

## **Authenticity and Aspiration: Exploring the CBBC Television Tween**

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### **Abstract**

I argue that while the tween is understood as having transnational relevance and mobility, this is often emphasized in ways that overlook the national and cultural specificities of tween culture. I argue that the distinctive context of British television history augments the connections between national and transnational paradigms of tween culture in important ways. While authenticity, friendships, and honesty remain foregrounded in a number of Children's British Broadcasting Corporation (CBBC) shows, these are constructed through a national discourse that connects to transnational models of the tween girl but also mobilizes a cultural specificity that is inextricable from the broadcasting context in which it is produced.

### **Keywords**

British, British Broadcasting Corporation, national identity, public service broadcasting, representation, tween

### **Introduction**

Tween culture consists of a complex, and sometimes contradictory, array of discourses and representations from an expansive range of texts, media, and cultural artefacts. Many of these cultural forms are transnational in their distribution and transmedia in form, creating what Anita Harris describes as a "total system" of girlhood that does "not differ significantly across national boundaries" (2009: 211). Certainly, it could be argued that the trans-cultural dominance of North American tween cultures and the globalized media cultures in which they circulate reinforces this construction of the tween as a stable and homogenous global

paradigm of contemporary girlhood (Mitchell and Reid Walsh 2005). Without dismissing important points of connection and overlap across and between different cultural permutations of tween media culture, I suggest that there is much to gain from exploring the ways in which local and global discourses converge to produce normative and yet variable ways of doing girlhood within postfeminist culture. In this article, I seek to complicate the notion of a singular, generic paradigm of tween femininity by exploring a number of televisual representations of British tween girlhood on the BBC children's channel, CBBC. I focus on three case studies, each of which is a live-action comedy-drama produced by and broadcast on the channel with the aim of exploring the relationship between these national representations and tween culture as a transnational phenomenon.

This article contributes to discussions about the cultural specificities of tween media within a transnational and postfeminist context (see Griffin 2004; Jackson and Vares 2011; Ward and Benjamin 2004). In focusing on representations of tween girls on CBBC my aim is to acknowledge the ways in which both cultural and institutional histories connect with and inform representational strategies. In doing so, I take a conceptual lead from Justine Ashby's work in its reinterpretation of the similarly transnational idiom of postfeminism within a British cultural perspective. Adopting a similar approach, I argue that while US (and other forms of transnational) media and popular culture clearly influence the representational spectrum of tween media in a British context, "we should not assume that [these discourses] can simply be grafted onto the rather different contours of British political and popular culture" (2005:128). I position these contemporary representations of British tweens within a longer lineage of debates about the relationship of screen images of British femininity within a transnational context as established by scholars including Antonia Lant (1991) and James Bennett (2011). In so doing, I suggest that the explicitly national purview of the BBC's public service remit plays a significant role in informing the representations of tween

girlhood that feature on CBBC but that, in turn, these representations come out of and connect to transnational forms of tween media culture.

In teasing out some of the complexities of the tween as a key representational paradigm of contemporary, young, postfeminist British femininity, following Jeanette Steemers (2004), I am not suggesting that cultural and national identities are synonymous or homogenous. Rather, I am arguing for the development of a nuanced understanding of tween media cultures (and the representations of tween girlhood therein) which is malleable, multiple, and intersectional, and which takes into account the multifaceted connections between local and global media cultures (Lawler 2014). As such, this article extends the theorization of contemporary British postfeminist culture while also intervening in the wider arena of British television studies (and studies of children's television more broadly) by turning an academic focus onto the representational strategies of tween girlhood in specific institutional and cultural/national contexts.

### **Studying British Children's Television**

Before considering contemporary children's programming on CBBC it is useful to take a brief look at the institutional history that led to the development of the channel. The BBC had been producing programming specifically for the child audience since its inception in 1922. Children's television programs commenced in 1951 and remained part of the generalized broadcast schedule, in designated time-slots, until 2002 when two dedicated children's channels, CBeebies (aimed at the pre-school audience) and CBBC (aimed at 6 to 12 year olds) were established.

Today, CBBC remains significant in both the national and transnational media markets. With a corporate commitment to representing "the full diversity of kids in the UK" (Taylor 2012: n.p.), CBBC output is mindful of the multi-cultural composition of contemporary Britain. However, it is also unapologetic in its nationally inflected mode of

address: its programs are explicitly made *for* a British audience. CBBC's output provides "a full adult multi-genre service in miniature" (Home 2011:102, emphasis in original) including documentaries, animations, news programming, comedy, and drama. While some programs, such as the long running BBC *Newsround* (1972–) are clearly made solely for a domestic audience, many of CBBC's programs are exported globally including a number of tween-based dramas such as *So Awkward* (2015–) and *Jamillah and Aladdin* (2015–). In addition to this, CBBC is involved in a number of international co-productions, including *Matilda and the Ramsay Bunch* (2015) and *Wolfblood* (2012–). The channel also screens a variety of imported programming including a number of North American series such as *The Odd Squad* (2014–), and *Arthur* (1996–). As this summary suggests, it seems that the CBBC tween is positioned simultaneously in relation to both national and transnational discourses of pre-adolescent girlhood. With regard to the analysis of CBBC representations, it is, as David Buckingham cautions, imperative to resist a simplistic dichotomy that positions public service output as inherently "good quality" and commercial children's television as exploitative "worthless junk" (2011:194). Indeed, such an approach obfuscates important representational, pedagogical, and discursive points of commonality and connection between various television forms, as Buckingham's study of pre-school channels, CBeebies, aptly demonstrates. However, the failure to accord any significance to the ways in which cultural and institutional contexts might affect the representational strategies of a media text is equally problematic and serves to efface points of nuance and distinction.

Despite the fact that children's television is often "genuinely innovative . . . [and] worthy of critical notice" (Messenger-Davies 2010: 97) there are few academic studies that take the text as their primary focus (Bazalgette and Buckingham 1995; Godfrey and Holmes 2016). Where textual studies and questions of representation in children's television have been addressed they have often emerged from a sociological perspective (as opposed to that

of cultural/television studies) and have emphasized quantitative approaches such as content analysis (Lemish 2012) focusing on issues surrounding stereotypes and/or media effects. Studies such as these raise broad questions about the representation of gender in children's television programming, but they have rarely offered much in the way of detailed analysis of the political and discursive processes that are at play in any textual representation. In exploring the construction of tween girlhood in British children's television, I am not denying the importance of listening to the voices and opinions of the tween audience (Mazzarella and Pecora 2007), nor am I attempting to efface my own position speaking as a white, middle-class, academic feminist who is no longer part of the audience to which these programs are aimed. Instead, it is an initial foray into the unmapped territory of British tween television. As such, the article responds to existing gaps in critical work about the textual and representational politics of children's television and to explore critical points of connection and divergence between the global and local paradigms of tween girlhood.

My focus in this article is on drama/comedy series and in exploring the ways in which tween girls are represented in the context of British children's television fiction. This is not to suggest that the various factual or reality programs, nor animations, are somehow less worthy of critical analysis; these programs have much to offer in terms of exploring the figure of the tween as a primary paradigm of contemporary children's television. But in order to provide a degree of conceptual coherence and methodological parity, I am excluding them from my focus here. The examples on which I draw in this article are fictional and were selected after my broad-based viewing across the channel in relation to the centrality of tween girls with a contemporary British setting. From this overview I identified a number of recurrent tropes, narratives, and representational strategies that appeared central to the construction of the tween girl on CBBC; this article focuses on a selection of texts and narratives that exemplify the ways in which tween girls are represented across the channel. In my analysis of these

programs, I explore the ways in which CBBC proffers images of tween girlhood that connect to broader discursive impulses of authenticity, aspiration, agency, and empowerment within global tween cultures but which do so in ways that are distinctly informed by their cultural and institutional context.

### **“The Litmus Test of Britishness?”**

As widely argued by scholars including Natalie Coulter (2014) and Melanie Kennedy (2014), the tween, as a contemporary icon of girlhood emerges out of a neo-liberal and postfeminist cultural context. The tween is understood broadly as a paradigm of girlhood that is inextricable from consumer culture and, as Coulter suggests, is “discursively articulated in the synergistic relations of the mediated marketplace” (2014: 4) and “defined by her ability to engage with” (9) this. There is, then, potential for ideological tensions between CBBC’s representational approach (as a public service broadcaster) to tween girls and the consumerist mores of postfeminist girlhood. Given that the BBC is firmly intertwined with the idea of national identity, contributing “towards the symbolic representation of what it [means] to be British” (Steemers 2004:15) there are further layers of complexity that need to be taken into consideration when we are undertaking textual analysis. While the nuances of national identity are “dynamic, conflictual, unstable and impure” (Ang 1996:144), questions of screen images and national identity have long been established in British film and television studies in particular.

Lant explains that female acting and appearance are “the litmus test of Britishness” (1991: 57). While she is referring to the representation of British women in wartime cinema, her argument that British femininity has historically been defined against American imagery plays out in the contemporary iterations of television tweens. Jackie Stacey develops this idea further in relation to cinema history by exploring the ways in which social class becomes mapped onto discourses of national identity and arguing that the centrality of respectability

“becomes an assertion of middle class norms” in which “‘true’ British femininity is middle-class and *not* painted or glamorous, and by implication, not explicitly sexual” (1994: 57 emphasis in original). Similar distinctions can be seen in more recent cinematic representations of young girls and women. American tweens and teens in films such as *Mean Girls* (2004) and *Pitch Perfect* (2012) are seen as aspirational, glamorous and perfectly on point. In contrast, British examples, including Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* franchise (2001–2011), Georgia in *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008) and Jess and Jules in *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) are presented as natural or ordinary, lacking the sophisticated glamour of their Hollywood counterparts. Discourses of “ordinariness” as “antithetical to glamour” (Bennett 2008: 32) have also been central to critical understandings of British television studies. Bennett focuses primarily on the discursive construction of television personalities via mechanisms of ordinariness within metatextual celebrity discourse, but his arguments provide a useful framework through which to examine television texts as well. To this end, it could be argued that British television representations of tween femininity can be considered as doubly ordinary by dint of both media and national context.

The representational palette of the CBBC’s tween girls is emblematic of this discourse of ordinariness. Across the CBBC platform, drama programs including *Millie Inbetween* (2014–), *So Awkward* (2015–), and *The 4 O’Clock Club* (2012–) provide images of tween girls who can be considered ordinary. The girls in these programs are, as Bennett terms them, “just-as-they-are” (2011: 30) familiar and recognizable forms of girlhood for the CBBC audience. We can see that, as is the case with the television personalities discussed by Bennett in an earlier work, the “ordinariness” (2008: 32) of the CBBC tween is key to her position within a broader discourse of “common knowledge” (29) of and for British tween girls. CBBC programs appear to offer representations of tween girls that are mobilized in opposition to discourses of “adultifying” (Jackson and Vares 2011: 700) girlhood, opting

instead to articulate that which Buckingham might term an investment in “traditional representations of childhood innocence” (2011: 193).

### **Authenticity, Agency, and Resistance**

I now turn my attention to a number of CBBC programs in more detail in order to demonstrate the complexities of cultural variegation and the factors that are at play in these. The following examples demonstrate where the CBBC tween connects with broader transnational paradigms and how these are, in turn, informed by the gendered discourses of postfeminist culture. Key areas of commonality are found in relation to ideas of self-determination, success, and empowerment as primary markers of contemporary girlhood (Charles 2012; Gonick 2006; Harris 2004; Kennedy 2014). These “calls to agency” (2013: 229), as Sue Jackson and Amanda Lyons term them, constitute narratives of girlhood via discursive threads of competency, authenticity, and achievement which in turn, as Joanne Baker points out, rely upon “the idea that girls and young women are particular beneficiaries” (2010: 2) of neoliberal, postfeminist cultures. In many ways these scripts of competency, achievement, and authenticity chime with the ideologies of successful and productive citizenship that form the heart of the CBBC public service mandate (Taylor 2014) and demonstrate the ways in which the CBBC tween connects to and draws from broader discourses about tween girlhood. From dramas such as *The Dumping Ground* (2013–), *So Awkward* (2015–), and the *4 O’clock Club* (2012–) through to reality style programs including *Got What It Takes* (2016–), *Matilda and the Ramsay Bunch* (2015–) and the flagship magazine program, *Blue Peter* (BBC 1958–), there is a persistent hegemonic valorization of participation, commitment, achievement, authenticity, friendship, respect, honesty, and loyalty. In many ways, then, Harris’ claim about the totality of girlhood, already mentioned above, appears to hold true. Certainly CBBC programs appear to foreground many of the same values and ideas that are found in recent North American tween media including



*The Next Step* (2013–), *Bella and the Bulldogs* (2015–2016) as well as in older programs such as *Hannah Montana* (2006–2011), and *iCarly* (2007–2012)..

The geographical spaces of CBBC programs are also integral to creating a sense of familiarity and connection between text and viewer in ways that might well be described as ordinary. While similar North American, Australian, and other national settings may well be recognizable to an audience that engages with transnational or imported media, the specificities of layout, décor, design, and culture seen throughout CBBC programs will be more familiar as representations of the kinds of everyday spaces that British audiences might inhabit. The iconography of the American or the Australian school, for example, is distinct from the school spaces seen in programs that are set in Britain. Programs including *So Awkward* (2015–) and *The 4 O'clock Club* (2012–) are school based comedy-dramas that address issues such as bullying, belonging, and friendship in the course of the narrative. The iconography of the classrooms and schools in these series is notably distinct from those seen in programs such as *Degrassi* (2001–2015) or *Girl Meets World* (2014–2017), for example. The national specificity of education in terms of curricula, examination schedules, and terminology further demarcate these programs within a clear cultural context alongside performative markers such as cultural reference points, regionally specific slang, and other locally or regionally shared scripts that become “expressions and experiences” (Edensor 2002: vi) of national identity. The domestic space of the home is another location that is commonly represented in transnational tween television but is a site of iconographical specificity. The layout of the home spaces in CBBC programs is typically distinct from the open plan layout of Australian houses and also from US homes which, particularly in tween fantasy programs such as *One Tree Hill* (2003–2012) are often more explicitly coded as aspirational markers of style and success. However, as Edensor points out, the “semiotic imprint” of the domestic also retains a national, or cultural specificity and this is seen in “the

style and materiality” (2002: 51) of domestic spaces. Thus, the semiotics of the domestic, as shown in these programs are key to the construction of “a form of common knowledge” (Bennett 2011: 30) or experience that is recognizable within the context of British culture.

The programs mentioned above are clearly designed in accordance with the inclusive ideology of the channel. Most of CBBC’s programs feature ethnically diverse characters and a range of personal circumstances and domestic arrangements that vary from nuclear families to extended or step-families, or, as is the case in *The Dumping Ground* (2013–), the shared domestic world of the children’s home. Invariably, the focus of most of the CBBC’s programs is on the various interpersonal and familial relationships being navigated by the central tween characters. *The Dumping Ground* features an ensemble of tweens and teens who are all living in the home and the focus of the series is very much on the interpersonal relationships between and among the characters. The ideological investments of the series consistently emphasize both the ordinariness of the day-to-day cultural experiences of the characters as well as drawing on the neoliberal mores of tweenhood by which the notion of self is positioned as an active process of becoming and self-management. The girls in the series are mobilized in ways that inculcate discourses about belonging, friendship, honesty, and authenticity, or what is known as being true to oneself. Tween girls, Chloe and Candi-Rose learn about the importance of honesty, integrity, and being true to themselves when they are caught lying about themselves in order to impress others. The moral of the episode is clearly signalled as the girls discover that they do not have to lie in order to be thought of as special or impressive to others: being true to oneself is hegemonically validated as something that is key to both self-worth and to the position of the individual within a friendship network. Thus, for the tween girls of *The Dumping Ground*, the questions of belonging and becoming are less to do with the conspicuous consumption often associated with the neoliberal tween and more focused on an inherent, or innate sense of authenticity (Holmes

2004). Alongside the centrality of authenticity, the youngsters of *The Dumping Ground* are deployed across narratives that reinforce kindness, loyalty, friendship, honesty, and success through working together to overcome obstacles. Indeed, it is notable that when individual characters have opportunities to take internships, be on the radio, or star in a film or television advert, try out for a soccer team, or where there are opportunities to make money the individual concerned can overcome obstacles or impediments only with the help of her or his friends. Thus, the success of the individual becomes a shared success that validates the importance of the group.

A similar group emphasis is seen in *The 4 O'Clock Club* (2012). There are key characters and a range of supporting roles encompassing teachers, adults, older and younger siblings, and children who drift in and out of narratives. Interestingly the most dominant characters in the series are boys, and Nero is perhaps one of the key members of the *4 O'Clock Club* ensemble. He is distinguished by his playful and good-natured irreverence and is positioned as a lynchpin of the multi-cultural group. *The 4 O'clock Club* is illuminative for the ways in which it appears to be fully invested in the ideology of girls as the “ideal citizen, ideal student” (Charlton 2007: 122). This is particularly pronounced in relation to the character of Polly Morgan who is introduced in series six as the “most intelligent and prettiest” girl in the school, according to Nero. Nero’s gently rebellious nature is juxtaposed with Polly’s smart but likable character. The gendered tension between Nero’s being being cool and Polly’s being smart is foregrounded when the pair is tasked with working together. Polly’s initial dismay at the unlikely pairing is proven to be premature when the pair performs their history sketch to a rapturous class reception. Her ongoing reservations are eventually assuaged when Nero demonstrates his commitment to the project via an uncharacteristic desire to complete homework and other tasks pertaining to their project. While this is, initially, at least, a performance aimed at winning Polly’s romantic attention, as

opposed to a genuine desire to take his schoolwork seriously, over the course of the series, Polly's more studious approach is consistently validated by their results, the esteem of their teachers and, importantly, the admiration of their friends. This narrative trajectory functions to reiterate the postfeminist rhetoric that "hails girls as the success story of recent times" (Charlton 2007: 122). This construction of female academic success is further validated when Nero comes to learn about and appreciate the importance of taking schoolwork seriously. Somewhat predictably, his reward comes in the guise of a relationship with Polly. The narratives, character tropes, and settings as well as the formal visual construction of *The 4 O'clock Club* are familiar and resonate within a transnational genre of high school sitcoms while retaining, and at times emphasizing, a cultural specificity, expressed via accent, vernacular, cultural reference points, and fashion.

In contrast, *Millie Inbetween* (2014–) focuses exclusively on the domestic, familial world of the eponymous Millie her older sister, Lauren and their recently separated parents. Millie is the central character and the stories are narrated from her perspective—a clear statement of her agentic position in the series. The privileging of Millie's voice and experience throughout the series not only facilitates her own agency and active participation in her life narrative but also enables her to exercise authority in her dealings with other family members. The fallout from the separation of Millie's parents provides the backdrop for the opening episodes of the first series. In these, Lauren is finding the process of adapting to her parents' separation particularly difficult; she puts considerable effort into manoeuvring a reconciliation. Lauren's romanticized hopes of a family reunion are counterpointed by Millie, who admonishes her elder sibling for her naivety. Millie's stoic appraisal of her parents' relationship contrasts with Lauren's elaborate and juvenile fantasies of reconciliation. Despite her reservations, Millie goes along with an elaborate plan aimed at reuniting her estranged parents. One of Millie's defining characteristics is her responsible level-headedness, a

characteristic seen in the tween characters of other CBBC programs including *So Awkward* (2015–) and *The 4 O'clock Club* (2012–) and which, as Lant (1991) suggests, has always been a defining component of British screen femininity.

This affirmation of Millie as an expert in her own life is a common trope of transnational tween media and is also a recurrent theme across a number of CBBC programs. The use of direct-to-audience addresses as a recurrent stylistic device in *Millie Inbetween* (2014–) brings the character of Millie into direct conversation with the audience and functions to reinforce her authenticity as a positive rendering of tween girlhood. As we know, such a stylistic device has been used historically in film, television, and literature in order to construct the agentic role of the speaker. Such moments of direct address emphasize Millie's legitimacy and her authenticity as an ordinary tween girl via a mechanism that replicates the intimate, and occasionally confessional, conversation with a girl confidante. The deliberate recourse to the conversational, positioned as a confidential and intimate space actively mobilizes Millie as an authentic, identifiable tween girl for the viewer while simultaneously constructing a shared experience or form of common knowledge, as Bennett (2011) terms it. This sense of proximity between character and viewer re-constructs the space of the tween friendship; the viewer is literally addressed by Millie and thus interpellated into her world. It is Millie's ordinariness that provides her with an aspirational form of authenticity. Millie's life and her surroundings are mundane and distinctly not glamorous and this is a crucial part of constructing a tween character with whom a British tween audience can relate. In contrast to her glossier, transnational fantasy counterparts, Millie is presented as what we would call natural and unglamorous; her life and the issues on which the series focuses echo the kinds of day-to-day concerns about family, siblings, and school that are readily recognizable to a British tween audience. Physically, Millie's appearance is natural; her face is free of make-up, her hair is in a neat but practical bob, and she wears round tortoise-shell glasses. Her

interests in science and dinosaurs further distance her from normative images of hyperfeminine girlhood. Moreover, these markers are mobilized to reinforce an ideological investment in maintaining the space of the tween girl as that of late childhood as opposed to one in which the tropes of “feminine display, artifice and the imperative to attract male attention” are dominant concerns; Millie offers a very different version of tween girlhood to the “hyperfemininity and sophisticated sexualised looks” (Harris 2004: 213) more commonly found in US programs, in particular, that provide fantasies of tween girlhood. In presenting Millie as respectable and natural, *Millie Inbetween* offers an image of middle-class tween femininity that makes sense in the historic context of British screen femininities and in the context of British television more broadly. Moreover, in emphasizing respectability, responsibility, and authenticity *Millie Inbetween* appears to use the specificity of British middle-class tween girl as a means of resisting the cultural mores of transnational postfeminist tweenhood as defined by aspirational consumerism.

*So Awkward* (2015–) provides a different example of British tween girlhood. Like *Millie Inbetween* (2014–), the three girls who are the focus of the series are presented in opposition to the glamorous, sexualized transnational tweens of, for example, *One Tree Hill* (2003–2012). The three friends, Lily, Jas, and Martha function to offer a hegemonic spectrum of tween femininity in which each fulfils a distinct function. Martha is the high-achieving, straight-laced one, Jas is confident, outgoing, and adventurous, and Lily represents the middle ground. She is well behaved but not as sanctimonious as Martha and less confident and more self-aware than Jas. Similar to the previously discussed programs, the emphasis in *So Awkward* is on being true to oneself, being a good friend, and being responsible. There is an implicit investment in hard work and ambition (but not too much). The imperative is always about making the right choices whether this is about boyfriends, school, parents, or friends. The moral codes of the program are clearly established and when characters contravene these

in some way they suffer the consequences in terms of being ostracized, as Martha discovers when she inadvertently informs teachers of her friend's mischievous behaviour. Once more the discourse of ordinariness is key to the representational strategies of the program. The narratives tend to foreground mundane, everyday issues such as the loss of a library card, struggling with homework and, in Martha's case, learning to have fun. The trio of Jas, Martha, and Lily functions to create a whole in that each individual's strengths and weaknesses are positioned in relation to the group. In episodes in which one of the girls breaks rank with the group, all group members are unhappy. It is only when they come back together that the group regains its equilibrium.

Unlike *Mille Inbetween* (2014–), *So Awkward* (2015–) does present the friends as emerging into the heterosexual matrix of adolescence; throughout the series there are several burgeoning but often clumsy romantic relationships. Foremost among these is the relationship between Lily and Matt. At the outset of the first series, the two are friends but over the course of the narrative this evolves into a romantic connection. This relationship is, however, clearly not sexual and the storylines focus more on the complexities of negotiating the unfamiliar terrain of romantic relationships rather than presenting the young couple as confident sexual agents. In avoiding the development of the relationship, *So Awkward* offers images of tween girls which promulgate discourses of “idealised asexuality” (Jackson and Goddard 2015: 242) and which actively regulate a norm of tween girlhood as heterosexually desirable but explicitly *not* sexually active. *So Awkward* thus seems to articulate a contradiction that is similar to that described by Morgan Blue in relation to Disney's tween girls whose characters are “constructed amidst complex negotiations between discourses of sexual objectification and discourses of asexuality and innocence” (2013: 57). One of the ways in which this seems to be negotiated in the program is by ensuring that romantic relationships remain at the periphery of the narratives, functioning as just one aspect of a broader social and experiential

whole. Moreover, romantic relationships are clearly coded as being of lesser importance than the relationships between the girls. When a romantic relationship causes friction within the friendship group (see episode ten, “Rox My World,” of the first series), it is the relationship between friends that is positioned as being of most significance. Indeed, the ambivalent approach to romance in the series continues when Lily worries about her grades dropping because of her relationship with Matt. It is, of course, her friends who work to reassure her and who support her attempt to develop strategies to ensure her academic success. In this narrative alone, we can see how the various strands of tween discourse come together and how questions of authenticity, aspiration, friendship, and academic success are all part of Harris’s “total system” (2009: 211) of girlhood and yet are also specifically inflected within a particular national context.

### **Conclusion**

The tween television programs featured on CBBC are simultaneously positioned as connecting to and informed by both global and local forms of postfeminist cultures. Foremost among these connections are the ways in which tween media representations are understood as contributing to what Valerie Walkerdine calls the “cultural work of femininity” (2006: 520) and the ways in which these are mobilized within a cultural context shaped by both postfeminism and neoliberal consumer culture. In particular, I have argued that the ways in which they articulate a discursive construction of tween femininity as “self-responsible confident and successful” (Jackson 2006: 470) via an emphasis on agency, self-determination, and authenticity are in keeping with transnational tropes of tween femininity but the means by which these are performed and accomplished are invariably tied to the specific cultural and institutional context. The tween characters discussed in this article are clearly defined in connection with but also against high profile transnational paradigms of tween femininity and they continue to offer images of British femininity that have a much



longer historical lineage. The British tween characters considered here seem to complicate the understanding of the tween as being a paradigm of postfeminist girlhood as defined primarily in terms of self-realization via consumerism; authenticity becomes a marker of self which is performed within a clearly defined British cultural context. Clearly, it would seem that authenticity itself becomes an aspirational marker of the CBBC tween and thus a crucial point of both connection and departure from transnational paradigms of tween femininity in which what we think of as authenticity is differently articulated. In the texts analyzed here, the CBBC tween draws on broader discourses of tween girlhood (such as an emphasis on aspirational qualities such as authenticity, kindness, friendship, integrity, and self-worth) but are inflected via culturally specific discourses which, in the case of Britishness, are defined by their ordinariness. that might be understood in terms of Harris's "total system" (2009:11) but are inflected via culturally specific discourses which, in the case of Britishness, are defined by their ordinariness. The CBBC tween is thus inextricable from transnational discourses of girlhood, but is rendered, via specificities of cultural and institutional context, as a specific media identity in her own right.

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