lobby, not anywhere else. So he said alright. As soon as I got to the lobby, I called him, he said he was sitting in the bar. So I was a little puzzled - why is he sitting in the bar when I specified to I would meet him in the lobby? So anyway I went to the bar. He was sitting with this other chap. So I sat with him, and he saw my pictures and... I didn't really, I wasn't very comfortable with the whole idea of people looking at me, you know. Of course I had my make up on and I was looking this thing... you know, how people think of... you know, the impression of models. And then he asked me, so what else can you do for me? We were talking about money then. I told him these are my rates and this is what I would charge. "No, what else could you do for me?" Then I got it. I asked him straight; oh. I said, are you talking about sexual favours? And he said... I think you're smart enough. (In sleazy tone) That's it. I just got up, gave him one tight slap. (M: You physically slapped him?) Ya, ya. I did. I did. I was... it was a shock you know! I was like... you called me here for this? (Incredulous tone) You know? I told him, I slapped him and said what do you think of me? I'm going to speak about this to my family, my family is into politics you know... in fact you must have heard of JP, she's my aunt, she's into politics. I took her name and I told him, I'm going to tell her, and I'm going to make your life impossible in Delhi. I just left...Of course I didn't tell anyone about it later.

(M: Were you shaken when you left?)
YA! *Emphatically* Of course I was! When I left, I couldn't drive. I met with an accident. *(Pause)* I couldn't believe it... that this could happen to me! You know because...there are certain... you know, sometimes you give certain vibes to somebody. There you can get approached by someone. But knowing myself when I am not giving that vibe, when I *don't* fall in that category when you know I am a different person... It was that feeling. I said, how *DARE* he ... you know... even ask me that question? I was shaken, and it was a very bad accident. I got home and told my mum about it. My mum said, this would happen, it's alright and it's good you gave it to him. *(Pause)* I wanted to speak about him to the press, but then I thought there is no point. I spoke to my friends, I told them about it, told them to be careful of ... this man. *(M: Did you meet him again?)* No. Everytime I look at that magazine... and I look at the girl on the cover *(laughs)* you know the same thing just comes to my mind. I mean imagine, for a magazine cover! You can imagine then what Bollywood would be like! I mean, if this guy could ask me... then people must be... it must really be happening, you know! For one magazine cover...!

Swati's own feelings of guilt and shock that something like that could happen to her, indicates a shattering of the myth that such offers are made only to 'those kinds of women'. She hesitantly states that she was indeed dressed like a model (thereby admitting some guilt) but had not given out any 'vibes'. In Swati's head there had been a separation between her and women who invited trouble; with this incident she realized that there were no such 'categories', and such offers were part of the praxis of the industry. This internalized image of the 'bad woman' who would do such a thing, is part of the reason why sexual harassment in the industry is a taboo topic, and women do not want to share their experiences about it, or be known as one of 'those kinds of women'.

Swati did not get onto a magazine cover, but Harpreet, one of the winners at the Gladrags pageant, did – without her knowledge or consent. Gladrags magazine put Harpreet’s photograph of her in a bikini on the cover of their magazine, putting her in a difficult spot with her
family and making her feel somewhat used and upset.

(The editor) never told me that she would be putting me on the cover. She just
told me that the shoot is just to see if I am photogenic or not. But after the
contest and everything she put me on the cover. I felt bad that she didn’t ask
me... But I guess people who have power will try to use it. And she has a lot of
power...

I couldn’t talk to her directly, as she doesn’t talk to anyone... She just talks to
you when she wants to talk to you. I talked to her assistant though, I called him
up and asked how this had happened? He said, she thought you should be on
the cover so that’s why... That was it. There was nothing I could do about it.

Lavanya talks about her experience in a television serial and how an
instance of being asked to perform in a sexually expressive manner left
her queasy. It was not a case of sexual harassment per se, she felt, yet
after the incident occurred she felt violated in some way and chose to
leave the serial.

I was paid Rs. 20,000 for the music video, it was great fun, the team was great. I
only agreed because it took me to Ladakh and it was a clean video. I can’t do full
time work now because I have to go to school... I was offered TV serials also but
it was not such a good experience. But one serial called KHKN offered me a role
- for 4 or 5 days of shooting a month I would be paid Rs.6-7,000 per day. I was
told I would play the role of a model who was sophisticated but manipulative -
you know, black pant suit kind of a girl. So I agreed. But when I went the
director made me wear a strappy beach dress (horror stricken expression on her
face) and kept asking me to bend (and show cleavage) while talking! And the
worst, while delivering some lines he asked me to suck my finger! I was
uncomfortable but I did it and then asked to see it on the monitor. It looked
awful! So I walked out of that show. So weird, the director would call me
“darling”, “sweety”... irritating! I don’t mind doing clean stuff. Where I can more
or less be myself. But this kind of stuff makes me feel awful.

Ruhi recognizes that she is losing out on work because of her stand, but
feels that once someone places a condition on you for work, there will
always be a condition to be dealt with. An extract from her narrative:
R: I don’t care anymore. If you work under a condition, again they will come up with some other condition.

M: But how do you feel when someone makes these offers to you?

R: I feel like killing them [laughs]. I remember once there was a shoot, and they offered me 2 lakhs. I was like, why are you giving me 2 lakhs? I only charge 6-7000 for a shoot. No, they said, you can keep 50 for the shoot. You’ll be signing contracts with them and things like that, and rest you know, you need to entertain the client. They don’t say you have to sleep with him, they say ‘entertain the client’. You need to go for a dinner and things like that. I was really angry... Why don’t you send your mother? Or your sister, if you have one! You can make better money!

When these things happen you feel a little bad. You feel, why? You should respect women. I tell them. They’re weird people, they keep on calling you, they’ll say Ruhi, listen don’t misunderstand us, but there are lots of girls who would do that, and we thought you would do it to get the work. I said listen, I’m not that kind of a person, so next time please don’t bother me with such offers. Now all the coordinators, all the people I work with, they know that.

I was just talking to a coordinator who did a music video sometime back. I told him, you did a music video, you never called me up, even for the auditions? They said, Ruhi, we know your conditions and what kind of work you do. I said, oh, ok fine. I think they also know which models are comfortable doing such things, they categorize you into those that will and those that won’t, or in their words, ‘jo friendly ho’ (friendly ones), ‘jo bahar hamare saath ghoon sake’ (who can go out with us), ‘jisko koi problem na ho’ (doesn’t have problems), and things like that.

See. We do think about it. We should say something, we should boycott, only you can protect yourself. What you can do, you can just tell other people, who are a little close to you, ‘listen, if somebody calls up just be careful’.

In 1997, in the landmark Vishaka judgment, the Supreme Court of India recognized sexual harassment at the workplace as a violation of human rights and outlined a set of guidelines (Guidelines on Sexual Harassment at the Workplace) for the prevention and redress of complaints by women
of sexual harassment at the workplace. The definition of sexual harassment as given in the guidelines includes "such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour (whether directly or by implication) as physical contact and advances; a demand or request for sexual favours; sexually coloured remarks; showing pornography; any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non verbal conduct of sexual nature." The guidelines place responsibility on the employers to provide a safe work environment for women employees, detailing preventive and remedial measures including the setting up of a complaints committee within the workplace for redress. Available evidence suggests that majority of women do not take action or lodge an official complaint for fear of being dismissed, losing their reputation or facing hostility or social stigma in the workplace. (Kapoor, 1999; Saheli, 1998; Sakshi, 1999; Sanhita, 2001) This is true for women in the glamour industry also. These guidelines are being made into a law in a legislation pending with GOI, Protection against Sexual Harassment of Women Bill 2005.

Sexual harassment, innuendoes, indecent proposals, these are not limited to the casting couch. It spills over into their personal lives as well as other sites of their professional life, from people outside the industry. Swati recounts some of the more horrific experiences of this impact during fashion shows in smaller towns in India.

FTV ... definitely harms the image of models, especially in smaller towns in India. They think, when they see Indian girls who are models, that they are the same as those girls on FTV. Lots of time it has happened that we face the consequences of these things. Like when we go for shows in small places – Meerut, Kanpur, Lucknow, Jalandhar – these places are quite difficult. All these guys stand outside the venue in big groups, and after the show – and sometimes even during the show – shout comments, pass remarks so we can hear. These guys usually pass comments on the body... like 'hi sexy', 'nice legs', 'nice cleavage', or 'sexy cleavage'. Or 'badi hot lag rahi thi skirt main' (you're looking hot in that skirt). Sometimes even terrible ones. Randi...slut, whore. Everything.
Ya, of course the girls discuss it, talk about it backstage. Usually we ignore it, what else can you do. They usually don’t do anything beyond the comments. Once though we had to say something. It was at the Patiala Heritage Festival I think, it was on a college campus. And during rehearsals the day before, some boys came in and sat in the first row, and started passing comments while we were rehearsing. It got quite bad, so we had to complain and the choreographer and all had to go up to them and ask them to leave. They were only 6 boys, it was not a big group so it was ok. Still, these things happen quite regularly in shows especially in the small towns.

Even while on stage in big cities, some of the women recount stories of obscenities being silently mouthed to them or whispered from men in the audience (while walking down the ramp and catching their eye), and having to maintain composure and ignore it while the blood rushes to their head in anger inside.

Pre-empting such a situation, and negotiating information to maximize safety is one of the strategies used by women to handle this impact. Harpreet says,

When I meet people, I don’t introduce myself as a model usually... I say I am a student or something. Because men really try to pile on once they know... especially on flights and things. Someone sitting next to you, they ask you what you do, if you say you’re a model that’s it! They try to pile on, thinking (rubbing her hands in lecherous manner) “oh, let’s try our luck...”! So better avoid it.

Tina feels that this is part of the seamless experience of sexual terror that women in general go through even in public places in our society, although admitting that within the profession, there is an added vulnerability. She says,

This profession is fun, but the sleaze factor can be quite high. There are cheap people around who like to get their thrills. I haven’t really heard of explicit sexual harassment... but yes I know of... you know, make up men who touch you for a bit too long while applying make up, or the masterjees (tailors) who take your measurement at fittings – they give that ‘extra touch’ sometimes. You
take it and feel like a victim. I think that's wrong. One should give it back. Even on the road, the way men stare... it's like "I will terrorize you!" Girls get this kind of attention.

There are often allusions made, especially by proponents of the veil that women in the veil are safer than women who do not veil. The interpretation of this is usually that women who wear more revealing clothes or do not cover themselves or their 'modesty' will invariably be lynched because of the provocation they will cause to men. Women in this sample are amongst those who are easily cited as being of the latter category, and therefore more vulnerable to sexual assault.

This study, on the contrary, indicates that women in the industry do not face any more sexual assault in public places than other women in similar contexts. Whatever they face is largely unconnected to their attire, but to the assumptions related to their occupation. There was no evidence in the sample to indicate any forcible incident of physical sexual assault, although there were many incidents narrated of verbal abuse, sexually coloured offers and acts of power in the context of the workplace. More than any actual physical assault it was the threat of violence or the 'sexual terror' that they experienced as part of the general experience of being young, single, working women in an unsafe city like Delhi⁷.

Another form of 'violence' which they experienced that was unique to them was through the global space of the internet. For example, Noelle says,

There are other hazards to being a model also. Like my brother found some pictures of women in bikinis under MY name on the Internet! And they are not

⁷ Sangari (2004) notes that the urban space is strongly linked in male imagination to the Westernised woman, she who is "a blind follower of Western fashion which reduces her to little more than a sexualized body to be gazed at and at times, even groped".
Mayuri’s photos (again in a bikini) are also on the internet, without her permission.

But what happened after that was that there are two three photographers, without asking me they put those pictures on the website. So people see it and (come with offers)... they ask me and the blood just rushes to my head. I told him few days back to just delete those photos, but he has not done it yet.

In a recent scandal, an actress in the film industry known for her bold acts lodged a complaint with the police when she found threats on her website by a man who threatened to have her killed as she was damaging the honour of her community. Another item girl called the police into the picture after she was repeatedly harassed on the phone by obscene phone calls after her mobile phone number was leaked to the public. Many of the women also caution against mobile phone cameras that could be capturing them when they are out in public spaces. One also finds in cyberspace all kinds of vicious libelous comments against particular item girls and a slew of offensive foul language and indecent proposals.

This kind of technology-related terror forms a new kind of violence against women experienced more intimately by women in the glamour industry, the effects of which we do not understand fully yet. It is not as 'real' as sexual assault but nonetheless creates a sense of sexual terror and has a traumatic impact on the women.

III. NOTES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SPOILED IDENTITY

'Stigma' has been a site for a multitude of sociological research, particularly in the field of the sociology of medicine, in relation to the stigma attached to mental illnesses, or diseases such as leprosy, HIV/AIDS. Erving Goffman in 1963 wrote a seminal work on the issue
entitled 'Stigma: Notes for the Management of a Spoiled Identity'.

Goffman describes stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting within a particular social interaction". The person with the attribute is "reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one". He identifies three types of stigma: 'abominations of the body' (physical deformities), blemishes of individual character (evidence or record of mental disorders, imprisonment, addiction, homosexuality, prostitution and so on), and tribal or stigma related to race/ nation/ religion. When this stigmatizing attribute is visible or immediately evident or well known, the person comes in the category of the 'discredited' whereas when the attribute is not immediately known the person falls in the category of the 'discreditable'.

Goffman is more concerned in his book about 'mixed contacts' or how an interaction between 'normals' and the stigmatized play out. In these interactions the stigmatized manage 'social information' (information that the individual conveys about himself by the person whom it is about and through bodily expression in the immediate presence of those who receive the expression) so as to manage their stigma. The already discredited focus on managing the tensions that are generated during social contact, while the discreditable manage information about the 'failing' or as Goffman says, "to display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when and where". Various strategies are used such as 'passing' or the management of undisclosed discrediting information about the self, 'covering', or the use of 'prestige symbols' and 'dis-identifiers' (well known signs to break a stereotype in a positive way), management of personal identity (such as change in name in the case of entertainers: as Goffman says, the "average chorus girl changes her name as frequently as her coiffure"), identity documents and the construction of biography.
Techniques of information control also include the concealment of visible signs that have become stigma symbols, disconnectedness in biography by maintaining physical distance from a location, threats to transfer the stigma or even voluntary disclosure through a 'disclosure etiquette' - purposeful slips or wearing of stigma symbols. Through these techniques Goffman says the stigmatized must "constantly strive to adjust to their precarious social identities. Their image of themselves must daily confront and be affronted by the image which others reflect back to them".

In this section I briefly apply Goffman’s concepts to the narratives of women in the fashion and modelling industry. I find that almost all the techniques of information control are used by women in the industry, pointing to the ambivalence that they have towards their profession.

For example, all the women I interviewed told me that they did not reveal their profession to strangers or to landlords or people they interacted with in social functions, and often tried to ‘pass’ as media, stylists or other such professions. An excerpt from the interview with Shivani:

M: How do people perceive you when you meet them... when you tell them, I am a model.
S: I don’t tell. *(pat comes the reply)*

M: You don’t tell them?
S: No. *(embarrassed laugh)*

M: What do you say?
S: Nothing. I just say I have done my MBA, now I am doing my grooming course.

M: Why don’t you tell them?
S: *(Silence, fidgets a bit)* Like that only...
M: *(We break into laugh to break the awkwardness)* Why, what's the reason?
S: No reason, I don't feel that comfortable, that's why.

M: Is it because people will think you are ...
S: *Model hai... to yeh hoga, wo hoga... bahut perceptions ban jaate hain.* (People think this and that, they have a lot of perceptions about models.)

M: Mmm...*Kaise perceptions?*
S: Everything.... First question, so how many boyfriends you have? Oh, you don't smoke? Oh, you don't drink? *Yaar, apni kuch model friends se milwao!* (Please introduce us to some of your model friends.) *(laughs)* That kind of thing you know.

Other responses are on similar lines:

When people ask me, I don't usually tell them I am a model - because then they start saying funny things... they will ask me how I maintain myself and things like that. I keep making up stories in response.

*(Josy)*

I never say I am a model. And I really don't look like one unless the make up is on. I tell them about myself like - I do a bit of work in advertising and fashion. I never, never ever say I am a model because I am not proud of it in the sense that most people misconstrue it. If you say I am a model in this country, I think anywhere for that matter, I am not sure abroad because I have not worked that much abroad. They take you to be a dumb ass who has done nothing, who has not studied, who has been a loser everywhere, but they are tall and they are okay to look at and that really riles me.

*(Noelle)*

I try not to say that I am a model. When people ask me I do, I say I am in the media. And this has been my line for a couple of years now.

*(Vineeta)*

I had a problem when I was looking for a house earlier. People refused to give us a house because I am a model. Ya. They refused us. Ya, there is a problem in some cases. But here I did reveal and I got the house.

*(Swati)*
Priya makes a distinction between the discredited and discreditable, pointing out how the category of 'models' is discreditable as a whole. She says:

See what I don’t like is that there are a lot of girls who are really vulgar and cheap who call themselves models. And they have a really bad name in the society. Because of them when you are a model, or when people look at you as a model, you get classified in the same category as them. That’s something I can’t stand. For people to club all models in one category as... sluts, or dumb, you know. It’s just a very medieval point of view to this profession. Because nobody looks at you as an individual, then you are a “model” and you’ll stay a “model” (in their eyes) that’s what I don’t like. I say... no, I don’t say I am a model. I say I am a stylist. And if they really go and try and find out more, I say and I also model sometimes. Which is true. I model sometimes. I don’t model every day!

Priya follows a 'disclosure etiquette', as if admitting her own failing as an aside. Tina also does this by admitting that she does sometimes 'model for friends' thereby distancing herself from the absolute category:

I never tell people I am a model! I avoid it as long as I can. If you tell them, they think “oh model hai...” and all kinds of things, they think you are unapproachable. So I tell them I am a graphics designer, or stylist, and if they really push it, I might say that I sometimes model also for friends.

This also works better as being models, they are often visible in the public sphere, and run the risk of being 'found out'. Although in the case of Shivani or Noelle, we have seen that they feel that because in real life they do not look like they do in photographs or on-screen, they will not be immediately recognizable. Those who are more visible or better known run the risk of being discredited rather than discreditable. There is an uncomfortable ambivalence here too, as part of their professional life does involve dressing up and doing a public performance of 'being models' as this is part of the work-seeking process and it is important to be 'spotted' by creative minds who may want to launch them in a film or hire them for a campaign.
In the narratives there is evidence of some amount of covering up within the profession (with regard to age, background, class and so on) and the construction of biography as part of the profession. There are less instances today of changing names in the profession (and therefore protection of personal identity) although previous generations of film actors were known for it. Most also maintained 'physical distance' in different ways – for instance by staying aloof from neighbours, or away from their home towns, or working abroad for a few months and therefore getting cut off from the local context, and returning with a newly constructed biography. During the interviews many of them employed 'dis-identifiers' to break the various stereotypes associated with the profession – for examples, wearing spectacles (like an illiterate who tries to pass as educated, in Goffman's examples; here, trying to reject a 'dumb blonde' image), claims that "I love reading", or "I wear salwar kameez and no make-up otherwise" and so on.

The information management is extended to intimates also – for example, the Elite modelling agency allows for models to bring their parents to the agency to 'see' it, so that any perceptions of the industry being 'shady' can be removed when they see it as a snazzy office like any other. (One cannot imagine employees in a call centre taking their parents to their office for such a reason!)

We see therefore that women in the industry undertake a systematic management of their 'spoiled identity' or the stigma (of 'blemishes of individual character' as per Goffman's categories) that is the main impact of the institutional sexual objectification that is part of the profession. To overcome the debilitating effects of this stigma, they often have to work to

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8 Some recent examples exist though, such as the model and actor Mallika Sherawat whose original name is Reema Gill.
build a persona that projects other elements of their personality. As Shaheen says,

You are looked at as an object... but to offset this you have to work doubly hard to make sure that you balance it with an apparent personality and an apparent intelligence and apparent education and apparently other things. You have to work hard to get that side of you as well ...up. And the moment you do that, then you get the best of both worlds.

Despite the stigma, societal ambivalences exist around women in the glamour industry' as there are models and 'item girls' who gain wealth, status and a certain kind of respectability, and go on to become role models for young women.